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FAREWELL TO IMAGINED POST-SOVIETNESS:

A POLITICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL NECESSITY

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FROM EDITOR. OVERCOMING SOVIETNESS

The year 2022 will go down in history not only as the beginning of Russia's genocidal war against Ukraine – its statehood and people – but also as the end: the end of the 'post-Soviet' era; the end of a period when certain similarities between the states that emerged from the ruins of the USSR – states which have become less and less similar over the years – led representatives of Western intellectual elites, who are accustomed to inertial thinking, to isolate the vast expanse of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and Siberia into a single basket called 'post-Soviet'. In the eyes of many, this term has become synonymous with economic and mental backwardness, accompanied by corruption and other pathologies. Meanwhile, Ukraine – which has defended itself heroically, supported by military equipment and financial, humanitarian, political and moral aid from EU countries, NATO and many other democracies of the Free World – has clearly shown that there is nothing in common between it and the aggressor state. And there probably won't be for at least a generation.

Russia and Ukraine are at war with each other. They also do not share a political system, foreign policy orientations, or underlying values. In Ukraine, sentiments in society are directed against everything Russian. This is fully understandable given the scale of destruction, suffering and emotion caused by the war, and the approval or passivity of the vast majority of Russians regarding the barbarism created in the name of the Russian state by the Russian army.

Given these circumstances, there is no reason whatsoever to use the term 'post-Soviet' to describe nations that were once part of the Russian Empire, which was renamed the Soviet Union 100 years ago, in 1922. Let us note that this term is highly unfortunate because it defines the present by referring to the past within a despotic, totalitarian empire.

In the second issue of AREI, you will find not only an elaboration of these theses in the form of a discussion between four renowned scholars regarding the problems which emerge when we use the term 'post-Soviet'

towards Eastern European and Central Asian states. The issue also features a brilliant analysis of this problem by the director of the Centre for Eastern Studies, one of the most renowned research institutions in Europe that analyses international affairs in the central and eastern part of our continent. Some of the articles in this issue concern current affairs, while others have a historical or quite historical background, but they are all united by a single leitmotif: What, with reference to the well-known German term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (in English, 'overcoming the past'), could be called 'overcoming Sovietness'? How have other aspects of the Soviet Union's legacy been overcome? This issue is complemented by an interview with one of the most renowned scholars of Eastern Europe, Professor Serhii Plokhii of Harvard University, and by interviews with two influential participants in the process of the disintegration of the USSR and the first years of the independent states created on its ruins. The entire issue closes with reviews of two important books.

ŁUKASZ ADAMSKI
Editor-in-Cheif

FAREWELL TO IMAGINED POST-SOVIETNESS. IS IT STILL JUSTIFIED TO USE THE TERM 'POST-SOVIET'?

Extract from a discussion, organised by AREI, held on 27 October 2022 at the University of Helsinki as part of the 21st Annual Aleksanteri Conference, "The New Era of Insecurity: How Russia's War in Ukraine Changes the World".

Łukasz Adamski: I welcome you to a discussion on the legitimacy of using the term 'post-Soviet', which dominates social science and political discourse and is used to denote states that were once part of the Soviet Union. However, more than 30 years have passed since the collapse of this union, so what cognitive value does this term carry today? What arguments can be made for and against its use? This is what we will discuss with eminent researchers from former post-Soviet countries: Dr Botakoz Kassymbekova from Basel University; Prof. Kataryna Wolczuk from the University of Birmingham; Wojciech Konończuk, director of the Centre for Eastern Studies in Warsaw; and Dr Ernest Wyciszkiewicz, director of the Mieroszewski Centre for Dialogue in Warsaw.

Botakoz Kassymbekova: Periodization and chronologies are not neutral or innocent scientific tools for dividing historical periods. They are, as Sebastian Conrad argued, "devised to think the world". They construct perceptions (of the past and the present), and they are made with claims (e.g., modernity or post-modernity), which has a direct influence on how we interpret and imagine regions, nations, and communities. Therefore, they are deeply political and are usually embedded in European teleologies. The term 'post-Soviet' illustrates the political coinage and usage perfectly. It is obscure and yet telling at the same time. It reflects the confusion over whether post-Sovietness is a spatial or a temporal reference. Does 'post-Soviet' refer to a region or a time period? Does it mean that either the Soviet system or the fact that these regions used to belong to the empire really matter? Does it highlight the social and political problems of postcolonialism, or does it classify a region as belonging to a certain political center? It is also an external category that is ascribed from outside of Central Asia. In this region, I think it is rare to find an institute or journal of post-Soviet studies. Some habit or way of thinking can be described as Soviet within Central Asia when referring to violence or repression, but 'Soviet' is not an identity to strive for. The fact that 'post-Soviet' is an external category signifies not only the poverty of Western Academia's political imagination, but also the marginal position it affords to regions to claim or defend their own periodization and description.

If we look at the term 'Sovietness' from a decolonial perspective, it flattens hierarchies. It is just one time and one space. It obliterates the colonial and the coloniality of the Soviet regime. This term flattens hierarchies, and just as the term 'Soviet' obliterates a centralized empire, 'post-Sovietness' obliterates the imperial regime behind it. It also obliterates the diverse paths that former colonies took after the end of the Soviet imperial rule. Some decided to end post-Sovietness; some did not. In that

sense, post-Sovietness is a decision. If we look at it as a process in which actors and their decisions play a role, then we will get a more complex but also clearer picture. For example, I look at education in Kazakhstan or Tajikistan, neither of which have undergone reform. In these cases, these are retained Soviet structures, so I would say these are very post-Soviet. However, if I look at cultural identities, for example, it is evident that they are not post-Soviet. For Kazakhstan, overcoming Sovietness would mean a successful revolution (or reform) in order to re-write the constitution and establish a representative government elected by the people. The current leadership is still the leadership nurtured in the Soviet context; it relies on Soviet logic and institutions for governance. As the January 2022 uprising showed, there are expressions of people's will to build a political nation, but it remains to be seen whether Kazakhstan will succeed in building a political nation or will remain a post-Soviet colony that retains Soviet structures of rule based on personalized rule and violence for its subjugation.

Kataryna Wolczuk: When I think about what the post-Soviet concept denotes, I have to go back to the explanation of the collapse of the USSR. The Soviet Union was a developmental empire that delivered mismodernization. Although it was a very comprehensive state that controlled every aspect of primary societal forms – such as the educational system, in which graduates were sent to different parts of the USSR – this state was shallow. It literally collapsed in terms of its capacity to deliver public goods.

So, what we have now is also post-Sovietness; different disciplines treat this phenomenon differently, but it shows a very fuzzy legacy of mismodernization. When I think about 'post-Soviet', this legacy comes to the fore of informal networks and practices. It was complicated to do good things and undertake reform in the post-Soviet states, but it was relatively easy to do bad things, like rent extraction.

So, we use concepts of neo-factionalist, clientelist, rent extraction, and limited access order, but these are all somehow imperfect; therefore, we have to recognize that there is something common between these countries.

And another aspect. We have been talking about the post-Soviet space, which has always been a hub. So, what we have is the Soviet legacy of interactions between post-Soviet space countries, usually taking place via Moscow. Moscow wants to be a gatekeeper to Ukraine and all other former Soviet republics, such as Moldova and Georgia, which still have very few horizontal interactions between each other. This is especially visible

in bodies like the Eurasian Economic Union, which is effectively about bilateral trade between the member states and Russia, but not actually between, let's say, Armenia and Belarus. So, there is a sort of very Soviet tradition of Moscow and Russia acting as the gatekeeper to the post-Soviet space. This is another aspect of what we regard as post-Sovietness, but it is perhaps the most interesting one, and the war has really challenged it.

Wojciech Konończuk: The Russian aggression against Ukraine is actually a crucial moment in the discussion about post-Sovietness because the disintegration of the post-Soviet area is ongoing before our eyes. I would argue that notions such as a post-Soviet area, a post-Soviet region, or post-Soviet states raise more questions than they answer. These are very misleading terms because we are talking about huge regions that had not been under Russian rule for long. Let's remember that some lands that belonged to the Russian Empire before the First World War were united or conquered by the Russian Empire only in the late nineteenth century. I'm talking about, e.g., part of Tajikistan. For most of the history of these regions of these countries, they were not part of the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union. So, what we are actually observing is that, since 1991, the territory of the former Soviet Union has transformed into historical macro-regions that are completely different. We see a very different story in Central Asia, in the Caucasus, and in Eastern Europe.

Another interesting argument we started to hear from Ukrainian decision-makers and intellectuals – even before the full-scale Russian aggression – is that Ukraine should be treated as part of Central Europe rather than Eastern Europe. For example, in October or September 2021, Dmytro Kuleba, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, made a program statement that argued: "do not treat us as part of the Eastern Europe region, because our tradition, our history, our political culture is part of the Central European region rather than something that is perceived as part of the traditional Russian Security Sphere of influence".

So, why is there actually a widespread perception of the region (which for some decades was part of the Soviet Union) as a post-Soviet area? I would respond that this is a consequence of a lack of knowledge.

However, there is a broader problem. When we look at Western historiography on Russia and the Russian Empire, we discover that – at least until recent times – it has been very much focused on Russia (the history of Russia, the history of the Soviet Union, the history of Russians).

I have many arguments for why we should not use the term 'post-Sovietness'. Let me present some of them, starting with political systems.

We are talking about 15 countries with very different political systems: from fully-fledged democratic systems to democracy with some problems, like Armenia or Moldova. Then we have very different types of authoritarian systems. For example, the political system in Kazakhstan is different from that of Tajikistan. Regarding Russia, the systems we can observe there are no longer authoritarian. We should instead call it a totalitarian system.

Another point is these 15 nations' foreign policies, which have become clearly visible in the last decade or so. I'm referring to the fact that these nations' foreign policies now exclude Russia as a dominant power. This process has accelerated since 24 February 2022, when the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine started

Then we have different economic models, from fully-fledged capitalist systems to centrally planned economies.

Finally, let's remember the Russification process and the different statuses of the Russian language in post-Soviet countries. We see interesting figures if we look at recent data from the Pushkin Institute in Moscow that compares how many school children and students were educated in the Russian language in 1991 and in 2020. In 1991, 9.5 million students studied in the Russian language outside the Russian Federation, but by 2020 this number had decreased to 4.1 million. So, basically, the region has been de-Russified step-by-step.

Łukasz Adamski: Thank you, Wojciech, for these excellent points. I entirely agree with you and especially with your last statement about the role of the Russian language since the war started. I have visited Kyiv many times since 24 February, and what struck me was the significant reduction in the use of the Russian language in public spaces. This change is absolutely obvious for those who have visited Kyiv since the war started.

Ernest Wyciszkiewicz: Let me begin my personal experience when I started to think the term 'post-Soviet' was truly dead. The first moment was Putin's conversation with CIS leaders on 9 December 2019. I usually don't watch this kind of event, but it was an exceptional one because the Russian president was about to deliver his analysis of the role of Poles and Poland in the Second World War. It was a lecture for about an hour given to the leaders of CIS countries. We could see from their faces that they were not very interested. They looked bored; they didn't know what was going on. They didn't understand why he wanted to impose this version of history on them. The second moment came in the summer of 2020,

when Belarusian society reacted strongly to the rigged presidential elections, calling into question the cliché about itself allegedly being an emanation of post-Sovietism. I must confess that I used to be a victim of this intellectual inertia as well, as using this term was simply convenient for analysis. If you don't have a lot of time or you want to cover something quickly, then you look for some keywords that can be easily grasped by the public, and their obscurity and lack of precision can be useful as 'space-filler'.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 are the final nails in the coffin of the post-Soviet space. This ongoing process has almost come to an end before our eyes. Thus, the term can be declared dead.

When we hear people saying 'post-Soviet', we tend not to go deeper and try to understand who these people are and why they use it. And scholars need to keep in mind that this is a political term with many political ramifications. So, if you use it, then you have a certain political message to deliver. Even if you are a scholar and you do this, you might think that you are just trying to understand and explain, but you also indirectly deliver a political message by trying to frame the region as something consolidated, unified, more or less homogeneous. So, that's the first point.

Now, my second and last point. Let's think instrumentally. If we assume that this is still a useful concept and we should use it, what does it give us that we cannot get using other notions? What is so special about it? And if you ask this question this way, I think it will be (at least, it is for me) very difficult to find a positive answer. How does the term 'post-Soviet' help me as an analyst today to understand what has been happening from Kaliningrad up to Vladivostok, Central Asia, and the South Caucasus? Actually, it doesn't help at all. However, I admit that sometimes I still use this term because old habits die hard – the inertia of language is powerful – therefore abandoning the use of this concept requires effort. So, let me put an end here to these general remarks.

Łukasz Adamski: I actually have two questions. Do the countries you are investigating as Central Asian states or Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Moldova – identify themselves as post-Soviet or not? And another question, perhaps of even higher importance, is what can scholars do? I'm referring to those who disagree with the term 'post-Soviet'. What can be done to change this dominant perception in Western

academia that there are, let's say, post-Soviet countries or lands of historic Russia.

Botakoz Kassymbekova: Although I'm not a political scientist, in the context of the January 2022 uprising in Kazakhstan I had to give a lot of interviews for the German-speaking media, simply because nobody in Germany or Switzerland knew anything about Kazakhstan. The term 'post-Sovietness' invites you to not pay attention to other countries except Russia. However, it is not enough to know the Russian language to understand the region. Studying the region with only the help of the Russian language means that one will have a Russocentric view of it because the huge narrative that is available only in its native languages would be missed. We need to learn other languages (Kazakh, Uzbek, Georgian, etc.), which is a huge challenge.

Ernest Wyciszkiewicz: I don't believe Russians consider themselves post-Soviet, especially younger generations. But this notion is useful for the regime, and this usefulness has been changing over time. In the 1990s, the CIS – the Commonwealth of Independent States – was seen in Moscow as a method to control former Soviet republics. At the same time, in the 1990s CIS was already a tool for peaceful divorce between Central Asia and Ukraine. So, the people knew they could not emancipate quickly, therefore they looked at CIS as a way to move away from each other in a gradual and orderly manner.

Although Moscow used to perceive CIS as a consolidation tool, now Putin and his regime seem to be sort of postmodern when it comes reconstructing something that cannot be the Soviet Union as it was, but the Kremlin can make political use of Soviet legacy. I don't believe that Putin wants to recreate the Soviet Union. It is something else. And he no longer thinks about the post-Soviet area as something that can be re-established as a homogeneous thing. I believe that the concept of *Ruski Mir* is sort of his response to this concept; however, it actually contradicts the post-Soviet concept because it emphasizes the role of Russian-speaking people, and the Russian ethnic space (as seen by him) is considered something that should be under Russian control, for historical or other reasons.

Wojciech Konończuk: I would say that almost all post-Soviet nations no longer perceive themselves as post-Soviet and do not want this term to be applied to them. Suppose we focus on different countries, starting from Ukraine and Moldova. We'll see that there is a concept that both

these countries were part of the broader Central European region or, in the case of Moldova, even the wider Balkan region. As I have mentioned, in the program statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, he said that we [Ukrainians] need to get back to Central Europe, since Ukraine is and has always been a central European state historically, politically, and culturally. Central Europe is where our [Ukrainian] identity belongs.

Since 24 February 2022, we can find many more arguments for the accuracy of Kuleba's statements. The same is even more obvious in the Caucasus. Let's remember how old these states are, mainly Georgia and Armenia: both accepted Christianity almost 1,000 years before the city of Moscow was established. They don't have to prove anything.

And finally, what we have observed in the last three decades is a gradual disintegration of something that used to be a Russian colony. This disintegration process is very different than the disintegration of the British or French colonial empires. Still, the notion of Russia being a colonial power is relatively new to Western analytical approaches.

As for the second question raised by Lukasz: what should be done? It's quite apparent we should not use the terms 'post-Soviet' or 'post-Sovietness'; instead, we should use the names of the regions: Central Asia, the Caucasus, Eastern or Central-Eastern Europe.

Kataryna Wolczuk: 'Post-Soviet' means making generalizations across the Soviet successor states, whereas fewer and fewer areas are united by one thing, even when it comes to the role of Russia and Russian foreign policy. So, even in terms of the role of Russia, we cannot generalize because it's a very complex picture. So, we went from this convenience – basically ambivalence and obscurity – to the realization that this term is politically loaded. It's not neutral. The challenge is: what are the alternatives? I have to engage with concepts such as the 'Eastern Partnership' (EaP), the 'Eastern Neighbourhood' and the 'Western Balkans'. All these umbrella terms are also flawed. But what do Croatia and Albania have in common?

Łukasz Adamski: The Croatians hate this concept, of course.

Kataryna Wolczuk: Exactly. So, while I'm trying to differentiate the post-Soviet space, I'm replicating those biases and generalizations.

Voice from the audience. I was surprised that there is still a question about whether we should use this whole post-Soviet concept. It is a legacy of a certain perception of the Soviet Union. And it's an easy and

lazy concept. It's obvious that we shouldn't use the concept of post-Soviet. Let me talk about Kazakhstan or Georgia, or Ukraine. But should we use post-socialism? For Poland, for Hungary?

Łukasz Adamski: What I can add on my side is that we have a problem with the terms 'post-communist country' and 'new EU member states'. Poland, for example, has 18 years in the EU; Finland, I think 27; but Finland is a mature EU member, and Poland is a new EU member state. And there are lots of similar examples of inertial thinking, both in the academic community and in political discourse.

Kataryna Wolczuk: When we talked about the Commonwealth of Independent States, for example, as the organizing framework in the 1990s, very few people registered that Ukraine was never a fully-fledged member of CIS because it never ratified it. There is one more aspect which I found very, very interesting. The post-Soviet space concept includes the Baltic countries, where – from the Russian perspective – international law doesn't operate and doesn't apply. These countries are perceived as being outside of international law, not only in terms of multilateral UN agreements, but also in terms of actual bilateral agreements.

Wojciech Konończuk: Yes. One of the many paradoxes regarding post-Sovietness is that nations that are now called post-Soviet didn't want to be part of Soviet Russia, the Soviet Union. The Soviets conquered them. Now they don't want to be called post-Soviet, but they're called post-Soviet. So, for me, this is like an explanation of the Russian special right, the Russian special role.

I don't think that if the Russian Federation collapsed, the nations which would emerge would be called post-Russian. Because what unites Poland and Finland is that they were part of the same state for more than a century, but nobody called Poland or Finland post-Russian states after 1918, right? Rather, they are post-imperial states. So, we should be careful in using this concept.

Ernest Wyciszkiewicz: I believe the huge challenge for intellectuals and scholars is to leave their ivory towers. It is important to publish books and deconstruct or reconstruct the notion of post-Sovietness, but it is equally or even more important to reach out to the public and explain that terms and frames matter. The public needs to be aware that

the way you use certain words has significant political ramifications. And we have to be careful.

Experts and analysts should be less interested in putting things in order just for the sake of intellectual clarity; they should think more in terms of complexity as the world is chaotic and our societies are messy by their nature.

Botakoz Kassymbekova: I will reemphasize that these terminologies might be imperial. When I go to the United States, I say: "I'm from Kazakhstan". The usual response is: "Oh, Russian". But I'm not Russian. It's part of that process of reconsidering. It's part of that process of disempowering. It's part of giving a voice so diversity and coloniality can be revised. So, this kind of thinking is a very colonial practice, and what we're doing now is decolonization in that sense. Hopefully, more people will start to understand that. We do need to influence the narrative, and we need to explain why this term is inappropriate. We need to coin new terms instead.

Edited by ŁUKASZ ADAMSKI

Interview with Prof. Serhii Plokhii
THE TRADITIONS OF UKRAINIAN DEMOCRACY MAY BE PROBLEMATIC, BUT THEIR EXISTENCE IS UNDENIABLE

SERHII PLOKHII

A leading expert on the history of Central and Eastern Europe, Professor of Ukrainian History and director of the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University. He is also a member of PEN Ukraine. Prof. Plokhii has won numerous awards, including the Early Slavic Studies Association Distinguished Scholarship Award (2009), the Lionel Gelber Prize (2015), the Antonovych Foundation Prize (2015), the Shevchenko National Prize (2018), and the Book Forum Best Book Award (2020).

My first question concerns the notion of conjuncture in contemporary academia. Today, the history of the twentieth century is in high demand. In your opinion, where are the current blank spots in the research of Ukrainian history or the broader history of Central and Eastern Europe? Which time periods remain out of sight for Ukrainian researchers? What is responsible for this boom in the research of the 'short twentieth century'?

– I think that, first and foremost, this demand comes from a society that is currently being transformed by war.[1] The war in Ukraine has gone on for eight years now, and this is what is determining the agenda. This war was preceded by an active application of historical mythology, specifically the subject matter of World War II. Everything connected to WWII was given priority. That is why once-marginal topics of Ukrainian nationalism, such as the history of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), have taken centre stage. All of this is directly or indirectly connected with the events of Maidan, with the war; in essence, we are talking here about military historiography.[2] Topics that are not connected with WWII or the question of victims, of heroes, of national identity are deprioritized now. It's not that they don't exist. They do. Recently, the history of everyday life has become quite important. Interesting research has been conducted on the subject of eighteenth-century history. This is quite an accomplishment, since even a decade ago there was no active research in this field in Ukraine.

At the same time, it is clear that the war is the precise cause of this barrage of books that focuses on the formation of society and state. Therefore, it is no wonder that this subject matter finds its way into academic works, even though not all historians are thrilled about this.

In connection with revived interest in WWII and twentieth-century history, a logical question arises regarding the validity of the concept of the 'short twentieth century'. Was it not too early for Francis Fukuyama to proclaim 'the end of history' and the victory of liberal values? After all, we are witnessing the decline of liberal democracy right now. Should we re-evaluate the construct of the 'short twentieth century' as an element of the global periodization of history?

– Every periodization is a reflection of today's outlook and the questions that are currently relevant for us. The 'short twentieth century' as a periodization appears at the moment of the completion of the communist phase of human and social history. It thus offers a vision of the twentieth

1 The interview was recorded on 17 February 2022.
2 In this context, the word means 'historical description'.

century from this particular point of view.[3] This does not mean that this concept is somehow incorrect; it appeared at a particular moment when an important phase of human history was coming to an end. The phase in question started with the Russian Revolution and was preceded by World War I. If one is to look at all these transformations from the point of view of the end of an empire, the disintegration of an empire, this periodization makes sense. After all, 1991 is when the history of the Russian empire, having been saved by the Bolsheviks back in 1917, ended. As you can see, some clusters of questions can be resolved quite successfully within the analytical constraints of the 'short twentieth century'.

From today's point of view, this is less interesting since we now know for certain that history has not ended – it still continues. (*Laughs*) And if it does continue, let us then talk about the 'long twentieth century'.

Russian aggression against Ukraine can be viewed in different contexts, including the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which is still taking place. In fact, the 'short twentieth century' might have ended in 1991, but the 'long twentieth century' found its continuation in the twenty-first century.

1991 saw the disintegration of the Soviet empire. However, postcolonial processes are taking place not only in Central and Eastern Europe. One can say that they are themselves worldwide processes. Interestingly, at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, a new academic discipline came to the fore: postcolonial studies. In this context, can we equate postcolonial and post-Soviet studies?

– I do not think we can equate the two. In this case, one should instead use mathematical equations such as 'approximately equals', that is to say, gentler formulations. Indeed, in certain situations we can trace the overlap between these two layers. When one is contemplating the history of Voronezh, postcolonial terminology hardly fits unless we are talking about internal colonialism, but the parallelism works in the case of post--Soviet Georgia or Ukraine.

The impetus for the development of postcolonial studies was caused by the process of the dissolution of the British and French empires, which accelerated in the 1950s and 1960s. The map of the world changed radically. Interestingly, Ukrainian historians in the 1960s attempted to adjust their history to the postcolonial context as well. The Cossack wars, which were previously regarded as mere peasant uprisings, were transformed into the struggle of Ukrainians for their national liberation. This is a word-for--word borrowing of the concept of national liberation struggles in Congo,

3 This concept was introduced by the Hungarian historian Iván Tibor Berend, and it gained popularity thanks to the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm.

with Patrice Lumumba included, as well as other colonies. The Ukrainian narrative was re-evaluated in this context but did not go beyond the 1960s. Ukrainians were also trying to interpose themselves into this process while it was taking place. I would say that, in this case, everything depends on place and time.

Russia can be interpreted in the context of a post-imperial situation, with the emphasis on the problem of determining a new identity, a connection with the empire and its territories. Clearly, contemporary Russia is suffering from post-imperial sickness. The extent to which this disease is post-communist or postcolonial presents an interesting question for investigation. The disintegration of the Soviet Union was not a classical death of an empire. It is important not to discard multi-factual understanding of historical processes. We can't explain the fall of the Soviet empire by one factor only.

The 1980s saw aggravation of the national question in the USSR, which led to the collapse of the empire. I would like to focus on the conflicts that sprang up in post-Soviet territory in the 1990s: in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Transnistria. To a certain extent, one can add the Crimea and Donbas to this list as these are regions in which zones of conflict between cultures and identities were created by means of so-called 'soft power'. In a *de facto* sense, these zones of conflict became 'delayed-action mines' that were harnessed by Russia. In 2008, the situation in South Ossetia was used as a pretext to launch the Russo-Georgian war; in 2014, the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas took place; in 2020, we witnessed the next stage in the escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. How and why did these conflict zones appear? During its existence, the Soviet Union put substantial effort into solving the national question and forming a new Soviet identity. Are these conflict zones in post-Soviet territory a Soviet legacy or do they have deeper roots than that? Are we talking about the failure of Soviet national politics or are conflict zones a logical outcome of Soviet politics?

– In reality, Soviet history is truly imperial in the sense that it demonstrates the strategies that the Soviet Union used to replicate and even expand the territories of the Russian empire. In a sense, this was done by way of a transformation into an 'empire of nations'. National statehood for minorities, even in its hollow manifestation, became indicative of attempts to resolve the national question within the Russian Empire. We are talking about associating a certain ethnic group with a certain territory and endowing it with (relatively) privileged rights to use its own language and culture according to this territorial prerequisite. In any case,

it is quite difficult to 'slice up' a territory in such a way that it corresponds to its ethnic groups. Problems inevitably arise. The 'drawing' of boundaries is inherent not only to the history of the Soviet Union; it also relates to the history of the Paris Peace Conference, during which the territories of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and other countries that emerged from the remains of the Austro-Hungarian empire were 'sliced up' in a similar way.

The conflict zones that were created by such demarcations are the legacy of empires and they always erupted, albeit in various ways. Think of Ukrainian Galicia, Volhynia in Poland, or Transcarpathia in Czechoslovakia. In the Soviet Union, which was ruled by authoritarianism, these contradictions between boundaries and identities were suppressed. The problems began when the central authority began to weaken. The weakening of centralized power in the USSR led to problems with Meskhetian Turks, for example, and provoked the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. Initially, the Kremlin had no interest in inciting such conflicts, since they led to the destabilization of the country.

Soviet helmsmen were so involved with *perestroika* that they weakened the centralized control system on the ground. What did Gorbachev do in this situation? He tried to suppress and resolve national conflicts. He reintroduced the military component to the 'solution of the national question', as was observed in Baku in 1990.[4] On the other hand, Gorbachev was attempting to use these conflicts to put an end to the republics' trajectory toward sovereignty and independence. This card was played in Gagauzia, in Crimea, and in other national conflicts.

Basically, at that time, Yeltsin was the leader of the Russian SFSR, a republic that was also participating in a raffle. That is why it is quite logical that he did not support the idea of creating a Transnistrian Moldovan republic, at least not in the early 1990s. The Russian SFSR already had sufficient internal problems.

Instead, in the case of Transnistria, the key role was played by the Slavic population, which felt threatened by the Moldovan majority. A similar situation occurred all over the Soviet Union. The centre as a political player which used to guarantee the rights and security of national minorities disappeared. These minorities had to face the majority population in every republic and so, with all their might, they clung to the centre.

The answer to the question of why Jewish and Polish parties did not support the full independence of the Ukrainian National Republic in

4 These events are known in Azerbaijani history as 'Black January'. In response to demonstrations by the Azerbaijani opposition, on 16–19 January 1990, the central government dispatched 50 thousand Soviet armed forces to Baku. On 20 January, they stormed the Azerbaijani capital. During the operation, under the codename 'Blow', the Soviet authorities managed to regain control over the territories of the Azerbaijan SSR. The operation led to hundreds of civilian deaths in Baku.

1918 can be found here. They supported the government in Petrograd until the very last moment, since the existence of the imperial centre secured the balance of power and security. At that moment, the minorities were absolutely not ready to find themselves standing alone against the Ukrainian majority. In the 1990s, a similar approach was employed by the majority of the national minorities of the Soviet Union, with the exception of Ukraine: there, the minorities no longer perceived a threat from the culturally Russified Ukrainians in the central and eastern parts of the republic. There is nothing new here: it is the typical post-imperial situation; it is a rather banal story of imperial disintegration and the emergence of new state structures, with new interrelations between the majority and the minority. For instance, the Moldovan majority was a minority in the Soviet Union; the Gagauzian minority, in turn, could act against the titular ethnicity only with Moscow's help. Upon the disintegration of the Soviet Union, these power dynamics changed substantially.

The Russian Federation did not create these conflicts. More than that: at first it was trying to avoid them. However, with time the Kremlin learned how to use 'frozen' conflicts in its favour, and it understood that this 'card' could be played to control post-Soviet territory. In essence, this means going back to Gorbachev's policy of utilizing autonomous territories in order to undermine their trajectory toward complete independence. At this point, the Russian special services step in and create conflicts in places where none existed previously. Ukraine is a striking example of such an act of creation, of an artificial conflict. In truth, this conflict is not 'frozen' but rather 'hot', and it has now transformed into a full-scale war.

Is it fair to say that during the creation of the Soviet Union, at a time when national republics were taking shape, the creation of enclaves with national minorities within larger republics became a deliberate policy of the Kremlin?

– If someone could demonstrate how to correctly 'slice up' the territories of former empires without creating these enclaves, I would believe that this process could be artificially engineered. (*Laughs*) In reality, even the leaders of democratic states at the Treaty of Versailles could not manage this problem. Everything was over at the Yalta Conference and later, when expulsions, migrations, and deportations led to the creation of ethnically homogenous countries. Of course, Soviet helmsmen were striving to create monoethnic administrative units, but this was impossible.

I think that, in the early 1920s, Bolsheviks truly believed they could bring the ideas of communism to life. They adhered to the logic that prioritized class over nationality. For instance, when we consider Lenin's support

for the idea of including Donbas within Ukraine, the key factor here is that Donbas was the centre of the working class that served as a buttress for the party and its policy of centralization. Ethnic and national aspects were important as well, but the main goal was to keep peasant Ukraine within the orbit of Soviet influence. At the same time, we cannot reduce Bolshevik policies to just one principle as this would be an oversimplification.

If we are talking about conflict zones in post-Soviet territories, it is fair to note the general post-imperial situation: the impossibility of solving issues of ethnicity without deportations and the creation of enclaves. Other factors begin to add up; in the case of the Soviet Union in the 1920s, the approach was based on class above all else.

In your book on the Cuban Missile Crisis,[5] you pay particular attention to the mistakes made by Soviet leaders. After WWII, Soviet power underwent a transformation from Stalin's cult of personality to the gerontocracy of the 1980s. What was the evolution of the Soviet party apparatus? What was the Central CPSU Committee's process of decision-making like at various times? Finally, how did the phenomenon of Gorbachev, such an active and charismatic leader who initiated *perestroika*, come to the fore?

– I would say that the process of forming elite groups in the USSR, as well as in contemporary Russia and Ukraine (at least partially), is quite similar. Let us start with the Soviet Union. After the 1920s, debate between factions or groups within the Bolshevik party, even parliamentary groups, became impossible. The following questions arose: How to form groups of political elites when political groups and parties are prohibited? How to set up a power structure? How to enforce party discipline? When regional elites (clans, in essence) emerge, with them emerges a certain 'know-how'. These regional clans fight to attain central power. During the first stage, the 'Caucasus' clan, headed by Stalin, Ordzhonikidze, Kirov, Beria, and others, came to the fore. What did representatives of this clan do? They fought with their competitors and, specifically, initiated the 'Leningrad affair',[6] given that Leningrad oblast was a large region boasting its own powerful elite.

Do you mean to say these people were rivals of Stalin's clan?

– Exactly. In order to destroy and later replace these competitors, Khrushchev was brought back to Moscow. He created a counterweight to the Leningrad group. In his turn, while ascending the career ladder,

5 Serhii Plokhii, *Nuclear Folly: A History of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Penguin Random House UK, 2021).
6 The 'Leningrad Affair' was a series of show trials in the late 1940s and early 1950s against the party and state functionaries of the Russian SFSR and USSR, especially those who worked in Leningrad oblast or had been promoted to leading positions in Moscow or other cities.

Khrushchev had to oppose both the Leningrad and the Moscow clans. In this struggle, he bet on Ukrainian personnel. As a result, in the 1950s, Ukrainian elites moved to Moscow and obtained the highest-ranking posts in the Soviet Union. Ukrainian elites continued to keep their central positions during Brezhnev's term. Their supremacy ended in the mid-1980s, just a few years before the disintegration of the Soviet Union, when access to 'fast-track promotion' stalled within the empire. Gorbachev put a stop to it.

You mentioned my book on the Cuban Missile Crisis. While working on it, I was shocked by the number of Ukrainians and people with Ukrainian last names who were in Cuba. I have to point out that at the time a new type of weapon was situated in Cuba, namely the missiles and the officers responsible for them. Basically, Khrushchev left this domain in the care of his own people. If we look at the development of the Space Race, behind it we can see the undoubtedly important figure of Yuri Gagarin and Ukrainians such as Serhij Korol'ov[7] and Marshal Kyrylo Moskalenko.[8] Actually, Moskalenko was one of those people whom Khrushchev summoned to the Kremlin to arrest his main power rival, Lavrentij Berija. Moskalenko's deputy, Pavlo Batyc'kyj,[9] was the one who personally executed Beria.

So, we could say that the Soviet party apparatus was structured like a clan?

– Yes, it was. And this structure was present not only within the party, but also in the army. The two Ukrainian generals who in 1962 gave the order to shoot down American U-2 jets over Cuba[10] had perfectly Ukrainian

7 Serhij Korol'ov (1907–1966): Soviet scientist in the field of mechanics and organization, spacecraft designer, and one of the founders of practical aeronautics. Academic of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (1958), twice Hero of Socialist Work (1956, 1961). Korolyov was born in Zhytomyr. Between 1924 and 1926, he studied at the Aero-Mechanical Department of Kyiv Polytechnical Institute. Starting in 1946, he worked as Chief Designer of long-range ballistic missiles and as Head of the Council of Chief Designers. In August 1957, the first intercontinental ballistic multiple-stage missile, designed by Korolyov, was launched. He designed and led the launch of the spaceships *Vostok* and *Voskhod*, which were the first in history to carry humans into outer space. For more details, see *Encyklopedija istoriji Ukrajiny* (hereafter *EIU*), ed. by Valerij Smolij, and others, 10 vols (Kyjiv: Naukova dumka, 2003–2013), V (2008), 175–76.

8 Kyrylo Moskalenko (1902–1985): Soviet military, Marshal of the Soviet Union (1955), twice Hero of the Soviet Union (1943, 1978), Hero of the Czechoslovak Republic (1969). Moskalenko was born in the village of Grishine (currently in Donetsk oblast). He joined the Red Army in August 1920. He graduated from the Ukrainian School of Red Officers (1922) and the Red Army Artillery Academy (1928). In September 1936, he was appointed Head of the 113th Mechanized Corps within the Kyiv Military District. Moskalenko took part in the Soviet-Finnish War in 1939–1940. During WWII, he held command of the defensive battles on the Southwestern front and took part in the battle for Moscow in 1941–1942. His troops liberated Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. After the war and up until August 1948, Moskalenko held command of the Carpathian Military District, and later he served as a Commander of the Air Defense Forces of the Moscow Region. From 1960 to 1962, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Strategic Rocket Forces and Deputy Director of USSR Ministry of Defense. For more details, see *EIU*, VII (2010), 75–76.

9 Pavlo Batyc'kyj (1910–1983): Soviet military leader, Hero of the Soviet Union (1965), Marshal of the Soviet Union (1968). He was born in Kharkiv and graduated from the Frunze Military Academy (1938) and the Academy of General Staff (1948). During World War II, he commanded the 1st and 2nd Corps of the Ukrainian front, and the 1st and 3rd Corps of the Belorussian front. After the war, he occupied leading positions in the Soviet Army. From 1965 to 1966, Batytskyi was Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the USSR Armed Forces; from 1966 to 1978 , he was Commander-in-Chief of the Air Defense Forces, Deputy of the Minister of Defense. He died in Moscow. For more details, see *EIU*, I (2003), 200.

10 This refers to the events of so-called 'Black Saturday' (27 October 1962) when the U-2 American reconnaissance aircraft was shot down.

last names: Harbuz[11] and Hrečko.[12] Let us have a look at the Red Army commanders' last names: we see not Malynovs'kyj,[13] but Hrečko![14] All of them were Ukrainian. There is nothing unique here. Stalin had the same story with his own people from the Caucasus. Khrushchev's pool consisted of Ukrainian natives. Since Putin came to power, positions of Russian power have been occupied by the so-called *piterskiye*.[15]

And contemporary Russia inherited this Soviet clan-like power structure?

– This structure is a consequence of the absence of political strife. In Ukraine, the Dnipropetrovsk clan held power for quite a while. When Yushchenko came to power, the previous clan moved to the background, but then the *donec'ki*[16] emerged. One might ask how they differ from the *dnipropetrovs'ki*,[17] the Ukrainian 'mafia' in Moscow during the times of Khrushchev and Brezhnev, or the *piterskiye*? It's the same structure of loyalty that manifests itself in appointing people from one's own region.

So, can we say that the client-patron relationship that formed in Soviet times and was the *de facto* system during Stalin's rule is still shaping political culture in the post-Soviet space?

– Exactly. From Khrushchev on, the regional and political elites of Soviet republics secured certain rights not only in the centre but also on the ground, in their own republics. After Stalin's death, an unspoken rule

11 Leonid Harbuz (1918–1998): Soviet military leader, General-Major (1961). He was born in Yalta. Garbuz served in the Red Army from 1937 to 1975. He graduated from the 2nd Kyiv Artillery School (1939), Dzerzhinsky Artillery Academy (1952), a nd Academy of USSR General Staff (1960).

12 Stepan Hrečko (1910–1977): Soviet military officer, General-Colonel of Aviation (1963). He was born in Tavriya province (now the village Černihivka in Zaporiz'ka oblast'). Hrečko served in the Red Army from 1930. He graduated from Odesa's Frunze Artillery School (1932) and participated in the so-called 'liberating campaign' by the Red Army in the fall of 1939. In 1940, he graduated from Zhukovsky Air Force Academy of the Red Army. Hrečko took part in World War II. Starting in 1957, he served as the Head of the Air Defense Force of Moscow Region. From 1962 to 1964, he was Deputy Commander of Soviet Air Defenses in Cuba.

13 Radion Malynovs'kyj (1898–1967): military leader and a statesman of the USSR, Marshal of the Soviet Union (1944), twice Hero of the Soviet Union (1945, 1958), and People's Hero of Yugoslavia (1964). He was born in Odesa. From 1927 to 1930, he studied at Frunze Military Academy. In 1937, Malynovs'kyj was dispatched to Spain, where he helped the Republican military commanders with organization and the carrying out of military operations during the Civil War of 1936–1939. With the beginning of the Second World War, he found himself on the frontline. After the war, Malynovs'kyj served as Commander of the Transbaikal-Amur Military District (1945–1947), the Supreme Commander of Far Eastern Forces (1947–1953), and Commander of the Far Eastern Military District (1953–1956). In 1956, he was appointed First Deputy to the Minister of Defense and Supreme Commander of USSR Ground Forces. Starting 1957, Malynovs'kyj was appointed the Minister of Defense of USSR. He died in Moscow and was buried in the Red Square's Kremlin Wall. For more details, see *EIU*, VI (2009), 475–76.

14 Andrij Hrečko (1903–1976): military, state, and party Soviet leader, Marshal of the Soviet Union (1955), twice Hero of the Soviet Union (1958, 1973). Hero of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (1969). He was born in the village of Holodajivka (now Kujbiševe, Rostov oblast, Russian Federation). He joined the Red Army in 1919. Hrečko graduated from the Cavalry School (1926), Frunze Military Academy (1936), and the Military Academy of the General Staff (1941). Starting in 1938, he was Head of the Special Cavalry Division of the Belorussian Military District. Hrečko fought at the front in the Second World War. From 1945 to 1953, he served as Commander of the Kyiv Military District. In 1953, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of Soviet Forces in East Germany. Starting in 1957, he served as the 1st Deputy of the USSR Minister of Defense, Commander-in-Chief of the Ground Forces; starting 1960 – Commander-in-Chief of the Warsaw Pact Forces. In 1967, he was made the Minister of Defense. For more details, see *EIU*, II (2004), 193–194.

15 Natives of St Petersburg, who formed Putin's inner circle.

16 Donec'k regional elite. The most vivid representatives are Victor Yanukovych and Renat Akhmetov.

17 Dnipropetrovs'k regional elites. The most vivid representatives are Leonid Kuchma, Yulia Tymochenko, Pavlo Lazarenko.

was put in place regarding the head of any republic: they had to be a local 'Kunaev' type.[18] When Gorbachev came to power, he thought the national question had already been solved and these rules did not have any value. He exchanged the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, Kunaev, for an ethnic Russian named Kolbin.[19] As a result, in December of 1986, riots started in Kazakhstan. Basically, Gorbachev's actions led to the first national uprising.

Gorbachev's situation is quite similar to Poroshenko's. In order to stay in power, one needs the backing of a large and well-staffed region like Donets'k, Dnipropetrovs'k, the Caucasus, Leningrad, etc. If, as in the case with Poroshenko, this region is Vinnytsia, it might not be sufficient, since Vinnytsia does not have enough of this staffing potential, thus the necessity of working differently or of orienting oneself toward the creation of some other model. This is how the transformation of political culture takes place.

Can we then say that Gorbachev left Ščerbyckyj[20] in power despite the fact that the latter did not support *perestroika*, especially after the situation in Kazakhstan?

– I think so. Gorbachev really burned his fingers in 1986 with the Kunaev situation. In addition, Ukrainian Soviet political elites reigned supreme, in the sense that they were well consolidated. Party elites from the Ukrainian SSR constituted the majority during the sessions of the Central Committee of the CPSU. This fact had to be taken into consideration.

So, Ukrainians had a real impact on centralized power?

– Yes, since Russians had neither separate representation nor a separate Central Committee within the party structure. As a consequence, despite their numbers, Russians did not have the facilities to structure and institutionalize their influence. Ukrainians were the largest organized group within the party ranks. It was this influence that allowed them to

18 Dinmuchamed Kunaev (1912–1993): Soviet party leader, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan (1960–1962, 1964–1986), a member of Politburo (1971–1987), Hero of Socialist Work (1972, 1976, 1982).

19 Gennadij Kolbin (1927–1998): Soviet political leader, member of the Central Committee of the CPSU (1981–1990), First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Kazakh SSR (1986–1989). He replaced Dinmuchamed Kunaev. Prior to his appointment, Kolbin was the First Secretary of the Ulyanovsk Regional Committee of the CPSU (1983–1986). On December 17–18, 1986, students in Almaty protested against Kolbin, who did not speak Kazakh and was not connected to Kazakhstan in any way. The riots were brutally repressed by internal military forces. Some of the students were criminally prosecuted or received administrative penalties.

20 Volodymyr Ščerbyckyj (1918–1990): Soviet political leader. In 1972, he was appointed 1st Secretary of the Central Committee of CPSU; he remained in this position for 17 years. Ščerbyckyj did much for the economic, scientific and technical development of the Ukrainian SSR, as well as for solving social issues in cities and villages. He supported Soviet methods of management, which entailed centralization, planned assignments, and extensive agriculture. During his term, the process of Russification intensified, and Ukrainian dissidents faced persecution. The Chernobyl catastrophe demonstrated the inability of the Soviet apparatus to adequately react to challenges, and Ščerbyckyj's authority was undermined. He did not accept or understand Gorbachev's course toward *perestroika*. In September 1989, Ščerbyckyj asked to be relieved of his responsibilities as the 1st Secretary of the Central Committee of CPSU. For more details, see *EIU*, X (2013), 685.

stay in power for so long. It was not at all easy to remove Ščerbyckyj because he had been spreading his roots into the system for thirty years. All that time, he was selecting and promoting his own people. When the central authorities finally decided to get rid of Ščerbyckyj, Gorbachev came to Kyiv in person to take part in the Central Committee's session. This was an unprecedented event. The dismissal happened quite late in the game. Let's look at the way Petro Šelest[21] was removed from power – it is also a fascinating story! First, he was sent to Moscow for promotion, and while there he was dismissed. There was an understanding among the central authorities that the Ukrainian party 'mafia' had to be reckoned with and carefully considered.

To what extent were the regional political elites supported by the populations of their republics? Were Ščerbyckyj or Kunaev popular among the people? Were they concerned with their level of popularity?

– The party leaderships of the different republics enjoyed varying levels of popularity. Mašerov[22] was quite popular in Belarus; Šelest was popular in Ukraine; while Ščerbyckyj was perceived rather neutrally. Regional political elites tried to control contact between their subordinates and the centre. Specifically, they intercepted letters and complaints that had been addressed to the centre since it answered such appeals with various inspections, which marred the reputations of the regional political elites. This kind of communication over the heads of the leadership was usually blocked.

Let's not forget about local patriotism either. It still exists. For instance, people who are staunch fans of Kyiv 'Dynamo' would likewise be delighted to see the next Ukrainian appointed at the centre. These are two sides of the same coin. Residents of Dnipropetrovsk were proud of the Minister of Internal Affairs of the USSR, Nikolaj Ščëlokov, because he was a native of Dnipropetrovs'k. The Head of Government, Nikolaj Tichanov, worked in Nikopol, and so on. In this grand game, they were 'ours'. A similar attitude prevailed in Donbas regarding Yanukovych.

Without a doubt, this local patriotism was connected with the regional elite groups. At the same time, complaints were sent to the centre with the hope that, in this way, the local placemen could be managed.

21 Petro Šelest (1908–1996): Ukrainian Soviet party leader, 1st Secretary of the Central Committee of CPSU (1963–1972). He was promoted and transferred to Moscow as Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR. However, in April of 1973, a devastating article that criticised his book appeared in the magazine *Komunist Ukrainy*, *Ukraina nasha radianska* (1970). Šelest was charged with idealizing Ukraine's past and diminishing the role of the Communist Party and violating the Leninist principles of the 'class and party, concrete-historical approach' in his assessment of historical phenomena. This was used as an excuse to dismiss him. For more details, see *EIU*, X (2013), 625–26.

22 Pëtr Mašerov (1918–1980): Soviet party leader, 1st Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus (1965 to 1980). He died in a car accident.

That's why local political elites strove to build relationships with journalists from *Pravda*, *Izvestiya*, and other central newspapers. These were direct channels 'to the top'.

Is it an exaggeration to say that journalists in the USSR had an impact, in spite of censorship?

– Newspapers were used as a 'feedback' channel, through which people sent various complaints (e.g., 'I was not given an apartment' or 'my pension has not been increased'). First, letters were sent to local branches of government; if there was no reaction, the next round went to the centre and to *Pravda*, which was the official newspaper of the CPSU. *Pravda* journalists were perceived by the regional political elites as 'eyes' or 'representatives' of the Central Committee of the CPSU. However, even within the Soviet system of surveillance, Ukraine held a privileged position.

After Stalin's death, the decision was made to appoint the head of each republic from the local population, while the second secretary was to be sent from outside. As a rule, the latter would be a Russian or a representative of another Slavic ethnic group. Starting in the 1960s, Ukraine was the only republic that had a local secretary. This was a consequence of Ukraine's direct relations with Khrushchev and the centre, and it provided Ukraine with more autonomy than, for instance, the leadership of Azerbaijan.

In your book *The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union*,[23] you emphasized the fact that it was Ukraine that voted for independence during the Referendum and therefore put an end to the Soviet Union's existence. How can one explain the paradox of the Ukrainian political elites who occupied privileged positions, unexpectedly causing the dissolution of the Soviet Union? It begs the question: why Ukraine and not Lithuania? If you recall the chronology of the events, it was Lithuania that first chose the path of independence. In January of 1991, the centre had to forcibly return Lithuania into the embrace of the Soviet empire. 15 people died then. Lithuania demonstrated that leaving the USSR was possible. Why then was it not Lithuania but Ukraine which became the key republic in causing the disintegration of the Soviet Union?

– Lithuania was an example of an independence that was proclaimed but not gained. It demonstrated a certain ideal. The idea of the Baltic republics leaving the USSR was supported by the Americans. The USA pressured Gorbachev, since the world had never recognized the Soviet annexation of

23 Serhii Plokhy, *The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. However, the secession of these republics was not critical to the existence of the USSR. Without Ukraine, the second largest constituent republic in terms of economic and human capital, the USSR as a political project made no sense for Gorbachev and Yeltsin alike. At the end of the day, as every empire does, the Soviet Union became too costly. The situation demanded economic support for the Caucasian and Central Asian republics. Russia was not ready to carry this load without its second partner. In addition, starting in the late 1950s, Ukraine emerged as Russia's junior partner in terms of managing the empire. Ukrainians occupied many positions in the centre and within the army. In the second half of the 1980s, a special decree curtailed the promotion of Ukrainians to the rank of generals. This was not caused by some sort of xenophobia; it so happened that during the 1950s and 1960s there were so many Ukrainians in these positions that something had to be done about it. The situation was similar to that in the times of Catherine II, when a decree prohibited the consecration of Ukrainians as bishops. That was a real-life precedent. It had nothing to do with xenophobia either: it's just that there were so many Ukrainians in those positions! (*Laughs*)

So, this decision was dictated by the desire to maintain parity, since the Soviet Union stressed equal opportunities for representatives of all ethnicities?

– It so happened that one well-organized group grabbed most of the pie...

Is it fair to say that Ukrainians promoted Ukrainians?

– It wasn't based on an ethnic principle. It was about the promotion of people from Ukraine as a whole. If you look at who Khrushchev or Brezhnev were, it becomes clear that they were Russians, yet natives of Ukraine. These were primarily regional groups, and I don't think they had any national ambitions. It is clear, however, that during this selection they were guided by the principle of 'our own people versus outsiders', thus giving preference to those who speak the same language, as it were,[24] and have a similar code of conduct. The key was that these people were coherent: you could read them, interpret them, and they, in turn, knew what to expect from you. So, the cultural aspect, of course, was present. It wasn't some kind of proto-independent circle, but it played its role when Ukraine gained independence and began building its own army. This circle

24 A common system of cultural values.

provided Ukraine with the necessary personnel because people started to come back.[25]

What role did Boris Yeltsin play in the collapse of the Soviet Union? He was very active in exploiting Russian nationalism. In 1990, a declaration on the state sovereignty of the Russian SFSR was adopted, and until 1998 this holiday was called Russia's Independence Day (now it is called Russia Day).[26] Yeltsin did quite a lot to facilitate the dissolution of the Soviet Union. What did he really want?

– I can say more about Yeltsin than about Russia's Independence Day. Russia proclaimed sovereignty earlier than Ukraine. In this sense, the apparatus created by Ščerbyckyj was quite conservative. It took hold of Ukraine in a far stronger fashion than the Russian apparatus.

Yeltsin headed the liberal wing of the Communist Party. His allies were Anatoly Chubais and Yegor Haidar. They were trying to reform the Soviet Union by introducing economic reforms and opening the USSR to the West. They were liberals who had no special ties to Russian nationalism. However, they quickly realized that their project of liberal transformation stood no chance in the USSR parliament, where Gorbachev could mobilize representatives of Central Asian republics, the Ukrainian party elites, etc. That is, they would be blocked immediately. Their only allies were parts of Ukraine and the Baltic republics, but this was not enough. Instead, Moscow, Leningrad, and Sverdlovsk had a large enough electorate to create a critical mass in the Russian parliament. It is then that these liberal elites decided to change horses midstream, and Yeltsin became the Russian leader and began to actively fight against the centre (in general, not only against Gorbachev personally). During this period, he was far more radical than the Ukrainian leaders. The proclamation of Russia's sovereignty was a sign of this radicalism. This happened in 1990, before the proclamation of Ukrainian sovereignty. In terms of these tendencies, Ukraine was really lagging behind. Ščerbyckyj was dismissed only in the autumn of 1989. While he was in power, everything was swept under the carpet, while in Russia there were already rallies in support of Yeltsin. And, until 1991, he was the champion in this competition for the collapse of the Soviet Union: Ukrainians only 'fetched' some missiles, while Yeltsin was the one who 'fired'. (*Laughs*)

25 Plokhii means that Soviet army officers who were Ukrainians by nationality and served in different parts of the USSR began to return to Ukraine after the proclamation of independence. Thus, independent Ukraine received military personnel for its national army.

So, Yeltsin was an unwilling Democrat? Did it just so happen that the political situation contributed to the realization of his personal ambitions?

– By nature, Yeltsin was an authoritarian leader and a proto-populist at the same time – someone who spoke to the people and tried to be likeable. He had both of these traits. Russia became the 'battering ram', and with its help he tried to knock down the doors of the Kremlin. Basically, he caused a second coup when, under the pretext of rescuing the country from the putsch, he removed Gorbachev from power. From the beginning, Yeltsin, with the support of his liberal entourage, sought to become the new leader of the Soviet Union and implement the liberal program. At this stage, Russia should have dropped out – rejected like dead wood – but this did not happen. The Soviet republics rebelled, and Ukraine proclaimed independence using rhetoric about the threat of a putsch. (*Laughs*) The Ukrainian elite's reaction to Yeltsin's attempt to consolidate power after the arrest of the putschists and to eliminate Gorbachev and become the new president of the USSR was to proclaim Ukraine's independence after the putsch.

Was it because the regional political elites did not accept Yeltsin as a new leader? Or did they see greater prospects for themselves as independent countries?

– The regional political elites did not want to concede the rights that they had received as a result of Gorbachev's *perestroika*. For Kravchuk and the Ukrainian communist elites, the main issue was to make sure the putsch would not take away the power they possessed in Ukraine. These elites could have lived under the power of the putschists in the centre, provided that they would retain all their powers. Yeltsin, in the wake of liberal elation, began jousting with Gorbachev for the leadership of the CPSU. His criticism was directed against the CPSU; the situation in Ukraine was very different. The communist majority there continued to control the parliament even after the declaration of independence.

Yeltsin's victory was contrary to the clan interests of the Ukrainian party elites. First, they were not keen on the emergence of a strong authoritarian leader in the centre. Secondly, Yeltsin played the anti-communist card, which, practically speaking, meant the removal of the Ukrainian communist elites from power. In essence[27], the August 24 vote was a vote against Yeltsin, the man who strived to reproduce the Soviet Union. Let's note that the United States, too, was not thrilled with Yeltsin. Actually, it was they and the political elites in Soviet republics who prevented him from finishing Gorbachev off in August 1991.

27 On 24 August 1991, the Supreme Council (Verkhovna Rada) of the Ukrainian SSR voted for the Act of Proclamation of the Independence of Ukraine.

On that note, the United States made great efforts to prevent the collapse of the USSR. President George H.W. Bush had hoped that Gorbachev would be able to keep a handle the situation. What was behind such trust in the first and last president of the USSR?

– The United States was concerned with its own security. This was about the world's largest arsenal of nuclear weapons. The Soviet Union, under Gorbachev, ensured the reliable preservation of this nuclear arsenal. The country was safeguarding against a possible civil war and the threat of this arsenal falling into the hands of terrorists.

So why, after all, didn't the US let Yeltsin finish off Gorbachev?

– Gorbachev was a convenient person to cooperate with. He was predictable. In fact, at some point the Soviet Union became a junior partner to the United States in the realm of foreign policy. The USSR did not block the UN resolution on the Gulf War, although Iraq was a long-time ally of the Soviet Union. An understanding was reached by both sides. Personal connections played a role. In Washington, they knew the previous Soviet leadership, whereas the new Russian political elites begged the question: who are these people 'racing their carts'?[28] It was not clear what could be expected of Yeltsin, who now had a nuclear suitcase in his possession. From this point of view, it was obviously in the interest of the US to preserve the Soviet Union as a state. This prompted Yeltsin to persistently pursue a closer friendship with Bush Sr. than Gorbachev ever managed, or at least to show that he was ready to be a partner. So, Yeltsin helped to solve the issue of nuclear weapons. He helped to gather all the nuclear potential of the former USSR into Russia.

To conclude on the topic of Yeltsin, it's worth mentioning that he really had the ambition of taking Gorbachev's office immediately after the putsch. When this attempt failed, Yeltsin focused on Russia as his main political project. It was then that he began to promote the confederation model for the post-Soviet space, which he tried to implement via the CIS project. If this was in fact a meaningful model in Yeltsin's mind, for the Ukrainians the CIS presented a way to 'divorce' in a civilized manner. That is why the Soviet Union did not come to an end in 1991 but continued its existence in the 1990s in some form. The Ukrainian-Russian Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership, with recognition of the inviolability of borders,[29] was signed only in 1997, since in the early 1990s it was

28 Horse-drawn carts equipped with machine-guns were used by insurgents in Ukraine and South Russia during the Civil War of 1918–1920. Here, this phrase is used as a metaphor for revolutionaries.

29 The Agreement on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation was signed on 31 May 1997. Ukraine made concessions on the question of the division of the Black Sea Fleet and also agreed to let the fleet of the Russian Federation remain on the territory of Ukraine until 2017. For more details, see *EIU*, II (2004), 431.

not clear what the CIS would become. As a matter of fact, it was also not clear what would happen to the former Soviet army and the navy.

You mentioned the 1997 Treaty, which temporarily settled the issues of Crimea and the Black Sea Fleet. The status of Crimea was hotly debated, which fuelled the separatist movement on the peninsula. Why didn't Yeltsin support the separatists?

– In fact, Russian support for Crimean separatism was paused after the signing of the Partition Treaty on the conditions under which the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation was allowed to remain in Sevastopol. From Yeltsin's point of view, this issue was temporarily resolved, although resistance to this solution lasted for a very long time within the Russian political milieu. In 1993, when Yeltsin ordered the shelling of the White House,[30] he managed to appease the part of the political milieu that sought to annex Crimea, but support for the separatist movement continued.

At that time, Russia had a complex but partner-like relationship with the United States. Russia in general and Yeltsin in particular were not ready for confrontation. Firstly, there was no combat-ready army. A small proportion of the combat units were bogged down in Chechnya. Secondly, a 'club' of Soviet leaders still existed. The heads of the newly created independent republics had all undergone the same party schooling. Kuchma, 'red director', Yeltsin, Secretary of the Industrial Sverdlovsk Regional Committee, and Nazarbayev, Chernomyrdin, and others were all of the same political culture, while the same cannot be said about the next generations of post-Soviet politicians. Political generations change, so the situation kept changing. In the political arena, a KGB native, Putin, appeared, as did the criminal Yanukovych. At a certain level, they had something in common, but they were still representatives of two different worlds. These purely personal psychological moments also played their role.

I can't refrain from asking about your book, *The Man with the Poison Gun*,[31] a political crime story about the murder of Stepan Bandera. Why did they have to kill Bandera in 1959? At that time, the entire Ukrainian nationalist underground in the Soviet Union had been destroyed; Bandera was a rather marginal figure in the West; and the Ukrainian nationalist diaspora was fragmented. The decision to kill him seems rather illogical.

30 White House: the House of the Government of the Russian Federation. In 1984–92, it was the House of Soviets of RSFSR. During the August coup in 1991, it became the centre of resistance, led by Yeltsin. After that, journalists started to call it the White House. In September–October 1993, the House of Soviets of the Russian Federation became the headquarters for the opposition to Yeltsin's reforms. The political crisis was solved by force. The White House was seriously damaged during the suppression of demonstrations. 157 people were killed.

31 Serhii Plokhy, *The Man with the Poison Gun. A Cold War Spy Story* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

Generally speaking, who made the decision to liquidate political opponents in the USSR? Furthermore, why was Bohdan Stašyns'kyj[32] chosen for this task, rather than some professional Chekist, as with the liquidation of Jevhen Konovalec'?[33]s

– From the memoirs of Volodymyr Semyčastnyj,[34] the Ukrainian Head of the KGB, we learn that he did not have the right to make decisions regarding these murders. Those decisions were made 'from above'. I can't say for sure whether it was the Politburo or a personal decision by Khrushchev as the foremost person in the hierarchy of power in the USSR. But it was made somewhere at that level. As we know, the leader of the Soviet Union was a native of Ukraine who used to fight against the OUN and Bandera's underground.[35] Interestingly, when the decision was made to kill Bandera, and when it was put into action, the second person in the government was Oleksij Kyryčenko[36] – the former first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine. Kyryčenko supervised the work of the KGB in his capacity as the second secretary of the Central Committee. For Khrushchev, as well as for Kyryčenko, the murder of Bandera was a very real symbolic victory over the Banderites.

So, this is a personal story?

– It is both a personal and a political story. The lower ranks of the KGB (the level of operatives), which surrounded Bandera with spies and played a game of disinformation with him, considered this decision completely impractical, but there was political will to go through with it nevertheless.

We do not have direct evidence or the documents to confirm this, but analysis of the timeline shows that within a week of Bandera's murder, the Politburo and the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR adopted a resolution to decorate Bohdan Stašyns'kyj. This fact indicates that such things can only happen with the blessing of the leader of the state,

32 Bohdan Stašyns'kyj (born 1931): the agent of the Soviet special services who murdered the leaders of the Ukrainian nationalist movement, Leo Rebet (1957) and Stepan Bandera (1959). In 1961, Stašyns'kyj fled to West Berlin and surrendered to the German authorities. In 1962, he was sentenced to 8 years in prison. He was released in 1969 and fled to South Africa. His whereabouts are unknown.

33 Jevhen Konovalec' (1891–1938): military and political leader, colonel of the UNR Army, commander of the UMO (Ukrainian Military Organization), head of the OUN (since 1929). He died as a result of a terrorist attack carried out by a member of the Soviet secret services, Pavel Sudoplatov. For more details, see *EIU*, V (2008), 28–30.

34 Volodymyr Semyčastnyj (1924–2001): party and military leader, colonel-general (1964). Chairman of the KGB of the USSR (1961–1967). Brezhnev was distrustful of Semyčastnyj, considering him the protege of his political competitor, Petro Šelest. Taking advantage of the fact that Stalin's daughter, Svetlana Alilueva, did not return from India and requested political asylum in the United States, Brezhnev dismissed Semyčastnyj. For more details, see *EIU*, IX (2012), 527.

35 Nikita Khrushchev.

36 Oleksij Kyryčenko (1908–1975): party and Soviet leader. From June 1953, the 1st Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine. He became the first Ukrainian to lead the Central Committee of the CPU. He supported Khrushchev in overthrowing Beria and with the policy of destalinization. Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU (1957–1960). Kyryčenko initiated a conflict with Krushchev's immediate circle and was subsequently removed from office. For more details, see *EIU*, IV (2007), 301.

and it is clear that Khrushchev had to explain to the members of the Politburo and the Presidium why they had to vote in favour of this resolution.

From our perspective, the decision to kill Bandera may seem illogical since the resistance movement had already been defeated. However, from Khrushchev's perspective these events had taken place only a decade before, which is a short amount of time. For him, it was like yesterday. All the phobias and personal revenge – everything was mixed into it.

Regarding Stašyns'kyj, I can say that he was just the perfect candidate for this assignment. It was run by officers from the Ministry of State Security,[37] who used to fight against the nationalist underground. The very same people, only then they had been sent to East Berlin. But who was Stašyns'kyj? He made his career during the war against the Ukrainian nationalist underground. He had received proper training – there was blood on his hands. In this case, all options for retreat were cut off. In addition, he had already established himself during a business trip abroad, when he killed Lev Rebet.[38] In fact, everyone was surprised because the plan was to blame Banderites for the murder of Rebet, which would lead to an internal conflict within the diaspora's nationalist milieu. This was the primary aim behind the murder; murder is always done for some purpose. Those who gave the orders might have received some moral satisfaction, but, in principle, murder should have a practical purpose. In the case of Rebet, it turned out that the weapon was so effective that everyone believed he had died of natural causes.[39] It was then that the idea of using Bohdan Stašyns'kyj against Bandera was first raised. Firstly, he already knew how to use the weapon; secondly, the method had been tested successfully, so there was no doubt left surrounding it. Why invent something new when there is already someone who has done it once and can do it again?

When talking about Bandera, we cannot fail to mention the 'war of monuments' we are currently witnessing. For the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, this is above all about a reckoning with the communist past, an attempt to discover their identity. But we see that this process is broader as similar waves have swept both the US and the UK. What has

37 The Ministry of State Security, which in 1954 was reorganized into the KGB.

38 Lev Rebet (1912–1957): politician, publicist, and ideologist of Ukrainian nationalism. During World War II, he was imprisoned in Auschwitz (1941–1944). After his release, Rebet emigrated to West Germany, where he joined the OUN Overseas Centre (1945). After the split of OUN Overseas (1954), Rebet established a new organization, OUN Abroad (ZC in Ukrainian, also known as '*dvijkari*' according to their two leaders, Rebet and Zinovij Matla), in 1956. OUN Abroad was in opposition to Bandera's group. Rebet was murdered by the KGB agent Stašyns'kyj and buried in Waldfriedhof cemetery in Munich. For more details, see *EIU*, IX (2012), 146–47.

39 Bohdan Stašyns'kyj used a poisonous ampoule which was sprayed into the victim's face with a special weapon. It triggered an instantaneous death. Forensic medical examination revealed no traces of poison and registered heart failure as the cause of death.

caused such a radical deconstruction and a reckoning with the past? Is this process cyclical? Or is this a trait of our particular epoch?

– There are global processes, but there are also dynamics at work here, because monuments have not been dismantled in every country. There are situations in which global things overlap with local specifics. Globally, these processes are connected to decreased living standards following the 2008 economic crisis, which caused the biggest recession since the Great Depression. We are now going through processes similar to those of the 1930s. The political system is struggling to cope with the political and social challenges caused by the economic crisis. As a result, radical parties are emerging, populism is growing, and social issues are escalating. In some societies, conflict manifests itself through unresolved issues of historical memory and historical justice. Let's say it's about the imperial past in the UK, whereas in the US it's about race relations, which are exacerbated not only by the demolition of monuments but also by mass protests. This radical revision of history leads to symbolic violence. Ukraine certainly has its own dynamics, but as the recent elections demonstrate, we are also no strangers to populism. In Ukraine, this is about not only a relationship with the past but also with Russia, and a process of decolonization.

You raised questions connected with the post-imperial situation. In your opinion, why is Ukraine's role a key one in the context of contemporary Europe? We are a large country, and at the same time we are driving the process of democratic transformation on post-Soviet terrain. This is actually something the protests in Belarus and Kazakhstan could not achieve. What will determine the success of Ukraine in its democratic evolution: is it geopolitical factors, or cultural and historical ones?

– As you mentioned, the country's size is already one factor. A week after the Ukrainian referendum for independence, the Soviet Union collapsed. When explaining the situation to Bush Sr., Yeltsin said that without Ukraine Russia would be crushed by the Muslim republics.[40] People, culture, language – they all play their part. But there are a few other points. The first is Ukraine's geopolitical location, which provides the country with a trajectory toward the EU and NATO. In the sixteenth century, the Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom existed, a state with which Ukraine was historically connected. Ukraine has been part of the European space and, to some extent, it remains so, albeit astride the EU border. For Kyrgyzstan,

40 The Soviet Central Asia republics (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tadzhikistan) as well as Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus, where Islam was the main religion. The Russian Federation also includes Muslim republics such as Tatarstan, Chechnya, and others.

for example, such a choice is not available due to geography. The second point is that, because of its history, Ukraine partially preserved a democratic tradition. This means that it is quite difficult to drag Ukraine into some new union and exercise control over it, because it is not enough to promise a transfer of 15 billion to the president to resolve the issue.[41]

So, it's impossible to buy out the local elites and thereby solve the Ukrainian question?

– Russians tried to do it again and again, waiting for their pro-Russian candidate. Now the doctrine has changed: they have realized that they need to do something else – to dismember, to destabilize, etc. This suggests that it is not possible to hold Ukraine down politically and economically, mainly because of its democracy. Therefore, all the factors matter here: Ukraine's size, its geopolitical circumstances, its historical and cultural ties with Europe, and democracy. Rather, the traditions of Ukrainian democracy may be problematic, but their existence is undeniable.

We recorded this interview one week prior to the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. In response to my last question, you basically predicted such a scenario, emphasizing that Russia has changed its 'doctrine' regarding Ukraine. The entire world was shocked by the crimes committed by the Russian army in Buča and other cities. On 3 April 2022, a notorious article outlining the program for the genocide of Ukrainians was published on the Ria Novosti website.[42] Much has been said about the 'Weimar syndrome' of the Russian Federation. From a comparative perspective, the parallels between the actions of the Russian Federation and Nazi Germany can be clearly traced. How correct are such comparisons from a historical point of view? Can one say that in both cases we are dealing with the phenomenon of fascism, or that 'ruscism'[43] has a different nature? What consequences will this conflict have for the post-Soviet space and the entire architecture of the international security system?[44]

– The parallels between the two regimes are obvious on several levels. Firstly, in both cases we are dealing with the revanchism of a country that lost a war (in the case of Russia, this is the Cold War) – lost its prestige

41 Russia's proposal to provide a $15 billion loan to Ukraine, which was perceived by the public as a bribe to then-President Viktor Yanukovych in exchange for rejecting Ukraine's policy on European integration. See Ksenija Kapustyns'ka, '"Borh Janukovyča": sud vynis rišennja ščodo sporu Ukrajiny ta Rosiji', *S'ohodni*, 14 September 2018 <https://economics.segodnya.ua/ua/economics/enews/dolg-yanukovicha-sud-vynes-reshenie-po-sporu-ukrainy-i-rossii-1170887.html> [accessed 21 April, 2022].

42 Timofej Sergejcev, 'Čto Rossija dolžna sdelat' s Ukrainoj?', *Ria Novosti*, 3 April 2022, <https://ria.ru/20220403/ukraina-1781469605.html> [accessed 21 April 2022].

43 See more about this term in Timothy Snyder, 'The War in Ukraine has Unleashed a New Word: In a Creative Play With Three Different Languages, Ukrainians Identify An Enemy – "Ruscism"', *The New York Times*, 22 April, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/22/magazine/ruscism-ukraine-russia-war.html> [accessed 22 May 2022].

44 The last question was asked on 21 April 2022, during the process of authorizing the interview.

and territory – but was not occupied and did not undergo a process of radical political transformation. Secondly, it is about unresolved German (or Russian) questions, wherein authoritarian leaders try to build a great Germany or a great Russia, hence the parallels between the Anschluss of Austria and the annexation of Crimea. Finally, we are talking about the monopoly of the state in the media as well as persecution of the opposition, by way of reducing people to the 'nuts and bolts' of the *de facto* authoritarian dictatorial machine. In addition, certain scholars bring our attention to the elements of fascism within the political system and the ideology of Putin's Russia. Unfortunately, certain elements of history may repeat themselves, even though it might seem that we have already turned over human history's most horrific pages.

The interview was conducted by YANA PRYMACHENKO

Wojciech Konończuk
PAX POST-SOVIETICA? THE FINAL END OF POST-SOVIETNESS

ABSTRACT

This article argues that use of the terms 'post-Soviet states' or 'post-Soviet region' does more to obscure than to explain anything. Although these terms have become anachronistic and misleading as they suggest a group of countries that still have much in common, they are still used because the area is traditionally and erroneously perceived as a certain whole with shared rules. The disintegration of this territory that has been visible since 1991 is no surprise but indicates a return to the situation before the Russian Empire's expansion and colonization efforts. A process of restoration of historically great macroregions is taking place in the area: Eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus, and Central Asia, each of which has a different cultural and civilizational identity, resulting in profound differences in their political and economic systems along with the pluralization of the influences of international actors. Despite Russian attempts to curb the territory's political, economic, and social disintegration, it has proved unstoppable and is being accelerated by Russian policy. Moscow's once hegemonic position in the region is becoming a thing of the past. Russia is no longer an attractive partner as it has become not a source of modernization, ideas, and technologies, but of problems and a threat to security and stability.

KEYWORDS:

post-Soviet area, post-colonialism, the Caucasus, Central Asia, Eastern Europe

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In many media discussions and academic discourse on the Russian aggression against Ukraine, this country is referred to as a 'post-Soviet state'. Similar terms are used for Belarus, Moldova, and the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia, but they are used much less frequently to describe the Baltic states or even contemporary Russia. For some reason, journalists and researchers think that the use of expressions such as 'post-Soviet states' or 'post-Soviet region' is still justified more than three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In this article, I will try to show that using these terms today does more to obscure than to explain anything, and that they have become artificial and anachronistic. They are used because, firstly, there is no better alternative common description of the territory that once comprised the Soviet state; secondly, the area is traditionally and erroneously perceived as a certain whole with shared rules and still much in common. The question is, though, whether one term is needed to describe an extremely diverse territory comprising 15 countries with a combined area of over 22 million sq. km, especially as history shows that the area which the Russian Empire, followed by the Soviet Union, attempted to unify was always more divided than united.

A RETURN TO HISTORICAL MACROREGIONS

Let us then begin with not the present but the past. Without showing the historical determinants, it will be impossible to understand the current political, economic, or social situation. Never in history did this territory comprise a uniform area; it always had various cultures, religions, and political traditions as a result of belonging to various civilizational circles. All the lands to which the current 'post-Soviet' concept refer became united within the Russian Empire only in the late nineteenth century. Moreover, the period when various regions belonged to it was fundamentally different. The lands of left-bank Ukraine were taken by Russia in the second half of the seventeenth century. Estonia joined the Russian Empire in the early eighteenth century and was thus part of it much longer than, for example, the North and South Caucasus and Central Asia, which were conquered in the nineteenth century. And yet the term 'post-Soviet' is used to refer to Estonia considerably less often. The Russian expansion, which happened, among other factors, because the country was more developed than the peoples it conquered, lasted until the late nineteenth century, when the Russian army captured

the lands of today's Turkmenistan (1881–1884) and Gorno-Badakhshan (1895), now part of Tajikistan.

The Russian Empire was a colonial state, and, like any colonial construct, it was artificial. Despite its efforts, it never managed to create an effective cement to bind this extremely diverse region. Throughout its existence, Tsarist Russia comprised entirely different lands, whose standardization, including in the linguistic sphere, was unsuccessful. The western part of the Russian state was historically part of the European circles of civilization, although Latin and Orthodox influences blended there. The Caucasus region, which has a longer tradition of statehood than Russia, was influenced by the Ottoman Empire and Persia and was therefore affected by the tradition of Eastern Christianity and the culture of Islam. Vast Central Asia, meanwhile, was dominated by Islamic civilization, and until the twentieth century much of it was inhabited by nomadic peoples.

The entry of these vastly disparate regions into the Soviet Union after 1917 was the result of violence, while the attempts of Ukrainians, Georgians, Armenians and Azeris to establish independent states ended in failure as they were conquered by the Bolsheviks. They were aware that strong national identities were their greatest enemy, and Lenin therefore recommended "taking the most care towards the holdover of national sentiments in the countries oppressed the longest", in order to instrumentally exploit national movements to assure the stability of the Soviet state.[1] Yet this 'national experiment' was abandoned in the 1930s, as Moscow decided that Bolshevik rule was already sufficiently consolidated. It was replaced by mass repressions against nationalist and liberating movements, or those at least aspiring to remain culturally distinct. These were supposed to make the Soviet Union uniform and to consolidate the various nations, with the Russian language and culture binding them together.

However, several decades of attempts to unify and integrate the area and create a *homo Sovieticus* did not succeed. Both before 1917 and after 1991, the region was diverse in linguistic, culture, religious and social terms. Finally, long-term efforts and mass repressions never produced a uniform identity there. It appears that the custom of speaking about 'post-Soviet countries' largely results from the earlier 'sin' whereby the history of Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union were written as the history of Russians and the Russian state, completely ignoring its ethnic, historical and cultural diversity. In fact, Russia and the Soviet Union were a multinational state in which ethnic Russians comprised roughly half of the population, a fact that until recently has tended to be ignored in Western historiographies.

1 Józef Czapski, *Na nieludzkiej ziemi* (Kraków: Znak, 2001), p. 213.

Incidentally, this was a broader problem of the perception of the West, which was unable to discern that the USSR was not a monolith. This was summed up well by Vladimir Bukovsky, a Soviet writer and dissident, who in the late 1970s noted that "the West calls us all 'Russians', from Moldavians to Eskimos".[2]

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the nations comprising it were to various degrees ready to build their own statehoods. Let us emphasize again that for most of its history this area was composed of various regions, therefore its disintegration not a surprise but rather a return to the period before Russian rule.

It was Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, which even in the Soviet period were perceived as the most European part of the USSR – sometimes described as 'the western Soviet Union' – that were the quickest to extract themselves. The process of their integration with Euro-Atlantic institutions proceeded remarkably smoothly, and in 2004 the three Baltic states joined the European Union and NATO. Today they remain strongly incorporated into the Western political, economic and social sphere. They have been successful in creating stable democratic institutions, rule of law, and buoyant economies, stifling social ethnic conflicts arising from the large Russian minorities in Latvia and Estonia. As a result, the Baltic states are less often included in the term 'post-Soviet region' and will only be mentioned below where the context requires.

The situation is more complex in Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, the three states of the South Caucasus, and the five Central Asian ones. It was they – rather than Russia – that began to be referred to as 'post-Soviet countries', which indicates the numerous supposed similarities between them. Below I will try to show that, despite some things that they do have in common, there are many more differences than there are commonalities between these states and regions, and these disparities are only becoming deeper with each passing year.

FROM DEMOCRACY TO TOTALITARIANISM

More than three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, increasing diversity can be seen among the post-Soviet states in terms of their political systems. After 1991, the term 'post-Soviet' was used to describe countries with similar systems that found themselves in the process of transformation from totalitarianism to democracy. In fact, the definition

2 Vladimir Bukovsky, *To Build a Castle: My Life as a Dissenter* (London: Deutsch, 1978), p. 52.

of this term became inapplicable immediately as the political systems of the states emerging from the ashes of the Soviet state soon differed and gradually became more distant. Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia very soon and without much fuss became stable democratic systems, as confirmed by Euro-Atlantic integration. The states of Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova) and the Southern Caucasus (Armenia, Georgia) sought in the 1990s – with varying degrees of success – to build democracies. Azerbaijan and the Central Asian states, with their distinct political tradition and culture, from the beginning of their independence consolidated authoritarian systems which also began to evolve with time.

Four states that were once part of the Soviet Union can currently be called democracies: Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia. Although their political systems vary and each has its own distinguishing features, they have in common regular alternation of power, extensive civil liberties, and free media. At the same time, their biggest weakness is the lack of independent institutions and occasional attempts by some politicians to imitate democratic procedures, leading to the appearance of elements of authoritarianism. Consequently, these states regularly undergo periods of political upheaval, as exemplified by the Orange Revolution of 2003/2004 and the Revolution of Dignity of 2013/2014 in Ukraine, the mass protests in 2009 and 2015/2016 in Moldova, the Rose Revolution of 2003 and protests in 2019/2020 in Georgia, and the 2018 protests in Armenia.

Despite the recurring instabilities, these countries' civil societies and political pluralism have proved sufficiently strong to halt the regression of democracy. Their experience shows how difficult the process of building stable democratic systems is after leaving a totalitarian period. Despite these caveats, one can observe gradual progress in the reforming and strengthening of their political systems. In the case of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, this has been bolstered by their association agreements with the EU, which are an important plan for extensive modernization, as well as their aspirations for European integration. Realistically, however, one must concede that these countries will need a long time to build stable and efficient political systems (in the case of Ukraine and, partly, Armenia, this is further complicated by the ongoing conflicts), but it is also unlikely that they will see a return of authoritarian tendencies and abandonment of democracy.

All the other countries have authoritarian political systems – the most widespread system type in the post-Soviet space. Yet they, too, exhibit rather significant differences. The command model of government in Turkmenistan – with its complete lack of opposition, civil liberties, free media, limited opportunities for foreign travel and controlled internet

– can be called a totalitarian state. Similar tendencies have been evident recently in Belarus (especially since August 2020) and Russia (particularly since February 2022), which were previously regarded as authoritarian states with a monopolistic role of the presidential office, rigged elections, and an extremely limited role for the opposition (only outside of parliament) and civil society. The regression towards rapid development of totalitarian elements is mainly manifested in the elimination of any centres of political power that pose a genuine or potential threat to these two regimes, eradication of all independent media, attempts to limit internet freedom, closure of the majority of NGOs, and adoption of a series of legal changes *de facto* resulting in censorship and loss of freedom of speech. One such example is the introduction of long prison sentences for calling the Russian aggression against Ukraine a 'war'. In the near future, barring an – unlikely – internal crisis and resultant breakdown of Putin and Lukashenko's regimes, there is nothing to suggest that the Belarusian and Russian societies might force any change. It is also important to note that Belarusians and Russians have fundamentally different value systems, despite the similarities of their political regimes. More than 50% of Belarusian citizens aged 18–45 believe that Western-style democracy is the best political system, while less than 25% of Russians aged 18–39 are of the same view.[3] This study shows that the current attitudes of Belarusians are influenced by their different tradition, as the Belarusian lands used to be part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This was also confirmed by the demands for freedom expressed by Belarusian society after the rigged presidential elections in August 2020.

Numerous similarities notwithstanding, the political system in Kazakhstan differs from the Russian and Belarusian regimes. Paradoxically, despite the authoritarian framework, it is characterized by more pluralism, debate, and islands of freedom. Even in the later years of President Nursultan Nazarbayev's rule, he attempted to reconstruct the system and streamline state institutions. Despite the outbreak of the most serious crisis in the history of Kazakh statehood in January 2022, his successor, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, seems to be continuing these changes with the aim of stabilizing the state in its current authoritarian 'corset' and ultimately securing limited democratization. Although the future of this process remains open, even the limited freedoms in Kazakhstan set it apart from the rest of the Central Asian region. Whereas the situation in Kyrgyzstan

3 John O'Loughlin, Gerard Toal, and Kristin Bakke, 'Is Belarus in the midst of a generational upheaval?', *Global Voices*, 17 September 2020 <https://globalvoices.org/2020/09/17/is-belarus-in-the-midst-of-a-generational-upheaval/> [accessed 12 July 2022]; Levada-Center, 'Kakoj dolžna byt' Rossija v predstavlenii rossijan?', Levada Analytical Center, 10 September 2021 <https://www.levada.ru/2021/09/10/kakoj-dolzhna-byt-rossiya-v-predstavlenii-rossiyan/> [accessed 2 July 2022].

is similar, it is much better than in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, which are governed by repressive authoritarian regimes. Since 2016, when Shavkat Mirziyoyev came to power, the Uzbek political system has been showing signs of liberalization and certain political reforms, yet these do not change the essence of the political system. This is in contrast to Tajikistan, ruled since 1992 by Emomali Rahmon, where the situation has regressed in recent years.

The conclusion we can draw from this brief outline of the political systems in the post-Soviet area is that although the most common model is still authoritarianism of various degrees of repressiveness – or, in certain cases, developed or developing totalitarianism – there is also a knot of countries with democratic systems, even if these still have various burdens and defects. Furthermore, the case of Belarus shows a society that has matured to democratization, but whose aspirations are stifled by Lukashenko's Kremlin-dependent regime.

ALIENATION FROM RUSSIA

Another factor that differentiates post-Soviet states is the ongoing reorientation of their foreign policy. After 1991, Russia sought to maintain political, economic, and other ties with the newly formed states in an effort to preserve its influence in an area that Moscow had traditionally considered its natural sphere of interest. The instrument that was to facilitate this was the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), set up at the same time as the collapse of the Soviet Union. This organization was initially joined – either more or less formally – by all the countries except Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, which simultaneously cut all ties with Moscow.

The CIS soon proved to be not so much – as the Kremlin envisaged – a reintegration instrument as an organization facilitating a relatively 'civilized divorce' and mitigating certain disputes between countries. The individual post-Soviet states preferred to build sovereign foreign policies, diversify their external partners, and avoid dependence on Russia. An exception was the free trade area maintained within the CIS, which at first brought significant benefits to the member states. However, only Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia joined the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), the new reintegration organization set up by Russia in 2015. Yet, the EEU is relatively ineffective and remains a far from efficient implementation of the Russian political objectives of establishing a closely integrated structure resembling the European Union. The Kremlin also

failed because it distanced Kyiv from the new organization, one of whose aims had been to attract Ukraine to the integration project with Russia.

The passing years have brought a weakening of Russian influences in the territory of the former USSR, while the post-Soviet states have diversified their foreign policies, leading to an increased impact of players from outside the region. This process has taken place fastest in Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, which opted for integration with the European Union and, in the first two cases, also NATO, which became their key priority and influenced their domestic policy. This also had the support of the majority of society in these countries, most visibly in Ukraine, where approval of integration with Euro-Atlantic structures after the full-scale Russian aggression of 2022 reached 85–90%, and less so in Moldova, where it is just over 50%. In June 2022, Kyiv and Chisinau received official EU candidate country status. This was not awarded to Tbilisi, however, owing to problems with human rights compliance and democratic principles. At the same time, although the ruling Georgian Dream party follows a moderately pro-Russian line, Georgian society remains enthusiastic towards European integration.

An entirely different foreign policy is pursued by Belarus, whose leader Alexander Lukashenko, unchanged since 1994, from the outset favoured a close relationship with Russia, although as late as 2020 he was still trying to maintain a space for dialogue and cooperation with the West. The pacified protests following the rigged presidential elections, support for Russian aggression in Ukraine, and Western sanctions have ensured that the level of Minsk's dependence on Moscow is the greatest since 1991 and will not change as long as the current regime remains in place.

Belarus is an exception, however, as none of the other post-Soviet states has a foreign policy so strongly oriented towards Russia, thus Belarusian sovereignty is very limited. Armenia, which continues to be dependent on Moscow in terms of security owing to the ongoing conflict with Azerbaijan, retains the option to develop relations with other partners, including the West. Yet Yerevan remains aware that the unresolved conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and frozen relations with Baku and Ankara consign it to the role of Russian vassal and prevents any economic development. This is the reason for the negotiations with Azerbaijan and Turkey that have been visible in recent months and could ultimately lead to a turning point that might result in reduced dependence on Russia. Azerbaijan, meanwhile, is showing increasing boldness in demonstrating an assertive policy towards Moscow – doing so under the patronage of Turkey, which has become an important actor in Baku – while also demonstrating ambitions in Central Asia.

In the Central Asian region too, important changes have been taking place in the last two decades or so, manifested in declining Russian influence and increased economic influence from China. Although it seemed that the intervention of Collective Security Treaty Organisation forces under the aegis of Russia in Kazakhstan in January 2022 would herald a major development of Moscow's political influence, all signs suggest that the war in Ukraine has reversed this process. The Kazakhs see Russian policy as a threat to the territorial integrity of their own state, leading to a desire to develop cooperation with other Central Asian states as well as creating opportunities for an increase in Western influence, including the EU. It is worth noting that Kazakhstan declared that it would abide by the Western sanctions placed on Russia, refused to recognize the para-states in the Donbas, and is gradually making its historical policy increasingly critical of the Soviet and Russian legacy. Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, despite retaining many interests related to their ties with Russia (economic exchange, economic migration), are also distancing themselves, openly or less so, from the Kremlin. Against this background, neutral Turkmenistan stands out: it is pursuing a policy of isolationism and feels more confident in relations with Moscow owing to the lack of a shared border and independence in the export of Turkmen energy resources.

The processes of alienation of the post-Soviet states from Russia that have been taking place in recent years, despite the Kremlin's efforts to stop them, have only accelerated since Russia's aggression in Ukraine. The war has not only fundamentally changed the Ukrainian state and society; it has also had far-reaching consequences for the entire former Soviet Union, only increasing the desire for distance from Russia. Moscow still holds major instruments for influencing its former provinces (military, energy-related, transit, access to the Russian labour market), but how much it will be able to use them is unclear. The future of Russian influence will largely depend on the result of the war. A Russian defeat would lead to further disintegration of its influence in other regions. The only exceptions are Lukashenko's vassalized regime in Belarus and – to a large extent – Armenia, which is dependent on Russia in terms of security. On top of this comes other states' influences in the former Soviet Union region: the EU in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia; Turkey in Azerbaijan; and China, the West and Turkey in Central Asia. The result is an increasing and seemingly unstoppable 'pluralization'of the international arena. The Russian Federation's loss of its status as an attractive partner and model of modernization has contributed to the current situation. Recurrent neoimperialist tendencies in Moscow's policy and the domination of the force factor have contributed to the post-Soviet states' successful search for alternative partners.

FROM CAPITALISM TO A CENTRALLY PLANNED ECONOMY

The area that once formed the Soviet state, and previously Tsarist Russia, was never uniform in terms of economic and social development. Traditionally, the most developed region, with the highest quality of life, was the western part: especially Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia; partly the industrial centres in Soviet Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus; and also agricultural Moldova. After 1991, the degree of economic diversification of the newly formed states only grew. Rather than having a common denominator, several models of economy have developed with various levels of development, economic freedom, role of the state and ruling elites, and corruption.

The Baltic states carried out a quick and effective economic transformation, building buoyant capitalist economies integrated (including in the institutional and legal sphere) with the EU market. For the rest of the former Soviet Union, the first decade of independence was a time of profound quality of life collapse, economic crisis and social pauperization, from which these countries began to emerge only in the new century. This was easiest for those countries with raw materials (Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan), which benefitted from the price situation, particularly for oil and gas. This also encouraged a particular economic model which had the characteristics of a market economy but was significantly influenced by the state and oligarchic groups, i.e., informal players privileged by their political influence and major business assets acquired in the period of privatization. Only a few states, however, made genuine efforts to secure economic reform and systemic modernization.

The economic map of the post-Soviet area in 2022 can be divided into several parts. The first, as mentioned, contains the Baltic states, which successfully integrated with the West. The second group comprises Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and Armenia, which have made certain – albeit inconsistent and incomplete – efforts to reform but have market economies. Their GDP per capita is similar, which is not to say that there are no differences between them, including the role of oligarchic groups. In the next group are Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, whose economies, which are geared towards the export of raw materials, fulfil certain criteria of a capitalist economy with a simultaneous strong role of state regulations, elements of central planning, and kleptocracy of the ruling elites. It is worth emphasizing that Kazakhstan is perhaps the most successful example of economic transformation in the post-Soviet space, with a GDP per capita twice as high as those in the previous group.

The fourth group contains such states as Belarus, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, which – despite highly contrasting economic

systems – are connected by strong state interventionism, central planning and a lack of respect for the right to private property. This is a problem in almost all the states described here, albeit with varying levels and strengths. Russia is alone in the fifth group: it has a raw materials-based economy and developed market features (until a few years ago), and it is characterized by a strong role of the state and – especially since February 2022 – central planning and developed parasitical influences of the kleptocratic elites. The evolution of the Russian economic model is taking place in parallel with Russia's political transformation. The final group consists of Turkmenistan, which has an isolated economy based on raw materials and agriculture, practically dominated by the monopolistic influences of the state, as well as demodernization tendencies.

This brief outline presents a region in which, in economic terms – despite certain common features (such as developed corruption, a lack of strong independent institutions and judiciary system) – there are more divisions than things in common. The tendencies observed suggest that the differences between them will become bigger, also within macroregions, like the five countries of Central Asia, thus forming incompatible economic models. Looking at the UN's Human Development Index from 2020, which measures not only the level of economic development but also the quality of education, life expectancy, access to medical services, etc., the picture of the 15 post-Soviet states becomes even more complicated. Four groups of countries then emerge: 1) Estonia (29th place in the world), Lithuania (34th) and Latvia (37th); 2) Kazakhstan (51st), Russia (52nd), Belarus (53rd) and Georgia (61st); 3) Ukraine (74th), Armenia (81st), Azerbaijan (88th), Moldova (90th); 4) Uzbekistan (106th), Turkmenistan (111th), Kyrgyzstan (120th), and Tajikistan (125th).[4]

ADVANCING DE-RUSSIFICATION

The traditional glue binding the Soviet Union's regions, otherwise disparate in almost every respect, was the Russian language. More than 30 years after the end of the USSR, it remains the lingua franca in the area, although it is becoming less important with each passing year. The reasons for this are the increased significance of national languages, the declining role of Russian in education, and emigration of ethnic Russians. It is worth noting that Russian has received the status of second official language only

4 United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2020. The Next Frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene* (New York, 2020) <https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2020> [accessed 12 July 2022].

in Belarus and Kyrgyzstan, while in Kazakhstan it is permitted for use in state institutions and local authority bodies. The scale of change is demonstrated by data published recently by the Moscow-based Pushkin Institute. Whereas in 1990/1991 some 9.1 million school pupils in Soviet republics (not including the Russian SFSR) were educated in Russian, by 2019/2020 this number had more than halved to 4.1 million.[5]

The de-Russification process has advanced most quickly in the Southern Caucasus, where the number of pupils in schools that teach in Russian has fallen to 2% in Armenia and Georgia and 8.4% in Azerbaijan. The situation in Central Asian countries varies: in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, one third of education still takes place in Russian; in Uzbekistan 10%, in Tajikistan 4.6%, and in Turkmenistan less than 2%. In both regions, the declining importance of Russian has accelerated countries' replacement of Cyrillic with the Latin alphabet, which has already taken place in Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, and is planned for 2025 in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In Moldova, meanwhile, Russian has become slightly less important: in 30 years, the number of Russian-language schools fell from 34.2% to 27.9%.

The only former Soviet country where the importance of Russian has grown, not declined, since 1991, is Belarus. This is the effect of the Lukashenko regime's policy, which has systematically weeded Belarusian out from education and public life. This policy is reflected well by Lukashenko's 2006 statement that "you cannot express anything great in Belarusian. The Belarusian language is poor. There are only two great languages in the world: Russian and English".[6] Although, according to the 2019 census, 61.2% of citizens of Belarus name Belarusian as their native language and 28.5% use it at home, in fact it can barely be heard on the country's streets. A better indicator of the assessment of the linguistic situation is the progressing Russification of schools: in 1994, 40.6% of children were educated in Belarusian, compared to just 10.2% in 2021.[7]

At the other end of the scale is Ukraine, where the declining importance of Russian is particularly significant because of the size of the country's population. In 1994, the proportions of use of Ukrainian and Russian at home were similar: 36.7% of citizens spoke Ukrainian, 32.4% Russian, and 29.4% both languages. By April 2022, the situation

5 Pushkin State Russian Language Institute, *Indeks položenija russkogo jazyka v mire* (Moskwa, 2022) <https://www.pushkin.institute/news/index_2022.pdf> [accessed 10 July 2022].

6 Julija Cjal'puk, 'Aljaksandr Lukašènka zahavaryŭ pa-belarusku', *Belsat.eu*, 1 October 2019 <https://belsat.eu/in-focus/alyaksandr-lukashenka-zagavaryu-pa-belarusku/> [accessed 12 July 2022].

7 Aleksandra Boguslavskaja, 'Kak Lukašenko rešil chajpanut' na belorusskom jazyke', *Deutsche Welle*, 5 February 2022 <https://www.dw.com/ru/kak-lukashenko-reshil-haipanut-na-belorusslom-jazyke/a-60661788> [accessed 10 July 2022].

had changed radically: Ukrainian was used by 51%, Russian 15%, and both languages 33%.[8] In Ukrainian education in 2020, just 6.8% of pupils were taught in Russian.

The process of de-Russification of education, culture, and public life in the post-Soviet states seems irreversible, with Russia's attack on Ukraine only accelerating it. The war will have consequences for the situation of the Russian language not only in this country but in many others too. Only in Belarus has the status of Russian been strengthened, thus threatening the Belarusian language, and a potential reversal of this trend currently appears unlikely.

CONCLUSIONS: FAREWELL TO POST-SOVIETNESS

The above comparative analysis leads to the conclusion that use of the definition 'post-Soviet countries/area' is misleading as it suggests a group of countries that still have much in common. Yet, more than three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the 15 countries that have risen from its ashes are marked by considerably more differences than similarities in each of the categories analysed. Returning to the question of the influence of history on the region, since the period of Tsarist Russia no common, consolidated space has emerged, and standardization in the Soviet era ended with partial success at best; it is even harder to speak of any unity of the post-Soviet space at present.

The disintegration of this territory that has been visible since 1991 is therefore no surprise, but it indicates a return to the situation before the Russian Empire's expansion and colonization. Indeed, a process of restoration of great historic macroregions is taking place in Eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus, and Central Asia, each of which has a different cultural and civilizational identity, thus resulting in profound differences in their political and economic systems and pluralization of the influences of international actors. The most characteristic manifestation of this is Russia's gradual loss of influence in its former provinces, although it still harbours aspirations to become the dominant force there. Nonetheless, not in two centuries has Russian influence in this region been as weak as it is today. For Moscow, this is an unequivocally negative trend. The post-Soviet states are less interested in maintaining – not to mention developing – relations with Russia than in strengthening their own statehood and

8 Sociological Group Rating, *Desjate zahal'nonacional'ne opytuvannja: Ideolobični markery vijny*, 27 April 2022 (Kyiv, 2022) <https://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg_files/rg_ua_1000_ideological_markers_ua_042022_press.pdf> [accessed 12 July 2022].

national identity, diversifying their foreign partners, and joining non-Russian integration projects. The process of 'regionalization' of the area remains incomplete but is irreversible. The trends described here mean that in the future one can only expect the differences between these countries to deepen, with the Russian attack on Ukraine only hastening them.

While loosening the relations with Moscow imposed on them in recent centuries, the countries of the region are also tightening links with their historic neighbours with whom they were once traditionally connected by plentiful political, economic, cultural, religious and social ties. In Ukraine's case, this process is illustrated well by foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba's programme speech from September 2021. He said: "We need to get back to Central Europe [...] becoming part of a larger united Europe is indivisible from becoming part of a unified Central Europe [...] Ukraine is and has always been a Central European state: historically, politically, and culturally. Most importantly, Central Europe is where our identity belongs".[9]

It is hard to disagree with Kuleba: part of Ukraine was indeed historically closely linked to Central Europe, although this is also a political choice, associated with detaching the country from the imperial Russian legacy and the belief that by referring to this past Ukrainians would not have the chance to develop their own national and cultural identity. Ukraine is not the only one 'escaping' its Russian neighbour, which has little to offer and is trying to pursue a neoimperialist policy of rebuilding its past influences. Similar tendencies can be observed in all of Russia's neighbours, which were once part of the Russian and then the Soviet state (until 2020, this also concerned Belarus) and today wish to reinforce their own statehood, less or more demonstratively, knowing that their independence in fact means independence from Moscow.

So why is the term 'post-Soviet countries' still used? It appears that in the media and among scholars the answer is the lack of an alternative combined with a desire to retain a broad and 'convenient' concept for an extremely diverse territory with few common denominators. Moreover, one of the exponents of the term is Russia, which has an interest in retaining it to preserve the perception of the area as one of supposed continuing unity. The 'post-Soviet region' thereby serves as an effective justification of the special Russian role in the territory as a supposedly privileged state with, for historical reasons, 'special rights'. These Russian designs on domination are still recognized by at least some other international

9 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 'Dmytro Kuleba: Ukraine is back in Central Europe. Keynote speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine at the Ukrainian Central European Forum in Kyiv, 15.09.2021', 20 September 2021 <https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news/dmytro-kuleba-ukraine-back-central-europe> [accessed 16 July 22].

actors. Yet, the advancing disintegration of the area outlined above – political, economic, cultural, linguistic and value-related – show that it has increasingly little in common with the actual situation. This does not change the fact that use of the term 'post-Soviet area' is an unconscious admission that this is a territory where Russia has particular responsibility and a privileged position.

The presence of the term 'post-Soviet' also seems to be affected by a lack of understanding and broader discussions, including academic ones, on the fact that the Tsarist and Soviet empires were colonial states.[10] However, while the European colonial empires collapsed in the twentieth century and reconciled themselves to the loss of their former lands, Russia is not only trying to restore its former influences but is also willing to start wars to defend its neoimperialist interests. In doing so – unlike the United Kingdom, for example – Moscow has not attempted to create its own 'commonwealth', meaning an organization whose aim is not so much to reintegrate the former Soviet area but to develop neighbourly cooperation. The Commonwealth of Independent States was not such an attempt as Russia designed it to maintain its political and economic influences in the region.

After 1991, the diversification process of an area once dominated by Russia took over, with the states that emerged there returning to their own cultures and traditions, reviving their identity and linguistic distinctness, and diversifying partners and international alliances. Despite the Russian attempts to curb the territory's political, economic, and social disintegration, it not only proved unstoppable but was in fact accelerated by Russian policy. As a result, Moscow's once hegemonic position in the region is becoming a thing of the past. Russia is no longer an attractive partner as it has become not a source of modernization, ideas and technology but of problems and a threat to security and stability. Finally, the Russian aggression in Ukraine has fundamentally changed the relations between the two most important states in the region and has already had a significant visible impact on Moscow's role and influence in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. All signs suggest that the ongoing war is only hastening the final farewell to the post-Soviet space as a category used to describe the region's reality, becoming the proverbial nail in the 'post-Soviet' coffin.

10 Exceptions are works by historians and political scientists from Central Europe or states enslaved by the Soviet Union. Proponents of the argument that the Russian Empire and Soviet Union were colonial states included Józef Mackiewicz and Włodzimierz Bączkowski. See the latter's high-profile article: Włodzimierz Bączkowski, 'Russian Colonialism. The Tsarist and Soviet Empires', in *The Idea of Colonialism*, ed. by Robert Strausz-Hupe, and Harry W. Hazard (New York: University of Pennsylvania, 1958), pp. 70–113.

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Rasa Čepaitienė

THE RICOCHET OF *LENINOPAD* AND THE SECOND WAVE OF DESOVIETIZATION OF LITHUANIAN PUBLIC SPACE

ABSTRACT

The article analyses the influence of the desovietization of Ukrainian public space (known as Leninopad), which started in 2014 as part of the 'second wave' of the dismantling of Soviet monuments in Lithuania. Two well-known cases that have sparked the most debate among experts and the public are discussed in detail: the removal of the socialist-realist sculptures from the Green Bridge in Vilnius in 2015, and the removal of a monument to the writer Petras Cvirka in 2021. The conclusion is that in the post-Soviet and post-socialist region, in response to Russia's increasingly aggressive foreign policy, shifts in the politics of history have become a pretext not only for attempts to cleanse public spaces of the remnants of the Soviet symbolic landscape, but also for solving local political problems, or for the need for decommunization as a pretext for the economic development of vacant urban areas.

KEYWORDS:

Leninopad, Lithuania, Vilnius, Green Bridge, socialist-realist sculptures, Petras Cvirka monument

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INTRODUCTION

According to art critic Boris Groys, all contemporary iconoclasm[1] is essentially of post-socialist origin. He suggested that, having looked at the mass demolition of Soviet ideological idols in Central-Eastern Europe at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Americans would do the same to monuments of Saddam Hussein in Iraq during the 2003–2011 war. He suggested that the terrorist Islamic State, which was originally an ally of the US in its fight against the Assad regime, would also appropriate the iconoclasm of the Eastern Europeans by destroying and looting the monuments of ancient civilisations in Iraq and Syria in 2014–2015.[2] Although this can only be considered a hypothesis – presented without taking into account different socio-cultural contexts – subsequent events have shown that the post-soviet and post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe have had to return once again to the desovietization of their public spaces, which did not seem to be completed in the 1990s. At the beginning of independence, a radical change in the Soviet symbolic landscape began that was mainly related to the rejection of the former political regime and its symbols, and to the efforts to restore pre-Soviet national statehoods or to create new ones. These processes have been most pronounced in the Baltic states, in the western part of Ukraine (to some extent), and in Moldova and the Caucasus republics. Meanwhile, the second wave of the desovietization of public space was mostly inspired by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which started in 2014 and led to the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula and the hybrid war in the eastern Donetsk and Luhansk regions[3].

The Maidan revolution of 2013–2014 became a new impulse for the spontaneous desovietization of the Ukrainian public space, which was first and foremost influenced by the desire to end the rule of the pro-Russian oligarchs (which can be described as *ideologically motivated vandalism*). Meanwhile, the subsequent events related to the more systematic

1 The author calls the destruction of ideological monuments 'iconoclasm', linking it to the (quasi)religious context, where the new ideology (the new faith) cannot tolerate the idols of the old cult in the public sphere. In the first sense, 'iconoclasm' is the destruction of religious images and religious art. This phenomenon is primarily associated with the iconoclasm of Byzantium in the eighth and ninth centuries as a struggle over the veneration of icons between the military-secular authorities and the monasteries. The Byzantine emperors, especially Constantine V, ordered the covering, confiscation and destruction of paintings and relics of saints, and they persecuted and tortured icon worshippers. The Second Council of Nicaea legalized the veneration of icons.

2 Marija Semendjaeva, 'Boris Grojs: "Za predelami SŠA nel'zja ob'jasnit' ničego, krome Supermena"', *Afiša* Daily, 25 March 2015 <https://daily.afisha.ru/archive/vozduh/art/boris-groys-za-predelami-ssha-nelzya-obyasnit-nichego-krome-supermena/> [accessed 28 January 2021].

3 Rasa Čepaitienė, 'Two waves of rejection of Soviet monuments in Lithuania', in *Communist Heritage in Belarus and EU countries: the Problem of Interpretation and the Relevance of Conservation*, ed. by Aliaksei Lastouski, and Iryna Ramanava (Konrad Adenauer Schiftung Belarus, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2021), pp. 58–72.

and consistent organization of *Leninopad* – not only in the larger cities but also throughout the territory under the control of the Ukrainian government – can be interpreted as *tactical vandalism*,[4] used as a response to the doctrine of the so-called 'Russian world' that had been used by Russian propaganda to justify its aggression against Ukrainian sovereignty. The removal of Soviet symbols that had escaped the first wave of desovietization in the 1990s was a way of preventing claims to these territories, in the same way as the destruction of cultural objects that had no military significance but were important for the enemy's identity was carried out during the war in former Yugoslavia in 1991–1995.[5] That the tactics of *Leninopad* – which included the destruction of not only monuments but also other 'ideologically charged' relics of Soviet art and propaganda that remained in public spaces – were perceived as a means for Ukrainians to defend themselves against Russian cultural influence and political claims to control the public space of neighbouring countries would be shown by the cases of both the unrecognized Transnistria Republic of Moldova (TRM) and the separatist Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, which were established in 2014. In these territories, which were torn from their native Moldova and Ukraine by Russia, the Soviet symbolic landscape remained frozen; this, among other factors, led to the invention of the history of the 'statehood' of these quasi-states and their inclusion in the wider Russian imperial/Soviet narrative.[6]

Leninopad, which originated in Ukraine but spread to the Baltic States and Poland, led not only to the purification of the symbolic landscape but also to the need for a deeper understanding of and critical reflection on the Soviet material and mental heritage, while also seeking a new national myth and collective identity that could unite a society divided by various socio-politic sections. Many exhibitions, photo albums and documentaries were created to capture and reflect on the phenomenon of *Leninopad*,[7] in which they tried to document what happened later to the toppled statues of Lenin and other Soviet activists and the places where they had stood.[8] Researchers noticed a certain memory disruption:

4 Stanley Cohen, 'Sociological Approaches to Vandalism', in *Vandalism: Behaviour and Motivations*, ed. by Claude Lévy-Leboyer (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1984), pp. 51–61.

5 Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art. Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), p. 38.

6 Aleksandr Voronovič, 'Istoričeskaja politika v nepriznannych respublikach Pridnestrov'ja i Donbassa v postsovetskom kontekste', in *Politika pamjati v sovremennoj Rossii i stranach Vostočnoj Evropy. Aktory, instituty, narrativy: kollektivnaja monografija*, ed. by Aleksej Miller, and Dmitrij Efremenko (Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropejskogo universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, 2020), pp. 610–27.

7 For example, the 2017 exhibition "FALLEN: Revolution – Propaganda – Iconoclasm" at the University of Essex explored, among other topics, the phenomenon of the Ukrainian *Leninopad*. Meanwhile a photo project by Niels Ackermann and Sebastien Gobert, "Looking for Lenin", presented in the same year, analysed what happened to the removed Soviet monuments afterwards, etc.

8 Donald Weber, 'The mighty have fallen: toppling statues in the name of decommunisation', *The Calvert Journal*, 14 September 2016 <https://www.calvertjournal.com/features/show/6696/decommunisation-ukraine-lenin-statues-donald-weber-photography> [accessed 15 October 2021].

former ideological icons disappeared from public spaces, but these locations were mostly left empty.[9] The search for a creative reinterpretation of these spaces, usually initiated by representatives of the non-governmental sector or individual artists, revealed that it is not new monuments in the place of the toppled ones that are more appropriate for post-Soviet society, but temporary artistic projects and installations *in situ* that encourage the public to openly discuss this complex past. Somewhat echoing the practice of the museification of these ideological objects after the first wave, attempts to collect and publicly exhibit these specific objects were made.[10] However, this museification affected only a few of these monuments and works of art. Most of the toppled statues ended up in storage or were destroyed, melted down for scrap metal, or sold to private art collections.

Although Russia's official reaction to the Leninopad in Ukraine was largely negative, in some ways it also occurred in Russia, where there were several cases of the anonymous toppling or destruction of Lenin monuments.[11] Meanwhile, in Belarus, the first wave of desovietization of public space, as elsewhere, passed in the early 1990s, but it was superficial and did not bring qualitative changes in society and the ideological landscape.[12] Thus, the influence in Belarus of the Ukrainian events of 2014 was manifested in the fact that the Belarusian *Leninopad* was determined not by political reasons but by the physical decay of these statues. In this way, some Soviet monuments were removed from city squares or companies' premises.[13] There was also domestic vandalism or, in contrast, efforts to create open-air art collections or museum exhibitions.[14] For example, in 2014, an open-air museum of Communist monuments was established in the city of Zhlobin.[15]

The 'first' and 'second' waves of desovietization of public spaces in some post-Soviet countries took the form of: 1) the cleansing of Soviet symbolic spaces and relics, which usually irritated and provoked protests from

9 Arsenij Avakov, *Lenin s nami?* (Char'kov: Folio, 2017); Oleksandra Hajdaj, *Kam'janyj bist'. Lenin u Central'nij Ukrajini* (Kyjiv: K.I.S, 2018).

10 One can mention Szobor Park in Hungary, Muzeon in Moscow, Grutas Park in Lithuania, similar open-air museums of Soviet sculptures under construction in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, etc.

11 'Lenin bez golovy: v Pervoural'ske otorvali golovu s pamjatnika voždju', *Novye izvestija*, 16 July 2017 <https://newizv.ru/news/incident/16-07-2017/lenin-bez-golovy-v-pervouralske-otorvali-golovu-s-pamyatnika-vozhdyu-ddd469a2-22d6-4686-a455-30769333bd5f> [accessed 4 April 2022]; 'Leninopad dobralsja do rossijskogo Volgograda', *Novoe vremja*, 28 October 2014 <https://nv.ua/ukr/world/leninopad-dobralsya-do-rossiyskogo-volgograda-17983.html> [accessed 4 April 2022].

12 '7 punktov dlja dekommunizacii i desovetizacii Belarusi', *1863x*, 8 December 2017 <https://1863x.com/desovetization/> [accessed 15 October 2021].

13 'Dekamunzacyja po-belorusski. Kakich Leninych i drugich Čapaevych podvinuli iz centra i počemu', *Hrodna life*, 22 September 2017 <https://ru.hrodna.life/articles/dekamunizacyiya-po-belorusski-kakih-leninyih-i-drugih-chapaevyih-podvinuli-iz-centra-i-pochemu-foto/> [accessed 4 April 2022].

14 'V Belarusi nadrugalis' nad pamjatnikami Leninu: opublikovany foto i video', *Apostrof*, 22 April 2017 <https://apostrophe.ua/news/society/accidents/2017-04-22/v-belarusi-nadrugalis-nad-pamyatnikami-leninu-opublikovany-foto-i-video/93965> [accessed 4 April 2022].

15 'V Žlobine pojavilsja "Park skul'ptur sovetskoj èpochi"', *Govorim.by*, 20 January 2014 <https://govorim.by/gomelskaya-oblast/zhlobin/novosti-zhlobina/115677-v-zhlobine-poyavilsya-park-skulptur-sovetskoy-epohi-foto.html> [accessed 5 April 2022].

Russia;[16] 2) neglect of these 'cleansed' spaces. The former manifested itself in the removal of Soviet monuments and the installation of the pantheon of pre- or non-Soviet heroes (in the Baltic states, this meant the restoration of the signs of interwar statehood, the restoration of historical justice, and the creation of new monuments to medieval rulers to highlight the long and rich tradition of statehood that is also characteristic of some other post-Soviet republics). Thus, cities in Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine were decorated with monuments to medieval dukes and hetmans. Such nationalization of public space is also quite pronounced in the Caucasus and in Central Asian post-Soviet states. Reflections of Soviet-era national tragedies should be mentioned: signs of honouring the heroes of the post-war anti-Soviet struggle in the Baltic States; Holodomor memorials and monuments in Ukraine;[17] monuments of the 1931–1933 famine in Kazakhstan, etc. However, the second process of neglecting or even vandalizing these public spaces reflected the ideological indecision of states such as Lithuania, or the fear of overloading public squares with symbols, the appearance of which usually leads to public disputes.

The case of Lithuania shows both the general tendencies of the region and its specific features. The first wave of symbolic landscape change here was characterized by a fairly consistent implementation of the anti-communist narrative in public discourse. This manifested in spontaneous action by ordinary people, mainly initiated by veterans of the anti-Soviet underground and the organizations of political prisoners and deportees that were active at the time. However, after public spaces had been cleansed of the symbols of the former regime, most of them remained empty for several decades, despite various plans and proposals to fill them with attributes of national memory. This may have been a reflection of democratization and the general European attitude to avoiding the nationalism that can arise when the opinions of ruling groups and the public are associated with closed-mindedness and ethnocentrism. Some public spaces in Vilnius are good examples of such physical and symbolic emptiness. It is worth remembering the fate of the square on Pylimo Street, which was

16 The most well-known case is the conflict between Estonia and Russia over the relocation of the so-called 'Bronze Soldier' in Tallinn in 2007.

17 In 2006, on the initiative of President Viktor Yushchenko, the construction of the main Holodomor memorial in Ukraine started. It stands on the impressive slope of the Dnipro River in Kyiv, between the Soviet WWII memorial – The Park of Eternal Glory – on one side and the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra monastery on the other, thus complementing the aura of local sacredness of this particular place with signs of the nation's tragedy. The Memorial complex opens a sculptural composition of weeping angels – a symbolic 'gate' to the Memorial. An alley of rowan bushes (symbolizing the memory of Holodomor victims) is constantly increasing in length due to the State Protocol and Ceremonial of Ukraine, which states that delegations of foreign leaders who visit the Memorial have to plant a bush. A sculpture of a girl commemorates children who died of hunger in 1932–1933. The central object of the Memorial is a candle-shaped building dedicated to the Holodomor Museum, where the memorial books of the Holodomor victims are stored. More: National Museum of the Holodomor-Genocide, 'History of the National Museum of the Holodomor-Genocide', *National Museum of the Holodomor-Genocide*, [n.d.] <https://holodomormuseum.org.ua/en/history-of-national-holodomor-genocide-museum/> [accessed 7 April 2022].

reconstructed and opened to visitors only in the summer of 2021 (the monument to Soviet partisans and underground fighters that had been there since 1983 was removed in the 1990s, and this public space had remained neglected for a long time). However, the most famous case is the never-ending story of the reconstruction of Lukiškės Square. It must be said that this square – which became the main ideological site of the Lithuanian SSR after the dismantling of the monument to Lenin in 1991 and despite numerous governmental attempts and public initiatives to erect a modern commemorative marker to anti-Soviet resistance in this place – remains ideologically indeterminate to this day.[18] It would seem that the "problem of Lukiškės Square" exists mainly due to social groups that oppose proposals to honour freedom fighters there or to install the Tomb of the Unknown anti-Soviet Partisan. On the other hand, there are quite a few Vilnius residents who are interested in the fact that the square could be turned into a recreational zone, without any special ideological symbols or connotations. There have also been artistic attempts to address this issue. For instance, at the beginning of September 2012, during the 'Capital Days' in Vilnius, for several weeks a sand statue of John Lennon with a guitar in his hands stood in Lukiškės Square; it was dedicated to the 50th anniversary of The Beatles, but maybe it was a witty play on words regarding the sonic similarity of the words *Lenin* and *Lennon* (the creators of this temporary monument were the Latvian artist group *Frostiart Baltic*[19]). This and other cases not covered here would indicate that people's relationship with relics of the Soviet era in Lithuania is still complicated.

The Ukrainian events of 2013–2014 and the beginning of massive decommunization of public space in Ukraine has had a significant impact on the renewal of this debate in countries where the issue already seemed resolved. So, the purpose of this article is to take a closer look at the influence of the Ukrainian *Leninopad* on changes in Lithuanian public spaces since 2014. The key question is to what extent do the cases discussed in more detail below reflect general trends in the region, and to what extent are they determined by local socio-political peculiarities?

18 Algis Vyšniūnas, 'Lukiškių aikštė – socialinio užsakymo evoliucija. Paminklas laisvės kovų dalyviams, ar simbolis "Laisvė"?', *Urbanistika ir architektūra*, 4 (2008), 201–20; Lina Panavaitė, and Saulius Motieka, 'Lukiškių aikštės Vilniuje urbanistinės plėtros evoliucija, pasekmės ir siūlymai', *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis*, 76 (2015), 139–57; Gintautas Tiškus, 'Lukiškių aikštės Vilniuje reprezentacinių savybių tyrimas', *Mokslas – Lietuvos ateitis / Science – Future of Lithuania*, 10 (2018), 1–7; Živilė Mikailienė, 'Memory Culture and Memory Politics in Lithuania (1990–2018): the Case of Lukiškės Square in Vilnius', in *Official History in Eastern Europe*, ed. by Korine Amacher, Andrii Portnov, and Viktori Serhiienko (Gottingen: Fibre, 2020), pp. 237–66.

19 Mindaugas Jackevičius, 'Lukiškių aikštėje vietoje Lenino iškilo Lennonas', *Delfi.lt*, 31 August 2012 <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/lukiskiu-aiksteje-vietoje-lenino-iskilo-lennonas.d?id=59425237> [accessed 2 March 2022].

THE CASE OF THE GREEN BRIDGE SCULPTURES

As sociologist Rasa Baločkaitė notes, "both in Lithuania and in other countries of Central Eastern Europe, the first wave of revisionism did not affect those heritage objects that can be called 'ideologically ambiguous': monuments to artists who collaborated with the Soviet regime; squares, streets, schools named after them; sculptures, etc., glorifying working people; monuments dedicated to the victory of the Soviet Union in World War II; buildings of architectural significance (cinemas, sports halls and cultural palaces, stadiums); cemeteries of Soviet soldiers, etc.".[20] This is the case of the Green Bridge statues in Vilnius.

One of the oldest bridges in the city, Vilnius Green Bridge, which has existed since the Middle Ages, has been repeatedly reconstructed and rebuilt. Its last reconstruction was carried out in 1894, after which the bridge looked completely different as it was covered by an arched steel structure. The bridge was blown up in 1944 with the retreat of Wehrmacht troops. Its remains were destroyed by the attacking Soviet troops. The plans for the new bridge were prepared by the Leningrad Design Institute in 1952 and realized by the Engineering Regiment of the Baltic Military District. The new bridge was created in the Stalinist 'great monumental style' and renamed 'Ivan Chernyakhovsky bridge' in honour of the memory of the Soviet general who led the liberation of Vilnius and died soon after in a battle in East Prussia. This general was solemnly buried in one of the main squares of Vilnius (now Vincas Kudirka Square) near the Green Bridge, and a monument by one of the most important Soviet sculptors, Nikolay Tomsky, was erected on his tombstone. Thus, the shape of the Green Bridge at that time was part of a wider semantic system of a symbolic landscape. Four sculptural compositions on the bridge corners, depicting a working peasant couple, young builders, students and Red Army soldiers, visually established the program of creation of communism in Lithuania. Statues embodying youth, idealism, enthusiasm, heroism, romance, futurism and the abundance of a utopian society were created by famous Lithuanian sculptors. In times when Stalinism was coming to an end in the USSR, it was only beginning to gain momentum in the newly annexed Baltic republics. Three of the seven authors of the sculptures of the Green Bridge (Juozas Mikėnas, Bronius Pundzius, and Petras Vaivada) already had experience with working in the style of socialist realism as, in 1946 in Kaliningrad, they had been tasked with creating the Victory Monument of the Soviet Army.

20 Rasa Baločkaitė, 'Sovietinis paveldas Vidurio Rytų Europoje – antroji revizionizmo banga?', *Kultūros barai*, 2 (2016), 18–22.

During the slow socio-cultural transformations of Soviet society, the ideological significance of the Green Bridge changed. In the post-Stalinist period, the statues lost the weight of direct indoctrination and became simply an eye-catching decorative accent of the capital of the Lithuanian SSR. Probably due to these processes of neutralization of the ideological value of the statues after the collapse of the USSR and the beginning of the desovietization of the Lithuanian public space, the bridge retained its socrealistic form because the sculptures depicted not specific historical figures but personalized allegories of the ideal representatives of the prosperous 'classless' future communist society. In 1990, the historical name 'Green'was returned to the bridge and it was granted the status of a state-protected object. The efforts to reinterpret the meanings of the bridge would be described on plaques mounted on the pedestals of the statues, explaining in Lithuanian and English the historical context of the emergence of these objects. Later, these sculptures became a source of inspiration and a stage for various artistic or social actions. They were artists who most actively advocated for their preservation in situ. These artists tried to give the statues a new, unconventional meaning and thus reinterpret them. The well-known artist Gediminas Urbonas was one of the first to try to find a way to 'suppress' the ideological 'messages' of the statues. His 1995 work "You Come and Go" comprised mirror cubes covering the heads of the "Agriculture" sculptural composition. This temporary work became widely known and was later used on the covers of several art catalogues and scientific publications. In turn, another sculptural group depicting two young men decorated the cover of a brochure published by the LGBT community, which provoked the anger and protest of one of its still-living authors, Bronius Vyšniauskas. The artist Gytenis Umbrasas, known for non-standard solutions to making sense of the capital's public spaces, in 2004 decorated the slopes of the embankments near the bridge on both sides with compositions of live flowers that formed the inscription "I love you – I love you too", which attracted the attention of inhabitants and tourists. During the Christmas period, the bridge sculptures were sometimes even covered with Santa Claus hats. However, not all similar attempts to establish a dialogue with the statues were so friendly or neutral. They were repeatedly attacked by vandals, who especially did not like the composition depicting Soviet soldiers, which was often showered with red paint.

The installation of the 'Chain' sculpture, hung under the Green Bridge by the artist Kunotas Vildžiūnas (together with co-author Martynas Lukošius) in 2009, can be considered a successful attempt to re-establish a discussion about a complex and inconvenient past. This work became part of the wider Vilnius Bridge Decoration Programme, one of the events

of the international "Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009" project, during which various works of art appeared under several bridges in Vilnius. Thus, at that time, it seemed that the long-lasting value conflict between citizens who were or were not 'in favour' of the preservation of the Green Bridge statues would be solved not by destroying things but simply by adding something to both the image of the bridge itself and its meanings. If this bridge's sculptures reflected an essential feature of the Soviet system, namely its propensity for façadism, the 'Chain', which was invisible from the top of the bridge, embodied its true essence: enslavement and lack of freedom. Therefore, it was only in combination that these artistic accents exposed the foundations of the Soviet totalitarian regime and became an eloquent didactic tool for children and young people – residents of Vilnius and foreign tourists who want to get to know the recent past of this city and Lithuania.

The last attempt to give the bridge a new meaning before the removal of the statues was a project of the architect Audrius Ambrasas, who proposed placing the sculptures in cages and reinforcing them with metal structures in 2014 during the Vilnius Street Art Festival. In this way, this artist reacted with a dose of irony to the growing public controversy regarding the cultural value of the statues by proposing to symbolically transfer them into a certain museum context and thus neutralize their ideological meanings. However, the project did not receive the approval of the city authorities, probably because the fate of the statues had already been determined.[21]

The socrealist statues – as representations of Soviet ideology and reference examples of the aesthetics of 'Stalin's empire' style – were removed in July 2015 under the decision of the newly elected Vilnius municipal council on the pretext of "an emergency condition that poses a danger to passers-by". This decision was political and clearly influenced by Ukrainian events as the beginnings of *Leninopad* had been widely discussed in the Lithuanian press as a precedent and a pretext for the dismantling of the Green Bridge statues.[22] Until the moment of their removal, there was a fierce debate among the Lithuanian public about whether these statues were honourable objects of national cultural heritage or hateful material witnesses of the former alien regime and the doomed communist

21 Rasa Goštautaitė, 'Dissonant Soviet monuments in post- Soviet Lithuania the application of artistic practices', *Baltic Worlds*, 12 February 2021 <https://balticworlds.com/dissonant-soviet-monuments-in-post-soviet-lithuania/> [accessed 5 April 2022].

22 Šarūnas Černiauskas, 'Ar Žaliojo tilto skulptūros nekeliaus Kijevo Lenino pėdomis?' *Delfi*, 9 December 2013 https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/ar-zaliojo-tilto-skulpturos-nukeliaus-kijevo-lenino-pedomis.d?id=63487460 [accessed 26 April 2022]; 'Nukeliamos sovietinės Žaliojo tilto skulptūros: argumentai už ir prieš'. *Kauno diena*, 19 July 2015 <https://kauno.diena.lt/naujienos/vilnius/miesto-pulsas/pradeti-zaliojo-tilto-skulpturu-nukelimo-darbai-701648> [accessed 15 April 2022]

ideology.[23] For now, the statues are stored on the premises of a municipal enterprise and their future is unclear. In March 2016, by unanimous decision of the newly elected Council for the Evaluation of Cultural Property of the Department of Cultural Heritage, the sculptures also lost their status of cultural property of local importance, as was granted to them in 1993.[24] This decision was taken without addressing the fact that the issue of the artistic and historical value of these statues was once raised at the beginning of 2015, when the majority of the members of this Council decided to let them keep their protection status of "objects of cultural heritage". This would indicate that there was no consensus among the heritage experts themselves on this issue. So, the Green Bridge sculptures can be considered a vivid example of "dissonant heritage".[25] In this case, the problem of the separation of 'ours' and 'alien' is still relevant and publicly discussed in Lithuanian society. This is because the authors of the sculptures – the best Lithuanian sculptors of that time – had worked under the conditions of Stalin's repressions, when the Soviet regime very brutally consolidated its power in the country and the official canon of 'socialist realism' was the only politically acceptable form of artistic expression. So the 'problem' of the Green Bridge statues emerged in 2015 as a combination of different internal and external, political and cultural reasons. The debates on their fate were also strongly influenced by intense media attention.[26] The internal causes can be attributed, first of all, to the inevitable physical degradation of the statues and their loss of aesthetic quality, which led to the growing need to restore them or remove them to a place where they would not pose a danger to passers-by (although it is not known whether this danger was actually real). The city municipality has repeatedly announced a competition for the restoration of the sculptures; however, due to the 'political sensitivity' of the issue, no conservation company has come forward to undertake their restoration. The Russian Federation offered to pay for their restoration; later, after their removal was postponed, the mayor of one of the cities of the neighbouring Kaliningrad *oblast* even asked for them to be transferred, but these proposals did not attract the attention of

23 *Debatai dėl praeities Lietuvos internetinėje žiniasklaidoje*, ed. by Živilė Mikailienė (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, 2019); Rasa Baločkaitė, 'The New Culture Wars in Lithuania: Trouble with Soviet Heritage', *Cultures of History. Forum*, 12 April 2015 <https://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/debates/the-new-culture-wars-in-lithuania > [accessed 1 April 2022].

24 Valdemaras Klumbys, 'Balvonams ir jų pakalikams suduotas vieningas atkirtis, draugai! Valio!!!', *Delfi.lt*, 17 March 2016 <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/lit/v-klumbys-balvonams-ir-ju-pakalikams-suduotas-vieningas-atkirtis-draugai-valio.d?id=70605212> [accessed 5 April 2022].

25 John E. Tunbridge, and Gregory J. Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage. The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 1996).

26 Skaidra Trilupaitytė, 'Medijų kultūra ar "atminties transformacijos"? Žaliojo tilto atvejis ir kiti paminklai', in *Nacionalinis tapatumas medijų kultūroje*, ed. by Žilvinė Gaižutytė-Filipavičienė, and Vytautas Rubavičius (Vilnius: Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, 2011), pp. 84–102.

the Vilnius authorities.[27] Patriotic groups, meanwhile, were fundamentally opposed to the restoration of the sculptures, arguing that the money needed for this could be invested in other more worthwhile things. In addition, opponents of the statues questioned even the very idea that they had any value at all. However, the main argument of the supporters of removal or demolition was the trauma that arose every time people looked at these statues, especially those who had suffered Soviet repression. The sculptural group of Soviet army soldiers – considered a symbol of occupation – were the cause of much of these people's dissatisfaction. Representatives of the organizations of former Gulag prisoners and anti-Soviet freedom fighter veterans often emphasized this emotionally saturated argument, although in this case there was a delicate dilemma: to destroy only these – the most hated statues – or all of them?[28] And since the flag held by one of the soldiers depicts a sickle and a hammer, attention was drawn to the fact that Lithuanian legislation had banned Nazi and Communist symbols in 2008, although it should be noted that these legal norms do not apply to objects of cultural heritage.

The external reasons for the escalation of this issue meanwhile could be attributed to the gradually growing concern in this region's small countries regarding the resurgent and increasingly openly demonstrated ambitions of Putin's neo-imperial Russia. As a form of systematic desovietization of public space, the Ukrainian *Leninopad* often served as an argument for enthusiasts of the demolition of the Green Bridge statues and other surviving Soviet monuments,[29] despite the fact that the historical contexts here were quite different. In the official discourse at the beginning of its independence, Lithuania, as mentioned above, was already able to fairly clearly and consistently assess the Soviet period, while in Ukraine such an approach remained regionally fragmented until the events of 2014.

Although the Green Bridge statues have received a lot of attention from specialists and the public, there has nevertheless been a rush to demolish them without consistent analysis and clarification of their historical and artistic values, especially their rarity and exceptionality. This bridge was the only object of its kind in Lithuania (although historically there have been other bridges with statues). Bridges decorated with sculptures usually attract the attention of tourists and become significant signs

27 'Sovietsko valdžia prašo Vilniaus savivaldybę perduoti Žaliojo tilto skulptūras', *15 min.lt*, 28 July 2015 <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/sovetsko-valdzia-praso-vilniaus-savivaldybe-perduoti-zaliojo-tilto-skulpturas-56-518515?copied> [accessed 25 March 2022]; 'Dėl Žaliojo tilto skulptūrų – iš Rusijos grasinimai prezidentei', *Delfi.lt*, 8 February 2015 <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/del-zaliojo-tilto-skulpturu-is-rusijos-grasinimai-prezidentei.d?id=67114660> [accessed 25 March 2022].

28 Author's interview with former political prisoner A.S. on 11 August 2015.

29 Šarūnas Černiauskas, 'Ar Žaliojo tilto skulptūros nukeliaus Kijevo Lenino pėdomis?', *Delfi.lt*, 9 December 2013 <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/ar-zaliojo-tilto-skulpturos-nukeliaus-kijevo-lenino-pedomis.d?id=63487460> [accessed 26 April 2022].

of a city – even its well-known symbols: for example, the Old Bridge in Florence, the Bridge of the Holy Angel in Rome, Charles Bridge in Prague, or the Anichkov Bridge in St Petersburg. However, the most interesting thing is that, despite the variety of visual forms of Stalinist propaganda, few bridges with statues were built in the USSR, and even less remain. Therefore, the closest analogues of the Green Bridge statues in post-Soviet space are the Victory Bridge on the Leningrad Highway in Moscow, with sculptures created by the abovementioned Nikolay Tomsky in 1943; the stations of the Moscow–Volga and Volga–Don river shipping channels and their gateway; and especially one of the bridges in Kharkiv, the capital of the Ukrainian SSR during the Stalinist era. The Kharkivskyi Bridge was built in 1954 and dedicated to the 300th anniversary of the reunification of Ukraine and Russia (arch. A. Mezherovsky; sculpt. A. Ovsiankin). One of the sculptural compositions depicted a Russian and a Ukrainian holding hands,[30] while another represented a worker and a kolkhoz woman, which is reminiscent of the Green Bridge in Vilnius. However, there are also significant differences between these two bridges. The Kharkivskyi Bridge has only two sculptural compositions, both of which are embedded on the west side of it. It is possible that the motive of the worker and the peasant, noticeable on both the Green Bridge and on Kharkivskyi Bridge, is a certain variation of the famous "Rabochij i kolhoznica" sculpture by Vera Muchina, unveiled in Moscow in 1937 near the VDNH complex. The statues of the Green Bridge embody in much more detail the program of Soviet totalitarian ideology, which aims to create the ideal people of a future prosperous society: a working class, peasants, intelligentsia, the Red Army, etc. Unfortunately, the Green Bridge has also become a sh arp tool for the manipulative use of history that demonizes and manipulates the 'Soviet inheritance' in the current political struggles; it is even a kind of 'scapegoat' for all the failures of the post-Soviet transformation of the country.

Subsequent attempts to make sense of the bridge by artistic means[31] or commercial advertising were temporary, so its condition after the removal of the sculptures could also be attributed to the already observed abandonment and emptying of public spaces that were created during the Soviet era. Among the temporarily implemented artistic projects on the Green Bridge, the "Megareality Goodness Activator" installation stands out. The concept of this project was developed by the photographer Saulius

30 Ngeorgij, 'K istorii Char'kovskogo mosta', *LiveJournal*, 22 May 2015 <https://ngeorgij.livejournal.com/102988.html> [accessed 29 January 2019].

31 Evaldas Činga, 'Ant Žaliojo tilto – nauja instaliacija', *Made in Vilnius*, 11 September 2019 <https://madeinvilnius.lt/naujienos/ant-zaliojo-tilto-nauja-instaliacija/> [accessed 30 January 2022]; Austėja Mikuckytė-Mateikienė, 'Ant Žaliojo tilto atsiras Ambraso siūlomos konstrukcijos: "nukeltos skulptūros tapo radioaktyvios"', *LRT.lt*, 9 April 2021 <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/kultura/12/1383581/ant-zaliojo-tilto-atsiras-ambraso-siulomos-konstrukcijos-nukeltos-skulpturos-tapo-radioaktyvios> [accessed 30 January 2022].

Paukštys and implemented by sculptor Šarūnas Arbačiauskas in April–September 2018.[32] In an interview, Paukštys told me how this idea came about: "when the competition for installations on the Green Bridge was announced by the municipality, my first thought was the wind. For several years, we regularly sailed on a pontoon boat on the Neris and noticed that the wind whirls all the time at the Green Bridge, where the river makes a little bend; it could be stronger or weaker, but it always blows. So, the idea was that the wind would be involved in the installations. One more thing: in my opinion, art must participate in life, respond to problems in societies, reflect expectations, sometimes ridicule phenomena that are occurring, sometimes rejoice, and so on. In most cases, works of art should contain elements of humour and satire. Thus, another idea prevailed in the creation of the 'Megareality Goodness Activator', namely the ironic rendering of important meanings for society: *Truth*, *Conscience*, *Determination*, *Courage* – very important qualities both personally and for society as a whole. Unfortunately, when looking at the life of Lithuania in recent decades, it is very clear that these characteristics are variable and take on different meanings as the government changes, etc. Thus, what for one government was conscience or truth for another means something else; with the change of powers, attitudes towards these fundamental values also change, and some phenomena disappear catastrophically in general".[33] According to Paukštys, during the creation of the installation, attention was paid to the re-establishment of the fundamental values supported by society. This is how the windswept *Courage*, *Determination*, *Truth*, and *Conscience* sculptures appeared on the bridge, which, with the help of the kinetics of the wind, constantly changed direction, ironically demonstrating that the location and meaning of these values were constantly changing. Since it was known in advance that the installations on the Green Bridge would exist only for half a year, these works were not criticized. Therefore, the humorous play of the kinetic elements of the installation had to help the audience to understand their meanings more easily. Sculptor Šarūnas Arbačiauskas combined various kinetic engineering solutions and modern elements: each part of the installation had different moving elements and different structural formations which – with a change in lighting, the strength of the wind, the angle of observation, etc. – formed a changing image. As expected, this installation received mixed reactions and reviews.[34] According to the artist,

32 Toma Vidugirytė, 'Žaliąjį tiltą papuošė keturios vertybių vėjarodės', *Kauno diena*, 20 April 2019 <https://www.diena.lt/naujienos/vilnius/miesto-pulsas/zaliaji-tilta-papuose-keturios-vertybiu-vejarodes-910168> [accessed 30 January 2022].

33 Author's interview with Saulius Paukštys, 31 July 2021, Vilnius.

34 'Naujos Žaliojo tilto puošmenos – menas ar kičas?', *Lietuvos rytas*, 9 April 2019 <https://www.lrytas.lt/kultura/meno-pulsas/2019/04/09/news/naujos-zaliojo-tilto-puosmenos---menas-ar-kicas--9908662/> [accessed 30 January 2022].

some critics were offended by the very idea of playing with such a serious concept; others perceived it as criticism or ridicule of the government's policy; still others were surprised by the unusual engineering of the installation, but most welcomed it. However, the art critics who analysed it missed the sharper contrast of the weathervanes with the environment and criticized the excessive bluntness of the idea.[35]

In the autumn of 2019, one of the pillars of the Green Bridge was decorated with Donatas Norušis's installation "Family", which echoed the growing public debate on the rights of the LGBT community and the civil status of non-traditional families. It is interesting that the author of this installation made a direct connection with the previous form of the bridge: on this pedestal, a composition of two young builders once stood, which could also be interpreted as a homosexual couple. Another highlight of this installation is the search for the optimal semantic links with the city, reflected in the choice of materials: iron, concrete, plastic and wood. According to the author, "these materials were chosen to replicate the urban environment that surrounds each of us. The image of people among these elements creates narratives that vary depending on how everyone looks at this work – what the experience of the viewer is".[36] This artistic decision made it possible to create effects of ephemerity and transparency, which are associated with the uncertainty of the issue of the rights of homosexual persons in the legal system.

So far, the most recent artistic installation to appear on the bridge was "Signs of the Green Bridge" in 2021, by the well-known architect Audrius Ambrasas, which was selected from among the many works submitted to the municipality's "I Create Vilnius" competition.[37] As mentioned above, this idea – empty iron cages – had been proposed by the author previously, when the socrealist sculptures were still in place. According to Ambrasas, the artistic installation on the Green Bridge, with no sculptures left and no idea who could replace them, completes the overall architectural composition of the bridge. "When we retreated, looking at the entire bridge, it became a bridge with finished pylons, because with only bare pedestals it seemed that something was missing. After removing the sculptures, the composition was somewhat disrupted. As an architect, it hurts

35 Jūratė Žuolytė, 'Ekspertų meninės instaliacijos ant Žaliojo tilto neįtikino: šlamštas eksponuojamas kaip geras means', *Delfi.lt*, 10 April 2019 <https://www.delfi.lt/kultura/naujienos/ekspertu-menines-instaliacijos-ant-zaliojo-tilto-neitikino-slamstas-eksponuojamas-kaip-geras-menas.d?id=80867613> [accessed 30 January 2022].

36 'Ant Žaliojo tilto iškilo nauja instaliacija „Šeima"', *LRT.lt*, 11 September 2019 <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/kultura/12/1096651/ant-zaliojo-tilto-iskilo-nauja-instaliacija-seima> [accessed 30 January 2022].

37 'Ant Žaliojo tilto iškilo meninė instaliacija', *Made in Vilnius*, 27 August 2021 <https://madeinvilnius.lt/naujienos/miestas/ant-zaliojo-tilto-iskilo-menine-instaliacija/> [accessed 30 January 2022].

my heart when a work of architecture is unbalanced".[38] In Ambrasas' opinion, when the Soviet sculptures, which were considered ambiguously, were demolished in the 1990s, this was at the beginning of Lithuanian independence. Those that remained could be seen as a relic of history that simultaneously neutralized the ideological pain. The empty cages aroused a variety of emotions and interpretations: the ideology has withdrawn, but what is left in its place?

THE CASE OF THE MONUMENT OF THE WRITER PETRAS CVIRKA

In 2020–2021, new initiatives to demolish the rest of the Soviet period monuments were launched in Vilnius. This time, the city's municipality drew attention to the sculpture of the writer Petras Cvirka (sculpt. J. Mikėnas; arch. V. Mikučianis; built in 1959; included in the list of cultural property of local importance in 1992). Could these initiatives also be attributed to the "second wave" of the desovietization of the public places discussed above, or were the roots of this value dispute completely different?

If the decorative sculptures of the Green Bridge embodied not specific persons but abstract allegories, then the Petras Cvirka monument commemorated a person whose biography was associated not only with his literary merits but also with active participation in the first Soviet occupation. Although talk of the need to remove this monument had been circulating for a long time, in 2019 the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania (GRRCL) prepared a historical-expert conclusion confirming that Petras Cvirka had actively collaborated with the structures of the occupying Soviet government in his political-social activities in 1940–1947, and this had had consequences for the fate of the State of Lithuania and its citizens. In August 2021 – after considering the requests of the Minister of Culture Simonas Kairys and Vilnius city municipality – this provided the basis for the Council of Experts on Immovable Cultural Heritage under the Department of Cultural Heritage to remove the monument of Petras Cvirka from the Register of Cultural Property. Soon after, Vilnius City Council decided to remove it physically too,[39] even though it had been created by of the most famous sculptors of the time and this was the only remaining

38 Kristina Buidovaitė, 'Instaliacijos ant Žaliojo tilto autorius A. Ambrasas: "Man skauda širdį, kai architektūros kūrinys išbalansuotas"', *Lietuvos rytas*, 31 August 2021 <https://www.lrytas.lt/bustas/architektura/2021/08/31/news/instaliacijos-ant-zaliojo-tilto-autorius-a-ambrasas-man-skauda-sirdi-kai-architekturos-kurinys-isbalansuotas--20593830> [accessed 30 January 2022].

39 'P. Cvirkos paminklas išbrauktas iš kultūros vertybių registro, nukėlimas – rugsėjį', *Statyba ir architektūra*, 24 August 2021 <https://sa.lt/p-cvirkos-paminklas-isbrauktas-is-kulturos-vertybiu-registro/> [accessed 30 January 2022].

authentic example of Stalinist public space design in Vilnius. The monument was not even saved from removal by a 'preventive performance' called "Remember not forget not remember", which was organized by two women artists Eglė Grėbliauskaitė and Agnė Gintalaitė, who covered the surface of the sculpture with fake sackcloth – a sign of oblivion and the passage of time.[40] The municipality did not give permission for this action, and this decision led to a conflict between Vilnius municipality and these artists.

In general, the process of the removal of the sculptures from the Green Bridge was repeated: the controversial decision made by heritage experts, which was opposed by other experts,[41] paved the way for the dismantling of the monument of Petras Cvirka and the purification of its surroundings from unwanted connotations. Meanwhile, the Lithuanian Writers' Union, which was joined by the Lithuanian Artists' Union, the Lithuanian Art Historians' Society, and the Lithuanian section of the International Association of Art Critics (Aica), publicly spoke out against the removal of this monument on the grounds that it would lead to the signs of historical epochs being destroyed and the public spaces of the city being aesthetically impoverished.[42] After the official decision to remove the monument from the lists of cultural property, the philosopher Nerijus Milerius noted: "It is possible to postpone it, but what after that? Is there a more detailed concept of what could be there? Is the monument to the collaborating writer removed only to make this square a 'neutral' place for history, or does this square have to convey any clearer narrative of history? Will it not be the case that, by erasing the unfavourable signs of history, we will begin to live in the eternal present, in a timeless, comfortable, candied space without the sharper corners and cataclysms of history?".[43] It may be added here that Vilnius has historically been characterized by waves of demolitions of monuments in the wake of political regime changes, which have helped to cleanse the city of the signs of earlier epochs.[44]

40 'Sostinėje menininkės "samanomis" dekoravo Petro Cvirkos paminklą, savivaldybė tam priešinasi'. *Lietuvos rytas*, 12 November 2021 <https://www.lrytas.lt/kultura/meno-pulsas/2021/11/12/news/sostineje-menininkes-samanomis-dekoravo-petro-cvirkos-paminkla-savivaldybe-tam-priesinasi-21374532> [accessed 30 January 2022].

41 Audronis Katilius, a well-known heritage expert and architect-restorer, commented on the decision of the Council of Experts as follows: "The Bolshevik mindset of our super-patriots has not changed in the 30 years of independence. The red partisans and underground fighters who were in power in the Soviet era still occasionally understood their own darkness and heard what scientists, artists and other intellectuals were saying... The present-day ones, fighting for the votes of the large darkness, or with other interests, allow themselves to hear nothing. I don't think it's just obtuseness, although that's part of it. It is easier to demolish than to build in order to be noticed. Cultural awareness, respect for the history that we have all lived through, for our Lithuania, are perhaps alien concepts. [...] The corner of Pylimo and Pamėnkalnio Streets will finally be an empty lot. In such a place!". Written interview with Audronis Katilius, 27 August 2021.

42 'Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos valdybos pareiškimas dėl Petro Cvirkos paminklo', *7 meno dienos*, 31 May 2019 <https://www.7md.lt/kronika/2019-05-31/Lietuvos-rasytoju-sajungos-valdybos-pareiskimas-del-Petro-Cvirkos-paminklo?fbclid=IwAR3mGh_8OwYirTVZ_UlN6hrtpFp4qMEiIuGHdq8Lox-YjgZwrqAm-B890wo> [accessed 6 February 2022].

43 'Petro Cvirkos paminklo anatomija (diskusija)', *Literatūra ir menas*, 26 August 2021 <https://literaturairmenas.lt/publicistika/petro-cvirkos-paminklo-anatomija?fbclid=IwAR2sb3QFZxkNnG4VfeG6Lu9858pkBVwoRx7PH6HysTzNuA7DknfAr2lT6F4> [accessed 6 February 2022].

44 Rasa Antanavičiūtė, *Menas ir politika Vilniaus viešosiose erdvėse. 20 a. pirma pusė* (Vilnius: Lapas, 2019).

However, perhaps the most profound essence of this value conflict is explained the literary researcher and former minister of culture, Mindaugas Kvietkauskas. He noticed that in modern political struggles it is popular to wrestle with the memory of long-dead persons, absolutizing the guilt of their collaboration and devaluing their literary merits, but this in no way leads to practical desovietization.[45] In this way, some writers who lived and created during the Soviet period and were honoured by the regime (Liudas Gira, Petras Cvirka, Salomėja Nėris) are still valued controversially; however, they have not been memorialized. So, only some cultural figures begin to be demonized and become 'scapegoats' of a kind, but this struggle with the past is already inconsistent enough. For example, the bust of writer Liudas Gira was removed from the Old Town of Vilnius and moved to the outskirts of the city in 2013, but the street bearing his name remained. Meanwhile, the name of Salomėja Nėris – the best Lithuanian poetess – is still commemorated in Vilnius by a gymnasium bearing her name, a bust next to it, and a street in the Fabijoniškės district.

French polymath René Girard, who has studied the phenomenon of 'scapegoats' as a religious idea and cultural practice, sees this phenomenon as a clear sign of the moral crisis that has arisen in society.[46] However, Girard wrote about specific individuals or groups of people who become targets of political or religious accusations and persecution by society, while in the above cases we are dealing with a symbolic struggle in which the purification of the public space from the commemorative signs of 'guilty' persons is based not on the desire to create greater social harmony but on quite selectively 'restoring historical justice'. However, it is said that the real reason for the removal of Cvirka's monument was property developers' interest in obtaining space in the city centre for the construction of new buildings. Thus, the renewed disputes over the surviving material signs of the Soviet era in Lithuania can also be considered as substitutes for solutions to the long-term moral consequences of Lithuanian society's cooperation with the Soviets, which divert attention from this intractable problem.[47]

45 Mindaugas Kvietkauskas, 'Prakeiktoji poetė', *Bernardinai*, 25 November 2014 <https://www.bernardinai.lt/2014-11-25-prakeiktoji-poete/> [accessed 28 March 2022].

46 René Girard, *Le bouc émissaire* (Paris: Grasset, 1982).

47 The most recent case is the proposal to demolish the socialist-realist Vilnius Airport, "guilty of being Soviet". This issue came up in 2018, when Dainius Kreivys, a member of the Seimas, formally addressed the Department of Cultural Heritage, asking for the removal of this object from the list of Tangible Cultural Properties. Practically the same 'not worth it' arguments were repeated in 2021 by the Minister of Transport and Communications, Marius Skuodis. Erika Alonderytė, and Roma Pakėnienė, 'Nusitaikė į Vilniaus oro uostą: tarp svarstomų siūlymų – jį griauti', *Lietuvos rytas*, 7 September 2021 <https://www.lrytas.lt/bustas/architektura/2021/09/07/news/nusitaike-i-vilniaus-oro-uosto-pastata-tarp-svarstomu-siulymu-ji-griauti-20673829> [accessed 28 March 2022].

CONCLUSIONS

The radical changing of public spaces is characteristic of the processes of creation of various post-colonial and post-authoritarian states, so the case of the former USSR is no exception here.[48] In post-Soviet countries, this process of decommunization has been protracted in time and still has not been completed. Russian political scientist Sergei Medvedev compares these processes with a straight line: "this is decolonization. The relocation of the 'Bronze Solder' in Tallinn, Columbus, and the *Leninopad* in Ukraine are all its markers. In my opinion, this is a completely natural process, especially in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine. Such monuments are perceived as symbols of a state that behaves aggressively".[49]

The first phase of change in cities' public spaces, as was most clearly manifested in the removal of Soviet ideological monuments in the 1990s, was by no means systematic and complete in all countries. The examples of symbolic landscape changes discussed above show that the rewriting from a national perspective of the history of post-communist states has become an uneven, controversial, complicated and step-by-step process. In some places, it was mainly limited to strategies of conscious oblivion: the purification of the national culture from the signs of communism and of political and mental dependence on Russia. In other states it relied more on the postulates of formal, legal lustration,[50] thus affecting only some supporters of the previous regime, while in other countries both of these perspectives were combined. Manipulation of ideological monuments by rejecting, ignoring, or adapting them to new political needs, or, in contrast, justifying Russia's neo-colonial revanchism, became especially pronounced in the second decade of the twenty-first century, when Russia's growing aggression in the region is an attempt to regain control of its neighbouring countries. Ukrainian *Leninopad*, inspired by increasing Russian socio-political influence and the subsequent invasion, also inspired the states of the region to be concerned about their ontological security. So, the second wave of Soviet monument demolitions that started in 2014 was more sensitive to the regional context and was influenced by it.

As the cases discussed in detail in the paper show, there is still no consensus about remaining Soviet ideological relics among politicians,

48 Shaun Tyan Gin Lim, and Francesco Perono Cacciafoco, 'Reflections on the Politics of Place (Re)-Naming: Decolonisation, the Collapse of Totalitarian Regimes, and Government Changes', *Academia Letters*, 956 (2021), 1–7.

49 Andrej Čerkasov, 'Ne vandalizm, a dekolonizacija: politolog o tom, počemu k snosu pamjatnikov nužno otnosit'sja spokojno', *Current time*, 21 June 2020 <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/toppling-monuments-interview/30679979.html> [accessed 5 April 2022].

50 1 February 2000 "The Law on Lustration" came into force in Lithuania, allowing former KGB and other Soviet special services personnel and secret collaborators to confess and register with a special commission. The data of those who have done so are classified and kept for 75 years.

experts and the general public, even in the Baltic States, which from the beginning have been characterized by fairly consistent efforts of desovietization. The 'second wave' of ideological space cleansing also did not become a prerequisite for deeper knowledge and understanding of the Soviet period but was content with a superficial solution, motivated by local political and economic interests. However, this superficiality and ideological inconsistency has been countered in Lithuania, as in Ukraine, by artists' initiatives to reinterpret sites or objects associated with significant locations of Soviet memorial culture. This has been made possible through the implementation of new visual languages and messages, making it possible not only to establish a peculiar dialogue with the inconvenient past but also to react critically to contemporary political issues, thus contradicting totalitarian monumentality and ideological monologism with transparency, fragility, irony and ambiguity.

The discussed cases from Vilnius are striking examples of how the attempt to desovietize public space has become a perhaps temporary, manipulative, even accidental political tool rather than a long-term and coherent program that could lead to more significant changes in society's mentality and Soviet era re-evaluations, including the question of personal and collective responsibility for collaboration with a foreign totalitarian regime. Despite many attempts to present the debate on the value of the Green Bridge sculptures in Vilnius as merely a dispute over aesthetic taste, the political background of the arguments used by both parties in the debate was dominant. Meanwhile, the question of the artistic value of Cvirka's monument has been overshadowed by the examination of his biography and the search for moral guilt, although researchers have stressed the inconsistency and bias of these aspirations,[51] and have also found evidence that not everything in his biography is so unambiguous.[52] Opponents of the removal of these statues were mainly cultural heritage specialists and representatives of the cultural intelligentsia who highlighted the historical and artistic value of these objects as representatives of a bygone era. The supporters of demolition were mainly representatives of conservative, anti-Soviet, patriotic forces (although this distinction remains superficial and rather problematic because reliable sociological studies on citizens' opinions, linked to their ideological orientation, have not been carried out on this issue).

51 Valdemaras Klumbys, 'Po Cvirkos. Kas toliau?', *Delfi.lt*, 24 September 2021 <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/lit/valdemaras-klumbys-po-cvirkos-kas-toliau.d?id=88230521> [accessed 24 April 2022].

52 Darius Pocevičius, 'Kuo iš tikrųjų apkaltintas Petras Cvirka? (I dalis)', *Delfi.lt*, 6 September 2021 <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/lit/darius-pocevicius-kuo-is-tikruju-apkaltintas-petras-cvirka-i-dalis.d?id=88115755> [accessed 24 April 2022]; Darius Pocevičius, 'Kuo iš tikrųjų apkaltintas Petras Cvirka? (II dalis)', *Delfi.lt*, 8 September 2021 <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/lit/darius-pocevicius-kuo-is-tikruju-apkaltintas-petras-cvirka-ii-dalis.d?id=88116235> [accessed 24 April 2022].

Meanwhile the question of the monuments and memorials created to honour the Second World War Soviet soldiers was never asked in Lithuania until 2022. However, the Russian war against Ukraine has awakened countries' fears in this region regarding the potential use of these objects by Russia in justifying its 'right' to these territories. It was discovered that the remaining Soviet memorials and monuments could be used not only for commemorative purposes but also in the real geopolitical battles of the present, which has aroused ontological insecurity. Therefore, being aware of these threats, the states in this region took appropriate action. For instance, in 2017 Poland supplemented its law on the prohibition of propaganda of communism and other totalitarian regimes with a provision that paved the way for the dismantling of the remaining Soviet-era monuments, obelisks, bas-reliefs, and memorial plaques; thus, Poland began removing the Soviet military legacy from town and city squares (about 500 objects in total). This, of course, caused outrage in Russia.

It could be concluded that the relics of Soviet-era memorial culture that still remain in Lithuanian public space are hostages to internal and external ideological struggles and a kind of simulated moral purification. This would also be shown by initiatives to demolish the surviving memorials and monuments to Soviet soldiers in Lithuania following Russia's attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Perhaps we can already call this a manifestation of the 'third wave' of symbolic landscape cleansing?

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Tomas Sniegon
FROM STATE TERROR TO INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT
A place of memory: Katyn as a foreign policy tool of Putin's Russia

ABSTRACT

This text discusses the transformations of the Katyn memorial site near Smolensk in western Russia, where, in 1940, the mass murder of more than 4,000 Polish military officers who were prisoners of war occurred. After the Soviet Union's admission of guilt in 1990, it seemed for two decades that Katyn could also serve as a place for mutual reconciliation between post-communist Poland and post-Soviet Russia. However, in the period of increasing tension between Russia and Poland after 2010, the monument in Katyn became an object of Russian–Polish confrontation. The author concludes that the Katyn memorial complex today illustrates the tendency to patriotize and detraumatize Soviet crimes, whereby the positive events of the Soviet era – especially the victory over Germany in World War II – are 'Russified' and newly politically traumatized in parallel with the trivialization and marginalization of murder and crimes against human rights. The new form of memory in Katyn reflects an increasingly firmly dictated line from above that combines Russian nationalism, Orthodox faith, and a sentimental view of the period of Communist rule.

KEYWORDS:

Katyn, Stalinism, Soviet Terror, Soviet History, World War II, Russian historical culture, Polish history

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The Katyn mass burial site is located near Smolensk in western Russia, yet it is mainly associated with Poland. In the spring of 1940, the brutal mass murder of more than four thousand captured Polish officers took place here. Around the world, the name Katyn has since become a symbol of Soviet cruelty and Stalin's brazen power ambitions, joining globally significant sites of traumatic memory such as Auschwitz-Birkenau or Treblinka in Poland, the Solovetsky Islands or Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad) in Russia, Nanking in China, the Killing Fields in Cambodia, the 9/11 Ground Zero site in New York in the US, or the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

But a few years ago, the leaders of the current Russian regime decided to turn Katyn – for the first time since 1940 – into a primarily Russian place of memory and adapt it to their conception of Russia's emerging 'patriotic' historical culture. The aim of this decision was to take full control of the historical interpretation of the events that marked the formation of Katyn as a memorial site, and to relativise and increasingly deny Soviet responsibility for the mass murder of 1940 once again, as was the case before 1990. This is mainly so that Russia can 'punish' contemporary Poland for its growing anti-Russian stance over the past decade and for its confrontational attitude towards the Soviet Red Army memorials on its territory.[1]

Russian 'patriotic' historical culture is understood here as the process through which Russia under President Vladimir Putin is constructing a historical culture that is intended to promote love of the homeland and cohesion between the country's people and the ruling political elite through a strictly controlled and top-down interpretation of Russian and Soviet history. At the same time, however, this kind of patriotism also means a rejection of the 'anti-patriotic' tendency of a section of contemporary Russian society that is sympathetic to Western liberalism and is demanding deep self-reflection and a critical reassessment of the Soviet past.[2] This 'guided patriotism' is based on a strict hierarchy with the widest possible reach to the local level and to the regions throughout the Russian Federation. The teaching of patriotism, aimed primarily at the younger generations, is carried out under the auspices of the Ministries of Culture, Education and Science, and Defence, as well as some other institutions. The aim is to achieve a high "patriotic awareness" of the population, including their "readiness to fulfil their civic duty and constitutional obligations in defence of the interests of the Motherland".[3]

1 See for example: Dominika Czarnecka, *"Monuments in gratitude" to the Red Army in Communist and post-Communist Poland* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2021).

2 Viktor Šapovalov, 'Rossijskij patriotizm i Rossijskij antipatriotizm', *Obščestvennye nauki i sovremennost'*, 1 (2008), 124–32.

3 Pravitel'stvo Rossijskoj Federacii, 'Postanovlenie № 1493 ot 30 dekabrja 2015 g. O gosudarstvennoj programme "Patriotičeskoe vospitanie graždan Rossijskoj Federacii na 2016–2020 gody"', 30 December 2015 <http://static.government.ru/media/files/8qqYUwwzHUxzVkH1jsKAErrx2dE4qows.pdf> [accessed 4 June 2022].

Katyn as a memorial site of the mass murder of 1940 has been analysed, for example, in the collective study *Remembering Katyn* from 2012.[4] However, the analyses presented in that book cover developments only up to 2010. This text therefore focuses on those aspects that have received little or no analysis so far.[5] This is especially true of the development of the Russian–Polish Katyn memorial site after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, after the changes in Poland after 2015 (when Polish politics became dominated by the nationally conservative and Catholic-oriented Law and Justice party, which also set patriotic goals in its interpretation of Polish history), and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.[6]

Since 1945, Soviet communist and now Russian 'Putin' historical culture has conceived of the memory of the Second World War as 'patriotic', more precisely as the memory of the "Great Patriotic War".[7] In this context, the period 1939–1945 has been reduced to 1941–1945 because, in the Soviet conception, the Great Patriotic War began with the invasion of the USSR by Nazi Germany on 22 June 1941 and ended with the Allied – but for the USSR above all Soviet – victory on 9 May 1945. The first period of the war prior to the invasion of the USSR is deliberately excluded from the 'patriotic' concept as coverage of the entire war from the 1st of September 1939 would also have drawn unwanted attention to the pragmatic alliance between Stalin's Soviet Union and Hitler's Germany, which, while sharing a common anti-Western course, enabled the Soviets to annex large parts of Poland and then to launch the aggressive Winter War against Finland and annex the Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, as well as parts of Romania. Moreover, the exclusive focus on the Great Patriotic War ensured for the USSR the status of the greatest and *de facto* unique victim, while other victims such as the USA or China, which after 1945 also became great powers in the subsequent Cold War and competed fully or partially with the USSR, were denied similar status. The narrower the focus in both Soviet and Russian historical culture on the censored image of Soviet suffering and heroism, the easier it was to refer to the 'patriotic continuity' that underpinned both successive Soviet

4 Alexander Etkind, and others, *Remembering Katyn* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

5 This text is a substantially expanded version of the author's much shorter texts on the recent transformations of the Katyn memorial site, published in popular science form in English and Czech. See: Tomas Sniegon, 'A Transformation of the Memorial Site in Katyn', *Ponars Euroasia*, 14 June 2019 <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/a-transformation-of-the-memorial-site- in-katyn/> [accessed 22 June 2022]; Tomáš Sniegoň, 'Místo paměti Katyň: Od masové vraždy přes pokus o smíření k nové konfrontaci', *Paměť a dějiny*, 2 (2022), 3–12.

6 See, for example, Krzysztof Jaskułowski, and Piotr Majewski, 'Populist in form, nationalist in content? Law and Justice, nationalism and memory politics', *European Politics and Society*, 31 March 2022 <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2022.2058752>.

7 The concept of the Great Patriotic War was introduced immediately after the German attack on the USSR. The term first appeared in the main communist newspaper *Pravda* on 23 June 1941. Soviet leader Iosif V. Stalin, however, did not start using the term until May 1945; before that, he had mainly used the terms "Patriotic War", "Liberation War" or "Great Liberation War" in his speeches. See Iosif Stalin, *O Velikoj Otečestvennoj vojne Sovetskogo Sojuza* (Penza, 1942).

and Russian national identities. Moreover, the 'Russification' of Soviet heroism after the collapse of the USSR in 1991 has increasingly attempted to take away the wartime merits of other former Soviet republics, especially Ukraine. Any attempts to challenge the official Russian version are then dismissed and attacked by Russian propaganda as 'revisionist' and, more recently, 'fascist' or 'Nazi', without the authors of such labels bothering to present clear definitions and evidence of what they mean in particular.

KATYN AS NAZISM MEETS STALINIST COMMUNISM

From this point of view, the Katyn memorial site is very specific. Its limited area of 22 hectares inextricably links the crimes of Soviet communism with those of German Nazism and speaks with equal clarity about the two greatest political catastrophes ever to take place on Russian territory: the Second World War and the Stalinist terror that came to be known collectively as the Gulag.

The tragic history of Katyn began even before 1940, especially during the so-called Great Terror in the Soviet Union in 1937–1938, when an as yet not fully specified number of Soviet citizens were murdered there.[8] The reason that both mass murders – of Soviet and Polish citizens – took place here was that this wooded area near Katyn belonged to the Soviet NKVD political police, which was also responsible for both horrific crimes.[9] The first secret burial of Soviet citizens – victims of the regime of the time – even took place here as early as the late 1920s, when a cottage used for recreation by the head of the regional Soviet political police was located in this forest area.[10] The nature of the site then changed from a 'resting' place to a place for 'state needs' in the mid-1930s, and access to the entire forest area was completely closed.[11]

The tendency to 'Russify' this place of memory by emphasizing Soviet victims at the expense of Polish victims thus inevitably attracts unwelcome increased attention to the crimes of Soviet communism and its terror against its own people. The main actors in the construction of Russian patriotic historical culture, however, seek to minimize this inconvenient reference to Stalin's 'anti-patriotic' repression by employing

8 For more on this process, see the *Book of Memory of Polish Prisoners of War – Prisoners of the NKVD Kozel Camp, shot on the basis of the Politburo decision of 5 March 1940*, published by the Russian human rights organisation Memorial. *Ubity v Katyni: Kniga Pamjati pol'skich voennoplennych – uznikov Kozel'skogo lagerja NKVD, rasstreljannych po rešeniju Politbjuro CK VKP(b) ot 5 marta 1940 goda*, ed. by Aleksandr Gur'janov, and others (Moskva: Memorial – Zven'ja, 2015). The book is available in electronic form at: https://www.memo.ru/media/uploads/2022/01/21/killed_in_katyn.pdf.

9 N. Gurskaja, and E. Koneva, 'Iz istorii Katynskogo lesa', *Vestnik Katynskogo Memoriala*, 10 (2010), 56–57.

10 *Vestnik Katynskogo Memoriala*, 7 (2007), 110.

11 Gurskaja, and Koneva, 'Iz istorii Katynskogo lesa', pp. 56–57.

a strategy I have previously described as the "patriotization of Gulag memory", which limits both reminders and interpretations of the meaning of the Gulag to the extent that they do not stand in the way of the dominant promotion of Soviet heroism and victory.[12] This strategy is delineated in a document, adopted by the Russian government in August 2015, entitled *Concept of State Policy on Preserving the Memory of Political Repressions*, which states that the memory of the victims of political repression must be jointly cared for by the Russian state and Russian society in coordination with religious and other social organizations, in order to promote the "patriotic education" of young people of Russia.[13] Post-Soviet Russia then for the first time linked Russian patriotism with the memory of the Stalinist terror, which was in its essence completely 'unpatriotic', as one part of Soviet society murdered another part of the same society, with ethnic Russians among both the victims and the perpetrators. This, of course, also applied to the murders that took place in Katyn during the Great Terror of the late 1930s.[14]

HALF A CENTURY OF LIES AND DENIAL

In the spring of 1940, the NKVD murdered more than four thousand Polish officers in the forests near the Soviet town of Smolensk.[15] This was not long after the Soviet Union, under a secret agreement with Germany (the so-called Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact), had occupied eastern Poland and taken many prisoners, both soldiers and civilians, to its concentration camps. Not all of them, however, suffered the same tragic fate.

The mass murder was carried out on the basis of a decision of the highest leadership of the USSR, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, on 5 March 1940, which approved a proposal by the People's Commissar of the Interior, Lavrentiy Beria.[16] At Katyn, everything was planned and executed so that the mass murder would remain secret. Such behaviour was not entirely typical and did not

12 Tomas Sniegon, 'Dying in the Soviet Gulag for the Future Glory of Mother Russia? Making "Patriotic" Sense of the Gulag in Present-Day Russia', in *Cultural and Political Imaginaries in Putin's Russia*, ed. by Barbara Tornquist-Plewa, and Niklas Bernsand (Leiden: Brill, 2019). See also Tomáš Sniegoň, 'Umírání v sovětském Gulagu pro budoucí slávu matky Rusi? „Vlastenecký" výklad Gulagu v současném Rusku', *Paměť a dějiny*, 3 (2018), 3–13.

13 Pravitel'stvo Rossijskoj Federacii, 'Koncepcija gosudarstvennoj politiki po uvekovečeniju pamjati žertv političeskich repressij', 18 August 2015 <http://www.president-sovet.ru/documents/read/393/#doc-1> [accessed 4 May 2020].

14 Nikita Petrov, *Nagraždeny za rasstrel. 1940* (Moskva: Meždunarodnyj fond "Demokratija", 2016), pp. 177–87.

15 The exact number of people murdered varies in the statistics over time, but not diametrically. For more on the census of the number of victims, see N. Gurskaja, and E. Koneva, 'Towards the question of the number of Polish prisoners of war buried in Katyn at the Polish War Cemetery', *Vestnik Katynskogo Memoriala*, 11 (2011), 59–69.

16 Rudol'f Pichoja, and Aleksandr Gejštor, eds, *Katyn'. Plenniki neob"javlennoj vojny* (Moskva: Meždunarodnyj fond 'Demokratija', 1999), pp. 384–92.

affect all occupied territories equally. Although Soviet forces regularly committed atrocities in the occupied territories, mass executions of thousands of people at once were still exceptional.[17]

After Hitler broke his pact with Stalin and German troops entered the USSR in the early summer of 1941, mass graves of Polish victims were discovered near the Russian villages of Kozi Gory (Goat Mountains) and Katyn. These troops brought some Poles with them, and it was they who would be the first to know about the execution site of the Polish officers, probably in March 1942. Then, while digging in the Katyn forest, they discovered bodies in Polish uniforms.[18]

Nazi propaganda did not immediately begin to report on these Stalinist murders; it did so only belatedly in the spring of 1943, when it needed to cover up its own similar atrocities committed on Soviet territory. First, mass graves of Polish officers were identified in February 1943, and interrogations of the local population took place at the end of the same month. Thus, German interest in Katyn grew at the same time that the German army suffered defeat at Stalingrad in early February 1943, and when German radio in Berlin reported that the site of the murder of as many as 10,000 Polish officers had been discovered near Smolensk on 13 April 1943.[19]

Originally, the Germans did not refer to Katyn in their documents as the site of the crime, but to Kozi Hory. However, Goebbels' propaganda changed the name when the name Katyn better served its purpose. In Russian, it is derived from the word *katit'* (to roll), but it also resembles the Polish word *kat*, meaning a person carrying out executions. This amplified the effect of the German findings and the accusations of Soviet Stalinism.[20]

As early as 15 April 1943, just two days after the German radio report, the Soviet Union began a disinformation campaign blaming Germany for the Smolensk massacre. The murders were supposed to have occurred not in 1940 but in 1941, when the Smolensk area was under full German control.[21]

After Soviet denials and the outbreak of disputes over who killed the victims in Polish uniforms, the Germans sent an international expert commission (composed of experts under their control) to Katyn in April

17 Mark Kramer, 'What Was Distinctive about Katyn: The Massacres in Context', *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, 44.3 (2012), 569–76. This article is available in electronic form at: https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1124&context=jil.

18 Andrzej Przewoźnik, and Joanna Adamska, *Katyń. Zbrodnia, prawda, pamięć* (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2010), pp. 199–200. See also the Russian version of the interpretation: Gurskaja, and Koneva, 'Iz istorii Katynskogo lesa', pp. 56–57.

19 Ibid. See also: *Katyn'. Mart 1940 g. – sentjabr' 2000 g.: Rasstrel. Sud'by živych. Èho Katyni. Dokumenty*, ed. by Natalija Lebedeva (Moskva: Ves' Mir, 2001), p. 447.

20 Oksana Kornilova, 'Katyn: dolgaja žizn' nacistskogo termina', *Izvestija Smolenskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta*, 1 (2018), 229–41.

21 *Katyn'. Mart 1940 g. – sentjabr' 2000 g.*, p. 448.

1943 to confirm the mass execution of Poles by the Soviet Union. At the end of that year, however, the Soviet Union recaptured the territory in question and immediately sent a commission of its own to the site. In its conclusions in January 1944, the commission denied the previous information about Stalin's crime and stated that the murder of the Poles had taken place not in 1940 but at the end of 1941, after the Smolensk area had been occupied by Germany. The Soviet conclusion was clear: the perpetrators were not Stalin's but Hitler's military units.

However, it was also significant that, in addition to the two commissions mentioned above, a technical commission of the Polish Red Cross (PCK), headed by the then-Secretary General of this organisation, Kazimierz Skarżyński, had already studied the remains of the victims in Katyn in the spring of 1943. Thus, the Polish resistance movement, and with it the Poles in exile, could learn about the fate of the Polish victims from sources other than German and, later, Soviet ones.[22]

At that time, outside the Soviet Union, Katyn was becoming one of the main symbols of Stalin's wartime terror. At the same time, however, the most vociferous interpretation of the crime at Katyn went from being directed by Goebbels' propaganda to being directed by Soviet propaganda for a long time. At the mass grave in the Katyn forest, despite the fact that access to the site was completely closed for a long time, a small memorial was erected, and an inscription was installed in both Russian and Polish: "Here are buried the prisoners of war, Polish officers, atrociously tortured by the German-Fascist occupiers in the spring of 1941". The Polish quotation did not include the term 'prisoners of war' but spoke of 'enslaved officers'.[23]

The Soviets even went so far as to try to force their own murders onto the list of charges against the top leaders of Nazi Germany in the run-up to the Nuremberg Trials. The Soviet lie was thus to be elevated to the official truth accepted by all the victorious Allies. The Soviet side, using prosecutors at Nuremberg with experience of the great Stalinist political trials of the 1930s, proceeded with great confidence in pushing for the mass murder at Katyn to be put on the tribunal's agenda, convinced of the success of such a strategy.[24] However, not only the Nazi documents but also a number of other testimonies and facts had by then already begun to refute the Soviet version and, in contrast, to suggest that the Stalin

22 See for example: Tadeusz Wolsza, *Encounter with Katyn: The Wartime and Postwar Story of Poles Who Saw the Katyn Site in 1943* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2018).

23 "Here are buried prisoners of war Polish officers, brutally executed by the German-Fascist occupiers in 1941". See: Gurskaja, and Koneva, 'Iz istorii Katynskogo lesa', p. 63. Translation of the quote by the author. In the Polish original the citation read as follows: "Ś.P. Tu są pogrzebani niewolnicy oficerowie Wojska Polskiego w strasznych męczarniach zamordowani przez niemiecko-faszystowskich okupantów jesienią 1941 roku".

24 See Francine Hirsch, *Soviet Judgment at Nuremberg. A New History of the International Military Tribunal after World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 8–9.

regime was responsible for this crime. This evidence included, for example, the testimonies of Poles who had managed to survive Soviet captivity before Polish military courts cooperating with authorities in exile in the UK during the Second World War.[25] The Nuremberg experiment thus failed for the Soviet Union.[26]

However, the main evidence, as well as complete control of access to the crime scene in the Katyn forests, remained in the hands of the USSR. Poland also remained under Stalinist control, therefore questioning of the Soviet version of the Katyn crime could only occur outside the USSR's sphere of influence, especially in Polish emigre circles in the West. One of the first historiographical studies, for example, appeared in London in 1948 in Polish as *Zbrodnia katyńska w świetle dokumentów (The Katyn Crime in the Light of Documents)*, edited by Józef Mackiewicz but published anonymously.[27] This publication had a rather complicated history – as did the author, who himself visited Katyn in 1943 as part of one of the international delegations initiated by Germany, but with the consent of the Polish Resistance. The final form of the book contained a foreword by General Władysław Anders, who was also imprisoned in the USSR during the war and later released, and who was put in charge of the Polish troops fighting alongside the Red Army in 1941–1942. Later, the so-called Anders Army came under British command and its commander subsequently fell back into disfavour with both Polish and Soviet communists.[28]

In 1951, Mackiewicz published his version of *The Katyn Wood Murders* in English, and in 1965, the 1948 publication was translated into English and appeared as *The Katyn Crime in the Light of Documents*.[29] In the United States, the American Committee for the Investigation of the Katyn Massacre was formed in 1949, and two years later the US Congress created a special commission on the Katyn case. After World War II, the Soviets transferred the 'Katyn problem' to the Cold War agenda, which the Soviet leadership took advantage of, dismissing accusations of guilt as mere 'Western propaganda'. Side by side with the Soviet Union, the Polish Communist leadership, which also shared the official version of the Katyn mass murder as a German crime, condemned the American initiatives.

The term 'Katyn' gradually came to encompass the crimes committed by order of Stalin's leadership against Polish officers not only at Smolensk,

25 See, for example, Jerzy Platajs, *Zbrodnia katyńska. Zeznania świadków przed polskimi sądami wojskowymi (1943–1946)* (Gdańsk: Muzeum II Wojny Światowej, 2016).
26 Natalija Lebedeva, *SSSR i Njurnbergskij Process. Dokumenty* (Moskva: Meždunarodnyj fond "Demokratija", 2012), pp. 54–57.
27 Władysław Anders, *Zbrodnia katyńska w świetle dokumentów* (London: Gryf, 1948). For more on this publication, see Etkind, and others, *Remembering Katyn*, pp. 17–18.
28 See: Jacek Trznadel, 'Kto jest autorem "Zbrodni katyńskiej w świetle dokumentów"', *Zeszyty Katyńskie*, 1 (1990), 207–11. See also: Jacek Trznadel, 'Józef Mackiewicz o Katyniu', *Zeszyty Katyńskie*, 8 (1997), 47–51.
29 Józef Mackiewicz, *The Katyn Wood Murders* (London: Holis & Carter, 1951).

but also in several other places in the Soviet Union – in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine – and in the occupied territories of Eastern Poland. In the massacre, which is also widely referred to as the 'Katyn massacre', 4,415 prisoners from the Kozelsk camp were murdered (these victims are buried in the Katyn Forest near Smolensk), 6,295 inmates from the Ostashkov camp were shot in Kalinin/Tver and buried in the forest near the village of Mednoye, and 3,820 inmates from the camp in Starobelsk were shot in the NKVD building in Kharkov and buried on the outskirts of the same city. In addition to the victims from these three camps, thousands of victims were imprisoned and murdered in prisons in the annexed territory of eastern Poland or taken to the USSR and murdered there. In all, the name 'Katyn' refers to the mass murder of nearly 22,000 Polish victims.[30]

Even the partial liberalization of the Soviet regime and condemnation of Stalin's repression in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death did not bring change. The new ruler, Nikita Khrushchev, criticized Stalin, but mainly for the murders of Soviet communists. Destalinization affected the USSR's foreign policy towards its satellites only marginally; instead of admitting Soviet guilt for Katyn, Poland received a threat of military intervention from Moscow in 1956 (similar to the invasion of Hungary in the same year) if it tried to break free from the Kremlin's grip. In 1959, then KGB chairman Alexander Shelepin sent a top-secret letter to Khrushchev in which he unequivocally confirmed Soviet guilt for the mass murders, including Katyn. He pointed out, for example, that the archives of his service contained documents on the executions of 21,857 captured Polish citizens as early as 1940 (not 1941). He also suggested that all these documents should be destroyed.[31]

However, the pressure for Soviet admission of the truth about Katyn did not disappear under Khrushchev or his successor Leonid Brezhnev. In the mid-1970s, memorials to Polish victims of this Soviet crime were erected in Stockholm (1975) and London (1976), but the Soviet authorities only continued to repeat the lie that the deaths of these Polish prisoners of war were a German crime, not a Soviet one. Those who cried out for the truth, according to Moscow, were spreading the same propaganda as Goebbels once did. Soviet leaders countered Western initiatives by passing a resolution on the means of combating Western propaganda on the so-called Katyn case at a meeting of the Politburo of the CPSU Central

30 For more, see the *Ubity v Kalinine, zachoroneny v Mednom. Kniga pamjati pol'skich voennoplennych - uznikov Ostaškovskogo lagerja NKVD SSSR, rasstreljannych po rešeniju Politbjuro CK VKP(b) ot 5 marta 1940 goda*, ed. by Aleksandr Gur'janov, and others, 2 vols (Moskva: Obščestvo "Memorial", 2019).

31 Aleksandr Šelepin, 'Zapiska predsedatelja KGB pri SM SSSR A.N. Šelepina ot 3 marta 1959 g. № 632-Š s predloženiem likvidirovat' vse dela po operacii, provedennoj organami NKVD v sootvetstvii s postanovleniem CK VKP(b) ot 5 marta 1940 g.', Rossijskij Gosudarstvennyj Archiv Social'no-Političeskoj Istorii, f. 17, op. 166, d. 621, l. 138

Committee on 5 April 1976.[32] The 1946 memorial at Katyn was removed and a new one – completely devoid of religious symbolism – was created in its place (a cross was part of the former memorial).[33] Part of the Soviet propaganda was the fact that instead of Katyn another place with a similar sounding name, Khatyn, located near Minsk, Belarus, was emphasized. This was a small Belarusian settlement that had been destroyed by the German Nazis during the Second World War. Thousands of other similar settlements in the USSR suffered a similarly sad fate during the war, but the 150 or so victims of Khatyn have been brought to the fore since the late 1960s by the erection of the National War Memorial of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (a total of 2,230,000 people were murdered in Belarus during the war).[34] It was unveiled in 1969 and visited by US President Richard Nixon in July 1974.

From the communist period, it is also worth mentioning that the Soviet regime began to 'Sovietize' the site of the Katyn memorial during the era of Leonid Brezhnev. In 1983, on the initiative of the Smolensk City Soviet, a tribute began to be paid to the memory of more than 500 Soviet prisoners of war who were also allegedly murdered by the Germans in Katyn. This allegedly happened in May 1943, but this claim was not supported by any concrete documentation or archaeological research and exhumations. Regardless, a stone commemorating Soviet prisoners of war can still be found on the grounds of the Katyn memorial today.[35]

A decisive shift in the question of Soviet guilt for the mass murders of Polish officers in Katyn and elsewhere took place only under Mikhail Gorbachev. The Soviet Union and Poland agreed in 1987 to jointly examine the sources, and for the first time there was a proposal in the Soviet Politburo, the highest organ of the Communist Party, that the Soviet Union accept its guilt. Gorbachev himself, however, did not immediately take such a step. In the end, definitive change was brought about only by pressure from outside – above all, of course, from Poland – and from within Soviet society, in which the need to come to terms with the dark history of Stalinism was growing stronger as democratization continued, and whose regime needed self-reflection and democratization to strengthen its own legitimacy.[36] The Soviet Union finally officially admitted its guilt for the murders of Polish prisoners in April 1990, when Gorbachev handed over to Polish Communist President Wojciech Jaruzelski in Moscow on

32 *Katyn'. Mart 1940 g. – sentjabr' 2000 g.*, p. 571.
33 Gurskaja, and Koneva, 'Iz istorii Katynskogo lesa', p. 63.
34 For more, see Per Anders Rudling, 'The Khatyn Massacre in Belorussia: A Historical Controversy Revisited', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 26 (2012), 29–58.
35 Gurskaja, and Koneva, 'Iz istorii Katynskogo lesa', p. 63.
36 See Inessa Jażborowska, 'Russian Historical Writing about the Crime of Katyn', *Polish Review*, 53.2 (2008), 139–57 (here: 141–42).

13 April the lists of Polish prisoners transported from Kozelsk to Smolensk and from Ostashkov to Kalinin (Tver) in the spring of 1940, the record of prisoners deported from the NKVD camp in Starobelsk, and some other documents.

In a Russian local scholarly journal published by the Katyn Memorial, information has become available that Jaruzelski secretly visited Katyn as early as 2 September 1988. Although he was the leader of a regime that fought ideologically against Polish Catholicism and promoted atheism, during this alleged visit a cross was re-erected at the Katyn memorial site.[37] In the same year, public access was granted.

However, Jaruzelski did not become president until a year later, on 19 July 1989. In 1988, he was officially the first secretary of the ruling Polish United Workers Party. This visit is not mentioned in other sources. Katyn was visited on 1 September 1988 by representatives of the Polish Embassy to the USSR in Moscow, and on 2 September a wooden cross was actually erected in Katyn as a result of the efforts of, above all, the Polish Primate, Cardinal Jozef Glemp.[38] At the same time, 1988 was also the year of commemoration in the USSR of the thousandth anniversary of the introduction of Christianity in Russia.

Gorbachev at the time – like no other Soviet communist leader before him – was trying to come to terms with the problematic Soviet past. Exactly half a century of Soviet lies and denial had thus come to an end.

VICTIMS OF WAR OR STALINISM?

On 13 April 1990, the TASS news agency published an admission of Soviet guilt. At the end of the same year, the Chief Military Prosecutor's Office of the USSR and the Chief Military Prosecutor's Office of Poland signed a mutual agreement on the joint investigation of the mass murders in Mednoye, Kharkov and Katyn. At that time, however, any mention of Soviet mass terror having occurred there before the murders of Polish officers and before World War II was still lacking in connection with Katyn.

The first official mention of the victims of the Stalinist purges of the late 1930s did not appear in the USSR until 1991. The authorities in Smolensk decided in a resolution to survey the terrain in order to locate and protect the graves of the victims of Stalinist repression.[39] Indeed, the graves of Stalinist victims had been discovered alongside Polish victims in both

37 Gurskaja, and Koneva, 'Iz istorii Katynskogo lesa', p. 64.
38 See: Milena Kindziuk, 'Historia postawienia krzyża w Katyniu w 1988 roku', *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne*, 31 (2008), 58–73.
39 Nikolaj Il'kevič, 'Iz istorii Memoriala "Katyń"', *Vestnik Katynskogo Memoriala*, 8 (2008), 121.

Kharkov and Mednoye, and although they had not yet been discovered in Katyn at that time, the protection zone for further exploration was a full 100 hectares in size.[40] According to later figures, given in 1998 by the Russian Federal Security Service (the successor to the Soviet KGB) following an investigation in the archives, a total of 2,997 Russian victims of Stalin's repressions are believed to have been buried in the Katyn complex.[41] However, the remains of all of them are far from being found and identified.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin paid tribute to the Polish victims of Soviet state terror by laying a wreath at the Katyn Cross in Warsaw's Powazki military cemetery during his visit to Poland in 1993. Three years after the collapse of the USSR, in 1994, Poland and the Russian Federation concluded a treaty on the mutual care of the burial sites of soldiers and victims of persecution/repression and the places of memory associated with these victims.[42] The concept of *burial sites* was easy to understand, but the precise meaning of the concepts of *repression* and *memory sites* was much less clear. This issue gained importance after Polish President Lech Kaczynski and his wife died in a plane crash on the way to Katyn on 10 April 2010, when their plane was landing in Smolensk. A total of 96 people lost their lives in this tragedy, including many high-ranking Polish government, military and political officials. They were all on their way to a commemorative event dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the mass murder of Polish soldiers in Katyn.

The memory of the mass murder in Katyn has become one of the most important historical pillars in the construction of a new Polish national identity in post-communist Poland.[43] The process of building a dignified memorial in Katyn began in 1995, when the then-President of Poland, Lech Walesa, personally attended the laying of the foundation stone for the construction of a new, dignified complex in Katyn. The stone was consecrated by Pope John Paul II himself, who, like Wałęsa, was Polish.

In a 1996 decision on the issue, the Russian government described the Katyn project as a place of memory that would honour "Soviet and Polish citizens who were victims of totalitarian repression".[44] Polish cit-

40 G. Andreenkova, 'K voprosu o memorializacii ostankov sovetskich graždan – žertv repressij na territorii Memoriala "Katyń"', *Vestnik Katynskogo Memoriala*, 9 (2009), 24.

41 Il'kevič, 'Iz istorii Memoriala "Katyń"', pp. 127–31.

42 Pravitel'stvo Rossijskoj Federacii, 'Soglašenie meždu Pravitel'stvom Rossijskoj Federacii i Pravitel'stvom Respubliki Pol'ša o zachoronenijach i mestach pamjati žertv vojn i repressij', 22 February 1994 <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/420349827> [accessed 5 April 2022]. In the Polish version: Rząd Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 'Umowa między Rządem Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej a Rządem Federacji Rosyjskiej o grobach i miejscach pamięci ofiar wojen i represji, sporządzona w Krakowie dnia 22 lutego 1994 r.', 22 February 1994 <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19941120543/O/D19940543.pdf> [accessed 5 April 2022].

43 See, for example: Maria Kobielska, *Polska kultura pamięci w XXI wieku: dominanty : zbrodnia katyńska, powstanie warszawskie i stan wojenny* (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2016).

44 Pravitel'stvo Rossijskoj Federacii, 'Postanovlenie №1247 O sozdanii memorial'nych kompleksov v mestach zachoronenij sovetskich i pol'skich graždan – žertv totalitarnych repressij v Katyni (Smolenskaja oblast') i Mednom (Tverskaja oblast')', 19 October 1996 <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/9031087> [accessed 5 April 2022].

izens murdered in Polish military uniforms were thus designated not as victims of the Second World War or prisoners of war, but as victims of Stalinist terror.

In this respect, it must be stressed that the USSR did not treat Poles as prisoners of war at the time of their murder. The Soviet Union did not officially declare war on Poland in September 1939; instead, it wrapped its annexation of eastern Poland in phrases such as "liberating the Ukrainian and Belarusian minorities" in that territory.[45] However, as early as 19 September 1939, Order No. 0308 of the People's Commissar of the Interior, Lavrentiy Beria, created the Administration for Prisoners of War of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the USSR, which also dealt with the soldiers of the Polish army detained in the camps in Starobelsk, Ostashkov and Kozelsk. The Soviet Union then used the designation of Poles as prisoners of war itself at a time when it wanted to attribute the crime to Nazi Germany. [46]

However, it is not clear from the 1996 Russian government document whether or not Russia considered including the concept of prisoners of war for Poles after the collapse of the USSR. However, all former Polish prisoners of war held in the camps in Kozelsk, Starobelsk and Ostashkov were also included in the Russian rehabilitation process for innocent victims of Stalin's repression in the early 1990s, which was not yet complete.[47]

Russia's decision meant that Katyn became the first ever international Gulag memorial on Russian territory. No other site of memory of Stalin's repressions has been used so prominently at the international political level by the Russian side as Katyn.

In the 1990s, the Polish authorities have decided to give the site of the mass murder in Katyn the status of a Polish military cemetery. However, this also meant that the memorial site, where Polish soldiers were murdered by the Soviet NKVD on the basis of a decision taken by the highest levels of the USSR, acquired in principle the same status as the memorial site of more than 600,000 Soviet soldiers killed on Polish territory by the Germans in 1944 and 1945 during the liberation of Poland from German occupation. The same liberation meant that Poland was immediately transferred from German to Soviet rule and, under Moscow's leadership, turned into a communist dictatorship until 1989.

45 Sovet narodnych komissarov SSSR, 'Nota Pravitel'stva SSSR, vručennaja pol'skomu poslu v Moskve utrom 17 sentjabrja 1939 g.', *Pravda*, 18 September 1939.

46 The NKVD Prisoner of War Department. See: *Katyn'. Plenniki neob"javlennoj vojny*, p. 79.

47 Polish scholar Wojciech Materski pointed out that the full rehabilitation of all Polish victims was never completed. See: Wojciech Materski, 'Problem rehabilitacji ofiar zbrodni katyńskiej w stosunkach polsko-rosyjskich', *Nowa Polityka Wschodnia*, 1 (2012), 39–53. The Russian human rights organisation Memorial has also addressed the problems of rehabilitating Polish victims. See: Meždunarodnyj Memorial, 'Pol'skaja issledovatel'skaja programma', *Meždunarodnyj Memorial*, [n.d.] <https://www.memo.ru/ru-ru/history-of-repressions-and-protest/victims/poland/> [accessed 5 April 2022].

The opening ceremony of the Katyn Memorial Complex took place on 28 July 2000 in the presence of Jerzy Buzek, Prime Minister of Poland, and Viktor Khristenko, Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation. After passing through a common entrance corridor, the 18.5-hectare area of the complex is divided into two parts: on the right, the Polish military cemetery; on the left, the part dedicated to the memory of Soviet victims of Stalin's repressions.

In Russia, the following decade – marked by the first and second periods of Vladimir Putin's presidency (2000–2008) and the first half of his successor Dmitry Medvedev's government (2008–2010) – did not suggest that the gradual search for ways of mutual Russian–Polish rapprochement on the memory of the Katyn tragedy would change in any fundamental way, and the tension surrounding the "Katyn case" did not disappear.

In 2007, the feature film *Katyn* by the prominent Polish director Andrzej Wajda attracted great international attention, among other things because Wajda himself was the son of one of the Polish officers murdered in the USSR in 1940. While his father, Jakub Wajda, may not have died and been buried in Katyn himself, the curiosity surrounding the film was magnified by the combination of Wajda's personal fate, his internationally acclaimed directorial skill, his first ever attempt at such a large-scale artistic representation of one of the most traumatic moments in modern Polish history, and his ambition to make the work as authentically credible as possible. [48]

The political dimension was indisputable: in Poland, the premiere was watched by the President, the Prime Minister, representatives of the Catholic Church, family survivors of the murdered, and representatives of *Memorial*, a Russian human rights organization that cares for the memory of the victims of Stalinist repression.[49] The film first appeared on Russian television in April 2010 and was even broadcast on Russia's main television channel, Channel One, in prime time on 11 April 2010.

On the other hand, however, the Supreme Military Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation concluded a lengthy investigation in 2005, which had been proceeding intermittently since 1991, with a controversial explanation that suggested new manoeuvring and did not satisfy the Poles. It also refused to label the mass murder of Polish officers as genocide. Only

48 Andrzej Wajda's father, Jakub Wajda, was murdered in the NKVD headquarters in Kharkiv as a prisoner of the Starobelsk camp. The site called Piatykhatky, where a small memorial plaque is placed and where Jakub Wajda's remains are buried, was first visited by his son in 2008 during the Ukrainian premiere of his film. *Remembering Katyn*, pp. 55, 77.

49 Ibid., p. 40.

some of the files collected by the prosecutor's office were handed over to Poland, with the remaining material reportedly classified as secret.[50]

The political process of symbolically accepting Soviet responsibility culminated on the Russian side in November 2010, when the Russian parliament, the State Duma, adopted a declaration condemning Stalin's murder of Polish military officers and civilians and seeing this step as an impetus for the new development of Russian–Polish relations. The document reads:

> "Our peoples have paid a huge price for the crimes of totalitarianism [...] The members of the State Duma, on behalf of the Russian people, extend their hand to the Polish people and express their hope that a new stage of development of relations between our countries on the basis of democratic values is beginning. Achieving such a result will be the best memorial to the victims of the Katyn tragedy, who have already been exhaustively rehabilitated by history itself, to the Red Army soldiers who perished in Poland, to the Soviet soldiers who gave their lives for the liberation of Poland from Hitler's Nazism.[51]

FROM ATTEMPTS AT RECONCILIATION TO A NEW CONFRONTATION

The above facts are necessary to understand the developments that have taken place around the Katyn memorial site over the last decade. These developments are, on the one hand, in the spirit of the continuing Soviet – and, to some extent, post-Soviet Russian – reluctance to include the crimes of the USSR against the Polish and Soviet populations in the official historical interpretation of the Second World War and the entire communist system; on the other hand, this reluctance reflects the current state of Russian-Polish relations. The tragedy of 2010, the death of Lech Kaczynski and his delegation at Smolensk, and the ongoing efforts of the regime led by Russian President Vladimir Putin to make 'patriotism' the main official ideology – and thereby legitimise Russia's current policy towards Ukraine since the annexation of Crimea in 2014 – have caused new tensions in the relations between these two countries.

Since 2010, Poland's conservative right has repeatedly accused Russia of conspiring against the late President Lech Kaczyński, of being

50 'Sejm Pol'ši potreboval ot Rossii priznat' fakt genocida poljakov', *Lenta.Ru*, 22 March 2005 <https://lenta.ru/news/2005/03/22/poland/> [accessed 14 June 2022].

51 Gosudarstvennaja duma Federal'nogo sobranija Rossijskoj Federacii, 'Gosduma prinjala zajavlenie "O Katynskoj tragedii i ee žertvach"', Gosudarstvennaja Duma, 26 November 2010 <http://duma.gov.ru/news/5093/> [accessed 5 May 2022].

responsible for his death, and of conducting an inadequate and problematic investigation into the air disaster, which has been dubbed 'Katyn Two' in Poland. Such an insinuation of the relationship between the original Katyn mass murder and the plane crash aimed to emphasize the similarities (the loss of Polish elites) at the expense of the fundamental differences: in the first case, the cold-blooded planned killing of innocents; in the second case, the plane crash, which, however, may also have been influenced by Polish mistakes in the attempt to land at Smolensk even in adverse conditions. The emphasis on the similarities then only strengthened a number of conspiracy theories that emerged in connection with the 'second Katyn'.

In addition, after the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice) party came to power in 2015, a new law was adopted in the country on the need to remove the remaining symbols of the communist system and its ideology. Under it, monuments and memorials from the communist era, including those commemorating the Red Army's presence in Poland, can be removed.[52]

Russia, on the other hand, was reinforcing its own nationalism and the 'Russification' of the Katyn memorial. Instead of promoting Russian-Polish reconciliation, which – despite all the partial problems – continued in the 1990s and even in the first two periods of Putin's presidency and the first years of the presidency of Putin's successor, Dmitry Medvedev, the rivalry of radical nationalist tendencies prevailed, which affected Katyn in a significant way.

In 2018, a large memorial dedicated to the victims of the so-called Great Terror of 1937–1938 was built in the Russian part of the site next to the Polish war cemetery. Thanks to this, the thousands of victims of the pre-war Stalinist mass murder from the Smolensk region finally received a suitable memorial site. After being deliberately neglected or even completely 'forgotten' during the existence of the Soviet regime and partly after its fall, the murdered were given back their names, which were inscribed on several dozen panels at the memorial. Compared to similar memorials, the Katyn monument is quite impressive. However, its role did not remain limited to empathy with the victims of Stalin's times.

The role of this memorial is also to weaken the dominance of Polish memory in Katyn. The emphasis on the more than 8,000 Soviet victims compared to the approximately 4,400 Polish victims, which is also reflected in the large inscriptions at the entrance to the memorial complex, turns Katyn mathematically into a place of Soviet – and in a sense even Russian – rather than Polish suffering. The inscriptions proclaim that all of

52 Jörg Hackmann, 'Defending the "Good Name" of the Polish Nation. Politics of History as a Battlefield in Poland, 2015–18', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 20 (2018), 587–606.

the more than 8,000 Soviet victims were buried in Katyn, which is not true. In fact, this figure corresponds to the entire area and, moreover, relates to the entire period of 'repression' from 1917 to 1953, i.e., the reigns of both Lenin and Stalin, which, incidentally, could certainly justify the erection of a large memorial in Smolensk.[53] According to the data documented so far, fewer Soviet – and especially Russian – citizens were buried in Katyn than Poles. [54]

The tendency of Russification was strengthened by the construction of an Orthodox church right at the entrance to the site. Its foundation stone was laid on 7 April 2010 by the then-Prime Ministers of Russia and Poland, Vladimir Putin and Donald Tusk. This was exactly three days before the aforementioned Smolensk air tragedy. The church was originally planned as a project on the road to reconciliation, as evidenced, for example, by the fact that it also housed a prominent Polish icon of the Madonna of Częstochowa. However, the church's position became ambivalent the moment the Russian Orthodox Church declared Katyn "the site of the Russian Golgotha", which not only emphasized the Russian ethnic dimension within the victims of Stalinism, but also particularly privileged the memory of those victims who belonged to this church over the victims of others. Therefore, the church in Katyn also joined the line of 'patriotization' of the memory of Stalin's terror.

RUSSIA AS THE SELF-PROCLAIMED MAIN VICTIM

The new 'Russian offensive' in Katyn has so far culminated in the opening of a new museum in April 2018. It was conceived under the strong influence of the Russian Military Historical Society (RVIO), an organization founded by Vladimir Putin in 2012 and led by former culture minister and current Putin adviser Vladimir Medinsky.[55] The same society also built a memorial to the victims of the Great Terror in Katyn, but in terms of content the museum and the memorial are in no way connected.

53 N. Semenova, 'Repressii v Smolenske v cifrach i faktach', *Vestnik Katynskogo Memoriala*, 13 (2013), (p. 37). This study gives a total of 8,243 Soviet casualties in the entire area. Another later study, however, reaches a new conclusion and increases the number of Soviet victims of the communist terror in the area to more than 10,000 in 1937–1938 alone, but even this does not claim that all these victims should be buried directly in Katyn. See Kirill Aleksandrov, 'Smolenskaja oblast'', *Vestnik Katynskogo Memoriala*, 16 (2016), 25–33.

54 According to the aforementioned data of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) from August 1998, a total of 7,860 people were shot in Smolensk during the "gratuitous repression", of which 2,997 "Russian citizens" are buried directly in the Goat Mountains/Katyn Forest. See: Il'kevič, 'Iz istorii Memoriala "Katyń"', pp. 127–28. The difference between the designation of victims as Russian (in the FSB document) and Soviet (at the entrance to the Katyn memorial complex) is not explained, but there is no conclusive data that victims of Stalinist repression from republics of the former USSR other than Russia were buried in Katyn in the numbers indicated on the Katyn entrance wall.

55 Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Medinsky served as head of the Russian negotiating team, confirming his prominent position in the Russian power structure.

The narrative of the museum exhibition does not focus on the individual suffering of the victims of the Soviet terror, sympathy for them, or condemnation of the immediate and highest-ranking, and therefore decisive, perpetrators. Instead, the focus is on Russian suffering in the long process of Russian (Soviet)–Polish relations and the attempt to convince the visitor of the only correct – Russian patriotic – truth.

The exhibition is entitled "Russia and Poland. Twentieth Century. Pages of History".[56] However, it begins with the early seventeenth century and emphasizes the aggressive behaviour of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth towards its Russian neighbour. The attack led to the Poles dominating and controlling Moscow between 1610 and 1612. In Russian history, this event was given the name *smutnoye vremja*. What follows is an account of another unilaterally interpreted 'Polish invasion of Russia', this time shortly after the end of World War I.

The occupation of Polish territory by the Russian Empire in 1795–1918, on the other hand, is pushed into the background, as is the 1939–1941 pact between the USSR and Germany. Although this so-called Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact – which led to the division of Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union and was followed on the Soviet side by the attack on Finland, the seizure of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and parts of Romania – played a significant role in the outbreak of the Second World War, the exhibition in Katyn, instead of traumatic images, presents only photographs of Poles who supposedly greeted the arrival of the Red Army in September 1939 with enthusiasm. The annexation of eastern Poland is explained in a similar vein to that of the central communist daily *Pravda* in 1939: because the Polish state *de facto* ceased to exist after the German attack on 1 September 1939, there was supposedly no one to protect the Ukrainian and Belarusian minorities there, so the Red Army took over. The annexation of eastern Poland is thus explained as a consequence of the 'German-Polish' war, and not as a consequence of the division of Europe between Hitler's and Stalin's empires.

All aspects of Russian–Polish history corresponding to the 'patriotic line' of the current Russian state are considered natural and positive, while the conflict themes, when mentioned, are considered by the creators of the exhibition as a kind of tendentious attempt by evil forces to disrupt the 'natural' friendship between the Polish and Russian people. From this point of view, the exhibition's narrative is reminiscent of former Soviet propaganda, which emphasized the progressive role of the majority 'people' and denounced the minority category of 'enemies of the people' as those

56 For official information on the Katyn Museum website, see: Memorial'nyj kompleks "Katyn'", 'Exhibitions', Memorial'nyj kompleks "Katyn'", [n.d.] <http://memorial-katyn.ru/en/exhibitions.html> [accessed 4 June 2022].

who did not understand the course of history and were therefore historically destined for extinction.

The mass murder in Katyn is seen in a broader disturbing context as an act of Russian-Soviet 'historical justice' that balances earlier unjust Polish actions against the Russian and Soviet state, rather than as an example of unacceptable brutality on the part of the communist dictatorship. A relatively large subsequent section of the exhibition is then devoted to what has been characterized as successful post-war cooperation between the Soviet Union and Poland. The Soviet liberation of Poland from Nazi occupation plays a central role in the museum, while the imposition of the Stalinist communist system on Poland is not highlighted.

The historical exhibition is rounded off with a section highlighting the differences between how contemporary Russia and Poland take care of their military monuments. While images show Vladimir Putin and the Russian patriarch paying tribute to the Polish victims during their visit to Katyn, Poland is presented as an ungrateful country that destroys Soviet military memorials and completely ignores the fact that without Soviet help it would hardly exist today.

All texts on the panels and the explanations on the multimedia presentations are written only in Russian, making it clear who they are exclusively for. Those who do not know Russian will, of course, understand their exact meaning only partially or not at all, and therefore will not be able to criticize the Russian 'patriotic' interpretation of the mass murder in Katyn in 1940. In fact, intentions of this kind are also evident on the museum's website, which reports on the exhibition. Both the English and Russian versions are based on half-truths and highly distorted facts, but, even so, the English version is somewhat less confrontational than the Russian version. For example, while the English version of the information site refers to the annexation of western Ukraine and western Belarus in the autumn of 1939 (without clearly specifying that this was a Soviet annexation, which took place in collaboration with Hitler's Germany shortly after the invasion of Poland), the Russian version emphasizes that after the Polish government fled the country in September 1939, the Soviet Union thus "could not remain neutral" in the situation, leaving the Ukrainian and Belarusian inhabitants of Poland undefended.[57]

57 For comparison: the Russian version is at: Memorial'nyj kompleks "Katyn'", 'Istorija', Memorial'nyj kompleks "Katyn'", [n.d.] <http://memorial-katyn.ru/ru/history.html> [accessed 4 June 2022]. English version: Memorial'nyj kompleks "Katyn'", 'History', Memorial'nyj kompleks "Katyn'", [n.d.] <http://memorial-katyn.ru/en/history.html> [accessed 4 June 2022].

ADMIRATION FOR RUSSIA INSTEAD OF SYMPATHY FOR THE VICTIMS

In summary, it can be stated that the current form of the Katyn memorial site has broken the previous tendencies that could be observed since the 1990s. After half a century of lies and denials from the Soviet side concerning the two mass murders carried out in the Katyn area – one on the victims of the Great Terror and the other on Polish prisoners of war – there was then finally a gradual process of admission of guilt from the Russian side and an improvement in relations between post-Soviet Russia and Poland. While far from being seamless, it was in any case a step forward.

However, the recent anti-liberal turn has turned the more favourable atmosphere between the two states into another confrontational phase, marked by new attempts to use the 1940 Katyn massacre as a weapon in international relations. Perhaps the most striking examples are the incidents of March and April 2022, when a group of politicians at the local and national Russian level even demanded the complete removal of the Polish military cemetery from Katyn in retaliation for Poland's attitude following Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022.[58] Given that this text is being written at a time when Russia's war against Ukraine is still ongoing, it cannot be ruled out that the Katyn incident of spring 2022 will have an even more radical sequel.

The current form of this site of memory, especially the new museum, shows that Russia still lacks a consistent policy of remembrance towards crimes committed during the Soviet era, and especially under Iosif Stalin. In addition, it is still unable to reconsider the Soviet Union's foreign policy, especially that of the first two years of the Second World War. It does not use the traumatic periods of its recent era with an emphasis that they cannot be repeated, as is the case, for example, with the memory of the Holocaust in democratic societies.

The Katyn memorial complex today illustrates the tendency to *patrioticize* and *detraumatize* Soviet crimes, whereby the positive events of the Soviet era, especially the victory over Germany in World War II, are "Russified" and newly politically traumatized in parallel with the trivialization and marginalization of murder and crimes against human rights. The new form of memory in Katyn reflects an increasingly firmly dictated line from above that combines Russian nationalism, Orthodox faith, and a sentimental view of the period of Communist rule.

It uses the memory of Stalin's terror only to the extent that the central power sees fit.

58 Aleksandr Asadčij, 'Pol'skij memorial v Katyni predložili likvidirovat'', *Kommersant''*, 3 March 2022 <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5240252> [accessed 5 May 2022].

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Oleksandra Gaidai
‘ETERNAL RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN FRIENDSHIP’ – A CASE STUDY OF HOW A POLITICAL CONCEPT WAS MEMORIALIZED AND IS DEMEMORIALIZED

ABSTRACT

The article touches on a concept that was in the very essence of imagining relations between Ukraine and Russia: ‘The Friendship of People’. The historical imagination had a tangible impact on Russian politics, and no political concept has ever been so damaging for Ukraine as this one. This concept undermined Ukraine’s subjectivity and led to the ‘rewriting’ of Ukrainian history. Monuments dedicated to the ‘friendship’ of these two peoples reveal the centrality of this notion in Soviet politics toward Ukraine. Notably, these monuments appeared only in Ukraine – there are none in Russia.

The article analyses the erection of these monuments and how they have been dealt with since the start of the Russian war in Ukraine in 2014. It also shows how monumental art is used to foster specific interpretations of the past to define the present and future, and how this particular story of monuments and narratives has always been problematic in Ukraine. The article questions the homogeneity of Soviet political monumental heritage, presenting the complexity of monuments that depict national and Soviet narratives. These monuments and their interpretations should be discussed in the framework of a political campaign aimed at tying Ukraine to Russia. Therefore, the Ukrainian perspective on the notion of ‘friendship’and its memorialization is fundamental.

KEYWORDS:

monuments, Ukraine, Pereiaslav agreement, Russia, friendship of people

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In July 2021, Putin presented his imperialistic views on the past and present of Ukraine and Russia in the article 'On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians'. The 'historic union' is a bizarre phrase since it has to mean an eternal union. At the same time, history itself is all about change. Reference to this union undermines Ukraine's subjectivity, pointing to the fact that only in relations with Russians can Ukrainians prosper and exist. Due to the author's personality, the piece was much discussed and raised a high alert in terms of international security. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine proved that this threat was genuine. Moreover, the Russian authorities have covered the occupied territories with the posters and billboards stating that "Russians and Ukrainians are one people, one entity".

The idea that the two nations have unbreakable ties is rooted in Soviet mythology and ideology, specifically in the Friendship of the People notion that was introduced by Stalin in 1935, when Soviet authorities launched a campaign that promoted the Brotherhood of the Peoples – a metaphor for the proletarian unity of the socialist states against the capitalist West. By 1938, the Friendship of the Peoples became the main characteristic through which relations within the USSR were described.[1] In the words of Terry Martin, the Friendship of the Peoples "was the Soviet Union's imagined community".[2] Being a symbolic and propaganda principle of a multi-ethnic union, the Friendship of the People also granted Russians and Russian culture a primary role in the Soviet union – the first among equals. But nowhere else in the Soviet Union did this notion became so emphasized as in Ukraine. Here, it gained the additional meaning of the 'eternal and historical' union of two nations, which was grounded in a seventeenth-century event, namely the so-called 'Pereiaslav Agreement', the military union between Cossacks and the Muscovy Tsar. The Soviet regime fostered the interpretation of the Pereiaslav Agreement as an 'act of reunion' of the peoples (not elites)[3] in the 'Theses on the Three-Hundredth Anniversary of the Reunion of Ukraine with Russia', which was issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1954. By promoting a particular interpretation of the Pereiaslav Agreement and what followed it, the Soviet authorities established the idea of unique relations between Ukrainian and Russian people. This seventeenth-century event was embodied with great political and cultural significance; it was presented as a historical act that defined the relations of these two peoples – as a turning point in Ukrainian history, when Ukrainian people "re-

1 Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 432.
2 Ibid., p. 461
3 Serhii Plokhy, 'Renegotiating the Pereiaslav Agreement', in *Ukraine and Russia Representations of the Past*, ed. by Serhii Plokhy (University of Toronto Press, 2008), pp. 90–112 (p. 109)

linquished themselves of foreign rule and entered a union" with culturally and politically close Russia.

In academic discourse, up to 1951 the word 'accession' was used instead of 'reunion' by historians,[4] and in 1966 the notion of reunion was openly challenged by Ukrainian historian Myhailo Braichevsky in his article 'Joining or reuniting?'. For this act, Braichevsky was dismissed from his post at the Institute of Archaeology. In 1972, his article was published in Toronto.[5] At the same time, official Soviet historicists promoted the official Soviet version of the Pereiaslav Agreement.

Serhiy Yekelchyk in his book[6] focuses on the notion of Ukrainian--Russian relations in the historical memory, particularly the way these relations were negotiated by the Ukrainian local elite, intellectuals, and the central Moscow authority, and then presented to the public. Yekelchyk's research covers only the Stalin period, but it provides useful insights into how the image of the relations between these two nations transformed from the early Soviet period to the end of the 1950s, including the interpretation of the Pereiaslav Agreement – from "less evil" to the "manifestation of the eternal union of the two nations". Importantly, Serhiy Yekelchyk challenges the homogeneity of Stalin's memory project, revealing acts of cooperation and resistance between the Soviet Ukrainian political and intellectual elites and central authorities. It was Khrushchev's idea to widely celebrate the 300th anniversary of the Pereiaslav Agreement in order to connect Ukrainian and Russian history. Recognizing the leading role of Russia in the Soviet Union, Soviet Ukrainian elites proved their alliance to the Soviet project but at the same time contributed to the formation of Ukrainian national identity, revealing Ukraine's long historical tradition[7]

So, what happened in Pereiaslav? The seventeenth century was marked by numerous Cossack uprisings within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; however, the most important one, which led to the establishment of the Cossack state, was Khmelnytsky's uprising of 1648. In the course of fighting with Polish forces, Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky entered into a military alliance with the Crimean Khanate. Still, as the Khan proved not to be a reliable partner, Hetman turned to Muscovy to gain a military advantage over the Polish army. For a long time, the Tsar of Muscovy stayed out of the conflict, fearing confrontation with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. However, in 1654, as the Commonwealth weakened, Tsar Alexei

4 Serhiy Yekelchyk, *Imperia pamiati Rosiysko-ukrainski stosunky v radianskiy istorychnii uiavi* (Krytyka, 2008), p. 166.
5 Myxajlo Brajčevs'kyj, *Pryjednannja čy vozz'jednannja? : krytyčni zauvahy z pryvodu odnijeji koncepciji* (Toronto: Novi dni, 1972).
6 Serhiy Yekelchyk, *Imperia pamiati Rosiysko-ukrainski stosunky v radianskiy istorychnii uiavi* (Krytyka, 2008). (also publish in English: Serhy Yekelchyk, *Stalin's Empire of Memory. Russian-Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination* (University of Toronto Press, 2004).
7 Yekelchyk, *Imperia pamiati*, p. 217.

Mikhailovich sent his representative, the noble Muscovite Vasiliy Buturlin, to Pereiaslav to meet with Cossack Hetman and prepare the ground for future agreements between the Muscovy and Cossack states.

The availed sources indicate that no document was signed in Pereiaslav, and the Tsar's approval of the conditions of the agreement was given much later in Moscow. The Pereiaslav Agreement was not a formal treaty (a written document with defined spheres of responsibilities and obligations) but an agreement between two sides that was less fixed in meaning. It consists of the Articles of Bohdan Khmelnytsky and the Tsar's response. Because they had different political cultures, the Cossack state and Muscovy interpreted the agreement differently: Muscovy, with its autocratic tradition, treated it as an act of eternal submission of the Cossack state to Muscovy; the Cossack state, on the other hand, with its political constitutionalism[8], treated it as a voluntary military union of two equal subjects that depended on the willingness of each party to keep its promises[9]. Importantly, it was not a (re)union of two nations in the modern sense but the start of communication between the Cossack and the Muscovy political elites[10]. The Pereiaslav Agreement was constantly mentioned and revised in the context of Muscovy's relations with the Cossack state. The Cossack nobility referred to the agreement of 1654 as a document that ensured their autonomy, rights, and privileges; they did not consider this agreement as eternal submission, which is why, in the following years, Cossack leaders tried to enter into the agreement with Poland.

The Pereiaslav Agreement remains the most contested document in Ukrainian and Russian historiography[11] because it has been subject to various interpretations. It was most strongly instrumentalized in the Soviet Union[12] with the promotion of the concept of the Friendship of Peoples. The Pereiaslav council appeared to be very useful for Soviet ideology, which, on the one hand, recognized the existence of the Ukrainian nation as a socialist nation and, on the other hand, promoted the vision of the 'natural' union of these two nations since only in a union with Russia could Ukraine develop freely in the political, economic, and cultural spheres. The issue of reunion became central for narrating the Russian-Ukrainian relationship in Soviet times.

By the 1950s, the concept of the inevitable 'reunification' of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples emerged as the only 'right' approach

8 Serhii Plokhy, 'Renegotiating the Pereiaslav Agreement', in *Ukraine and Russia Representations of the Past*, ed. by Serhii Plokhy (University of Toronto Press, 2008), pp. 90–112 (p. 92).
9 Serhii Plokhy, 'Russia and Ukraine: Did They Reunite in 1654?', in *The Frontline Essays on Ukraine's Past and Present*, ed. by Serhii Plokhy (Harvard University Press, 2022), pp. 37–53 (p. 53).
10 Ibid., p. 52.
11 Plokhy, 'Renegotiating the Pereiaslav Agreement', p. 90.
12 *Vossoedenenie Ukrainy s Rossiey. Documenty i Materialy.* V treh tomah (Moskva: Isdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1953).

in Soviet historiography.[13] As well as medals, postcards, stamps, decorative art, street names, metro stations, and squares, several memorials appeared that commemorated the 300th anniversary of the Pereiaslav Agreement and visually fostered the notion of the "friendship of Ukrainian and Russian peoples" in the public space of Soviet Ukraine: a commemorative plaque in the Kharkiv region;[14] a monument of two female figures in traditional costumes at the entrance of the city of Sumy; a 'Forever Together' monument and a memorial sign at the place where the Pereiaslav council supposedly took place; a sculpture of two male peasant figures on the Kharkiv bridge; and a memorial stone in Cherkasy, where Khmelnytsky presumably wrote a letter to the Tsar asking for a protectorate for the Cossack state.

In this article, I will focus on two monuments that became central in the memorialization of the Pereaislav Agreement in Soviet times: the Peoples' Friendship Arch complex in Kyiv and the 'Forever Together' monument in Pereiaslav. Artistic discussions around them reveal the peculiarities of the visual representation of the Pereiaslav Agreement and the notion of Russian-Ukrainian friendship; at the same time, they present the complexity of Soviet monumental heritage in Ukraine. Also, this is a story about the interpretation of a particular historical event that still requires demythologization and decolonization in the historical memory of Ukrainians[15]. These monuments present a worthy case study of a contested heritage – the use of the past in military conflicts. As the Guardian summarizes the war in Ukraine, "this is a conflict, like so many others, that's not just about controlling territory – but owning narrative".[16] The central narrative is the "historical union of two nations", with the leading role being played by Russia.

The seemingly 'civilized' break-up of the Soviet Union and the partial liberalism of the Yeltsin government led to the perception that no military conflict was possible between these two post-Soviet states in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, the Ukrainian government had no illusion about

13 The concept of reunion of two nations – often with the emphasis on the strong figure of Bohdan Khmelnytsky and heroic episodes of Cossack history – started to be promoted during the Second World War to mobilize Ukrainians' national feelings in the fight against Nazi forces. The image of Bohdan Khmelnytsky and the narrative about the Pereiaslav agreement was to a great extent formed by the works of Ukrainian Soviet writers. In this regard, Oleksandr Korniychuk's play *Bohdan Khmelnytsky* (filmed by Savchenko in 1941), Natan Rybak's historical novel *Pereiaslav council* of 1948, Lubomyr Dmytreko's play *Forever together* of 1951 should be mentioned.

14 The plaque in the village of Ruska Lozova was targeted a number of times. Demolished in 2021, the plaque was restored by a member of the pro-Russian oppositional party, but it was subsequently destroyed again. (https://www.rbc.ua/ukr/styler/znak-druzhby-ukrainskogo-russkogo-narodov-1616615695.html). In 2022, Russian military forces occupied the village and used it as a base for shelling Kharkiv.

15 The historical memory of Russians about the Pereiaslav Agreement is beyond the scope of this article and deserves a separate study.

16 The Guardian view on Ukraine's cultural heritage: a second front. Editorial, *The Guardian*, 10 March 2022 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/10/the-guardian-view-on-ukraines-cultural-heritage-a-second-front> [accessed 8 September 2022].

the imperialistic attitudes of the Russian government and politicians.[17] This was proved by numerous disputes and conflicts.

The concept of Friendship between Peoples and its memorialization are just some of the elements that help one to understand the dynamics of the post-Soviet time. Unlike Lenin's monuments, these monuments are not only tied to the Soviet state and its achievements, so monuments to 'The Friendship of People' did not turn into reminders of the past because the Soviet state had ceased to exist. Monuments to Russian-Ukrainian brotherhood are more complex in meaning and aim to foster the notion of the cultural and historical proximity of these two nations. The notion of 'eternal union' of Russians and Ukrainians became even more problematic to contest as it uses an element of national historiography: the Khmelnytsky Uprising.

ERECTION OF THE MONUMENTS IN KYIV AND PEREIASLAV

To memorialize the 300th anniversary of the Pereiaslav Agreement in 1954 and stress the friendship between Ukrainian and Russian people, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine planned to erect a monument to Khmelnytsky in the city of Pereiaslav-Khmelnytsky,[18] where the Pereiaslav council took place, and erect the Triumphant Arch in Kyiv, the capital of Soviet Ukraine. Generally, the Ukrainian-Soviet elites contributed to the promotion of Khmelnytsky as a hero of national pride, a strong leader, and one of the chief figures of the Cossack period, by supporting literary, scholarly and artistic work about him. However, in the case of the monument to the 300th anniversary of the Pereiaslav Agreement, Ukrainian authorities later gave up the idea of erecting a monument to Khmelnytsky in Pereiaslav or any other Ukrainian city to avoid being accused of promoting the national (separate) history of Ukraine.[19] Instead, the Central Committee and the Rada of the Ministers of the Ukrainian RSR focused on a monument that would praise Russian-Ukrainian friendship not a particular historical figure. Two hundred and fifty-seven designs for the Arch in Kyiv were submitted for an art contest[20] that was held by

17 Paul D'Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 38–43.
18 Pereiaslav was renamed to Pereiaslav-Khmelnytsky in 1943 by the Soviet authorities in honor of Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky.
19 Yekelchyk, *Imperia pamiati*, p. 213.
20 Mykola Tsapenko, 'Proekt Triumfalnoi Arky v Kyevi na Chest 300 richchia Vozednannia Ukrainy z Rosieiu', *Arhitektura ta Budivnytstvo*, 5 (1954), 11–13.

the executive office of Kyiv city council, and one hundred and twenty-seven designs were submitted for the monument in Pereiaslav.[21]

Traditionally, a triumphal Arch is erected in honour of a military conflict over territory; however, in Kyiv the Arch had to celebrate the friendship of two nations. The main idea was to create an impressive monument at the city's entrance, on the right bank of the Dnipro, near the Paton bridge. The May issue of the 1954 *Journal of Architecture and Reconstruction* published the designs that won the contest.[22] Three collective projects of Kyiv and Moscow artists shared the first and second prizes. The names of the designs were symbolic: "300", "Ear of Corn with a Star", and "To the People-Heroes". However, none of these designs were implemented due to a lack of funds and bureaucratic inefficacy caused by the sudden death of Stalin in 1953.

Before the 300th anniversary of the Pereiaslav council, a major change in power occurred in the Soviet Union. After the death of Stalin in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev won the internal power struggle, became the new Soviet leader, and started a period of thaw and liberalization of the political regime. Also, the number of Ukrainians in the party institutions of Soviet Ukraine increased, and Oleksiy Kyrychenko became the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, the *de facto* leader of the Ukrainian Soviet republic. With this change of leadership, the atmosphere of the celebration of the 300th anniversary transformed: the event became highly important and was widely celebrated on the level of the republic. It was within this celebration that Khrushchev gave Crimea to Ukraine as a gift, but monuments that marked this event appeared much later in the 1960s and 1980s.

Only in 1982 was the monument to Peoples' Friendship erected in the city centre to celebrate the 1,500th anniversary of Kyiv and the 60th anniversary of the creation of the Soviet Union. Although the name was the same, the project was significantly different from the one that won the competition in the 1950s. Now, it was not a triumphal arch but a composition that linked two time periods in one space: the Soviet period (the arch and the statues of Soviet workers) with a seventeenth-century historical event, namely the Pereiaslav Agreement (a granite sculpture group of Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky and Vasiliy Buturlin, a representative of the Tsar).

The thirty-five-meter-tall Arch (unofficially called the 'yoke' or 'rainbow') is made of titanium sheets. Above it, there used to be an

21 Mykola Onishchenko, 'Monument u Pereiaslavi Khmelnytskomu. Do Pidsumkiv Konkursu na Monument u misti Pereiaslav Khmelnytsky na Chest 300 richchia Vozednannia Ukrainy z Rosieiu', *Arhitektura ta Budivnytstvo*, 4 (1954), 21–25.

22 Mykola Tsapenko, 'Proekt Triumfalnoi Arky v Kyevi na Chest 300 richchia Vozednannia Ukrainy z Rosieiu', *Arhitektura ta Budivnytstvo*, 5 (1954), 11–13.

eight-meter-tall bronze sculpture of two male Ukrainian and Russian figures of workers (Homo Sovieticus), symbolically holding the Soviet Order of Friendship of Peoples. The sculpture's pedestal was marked with a metal inscription in the Russian and Ukrainian languages: "In commemoration of the reunification of Ukraine with Russia". This sculpture of workers was the only part of the composition that was removed in 2022 (more about this in the final section).

The monument in Pereiaslav was erected in 1961. The designs submitted to the art contest included columns, obelisks, sculptures of two or more figures, and monument panoramas. The joint first prize went to the compositions "Glory to the nations-brothers" and "Trumpet", both of which include two female figures that represent Ukraine and Russia and are half hugging in semi-traditional costumes. The commission preferred the female sculptures to the abstract monument, arguing that people do not always properly understand the meaning of abstract forms.[23] As a result, the winner's design "Glory to the Nations-Brothers" by architect Vasyl Hniezdylov and sculptor Vasyl Vinaykin under the name "Forever Together" was implemented. Due to the commission's comments, it had to be adjusted to the surrounding landscape of the small city in order to be in harmony with it,[24] and reflect the symbolism and epicness of the memorized event. During the debate on the projects, the main issue was the way women interact with one another. The participants of the discussion proposed that the women in the statue would be shaking hands or walking in a half-hug; the idea was to stress equality and to avoid the impression that the Russian figure was pushing the Ukrainian one. Also, the sculpture had to create the impression that these "two nations" were "forever together, not temporary". Vasyl Hniezdylov's final design included two female figures wearing stylized national costumes. Walking in a half-hug, the Russian woman is raising her hand in a call for communism,[25] and the Ukrainian woman is holding a book – the Constitution of the USSR. On the pedestal, the description reads "Forever together – forever with the Russian people"!

In their sculptures, Ukrainian artists often tried to present Russian-Ukrainian relations as equal. Although the artists were successful in this in the cases of the monument in Pereiaslav and the statue of workers in Kyiv, the sculpture group at the bridge in Kharkiv clearly presents the superior role of the Russian toward the Ukrainian figure. The Russian figure

23 Onishchenko, 'Monument u Pereiaslavi Khmelnytskomu', p. 25.
24 Ibid., p. 21.
25 'Instrukcii do druzhby. Iak 61 rik tomu u Pereiaslavi Khmelnytskomu vidkryly monument "Naviky Razom", iakyi nezabarom mozhut znestu', *Novoe Vremia*, 23 February 2022 <https://nv.ua/ukr/ukraine/events/monument-naviki-z-rosiyeyu-u-pereiaslavi-mozhut-znesti-yak-yogo-vstanovlyuvali-u-1961-novini-ukrajini-50025921.html> [accessed 8 September 2022].

is leading and supporting the Ukrainian. Moreover, the Russian men look more confident and older.

The monuments to the Pereiaslav Agreement not only present the event that launched the process of incorporating Ukrainian lands into the Russian Empire; they also set in stone the formless concept of the friendship of Ukrainian and Russian people. In this way, these monuments contributed to fostering an interpretation of the Pereiaslav Agreement as a reunion of Ukrainians and Russians (through the socially marked figures of workers and peasants) and as one of the central events of Ukrainian history; they also served as visual reminder of the cultural closeness of Ukrainians and Russians. The sculptures presenting a Ukrainian and a Russian are almost indistinguishable: only the costumes, which include ethnic motifs, help us understand who is who.

Although there were plans to build a monument to Ukrainian-Russian friendship in Moscow, it has never been realized. In 1954, a granite stone was placed in the square near "Kyiv railway station" in Moscow with the inscription "On this spot, a monument in commemoration of 300 years of the reunion of Ukraine and Russia will be erected". Russian authorities held three architectural contests for the design of the monument, but due to bureaucracy and a lack of political will no monument was ever erected in Moscow as a result. Only the "Three Sisters" monument was erected in 1975 on the borders of Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine to memorialize the friendship of these three peoples.

In 2000, the majors of Kyiv and Moscow initiated the installation of a small sign in the form of two pillows painted in the colours of the Ukrainian and Russian flags in an alley with the same name on the outskirts of Moscow. However, after the full-scale Russian invasion, the pillars were painted white, and the commemorative plaque with information on the occasion of the erection of the sign was removed.

INDEPENDENT UKRAINE. TEXTBOOKS' NARRATIVES AND HISTORICAL ATTITUDES

In order to analyse the Ukrainian institutional memory of the Pereiaslav Agreement in independent Ukraine and to learn how historical attitudes defined interpretations of monuments dedicated to the Pereiaslav Agreement, I studied seventeen textbooks on the history of seventeenth-century

Ukraine,[26] published from 2006 to 2021 and recommended by the Ministry of Education of Ukraine for 8th-grade school students. Often, books by the same authors have been republished several times with minor or no changes, including the narrative of the Pereiaslav Agreement.

All the authors of these textbooks very positively evaluate Khmelnytsky and his deeds. His orientation toward the Russian tsar is justified by military necessity, the complicated diplomatic situation of the Cossack state, and the religious proximity between the Ukrainian and Russian people.[27] Khmelnytsky's decision to seek a military union with Muscovy is presented as well-calculated, pragmatic, and logical, due to the need for a powerful military ally.[28] "Having started the war with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Khmelnytsky understood the need to maintain good relations with the Muscovite kingdom. The Cossacks declared their defence of the Orthodox faith, and Muscovy at that time was the only independent Orthodox state".[29] The authors of these textbooks often stress the numerous attempts to establish contacts with Muscovy. For instance, Olga Dudar, and Oleksandr Huk mentioned contacts between Cossack leader Dmytro Vyshnevetsky and Moscovy: "in the sixteenth century, according to the tsar's order, gunpowder, weapons and food supplies were supplied from Muscovy to Sich";[30] another example from a 2016 textbook reads "The alliance with the Moscow kingdom, with which the Cossack state shared the Orthodox faith and with which Bohdan Khmelnytsky had long maintained diplomatic ties, appeared to be the most profitable".[31] The authors Natalia Sorochynska and Oleksandr Hisem pointed out that "belonging to one religion was of decisive importance in the world of that time. Ukrainians considered themselves to belong, together with Muscovites, to one Orthodox nation, and they expected help from their brothers in faith in

26 Oleksandr Martunuk, *Istoria Ukrainy: Pidruchnyk dlia 8 klasu* (Kharkiv: Ranok 2006), pp. 124–27; G. Shvydko, *Istoria Ukrainy: Pidruchnyk dlia 8 klasu* (Kyiv: Heneza, 2016), pp. 152–62; Vitaliy Vlasov, *Istoria Ukrainy: Pidruchnyk dlia 8 klasu* (Kyiv: Geneza, 2008), pp. 151–56; Oleksiy Strukevych, Ivan Romanuk, *Istoria Ukrainy: Pidruchnyk dlia 8 klasu* (Kyiv: Hramota, 2008), pp. 137–40; Shvydko, *Istoria Ukrainy*, pp. 175–79; Oleksandr Hisem, Oleksandr Martynuk, *Istoria Ukrainy: Pidruchnyk dlia 8 klasu* (Kharkiv: Ranok, 2016), pp. 149–53; Vitaliy Vlasov, *Istoria Ukrainy: Pidruchnyk dlia 8 klasu* (Kyiv: Geneza, 2016), pp. 136–39; Vitaliy Vlasov, Oleksandr Panarin, Yulia Topolnytska, Oleksiy Strukevych, *Istoria Ukrainy: Pidruchnyk dlia 8 klasu* (Kyiv: Litera, 2016); I. Burnenko, O. Naumchuk, M. Kryzhanovska, O. Shtanko, *Istoria Ukrainy: Pidruchnyk dlia 8 klasu* (Aston, 2016), pp. 150–53; N. Guoan, I. Smagin, O. Pometun, *Istoria Ukrainy: Pidruchnyk dlia 8 klasu* (Kyiv, 2016), pp. 163–66; Oleksiy Strukevych, *Istoria Ukrainy: Pidruchnyk dlia 8 klasu* (Kyiv: Hramota, 2016), pp. 128–34; Natalia Sorochynska, Oleksandr Hisem, *Istoria Ukrainy: Pidruchnyk dlia 8 klasu* (Ternopil: Bohdan, 2016), pp. 154–57; Oleksandr Hisem, Oleksandr Martunuk, *Istoria Ukrainy: Pidruchnyk dlia 8 klasu* (Kharkiv: Ranok 2021), pp. 95–97; Olga Dudar, Oleksandr Huk, *Istoria Ukrainy: Pidruchnyk dlia 8 klasu* (Kyiv: Osvita, 2021), pp. 107–10; M. Mudry, O. Arkush, *Istoria Ukrainy: Pidruchnyk dlia 8 klasu* (Kyiv, 2021), pp. 120–26; Vitaliy Vlasov, Oleksandr Panarin, Yulia Topolnytska, *Istoria Ukrainy: Pidruchnyk dlia 8 klasu* (Kyiv: Litera, 2021), pp. 132–40; Ihor Shchupak, Borys Cherkas, and others, *Istoria Ukrainy: Pidruchnyk dlia 8 klasu* (Kyiv: Orion, 2021), pp. 112–17.

27 Oleksandr Martunuk, *Istoria Ukrainy: Pidruchnyk dlia 8 klasu* (Kharkiv: Ranok 2016), pp. 149–53; id., *Istoria Ukrainy* (2006), pp. 124–27.

28 Strukevych, Romanuk, *Istoria Ukrainy*, pp. 137–40.

29 Martunuk, *Istoria Ukrainy* (2006), p. 126; id.; *Istoria Ukrainy: Pidruchnyk dlia 8 klasu* (Kharkiv: Ranok 2021), p. 95.

30 Dudar, Huk, *Istoria Ukrainy*, p. 107.

31 Burnenko, Naumchuk, Kryzhanovska, Shtanko, *Istoria Ukrainy*, p. 150.

the war against the authorities of Catholic Poland. As a result, pro-Moscow sentiments spread in Ukrainian society during the War of National Liberation".[32]

The textbooks I studied emphasize that the Cossacks' military council unanimously supported Khmelnytsky's decision to conclude an alliance with the Muscovy tsar. However, there is also a contradiction, as the authors of these textbooks also point out that several prominent Cossack leaders (namely, Ivan Bohun and Ivan Sirko) refused to support the Pereiaslav Agreement and take an oath to the Tsar. The Cossack leaders criticized the political system of Muscovy, in which the Tsar had absolute power and was known for the oppression of nobility, while Cossacks shared the constitutional principles of the governance of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, namely a parliamentary elective monarchy. Importantly, all authors of the textbooks I studied generally did not question or discuss the relevance of the notion of cultural and religious proximity in the context of Ukrainian-Russian relations. This point deserves particular attention as cultural and religious closeness is often cited as the factor that facilitated the union between the Cossacks and Muscovites. However, this is a more retrospective point of view: historical seventeenth-century sources show that the Muscovy defined Ukrainians as quite different from them even in religion. Also, the Ukrainian Orthodox clergy did not take an oath to the Tsar and rejected the Pereiaslav Agreement. The references to similarities between Ukrainians and Russians in religion, language, as well as the common historical legacy of Kyivan Rus appear to be less emphasized in the 2021 textbooks than in those from 2016.

Interestingly, in their textbook of 2008, Strukevych and Romanuk explain the Ukrainians' inflated expectations regarding the alliance with Muscovy by the fact that they did not have a chance to meet with Muscovites in person, so they did not know their traditions, education, and cultural level.[33]

The central episode in the story of the Pereiaslav council is about the oath. All the textbooks I read for this article stress that the Cossacks took an oath to the tsar, but the Tsar's representative refused to do so on his behalf, arguing that the Tsar does not take an oath to his subjects. "It unexpectedly turned out that the Muscovites were expecting only Ukrainians to take the oath. Hetman, in accordance with Ukrainian and European traditions, insisted on a mutual oath: on providing military aid and guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of Ukrainian states. However, Buturlin refused, explaining that the Tsar would never swear an oath to

32 Sorochynska, Hisem, *Istoria Ukrainy*, p. 154.
33 Strukevych, Romanuk, *Istoria Ukrainy*, pp. 137–40.

his subjects because it would degrade his royal dignity. The negotiations dragged on for several hours. In the end, the Ukrainian side relented. [...] Ukraine really needed a military ally. Hetman agreed that the Tsar's word equals his oath". However, as Strukevych points out, "This should not be considered as a terrible diplomatic mistake by Hetman. After all, according to the European tradition, the failure of a protector monarch to fulfil his duties towards his subjects automatically exempted him of his duties".[34]

A common feature of the textbooks is that they tend to highlight some positive outcomes of the agreement (recognition of the independence of the Cossack state; the Cossacks were able to end the war with Poland and keep the conquered territories) as well as some negative ones (the start of Muscovy's political dominance over the Cossack state). In 2016, Vlasov in his textbook also talked about the positive potential of the agreement in that it could have brought benefits to both sides,[35] but the agreement was short term because the tsar did not do what was agreed – it did not work out as expected. A textbook from 2021 notes that "The terms of the Ukrainian-Moscow treaty of 1654 were generally mutually beneficial [...] The treaty included the establishment of protectorate relations that were common in Europe at that time. Hetman did not see the terms of the agreement as something permanent: rather, it was a tool to achieve the ultimate goal".[36]

In the textbooks from 2021, the interpretation of the agreement became less concrete, noting that there was much misunderstanding on both sides; it is characterized as a type of protectorate that included two sides that had to fulfil their obligations. Although all the blame was put on the Tsar and Muscovy, some authors mention that the two sides understood the agreement differently from the beginning and had different expectations but preferred not to notice this inconsistency. "The Ukrainian-Moscow agreement of 1654 meant the establishment of formal vassal dependence. Many issues remained debatable and could be interpreted by the parties in their own ways; however, at the time of its signing, the Ukrainian Cossack State actually had no other choice".[37] Overall, the Pereiaslav agreement with Muscovy is presented as a turning point in the history of Ukraine.

34 Strukevych, *Istoria Ukrainy*, p. 131.
35 Vlasov, *Istoria Ukrainy*, pp. 136–39.
36 Vlasov, Panarin, Topolnytska, *Istoria Ukrainy*, p. 135.
37 Shchupak, Cherkas, and others, *Istoria Ukrainy*, p. 114.

The available sociological data on the historical attitudes of Ukrainians generally reflects the textbooks' narratives.[38] The Pereiaslav Agreement is perceived as one of the most important in Ukraine's history and, according to surveys in all regions of Ukraine (6,000 respondents) conducted in 2013, 2015, and 2017, Khmelnytsky remains a major hero.

Of the 6 thousand people who took part in the surveys from all regions of Ukrainian, almost half of them listed Bohdan Khmelnytsky among the three most influential figures in Ukraine's history. This constancy in Khmelnytsky's evaluation makes him one of Ukraine's most recognized and well-known historical figures. Also, his image is very positive: 87–93% of those who mentioned Khmelnytsky among the three most important historical figures in the history of Ukraine evaluated him rather or very positively (Table 1).

The respondents of the surveys of 2013, 2015, and 2017 were asked to name the most important events in the history of Ukraine, and the Pereiaslav Agreement turned out to be on this list. In 2013, 70.7% of respondents who took part in a survey evaluated this event as rather or very important. In 2015, it was 62.94%, and in 2017 it was 67%. At the same time, since 2015 we have been able to see minor changes in the evaluation of the Pereiaslav Agreement: after Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, the number of undecided (those who did not choose the options 'yes' or 'no') grew from 16.3% in 2013 to 20.32% in 2015, and 18.7% in 2017 (Table 2).

Although the majority of the respondents considered the Pereiaslav Agreement significant, they were not asked if this event was positive or negative. If we compare the Pereiaslav Agreement to other historical events on the list given to the respondents of the surveys in 2012, 2015, and 2017, we see how less relevant it became after 2014. In 2013, out of 15 historical events on the list, the Pereiaslav council was in sixth place. In 2015, out of 17 events, it was in 12th place; and in 2017, out of 19 events it was again in 12th place.

38 The first survey was conducted in February 2013; the second was in February–March 2015; the third was in the fall of 2017. While the 2013 survey covered all Ukrainian oblasts, the 2015 and 2017 surveys did not cover the Crimean Peninsula or the occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts due to the annexation of Crimea and Russian military aggression. The surveys were financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Wolodymyr George Danyliw Foundation; they were conducted by the Sociological Group "Rating" and by the Center for the Study of Public Opinion "Sotsioinform". The project website is http://www.uaregio.org/.

TABLE 1. Response to the survey question "What is your attitude toward Bohdan Khmelnytsky?"

Bohdan Khmelnytsky	Very negative	Rather negative	Hard to answer	Rather positive	Very positive	The most significant
2013	0.2	1.1	2.6	49.9	46.1	54.8
2015	0.86	1.91	5.01	48.71	43.52	44.6
2017	0.4	1.3	11.3	38.6	48.4	53

TABLE 2. Response to the survey question "How important is the Pereiaslav council – an agreement between Ukraine and Russia in 1654?"

	Not important at all	Rather unim-portant	Yes and no	Rather important	Very important	Never heard about it
2013	1.6	3.9	16.3	32.5	38.4	7.3
2015	2.62	6.22	20.32	32.57	29.92	8.30
2017	1.6	4.4	18.7	32	35	8.3

The evaluation of the Pereiaslav agreement was associated with the evaluation of Khmelnytsky and the Cossack period in general, which remained very positive in independent Ukraine. The agreement was considered important and justified by the political situation; Khmelnytsky was not criticized for it, and all the blame was assigned to Moscow, which failed to do what was agreed.

DEALING WITH THE MONUMENTS

In 2003, a president's decree was issued to commemorate "350 years of the Pereiaslav council". Conferences, round tables, exhibitions, cultural and educational events, and publications were planned.[39] Unfortunately, the same year was marked by a major crisis between Ukraine and Russia. In order to establish control over the Azov sea, Russia declared Tuzla island, located in the Kerch Strait, its territory. After that, Russia began building a dam to connect Tuzla with the Russian coast. The conflict was avoided only after direct talks between the presidents of Ukraine and Russia.

The adoption of so-called 'memory laws' in 2015 as a result of the protest movement of 2014 and Russian military aggression placed acts related to the dismantling of Soviet monuments within a legal framework. As for monuments to Russian-Ukrainian friendship, the decommunization law could not be easily applied to them. Although these monuments were produced in Soviet times, they referred to events before the Soviet period. The decommunization law called for the demolishing of images, monuments, commemorative signs, and inscriptions dedicated to events related to the activities of the Communist Party, and the establishment of Soviet power on the territory of Ukraine or in separate administrative and territorial units.[40] Therefore, only the removal of the sculpture group of two workers in Kyiv holding the Soviet emblem could be justified by the laws, but the controversy around the monuments to Ukrainian and Russian friendship became more pronounced.

In 2016, a representative of the Right Sector, Andrii Kozii, initiated the covering of the Pereiaslav monument's Russian figure with a black cloth. This action was broadly discussed on social media.[41] In Kyiv, unknown persons vandalized the statue of workers below the Arch, paint was poured over the monument, obscene words were written, and the nose of the Russian Ambassador Buturlin was broken off. Later, in 2018, the Arch became the subject of an artistic intervention when an installation called 'Crack of Friendship' was added to it. The crack painted on the Arch was dedicated to the Ukrainian political prisoners held by the Kremlin, including film director Oleg Sensor. Art workers and curators considered this artistic intervention very successful as its meaning could be easily read

39 Decree of the President of Ukraine, *On the commemoration of the 350th anniversary of the Pereiaslav Cossack Council of 1654* No. 162/2003 <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/238/2002#Text> [accessed 8 September 2022].

40 Law of Ukraine, *On Condemnation of Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes in Ukraine and Prohibition of Propaganda of Their Symbols,* № 595–VIII, 14 July 2015 < https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/317-19> [accessed 8 September 2022].

41 Naviky Razom, *Mist.Online*, 9 October 2014 <https://meest-online.com/history/action/naviky-razom/> [accessed 8 September 2022].

by viewers, while the intervention itself was minimal.[42] At the same time, this installation signified that friendship had existed in the past. The installation undermined the monument's meaning but did not challenge the narrative itself.

In 2016, the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine declared its intention to remove statues representing the friendship between Ukrainian and Russian people, but the Arch was preserved. As a representative of the Ministry noted, the fate of the Arch demands broader public discussion.[43] This official mentioned the possible transfer of the sculpture to a statue park of the Soviet period that the authorities declared they would create. The reference to a 'statue park' aimed to demonstrate orientation toward 'European' practices in dealing with contested monuments and therefore helped 'to cool' the public outcry over the monument. However, this park has never been established. Also, there were no major changes in the representation of Soviet times in museum exhibitions, so the references to European practices remained more of a communication strategy than an action plan. Because of their artistic and historic value, these monuments could not be as easily neglected and removed as numerous typical Lenin statues.

In February 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine again discussed the fate of the Arch in Kyiv and the need to remove the statues from it. It was decided that the Arch should be preserved as an example of modernist architecture and a valuable engineering object. A working group with representatives from the city administration, the Ministry of Culture, and the Institute of National Remembrance has been formed to develop a strategy for dealing with the Arch and its sculptures. The Ukrainian online journal *The Village* ran a piece on this topic.[44] The journalist talked with experts and presented their views on what to do with the monument. The monument was discussed as an example of Soviet monumental propaganda, not as a tool for memorizing a particular interpretation of a historical event.

In 2009, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine deprived the Pereiaslav monument of the status of a cultural heritage monument of national significance. However, half a year later, when the pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych came to power, the monument was included in the local Register of protected monuments by another order of the Ministry of Culture

42 'Trishchyny" vzhe ne dostatno? Shcho robyty z Arkoui druzhby narodiv?', *The Village*, 23 February 2022 <https://www.the-village.com.ua/village/city/cityplace/322921-scho-robiti-z-arkoyu-druzhbi-narodiv> [accessed 8 September 2022].

43 'Minkult ne bude znosyty Arku druzhby narodiv', *Dzerkalo Tuzhnia*, 23 May 2016 <https://zn.ua/ukr/UKRAINE/minkult-ne-bude-znositi-arku-druzhbi-narodiv-u-kiyevi-209059_.html> [accessed 8 September 2022].

44 "Trishchyny" vzhe ne dostatno.

of Ukraine. Therefore, in order to dismantle the monument, it first had to be released from the status of protected monument.

To define the artistic, historical and cultural significance of the monument in Pereiaslav that is dedicated to the 300-year anniversary of the 'reunion' of Ukraine and Russia, in March 2019 the Kyiv regional state administration, Department of Culture asked the Institute of Art, Folklore and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (NASU) for its scholarly opinion regarding the historical and cultural significance of the 'Forever Together' monuments. A group of local deputies from Pereiaslav sent a similar request to the Institute of History of Ukraine of NASU in December 2019. These two academic institutions arrived at more or less the same answer: they stressed the historically incorrect interpretation of the past that laid behind the monument and pointed to its propagandistic nature. Scholars of the Institute of Art, Folklore and Ethnography and the Institute of History of Ukraine agreed that monument in Pereiaslav should be removed from public space and placed in a museum as a relic of the communist regime.[45] Using the official reply from the two aforementioned academic institutions as an argument, the group of Pereiaslav deputies and educators argued for the removal of the monument from the State register by the city council of Pereiaslav. Not wanting to take this decision on their own, the executive committee of Pereiaslav city administration stated that such issues have to be managed by Pereiaslav city council, which is an elected representative body of the community. However, in 2021, a public city council hearing on the removal of the monument from the list of protected monumental heritage did not lead to any results.[46]

On 22 February 2022, two days before the full-scale Russian invasion, the monument in Pereiaslav was again discussed at public hearings: 80% of participants supported the removal of the monument from the city's central square,[47] but the Russian invasion made the implementation of this decision impossible.

In April 2022, the monument in Pereiaslav was vandalized: a group of young men wrote the names of destroyed Ukrainian cities on the monument, pointing to Russia's war crimes in Ukraine.[48] On 19 May, the local council

45 Oleksandr Ihnatenko, 'Het vid Moskvy chy naviky razom? Shcho robyty z pamiatnykamy, iaki vykonuiut rol ideolohichnoi otruty', *Pereislav.City*, 29 March 2020 < https://pereiaslav.city/blogs/70141/get-vid-moskvi-chi-naviki-razom-scho-robiti-z-pamyatnikami-yaki-vikonuyut-rol-ideologichnoi-otruti> [accessed 28 September 2022].

46 'Pereiaslavsky symvol totalitarnoi "druzhby" nareshti demontuui', *Pereislav.City*, 19 May 2022 < https://pereiaslav.city/articles/213443/pereyaslavskij-simvol-totalitarnoi-druzhbi-nareshti-demontuyut-erishennya-sesii- > [accessed 8 September 2022].

47 'U Pereiaslavi znesut pamiatnyk "druzhby" Ukrainy i RF', *Dzerkalo Tuzhnia*, 23 February 2022 < https://zn.ua/ukr/UKRAINE/u-perejaslavi-znesut-pamjatnik-druzhbi-ukrajini-ta-rf.html> [accessed 8 September 2022].

48 'Na pamitnyku "druzby" z krainoui-agresarom napysaly nazvy rozbomblenyh rashystamy mist', *Preiaslav City*, 4 April 2022 <https://pereiaslav.city/articles/204424/napamyatniku-druzhbi-z-krainoyu-agresorom-napisali-nazvi-rozbomblenih-rashistami-mist> [accessed 8 September 2022].

unanimously voted to dismantle the monument.[49] The removal of the monument happened on 7 July 2022, on the 134th day of the Russian invasion.

In turn, the Kyiv authorities dismantled the sculptures of Soviet workers below the Peoples' Friendship Arch early on 26 April 2022, on the 62nd day of the invasion. This occurred in the presence of its creator, 87-year-old architect Serhiy Myrgorodsky, who publicly supported the process.[50] During the dismantling, the head of the Russian worker fell off and rolled with a crash on the polished foundation stone.[51]

While the statue of workers was publicly dismantled, the Arch and the sculpture group of the Khmelnytsky and Muscovy delegates, which was created by Kyiv sculptor Oleksandr Skoblikov and was also a part of the Arch complex, remained. In the political sphere and the media, the sculpture of the two Soviet workers resonated while the sculptural composition of the Khmelnytsky and Muscovy delegates was not so contested.

City major Vitali Klitschko, who was present during the dismantling process, promised to rename the Arch. On 14 May, by the decision of Kyiv city council, the Arch was renamed as "Arch of the Freedom of Ukrainian People".[52]

The full-scale Russian aggression toward Ukraine in 2022 caused a push for radical changes in the symbolic sphere. As a result, not only Soviet communist heritage has been targeted, but also cultural and military figures of the Russian Empire (for instance, poet Aleksander Pushkin and Russian Army General Aleksander Suvorov) and war memorials to fallen Soviet soldiers. While sporadic dismantling continued, including by militia,[53] debates on Russian and Soviet heritage in Ukraine began between representatives of the Ministry of Culture and Informational Policy, the Institute of National Remembrance, and the art community.[54] However, these debates have only taken place on certain online platforms, with a focus on the issue of the monuments themselves, not on the interpretations. Therefore, the material remnants from the Soviet period have not been differentiated and problematized.

49 'Pereiaslavsky symvol totalitarnoi "druzhby"'.
50 'U centri Kyeva pochaly znosyty pamiatnyk "Druzhby narodiv". Avtor proponue znyshchyty', *Liga. Novyny*, 26 April 2022 < https://news.liga.net/ua/all/news/v-tsentre-kieva-nachali-snosit-pamyatnik-drujby-narodov-avtor-predlagaet-ee-unichtojit > [accessed 8 September 2022].
51 'Arka druzhby narodiv: shcho tse bylo I shcho byde?', *Ukrinform*, 27 April 2022 <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/3468987-finis-arki-druzbi-narodiv-nu-orki-teper-vam-tocno-skoro-kinec.html> [accessed 8 September 2022].
52 'Arku druzhby narodiv u Kyevi pereimenuvaly', *Ukrainska Pravda*, 14 May 2022 <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2022/05/14/7346176/> [accessed 8 September 2022].
53 'U Chernigovi viiskovidemontuvaly pamiatnyk Pushkinu', *DeloUA*, 30 April 2022 <https://delo.ua/uk/incidents/u-cernigovi-viiskovi-demontuvali-pamyatnik-puskinu-shho-prostoyav-ponad-120-rokiv-video-396727/> [accessed 8 September 2022].
54 'Derusyfikatsia – decomunizatsia – decolonizatsia', *Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance Video* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mhj71wYXVxY> [accessed 8 September 2022]; 'Pohovorymo pro mystetstvo u publichnyh prostorah?', *Derzhmystetstvo Video* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQRXcwMWCfc> [accessed 8 September 2022].

Art expert Eugenia Moliar has argued for more nuanced, less emotional attitudes toward Soviet monumental heritage. In an article written after the dismantling of the monument to Ukrainian-Russian friendship in Kyiv, she points out that it is harmful to erase Soviet heritage from the history of Ukrainian art as it has cultural value and presents a specific period. Also, she calls for a non-political, critical, and scholarly approach in dealing with Soviet heritage that includes going beyond the 'destruction/restoration' strategy.[55] It is notable that central and local authorities' practices and methods of dealing with these monuments – including how decisions are made, implemented, and communicated to the community – are often the focus of criticism. Therefore, the participants of these debates are often not only experts but also civic activists who actively engage in reshaping public space.

It is too early to say what the results of these debates will be. However, David Art points out that the success of these discussions is defined by their width, the number of actors with different political views involved, the intensity of the communication, and the duration, which should be at least one year;[56] therefore, for public debates to succeed, they should extend beyond any particular institution and should include political elites that discuss these issues from different political angles.[57] In the Ukrainian case, this means going beyond the narrow circle of art and cultural experts and appearing in the political sphere. Importantly, these issues are not perceived as necessary in terms of raising a debate in Ukrainian society due to the security situation and the need to constantly resist Russian military threats: any discussions in the sphere of heritage and its interpretations are not part of the current social and political agenda.

Attitudes regarding visual representations of friendship between Ukraine and Russia have been impacted to some extent by the deterioration of Ukrainians' view of Russia since Russian military aggression started in 2014: positive attitudes dropped sharply from 78% in February 2014 to 52% in May 2014. The share of Ukrainians who have a negative attitude towards Russia has almost tripled (13% in February 2014, rising to 38% in May 2014).[58] The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine has strongly contributed to this process: in May 2022, 92% of respondents expressed a negative attitude towards the Russian Federation, including 90% in the South

55 'Ruinatsia. Pro viinu z pamiatnykamy I monumentamy', *YourArt*, 29 May 2022 <https://supportyourart.com/columns/ruj_nacziya/?fbclid=IwAR2xqkxeaPNnkfbaSTCs5FJZ9-KK3JmZikQ_g5j_AWzF6mDQRkxcSqsPopCI> [accessed 8 September 2022].

56 David Art, *The Politics of the Nazi Past in Germany and Austria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 63.

57 Ibid., p. 1.

58 'Dynamika stavlennia naselennia Ukrainy do Rosii ta naselennia Rosii do Ukrainy', *Kyiv International Institute of Sociology*, 4 March 2014 <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=236> [accessed 8 September 2022].

and 85% in the East.[59] Another opinion poll demonstrates similar trends regarding the question "After Ukraine's victory and the de-occupation of its territory, will you support the complete termination of all relations with the Russian Federation, including a complete ban on the entry of Russians into Ukraine?" 59% of respondents said 'yes', and 32% said 'probably yes'.[60]

CONCLUSION

In Ukrainian-Russian relations, the interpretation of the past has always been essential. Russia uses a particular interpretation of the past to justify its political domination and geopolitical ambitions. In contrast, Ukraine has been struggling for decades to release its memory landscape from the Soviet remains and to regain its subjectivity in the historical process. The debate over the interpretation of Ukrainian-Russian relations has never been just a matter of academic debate: it is a political issue.

Monuments to the Friendship of Peoples were an element of Soviet ideology – the embodiment of a notion that defined the nature of relations between Soviet republics. Although there are several monuments celebrating friendship between Soviet republics across the former Soviet space, the Ukrainian case is an exception due to the number of monuments, references to the 'eternity' of this friendship, and the grounding of this notion of friendship within the narrative of a particular historical event. The campaign to promote the idea of reuniting Ukraine and Russia as a people's union was massive and included the erection of monuments as a revision of Ukraine's history. Notably, this was intended to not only emphasize the idea of friendship but also to eliminate the differences between Ukrainians and Russians, as if these two peoples were doomed to be together. Within this concept, power relations between these two nations have been discussed. It is notable that all these monuments to Ukrainian-Russian Friendship appeared in Ukraine, but none were realized in Russia. Perhaps it was Ukrainians that needed to be convinced about this notion. Also, analysis of this notion of friendship has revealed the peculiarities of the Soviet authorities' policies regarding Ukraine – the central status of Ukraine not only within Soviet politics but also within Russian history.

The story of Pereiaslav continues to occupy a prominent place within Ukrainian historical memory. Removal of the monuments that

59 Iryna Balachuk, '92% ukraintsiv stavliatsa do Rosii pogano', *Ukrainska Pravda*, 26 May 2022 < https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2022/05/26/7348625/ > [accessed 8 September 2022].

60 'How the War Changed the Way Ukrainians Think About Friends, Enemies, and the Country's Strategic Goals', *The Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation*, 30 May 2022 <https://dif.org.ua/article/yak-viyna-vplivae-na-dumku-ukraintsiv-pro-druziv-vorogiv-ta-strategichni-tsili-derzhavi> [accessed 8 September 2022].

memorialized the Soviet interpretation of the agreement between Hetman Khmelnytsky and the Muscovy Tsar will downplay the importance of the Pereiaslav event, but not substantially. This historical event is deeply embodied in Ukraine's narrative of the past. The task is not only to overcome the Soviet historical framework of how this agreement is interpreted but to discuss which events and historical figures are in the focus of the narrative about the past. Why is the Pereiaslav Agreement considered such an important event that it is discussed in detail in history books? Is it important because of what happened in 1654, or is it due to the later (mis) use of the event by Russian and Soviet political actors? Challenging the very basis of this idea is an important factor in understanding contemporary events and the ideological background of Ukrainian-Russian relations.

A monument cannot grasp the meaning and complexity of a historical event, but it does not have to. The aim of a monument is to memorialize an event in a particular way. Therefore, monuments cannot help us understand historical events – they just foster a certain image of an event in collective memory. Rethinking the monuments to Russian-Ukrainian friendship also includes rethinking the notion of heritage. In the present tradition, heritage is understood through its materiality and stands for all that is good about the past and that has contributed to the cultural development of society. This interpretation proves problematic as there are different kinds of heritage, but not all of them are 'positive' in meaning. Heritage is not a monument or a place but cultural values and meanings. Emma Waterton and Laurajane Smith note that heritage is a "cultural process and performance that is concerned with mediation and negotiations of cultural and historical values and narratives".[61] Due to this approach, the object is not so important: the meaning is of primary importance.

So, what values and narratives are constructed around the discussed monuments? Labelling them as Soviet ideological monuments simplifies their meaning and makes dealing with them easier as it places the Peoples' Friendship Arch complex in Kyiv and the 'Forever Together' monument in Pereiaslav, which aimed to memorialize the Soviet interpretation of the Pereiaslav agreement (and, even more broadly, Soviet interpretation of the history of Ukraine), in 'the box' of Soviet heritage. These monuments present an idea that goes beyond the Soviet period and for which Khrushchev was much responsible: the idea that, on the one hand, Ukrainian history has existed since ancient times; on the other hand, it was destined to develop only within a union with Russia

61 Emma Waterton, and Laurajane Smith, 'There is no such thing as heritage', in *Taking Archaeology out of Heritage*, ed. by Emma Waterton, and Laurajane Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), p. 15.

In a time of open military conflict and ongoing security threats, the issue of monuments is less relevant to the public. War-torn Ukraine has left gaping wounds in the Ukrainian psyche and on the landscape. Ukrainian's economy, politics, and demography are undergoing a significant transformation. Ukrainians are becoming more radical in their views and verbal expressions. However, as the data shows, these changes in Ukrainians' attitudes to history had already started before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

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Yana Prymachenko

THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY COLONIALISM WITHIN UKRAINIAN ACADEMIC AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE IN THE ERA OF INDEPENDENCE*

ABSTRACT

The article analyses the notion post-, anti- colonialism in Ukrainian political and public discourse since 1991. The author focuses on the debate about coloniality and its reflections on Ukrainian political thought in XX century. The first part of the article devotes to the problems of applying postcolonial theories to the Ukrainian context and the specifics of the relationship between the Soviet Union's center and the national republics that represented the periphery. The second part analyses the influence of the legacy of Ukrainian national communists on the notion of colonialism in contemporary Ukrainian historiography, while the third part focus on the processes of decolonization represented in public discourse. Finally, the author analyses how Euromaidan launched the politics of decommunization and how it affected the post-Soviet space.

KEYWORDS:

Colonialism, Ukraine, Ukrainian national-communist, Russia, decommunization, decolonization, the Soviet Union, discourse, Euromaidan

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The collapse of the Soviet Union kick-started a powerful process of decolonization among post-Soviet countries, with the Russian Federation – successor to the USSR – playing the unpleasant role of the heir to Russian empire and its colonial practices. Decolonization and revision of historical narratives in the countries of the so-called "near abroad" radically changed the image of Russia. This situation worried the Russian leadership, which used "common historical memory" as an instrument of influence in the post-Soviet space. Clearly, the positive image of Russia was an important element of this political technology.

In 2009, Russian experts analysed the history textbooks of CIS countries and concluded that – with the exception of Belarus and Armenia – these countries did not perceive the role of the Russian Empire and the USSR as a positive one in their history. If this trend continues for the next twenty years, the image of Russia as a notorious empire will be decisively imprinted in the minds of the peoples of the former USSR. This trend is unacceptable for Russians. Ukrainian historian Vladyslav Hrynevych rightfully observed that the processes that had caused the indignation of the Russian leadership were quite natural for a post-imperial space, where the collision of post-colonial and imperial discourses is inevitable. The reformatting of the Soviet past among the CIS countries was natural because "a new future requires a new past".[1]

The debate regarding the nature of the dependence of the modern Ukrainian state on other countries, primarily Russia, is not only the subject of lively historical discussions; it is also the object of attention of public opinion and is an important component of state policy in terms of memory. The essence of the discussion boils down to one question: was this dependence a result of external violence or did it – at least in part – have internal legitimization? The application of the concept of colonialism remains an important element of these discussions. Such discussions were quite relevant for Central and Eastern Europe, where most of the countries had been able to implement their modern national projects only after the collapse of the colonial empires in the aftermath of World War I. In this context, Ukraine is quite an interesting and, to some extent, unique phenomenon, since it is the only country in Eastern Europe[2] that attempted to implement its modern project within the Soviet Union; concurrently,

1 Vladyslav Hrynevyč, 'Vijny pam'jatej jak konflikt postkolonial'noho ta impers'koho dyskursiv', *Ukrajina Moderna*, 17 March 2016 <https://uamoderna.com/blogy/vladislav-grinevich/memory-wars-imperial-discourses> [accessed 17 September 2019].

2 In 2011, Professor Serhii Plokhy proposed applying the term "New Eastern Europe" to Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, arguing that there are some real geographical, cultural, ethnic, and historical factors that distinguish this region from the neighboring ones. Despite the ambiguity of this approach, which leads to the artificial differentiation of the Baltic-Black Sea region, one can single out the abovementioned countries into a separate sub-region; such an approach has heuristic potential. See: Serhii Plokhy, 'The "New Eastern Europe": What to Do with the Histories of Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova?', *East European Politics & Societies*, 25 (2011), 763–69.

Ukraine has its own intellectual tradition of processing the experience of colonialism and Marxist criticism.

The goal of this article is to analyse the history of colonialism as a concept within twentieth-century Ukrainian intellectual thinking and to assess this history's impact on the field of contemporary Ukrainian humanities.

At the dawn of Ukrainian independence, colonialism was a marginal term that occasionally emerged in the rhetoric of the newly formed Ukrainian political parties.[3] Gradually, the concept of colonialism moved into the mainstream of the intellectual and political community. Its popularity exploded during the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko (2005–2010). According to the Ukrainian historian Heorhiy Kasyanov, the first 'historical president' actively used the colonial approach that had been created in the United States and Canada and which borrowed from the practices of the post-war Ukrainian emigration and diaspora.[4] The public demand for a historical policy of decolonization became apparent during the Orange Revolution, and the Russian Federation's interference in Ukraine's internal political processes had a strong impact on this demand. Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which began in March 2014 with the occupation of Crimea and Donbas, only reinforced this trend. In 2015, this demand resurfaced with the introduction of a policy of decommunization, the goal of which was to clear Soviet markers and names from the public spaces of Ukrainian cities and villages.[5] Since the legitimacy of the national liberation struggle of the Ukrainian people was secured at the legislative level, and the communist regime, on a par with the Nazi regime, was recognized as criminal, the developments of 2015 reinvigorated the discussions on the colonial status of Ukraine within the USSR.

It is worth noting that the term "colony" in relation to Ukraine as part of the Russian/Soviet empire was coined by the Ukrainian Communists and was supported by the left wing of the Ukrainian Social Democrats and Socialist-Revolutionaries, most of whom perished during the Stalinist purges and the Great Terror policy. Paradoxically, the heritage of the National Communists was preserved and refined by Ukrainian nationalists during World War II and the third wave of Ukrainian emigration to the United States and Canada. The focus on the struggle against the Soviet Union, where the Russian people acted as a state-building body, determined

3 Stephen Velychenko, 'The issue of Russian colonialism in Ukrainian thought. Dependency identity and development', *Ab Imperio*, 1 (2002), 323–67 (p. 323).

4 Heorhij Kas'janov, *Danse macabre: holod 1932–1933 rokiv u polityci, masovij svidomosti ta istoriohrafiji (1980-ti – počatok 2000-ch)* (Kyjiv: Naš čas, 2010), pp. 56–79.

5 Vladyslav Hrynevyč, 'Revoljucija, vijna i proces tvorennja ukrajins'koji naciji', *Ukrajina Moderna*, 8 November 2015 <https://uamoderna.com/blogy/vladislav-grinevich/revolution-war-nation> [accessed 8 November 2019].

the direction of the diasporic intellectual thinking that methodically introduced the colonial paradigm.[6]

How did the concept of 'colonialism' evolve within the Ukrainian political thinking of the twentieth century? What is the ratio of the use of colonial approaches in the field of cultural and socio-economic history? What are the prospects of colonial theory for studying the history of Ukraine in the twentieth century? How is the term 'colonialism' currently being used in intellectual and public discourse? These are only some of the questions to which we will draw attention and try answer within the framework of this article.

PRO ET CONTRA: (POST/ANTI) COLONIAL THEORIES AND THE HISTORY OF POST-SOVIET COUNTRIES

Reflecting on the Ukrainian situation from the standpoint of post-colonial criticism, the Swedish researcher Roman Horbyk notes that this problem is complex since we have to deal with several diverse trajectories at once: Western colonialism towards Eastern Europe; Russian colonialism in Eastern Europe and Central Asia; Polish imperialism and the general self-Orientalism/internal colonization of Eastern European peoples. Since all of these colonial experiences are quite difficult to combine within the framework of post-colonial theory, Horbyk proposes shifting the focus of attention from the question of 'who colonized whom?' to 'how did the modern subject form itself within the system of power relations?'.[7] Empires shape and influence colonies in the same way as colonies shape and influence an empire. The ambivalence of the Ukrainian colonial situation is obvious. Ukrainians helped to build the Russian Empire, but they later became its victims. According to Horbyk, the cultural and ideological influence on Muscovy of seventeenth-century Ukrainian intellectuals can be compared with cultural imperialism. On the other hand, he also notes that the incorporation of the Hetmanate, like any colonization, would have been impossible without the support of interested local groups.

The attention that Roman Horbyk pays to the discursive Soviet practices that were designed to construct Ukrainian Soviet subjectivity in the 1920s best reflects the essence of the discussions on the application of post-colonial approaches to the history of Eastern Europe. After all, this

6 Jana Prymačenko, *Pivničnoamerykans'ka istoriobrafija dijal'nosti OUN i UPA* (Kyjiv, 2010), pp. 25–32.
7 Roman Horbyk, 'Ideologies of the Self Constructing the Modern Ukrainian Subject in the Other's Modernity', *Kyiv-Mohyla Humanities Journal*, 3 (2016), 89–103 (pp. 90–92).

attention makes it possible to overcome a simplified ideological vision which rejects basic concepts of post-colonial theory, such as hybridity, subjectivity, and subordination.[8]

The use of colonial optics in the context of the implementation of the Ukrainian modern project, which took place within the framework of Soviet modernization, is the main aspect of modern Ukrainian discussions about colonialism. Actually, the key question is: was Ukraine a Russian colony within the USSR?

The concept of "Russia is the prison of peoples", which was actively used by the Bolsheviks in their propaganda against the Tsarist regime, was based on the idea that all the peoples of the Russian Empire, including the Russians themselves, were belittled by imperialism. The Soviet modern project of *korenizatsiya*, or nativization – creating a culture that is "national in form, socialist in content" – was presented as anti-colonial. In essence, the Bolsheviks led the process of cultural and political emancipation of the ethnic groups that used to inhabit the Russian Empire – a process that had been caused by World War I. But was this project anti-colonial in regards to Ukraine? How relevant is the use of colonial approaches to the Soviet period of Eastern European history?

Post-colonial studies, as well as the new imperial history itself, came to life as part of a 'new cultural history' of the West in the 1980s and quickly gained popularity among Western scholars.[9] Canadian literary critic Myroslav Shkandrij was one of the first to apply postcolonial approaches to Ukrainian history. He believes that the integration of Ukrainian elites into imperial structures was a classic example of the colonial policy used by the Russian empire to subdue newly acquired territories. A striking example of such a colonial policy is the prolonged marginalization and oppression of Ukrainian culture.[10] In support of his position, he refers to another diasporic scholar, Mark Pavlyshyn, and proposes applying three approaches to modern Ukrainian literature and culture: colonial, anti-colonial, and postcolonial. The colonial approach refers to those elements in literature that help spread the structures and myths of colonial relations of power. The anti-colonial approach rejects these structures or seeks opportunities to change them with the aim of exacting revenge on the Russian empire by humiliating the culture of the metropolis and emphasizing the benefits of the cultural heritage of the colony,

8 Ibid., pp. 94–95.
9 Andrij Zajarnjuk, 'Pro te, jak social'na istorija stavala kul'turnoju', *Ukrajina Moderna*, 9 (2005), 249–69; Natalja Laas, 'Social'na istorija SRSR v amerykans'kij istoriohrafiji: teoretyčni dyskusiji 1980–2000-ch rr.', *Ukrajins'kyj istoryčnyj žurnal*, 4 (2010), 170–91.
10 Myroslav Shkandrij, 'Colonial, Anti-colonial and Postcolonial in Ukrainian Literature', in *Twentieth Century Ukrainian Literature: Essays in Honour of Dmytro Shtohryn*, ed. by Jaroslav Rozumnyj (Kyiv: Kyiv Mohyla Academy Publishing House, 2011), pp. 282–97 (pp. 284–85).

which in this case is Ukraine. In turn, the postcolonial approach is relevant to both of these categories within literature and culture and regards these approaches as equal.[11]

For quite some time, postcolonial theory was applied only within the framework of literary studies. Historians were not in a hurry to use it, fearing erosion of the boundaries of historical research. Canadian historian Stephen Velychenko became the first to actively apply these approaches to the military and political history of the USSR. He emphasized the following,

> While examining only the cultural aspects of domination and subordination, which they [literary critics] consider 'cultural and linguistic imperialism'... postcolonialists consider their methodology to be a kind of therapy that helps formerly colonized peoples become cognizant of themselves through knowledge of their past. By limiting the colonial-imperial relations to the literary and cultural sphere, they seem to take on the role of guides, whose only goal is to clarify the essence of domination and liberation.[12]

Velychenko believes that postcolonialism has been successful within Western historiography primarily thanks to the generous donations of large corporations, which hired postcolonialism researchers as consultants in order to increase the efficiency of their international branches. Another negative aspect of this methodology, in his opinion, is that it leads to a 'victim complex'. As a supporter of the colonial approach, Velychenko admits that no dedicated scholar of Ukrainian history supports the idea of the colonial status of Ukraine within the USSR.[13]

For a long time, the colonial approach to Soviet Ukraine was limited to the problem of "the colonization of discourse", which silences the voice of the "colonized nation". At the same time, socio-economic aspects were put aside precisely because of the ambivalence of the Ukrainian colonial situation, which created a number of difficulties for the justification of colonial relations in economic categories.

The concern regarded the so-called "white colonialism toward whites", which American researcher Ewa Thompson quite aptly defined as the "military subjugation of a territory and population that already has its own national consciousness, political system, law, language, and

11 Ibid., p. 292.
12 Stephen Velychenko, 'Postkolonijalizm, Evropa ta ukrajins'ka istorija', *Ukrajina Moderna*, 9 (2005), 237–48 (p. 237).
13 Ibid., pp. 222–33.

social customs".[14] In this sense, according to Thompson, the image of Central Europe created by "outside observers" hardly differs from nineteenth-century European travellers' descriptions of Africa. Based on the historical experience of Poland, this American scholar distinguishes two stages of discursive colonization of Central Europe, which, to some extent, can be extrapolated to the Ukrainian situation: 1. From the eighteenth century to the collapse of the USSR (except for the interwar period); 2. The modern era – the struggle for liberation from the baggage of colonial discourse. Consequently, the "colonization of discourse" is nothing more than the creation of an image of a "colonized nation" by those who are far from expressing this nation's interests.[15]

Considering Central-Eastern Europe as a space that formed as a result of the expansion of the Russian and German empires, the Polish historian Jan Kieniewicz interprets national society as an organism struck by imperial influence, while the intelligentsia within this system take on the role of the antibodies that the organism produces to combat this threat – the colonial empire.[16] Interpreting the intelligentsia–empire conflict as a conflict of values, Kieniewicz notes that, even under the conditions of civilizational pressure, the right to choose a behavioural model was up to representatives of intelligentsia. After all, an intelligentsia that acts, a priori, as a force of modernization that is responsible for the transformation principles of a dependent society[17] always reserves certain rights that make it responsible for this society, regardless of the conditions.[18]

A significant contribution to the debate on the application of postcolonial theory to the post-Soviet space was made by the American historian David Chioni Moore. He noted that the term 'post-colonial' was introduced into the academic community as a euphemism and as a substitute for such attributes as 'not Western', 'Third World', 'minority', and 'developing countries'. Within the dichotomy of contrasting the 'first' and the 'third' worlds, the 'second world' seems to constitute a separate phenomenon. It is the presence of a discursive line between the 'West' and the 'East' that acts as a deterrent that separates Europeans in the post-Soviet space from the postcolonial third world. Europeans *a priori* cannot be colonized since they play the role of the colonizers.

14 Ewa Thompson 'Istorija Central'noji Evropy jak postkolonijal'na naracija', *Ukrajina Moderna*, 16 (2010), 227–34 (p. 227).
15 Ibid., pp. 229–30.
16 Jan Kenevič, 'Intelligencija i imperija', *Ab Imperio*, 1 (2011), 131–62 (p. 134).
17 Ibid., pp. 149–52.
18 Some of these ideas have previously been voiced in one of my articles. See: Jana Prymačenko, 'Ukrajins'ka chudožnja intelihencija 1920-ch rokiv jak istoriohrafične javyšče: problemy metodolohiji dosliđžennja', *Ukrajins'kyj istoryčnyj žurnal*, 3 (2013), 184–97.

For a long while, post-Soviet countries did not fit into the post-colonial paradigm because of the difference between the Russian-Soviet and Anglo-French variants of colonial relations, with the latter being considered a benchmark. In his analysis of the Russian situation, Moore points out that the understanding of Russia as a colonial empire has always been hampered by the absence of seas and oceans between the metropolitan and the colonial countries, something that was inherently present within the 'classical' understanding of colonial empires. Besides, Russia itself was not considered a part of the Western world.

Moore criticized Edward Said for his unwillingness to include Russia among the colonial empires based solely on the criterion of distance. After all, the distance from Moscow to Tashkent was no less than the distance between Britain and its overseas colonies. Moore calls this concept the myth of 'contiguity', which disguises the true colonial essence of the Russian empire.[19]

This American scholar also pointed out the differences within the trajectory of colonization processes in Russia. If the eastward movement was a kind of revenge for the Mongol domination by which the Russian Empire colonized the peoples whose vassal it used to be, the trajectory of the westward movement was completely different. Moore proposes considering the case with the Soviet colonization of Central Europe as a fourth, culturally reversible, type of colonization. If standard 'Western' colonization entails the "orientalization" of a subject – with the colonized people being a priori passive, ahistorical, feminine, or barbaric – the 'fourth case' introduces the opposite scenario, which is related to the Russian complex regarding the supremacy of Western culture. In turn, the countries of Central Europe perceived the Russian and Soviet domination as Asian or barbaric.

David Moore noted that, in the case of Soviet colonialism, one could observe all the classic colonial practices being applied to the subjugated countries: the lack of sovereign power, travel restrictions, military occupation, etatism, and forced education in the language of the colonizers.[20]

Ewa Thompson indirectly supports David Moore's argument. While analysing the Russian literature of the late Soviet era, she mentions another characteristic feature of Russian colonialism, namely the fact that Russians even continued to confuse the concept of *Imperium* with Russia after the collapse of the USSR. Similarly to the Western bards who glorified

19 David C. Moore, 'Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique', *Globalizing Literary Studies, special issue of PMLA*, 116.1 (2001), 118–28.
20 Ibid., p. 121.

the empires of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Russian writers of the post-Soviet era believed that the former territories of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union should forever preserve their ties with Moscow. Russia's imperial vision outlived the USSR and lodged itself in the minds of Russians.[21]

The Bolsheviks offered their own alternative to the systems of control that were available when they came to power after the October revolution in 1917. In order to 'not remain' an empire, Lenin came up with the idea of a multi-level 'voluntary' alliance of republics.[22] Terry Martin called this model a strategy of 'affirmative action', which he elaborated on in his book *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939*,[23] which stirred up a great debate in post-Soviet lands.[24] The "national in form, socialist in content" approach became an alternative to the imperial, colonial, caste, universalist systems, as well as the "melting pot" ideology of the time. However, according to Leninist–Marxist theory, sooner or later all nationalities would become *Homo Sovieticus*.[25]

David Moore admitted that in the process of analysing the Soviet project one can find arguments both for and against its colonial essence, while expanding the scope of application of the term 'post-colonial' can lead to the loss of its analytical force. In the end, he comes to the conclusion that "the colonial relations at the turn of the millennium… become as fundamental to world identities as other 'universal' categories such as race, and class, and caste, and age, and gender".[26] It is difficult to disagree with this statement.

British scholar Taras Kuzio believes that post-Soviet countries, like the rest of the post-colonial world, are experiencing 'imperial transit', i.e., attempts to build a national state on the basis of inherited quasi-statehood. However, in the post-Soviet countries this 'imperial transit' is different from the authoritarian transition that took place in Southern and Central Europe and Latin America, where nation-building and state-building did not play such an important role during the transition to democracy. Analysing the situation in more depth, Kuzio observes that the 'imperial transit' of Ukraine, Moldova and Kazakhstan is radically different from the processes of the 1970s–1980s in Latin

21 Ewa M. Thompson, *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism* (Westport–Connecticut, 2000), pp. 129–31.
22 Ibid., p. 123.
23 Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).
24 Oleksandr Rubl'ov, and Larysa Jakubova, 'Pro 'Imperiju pozytyvnoji diji' Teri Martyna', *Historians.in.ua*, 1 August 2013 <https://www.historians.in.ua/index.php/en/dyskusiya/796-oleksandr-rublov-larysa-yakubovapro-imperiiu-pozytyvnoi-dii-teri-martyna> [accessed 1 August 2019].
25 Moore, *Is the Post- in the Postcolonial Post- in the Post-Soviet?*, p. 122.
26 Ibid., p. 124.

American countries, which seceded from the Spanish and Portuguese empires in the nineteenth century. These processes are also different from the transformations that took place earlier in Southern Europe at the core of the two former empires: the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman. Instead, the 'imperial transit' of Ukraine, Moldova, and Kazakhstan is similar to the processes that occurred in the post-colonial countries of Africa and Asia.

According to Kuzio, of these three countries, only Moldova manifests processes that are similar to those that happened to the post-colonial states of the former Western empires. It is also important to mention that Russia and Turkey, unlike Western European empires, were unable to create their own national states before the creation of their empires. The Turkish national state emerged after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire; the Russian Federation had the potential to evolve into the Russian national state after the collapse of the Soviet empire, but imperial resentment prevailed.[27]

Probably the most striking example of re-thinking of the Ukrainian Soviet experience in post-colonial categories comes from Mykola Riabchuk, who thoroughly critiqued Moore's fundamental article, making the observation that post-colonial studies are based on racial inferiority, but this does not deny the other colonial experiences of oppression and discrimination. Using Moore's classification, Riabchuk views Ukraine and Belarus as an intermediary link between two poles: on one hand, classical colonialism in Russian-Soviet Asia and the Caucasus; on the other hand, the relatively mild, non-colonial dominance of the USSR in Eastern Europe. Ukrainians and Belarusians did not create sovereign states, but at the same time – provided they were loyal to the system – they did not suffer from discrimination.[28]

In Moore's classification, during the times of the Russian Empire the incorporation of Ukraine took place via the 'dynastic' route. According to Riabchuk, Soviet modernization, accompanied by the extermination of intelligentsia and peasantry, turned Ukrainian villages into internal colonies. Actually, the transformation of cities into the 'first' world and villages into the 'third' was an all-Soviet practice, but in Russia this gap was not deepened by the linguistic aspect. Riabchuk says,

> For all the similarity between the global third world and the Soviet internal colonial world, one should remember

27 Taras Kuzio, 'History? Memory and national building in post-Soviet colonial space', *Nationalities papers*, 30.2 (2002), pp. 259–60.

28 Mykola Rjabčuk, 'Vidminy kolonializmu: pro zastosovnist' postkolonial'noji metodolohiji do vyvčennja postkomunistyčnoji Schidnoji Jevropy', *Naukovi zapysky IPiEND*, 2 (2013), 41–58 (pp. 48–49).

> the essential difference – the absence of a fundamental racist component in Soviet colonialism. Communism as a system, in various ways, was lawless and discriminatory against many groups, including ethnic ones; however, at the individual level, Soviet subjects had incomparably more opportunities to avoid discrimination than coloured Africans, whose fate was largely determined by the very colour of their skin. For Ukrainians, their "blackness" was represented by the miserable, despised, inferior, "collective farm" language. It was not difficult to switch to a different one, at least in the second generation, thereby putting an equal sign between urbanization and Russification...[29]

Only Galicia managed to avoid the Russification of its cities since this region, as well as the population of the Baltic and Central European countries, perceived the Russians as occupiers and therefore did not display an inferiority complex.[30]

To conclude, let us note that the application of postcolonial theory to Ukraine and, in a broader context, Eastern Europe demonstrates the specifics of the relationship between the centre and the periphery. The question of how to fit postcolonial theories into the Ukrainian context has been discussed for quite some time. It is obvious that the history of Ukraine, especially its Soviet period, is multilevel and complex, thus it requires unconventional approaches. The application of the comparative approach makes it possible to fit the Ukrainian experience into the general paradigm of colonial discourse, while micro-historical studies demonstrate national specifics. It is hard to deny that when it comes to Ukraine or Eastern Europe, the experience of colonialism has a distinctly non-classical form, and this should be taken into account when applying colonial optics.

29 Ibid., pp. 50–51.
30 Ibid., p. 52.

COLONIALISM IN UKRAINIAN SOCIO-POLITICAL THOUGHT OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: CULTURE VERSUS ECONOMICS

Within Ukrainian historiography and public opinion, it is much easier to think about the issue of colonialism from the point of view of cultural rather than economic processes. Firstly, this is true thanks to the great impact of the creative intelligentsia on the state-building processes in Ukraine, starting from the Ukrainian national liberation struggle of 1917–1921, which brought to the fore such important figures as historian Mykhailo Hrushevskyi, writer Volodymyr Vynnychenko, and journalist and publicist Simon Petliura. In fact, it is precisely the creative intelligentsia who, according to Miroslav Hroch's model of non-state nations, determine nation-building processes and form an imaginary community which later transforms into a political nation. Secondly, socio-economic history lost ground during the Independence era, which was a natural reaction to the long period of domination of vulgar Marxism within Soviet science. Therefore, it is not surprising that, during the first period of the creation of independent Ukrainian historical science, the main emphasis was on the so-called 'blank spots'. The Ukrainian national liberation struggle of 1917–1921, as well as the Executed Renaissance and the literary discussion that preceded the policy of curtailing Ukrainianization, appeared to take centre stage. The main focus of researchers' attention shifted to the Ukrainian writer and publicist Mykola Khvylovyi, People's Commissioner of Education in the Ukrainian SSR Oleksander Shums'kyi,[31] and his

31 Oleksander Shums'kyi (1890–1946): Ukrainian party and state leader. From September 1924 to February 1927, he served as People's Commissar of Education of the Ukrainian SSR. He actively pursued the policy of Ukrainianization and supported the development of Ukrainian culture, in particular the work of Mykola Khvylovyi. For this reason, he came into conflict with Lazar Kaganovich, the Secretary General of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine (CK KPbU), who was appointed in April 1925. Joseph Stalin, the Secretary General of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (CK RKPb), intervened in this discussion; in a letter to the members of the Politburo of CK KP(b)U, he made Oleksandr Shums'kyi responsible for spreading anti-Russian sentiment in Ukraine. At the May Plenum of CK KPbU in1926, Shums'kyi was forced to officially admit his mistakes, but even that did not save him. In 1927, he was removed from office on charges of undermining the work of People's Commissariat of Education of the Ukrainian SSR. In February–March 1927, the Plenum of CK KPbU confirmed the existence of the so-called *shumskism*, or the "nationalist inclination of Shums'kyi". He was forced to leave Ukraine and work in Russia, occupying various positions. On 13 May 1933, Shums'kyi was arrested on charges related to the fabricated *UVO* case (Ukrainian Military Organization) and sentenced to ten years in prison. After spending two years in the Solovki special camp, he was sentenced to ten years of exile in Krasnoyarsk by the resolution of the Special Meeting of the NKVD that took place on 10 December 1935. On 13 May 1943, having served his sentence, Shums'kyi remained in Krasnoyarsk "for medical treatment". While in prison, he did not stop fighting for his public rehabilitation, did not admit any of the charges, and appealed to CK KPbU numerous times. In a letter to Stalin dated 18 October 1945, he criticized the national policy of the USSR, in particular the idea of elevating the Russian people as Ukraine's "elder brothers". On his way back to Ukraine in September 1946, Shum'skyi was killed by a special group of the Ministry of National Security of the USSR at the personal order of Joseph Stalin. Oleksander Shums'kyi was rehabilitated on 11 September 1958. *See:* Heorhij Papakin, 'Šums'kyj Oleksandr Jakovyč', in *Encyklopedija istoriji Ukrajiny* (hereafter *EIU*), ed. by Valerij Smolij, and others, 10 vols (Kyjiv: Naukova dumka, 2003–2013), X (2013), pp. 671–72.

successor Mykola Skrypnyk,[32] while Ukrainian communists and economists Vasyl' Shakhrai, Serhii Mazlakh[33] and Mykhailo Volobuiev[34] attracted far less attention.

The purpose of this part of the article is to mark the main milestones in the development of colonial theory within twentieth-century Ukrainian public opinion. Here, I resort to a certain schematization that simplifies the overall picture. The accomplishments of Ukrainian interwar and post-war emigration are beyond the scope of my analysis, since I am focused mainly on what was created in 'mainland' Ukraine in response to the current political situation. This approach by no means reduces the achievements of Ukrainian emigration and the diaspora, where ideas that had originated in Ukraine developed.

32 Mykola Skrypnyk (1872–1933): Ukrainian Soviet party and state leader. In March 1927, he was appointed People's Commissar of Education of the Ukrainian SSR; in February 1933, he was appointed Head of the State Planning Commission and the Deputy Head of the People's Commissars' Committee of the Ukrainian SSR. While serving at this high state level, Skrypnyk actively participated in the process of creation of the USSR. At the same time, as a member of the Commission on the development of the Federal Constitution, he fought for guarantees of Ukraine's sovereignty within the Union State. He actively pursued the policy of Ukrainianization and significantly expanded the fields where Ukrainian language could be used. Another project of his was training personnel from representatives of the native nationality. Concurrently, much was done to ensure the national and cultural development of all national minorities living in Ukraine. Mykola Skrypnyk was one of the most significant Soviet theorists of the national question. With the start of the campaign accusing Ukrainian elites of 'national evasion', he pleaded not guilty and committed suicide in Kharkiv. See: Valerij Soldatenko, 'Skrypnyk Mykola Oleksijovyč', in *EIU*, IX (2012), pp. 618–19.

33 Serhii Mazlakh (born Serhii Robsman, 1878–1937): politician, one of the founders of Ukrainian national communism. Together with Vasyl' Shakhrai, he founded and edited the Bolshevik newspaper *Molot*. He did not share the views propagated by Bolshevik extremism. He publicly supported the First and Third Universals of the Ukrainian Central *Rada*, recognizing it as the highest governing authority in Ukraine and, at the same time, putting forward the idea of its transformation through elections into the Ukrainian Central *Rada* of Workers', Peasants', and Soldiers' Deputies. Mazlakh collaborated with Shakhrai on a political pamphlet *Concerning the Moment: What is Happening in Ukraine and to Ukraine* (1919). This text justified the state independence and unity of Ukraine, while the success of the social revolution was seen as dependent on the solution to the national question. In 1923–1924, Mazlakh served as the manager of a Donbas logistics organization, as well as the editor of the magazines *Donbas Economy* and *Znannia* (The Knowledge). Later, he was appointed the Head of the Central Statistical Office and continued with the policy of Ukrainianization of the personnel. Starting March 1931, he held a number of high-level positions in the USSR State Planning Commission in Moscow. On 7 August 1937, Serhii Mazlakh was arrested by the NKVD, allegedly as a member of a "counter-revolutionary right-wing organization". Soon after, allegations of Ukrainian nationalism were added to the list of accusations. Despite the fact that Mazlakh did not confess, on the grounds of these falsified charges he was sentenced to death by the Military Board of the USSR Supreme Court of the USSR on 25 November 1937, and he was executed in Moscow. See: Oleksandr Jurenko, 'Mazlach Serhij Mychajlovyč', in *EIU*, VI (2009), pp. 430–31.

34 Mykhailo Volobuiev (alias: Artemov; 1903–1972): Ukrainian economist. In 1928, he published an article *Toward the Issue of Ukrainian Economy* in the *Ukrainian Bilshovyk* journal, which outlined the phases of the Russian Empire's colonial policy development in Ukraine prior to the events of October 1917, thereby refuting the statement about the complete unity of the pre-revolutionary Ukrainian and Russian economies. Volobuiev emphasized that Moscow governing institutions (including the USSR State Planning Commission) continued with their imperial policy, at times avoiding even the very name of Ukraine, instead giving preference to the names such as South, Southern District, South of European Russia, or Southern-Russian Economy. Volobuiev stipulated the idea that Ukraine had its own path of economic development and had to join the world economy. Using concrete examples, he demonstrated the irrationality of the centralized usage of natural and economic resources of Ukraine by the planning institutions of the USSR. He proposed considering the economy of the USSR as a system of national economies, with each national economy keeping its own integrity. His views were qualified as an economic platform for 'national evasion'; as a result, he was subjected to public ostracism. Volobuiev was arrested on 7 December 1933, on charges of participating in the "Ukrainian counter-revolutionary organization seeking to overthrow the Soviet power by means of armed resistance". On 8 May 1934, Volobuiev was sentenced to five years of correctional camps by the decision of the special judicial *troika*, authorized by the State Political Directorate (GPU) of the Ukrainian SSR, but his sentence was changed to exile to Kazakhstan. After his release, he lived in the Krasnodar Territory of the Russian Federation. During the war with Nazi Germany, he worked for Soviet intelligence. In August of 1957, Mykhailo Volobuiev was rehabilitated. In the last years of his life, he worked as a teacher in Rostov-on-Don. See: Jurij Šapoval, 'Volobujev (Artemov) Mychajlo Symonovyč ta joho stattja' Do problemy ukrajins'koji ekonomiky', in *EIU*, I (2003), p. 614.

Vasyl' Shakhrai was the founder of Ukrainian national communism. His creative legacy is relatively small compared to the impact his work had in and after the 1920s on subsequent generations of Ukrainian intellectuals. In his works *Revolution in Ukraine* and *Concerning the Moment* (co-authored with Serhii Mazlakh), Shakhrai reflects on the reasons for the defeat of Soviet power in Ukraine in 1918. He poses an uncomfortable question to Vladimir Lenin: when it comes to Ukraine, why do nations' rights to self-determination diverge from real politics?[35] In fact, he accuses the Bolsheviks of continuing the autocratic policy of the Tsarist regime under the disguise of internationalism, which found its embodiment in the policy of centralized management of national borderlands. Specifically, the governance of the Communist party of Ukraine (KPbU) was carried out by Moscow-appointed emissaries. Under the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', it was the KPbU that was the highest governing body in charge of all economic and cultural policies in Ukraine. Vasyl' Shakhrai insisted on the creation of a separate Ukrainian Communist party that was different from the KPbU, which was just a branch of the Russian Communist party (RKPb). Moreover, Ukrainian communists, in his opinion, should have been represented in the *Comintern* (*Communist International*), and Ukraine should have acted as a state ally of Russia, concurrently preserving its independence.

In his work *Revolution in Ukraine*, Shakhrai openly declared,

> The situation of Ukraine is such that the way to unification with the neighbouring states lies only through independence... Otherwise, there is a possibility of wars against the socialist state, as well as revolution.
> National antagonisms will not dissipate that fast, and hatred, quite legitimately, will remain with the oppressed and oppressor for some time. It will evaporate only after the victory of socialism and after entirely democratic relationships between the nations have been established.
> [...]
> The victorious proletariat cannot impose any happiness on other ethnos without undermining its own victory.[36]

35 Serhij Mazlach, and Vasyl' Šachraj, *Do chvyli (Ščo dijet'sja na Ukrajini i z Ukrajinoju)* (N'ju-Jork: Proloh, 1967), pp. 281–96.
36 Vasyl' Šachraj, *Revoljucija na Ukraine*, ed. by Andrej Zdorov, and others (Odessa: TÈS, 2017), pp. 125–26.

Later, Mykola Khvylovyi expressed similar ideas, but the 'parents' of Ukrainian National Communism were the first to pay the price for these subversive thoughts. On 9 March 1919, CK[37] KPbU expelled Vasyl' Shakhrai and Serhii Mazlakh from the party for engaging in "actions directed against the party", while Shakhrai's *Concerning the Moment* was withdrawn from circulation.

Shahray's standpoint had a significant impact on the left-wing Ukrainian Social-Democrats (*esdeks*) and Socialist-Revolutionaries (*esers*), who held the founding Congress of the Ukrainian Communist party (UKP) in January of 1920. The participants of the Congress did not yet know about the death of Shakhrai in Kuban at the hands of Denikin's followers, so they appointed him a member of CK KPbU and the honorary chairman of the Congress.[38] For a long time, the UKP was a real political force and competed with the KPbU, but in 1925 it was dissolved by the *Comintern* and some of its members joined the ranks of the KPbU. Subsequently, many of them were repressed.[39]

The issue of Ukraine's real right to self-determination, as was discussed by Vasyl' Shakhrai in his works, became the ground for exploration of the cultural and economic emancipation of Ukraine in the 1920s. The colonization of the cultural discourse was raised by the Ukrainian writer Mykola Khvylovyi[40] in his famous series of pamphlets, which stirred up a politically invested literary discussion in 1925. Khvylovyi's last pamphlet, *Ukraine or Little Russia?*, was banned by the Soviet censors.[41] The author argued that only Ukraine's real independence within the USSR would allow it to undergo a class differentiation that would accelerate the development of communism.[42] Khvylovyi insisted on the ideological affinity of Ukraine with the "psychologically oriented Europe" and denied Moscow the role of a cultural intermediary, encouraging young Ukrainian writers to learn languages and get acquainted with Western art directly. The literary debate, which began as a struggle for high standards in art, very quickly grew into

37 CK – Central'nyj Komitet – Central Committee.

38 Andrej Zdorov, 'Ukrainskij bolşevik Vasilij Šachraj: stranicy biografii', in *Revoljucija na Ukraine*, pp. 15–16.

39 Viktor Pryluc'kyj, 'Ukrajins'ka Komunistyčna Partija (UKP)', *Encyklopedija istoriji Ukrajiny: Ukrajina–Ukrajinci*, 2 vols (Kyjiv: Naukova dumka, 2018–2019), II (2019), pp. 589–90.

40 Mykola Khvylovyi (born Mykola Fitilev; 1893–1933): Ukrainian writer and publicist, one of the ideological leaders of Ukrainian National Communism. He actively participated in the literary discussion of 1925–1928. These discussions highlighted the ideological and aesthetic explorations of the post-revolutionary generation of Ukrainian writers; however, they were politicized by the Bolsheviks. Khvylovyi's pamphlets *Quo Vadis?* (1925), *Thoughts against the Current* (1926), and *Apologists of Scribbling* (1926) advocated for Ukraine's movement towards Europe and encouraged letting go of psychological dependence on Moscow – two processes that were seen as a guarantee of the revival of Ukrainian statehood. By the resolution of the Politburo CK KPbU dated 15 May 1927, the literary discussions were terminated, while their initiators, as well as leaders of the Ukrainian National Communist movement, were subsequently eliminated. On 13 May 1933, Mykola Khvylovyi committed suicide in Kharkiv. See: Vitalij Ablicov, 'Chvyl'ovyj Mykola', in *EIU*, X (2013), pp. 364–65.

41 Jurij Šapoval, 'Car i rab chytroščiv'. Dolja Mykoly Chvyl'ovoho u svitli spravy-formuljara', in *Torknutys' istoriji* (Dnipropetrovs'k: Lira, 2013), pp. 128–61.

42 Mykola Chvyl'ovyj, 'Ukrajina čy Malorosija?', in *Mykola Chvyl'ovyj. Vybrani tvory*, ed. by Rostyslav Mel'nykiv (Kyjiv, 2011), pp. 742–43.

a political debate. This trajectory was not accidental. The Bolsheviks, who at that time had not yet completely solidified their presence in Ukraine, were aware of the dangers of Ukraine's cultural emancipation. In addition, this emancipation was initiated not by the political opponents of the Bolsheviks but by their party associates – the Ukrainian National Communists.[43] Khvylovyi pointed out the affinity of the mindsets of the Ukrainian and European cultures, and this observation raised the issue of Ukrainian national identity on a fundamental level. The Ukrainian writer predicted an era of 'Asian Renaissance', which, on the basis of the old European tradition, would not only provide impetus to this tradition's renewal but would also be at the forefront of the entire process of renewal. Here, Khvylovyi refers to the idea of 'modernization without Westernization', which was popular within the public discourse of the 1920s. Even though the entire concept of Soviet modernization was constructed with the help of an idealized vision of Europe and North America, it [the concept] was presented as Asian.[44] However, Stalin did not like Khvylovyi's idea of "Ukraine [...] moving toward socialism a little differently, albeit within a Soviet political union with Russia".[45]

The issues of economic colonialism found their way into Mykhailo Volobuiev's lengthy article 'Toward the Issue of the Ukrainian Economy', which was published in *Bilshovyk Ukrainy* in 1928 (#2-3). Based on in-depth analysis of Ukrainian-Russian economic relations since the time of the Hetmanate, Volobuiev showed that these relations had been unequal and introduced the concept of a 'colony of a European type' to describe the relationship between dependence and subordination.[46]

Rather unexpectedly, another author who analysed Ukraine's economic dependence on Russia in depth was Petro Fedun (aka Petro Poltava), the leader of the OUN's (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) main propaganda cell, and later the deputy of the Ukrainian Supreme Liberation Council (UHVR).[47] His article *The Colonial Economic Policy of the Bolshevik Imperialists in Ukraine* (1945) is a good example of Marxist criticism.[48] In it, Fedun distinguished between the three types of imperialist states: capitalist, fascist, and Bolshevik.[49] He considered Ukraine the "India of Stalinist USSR",[50] imitating the language of the Ukrainian

43 Jana Prymačenko, 'Ukrajins'ka literaturna dyskusija 1920-ch rr.: vid pytannja profesijnych standartiv do problemy nacional'noji identyčnosti', *Problemy istoriji Ukrajiny: fakty, sudžennja, pošuky: Mižvidomčyj zbirnyk naukovych prac'*, 23 (2015), 228–47.
44 Horbyk, 'Ideologies of the Self', pp. 97–98.
45 Chvyl'ovyj, 'Ukrajina čy Malorosija?', p. 752.
46 *Dokumenty ukrajins'koho komunizmu*, ed. by Ivan Majstrenko (N'ju-Jork: Proloh, 1962).
47 Halyna Herasymova, 'Poltava Petro', in *EIU*, VIII (2011), pp. 361–62.
48 Petro Fedun-'Poltava', 'Kolonial'na hospodars'ka polityka bil'šovyc'kych imperialistiv v Ukrajini', in *Petro Fedun-'Poltava', Koncepcija Samostijnoji Ukrajiny*, ed. by Mychajlo Romanjuk, 2 vols (L'viv, 2008), I, pp. 43–98.
49 Ibid., p. 70.
50 Ibid., p. 97.

National Communists.[51] In this article, he further substantiated the idea that the Ukrainian people had no influence on the formation of their economic life. Fedun showed that the Bolsheviks were consistent ideological followers of the Russian policy of imperialism. Moreover, it was the Bolsheviks who invented a more sophisticated system for the exploitation of Ukrainian lands – the so-called Stalinist collective farms. As examples of signs of the Kremlin's colonial policy, Fedun mentioned economic zoning, according to which "certain economic areas of the USSR are forced to follow certain production directives that are most profitable from the point of view of all-Union planning". As a result, agricultural production quotas of wheat and beets, as well as extensive methods of farming, were artificially imposed, making the Ukrainian economy uncompetitive on the world market.[52] Petro Fedun emphasized that the main industrial centres were concentrated in Russia, while Ukraine was transformed into a raw materials appendage that was facilitated by the development of a railway network connecting the centre with the national outskirts.[53] Leaning on the criteria of imperialism established by the 'Stalinist authors', Fedun exposed the colonial nature of the Kremlin's economic policy towards Ukraine and defined the Stalinist USSR as a new type of empire.[54]

The emergence of analytical studies of this kind among the journalistic writings of the Ukrainian liberation movement was the outcome of the collision between nationalists and the Soviet reality. As a result, the OUN started transitioning into a democratic platform, which was approved by the decisions of the Third Extraordinary Grand Assembly of the OUN(B) in August 1943. In terms of rhetoric, the decisions of the OUN(B) Assembly had an anti-colonial orientation. The rejection of the ethnic organizing principle of Ukraine in favour of the territorial one, the involvement of representatives of all ethnicities residing in the USSR in the struggle against Moscow's imperialism, and the guaranteed rights of national minorities – all these factors reflect the shift in mentality that took place in the OUN's ideology during World War II.[55]

The decisions of the Third Extraordinary Grand Assembly of the OUN(B) had far-reaching consequences for the organization itself. The democratic course was actively supported during the emigration that occurred after the end of World War II. Stepan Bandera and Yaroslav Stets'ko's attempt to withdraw the decision of the Third Assembly and

51 Prymačenko, 'Ukrajins'ka literaturna dyskusija'.
52 Fedun-'Poltava', 'Kolonial'na hospodars'ka polityka bil'šovyc'kych imperialistiv v Ukrajini', p. 66.
53 Ibid., pp. 43–98.
54 Ibid., p. 71.
55 Velykyj zbir Oun, 'Materialy III Nadzvyčajnoho Velykoho Zboru Orhanizaciji Ukrajins'kych Nacionalistiv (S. Bandery)', in *Ukrajins'ka suspil'no-polityčna dumka v 20 stolitti. Dokumenty i materialy*, ed. by Taras Hunčak, and Roman Sol'čanyk, 3 vols (N'ju-Jork, 1983), III, pp. 57–73 (pp. 63–64).

return the movement to its pre-war positions of ethnic nationalism and chiefdom led to a split within the organization. In 1954, a group of *dviikari* (joint leaders, Lev Rebet and Zenon Matla) seceded from the OUN(B), creating an organization OUN(Abroad) in 1956.[56] They united around the Ukrainian publishing house *Prologue* in the United States, which in 1962 published a collection of *Documents of Ukrainian Communism* (as part of the "Social-Political Thinking" series). This collection included already classic works of Ukrainian National Communism: excerpts from Vasyl' Shakhrai and Serhii Mazlakh's brochure *Concerning the Moment*, Mykola Khvylovyi's pamphlets, Mykhailo Volobuiev's article, and speeches by Mykola Skrypnyk, the People's Commissar of Education of the Ukrainian SSR.[57] The collection's editor was a Ukrainian national communist and prisoner of Soviet concentration camps Ivan Maistrenko, who lived in Germany in the aftermath of World War II, taking an active part in the public and political life of the Ukrainian diaspora.[58]

The shift toward the left within the right-wing Ukrainian movement was due to the presence of a powerful social-democratic intellectual tradition within Ukrainian political thinking.[59] In particular, when analysing twentieth-century Ukrainian political thinking, Ukrainian historian Ivan Lysiak-Rudnyts'kyi proposed a four-fold structure in which democratic and totalitarian traditions are represented by two directions on the left and right political spectrums. He classified populism and conservatism as parts of the democratic tradition, while communism and nationalism came from the totalitarian one.[60] Lysiak-Rudnyts'kyi emphasized that Stalin destroyed Ukrainian National Communism, but World War II gave it a second chance, which materialized in the generation of the Ukrainian *shestydesiatnyky* (The Sixtiers), who exposed the defects of Russian imperialism from the positions of Marxist criticism.[61] Due to official restrictions, the dissident movement of the 1960s in the USSR took distinctly cultural forms.[62]

56 Jana Prymačenko, 'Pivničnoamerykans'ka istoriohrafija pro dijal'nist' nacionalistyčnoho pidpillja v umovach nimec'koji okupaciji URSR', *Ukrajins'kyj istoryčnyj žurnal*, 6 (2009), pp. 25–32.
57 *Dokumenty ukrajins'koho komunizmu*.
58 Oleksandr Jurenko, 'Majstrenko Ivan', in *EIU*, VI (2009), p. 437.
59 Ivan Lysjak-Rudnyc'kyj, 'Nacionalizm', in *I. Lysjak-Rudnyc'kyj Istoryčni ese*, ed. by Jaroslav Hrycak, 2 vols (Kyjiv: Osnovy, 1994), II, pp. 249–59.
60 Ivan Lysjak-Rudnyc'kyj, 'Naprjamy ukrajins'koji polityčnoji dumky', in *I. Lysjak-Rudnyc'kyj Istoryčni ese*, II, pp. 59–88 (p. 66).
61 Ibid., pp. 59–88.
62 Ibid., p. 86.

After Mykola Khvylovyi, the second person to raise the problem of cultural colonialism was the Ukrainian writer-*shestydesiatnyk* Ivan Dziuba.[63] In his work *Internationalism or Russification?*, written in September to December 1965, Dziuba exposed the misconceptions of the Soviet national policy that aimed to destroy the Ukrainian language and culture. His work received wide publicity in the West, which led to the author's persecution and cost him a career in the USSR.[64] Dziuba's contribution to the subject of colonialism was duly appreciated only after Ukraine's independence.

As analysis of twentieth-century Ukrainian political thinking demonstrates, the intellectual tradition of using the terms 'colony' and 'colonialism' to describe the co-dependence between the centre and the periphery took shape within the framework of Marxist criticism in Ukraine. Ukrainian intellectuals traced a special type of this dependency, which Mykhailo Volobuiev defined as a "colony of a European type". It should be noted that, at the present stage, the subject of the colonization of cultural discourse receives the majority of the attention, which can be explained by the dominance of the populist approach within Ukrainian historiography in the era of Independence. Nevertheless, the subject of colonial relations within the political and economic fields is starting to attract increased attention from researchers.

DISCUSSIONS ON THE COLONIAL STATUS OF UKRAINE WITHIN THE USSR IN MODERN UKRAINIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

In his *opus magnum*, the three-volume monograph *The Red Challenge*, Stanislav Kulchyts'ky reflects on the fundamental question: was communism in Ukraine a product of external intervention, or was it an organic manifestation of Ukrainian reality? After all, the answer to this question hinges on the assessment and interpretation of the Soviet period of Ukrainian history. Kulchyts'ky believes that the virus of communism was masterfully implanted

63 Ivan Dziuba (1931–2022): Ukrainian literary critic, writer, public and political figure. He was a member of the Writers' Union of Ukraine (1959–1972; 1980–2022), a full member of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (1992–2022), and a Hero of Ukraine (2001). Dziuba was persecuted for his views. In 1972, he was arrested and sentenced to five years in prison for 'anti-Soviet activities', then released a year and a half later and rehabilitated in 1991. Dziuba actively participated in the dissident movement and was one of the founders of the People's Movement in Ukraine (*Rukh*). In 1992–1994, he served as the Minister of Culture of Ukraine. A literary critic who has been widely published since 1952, he defended the right of Ukrainian literature for freedom of thought and its own aesthetic quest. Dziuba authored numerous *samvydav* materials (uncensored underground publications), specifically his work *Internationalism or Russification?* (1965), which analyzes the mechanism of forced Russification among the various ethnicities of the USSR, primarily the Ukrainian one. This process was carried out under the hypocritical slogan of "internationalism". Ivan Dziuba passed away in Kyiv on 22 February 2022. See: Mykola Železnjak, 'Dzjuba Ivan Mychaljlovyč', in *EIU*, II (2004), pp. 378–79.

64 Ivan Dzjuba, *Internacionalizm čy rusyfikacija?* (Kyjiv, 1998).

by Vladimir Lenin into the existing social confrontation in Ukraine, which explicitly manifested itself in the idea of 'black redistribution'.[65]

This prominent scholar of modern Ukrainian history observed that communism in Ukraine was both a consequence of the Russian conquest and a product of purely domestic origin. But, as we all know, the devil is in the details. So, what was the ratio of the external to the internal? Kulchyts'kyi is sure that communism would not have been installed in Ukraine had it not been for the Russian armed intervention:

> The depth of the social and economic transformations associated with it [communism] caused intense social resistance, the suppression of which could be accomplished only with the help of Vladimir Lenin's dictatorship, which was quite unique in terms of its means. When this dictatorship in Ukraine took on the shape of the second Soviet republic, it failed to address the counteracting reaction of the freedom-loving and economically strong Ukrainian peasantry. As soon as the class confrontation was freed from the virus of communism, the Ukrainian village destroyed Soviet power. However, with the exception of a small area in the northwest, where the Directorate [of the Ukrainian National Republic] was fading, Ukraine became the stage for the Russian civil war. Ukraine was stuck between the armies of Leon Trotsky and Anton Denikin. The victory of the Red Army condemned the Ukrainian people to a common destiny with the Russians.[66]

Another Ukrainian researcher, Andrii Zdorov, who adheres to Marxism and is actively working to preserve the heritage of Ukrainian National Communism and the development of communist ideas, defines the social order that existed in the USSR as state capitalism. Due to the objective absence of the conditions necessary for a socialist revolution, a year after the October coup (which the author interprets as a step toward the formation of a proletariat dictatorship), in the fall of 1918 the revolution morphed into the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party, and later of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Similarly to Stanislav Kulchyts'kyi, Andrii Zdorov does not agree with the statement that Bolshevism is a purely Russian phenomenon brought to Ukraine with Russian bayonets. Instead, Zdorov proposes considering the situation in Ukraine not from the traditional point of view of

65 Stanislav Kul'čyc'kyj, *Červonyj vyklyk. Istorija komunizmu v Ukrajini vid joho narodžennja do zahybeli*, 3 vols (Kyjiv: Tempora, 2013), I, pp. 302–03.
66 Ibid., p. 304.

Stalinist-Brezhnev historiography about the 'Great October Socialist Revolution'; instead, the term 'Ukrainian October', proposed in the early 1920s by Mykola Skrypnyk, should be used. Moreover, he narrows the scope of study of the 'Ukrainian October' to just three months: from November of 1917 to 18 February 1918, when, as a result of the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk by the Ukrainian Central *Rada*, German and Austro-Hungarian troops entered the territory of Ukraine. Zdorov defines this period – in a spirit of Marxist criticism – as an intervention.[67]

In Ukrainian historiography, there is still no consensus as to whether it is correct to interpret this period of Ukrainian history as a German occupation. After all, we are talking here about a contractual relationship that, nevertheless, is quite difficult to define from a legal standpoint. Essentially, a relationship resembling a protectorate was established between the Ukrainian National Republic (UNR) on the one hand, and Germany and Austria-Hungary on the other.[68] But, due to the lack of a real power hierarchy in Ukraine, this relationship *de facto* turned into an occupation. Still, as Zdorov rightly observes, the German army was not able to radically change social processes in Ukraine.[69] Consequently, he believes that Bolshevism has Ukrainian roots. This, in fact, is evidenced by the ideological origin of Shakhrai – "the father of Ukrainian national communism" – who came from the Bolshevik Party.

Andrii Zdorov acknowledges that the activities of KP(b)U[70] (established in July 1918, a branch of the Russian RKP(b), later called VKP(b)[71] and then KPSS[72]) do not leave much space for ambivalent interpretations. It was Vasyl' Shakhrai who was the first to put forward the idea of creating an independent Ukrainian Communist Party (UKP) – an idea which came to fruition after his death in January 1920. He became the founder of the movement of Ukrainian 'national communists'.[73]

Currently, the scope of Marxist criticism still remains rather small within Ukrainian historical research, which is related to the fact that social-democratic ideas were discredited in the Soviet period. But the intellectual ideas of Ukrainian communism are slowly coming back to Ukrainian public discourse. In 2017, Ukrainian Marxists Andrii Zdorov and Artem Klymenko reprinted *Revolution in Ukraine*, a classic work by Vasyl' Shakhrai.

67 Andrij Zdorov, *Ukrajins'kyj žovten'. Bil'šovyc'ka revoljucija v Ukrajini: social'no-polityčnyj aspekt (lystopad 1917 – ljutyj 1918 rr.)* (Odesa: Astroprynt, 2007), p. 3.
68 Oleksij Lupandin, 'Avstro-nimec'kych vijs'k kontrol' 1918', in *EIU*, I (2003), p. 19.
69 Zdorov, *Ukrajins'kyj žovten'*, p. 4.
70 KP(b)U – Komunistyčna partija (bil'šovykiv) Ukrajiny – Communist Party (of Bolshevik) of Ukraine.
71 Vsesojuznaja kommunističeskaja partija (bol'ševikov) – All-Union Communist party (of Bolshevik), the party of Russian Bolshevik that was a governing party of the Soviet Union. Until 1925 it was called RKP(b) – Rossijskaja kommunističeskaja partija (bol'ševikov) – Russian Communist party (of Bolshevik).
72 KPSS – Kommunističeskaja partija Sovetskogo Sojuza – Communist Party of the Soviet Union is official name of the governing party of the USSR since 1952.
73 Andrej Zdorov, 'Figura umolčanija', in *Revoljucija na Ukraine*, pp. 3–5.

The editors' decision to reprint the Russian-language version of Shakhrai's work was informed by the fact that, unlike *Concerning the Moment* (this author's first classic work), *Revolution* had not previously been republished, therefore this reprint became a rare edition. Also, the editors wanted to provide an opportunity for the Russian-speaking audience to familiarize itself with the book since the Russian factor dominates both academic and public discourse, where Russia is primary considered the 'Other'.

The editors sought to communicate Shakhrai's belief system to a wide audience. According to this system, no universal method is available to solve the national question. In each individual case, one has to act according to the context. In addition, as early as 1919, Shakhrai made an attempt to explain to Russian readers why Ukrainian independence had to be real, not imaginary.[74]

Andrii Zdorov and Artem Klymenko admit that the majority of the gains of the "Great Revolution of 1917–1921" were liquidated by the "Stalinist state-capitalist counter-revolution,"[75] and the newly formed exploitative class of the state bourgeoisie mercilessly exterminated those who remained adamant adherents of communism until the very end. However, here is what the editors want the modern Ukrainian reader to pay attention to:

> The genuine 'manifesto of Ukrainian communism', that is the famous book Concerning the Moment, was created by the Bolsheviks, even though they were 'black sheep' within the party ranks, outright 'heretics' who were expelled for their 'counter-revolutionary', almost 'Petliura-inspired' views. In itself, this is undoubtedly an interesting fact. It clearly points to the complex ideological evolution that prevented the left wing of Ukrainian socialist parties, which in March 1917 formed the Central Rada, from rapidly morphing into communist organizations; in other words, they were prevented from keeping pace with the general dynamics of radicalization of the revolutionary process. Later, the leading Ukrainian theorist of ukapism [from UKP, Ukrainian Communist Party],

74 Ibid.
75 Artem Klymenko, 'Vyokremlennja iz zahal'nosocialistyčnoho ruchu ta borot'ba ukrajins'kych komunistyčnych partij pid čas velykoji revoljuciji 1917–1921 rokiv. Istoryko-populjarnyj narys', in *Revoljucija na Ukraine*, p. 137.

> Andrii Richyts'kyi [pseudonym of Anatolii Pisots'kyi],[76] explained this phenomenon in terms of the occupation policy of the Russian Communist party, which maintained the unity of the future ukapists with that part of domestic social democracy that defended the ideal of the parliamentary superclass democracy and denied the slogan "all power to the Soviets!" Concurrently, as Richyts'kyi noted, they had "utopian hopes" of winning over all the USDRP [Ukrainian Social-Democratic Worker's Party] with the help of Soviet ideology.[77]

A number of questions arise from an academic perspective. The first and fundamental one concerns terminology, which, as we know, is not disputed but negotiated. Ukrainian historian Hennadii Yefimenko observes, on the one hand, the inconsistency between the connotations of terms used in the USSR, and, on the other hand, the genuine meaning of these terms. The ideologization of terminology leads to a focus on its emotional effect, not its content. Yefimenko points out the inadequacy of the term 'colony' as a way of assessing Ukrainian-Russian relations. This term's great popularity among researchers of the Ukrainian diaspora – as well as within post-Soviet historiography, where only this term's negative connotation is used – narrows down the analytical framework of this approach.

Hennadii Yefimenko emphasizes that, firstly, the Kremlin did not consider Ukraine its colony precisely because it [the Kremlin] rejected the idea of Ukraine as something separate. For most Kremlin rulers, Ukraine was just the 'south of Russia'. This stems from Yefimenko's view that the USSR was an ethnocratic,[78] not a colonial, empire. Following Stanislav Kulchyts'kyi, Yefimenko believes that the relations that developed between the centre and the periphery in the USSR should not be considered

76 Andrii Richyts'kyi (real name Anatolii Pisots'kyi; 1893–1934): political and public leader, economist, journalist, and literary critic. One of the ideologists and authors of the party program reorganized from the USDRP (the Independents) faction of the Ukrainian Communist party; a member of CK UKP. In 1923–1924, Richnyts'kyi headed the statistical department of the Ukrainian Bank. After the resolution of the Comintern to dissolve the UKP (24 December 1924), he joined the KPbU together with other members of CK UKP. From 1925, he worked as the Head of the socio-economic literature department of the State Publishing House of Ukraine (DVU); in 1928–1930, he was the Chairman of the Board of DVU. Concurrently, he was a professor at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, a member of the Department of National Issues of the All-Ukrainian Association of Marxist-Leninist Research Institutes, and a member of the Editorial Board of *Bilshovyk Ukrainy*. On 9 August 1933, the secretariat of CK KPbU relieved Rechyts'kyi of all his posts. On 8 September 1933, he was arrested by the State Political Office of the Ukrainian SSR on charges of belonging to the 'Ukrainian Military Organization' and carrying out 'active provocative counter-revolutionary work aimed at overthrowing the Soviet power in Ukraine.' Anrdrii Richyts'kyi was shot on 25 April 1934, according to the decision of the visiting Extraordinary Session of the Supreme Court of the Ukrainian SSR. See: Oleksandr Rubl'ov, 'Andrij Ričyc'kyj', in *EIU*, IX (2012), pp. 238–40.

77 Klymenko, 'Vyokremlennja iz zahal'nosocialistyčnoho ruchu', p. 139.

78 Ethnocratic state: a term used by Hennadij Jefimenko to explain the functioning of a Soviet state where there existed a certain hierarchy of nationalities. This term is related to the concept of 'politicization of ethnicity', which Stanislav Kulchyts'kyi commonly uses to explain how the Bolsheviks solved the national question in the USSR. According to this approach, the Russian ethnos in the USSR had state-building status. It was followed by the 'titular nations' of the national republics, then by the national minorities, which formed autonomous republics and territories.

within the framework of the 'metropolis–colony' colonial dichotomy, but rather at the level of a centre of power and a *subordinate centre*.[79]

In Ukrainian historiography, there is still a large disparity among studies devoted to "nationalist inclinations" within the ranks of KPbU. On the one hand, the issues of *Khvylovism* as a certain anti-colonial current within the environment of Ukrainian intelligentsia, as well as *Shumskism* as a corresponding current on the part of Ukrainian communists who held important posts in the Committee of People's Commissars of the Ukrainian SSR, have been covered quite well. On the other hand, research on the current of *volobuievshchyna* did not advance beyond the analysis of the above-mentioned article by Mykhailo Volobuyev (published in *Bilshovyk Ukrainy* in 1928).

Hennadii Yefimenko insists that the 25-year-old Volobuiev only summarized the achievements of his colleagues, namely economists from the State Planning Commission. In addition, he rejects the view that Volobuiev's 'Toward the Issue of the Ukrainian Economy' article could be a provocation by the Soviet intelligence services. Actually, Yefimenko focuses on the reasons behind setting up an artificial public discussion on the economic relations between the Ukrainian SSR and the centre.[80]

Yefimenko argues that since Volobuiev's article resonated with the moods of the Ukrainian leadership, the hypothesis that it was published in *Bilshovyk Ukrainy* as a provocation and a pretext to begin fighting another 'deviation'" such as *Shumskism* and *Khvylovism*, is not accurate. The NarKom of Education, Mykola Skrypnyk, used this article to initiate a discussion about the fallacy of Moscow's economic policy towards Ukraine. Volobuiev himself was not a person of the necessary level of magnitude; instead, it was this article that made him notoriously famous and later cost him his freedom. According to Yefimenko, the only logical explanation for the appearance of Volobuiev's article is the following,

> The Ukrainian leadership, and in particular M[ykola] Skrypnyk, who placed this article in a leading Ukrainian journal, wanted to use volobuievshchyna in the fight against the centre-oriented aspirations of Moscow, as well as increase funding for Ukraine during the first five-year plan. In order to divert the strike from Moscow away from the leadership of Ukraine, as well as for the greater resonance of his article, M[ykhailo] Volobuiev used a number of emotional epithets to show Moscow in a bad light

79 Hennadij Jefimenko, 'Bil'šovyc'kyj centr i Radjans'ka Ukrajina: ekonomični aspekty nacional'noji polityky Kremlja u 1917–1925 rr.', *Ukrajins'kyj istoryčnyj žurnal*, 2 (2009), 96–109 (pp. 102–03).

80 Hennadij Jefimenko, 'Pro pryčyny pojavy' volobujevščyny ', Problemy *istoriji Ukrajiny: fakty, sudžennja, pošuky*, 14 (2005), 94–136 (pp. 94–96).

> as a colonial profiteer. The hope was that such an article would finally hit a nerve with the Kremlin, because all the other cries of Ukrainian economists and government officials had been left unanswered. Ukrainians, having learned from the example of fighting Shumskism by forcing the policy of Ukrainianization, tried to use the fight against volobuievshchyna to get the Kremlin to implement its declarations in the field of economic relations between the Ukrainian SSR and the USSR. One cannot characterize this attempt as particularly successful... However, this manoeuvre of the Ukrainian government was not unsuccessful either. For a while, the Ukrainian leadership had a small horror story at its disposal – see, our dear Moscow comrades, the failure to fulfil your own promises contributes to the proliferation of similar problems.[81]

Hennadii Yefimenko emphasizes that the level of investment in Ukrainian industry during the first five-year plan increased significantly, both in absolute terms and percentage-wise. Before 1928, investments were at 18.6% of the allotted budget, but they increased by 20.6% in the first five-year plan, 18.5% during the second five-year plan, and 14.9% in the three and a half years of the third (uncompleted) plan.[82]

But the question of how much these indicators can be attributed to the success of the Ukrainian leadership remains open. Investing in the Ukrainian SSR, where one of the largest coal basins was located, plus Ukraine's proximity to the profitable European market, was in the strategic interests of the Kremlin. As Yefimenko rightly observed, the Kremlin considered Ukraine just 'southern Russia', and even the emergence of the Ukrainian SSR did not fundamentally change this attitude.

A supporter of the colonial approach, Canadian historian Stephen Velychenko also demonstrates the vulnerable points of contemporary Ukrainian discussions. In his 2009 polemics with Ukrainian researchers regarding the colonial status of the UkrSSR, Velychenko points to four main problems: 1. the lack of discussion on Ukrainian-Russian economic relations from the perspective of Bolshevik theory of colonialism and imperialism; 2. the absence of thorough studies analysing whether Russia really needed Ukraine from standpoint of economics, and whether there was the opposite need for Russia in Ukraine; 3. the role of "imperial-chauvinistic" prejudices among lower-ranking Russian Bolsheviks and their supporters in the implementation of imperialist policy towards Ukraine under the banner of

81 Jefimenko, 'Pro pryčyny pojavy' volobujevščyny', p. 131.
82 Ibid., p. 130.

Marxism; 4. the weakness of the Ukrainian National Communists' opinion is that it deems it impossible to implement a Ukrainian socialist state project that is separate from Russia.[83] Velychenko criticizes Yefimenko for abandoning the colonial approach solely on the basis of the absence of clear signs of colonial dependence.

Let's note that Yefimenko's analysis is based on three purely formal factors: 1. locals could have a successful career in the imperial centre; 2. Russia did nothing positive for Ukraine, unlike other parent states such as France and Great Britain did for their colonies; 3. the main market for Ukraine's produce was not Russia. Velychenko has a point when he considers these arguments weak. Similarly to David Chioni Moore, he observes that a number of biases that have gripped Western academia make it problematic to use the term 'colony' in regards to Ukraine,

> The concept of colonialism is currently used almost exclusively in relation to the overseas dominions of the Western European countries; this type of relationship, however, does not run the entire gamut of dependency/subordination relations in history. Therefore, there is no reason to limit this concept to one type of dependency. The British rule in Ireland, French rule in Algeria, and Japanese rule in Korea, as well as Russian rule in Ukraine also differ from the now dominant definition of 'colonialism'. Does this mean that these countries cannot be called 'colonies'? Likewise, the fact that there existed no private ownership of means of production in the Soviet-type countries does not indicate that "colonialism" was impossible there because of the absence of capitalism, which some consider a prerequisite for colonialism.[84]

It is worth adding that Stephen Velychenko notes that "the community of Russian urban settlers-colonists, from which almost all Ukrainian Bolsheviks originate, did not give rise to Creole-separatist nationalism, although Artem could have become the Ukrainian Creole-Russian double of Simon Bolívar in the fleeting Donetsk-Kryvyi Rih republic".[85] In any case, like most researchers, Velychenko believes that the local Bolsheviks could not have held power in Ukraine by themselves without the help of the Red Army.

83 Stepan Velyčenko, 'Čy bula Ukrajina rosijs'koju kolonijeju? Dejaki zauvažennja ščodo ponjattja kolonializm', *Ukrajina Moderna*, 14 (2009), 266–80 (pp. 266–72).
84 Ibid., p. 279.
85 Stepan Velyčenko, *Imperializm i nacionalizm po-červonomu: ukrajins'ka marksysts'ka krytyka rosijs'koho komunistyčnoho panuvannja v Ukrajini (1918–1925)* (L'viv, 2017), p. 282.

In analysing the heritage of Ukrainian Marxists, Velychenko compares their ideas with those of Joseph Schumpeter. Both pay great importance not only to the economic exploitation but also to the imperialist prejudices that were the driving force behind Russian colonialism. They perceived cultural and ideological imperialism and colonialism as no better than economic colonialism.[86]

Velychenko emphasizes the need to make use of the works of Ukrainian national communists in the analysis of Ukrainian-Russian relations. It was them who proposed stepping beyond the binary category of oppressor–oppressed and involving a third group: Russified and Russian urban settlers-colonists who stood between the Ukrainians and the imperial metropolis.[87] After all, cultural and linguistic imperialism, as well as the assimilation generated by it, were no less evil than 'traditional' economic imperialism.[88]

It is too early to put an end to the debate regarding the anti-colonial legacy of Ukrainian National Communism. It seems that only such a discussion can provide an adequate toolkit for the study of Ukraine as a non-classical colony of the 'European type'.

POSTCOLONIAL THEORIES IN MODERN UKRAINIAN POLITICAL AND SOCIAL DISCOURSE

Reflecting on the post-communist transformation in Ukraine on the eve of the Revolution of Dignity, Mykola Riabchuk observed that "Ukrainian national identity in Ukraine is now opposed not by the Russian imperial identity, and even more so, not by the Russian national identity, but by a specific variety of a local, post-imperial identity. Due to the lack of a better term, this post-imperial identity can be described as 'Little Russian' or 'Creole'.[89] For Riabchuk, the main issue is the fact that the political emancipation of the 'Creole' identity, which coincided with the disintegration of the USSR, turned out to be the primary process that did not manage to solidify in cultural and psychological terms and remained dependent on the no longer existing – at least *de jure* – Soviet empire. At the same time, Riabchuk noted that the 'Creole' identity remained a 'promising' project that could be actualized in various ways.[90] The events that took place in

86 Ibid., p. 287.
87 Ibid., p. 288.
88 Ibid., pp. 292–93.
89 Mykola Rjabčuk, 'Sjak-tak, abyjak': dvadcjat' rokiv postkomunistyčnoji transformaciji v Ukrajini', in *Ukrajina. procesy nacijetvorennja*, ed. by Andreas Kappeler (Kyjiv: K.I.S, 2011), p. 386.
90 Ibid., p. 387.

the spring of 2014 confirmed that his opinion was fair. These events can be considered a new point of reference in the history of independent Ukraine.

In their analysis of the nature of the *Euromaidan* protest, researchers distinguish its anti-colonial and national liberation component. Riabchuk considers the revolution an attempt by Ukrainians to resolve the issue of "emancipation from the 'Russian world'" on the level of culture and mentality, which would finally make it possible to permanently overcome Ukraine's neo-colonial status.[91] This opinion is supported by the political scientist Anton Shekhovtsov. He draws analogies between Ukraine and post-war Austria, which, similarly to Ukraine, *de facto* continued to be occupied, while de jure it had the status of an independent state. However, in the case of Ukraine the 'occupation' was not external but internal. For the old Soviet administrative elites, independent Ukraine created more favourable conditions for the implementation of their business interests. Latent 'occupation' and the immaturity of Ukrainian society led to a largely conflict-free existence for more than 20 years. The relative peace of Ukrainian life was disturbed by the appearance of a new generation in the political arena, as well as the understanding that, under the then-current conditions, these young people had no prospects for a decent life in their own country. Shekhovtsov distinguishes between at least four components of the Revolution of Dignity: 1. democratic (directed against authoritarianism, the despotism of the police and officials); 2. anti-colonial (against the imperialist tendencies of Russia and the *sovok*[92] mentality); 3. social (for social justice and against corruption); 4. liberal (for the European civilizational choice).[93]

German historian Leonid Luks and American researcher Marci Shore also draw historical parallels that refer us to the classic example of Poland's national liberation struggle. According to their comparative analysis, independent Ukraine and communist Poland emerged as Russian/Soviet 'external colonies'. These researchers see similarities between the Polish *Solidarity* and the *Euromaidan* movements primarily in terms of the integrative idea of national resistance against the occupier, which made the unification of various political groups possible. Marci Shore calls the Ukrainian *Euromaidan* an enhanced form of civil society. In her opinion, the ethnic, religious, linguistic, socioeconomic, generational, and ideological diversity of *Maidan* resembles *Solidarity*.[94] This Polish resistance movement also in-

91 Mykola Rjabčuk, 'Ukrajina maje pokazaty, ščo vona zdatna plysty', *Historians.in.ua*, 24 April 2014 <https://www.historians.in.ua/index.php/en/intervyu/1136-mykola-riabchuk-ukraina-maie-pokazaty-shcho-vona-zdatna-plysty> [accessed 10 October 2019].

92 This colloquialism is used to show disdain for everyday Soviet practices or as a synonym for everything Soviet.

93 Anton Šechovcov, 'Ukrainskaja revoljucija – evropejskaja i nacional'naja', *Forum novejšej vostočnoevropejskoj istorii i kul'tury*, 2 (2013), 27–30.

94 Marsi Šor, 'Solidarnist' pryholomšenych: čomu Pol'ščа rozumije Ukrajinu', *Historians.in.ua*, 10 May 2014 <https://www.historians.in.ua/index.php/en/istoriya-i-pamyat-vazhki-pitannya/1154-marsi-shor-solidarnist-pryholomshenykh-chomu-polshcha-rozumiie-ukrainu> [accessed 10 October 2019].

cluded a wide range of participants, from the right of the spectrum to left, who in other circumstances would hardly end up in one camp.[95]

However, the change in the political situation after the Revolution of Dignity of 2013–2014 unexpectedly actualized the anti-colonial discourse from the era of the Ukrainian national liberation struggle of 1917–1921. The similarity between the situations in 1918 and 2014, as many experts remarked, was striking. Independent Ukraine, which was never able to incorporate the Soviet experience at the level of symbolic capital, returned to the implementation of the modern project of Ukrainian statehood, which took place in the context of the dissolution of continental empires after World War I. In fact, this project was put on hold as a result of the compromise between the Ukrainian Social Democrats and the Bolsheviks, and because of Stalinist purges.

Ola Hnatiuk rightly observed in her book *Farewell to the Empire: Ukrainian Discussions about Identity* that after Ukraine became independent, the question "Europe or '*Prosvita*'[96]" – originally raised by a spokesman of the Ukrainian anti-colonial stance, Mykola Khvylovyi – returned to the Ukrainian discourse: "Modernizers have re-entered the exhausting clinch with traditionalists".[97] Discussions around the Ukrainian identity rose to a new level during the Revolution of Dignity, which accelerated the formation of the Ukrainian political nation. These events took place in the context of Russian aggression, which was interpreted by a number of political scientists as Ukraine's national liberation war against the imperial aspirations of the Kremlin.[98] In this situation, the anti-colonial discourse of *Euromaidan* turned into the mainstream of public and academic history.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the legacy of Ukrainian National Communism has been discussed with renewed vigour. In 2017, Ukrainian Marxists Andrii Zdorov and Artem Klymenko, who initiated the reprint of Vasyl' Shakhrai's classical work *Revolution in Ukraine*, indignantly stated in the preface to this publication that someone like Shakhrai "is of no interest to either the former Head of the Institute of National Remembrance, Valerii Soldatenko, or to its current Director, Volodymyr V'iatrovych".[99] While the position of V'iatrovych, according to Zdorov and Klymenko, was consistent and understandable, Soldatenko's lack of interest raised questions. After all,

95 This analysis was published in one of my articles. See: Jana Prymačenko, 'Antykolonial'nyj dyskurs ONU/UPA v sučasnomu konteksti borot'by za jevropejs'ku identyčnist'', *Ukrajins'kyj istoryčnyj zbirnyk*, 17 (2014), 328–38.

96 Prosvita – Ukrainian public organization for cultural and educational enlightenment, founded in Lviv in 1868. Prosvita promoted Ukrainian culture, resisting the colonial policy of the empires. Khvylovoy used this word with a negative connotation as a synonym for local vernacular culture. He opposed the approach that suggested following Ukrainian popular culture. Instead, Khvylovyi insisted that Ukrainian culture is a part of European culture, which was why Ukrainian writers had to match the high standard of European literature.

97 Olja Hnatjuk, *Proščannja z imperijeju: ukrajins'ki dyskusiji pro identyčnist'* (Kyjiv: Krytyka, 2006), pp. 190–97.

98 Oleksandr Paschaver, 'Majdan – ce veršyna ukrajins'koji istoriji', *Gazeta.ua*, 10 July 2018 <https://gazeta.ua/articles/opinions-journal/_majdan-ce-vershina-ukrayinskoyi-istoriyi/846847> [accessed 10 October 2019].

99 At the time of publication of the book, Volodymyr Viatrovych held the position of the Head of the Institute of National Economy.

Soldatenko was not only a well-known researcher of the history of Bolshevik organizations in Ukraine, as well as the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–1921, but he was also an earnest communist. Somehow, the editors of the reprint came to the conclusion that Ukrainian National Communism was equally uninteresting to both 'nationalists' and Soviet communists.[100]

Furthermore, according to Zdorov and Klymenko, in the context of the undeclared war between Russia and Ukraine, the very word 'communist' within Ukrainian public opinion became synonymous with 'Russian patriot'/'Russian chauvinist'. This is why the process of decommunization did not provoke resistance within Ukrainian society.

Still, Zdorov and Klymenko are not quite fair in their analysis of the policy of 'decommunization', or in regards to the position of Volodymyr V'iatrovych, the former Director of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance. Firstly, the decommunization package did not impact a number of cultural leaders and scientists of the Soviet era, including national communists Oleksander Shums'kyi, Mykola Khvylovyi, Mykhailo Volobuiev, and Mykola Skrypnyk. Secondly, V'iatrovych adheres to the colonial assessment of the Soviet period in Ukraine, which is presented as an occupation imposed from above. His belief system is based on the intellectual heritage of the World War II Ukrainian liberation movement. A number of OUN publicists have reinterpreted the legacy of Ukrainian National Communism in their works. In fact, as we discussed earlier, some OUN and UPA leaders considered themselves part of the Ukrainian anti-colonial national liberation movement.

Given the political circumstances in which *Euromaidan* and Russian aggression took place, the consolidation of the colonial perspective within the social and political discourse is only natural. However, comprehension of the very phenomenon of the Revolution of Dignity has only just begun. The Russian historian Ilya Gerasimov, who initiated the discussion on the pages of *Ab imperio* journal, referred to *Euromaidan* as the first post-colonial revolution. Not only did it overthrow the tyrant, but also its agenda was determined by the citizens of Ukraine, not by Putin or Yanukovych. In addition, the unification of people during *Euromaidan* happened on the basis of shared values. It is the transcending of one's identity that, for Gerasimov, was one of the key signs of leaving the colonial paradigm behind.[101]

Yaroslav Hrytsak, as well as a number of other researchers, believe that Euromaidan was a breakthrough in world history because it signalled that postmodernism was becoming the past. But will this process create impetus for paradigmatic shifts in the study of the history of Ukraine? According to Hrytsak,

100 Zdorov, 'Figura umolčanija', pp. 4–5.
101 Gerasimov, Ilya, 'Ukraine 2014: The First Postcolonial Revolution. Introduction to the Forum', *Ab imperio*, 3 (2014), 22–44.

this question is a rhetorical one. After all, the main theoretical and methodological discussions about Ukraine are still taking place outside of Ukraine.[102]

Euromaidan has indeed opened up new perspectives for the debate about the place of Soviet heritage in the history of Ukraine. But will this debate be carried out to the fullest? This question remains open. Clearly, at the moment Ukraine is trying to implement its modern project, which contradicts the Western postmodern discourse and generates a number of misunderstandings. On the other hand, *Euromaidan* has put Ukraine at the forefront of global world processes, and this gives a chance for a complete reformatting of historical and socio-political discourse.

UKRAINE AND COLONIALISM: POST-, NEO- OR ANTI-?

Anti- and post-colonial discourse has impressive academic backing in the Ukrainian political thinking of the twentieth century. It can provide the analytical framework for studying the history of Russian-Ukrainian relations.

The process of the nationalization/decolonization of history in this era of globalization, which takes place against the background of a crisis in the international security system that is unprecedented since World War II, at times holds history hostage to the political situation. This process reinforces the responsibility of historians as representatives of academia.

The world is at a crossroads. In the context of the global confrontation between 'modernism' and 'tradition', it is extremely important for Ukraine to find its place within the new world system. The heated debates that we are witnessing, both within academia and in public circles, are meant to put an end to the Ukrainian debate about identity.

The departure from interpreting the common Russian–Ukrainian past in terms of a binary opposition 'metropolis/empire – periphery/colony' allows us to examine empires as a 'context-forming category', within which attention can be focused on the discourse of power and power relations, as well as mutual cultural influences.[103]

The belated process of decolonization, the implementation of the modern Ukrainian project in the context of globalization and the postmodernism that has dominated Western discourse, has led to a number of misunderstandings on the part of the Western world. Ukraine has often appeared as an incomprehensible, problematic, and at times uneducated 'child' in the eyes of the West. The 'crisis of adolescence' was a consequence

[102] Jaroslav Hrycak, 'Dyskusiji pro Jevromadan', *Ukrajina Moderna*, 24 February 2016 <https://uamoderna.com/blogy/yaroslav-griczak/euromaidan-discussions> [accessed 19 September 2019].

[103] Iljaja Gerasimov, and others, 'Mnogoobrazie inakovosti v XX veke', *Ab Imperio*, 1 (2011), 9–14 (p. 10); Stiven Chou, 'Zapad i vse ostalstalnoe', *Ab Imperio*, 1 (2011), 21–52 (p. 24).

of the insurmountable traumas of the totalitarian past and the absence of a state policy of de-Sovietization of Ukrainian society.

It is the 'northern neighbour' that has been and still remains the primary 'Other' for Ukrainians. The book *Ukraine is not Russia* (2003)[104] by the second president of Ukraine, Leonid Kuchma, confirms this statement and reinvigorates Ukrainian discussions about identity. *Euromaidan* and the Russian intervention have contributed to the return of anti-colonial discourse. These events only deepened (post/neo-/anti-)colonial discussions about Central and Eastern Europe in general, and Ukraine in particular.

PS. THE RUSSIAN NEO-COLONIAL WAR IN UKRAINE

As mentioned in the first footnote, this article was written two years prior to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. I have left the text unchanged because the issues raised in the article, as well as the interim conclusions, have not lost their relevance.

The neo-colonial Russian war has stirred up an immense debate within Western academic circles regarding Russian imperialism and the Kremlin's colonial policy. Decolonization is becoming a global trend, and colonial studies of the history of Central and Eastern Europe are reaching a new level. In this context, the proposed analysis and cross-section of Ukrainian political opinion may prove useful for this discussion.

Finally, I would like to recall the opinion of a Canadian historian of Ukrainian background, Andrii Zayarniuk, regarding the current situation in Ukraine:

> While other formerly colonial nations moved from anti-colonial struggles, through neo-colonialism to post-coloniality, independent Ukraine's trajectory seemed to be the opposite: from post-coloniality through Russian neo-colonialism to the anticolonial struggles of national survival.[105]

Obviously, Russia/USSR's policy towards Ukraine has been colonial, but scholars will have to decide on the typology of Russian-Ukrainian dependence relations. The consequences of this imperialist war will be long-lasting and global, because mankind has embarked on another round of decolonization and dissolution of empires.

[104] Leonid Kučma, *Ukrajina – ne Rosija* (Kyjiv, 2004).
[105] Andriy Zayarnyuk, 'Historians as Enablers? Historiography, Imperialism, and the Legitimization of Russian Aggression', *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, 9.2 (2022), 191–212 (p. 209).

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HOW THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR BROKE OUT

– on the backstage of international politics from Jakub Kumoch's perspective

This conversation between Igor Janke and Jakub Kumoch is an important source for research into the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the role of Polish diplomacy in the winter and spring of 2022. After all, it is not often that direct participants in high-level international talks share their memories of key historical moments, along with many important details and observations, less than a year after the events themselves. This is what Jakub Kumoch does – and he does it in a colourful way. A Polish political scientist and diplomat who has served as Poland's ambassador to Switzerland, Turkey and other countries, Kumoch was State Secretary for International Affairs in the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland from 2021 to 2023. During this time, he was in close contact with many governments, including those of Ukraine, the United States, France and Germany. In the form of a long chat between two friends, he shared his memories of this period with Igor Janke, a well-known Polish journalist. This conversation is also extremely interesting because it vividly illustrates the thinking in Polish government circles about the challenges to regional and global security associated with Russia's war against Ukraine and the future of Polish-Ukrainian relations, including the historical dialogue.
This interview was recorded on 19 January 2023. It was broadcast three days later on Janke's *Układ Otwarty* podcast and on this author's YouTube channel.[1] Jakub Kumoch resigned from his government post just one week before the interview, on 12 January 2023. He cited important family reasons.
The original Polish version of this interview is available on the *Układ Otwarty* YouTube channel. We are publishing an English translation of it here. The lively, spontaneous exchange of ideas and the colloquial language of these two friends, as well as some broken thoughts and threads – a feature characteristic of many live conversations – may give some readers the impression of an under-edited conversation. This is a false impression. In accordance with the requirements of the source material, we are publishing the interview in its entirety, without any cutting or editing, and with editorial insertions in only a few places to make the flow of thought more understandable.

Łukasz Adamski

1 'Strategia dla Polski: silny blok. Szczery wywiad po opuszczeniu Kancelarii Prezydenta – Jakub Kumoch', "*Układ Otwarty* – Igor Janke", YouTube channel, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BTQ_7H_TZ_0s (4 February 2023).

Igor Janke: What should Poland's great strategic goal be today? What is the result of the situation we are in today? This is what we are talking about today on *Układ Otwarty*. I would like to thank all those who support my work. I would like to thank all the patrons, as it is thanks to you that this programme can exist; it is thanks to you that I can hold these talks. I would like to invite you to support *Układ Otwarty* on my profile on Patronite.pl. And now I invite you to the conversation.

Jakub Kumoch, until recently Secretary of State and Head of the International Policy Bureau of the President of the Republic of Poland, welcome.

Jakub Kumoch: Hi.

Igor Janke: We have known each other for more than 20 years probably because we used to work together at PAP.[2]

Jakub Kumoch: You once sent me to Moscow as a correspondent,[3] so that's how you created the man of the East a little bit.

Igor Janke: Well, no, but Jakub Kumoch has become president. He hasn't become president yet, but...

Jakub Kumoch: I have not and will not become president.

Igor Janke: We don't know that. He became a correspondent for the Polish Press Agency (PAP) many years ago in Moscow, and that's how we met. He won a competition that we organized there at PAP at the time. Okay. Then you worked in many places: you were an expert then a diplomat in several places. Now, you supported the president in such a key area of his competence. What do you think today? You can detach yourself because you are not a civil servant at the moment. You remained in the [diplomatic] service, but now you can speak more freely. What should our strategic goal for Poland be? An ambitious but realistic one for the next five or ten years? Where should we be?

Jakub Kumoch: Give me a moment's break from my former role to speak here more as an observer than as a participant in these processes. I think that... I don't even so much think that, as it seems obvious to me that our neighbourhood in the East will be shaped in the coming years. Well, the main objective is to shape it in such a way that Poland will not be physically

2 Polish Press Agency.
3 Jakub Kumoch was PAP correspondent in Moscow in the years 1999–2004; Igor Janke was the Editor-in-Chief of PAP in the years 1998–2003.

threatened. What am I talking about here? Well, I am talking above all about the war in Ukraine, on which Poland has a specific position – a certain attitude. Poland wants Ukraine to win; it wants Russian forces to be ousted from Ukraine, from Moldova.

Poland has a very strong interest in the preservation of an independent Belarus. And that there should be no ... Because if an independent Belarus is not maintained, and if Russia absorbs Belarus, then we will have the issue of the Suwałki corridor,[4] which means that there will be a threat to – a direct threat to – the security of the country, and I think that Russia's strategy will then be to regain this corridor.

Russia thinks in very old-fashioned categories. Territorial connection. After all, we have now seen how important the territorial connection with Crimea was for it, even though it was unnecessary ... because there is the Crimean Bridge and so on. But the very fact that thinking in terms of a map, which is nineteenth-century thinking, is still there in Russia...

So, the formation of this neighbourhood in the East is crucial for Poland. It is very important to build the unity of the region on this issue so that the countries that we call the Brave Six – or the Baltic States, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, the ones that speak most with one voice on Ukraine – so that they keep that one voice.

The next thing is, of course, that it is always worth stressing that maintaining a NATO presence in the region is important. After all, no alliances and no military presence is given forever. A country's geographic position, on the other hand, is given once and for all. And what will take shape beyond our eastern border is much more important than how many American troops will be in Poland at the end of this year, at the end of next year. The most important thing is what configuration we leave behind in the East. I think the whole effort of the state will lean towards that.

Igor Janke: Do you agree with the thesis that was put forward here, I mean in his book, but also here in this programme by Marek Budzisz,[5] who said that we should think about our – about Poland's – strategy alone, that is, not that we want to separate ourselves from everyone, but we should think about our own interests, and we should treat all neighbours, all institutions, organizations with which we cooperate, of which we are members, as tools to achieve this goal. That is to say, we should have such courage and such clarity – that is how we should think about our strategy.

4 Also known as the Suwałki Gap. A narrow land connection between Poland and Lithuania near the town of Suwałki, squeezed between Belarus and the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad region.
5 Marek Budzisz (b. 1964), journalist, analyst, advisor to two ministers in the government of Jerzy Buzek.

Jakub Kumoch: I don't know the context in which this theory was put forward, so it's difficult for me to comment on something I haven't read myself, whereas what you've now said is obvious to me. For any person thinking about foreign policy, every country thinks alone. We understand that belonging to international organizations is a means, not an end. If this membership is unfavourable tomorrow, we will look at it completely differently, and this has to be said openly. That is why I said this about the American presence. The alliance with the United States is the basis of our security and this I think we all agree on. But the question of whether Poland will be the same ally of the United States in 50 years' time as it is today, well that's a question we have to ask ourselves – we really have to ask that question. However, the second question is: will Poland be in the same geographical position it is in today? We can assume that it will.

Igor Janke: It probably will.

Jakub Kumoch: Well, yes, it will. That's it. At least, that is the purpose of this country. To stay where we are. So, well, to talk in terms of a few decades – that the goal is to maintain alliances, or affiliations, or influence, for example, the European Union – is in my opinion, looking too far into the future. I do not know what shape these organizations will take or what they will mean then. Even the word NATO meant something completely different 50 years ago than it does now.

Igor Janke: But I understand we have to build our strength in order to... Whatever we are going to be a part of, we need to...

Jakub Kumoch: I believe that what President Duda did last year was absolutely dictated by Poland's security. It is not the case that support for Ukraine stems from some kind of love – purely love for Ukraine. Of course we like Ukraine because it is a nation close to us: close in language, closely related to us. What has happened has happened: there were tragic things, true, but there are nations that had the same tragic things within themselves: take Spain for example, the civil war.

Apart from that, we are talking about centuries of history with Ukraine and the intermingling of these cultures. That's one thing, notwithstanding that our support for Ukraine was support for our own security. We thought of ourselves first and foremost, our equipment, fighting in Ukraine actually avoids fighting on the Bug river line. So that, yes. states are selfish as a rule, and if they are altruistic it is a kind of, well a kind of, I won't say a show, but there is a certain amount of selfishness in it nevertheless.

Igor Janke: As you've mentioned Ukraine – I wanted us to talk about that at the end – but as you've started, let me ask you about your personal experience, because that's probably your biggest experience, isn't it? This situation, since 24 February. Professional facing with, well... working for the President in a situation like that in an area like that.. well, because I understand that's what you were primarily concerned with.

Jakub Kumoch: Igor, I've been dealing with Ukraine since the mid-1990s; I speak Ukrainian – maybe not the best, but I've known the language pretty much since 94 or 95 – so this is not the first time I've seen Ukraine.

Igor Janke: But in a completely different situation.

Jakub Kumoch: In a completely different situation. Of course, it's also not the first time I've seen Russia. It's not the first time I've seen Russians carrying out aggression or committing crimes, because, you know, I served in Russia, I worked in Russia for the PAP; you sent me there yourself, so you know what was going on at the time. Whereas the experience of a state being ... well, I won't say in a state of war, because Poland is not in a state of war, but also Poland is not – let's say it openly – Poland is not neutral in this war; it is not impartial, it is on the side of Ukraine. Poland has become Ukraine's hinterland, Poland is – well I don't know if I should say this because I once told the Americans that we are ready to be the Pakistan of this war, of course, in relation to the Afghan war, where Pakistan was – in particular, Peshawar was – such a symbol of supply for the Mujahideen. I thought that Poland should play a similar role.

Igor Janke: But it plays this role.

Jakub Kumoch: Yes, it does. Rzeszów, which is sometimes referred to as 'Rzeshawar' by military analysts – derived from Peshawar – is such a place; not for nothing was it honoured by President Zelensky. They realize that, without Rzeszów, Ukraine would simply not have been able to win this war. Well, it was a time of decisions, it was a time of decisions in which I participated, of course, but I am not the main decision-maker here. It was a time when the president, the prime minister and the then-deputy prime minister, Jarosław Kaczyński,[6] in fact the three of them decided on a significant part of the support for Ukraine. These were courageous decisions, and I must admit that I was proud to have been able to take part in this, or to be an

6 Jarosław Kaczyński (b. 1949), Polish politician, currently serving as leader of the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice) Party, prime minister of Poland from July 2006 to November 2007.

implementer, to be a witness, sometimes to be an advisor, and sometimes to play some small part on my own. And I think that if Poland had to take these decisions a second time – I think that not much would change.

Igor Janke: Do you remember that first day, those first days? What do you remember of it, on a personal level?

Jakub Kumoch: You know, I remember. Well, it's difficult to talk about personal matters here at all, because one turns into a bit of a machine at such moments.

Igor Janke: Tell us what it was like from what you can recall.

Jakub Kumoch: On the eve of the war, if you remember, on the 23rd of February, I was with the president in Kyiv and it was an amazing visit. We met on the evening of the 22nd [of February] with the president of Lithuania,[7] just near the border. There we stayed overnight for a few hours in a hotel, then we left at four or five in the morning.

Well, there were only us with the president: there was only me and the head of protocol, the SOP officers,[8] the doctor. Just not to expose anyone, because we didn't know what this war would look like. It was the most difficult visit, because when you are already in Kyiv – you go to Kyiv on a train – you know that the Russians have never succeeded to hit a train, so it is a completely different conversation about security. [But] it's a different thing if you know that war is about to break out and you don't know what it's going to be like. Is it going to be landings? Is it going to be...? Do the Russians have any weapons that we don't know about, etc.?

Igor Janke: And how then, can you say how then... Were planes still flying, or not anymore?

Jakub Kumoch: The planes weren't flying. It was all by car. Of course, needless to say, not everyone was enthusiastic. Very many people advised against it, but President Duda said "no, I'm going". And he took only volunteers, those closest to himself. President Nausėda did the same. And this was an important thing, because we showed the Ukrainians that we are with them, that we are not afraid. Therefore, a Poland that is not afraid is in this...

7 Gitanas Nausėda (b. 1964), Lithuanian economist and politician. President of Lithuania from 2019.
8 Abbreviation of Służba Ochrony Państwa (State Protection Service), a service providing VIP security for Polish government officials.

Igor Janke: How did Zelensky react at that time? What state was he in? How do you remember him from that day?

Jakub Kumoch: There was a moment when I understood that it was inevitable and it really would be in a few hours. I mean our Ukrainian friends who were downplaying it before, in their conversations with us they calmly said they were ready; it was already nervous – I mean not so much nervousness, but there was resignation. We failed, there is no retreat, there is a war. It will break out in a few hours. Even when we were coming back, I was still in touch with our, let's call it, supporting organizations: Jakub, where are you? When will you reach the border? We arrived at two in the morning. At four o'clock, there was a war.

Igor Janke: Did you then ...

Jakub Kumoch: At that time, I had already received a call from the Ukrainian ambassador saying that he wanted to contact President Zelensky. At that time, President Duda and President Zelensky had already been talking for the first time under wartime conditions.

Igor Janke: And when you spoke to them before the war started, did you sort of – with today's knowledge – feel that yes, this is a country that is going to defend itself and has a chance to defend itself? Well, because for the whole world the attitude of Ukraine – how they are conducting this war – is a huge surprise. Maybe not for the whole [world] – for the experts no – because when I talked to the Americans, when I talked to Andrew Michta,[9] he said he wasn't surprised at all. We knew, because we trained them [Ukrainians] for many years after all.

Jakub Kumoch: Well, this is where I ... I hold Andrew Michta in high esteem, and I know that he knew, but whether the US administration knew, I would not be so forward here.

Igor Janke: Well, they offered him [Zelensky] a lift, he said.[10]

Jakub Kumoch: Exactly, and now what is the difference? Our president was convinced that Ukraine would defend itself. Whether it would be effective, we didn't know, because we didn't know what weapons – what

9 Andrew Michta (b. 1956), an American political scientist of Polish origin.
10 Mentioned is the offer by the US to help in the evacuation of President Zelensky from Kyiv to Lviv or to Poland at the beginning of the war.

means – the Russians really had at their disposal; after all, they were flexing their muscles, they claimed to be the most – one of the most – modern armies in the world. But we believed that they would fight and that it would be an effective fight, that Zelensky must not be evacuated, that Ukraine might have territorial and human losses, but that it would defend its independence. If we had not believed, our policy would have been completely different.

Let's start with the first thing – the arms supply. I remember at the end of December Paweł Soloch[11] and I – Paweł Soloch was then the head of the National Security Bureau – had a conversation with Jake Sullivan, the security advisor to the President of the United States.[12] He asked us what our – what the Polish position on the war in general – was. We told him that Ukraine would defend itself, that this is a very convenient war for the United States in fact, because Ukraine does not expect any military aid, it does not expect support, it does not expect one American soldier to be sent; it only needs weapons.

Igor Janke: Was that in December?

Jakub Kumoch: It was December, the end of December. It was at the end of December that Jake called. I remember at that time we were talking about the issue; it was already after the veto on the broadcasting law.[13] So he called to thank us, to pass on his thanks; well, of course we brushed it off with silence because I think it's not the competence of foreign countries to thank the president for exercising his constitutional powers, but we moved on very quickly to the subject of Ukraine and that's where the 'Give weapons to Ukraine' phrase came up, which later, by the way, came back to me a couple of times more because someone somewhere in Washington talked about it and American journalists came to see if it was true that Poland was the one who said it. But in February it was the same thing. First there was a conversation between the president and President Biden, when President Duda also said the same thing: 'give weapons, give weapons and threaten Russia that if it escalates you will give more and more effective weapons. One by one, we are always ready'. Then in mid-February, the president sent me to Washington; we said exactly the same thing to Jake as we said to several other representatives in the State Department, and so on. On the other hand, I pointed out at that time that the problem was that the Americans didn't believe that Ukraine would successfully defend itself. They admit it today; it's not, it's that they had this

11 Paweł Soloch (b. 1962), Polish government official, Head of the National Security Bureau in the years 2015–2022.
12 Jake Sullivan (b. 1976), United States National Security Advisor since 2021.
13 President Andrzej Duda vetoed an amendment to a law regulating media in Poland that was unfavourable to broadcasters with capital from outside the EU (including US capital), on 27 December 2021.

belief, no? What's good about the Biden administration is that they acknowledged the facts – the fact that Ukraine is defending itself well. It took a while before they got the weapons, but still this line of ours, because there was still this right, this unfortunate 'lift' [offer of the evacuation], right? They were proposing to evacuate the President at a time when we had decided that our ambassador would not leave Kyiv. Well, and Ambassador Cichocki[14] stayed there; by the way, he stayed of his own free will. He also said that as long as the flag hangs there, he wouldn't leave the post; one should give credit to him too, right? But it was absolutely not... I thought, I think, many people thought that Poland could not afford to evacuate the ambassador.

Igor Janke: Psychologically and politically it was extremely important.

Jakub Kumoch: No, no, this was crucial. Well, I can also reveal that to this day some Ukrainians, representatives of the elite, speak of Bartosz Cichocki as Bartosz 'Chrobry' [the brave] – *chrobry* meaning brave for those who do not know old Polish. That is how it was.

Igor Janke: Without going into details, we can still also say about the Polish ambassador that... there was a situation. Let's imagine being there in the middle in those days. Today it is Kyiv that is a normal city, but then it was not a normal city.

Jakub Kumoch: Absolutely, devoid of protection.

Igor Janke: And the Polish embassy could have been a target, a natural target for attack.

Jakub Kumoch: It could. Bartek, after all, we were also already on a first-name basis with him, we have been colleagues with him for many years; let me put it this way, Bartosz then, mister ambassador then, knew perfectly well that our conversation could be, any conversation could be... could be...

On the other hand, there was another thing before the war that is often forgotten. There was an attempt to revive the Weimar Triangle in Berlin. Chancellor Scholz invited President Duda and President Macron. I was there at the time and Paweł Soloch and Szymon Szynkowski vel Sęk[15] from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was still with us. We sat and listened to the conversation between these three leaders; this is no longer a secret

14 Bartosz Cichocki (b. 1976), Polish state official, Poland's Ambassador to Ukraine since 2019.
15 Szymon Szynkowski vel Sęk (b. 1982), Polish politician, Secretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the years 2018–2022, Minister for European Union Affairs since 2022.

today because it has been talked about, written about. The French and Germans very much wanted to revive the Minsk agreements once again. Well, let me remind you what the Minsk agreements are: they are, in short, agreements made after the aggression in 2014.

Igor Janke: Which petrified the *status* [*quo*] in fact.

Jakub Kumoch: Which actually, yes. On the other hand, if you were to read them literally, the way we wanted, well the first thing was to restore Ukraine's control over the borders and then discuss the status of Donbass. Russia did not understand this in the same way: Russia understood that first we would legalize the Donbas authorities – we are talking about, excuse me, the separatist authorities, the so-called Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic – and then we would talk about borders. I had this impression, I had this impression that our president said that – first of all, he had diagnosed the situation very accurately – that talking today about the Minsk agreements is just giving Putin a gift because they serve him only to accuse Ukraine of not fulfilling them, nothing else.

It is such a common practice in Russia that we still remember – this being the years 1939 to 1940 – to accuse someone of violating an agreement and then violating it yourself on a regular basis. The President told them [Scholz and Macron – ŁA] this, and I got the impression that he was met with complete incomprehension. He said that, come what may, the Ukrainians would defend themselves... I don't know, I got the impression from the exchange of glances between the leaders of France and Germany that they didn't know what they [the Poles – ŁA] were talking about. What do you mean, the Ukrainians will defend themselves?

Igor Janke: That is, there was a belief that...

Jakub Kumoch: They [Scholz and Macron] really believed that they were saving Ukraine, and we really believed that by doing what they were doing they were helping Russia to win the war. In fact, a war without firing a shot – they're just giving Ukraine back. And that was the difference between us. History has shown that Duda was right. Well he was right. And he was the only Western leader who believed that Ukraine would defend itself.

Well, and of course I say the work for him at that point was also very... completely different, easier, more edifying and so on. I also once said, I think publicly, that something tells me that I advised a good thing. I said, Ladies and gentlemen, it is not important who advises: it is important who listens. If I had advised Scholz, probably nothing would have come of it.

Igor Janke: Do you agree with those who say that, in fact, France and Germany would have preferred that this war had gone differently, that nothing had changed because it was in their long-term interest? Meaning they understood their interest that way, even if they didn't say it explicitly?

Jakub Kumoch: Remember, Igor, that we also have to look at how certain countries view processes in other parts of the world. I for one have the impression that France has not quite got used to the existence of Ukraine. And also Germany doesn't fully understand that Ukraine is not such a 'fallen' part of Russia – that it is a completely different story. Well, for obvious reasons, historical reasons, we know perfectly well that Ukraine is not Russia; you don't need to convince any Pole of this at all; even I think that Poles have often overestimated this 'Ukrainianness' [meaning the differences between Ukrainians and Russians – ŁA]; for example, the widespread amazement that Ukrainian refugees speak Russian, how can a Ukrainian speak Russian?

Igor Janke: By the way, you can see what an incredible toll the press of culture and the thought of the Parisian 'Kultura'[16] has taken.

Jakub Kumoch: Indeed.

Igor Janke: How they had a great influence; how they shaped the entire political class of Poland from Kwaśniewski[17] to Kaczyński.

Jakub Kumoch: I think that this is true, although I think even before that [Poles had considered Ukrainians as people close to Poles and different from Russians – ŁA]. I don't know of a time in history when a Pole would consider a Ukrainian to be a Russian. They just didn't. It is simply absurd for us.

Igor Janke: But this way, well, do we also mean that Ukraine [itself] thought in this way [about itself and its relationship to Russia – ŁA]?

Jakub Kumoch: That it is not – that Ukraine – that the territorial issue is finished, therefore a relationship can be built. Without the most important thing that existed between these nations, well its territorial issue is *de facto* finished, no matter whether one likes it or not, whether it hurts

16 *Kultura* was a Polish-émigré magazine with Jerzy Giedroyc (1906–2000) as Editor-in-Chief published from 1947 to 2000 by *Instytut Literacki* (the Literary Institute), initially in Rome and then in Paris. One of the main intellectual magazines for Polish emigrants.

17 Aleksander Kwaśniewski (b. 1954), Polish politician, President of Poland from 1995 to 2005.

us or not, whether or not it hurts the Germans. Poland is here where it is; Poland has no territorial claims on any country; it respects the borders of other countries; it does not claim the smallest part of any other country's territory; at this point we are able to build policy. That has untied our hands. It has made us, in fact, a regional power. Otherwise we would have been... Well, the whole problem that had existed before – the unresolved ethnic question, the unresolved border question – actually complicated this policy for us. And we were held hostage. And this policy towards Ukraine... If our borders had looked the way they looked before the war, well there would be... We would have had our hands firmly tied. [Now] they're not.

Igor Janke: Tell me again, I'll go back, because I'm very curious, to that moment, that meeting just before the war and what Volodymyr Zelensky was like. Did you see in him then... did you [President Duda and people next to him...]? Well, I'm asking you, well because it's easier for you to talk. Otherwise, did it surprise you later that he became such a leader? Did he surprise the whole world, or was it already apparent then that this was a real leader?

Jakub Kumoch: Never did Zelensky surprise me with the fact that he is a courageous man. He is a brave man, he is and – if you get to know him more closely – he is not. This stature of his of such a small actor, and so on and so forth, completely disappears on closer acquaintance. He's a modest man – that has to be said for him – it can also in a way create a false image, but he's very down to earth and speaks very realistically.

Igor Janke: But at that time you already felt that it was so...?

Jakub Kumoch: We met in Wisła,[18] after all, in Wisła we had already got to know each other very closely because we spent about 48 hours there, so that's how it was. It was January, January. The president invited Marcin Przydacz[19] and me – on the other side there was Andriy Yermak[20] and Andriy Sybiha:[21] the first one is head of administration, [the other is] deputy head of administration. Practical, decisive persons. The six of us

18 Wisła is a town in the south of Poland where one of the official residences of the President of Poland is located.

19 Marcin Przydacz (b. 1985), Polish state official, Undersecretary of State in the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the years 2019–2023.

20 Andriy Yermak (b. 1971), Ukrainian film producer and politician. Since February 2020, Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine and a member of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine. Perceived as the main foreign policy advisor to President Volodymyr Zelensky.

21 Andriy Sybiha (b. 1971), Ukrainian diplomat, Ukraine's Ambassador to Turkey 2016–2021, Deputy Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine since May 2021.

met precisely to actually establish relationships that would later be used during the war.

Igor Janke: As for Yermak, I understand you knew each other from Turkey, yes?

Jakub Kumoch: And Sybiha. He was the Ukrainian ambassador; I was the Polish ambassador. Well, I must admit that we became friends at that time; we spent a lot of time together, we talked about many things, and somehow it happened; somehow it was the will of heaven that we both moved to the presidential administration at the same time, at almost exactly the same time. On the other hand ...

Igor Janke: It helps such relationships a lot?

Jakub Kumoch: Well, of course it helps. Andriy Yermak, on the other hand, I met in Kyiv in 2021, but then in Wisła we had a chance to talk for real. And Wisła was planned in such a way: it was not a meeting in a bilateral format, with a delegation and so on; we sit, we eat, we go for a walk, we walk in the mountains, we talk, we sit by the fire. We'll spend time and tell it like it really is. And we'll talk to each other honestly, what you're about, what we're about.

Initially this Wisła was planned... Generally... it was such a project that I talked about with the president from the very beginning. It was quite planned; it was the summer of 2021, and it seemed that it would be a conversation about Polish-Ukrainian history, that we would say exactly what we want, what we expect from each other, and we would agree on some kind of a strategy to get out of this historical quagmire.[22] However, the war verified everything. But there, too, the issue of the railways blocking.[23] Our railways have been resolved and, in general, the transport issues have also quickly...

Igor Janke: The other way too... as I said in Kyiv recently with people from the Ministry of Administration, there is such a deputy minister of administration there, Mustafa Nayem,[24] who...

22 Mentioned are Polish-Ukrainian disagreements on the memory politics of both countries in relation to the Second World War.

23 It is about the ban imposed by Ukrainian Railways on accepting for transport all consignments from 15 selected countries (including China, Russia, Kazakhstan) to Poland in transit through Ukrainian territory. This happened because Poland did not agree to increase the number of permits for Ukrainian TIR drivers to operate in Poland.

24 Mustafa Nayem (b. 1981), Ukrainian journalist and state official. Since January 2023, Head of the State Agency for Restoration and Infrastructure Development in Ukraine. Prior to this he was Deputy Minister of Infrastructure, appointed in August 2021.

Jakub Kumoch: Known to me.

Igor Janke: A very interesting character who told me – how from their perspective – our approach to blocking their trucks had changed a lot. We were, of course, supposed to defend our interests.

Jakub Kumoch: Everyone always has an interest and ends up with a compromise; we reached that compromise in five minutes, probably a week after the Wisła meeting.

Igor Janke: It was from several people in Kyiv that I heard the same.

Jakub Kumoch: They were talking down to us, yes?

Igor Janke: Yes, they groped around. They talked about the attitude from their point of view, the relationship with Poland after the war, how after the outbreak of war [the relationship] had changed dramatically. They said: yes, we were partners but there were a lot of difficult issues, and after the outbreak of war and this [Polish] government in particular changed its attitude towards us very much and became much more co-operative. That's what I've heard from a few people about their perspective.

Jakub Kumoch: The most important thing in relations with Ukraine – in general in relations with all countries, especially with which you have a common history of some kind, no matter whether it's sad or not sad – is to show respect. If this respect is lacking from either side, it starts to get bad. And it is very easy to show disrespect because there are so many little things that you have to know how to deal with. It seems to me that President Duda has been greatly underestimated, especially by the publicists on the left or, let's say, on the opposition side. Duda enjoys enormous trust from Ukrainians. This can be seen from all the polls. Now why does he have this respect? Just because he is the president of Poland? This is what the president says, and I disagree here. I think, however, that his personal role in such a message of ours – of our position, of our position to the Ukrainians – is a big role. He has very deep thoughts about Polish-Ukrainian relations, about the history of Polish-Ukrainian relations, about putting events in a historical context, and I have also witnessed his meeting with a difficult partner, which is the World Ukrainian Congress; these are often circles which are more nationalistic than the government in Kyiv, and I have seen that they came away touched by what he told them – how he assesses things, at the same

time not giving up on our principled issues of history. So, he has done a tremendous job, and he himself has told me many times that Polish-Ukrainian understanding and reconciliation are some of the goals of his presidency.

Igor Janke: Going back to this war situation and your contacts with the Ukrainians, what were the most – some of the most – difficult, most dramatic situations since 24 February in your relations, contacts?

Jakub Kumoch: Well I think Przewodów[25] was the most difficult moment. Well, because... well something happened that... How would you say it? We were, of course, prepared for the fact that we... were going to be hit by fragments of a missile or a projectile at some point, but... Well, that first reaction, where both sides said something different; we had to fix it and we immediately started to fix it. Both sides acknowledged that, yes, we sat down and talked.

Igor Janke: But then those days and the emotions on both sides were huge? Also on our side?

Jakub Kumoch: Well, we all saw what happened, whereas, well, it has been fixed, I would say it has been corrected.

The problem is that precisely in a situation of media hype it is very easy to lose what I was telling you. Such a small thing which I just told you about respect. A little thing, two words too many, someone said. Somewhere, Ukrainians said to me: Well, why are you saying here, Jakub, in some interview you said that the president is driven by emotions? First of all, I didn't say he was guided by emotions, I said he was fighting a war. You drew from that that it was about emotion; no, I said something completely different than I meant. A hundred rockets fell on your territory, I understand that day and so on and so forth, the president is... You also have other issues. Also your people died. But this is the kind of thing I think we have behind us and it doesn't affect trust in any way, because it seems to me that both presidents and our teams were very keen to resolve this matter somehow. Well, differences of opinion about what happened can always happen.

Igor Janke: I remember afterwards when I was in Kyiv and I talked to a lot of people, with various experts mainly; well, there was such

25 On 15 November, a missile fell on a grain drying facility in the Polish village of Przewodów, near the Ukrainian border, causing the deaths of two Poles. Immediately after the accident, Ukrainian officials, including President Zelensky, claimed that the missile was Russian, although according to initial Polish assessments, also confirmed by US assessments, the object was a Ukrainian air defence missile.

a conviction that it was a Muscovian [*ruska*] missile, and we said what the Americans told us to say.

Jakub Kumoch: I think they already know after talking to me that nobody forced Poland to do anything and that first of all it's not Ukraine that is accused of causing this situation: it's Russia. And I'm very sorry, but if a traffic pirate drives against the traffic on a highway and causes a series of accidents, unfortunately, the traffic pirate, even though he didn't hit anyone, is still responsible. And here Russia is a giant pirate that is destroying the whole safety configuration in our part of Europe – it would like to destroy, let's put it this way – and, by killing people in Ukraine, it is also responsible for what is happening right on its borders.

Igor Janke: I'm going to ask you another question about... which I probably wouldn't have asked you if you were still in your recent job. I don't know if you'll want to answer, but maybe you will. I'm very curious about what is, what is the reason for such and not other behaviours of President Zelensky towards his entourage, some of which is part of the old deal concerning the judiciary. There are, well, the Ukrainian judiciary looks dramatic and unless they make radical moves... It is very corrupt. I've heard masses of stories about corrupt judges, extremely rich judges, who clearly are, have made their wealth in non-obvious ways, let's put it that way. This is crucial for the new Ukraine and it is also crucial for its entry into the EU; if they don't do it today, then they will have the problems we have because we didn't do it; we didn't rebuild the judiciary in the early 1990s, and probably the problem is even bigger in their country. Do you think they can handle it?

Jakub Kumoch: No, Igor here unfortunately... well you guessed it, well I'm going to have to refuse to comment on Ukrainian internal affairs because I've never done that and that's where my respect for our partners lies. All I can say is that we support the Zelensky administration in everything that concerns reform and the dismantling of oligarchic structures and corruption. And we absolutely understand that changes in the judiciary are extremely difficult and need to be made at the very beginning, not after the system has become entrenched. This was also said, and the President of Moldova, President Maia Sandu,[26] who was also reforming this judiciary, said how difficult and complicated it is; she said it at a press conference. Well, it is a complex problem.

26 Maia Sandu (b. 1972), Moldovan economist and President of Moldova since 24 December 2020.

Igor Janke: I understand. I'm not going to push you at all on this issue because it's awkward.

Jakub Kumoch: I wouldn't want to get into Ukraine's internal affairs at all; we respect Ukraine; Ukraine doesn't get into our internal affairs either, it's also so...

Igor Janke: I am in a different role, I can ask.

Jakub Kumoch: This you know, but it is such an achievement if two countries – I was saying this to our German partners – if two countries really build a strategic partnership, they don't care who is in power in the other country; they do it regardless of the political colour of the government. If they start to mix things up, then it is not a partnership that starts to happen but a mutual influence, which is a bit contradictory to such a classic notion of diplomacy.

Igor Janke: Let's go back to talking about the strategy and what role the Polish partnership with Ukraine can play in the future: what should be the outcome [of the partnership], what is our goal, what is the chance that this treaty, which I know you also worked on, will come into force? I mean, of course, it will come into force when the war is over. But is anything happening with it? What should be the effect? What role can this Polish-Ukrainian duo play in the future, also in Europe, assuming that Ukraine will sooner or later get closer to the European Union? Whether it will join the EU... This is a more difficult question.

Jakub Kumoch: In turn, I think this is a very complex problem and I have to distinguish between two things. Firstly, what I think is the strategy of the Polish state; what is the strategy of Ukraine? Firstly, it is a geographical fact. Poland and Ukraine are not going anywhere; they are going to stay where they are. I hope very much for this, after Ukraine's victorious war of independence, they are going to stay where they are, which is probably obvious to all of us. Second, Russia is not going anywhere either, and Russia will be going in some direction after losing the war in Ukraine. I rather doubt that it will be reflection on its own past and the crimes it has committed; I rather fear that it will be a desire for revenge – a sense of humiliation. I rather expect such a turn of events. Let's hope I'm wrong, because this optimistic reflection on what has happened, well, it would cause Russia to have a chance to rejoin the ranks of civilized nations, of the world, but...

Igor Janke: So far, Russia is not giving any signals.

Jakub Kumoch: So far, it is not giving any signals. We have Poland and Ukraine – countries with similar population potential, with a huge advantage in economic potential on our side, several times greater. We have two countries that will build strong armies. They will remain. The Ukrainian army is currently the strongest army in Europe, but after the war, too, under conditions of peace, the Ukrainians will have a professional strong army with combat experience, and so this state will continue.

Igor Janke: What's more, they are undertaking, or declaring, they are saying that they want to build, that they just have to build an army, just like Fortress Israel, just like they have to have Fortress Ukraine.

Jakub Kumoch: We also need to be Fortress Poland. These two fortresses don't have conflicting security interests: they just have common interests, so they should cooperate. Volodymyr Zelensky said it; I think President Duda understands it very well and he said it himself; the fact that we will be a *de facto* ally of Ukraine is obvious to me. The big question is what will happen with Belarus. But it is also necessary to work towards a certain solution: our goal is a democratic, independent Belarus. Such a country immediately has pro-European and pro-Polish tendencies and in fact becomes this third lung of our area of the Commonwealth.[27] And I'm saying this because I don't know if you've seen the last declaration from the presidents of Lithuania, Ukraine and Poland, referring to the First Commonwealth as a common state and referring to the January Uprising[28] as a common uprising; so really, this feeling, feeling, feeling of belonging to a certain cultural circle and to the political community of the First Commonwealth is growing. In Belarus, in 2020, it was noticed that this feeling is really very strong among young Belarusians; while in Ukraine, of course, with all the differences, with the history of the Cossacks and so on and so forth, it takes a slightly different turn. But these three countries could form something very close in the future. I am not saying a federal state, because that is a pipe dream – it is such a utopia today – but Poland's objective should be the integration of our region. Of course, it should be on an equal footing, because together we have almost 100 million people. 90 million Poles, Belarusians and Ukrainians, with the Baltic States, we come to 95 million.

27 This refers to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, a federal state created by the Kingdom of Poland and the Great Duchy of Lithuania in 1569; it existed until it was conquered by Russia, Prussia, and Austria in 1795 (Third Partition).

28 January Uprising, an uprising against Russia in the Russian-ruled territories of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the years 1863–1864.

Igor Janke: Which will not arouse enthusiasm in our partners on the western border because you could say it will grow a fantastic market...

Jakub Kumoch: If this were to happen.

Igor Janke: Well, say the Polish-Ukrainian partnership.

Jakub Kumoch: Well no, that doesn't inspire any enthusiasm. And I am sorry. The first thing I noticed was the interest of diplomats from another of our close partner countries, this time within the European Union, our neighbour to the west, who were very interested in what this treaty was and what this treaty was for.[29] We reassured them. I reassured them that the treaty would be modelled on the Elysée Treaty: that it is about the same kind of cooperation as you have with France, which probably did not arouse much enthusiasm either because the principle is rather one of 'divide and rule'. A fractured Central Europe in which the West is really the only point of reference for each of these countries. This war is changing that in my opinion, and changing it permanently.

Igor Janke: But that [German interest in Polish-Ukrainian work on a treaty between two countries – ŁA] also should not make us indignant, well, because this is normal. Every country thinks about its strategy, its interests.

Jakub Kumoch: No, nothing personal – it's business. It is business, there is nothing personal here, and we don't have to worry about it at all. Our goal is to bring about reconciliation with Ukraine, including, of course, the resolution of historical issues. Well, this reconciliation cannot be carried out without, for example, the issue of exhumations or without facing reality, not burying our heads in the sand when it comes to Volhynia.[30] A crime took place there, a genocide took place there – a serious one, the murder of many tens of thousands of Poles – and this must be clearly stated. We can and do talk about the classification of crimes, but no, Ukraine does not; Poland has the right to expect, to ask that the cult of those who are directly responsible for these crimes be abandoned. It is simply impossible without this. This will be triggered on a regular basis.

29 This refers to the project of a new Polish-Ukrainian treaty which should regulate bilateral relations between Poland and Ukraine.

30 Mass murders committed against Polish inhabitants of Volhynia, Eastern Galicia, and present-day Eastern Poland by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army in 1943–1945. The ethnic cleansing instigated by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army claimed up to 100,000 victims, of which several thousand were Ukrainian victims of retaliatory actions by Polish partisan units.

Igor Janke: But it's going to be very difficult on the cult, in my opinion. That's why I also recorded an interview on the Bandera cult which is has not been yet aired with Łukasz Adamski.[31]

Jakub Kumoch: This is an eminent expert and an eminent person with a sense of Ukraine who is regarded as a Polish nationalist by Ukrainians, while Poles and Polish nationalists often consider him as a Ukrainianophile. But [he is] a figure of gigantic knowledge and has a sense of the [Polish-Ukrainian] problematics.

Igor Janke: Yes, I urge you to listen to this talk as soon as it comes out, but Łukasz talked about the fact that just during the war (surprisingly for me, I didn't have any such awareness) because this cult of Bandera – understood as not anti-Polish, fascist, something there, but as a hero of the fight against Russia – contrived a bit, grew unbelievably. War needs, builds myths. And now this popularity of his has also increased in eastern Ukraine, which was not there at all before, and it will be very difficult to know; in the end, President Zelensky and other politicians will fight to win the next democratic elections when the war is over, and they will not be able to go against the public mood.

Jakub Kumoch: Igor, I will openly say what I think on this subject. Well, I see the difference between Stepan Bandera, whom Soviet propaganda has somewhat elevated the importance of, his role. He was an enemy, our enemy, an enemy of Poland, a terrorist, the leader of a nationalist organization whose ideology, if you read, is, well... to... Even a Ukrainian looking at it through the prism of a Christian man, a European, would glue together these ten nationalist commandments – a prayer to Ukraine – and would rather not return to it. But a man who at the same time... Bandera was sitting in a concentration camp [having been] earlier [imprisoned] when the Volhynian crime happened, and I would absolutely not mix one thing – the cult of a fictional personality, a real character, but a cult which has been heavily coloured – with the perpetrators of the Volhynian massacre.

Igor Janke: That's true.

Jakub Kumoch: I would not mix that because here [in the case of the Volhynian massacre] we are absolutely talking about murder. We are talking

31 Łukasz Adamski (b. 1981), Polish historian, publicist, expert on Eastern Europe, Deputy Director of the Mieroszewski Centre.

about the mass murder of people, so I would definitely make a distinction between the two here.

The fact is, what you said, that this cult of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and this cult of Bandera, because let's take it, no more... Let's leave the cult of Shukhevych aside, it is absolutely a *no-go zone* for us. On the other hand, the cult of Bandera and the cult of UPA... the paradox is that the stronger the cult of Bandera and UPA is in a given region, the greater the sympathy for Poland. Why? Well, because Ukrainians are convinced that the Ukrainian Insurgent Army is an organization which fought for Ukraine's independence primarily against the Soviets and, to some extent, against the Germans. The latter is, I would say, more incidental, but the UPA's fight after the war against the Soviets... This Polish part [of UPA's struggle] is considered to be rather episodic in Poland. [As to the Volhynian crime as such] there was little awareness of the Volhynian massacre in Ukraine.

Igor Janke: And it is still so.

Jakub Kumoch: That they [the Ukrainians] went through Soviet schools; that they therefore told a certain story in their kitchens [the story] which was romanticized, coloured. Every nation does that; we should be aware of that too. Just yes, the very fact that Bandera was a terrorist. Does it really bother Britain and Ireland that Ireland was, in fact is, a creation created by the effective activities of the IRA and Michael Collins, and the fact that the potency of it was overestimated? Well, the assassination of someone, of a public servant in the 1920s or 1930s or before, was, unfortunately, the method of operation of many nationalist movements, and that is how Europe was. Here we also have to do ourselves some justice.

Igor Janke: But of course, so do I...

Jakub Kumoch: And the fact that someone fought for their independence, I think we also have to take a fair look. Well, unfortunately, yes [we have to do it].

Igor Janke: Their awareness is that this is the man who fought for Ukraine's independence...

Jakub Kumoch: Because he undoubtedly fought.

Igor Janke: Like them. I don't know if you've encountered that, because you've met the elite, the conscious...

Jakub Kumoch: Whether or not I like the ideology and the fact that the UPA was – that the organization of Ukrainian nationalists had such un-Christian and un-European thinking about it [fight for independence] – that is another matter, that is philosophical.

Igor Janke: But I'm going to mention one more thing, though. For those of you who are listening or have listened to the interview with Łukasz Adamski, I talked about it there. When I was in Ukraine, bringing various things, helping them, it was somewhere in western Ukraine; the Ukrainians showing me around, ordinary Ukrainians, they weren't representatives of the elite, extremely pro-Polish, with great love, with gratitude to Poland; they told me, listen, look here there's a monument to Bandera. And me ... acid in my face [appeared], you know.

Jakub Kumoch: In Lutsk I saw four flags on one of the state buildings. There was the flag of Volhynia, [i.e.] the flag of the region, the flag of Ukraine, the flag of the UPA and the flag of Poland. Not everything in the world is black and white – there are different shades of grey. Ukraine is also not the first nation or country I have dealt with, because I have travelled the world a bit. We all have a distorted perception of our own history. All the nations of the world have a certain legend that accompanies them, a certain perception of their past. I firmly believe that this should, after all, firstly be respected, spoken of with respect. Surely saying 'get down on your knees and express [sorrow for] your past' is a huge mistake – this mistake Israel has been making, has made towards us. What is the effect of this on Israel? Such that instead of being a friend of that country – of a country which is, let us say, not the most popular country today – Poland has joined the European mainstream on the issue of Israel, which stands out from our region, with which Israel has correct relations. Somehow these emotions got the better of them and they [the Israeli politicians] decided that Poland should simply apologize for everything and we should consider our whole history to be anti-Semitic.

Igor Janke: Let's talk about our role in the European Union at the end; well, as far as the relationship with the United States is concerned, it's pretty obvious.

Jakub Kumoch: Well you talked about the fact that the West won't necessarily welcome a Polish-Ukrainian agreement, and I think that for the United States this is a huge asset.

Igor Janke: For the United States, of course. As they see... or otherwise: in your opinion, what should we play for? What role can we realistically play in the European Union? If we play wisely of course, which we don't always do, what potential do we have? And how do you see Germany's role? And to what extent – extending this question a little bit – to what extent do you think this whole '*Zeitenwende*'[32] can one day really come to fruition, and can it happen? Do you believe that it's easy [to change Germany's foreign policy], if it's going very slowly, very laboriously, maybe not so much laboriously, but it's going slowly, but it's going in that direction and we will definitely be on the same side and it will be our partner with whom we will continue to work well together, despite some tensions. I'm talking about Germany.

Jakub Kumoch: It all depends on how Germany defines its own national interest. Such an interesting theory I heard at a conference that this is Germany's weakness. I will quote a speaker who said a very cool thing. He said: 'just as the German Empire was said to be an army that owns the state, the Federal Republic is said to be a business that owns the state.'

Igor Janke: Interesting. Very pertinent.

Jakub Kumoch: And this business, this German economy, the mighty German economy, grew because of, among other things, two factors: cheap labour, i.e., Central and Eastern Europe, subcontractors and so on, and cheap raw materials, i.e., Russia.

Igor Janke: Plus China. A very important market.

Jakub Kumoch: Clear.

Igor Janke: Germany's two main trading partners.

Jakub Kumoch: Sure, sure. Whereas Germany's exports produce quite cheap goods all the time, so it's not... It's a country that produces cheaply, in which prices are reasonable, it's not... it's a very rich country which is still cheap all the time. The standard of living of the Germans is really very, very high. However! However! The price for this attitude is, among other things, that Germans have difficulty defining their own national interest. The national interest is something where you force a business

32 German term for 'turning point'.

to participate in certain projects. It is much easier for France to ask big business to do something for the state. In Germany, it is rather business which has requests to those in power. And I am afraid that this is the case here. We've definitely had a historical breakthrough when it comes to the German public's perception of events in Ukraine. And here there has been a radical change. The Germans are a very educated, learned, smart people. It's as if you talk to Germans very well, they are rational, you can convince them of many things, ordinary Germans. I have met a lot of these people in my life. And, indeed, public opinion has changed. Quite a lot of the media have changed their stance.

Igor Janke: In those days, when we were recording [that conversation – ŁA] , Scholz was being hammered so strongly...

Jakub Kumoch: Today, if President Duda or President Zelensky criticize Scholz, the German media will not come to his defence. Some of them will say that yes, that indeed one has to admit that he is right. Leopards, for example, after all, it is not so clear that Poland is frivolous again, that Poland is dividing, that unity is breaking down. In the past it used to be like that, the whole media would be... there would be a series of articles simply sounding the same, mostly like that. Today – well it's not; it doesn't look like that at all. It is one thing. Public opinion, the media. The political class, some of them think that we should go with public opinion; some of them think, especially the Chancellor's entourage, as I understand it, that, well, you can't make radical changes overnight, which makes Germany lose its position, because for our part of Europe – and relations with Eastern Europe, Central-Eastern Europe, have built up Germany's position in the entire Union, no country has managed to establish such close relations with our region – but for our countries it is security that counts. That is to say, if someone is not a 'provider' of security but is uncertain in this matter, then, unfortunately, as a partner, he comes out very, very badly. And that is what it is all about. Now, the popularity of the US and the UK from Tallinn to... well, let's say, to the Danube, has increased dramatically.

Igor Janke: To the part. Not the whole Danube, unfortunately.

Jakub Kumoch: Well, the Danube, which divides Romania, let us say, is Romania's border increased radically, because these are the suppliers of security, and we need nothing more than security. But is continental Western Europe a security provider? Yes, it is helping Ukraine, but do we really believe that in the event of something happening, it is the one who will

defend us, the one who will stand by us fully, or have we been persuaded to do so by successive German chancellors? Well, I ask myself, because at the moment we are being watched by people who may not have the same political views as me or agree with the president, but have you been persuaded by your continental European partners that, if anything happens, they will defend us? Well, that is the question.

Igor Janke: Yes.

Jakub Kumoch: That is the question. This is where the division comes from. And as you asked me about my role in the European Union.

Igor Janke: Is it? Do you believe it? Because I have this vision of our ambition in Polish politics for the next five or ten years, because of course it is not overnight... But we have finally gained the weight to fight higher, to make it so that in the end these main players in the European Union are... of course, Germany, because it is a powerful country, of course, France, because it is a powerful country, with influence in the north...

Jakub Kumoch: And with nuclear weapons and a powerful army which is serious when it comes to security.

Igor Janke: And in terms of energy security indeed.

Jakub Kumoch: Its own, of course...

Igor Janke: And this third element – it seems to me, a serious third element – could be Poland, as a coordinator of this post-Soviet part, although already less and less post-Soviet. However, for those small countries originating from this part, well I mean not originating, but [simply] being in this part of Europe. In your opinion, is this a realistic plan? Or maybe such a Weimar Triangle in the future so that it would not be a meeting of Germans and French to which Poland is sometimes invited – actually to play some kind of theatre – but a real engine of the European Union.

Jakub Kumoch: By the way, before I answer your question seriously, you know that in probably 2016 or 2017 you said 'post-Soviet Europe' and you corrected yourself immediately – [in 2016 or 2017] I did the calculation for myself. The governments of each country, what percentage of the members of those governments had been a member of the Communist Party in the past? And what came out, who had the highest percentage?

The European Commission. Not Estonia, not Poland, not the Czech Republic. The European Commission, and it was so that even there I remember it was still under... Or I did... I don't remember which year it was; either it was still under Barroso or it was already under Juncker, and it came out that in their youth even those from the West had some. You know... sometimes it was not mainstream Soviet parties of course, but all sorts of left-wing organizations referring to Marx and Lenin.

Igor Janke: But which were not part of the regimes.

Jakub Kumoch: [It was a] joke, of course. The sins of youth, of course. In any case, there was such a moment. On the other hand, you have posed a very good question. And it [Poland's leading role in Central-Eastern Europe – ŁA] will be such a temptation for us. At some point, I think we will be brought to the table. Well, there was already this project of the Weimar Triangle; it was the Germans who came up with the slogan 'Let's renew the Weimar Triangle'; but I have this impression... I came out of it then with this feeling that this is not an instrument to solve our main problem, which is to provide support for Ukraine. You know, European integration solved a big thing, created a big thing: first of all it solved the Rhine question. It has solved the issue between Germany and France; it has led to the fact that the tragedy that is the trauma of the West, which is the First World War – the First World War, not the Second World War – will actually not happen in the West of Europe. It is the trauma of continental Europe, it is the trauma of Belgium, France, Germany... Well, Germany does have the trauma of the Second World War, but for others, other countries, they still think in terms of 1914. How could we do such a thing to ourselves? The Rhine question has been resolved. But European integration does not solve the Central European question; it does not resolve it, if only because this Iron Curtain runs through our region, it runs right across the Polish border. That is why Poland is fighting so hard to integrate Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova – all countries that wish to do so [acquire EU membership], right up to Russia's borders – into European integration. Then the Central European question will be resolved.

Here, something that I immediately think I can also be proud to have participated in. However, behind all this situation is the person of the president. On the third day of the war, President Duda said that Ukraine should be given the status of a candidate for the European Union. He was thinking in these categories: 'we have to show them [Ukraine and other countries of Eastern Europe, who want to become EU members – ŁA] on the table – the Russians and them: yes, are you attacking Ukraine? And we are not making any concessions,

we will accept Ukraine into the Union; besides, Ukraine must have prospects. And if you win the war, you will live happily ever after in the community of the West'. After all, they, the people who are outside the Union think about it [EU membership], just as you remember we thought about it, that we will become rich immediately and live happily ever after.

And there was a moment on the 26th [of February] a letter was from the president on that, on the 28th [of February] a letter from several Central European presidents.[33] I think we brought together nine people, nine leaders. And that's a kind of naivety of me, I remember, I have to confess. Among the advisers we talk, we say: well, all our presidents are confirmed; now, if we could only make each of them choose two Western leaders whom they know, like and value the most, and convince them to sign up – well, at least we will catch a few. So we went hunting, we split the roles, we went hunting. How many did we catch? Zero. Zero. It's just that the West at that moment was... [they were] like [thinking]: but why, how come, we in some initiative of yours, well you know how it's – coordinated, or not coordinated – including the fact that, and this was also said publicly by the president. One of the leaders of a smaller Western European country said: 'Mr. President, please withdraw your signature, my country will never agree to accept Ukraine, it's just breaking unity'. So it turned out that, after a few months, Ukraine got the status of a candidate for the European Union. We won it, it really was months of hard work, a president who was able to fly to Portugal, to Italy, still in Spain he wanted to be, still in the last straight of talks with the next last leaders.

So why am I bringing this up? There will be such a temptation now for us to be invited [to the club of leading Western European states that *de facto* manage the EU – ŁA], because, in my opinion, they will invite the Poles to come. Maybe the government will change, for example, it will be easier for them [for governments of leading Western European countries – ŁA]. And the temptation may be that we are already in this top league and we can now, in fact, sign up to what France and Germany will preach.

Igor Janke: Are we able to bring this situation [close prior coordination between France and Germany in European politics – ŁA] about...?

Jakub Kumoch: They came to the Triangle already and agreed with each other.

33 A letter signed on 28 February 2022 by the presidents of Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Czechia, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Slovenia, supporting immediate EU accession for Ukraine; see *Support of Ukraine's swift candidacy to the EU*, 28 February 2022: https://www.president.pl/news/open-letter-by-presidents-in-support-of-ukraines-swift-candidacy-to-the-european-union,49584.

Igor Janke: Exactly, so my question is not that we will formally be in some kind of group. The Weimar Triangle will meet every month. Will we realistically play a role there? Can we?

Jakub Kumoch: The biggest temptation is to abandon the Central European partners. They never go, they stay here. Slovakia stays here. The Balts stay here, the Czechs stay here. We all feel it... When you talk about the change, for example this *Zeitenwende*[34] in Germany? A [real] change has happened in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. [The real change was] what Slovakia did about Ukraine.

Igor Janke: This is not a foregone conclusion forever.

Jakub Kumoch: It is not a foregone conclusion, but nevertheless President Čaputová[35]... well, there were different relations between President Čaputová and the team that is currently governing Poland, but she has completely sided with Ukraine – the Czech Republic the same. This is...

Igor Janke: And in the Czech Republic now, the presidential election is also moving in this direction...

Jakub Kumoch: I am looking now; we have two more Baltic States [Czechia and Slovakia].

Igor Janke: But let us be honest with ourselves; when I look at our foreign policy over the last dozen years or so, without naming the governments, we have also started to cooperate differently with these small countries. We have not been able to cope with them for many years. Lithuania? 'They only bother us'. Slovakia? 'Who is that?'. 'We here have to be first of all in Berlin and so on'. To be in Berlin we have to be with them.

Jakub Kumoch: True, true, true. And that's what I was advising as well. But, as I say, it's easy to advise someone who thinks this way – no need to correct anything here. A full understanding on the part of the president that our position in the West depends not on whether we get to the table but on what regional relations we have. And in order to have good regional relations with Lithuania, really, if President Duda was able to say a few sentences in Lithuanian in the Lithuanian parliament, well, probably the first

34 Mentioned was an address delivered to the Bundestag by Olaf Scholz, the Chancellor of Germany, on 27 February 2022. The head of German govermnent announced a huge change Germany's politics towards Russia.
35 Zuzana Čaputová (b. 1973) is President of Slovakia since 15 June 2019.

president in history, well, I think that such a gesture does more than saying that Lithuania is a partner and a friend. Well, the President of Poland, who comes and says in Lithuanian: 'Dear Madam President, Members of Parliament, I am here as the President of Poland'. He says, he mentions the tower[36] in Vilnius, he says this, well you have to work a little bit on such a text, but the effect is that you are showing respect to a country which – as I think – believed that on the Polish side there is a deficit of respect [for Lithuania]. 'The Poles don't respect us, the Poles consider us provincial, the Poles would love to be here, the Poles only look at us through the prism of the former Poland.' No, Poland respects this Lithuania as it is and the Lithuanians. It is not just that Poland looks at Lithuania through the prism of our minority. No, Poland looks at Lithuania as a security partner which is not going anywhere, which is a brave nation and so on. The same is true of Latvia, Estonia, and the Belarusians and Ukrainians.

Igor Janke: And in all this we have been greatly helped by Vladimir Putin, without whom it would not have gone so easily.

Jakub Kumoch: But I remind you that the President's speech to the Belarusians – partly in Belarusian, and to the Lithuanians – partly in Lithuanian language – took place even before the war, so it is not that this understanding here... [appeared only after the Russian-Ukrainian war had begun – ŁA.]

Igor Janke: Tell us, in one sentence at the end. Is this role of ours in the Union as one of the playmakers – from a realistic perspective, not a formal one – is that a realistic prospect? In other words, should we set ourselves... should Polish politics – the Polish state, regardless of who governs Poland after the elections – set itself such an ambitious goal and pursue it consistently? Do we have many more assets?

Jakub Kumoch: Whatever answer I give to this question, it will be neither complete nor entirely truthful, because of course I should say 'yes, indeed!' On the other hand, I am asking myself what the Union will be like in the coming years and what it will be aiming at; and at what point, in how many years, to what extent it will be conducive to our security, because I, like many, have repeated like a mantra that membership of the Union is one of the sources of our security.

36 Wystąpienie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej Andrzeja Dudy w Sejmie Republiki Litewskiej z okazji 500. rocznicy urodzin króla Zygmunta Augusta: https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta-rp/wystapienia/wystapienie-prezydenta-w-sejmie-republiki-litewskiej,4386.

Igor Janke: And there it is! Nevertheless, it is the source of our wealth.

Jakub Kumoch: Yes, this is true.

Igor Janke: It gives us strength. I will tell you something. It will be more of a source of our security when we have more influence there.

Jakub Kumoch: However, when countries are in danger, they behave selfishly. Let us concentrate on relations with those countries that will be in danger with us; this is very important because of Russia. See, Russia tends to attack countries one by one. First Georgia, then Ukraine; when Georgia was attacked, in Ukraine [at that time] it was still Tymoshenko[37] who was Prime Minister at that time, and Yushchenko[38] was President; and Yushchenko flew with President Kaczyński to Tbilisi,[39] but the Ukrainian Government under Tymoshenko was, in fact, very moderate, whereas today Georgia is behaving towards Ukraine in a way that causes a certain amount of disappointment, if not embarrassment throughout. We are talking about the government of Georgia.

Igor Janke: Not about society.

Jakub Kumoch: No, not society. Although, on the other hand, so many thousands of Russians have fled to Georgia and are walking freely in the streets, renting flats, doing business, investing money, and something little bothers them. Russia, you see, attacked one state. It attacked another country. When it attacked Moldova, it didn't attack Ukraine. When it attacked Georgia... Why is Russia doing this? After all, they also realize that we stand together as a bloc of states in solidarity, and this solidarity should be absolute in matters of security. We have the Courageous Six I mentioned: the Baltics, we, the Czechs, the Slovaks, we have in the future Ukraine, Moldova and a free, I hope, Belarus. We have Romania on board. If these countries cooperate, I am also talking about other countries in the region; just to be clear, these are the countries under direct threat. If they cooperate, Russia simply has a potential adversary that is not worth considering attacking at all. It is simply better to get along. And I think this is our basis: 'Stick to the region'. And the West looks at us first and foremost in terms of just being a regional leader, and as such we have more

37 Yuliya Tymoshenko (b. 1960), Ukrainian politician, Prime Minister of Ukraine from February to September 2005 and from December 2007 to March 2010.
38 Viktor Yushchenko (b. 1954), Ukrainian politician, President of Ukraine from 2005 to 2010.
39 On 12 August 2008, together with the presidents of Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, Polish President Lech Kaczyński visited Georgia during the Russian-Georgian War.

clout. Whereas just being invited to the table alone and simply agreeing to what is accepted at that table and in the name of some interests – in the name of unity – that are often contrary to our interests, can be wrong.

Igor Janke: Finally, one last sentence. What has this year of working in this place, under these conditions, taught you? What did you learn that you didn't know before?

Jakub Kumoch: You know what, of course I learned a lot about the workings of the state and the mechanisms of the state. It was my first experience of world politics, and let's be clear that it was a new experience for all of us because Poland was never such a centre, such a focal point, as it was this year.

I remember the day when there was both Kamala Harris[40] and Prime Minister Trudeau,[41] and right after that we were preparing for Joe Biden's visit,[42] when the president talked to someone practically every day, received someone: someone went to Kyiv, we went to Kyiv, these were amazing things. What did it teach me? I think that Poland can follow a courageous, assertive and ahead-of-the-facts policy. That we used to be such... I don't know if you see a paradigm of failure in us, which is for example in some publicists, in one well-known publicist of Onet[43] for example, that Poland when it does something, it surely does it wrong and it surely fails, and here we have shown, as you can see, that it succeeds.

Poland, however, was able to encourage the provision of weapons to Ukraine, and yet say 'we are giving Rzeszów', 'we are giving the hub'.[44] I was there, I saw it. The word 'hub' was spoken by President Duda before the word 'weapons'. That's the first thing. The second is Poland, which was able to make Ukraine a candidate for the European Union today.[45] If it were not for the determination of President Duda, it would not be, quite simply. This candidature was forced on the West by our countries acting together. Another thing is Poland, which did not allow itself to be framed in the matter of the planes and in the matter of responsibility for the alleged failure to deliver the planes. After all, that was the narrative they were trying to sew up for us. Another thing: Poland stood up for the Leopard coalition now.[46] After all, it was not a call from Berlin. And this coalition

40 Kamala Harris (b. 1964), an American politician, vice-president of the US since 2021.
41 Justin Trudeau (b. 1971), a Canadian politician, Prime Minister of Canada since 2015.
42 Joseph Biden's visit to Poland took place on 20–21 February 2023.
43 Popular Polish internet portal.
44 Rzeszów Airport.
45 At the European Council summit on 23 June 2022, Ukraine and Moldova were granted the status of EU candidates.
46 States which advocate delivery of Leopard tanks to Ukraine and exerted pressure on the German government for consent on the re-export of German weapons.

will arise; you will see that this coalition will arise, so the courage and the creation of facts [matter] and a big country just has to do it [act decisively and with courage].

Igor Janke: And you have to admit that this is a new quality in Polish politics. Such international activity, effectiveness.

Jakub Kumoch: We go out, we do not walk in line. If something is in our interest, we will simply do it and even perhaps later our partners will, to some extent, resent why it was not agreed beforehand. It is difficult; that is how states work; that is how big states work.

Igor Janke: And may we pursue such a policy. Kuba, thank you very much. It was a very frank conversation.

Jakub Kumoch: I hope, as much as you know, as a diplomat is able to be honest.

Igor Janke: At times you stopped being [a diplomat]. Thank you very much; thank you very much. Thank you, that is all in this conversation. Be sure to write what you think of it. We have touched on a lot of important threads; I will continue the conversation on Poland's strategy in *Układ Otwarty*. Support *Układ Otwarty*, because it makes this programme independent and allows me to have such discussions. I invite you to my profile on Patronite.pl. Thank you very much, see you, hear you.

Edited by ŁUKASZ ADAMSKI

Interview with Alexandru Burian
MOLDOVA IS A MULTIFACETED STATE IN TERMS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

ALEXANDRU BURIAN

Doctor of law, professor in the Department of International Law and External Economic Relations Law of Moldova State University, and pro-rector of the University of European Studies of Moldova. He is the author of more than 250 pieces of scholarly writing, including 6 monographs and 12 university textbooks in the fields of public international law, diplomatic and consular law, geopolitics, diplomatic protocol, and etiquette.

In 1988–1990, he was a Senior Scientific Assistant in the International Department of the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), and Senior Researcher in the International Relations Department, Institute of Marxism – Leninism of the CPSU CC (Moscow). In 1990–1994, he was a Member of Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. In 1993–1994, he was the Chairman of the Commission for International Relations, and the head of the Moldovan parliamentary delegation to PACE. In 1994–1995, he was Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova. Burian was the head of Moldovan government delegations in negotiations with Iran, Cuba, China, Romania, Russia, Italy, Mexico, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, and Malta.

In 1995–1997, he was the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Moldova to the Federal Republic of Germany, the Kingdom of Spain, and the Kingdom of Denmark. In 2002–2003, Burian was the Head of the Protocol Sector of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. In 2005–2009, he was the Director of the Institute of History, State and Law at the Academy of Sciences of Moldova.

After the collapse of the USSR, relations with national minorities in many post-Soviet republics became strained. Moldova managed to resolve the issue with the Gagauz people peacefully, while the situation in Transnistria erupted into conflict. You participated directly in these political processes. How can you explain this situation? What miscalculations were made by the Moldovan leadership in the 1990s?[1]

– The 1990s is a period that we still do not completely understand. From 1990 to 1994, I was a member of the Moldovan Parliament, so I observed many things and processes from within. Moldova is a multifaceted state in terms of national identity. It has been like that for centuries.

Moldova as a state emerged in the fourteenth century at the crossroads of different cultures and civilizations. As it had very strong neighbours – Poland, Turkey, and later Russia – Moldova constantly had to manoeuvre. This influenced the choice of state religion. Ultimately, Orthodox Christianity was chosen. The Cyrillic alphabet was borrowed from the Bulgarians. This policy of manoeuvring enabled Moldova to retain its sovereignty for a long time. However, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Moldova had the bad luck of being divided into three parts.

In 1775, following the Austro-Turkish War, northern Bukovina, which is part of historical Moldova, was incorporated into the Austrian Empire. In 1812, after a series of Russo-Turkish wars, the eastern part of Moldova was incorporated by Russia. The territory between the Carpathian Mountains and the Prut River remained part of Turkey. In 1859, as part of the Ottoman Empire, this territory was united with Wallachia to form Romania, which became an independent state in 1877.

Moldova was unable to implement its modernist statehood project because of these partitions. However, the emergence of Romania facilitated the evolvement of a literary Romanian language which became the language of science, culture, politics, and economics. Previously, Moldovan was spoken only at home and was the language of the common people. The emergence of literary Romanian contributed to the growth of the Moldovan national identity.

For example, in the Russian Empire, the Moldovan language was not taught in school. My father, who was born in 1902, completed five grades under the tsar, and he was taught in Russian. There were no Moldovan schools in Bravicea at the time.

The fact that the modern territory of Moldova was for a long time a part of different states contributed to the multi-ethnic character of the region. In addition to the Moldovans, in the nineteenth century a large

[1] The interview was recorded on 11 May 2022. The editors of AREI do not necessarily share the interviewee's views or opinions.

group of the Gagauz, a Turkic people who are Eastern Orthodox Christians, settled on this territory. The Russian Empire extended its patronage over them. The same goes for the Bulgarians who settled in the south of Bessarabia.[2] In fact, both the Gagauz and the Bulgarians still live in Moldova and in the south of the Odessa region in Ukraine.

This is a brief history – a context, so to speak. But let's go back to the 1990s. In the process of *perestroika*, the language issue became more acute in Moldova. In 1989, a law was passed on the official status of the Moldovan language as the state language, written in the Latin script instead of the Cyrillic alphabet. This was only logical. After all, Moldovan belongs to the Romance group of languages, and its semantics are easier to convey in the Latin script.

At that time, the Moldovan independence movement was born. However, it was very cautious and limited in scope, as people were afraid of Moscow. It was Russia that had the upper hand in this regard. It was the first to declare its state sovereignty.[3] We – Ukraine and Moldova – simply followed the lead. We have to be grateful to the Russian political elite, which took this radical step. They were, to some extent, the drivers of this process, and that has to be acknowledged.

Parallel to the Moldovan independence movement, a movement for unification with Romania began, which was a rather radical step. None of the 15 former Soviet republics had the sort of plans that Moldova had. In Ukraine, for example, there were no intentions to unite with Poland. It was out of the question.

What was the reason behind Moldova's desire to unite with Romania?

– In fact, very few people – less than 10% of the country's population – were in favour of unification with Romania in the past, and the same is true now. There was no reason as such for this. It existed only at the level of an idea. Democracy allowed every group to put forward its vision – to express its opinion. On the other hand, the supporters of unification with Romania have been very active.

In Romania there is indeed a desire to unite at the level of public sentiment, but there is no state strategy for that. It's not that simple. In 30 years, Moldova's pro-Romanian political circles have never managed to get more than 10% support in parliament.

2 From the fourteenth century, the Gagauz people lived in the Despotate of Dobruja (aka the Principality of Karvuna), which later became part of the Ottoman Empire. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Russo-Turkish wars led to anarchy in this region. It was then that the Gagauz and some Bulgarians took advantage of the Russian Empire's invitation to resettle in Bessarabia.

3 The Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) was adopted on 12 June 1990.

Did you say there is such a desire in Romania?

– There is. Some politicians talk about unification. However, the only Romanian president who stated that publicly was Traian Băsescu.[4] Other presidents, starting with Ion Iliescu[5] (with whom I personally discussed the subject), preferred to refrain from making public statements of that kind. They were aware that this would require a referendum, the results of which would be disappointing. Even if there had been an option to unify the countries based on a decision of the parliaments of Romania and Moldova, there would not have been enough votes in the Moldovan Parliament to support it.

Such an attempt was made in 1992. The entire Romanian Parliament came to Chișinău. I remember that joint meeting. They realized as soon as they arrived that this was a lost cause. Against the backdrop of these events, the Gagauz and Transnistria raised the issue of seceding from Moldova. I want to note that this idea of Transnistria's secession from Moldova was also supported by some circles in Ukraine. This has to do with our common history. The fact is that Transnistria in the interwar period was part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR).[6] The population of Transnistria is very mixed, as, indeed, is the population of Moldova. In the early 1990s, the ethnic composition of Transnistria was as follows: Ukrainians, 28%; Russians, 25%; and Moldovans, 40%.

Obviously, the Ukrainian population in Transnistria had a say and, to a certain extent, was able to choreograph this process. At that time, Ukrainians in Transnistria joined efforts with Russians, and that's how it all turned out.

The 1992 war was provoked. In its essence, it was utterly stupid, just like any war.

Can you please tell me if this war was provoked by external actors, such as Russia, or if it was instigated by internal Moldovan and Transnistrian circles?

– We had the feeling that local political elites sought escalation, but we have no corroborative evidence.

In any case, I can say this based on the findings of our parliamentary commission. We managed to establish that someone called the Moldovan

4 Traian Băsescu (b. 1951) is a Romanian politician; he was president of Romania from 2004 to 2014. He is a supporter of the idea of a 'Greater Romania'. In 2005, he put forward a plan to unite Romania and Moldova. However, this plan was not supported by the Moldovan leadership.

5 Ion Iliescu (b. 1930) is a Romanian politician; he was president of Romania from 1990 to 1996 and from 2000 to 2004.

6 The Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) was part of the Ukrainian SSR from 12 October 1924 to 2 August 1940. The Moldavian ASSR included the left-bank part of modern Moldova, i.e., present-day Transnistria. In 1940, after the annexation of Bessarabia by the Soviet Union, the Moldavian ASSR, except for some areas, became part of the established Moldavian SSR.

president's office on the morning of 2 March 1992, and said that civilians were being fired at from the Transnistrian side across the Dniester River. The president's office was not able to make sense of this and immediately summoned the police, as we didn't have an army at the time.

At the same time, someone called the Transnistrian leadership and said that shots were being fired from the Moldovan side across the Dniester River. The Transnistrian leadership, in turn, sent their police. Then it went from bad to worse; the police from both sides arrived at the location, waiting in ambush; someone fired a gunshot in the air, and the process went off the rails. And then the situation escalated. The irrational commander of the 14th Army, General Lebed,[7] gave an order (without any approval from Moscow, by the way) for the army to take up firing positions. This war claimed 300 lives on both sides.

How realistic is this figure? There are reports of 1,000 deaths.

– No, the Transnistrian authorities are exaggerating so that they can create a pantheon of heroes. There were no firefights as such – only shots fired across the Dniester River.

There was a clash in Varnița when two buses carrying Moldovan policemen came under fire. During that incident, 90 people were killed. As a result, Moldovan police stormed into Bender, and shooting started. Apparently, they fired at the balconies of residential buildings. Those victims and those who died in Bender are actually the 300 people who fell victim to this conflict.

The situation with Gagauzia was completely different. They tried to declare independence, but we managed to come to an agreement with them in 1994. A parliamentary commission was set up. By the way, I was a member of it, and I participated in meetings with the Gagauz. Moldova provided the Gagauz with national and cultural autonomy. Politically, Gagauzia is not an independent entity recognized at the international level, but it has all the attributes of a state: a constitution, a flag, and an anthem. I believe Transnistria could also receive these attributes, but the local elites have inflated political ambitions. Unfortunately, I have no corroborative evidence, but there is reason to believe that all the Moldovan authorities are in some way involved in the corruption schemes and fraudulent actions of the Transnistrian leadership. This is also one of the factors preventing this conflict from being resolved, as it benefits both sides, and there is

7 Alexander Lebed (1950–2002) was a lieutenant general and a Soviet and Russian military and political figure. On 27 June 1992, by order of the General Staff of the Russian Federation, Lebed was appointed commander of the 14th Guards Army stationed in Transnistria. On 8 July 1992, he launched artillery strikes at the Moldovan side and put Russian tanks in combat positions. None of these manoeuvres were formally approved by Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev and were against his orders.

some indirect evidence that speaks in favour of this interpretation. Transnistria is a grey economic zone.

Can you give an example?

– There is no conflict as such between Transnistria and Moldova. There is a conflict between political elites, whereas the ethnic compositions of Transnistria and Moldova are the same: 40% and 67% Moldovans, 28% and 13% Ukrainians, and 25% and 6% Russians, respectively. This is, let's say, taking into account the migration processes of the last 30 years, which have led to a decrease in the percentage of Russians and Ukrainians in Moldova.

Also, there are a lot of mixed marriages for whose children it is quite problematic to determine national identity. My brother, for example, was married to a woman from Dubăsari, Transnistria. From this point of view, it can be argued that there is no ground for interethnic hostility.

The population of Transnistria has significantly decreased over the last 30 years. At the moment, 300,000–350,000 people live there, about 200,000 of whom have Moldovan citizenship in addition to Transnistrian, as well as Russian IDs, and 70,000–80,000 have Ukrainian citizenship. I am more than certain that many Transnistrian residents have three IDs at the same time.

It is clear that the political leadership in Transnistria would not want to swap their presidential and ministerial positions for those of district leaders. A large proportion of the population is involved in state structures that would be dissolved in the case of unification with Moldova. We are talking about customs, border guards, the army, etc. All these people are afraid of losing their jobs.

In fact, there is no border between Moldova and Transnistria, i.e., there are border guards on the Transnistria side but not on the Moldovan side. I have travelled there several times by car.

Regarding instances of corruption, the Transnistrians have, for example, introduced their own number plates, which are not recognized by the international community. Unfortunately, Ukraine, Belarus and Russia used to allow entry onto their territory with these number plates. Now Ukraine has banned them. Moldova also allows vehicles with these plates to enter, but it is impossible to enter EU territory – for example, Romania – with them. Transnistria has started demanding recognition of its number plates through the OSCE, but so far without success. They recognize Moldovan plates.

They have no telephone service because the International Telecommunication Union has refused to give them an international code. The population uses Moldovan telephone numbers.

At its widest, the width of Transnistria is 13–16 km, with an average width of 10 km. Of course, the Moldavian mobile network covers the territory of Transnistria.

It is absolutely unclear to me why Moldova met them halfway when it comes to number plates and communications.

In the 2000s, Transnistria was allowed to sell products to the EU through Moldova. They register their companies as Moldovan and export products to the EU and Ukraine, but these business entities do not pay taxes. Moreover, they are not subjected to customs control, which creates favourable conditions for smuggling. This is absolute nonsense, and it goes on with the permission of the Moldovan authorities. A legitimate question arises as to why Moldova is playing up to the Transnistrian leadership.

I hope that all these issues will be resolved when a serious debate starts. Right now, people in Transnistria are scared by the war in Ukraine.

Is this a direct threat to them?

– Naturally, this is a direct threat in terms of the Russian troops stationed on Transnistrian territory. If you are clear-eyed, you must admit that these troops are the Soviet army, which has been deployed in Moldova since Soviet times. It's only 1,500 people. At that time, that was all the troops that were in Tiraspol. In October 1991, after Moldova declared independence, President Mircea Snegur issued a decree on the [Moldovan] ownership of the Soviet army's property on the territory of Moldova. Unfortunately, this decree claimed ownership of only the property on the right bank of the Dniester River, while what was on the left bank was left to Transnistria. Officers from the 14th Army reported to Snegur. I know this for a fact because we heard Snegur's report in the Parliament. He could never clearly explain why he took such a band-aid solution. Snegur refused to extend Moldovan jurisdiction to officers of the 14th Army.

Was there such a demand from officers of the 14th Army?

– Yes, there was such a demand. Most of them wanted to fall under Moldovan jurisdiction because they did not have much choice. They were sort of stuck in limbo between the past and the future. The depot in Cobasna, which housed 45,000 tonnes of weapons brought from

Czechoslovakia, the GDR and Hungary,[8] was essentially left unattended. The Transnistrians started to sell these weapons. On 1 March 1992, the war between Transnistria and Moldova broke out, and, on 2 March, Russian President Boris Yeltsin issued a decree to put the 14th Army under Russian jurisdiction. Let me draw your attention to the fact that it was as late as March 1992 that the 14th Army came under Russian jurisdiction. And, since then, Russian troops have been stationed on the territory of Transnistria. Of course, there is no agreement that regulates their stay on that territory. It is important to understand that Russia did not send its troops to Transnistrian territory but simply brought the 14th Army under its jurisdiction. In other words, to some extent, all this was the result of our own folly.

How capable is the 14th Army now? In fact, for the last 30 years this army has been slowly deteriorating. Is it realistic for the Russian Federation to use the potential of this army?

– There are now two corps of Russian troops in Transnistria. The first corps comprises the remnants of the 14th Army, which guards the depot in Cobasna and does nothing else. The headcount is probably a couple of hundred servicemen at most. The second corps is the Russian peacekeeping forces, which are deployed on the territory of the PMR together with peacekeepers from Moldova, Transnistria, and Ukraine. Their stay is regulated by a 1992 agreement, i.e., these Russian peacekeeping forces are legally stationed on Moldovan territory.

The replacement of these peacekeeping forces with a UN contingent has been under discussion for years. At some point there was an idea that it should be an OSCE peacekeeping mission. But, as you may be aware, the OSCE does not even have the status of an international organization, let alone an armed force. It would be good if a UN contingent could be brought in, but this decision would have to be approved by the Security Council. This is not possible because Russia has the right of veto and would block such a decision with 100% probability.

8 Cobasna is a village in the Rîbnița District of the Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic (PMR, aka Transnistria). In the 1940s, armament depots were set up there. Most of the ammunition was brought there after the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the Warsaw Pact countries. In 2000, the weapons and ammunition stored there amounted to 42,000 tonnes. Before 2004, about 50% of the weapons, military vehicles, and ammunition stored there had been removed or destroyed. At present, about 20,000 tonnes of military items are stored in the depot, more than half of which are unserviceable. The warehouse in Cobasna is the largest military depot in Europe and is guarded by an operational group of Russian troops, which is the successor to the 14th Army, which came under Russian jurisdiction after the collapse of the USSR.

You said that General Lebed played a major role in escalating this conflict. Can you please elaborate on this?

– The General's personal traits and personality played a major role here. Lebed was a typical hawk, and he couldn't pass up such an opportunity. The fact is that, for any general or serviceman, a war or military conflict is an opportunity to add stars to their epaulets. It is a window of opportunity for them. You can understand the military from this point of view. They shoot first and talk later. On the other hand, I want to say that we also had our own hawk, General Ion Costaș,[9] who headed the Ministry of Interior of Moldova. He, too, was determined to solve the issue militarily, although Moldova didn't have an army back then. There is some semblance of an army now, but back then we had nothing. My understanding is that General Lebed carried out this sortie without the Kremlin's instructions, but they managed to get the situation under control. Russian tanks went as far as Bender but did not go any further.

Going back to the situation of the PMR army and its combat readiness, it is unlikely that these 1,500 men can make any dramatic difference in the war in Ukraine or the situation in Moldova. And that is why they are scared. They have some weapons and even four defence zones, but their morale is extremely low.

Our Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration, Oleg Serebrian,[10] has met and spoken to Transnistrian representatives many times. I know Serebrian very well. He is our former ambassador to Germany and France. He is convinced that they are scared now. They definitely don't want to go to war, and they are afraid that Ukraine might attack them. The allegations that the Ukrainian side is responsible for the recent explosions in Tiraspol do not hold water.[11] According to Moldovan data, this is most likely the result of internal squabbles among Transnistrian elites. Yes, there is indeed a radical group in Transnistria that supports the Russian invasion of Ukraine and is ready to fight on the side of Russia, but these are marginal sentiments that do not have wide support. The number of bellicose Transnistrians does not exceed 5–6%. Such extremist groups exist all over the world; I wouldn't take them seriously.

9 Ion Costaș (b. 1944) is a Moldovan military and political figure. From 3 June 1990 to 5 February 1992, he served as the Minister of Interior of Moldova, and as the Minister of Defence of Moldova from 5 February to 29 July 1992. In 2010, his book *Transnistria 1989–1992: Chronicle of an 'Undeclared' War* [Transnistria, 1989–1992. Cronica unui război "nedeclarat"], presenting his view of the 1992 Transnistrian conflict, was published.

10 Oleg Serebrian (b. 1969) is a Moldovan politician and diplomat. He has been Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration of the Republic of Moldova since 2022.

11 On 25 April 2022, there were several explosions in the building of the Ministry of State Security in Tiraspol, the capital of the PMR. President of Moldova Maia Sandu stated that the blasts in the PMR were the result of 'internal differences between various groups in Transnistria that have an interest in destabilizing the situation'.

UN Secretary General António Guterres visited Moldova the other day.[12] During his visit, he noted that the 5+2 format for resolving the Transnistrian conflict is becoming a thing of the past.[13] Since the group includes Russia and Ukraine, which are now irreconcilable enemies, it is impossible to reach any consensus in this format.

Yes, Ukraine has completely severed diplomatic relations with Russia.[14]

– Guterres praised Moldova for starting a direct dialogue with Transnistria, and he even suggested that the UN should be involved in the new 1+1 format. However, I don't think that Transnistria will want to reach a peaceful settlement, as it wants to be independent. They enjoy it. *(Laughs)*

If you compare this conflict with, say, the situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, or even Donbas in Ukraine, you could say that the Transnistrian conflict is the only conflict in the post-Soviet space where everything is developing quite peacefully. We have joint sports teams at the Olympics and world tournaments. Transnistrian athletes compete under the Moldovan flag and when they win prizes they shed tears to the sounds of the Moldovan anthem. The Transnistrian football club Sheriff plays under the Moldovan flag.

Transnistria has no infrastructure of its own to connect with the outside world. They fly via the airport in Chișinău. The Orthodox Church in Transnistria is subordinated to the Metropolis of Chișinău and All Moldova.[15] All of the above give grounds for guarded optimism. Perhaps Transnistria will follow in the footsteps of Gagauzia and agree to autonomous status as part of Moldova. Maybe, but I wouldn't say that for sure.

If, God forbid, Russia appears at Moldova's borders, Transnistria might become active, but at this point they are scared. It is difficult to predict anything.

Coming back to the political processes in the 1990s, I would like to ask you about the first president of Moldova, Mircea Snegur.[16] What kind of person was he, and what was the impact of his personality on the political processes that were taking place in Moldova? Moldova managed to get international recognition quite rapidly: within a few years, 130 countries recognized its independence. I noticed that Snegur and several other

12 António Guterres paid an official visit to Moldova on 9–10 May 2022.
13 The 5+2 format for resolving the Transnistrian conflict, which involves the US, Russia, Ukraine, the OSCE and the EU plus Moldova and Transnistria, was established immediately after the end of the hot phase of the conflict.
14 On 24 February 2022, Ukraine cut diplomatic ties with Russia.
15 The Metropolis of Chișinău and All Moldova is a self-governing body within the Russian Orthodox Church.
16 Mircea Snegur (b. 1940) was the first President of Moldova (1990–1997).

Moldovan presidents were natives of the Floreşti District of Moldova.[17] Were there old patron–client relationships that had developed back in the Soviet period? Can we say that the Floreşti District gave Moldova a post-Soviet political elite?

– Mircea Snegur and Petru Lucinschi[18] do indeed originally come from the *Floreşti* District, but this is just a coincidence. I don't see any cronyism in it. Mircea Snegur was the Central Committee Secretary for Agriculture, and he held a PhD in Agricultural Sciences. I know him very well. First, I want to say that he is a decent man. He is not corrupt. I know this for sure. In addition, he felt insecure, as he is of an agrarian background. He didn't know his way in politics; he wasn't aware of many things. He lacked determination. He often withdrew or wanted advice on how to do the right thing. At first, he served as the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of Moldavia when he was elected. He was competing for this position with Lucinschi. This was during the first term of the independent parliament. He was then supported by the unionists, but he did not give them the positions they had hoped for. He rejected the idea of unification with Romania and distanced himself from Russia.

In terms of international recognition, I know this situation very well. At that time, I was the Chairman of the Parliamentary Commission for International Relations, and I was Deputy Foreign Minister afterwards. I know the way we approached other countries, and this was probably the proper approach. I was the Chairman of our delegation to the Council of Europe. In 1994–1995, we became a member of the Council of Europe. We received strong support from Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic. There was also support from Bulgaria, though to a lesser extent. We had great relations with the Italians and the French. At that time, socialist parties were in power there. I used to work in Moscow, in the protocol service, and had contacts with the French Socialist Party and the Italian Socialist Party. Thanks to this experience, I knew very many parliamentarians personally.

So, you also deserve some credit for that?

– To a certain extent. *(Smiling)* I don't want to pose as a hero, but it did play a role. At that time, Moldova was making steps in the right direction, but later on it started going round in circles.

Why did the agrarian party roll back these European integration processes?

– The agrarian party comprised mainly collective farm chairmen.

17 An area in the north of Moldova.
18 Petru Lucinschi (b. 1940) is a Moldovan politician and former President of Moldova (1997–2001).

So, they had no understanding of international politics?

– Yes, absolutely. In the first parliament, the unionists[19] had a strong hand. The first parliament of Moldova was composed of 380 MPs, of whom 105 were unionists. The second-most influential faction comprised the agrarians, i.e., collective farm chairmen and representatives of the district committees of the Communist Party. The Soviet Moldavia faction was the third largest. There really was such a faction. It consisted of Transnistrians, the Gagauz and some party officials. And the fourth faction, headed by me, comprised independent MPs. We were few in number, as few as 25 people, but we were very influential because we chaired 4 of the 12 parliamentary commissions.

We had representatives from Gagauzia and Transnistria. In 1994, we lost momentum, and the agrarians came to power. Unfortunately, they still thought like collective farm chairmen. They had the mindset of a leader like Viktor Yanukovych in Ukraine, who used to head a trucking division.[20] I can draw a parallel, as I was an observer during the presidential election in Ukraine in 2010. We had meetings and conversations with Yanukovych's entourage, and it was terrible.

Did the Transnistrian conflict have any impact on Moldova's aspirations for EU integration?

– No, the Transnistrian conflict was not a direct disincentive, but it deterred foreign investment because potential investors feared war. Transnistria could in no way interfere with Moldova's EU integration. First, they had no say in the international arena. Second, there have been precedents regarding the integration of countries that have unresolved territorial issues. For example, Cyprus, which has an unresolved territorial conflict with Turkey. If part of a divided country wants to join the EU, then why not? From this point of view, it is the right thing to do.

Ukraine may well integrate into the EU even without settling the Donbas and Crimean issues. How long the war in Ukraine will last and how it will end, this is another story; will a peace treaty be signed, or will it transform into some form of frozen conflict? It's difficult to predict anything at this point.

At this stage, neither side has given up hope of winning. For the time being, therefore, a negotiation process is unlikely.

19 The movement for the unification of Moldova and Romania.
20 Viktor Yanukovych was the President of Ukraine from 2010 to 2014. He was ousted from the country during the Revolution of Dignity. Prior to his political career, he worked for 20 years as the director of the Donetsk Regional Motor Transport Association.

Coming back to the processes in Moldova, I would like to talk about GUAM.[21] This was an initiative launched by President Leonid Kuchma, and there were attempts to resuscitate it later under Viktor Yushchenko. Why did the initiative fail? It was essentially a counterweight to the monopoly of Russia and Turkey in the Black Sea–Caspian Sea region.

– To begin with, GUAM did not enjoy much support in Moldova. Moldova was sidelined in this project. It wasn't clear what prospects this would open up for Moldova. Frankly speaking, the prospects for this community were unclear even for Ukraine. On the one hand, it opened up the prospect of building an oil pipeline across the Black Sea; on the other hand, it was clear that implementation of such projects was extremely difficult.

Moldova supported this initiative as a form of cooperation in the Black Sea region. Let's say this is something akin to the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation (BSEC). We are involved in it, although there are no real outcomes. My acquaintances, who are BSEC diplomatic staff, are of course happy as they receive high salaries, but they honestly admit that they do nothing. *(Laughs)* From this point of view, GUAM is yet another BSEC, only in the case of GUAM it didn't even go so far as to create bureaucratic structures.

Azerbaijan's membership in GUAM was of particular interest, since it could act as an oil and gas exporter for Ukraine and Moldova, even though they cannot meet all our demands in terms of commodities. They simply do not have such huge reserves. They might be enough for Moldova, but definitely not for Ukraine.

Another important element is how to deliver these commodities. If the route goes across Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, and Moldova, the question is how cost-effective it will be. Therefore, the successful implementation of such projects is very doubtful. GUAM was a political project rather than an economic one filled with real content. Actually, the project failed because it did not have a real economic component. GUAM, of course, was a counterweight to the CIS, but it was declarative in nature.

You have met Ukrainian presidents and engaged with them personally. How would you describe them? What personal traits did you find most remarkable?

– I met Kuchma and Kravchuk, who died yesterday.[22]

21 GUAM is a regional international organization established in 1997 at the initiative of Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma. Its members include Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan (from 1999 to 2005), Azerbaijan and Moldova. The name is an acronym of the names of the member countries.

22 Ukraine's first President, Leonid Kravchuk, died on 10 May 2022.

Both these presidents left a mark in history which is surrounded by controversy. Yesterday, when the news of Kravchuk's death became known, there were some rather harsh statements on Ukrainian social media. On the one hand, he was the first president of independent Ukraine; on the other hand, he signed the Budapest Memorandum,[23] which in fact turned out to be empty promises. What are your personal impressions of Kravchuk and Kuchma?

– These were people with a Soviet mentality. Kravchuk certainly loved Ukraine. I want to say that Kravchuk was a very sly person. A real fox. During a conversation he would catch every phrase – was quick to grasp the meaning. Kuchma, on the contrary, was very slow in his reactions.

Kravchuk was not the initiator of the Belovezh Accords, which were signed by Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia, but he agreed to it. From this point of view, Kravchuk's role in the collapse of the USSR is huge. Kravchuk signed the Budapest Memorandum under pressure. It was not so much the Russians who wanted this memorandum as the Americans. I had a chance to be in the US in 1992, right after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. I was the pro-rector of a Russian-American university. I was in the US in August–September 1992. At the time, I was lecturing at various universities in the US and meeting various politicians. Their attitude to Russia was different then. The USSR had lost the Cold War.

I want to clarify: were American officials proud of winning the Cold War?

– They were happy, but they recognized that it was a kind of an unexpected gift for them. The Soviet Union collapsed because of Gorbachev's folly. Now, of course, they no longer acknowledge that, but that is not the point.

When I was in the US, the American officials I met had studied my biography and found out that I had served in the Soviet Army for two years in the Strategic Missile Forces. In one conversation, they asked me how the Soviet missile forces were organized. As the Soviet Union was already a thing of the past, this was no longer classified information. I could conclude from this conversation that they were afraid that every Soviet republic had nuclear weapons, whereas nuclear warheads were deployed only in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan. The other republics had none. The missile forces were integrated. They were not subordinated to republican centres, only to Moscow.

[23] The Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances was a document guaranteeing security to Ukraine in exchange for its accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. It was signed on 5 December 1994 by the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The 43rd Missile Army, which was stationed in Vinnytsia, reported neither to the Kyiv military district nor to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine. The strategic forces reported to Moscow. All command and control came from Moscow. I served in the Smolensk missile army, but it was deployed on the territory of Belarus. I can assure you that the Belarusians did not even know we were there.

The Americans were afraid there were strategic missile forces somewhere else, so they went for the peaceful dissolution of the USSR. They put diplomatic pressure on Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus for them to give up their nuclear weapons. The scientific, technological, and industrial potential of Ukraine was sufficient to produce nuclear weapons then and still is now. To begin with, Ukraine has all the necessary natural resources to do so.

The Budapest Memorandum was an American initiative. It did not have the status of a state treaty and was not ratified by the parliament. It was more of a declaration. Regrettably, this was Kravchuk's miscalculation. But as a political leader Kravchuk did a lot for Ukraine at that time. I don't know if anyone else could have done more.

Clearly, under those circumstances Kravchuk exchanged recognition of Ukraine's independence for nuclear weapons.

– Yes, in a way. It was not as easy as it seems now. Moldova was a simpler case. It is a small country. Ukraine is a heavyweight, a big country with strong industrial and economic potential. I think that at the time the US was slightly wary of Ukraine. Look at how concerned the US is with North Korea's ballistic missile launches. But this is a tiny country, and Ukraine is huge, so these concerns and caution were justified.

Prof. Burian, I would like to ask another question; this is more about the 2000s, about the success of the Communist Party in Moldova. In virtually all post-Soviet countries, the Communist movement had withered away by the end of the 1990s. At best they could act as junior partners to the ruling coalition. In Moldova, on the contrary, the Communists came to power in 2001 and held power until 2009. How can you explain their success in Moldova under the new circumstances?

– Their predecessors paved the way to power for the Communists. In 1998, after four years of the agrarians being in office, the mob – unionists, liberals, and others – came to power and ran the country into the ground in three years. Actually, corruption and other nasty phenomena typical of the transition period date back to those days in Moldova. The Communists played on the dissatisfaction of Moldovans with those political forces.

This was the new Party of Communists [of Moldova] formed by Voronin. They were not the successors to the former Communist Party of Moldavia. They gained a majority in parliament and elected their own president. Moldova was then a parliamentary republic. The Communists managed to gain a foothold in power for eight years.

In 2009, popular unrest started. The parliament building and presidential office were set on fire. My understanding is that it was organized by external forces. By whom, how and why is difficult to say.

On the other hand, Moldovan society is very multifaceted. It is deeply divided even now: 53% want to join the EU, and 47% want to have close ties with Russia. Let's say Moldovans are not eager to join the [Eurasian] Customs Union, but part of society wants to have some form of cooperation with Russia.

What motivates such aspirations? Is it about cultural ties or something else? After all, Moldova has no common border with Russia, whereas not only does the EU share borders with Moldova, but it also offers an attractive liberal economic model. And what does the Russian Federation have to offer Moldova?

– Overall, the attitude to the EU is positive. The fact is that we have very few Russians. Only about 6%. I cannot say why this is so. It is quite irrational, and nobody can explain it. Still, this division into supporters of the EU and closer cooperation with Russia has been virtually unchanged for a very long time.

So there hasn't been any fluctuation or drifting on the part of those who support cooperation with Russia into the camp of those who support EU integration?

– Yes, Maia Sandu's party won only because they gained the support of the Moldovan diaspora, and it is not absolutely clear what caused such a surge in activity among the Moldovan diaspora.

Do you mean Moldovans who are now abroad and vote at Moldovan embassies?

– Yes, precisely. But it wasn't just embassy voting. A huge number of polling stations were opened abroad. Maia Sandu's current position in favour of neutrality and her refusal to join the anti-Russian sanctions have earned her increasing support in Moldova itself. I think Ukrainians should not feel offended by Moldova. We are a small country, and our position can't change much.

But the popularity of Maia Sandu's party is shaky, so it is difficult to predict what the situation will be during the next election. At the moment, opinion polls show that if there were elections in Moldova, three parties would enter the parliament: Maia Sandu's party, the Bloc of Communists and Socialists, and the ȘOR Party. The latter is the party of Ilan Shor,[24] a major fraudster. He was involved in the theft of 1 billion dollars. He is now in Israel and runs his party from there. He has other parties in the Moldovan Parliament. Can you imagine such an absurd situation? *(smiling)*

I can certainly imagine it, since Ukraine too had such politicians in the past and still does now. Just look at the scandal involving Pavlo Lazarenko.[25] It is surprising that this does not stop people from voting for fraudsters.

– People dislike fraudsters here, but conventional wisdom has it that everyone steals.

I did not plan to refer to most recent events, but unfortunately Russian aggression against Ukraine is of a global nature, and it is simply impossible to avoid the topic. The international security system established after the Second World War has failed. We see that the UN and a number of other international organizations have been virtually helpless. The world community has no effective means to stop the aggressor. In this context, the question arises as to how the ongoing war will affect the international system of collective security.

– The situation in the international arena has changed dramatically since the collapse of the USSR. Since the 1990s, very complex processes have been taking place at the UN. At one time, the UN recognized that Russia was the successor to the Soviet Union. On that basis, Russia received the right of a veto on the Security Council. Now Russia can legally block any possibility of changing the UN Charter. UN reform is thus impossible.

How to assess Russia's current actions is also a question. After all, the United States also used to abuse their right of veto on the Security Council to a large extent. Therefore, they are two peas in a pod, I would say.

This is all true of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act.[26] The principle of the inviolability of borders drawn after the Second World War was violated by the very fact of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This was followed

24 Ilan Shor (or Șor) (b. 1987) is a Moldovan politician and businessman of Jewish origin and leader of the party bearing the same name. In 2017, he was sentenced to 7.5 years in prison for 'a $1 billion theft' from Moldova's banking system. Shor fled the country. In 2020, he was put on an international wanted list.

25 Pavlo Lazarenko (b. 1953) is a Ukrainian politician; he was Prime Minister of Ukraine in 1996–1997. He was accused of corruption and fled to the US, where he was sentenced to nine years in prison and fined $10 million for extortion, money laundering, and wire fraud.

26 The 1975 Helsinki Final Act nailed down the political and territorial outcome of the Second World War.

by the breakup of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. There were a lot of ambiguous developments concerning Kosovo. These are all links in a chain.

Ukraine, incidentally, like Moldova, does not recognize Kosovo's independence. However, the international community not only recognized but even forced the UN's International Court of Justice to recognize the validity of this decision. All of this sets dangerous judicial precedents that can be used, for example, in the situation around Donbas. So, I would say that the situation is complicated when it comes to the UN.

A recent opinion poll in Moldova showed that a significant proportion of Moldovans believe that Russia's aggression against Ukraine is legitimate.[27] What, in your opinion, is behind such an opinion? Is it the effect of Russian propaganda in Moldova?

– Based on what is happening in Moldova, as I said above, Moldovan society is multifaceted. At the same time, however, it is quite democratic. Even under the Communists, the opposition channels were not shut down. We have had an open information policy for 30 years of independence. People watch Russian, Romanian, and European channels. By the way, Ukrainian channels are available here too. This makes us very different from Romania. Once you cross the Romanian border, you find yourself in a purely Romanian information field. In Ukraine, by the way, there are restrictions too.

Yes, these restrictions have been in place since 2014. In Ukraine, in order to watch Russian television, you have to have a satellite dish.

– Yes, but my acquaintances from Odessa recently told me that people are being forced to take down their satellite dishes. Coming back to Moldova, I would like to say that in Moldova you can get a more or less adequate picture of the situation if you want to. Russian channels are not available everywhere in Moldova.[28] In addition, Russian news programmes have not been broadcast for many years now; only entertainment and educational channels are allowed.

I lecture in Slovakia, and I stay in a hotel and watch Russian channels when I go there. In Moldova you can't watch the Solovyov show;

27 More than 40% of Moldovan citizens believe Russia's invasion of Ukraine is unjustified and unprovoked. About 23% are convinced that Russia is protecting the self-proclaimed Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics, and another 15.2% believe that the Russian Federation is conducting an 'operation to liberate Ukraine from Nazism'. At the same time, 31.1% of the respondents support Ukraine in the war, and 20% support Russia. Another 30.4% of Moldovan citizens say no one is right in the war in Ukraine. See Markijan Klimkoveckij, 'Počti tret' graždan Moldovy sčitaet, čto Zapad ne dolžen pomagat' Ukraine vojne s Rossiej – opros', *hromadske.ua*, 1 July, 2022 <https://hromadske. ua/ru/posts/pochti-tret-grazhdan-moldovy-schitaet-chto-zapad-ne-dolzhen-pomogat-ukraine-v-vojne-s-rossiej-opros> [accessed 10 May 2022].

28 On 19 June 2022, Moldovan President Maia Sandu signed a law on combating disinformation and propaganda which introduced a ban on the broadcasting of Russian news and analytical programmes and the screening of Russian war films.

we don't have it, thank God, but in Slovakia you can. It's true, few people in Slovakia know Russian, unlike in Moldova, where everyone speaks Russian.

Thus, Moldovans can get information from different sources. However, there's always an information war and, of course, some people fall under the influence of propaganda. Still, there are more people who condemn Russia's aggression, and 31% believe that both parties are wrong.

I want to note that these sociological surveys are conducted by Western organizations, and they do not always present an objective picture of the situation. Moldova has opened its doors to Ukrainian refugees. We are now ahead of all other countries in Europe in terms of the number of refugees per capita. Moldova supported all sanctions except the oil and gas embargo. Especially gas, because without gas Moldova will have no electricity and no heat. There's no other way out. Yes, there is an agreement with the European Union that we will receive gas, but there are no technical solutions for that. The oil pipeline from Romania has not been completed. It has been under construction for 8 or 10 years already. In fact, it is business as usual: the money has been stolen. The Romanian and Moldovan presidents have inaugurated the pipeline six times already, but it remains unfinished.

The same goes for electricity. There is an agreement with the European Union that Moldova can connect to the European grid. However, the agreement covers only exports. We have even exported electricity to Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Greece. We have power transmission lines, but they can't be used in reverse mode, and it may take three to four years to build new lines.

At this stage, Moldova gets most of its electricity from the Kuchurgan power station,[29] which runs on gas. They sell us electricity at half the Ukrainian price. We buy electricity from Ukraine for our northern regions. By the way, part of the Odessa region also receives electricity from Kuchurgan. We sell electricity to Ukraine in the south and buy it from Ukraine in the north. If I am not mistaken, we receive it from a coal-fired power plant located in the Ivano-Frankivsk region.[30] The Kuchurgan power plant belongs to Russia, and we are dependent on them. If we refuse to accept gas now, the situation will be extremely difficult. Other EU countries aren't giving up on gas either, e.g., Slovakia and Germany.

29 The Kuchurgan power station is a thermal power plant located in the town of Dnestrovsc in Transnistria, on the bank of the Kuchurgan estuary. It was privatized by Russian business in 2005. It is part of the Russian Inter RAO energy company.

30 This refers to the Burshtyn TS (coal-fired power plant), which is located near the town of Burshtyn in the Ivano-Frankivsk region.

Does Moldova have any strategic plan to diversify its gas supplies to make Moldova self-sufficient in terms of energy? It has long been obvious that Russia is using commodities as an element of blackmail.

– Of course, this is being done. The issue of renewable energy sources and green energy is being studied in detail. The central part of Moldova is particularly promising in this regard due to its mountainous terrain. We are going to use alternative sources of gas supplies. We have conducted negotiations with Azerbaijan. Recently, our Deputy Prime Minister, Nicolae Popescu, paid a visit there.[31]

We launched this policy of energy independence from Russia back in the 1990s, and I was one of those who launched it. As Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, I went to Iran. We drafted 12 agreements with Iran to buy oil, build an oil refinery in Moldova, in Giurgiulești, and so on. Everything was fine; we went together with our Prime Minister, Andrei Sangheli,[32] to Iran and signed these agreements. And then we came up against the tough positions taken by Russia and the US. They ganged up on us. (*Laughs*) Thus, our cooperation with Iran never came to fruition. Maybe we will make it this time.

Interview conducted by YANA PRYMACHENKO

31 Nicolae Popescu (b. 1981) has been Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova since August 2021.
32 Andrei Sangheli (b. 1944) is a Moldovan politician and former Prime Minister of Moldova (1992–1997).

Interview with Sergey Tsyplyaev
WE ARE ASPIRING REPUBLICANS

SERGEY TSYPLYAEV

PhD in Physics and Mathematics; member of the Supreme Soviet of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (1989–92); Plenipotentiary Representative of the President of the Russian Federation in St Petersburg (1992–2000); President of the Respublika Foundation (since 2000).

Sergey Alekseyevich, what were your feelings when Gorbachev's *perestroika* began? Was there a demand for change in Soviet society?[1]

– Indeed, the new General Secretary had a different style. He met people, talked off the record, and the general mood was that something was about to change. On the whole, every new leader of the country generates inflated expectations. At that time, the general feeling was that we were clearly lagging behind – that problems had been aggravated and that we could not go on living like that. But no one had a clear understanding of how to live further. At that time, the intelligentsia had persuaded the citizens to follow the so-called Western path and opt for liberalization. The basic slogan was 'Look, the standard of living is better in the West, because they have this, this and that. Let's do the same and we'll follow the same path.' Inflated expectations were followed by bitter disappointments, since the path to democracy required everyone to work comprehensively with their individual cultural values and attitudes, which in reality didn't happen. Of course, at that time it was expected that things would get better instantly and that we would simply have freedom – in all spheres. The first stirrings of the wind of freedom were in the air. The expectation was that things would never be the same.

Gorbachev's role in the changes of the late 1980s is still debated. Some believe that without him there would have been no *perestroika*. Others are convinced that Gorbachev was hostage to the critical situation and that his actions were largely forced by circumstance. In your opinion, which factor predetermined the start of the reforms of the 1980s: personality or circumstances?

– We tend to overestimate the role of personality in history. People think that whatever the leader decides is how it's going to be. Not at all! In critical situations, the role of the individual is of course key, but the individual cannot stem the tide or stop progress. In the 1980s, it was unrealistic to maintain and preserve the *status quo*. Most importantly, back in 1986, it was clear that the Soviet Union had suffered a complete economic catastrophe. Until 1980, the price of oil was extremely high. At the current exchange rate, it was about USD 100 per barrel. Back then we could afford the Olympics, we could celebrate the laying of submarines' keels one after another, and we could enter Afghanistan[2]. But, after 1980, the price of oil started to fall. Gorbachev started his rule with *uskoreniye* (acceleration), and no mention of any political reforms was made. But 1986 saw a plunge

1 Interview recorded 18 January 2022.
2 The Soviet–Afghan War (1979–88). In Russian political discourse, this refers to the invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet troops to support the Marxist–Leninist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan who was in power at the time.

in the price of oil, which fell 2.5 times and remained at the same level for the next 16 years. The Soviet economic model died of a heart attack. This situation could have been resolved peacefully, or through a bloodbath like in Yugoslavia. But it was impossible to maintain the *status quo*. You see, not only was there no money to buy grain, but there was even no money to pay the freight to bring it in. Food coupons were introduced in the USSR and famine was looming. I think we were very lucky that Gorbachev was aware of the need for reform and did not try to forcefully hold on to a moment that was far from wonderful.

Why was the USSR posing as a superpower while its citizens had nothing to eat?

– This comes as no surprise! The USSR was a superpower in the field of armaments, but there was no budget left for anything else. The country had long reduced its economy to the commodity-based model, which boiled down to selling oil and gas to the West and buying everything there: from Finnish boots to butter. From 1961, the Soviet Union even began to import crops from Canada. The country that had been Europe's breadbasket under the Tsarist regime turned into the world's largest importer of wheat as a result of Bolshevik collectivization. This was the result of the destructive reforms that were carried out in the countryside, in villages. This is how almost the entire economy was destroyed. By the 1980s, it was clear that everything was out of order, there was no progress. People no longer remember but, back then, food was the most acute issue. It was surrounded by myths. For example, there were rumours that trains carrying grain were stuck near Moscow and St Petersburg, and some unknown forces, the Americans for sure, were preventing them from entering the city. In reality, however, the economic system was at a dead-end. It had long been based on the sale of fossil fuel, and the drop in its price instantly destroyed the Soviet economy.

You mentioned the role of the intelligentsia. They supported the idea of *perestroika* with great enthusiasm. However, by 1991, this stratum of society was deeply disappointed with the transformation. Why did the intelligentsia give up on the idea of change so easily?

– This is very logical, and it has to do with the following. First, there were illusions that the transformation would be quick – that we would simply adjust some screws, and everything would be great. There was

Yavlinsky's '500 Days Programme'[3]. Just think about it – 500 days! It's been 30 years, and they wanted to implement the programme in 500 days! Second, the intelligentsia believed – and I observed this many times when meeting representatives of academia – that everything had to change except for them. They didn't want to make the slightest change. The intelligentsia had no understanding of market principles, no openness to change, nor any internal acceptance of change. They'd say, 'No, no, we don't need any of this [reforms], just give us money! Let's go back to when it was hard but peaceful!' A huge number of employees of large defence research and development institutes who supported Gorbachev's *perestroika* were disappointed because *perestroika* and the reforms required them to retrain, change profession, and find a place in the market. Many of them were advanced in years and were not ready for this. In other words, they were not ready for what they had called for.

However, *perestroika* did have achievements, including pluralism and glasnost. But why did society end up abandoning them?

– In fact, *perestroika* has had many more achievements. I've always repeated that, at this stage in history, we'll probably not be able to maintain the full set of human rights and freedoms that we laid down in our Constitution, simply because we're culturally unprepared for it. It would be a great historical achievement if we upheld at least the concept of private ownership, which, in our country, emerged and lives on due to *perestroika*. This is one thing. Second, we've been through the hardest transformation and walked over the precipice of civil war blindfolded. Just look at Yugoslavia, which is much smaller, but it cost them seven years of war and several hundred thousand victims. We could have suffered a similar fate, but we managed to escape it. It is a gargantuan achievement that we were able to resolve the issues of statehood relatively peacefully.

Now, why couldn't the results of *perestroika* be maintained? As is always the case, society, having had inflated expectations, sank into bitter disappointment. We were not the only ones to experience this. For instance, the entire Muslim world, which after World War I thought that it would quickly catch up with the West, experienced it and then decided that it didn't need it – that Muslim countries should go their own way, moving away from the West. We also failed to catch up with the West in one leap, and now we're saying that since we've failed, we do not need to.

[3] '500 Days' was a programme developed by a group of economists in the autumn of 1990 that envisaged a rapid transition from a command economy to a market economy in the USSR. Its team of authors included: Sergey Aleksashenko, Yuri Bayev, Andrey Vavilov, Leonid Grigoryev, Mikhail Zadornov, Vladlen Martynov, Vladimir Mashchits, Aleksey Mikhailov, Nikolai Petrakov, Boris Fyodorov, Stanislav Shatalin, Grigory Yavlinsky, Tatyana Yarygina and Yevgeny Yasin, *Perechod k rynku* (Moskva: EPIcentr, 1990).

Moreover, any revolution is always followed by an era of restoration, when nostalgic sentiments naturally build up. We are now in a period of restoration. The question is for how long will we be stuck in this, how far will we go, and when the next wave of modernization will begin. Our culture and level of societal know-how are slowing down these processes. Russian society follows a chiefdom model. In it, the tribe always tries to rally around an irreplaceable and infallible leader, and any dissent is perceived as an attempt to undermine the principles of the tribe's existence. Thus, dissenters are ostracized, expelled or physically annihilated. No criticism is allowed, and the culture is totalitarian in nature. A similar totalitarian model with an infallible leader as its core is characteristic of all of our educated class. You'll encounter it everywhere – in science, the arts, theatre or cinema. No form of objection or dissent is tolerated there at all. This is the traditional state of our consciousness: one truth, one people, one leader. If something contradicts the proclaimed 'truth', it is immediately declared heresy. Such a culture does not allow for pluralism, a multi-party system, or competition of ideas. And this is a problem. Look at the Russian parties. They are all built around irreplaceable leaders who have been at the helm for 30 years, no matter what slogans they come up with.

The model of social organization is the same, and, unfortunately, we haven't mastered a different one. This will be our task for hundreds of years. We still believe in organizing the country as a military camp with a centralized command. This is deeply rooted in centuries of our historical experience. Russia has always been a warrior state – it has always been preoccupied with military activity. Military valour always comes first, and no one cares a jot about entrepreneurial valour. The ideology of the noble class has been dominant to this day.

In one of your articles you wrote that if there is no debate about development goals, society runs the risk of stagnation...

– This dialectic that the only source of development is the struggle of opposites was taught [at institutions of higher education]; we constantly repeated it but never believed in it. It's always been either–or: either the struggle of opposites, which leaves everything in tatters; or unity without any opposites, which destroys the sources of development. This is a serious problem, and it is not yet clear how to solve it.

Let me emphasize: even our most refined intelligentsia are essentially imbued with an ideology that is totalitarian – or at least authoritarian. No matter what they're working on, they get the same result. Just take a look at the Russian Theatre Union, headed by Comrade Kalyagin, who

has embarked on his sixth five-year term,[4] while reports from their meetings resemble those of the Communist Party Congress in the Soviet days: praising the leader, stories about how great everything is in our country, and complaints about regional problems.

In general, our intelligentsia makes me sad. They constantly write letters to the president [of the Russian Federation] demanding that he intervene on an issue, regardless of whether or not it is within his scope of powers. That is, we as a country still expect the president to be an absolute dictator. If he is not, we say he is not a true leader.

It turns out that Russian society is woven of thousands, hundreds of thousands of micro-models akin to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), literally in every nook and cranny...

– This is the monarchical model of social organization that existed during the Soviet era. After the revolution, different forms of collegiate governance were introduced, but in reality the structure of society remained unchanged: unconditional subordination to the leader was required. We are still reproducing the monarchical model.

If we go back to August 1991, the impression is that the vast majority did not care about what was going on. In those watershed days, people preferred to stay in front of their TV sets and watch Swan Lake. There was no sense of civil war looming ...

– If you remember, Moscow's White House was encircled by defenders, and people voicing their civic position gathered outside the Mariinsky Palace [in Leningrad]. Yes, it was a minority, but it took to the streets. And then there was the decisive question of how the army would behave. It turned out it was not ready to shoot at the people, despite all the verbal orders and instructions.

However, the conflict in Moscow is only one side of the story. What if the central government had called for the territories of other republics inhabited predominantly by Russian-speaking populations to be claimed? This was the problem of Yugoslavia, where they tried to seize territories inhabited by Serbs. This would have been a bombshell that could have exploded between all the republics, as in the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Imagine similar hostilities at the borders of Russia and Ukraine, Russia and Kazakhstan, Russia and the Baltic states. We managed to pass peacefully

4 Alexander Kalyagin is a Russian actor, director, teacher, theatre professional and People's Artist of the RSFSR (1983). Since 1996, Chairman of the Russian Theatre Union. He was awarded the Order 'For Merit to the Fatherland' of the 3rd class (2007) and 4th class (2002). See: Tat'jana Nikol'skaja, 'Kaljagin', *Bol'šaja rossijskaja èniklopedija* <https://bigenc.ru/theatre_and_cinema/text/4344082> [accessed 24 October 2022].

through this moment because the Soviet and Russian leadership were not nationalistic bigots. They could have attempted to redraw the borders by force. It would have been difficult to mobilize people to defend the CPSU government, but these sentiments of revanchism and ressentiment are deeply entrenched and could have resonated with the public. That is why I believe that we managed to avoid a disaster at that time.

Nevertheless, in Russia in the early 1990s, calls to redraw the borders with the former Soviet republics were quite frequent. Many politicians made careers out of this. One might think of Sergey Baburin, Dmitry Rogozin...

– This means that such rhetoric was in demand. And the Russian leadership could have taken a similar stance, but it did not do so.

Many believe that it was not Putin but Yeltsin who started building a rigid power vertical. Don't you think that centralization of power prevented the development of democratic institutions?

– If we look at the 1993 Constitution, it is built on horizontal structures. And it was Yeltsin who forced all governors to run for their posts in elections despite their resistance. They begged the president not to do this. A system of elected officials replaced the system of political appointees. A federation was built, which implied a separation of powers between the centre and the regions. And this road [to democracy] was just being built.

Yes, instinctively, of course, on a subconscious level, we tried to build verticals everywhere. I remember when Our Home – Russia[5] and Rybkin's party [Ivan Rybkin Bloc] emerged: all of officialdom complained that it was making their heads spin. They were waiting for the command for where to go. What was the right place for them to make sure they stayed in the system? Multipartyism found it difficult to take root in Russia.

As for the centralization of power, it was necessary at the time because there was essentially no rule at all. But power was consolidated at a certain level: there had to be a well-functioning centre, but there was none, and there had to be efficient power in the regions. But when the construction of the power vertical began, it was a completely different scope of centralization. It swept away regional authority, and now local self-government has been eliminated, although under the Constitution it is supposed to be independent and not part of the system of state government.

5 Our Home – Russia (NDR) was a Russian pro-presidential centre-right political party founded in 1995 and chaired by Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. In the 1999 election, NDR failed to make it to the Russian State Duma, and in 2000 it merged with the Unity bloc, which in turn was reorganised into the United Russia party in 2001.

Common sense – a sense of equilibrium – is necessary. Currently, we are far behind the optimum.

Under Yeltsin, the presidential plenipotentiary had no regulatory powers. It was largely a political figure, an instrument of influence and information. Centralization was not that advanced back then. Regional authorities were independent and had their own funding. Governors were often in political opposition to the centre. The presidential appointment of the head of a region was simply out of the question.

In the aftermath of the collapse of the USSR, the Central Eastern European countries (CEE) went on to establish parliamentary systems, and many of them successfully transformed into consolidated democracies. Post-Soviet countries for the most part opted for presidential republics, which in some cases resemble an outright dictatorship. Which model suits Russia best: presidential or parliamentary?

– This is an erroneous assumption. Parliamentary republics are mostly common in the West. They have been formed in countries with a fairly long tradition of a developed political culture, which implies the political maturity of a nation capable of running a state. In a parliamentary republic, there is no division into executive and legislative branches of power. The backslide into totalitarianism can happen much faster; that's why it is not possible to build an effective parliamentary republic everywhere.

We lived under a parliamentary republic for four years [1990–1993]. We had a president who made no decisions and a government that relied on a majority in the State Duma. Did we like it?

Besides, who says that the political reality will change under a parliamentary republic? Everything will remain unchanged. After all, as soon as a new party appears in Russia, what question do we immediately ask? What is the party's manifesto? No. We want to know its leader! When we look at the political system, we first of all want to know who the main boss is. In a parliamentary system, people vote for political parties – not the prime minister. This is a very dangerous situation.

Consequently, in terms of governance, the presidential model is far more advanced compared to a parliamentary republic. But it is not easy to establish. Our attempt to build a republic by the American standard threw us into a fierce conflict between the legislative and executive branches, which ended in tanks being deployed [in October 1993]. Then we moved to the semi-presidential French model. This involves the greatest separation of powers, with the arbitration of the president as head of state standing above all the branches. This is the model for aspiring political nations.

In other words, you are not a proponent of a parliamentary republic…

– The idea of building a parliamentary republic in Russia is usually promoted by armchair humanitarian theorists who believe their theories written on paper will come true. Well then, let's import a parliamentary republic into an African country, get it endorsed by a tribal council along with a package of the best European laws. Will it work? No, of course not! If the political system does not correspond to traditional behaviour and understanding, it won't work. Eventually, at some point, that infallible and irreplaceable chief will come to rescue.

It is impossible to build a republic without republicans. If most of the population has a monarchical type of allegiance, it is extremely difficult to build a parliamentary republic. Look at how the Weimar Republic was built by the Germans and what is happening to the parliamentary system in Italy!

A parliamentary republic is like a unicycle: it's the easiest and simplest build, but you have to know how to ride it. A presidential republic is like a two-wheeler: it's easier to ride, but you have to work hard to find compromises between the executive and legislative branches. And the semi-presidential republic resembles a tricycle: it moves slower but is more stable. I am a proponent of the presidential republic, but we should at least master the semi-presidential model. But tradition constantly pushes us back into autocracy. As long as everyone in the country appeals to the president to solve their problems, we cannot build anything but an autocratic state. The same model is being reproduced no matter who the president is.

Is it a generational issue?

– It is about both a generational change and personal experience. I've always said that the key task of the country's political leadership is to create local self-government. Even the pro-democratic parties are not discussing this issue, but they're concerned about the person occupying the top seat in the Kremlin. And I'm asking about the fate of the local self-government. If you create a local government, you build a democratic edifice. If not, who cares what the federal centre looks like? We have failed to create local self-government even at the level of dacha owners. There, too, a satrapy instantly emerges, accompanied by endless thievery, scandals, its endless rule, and so on.

Let us go back to the events of October 1993. You appealed to the people of St Petersburg at the time to sort things out at the ballot box – not in firefights and battles with police. But those events did help to significantly

expand presidential powers. How do you perceive those events now? Did the president do everything right back then?

– It was not a clash between the president and the parliament, this is a misinterpretation. It was a fight between the president and the Congress [of People's Deputies of the Russian Federation]. And the Congress was an absolute collective dictator, because it had the right to take any issue under consideration and resolve it, including amending the Constitution. An infallible leader was about to emerge at the helm of the Congress. We had to come to an agreement with him. Otherwise, the executive branch had no chance because, after the change to the Constitution, the executive branch would have become impotent. This was the mistake of both Gorbachev and Yeltsin. They believed that assuming presidential power made them the main players. Not at all! All power remained in the hands of the Congress. And as soon as control over the Congress was lost, so was control over the country. Under Gorbachev, this did not have time to fully develop, although Anatoly Lukyanov was already making attempts to seize power. And after the collapse of the USSR, this tendency came to fruition: the Congress had the upper hand. It transpired that the Congress could ultimately smash the executive branch and – given the hodgepodge nature and diversity of the Congress – it would not have been able to solve the problem of the country's system of governance.

The conflict between the president and the Congress was profound. Unfortunately, it could not be resolved within the elite. In the end, the *siloviki* and the masses got involved, which never ends well. I can say that we got off lightly. It could have ended much worse.

As a result of these revolutionary events, we have a Constitution that is not as bad as we might think. It's beyond our reach at the moment; it offers room to grow. And if we look at the powers of the president, their scope was not foreseen in the constitution. We endow him with an increasing scope of powers, and our demands are growing. Nothing is wrong with the Constitution. Something is wrong with the way we construe power.

The next major event in Russia was the parliamentary election of December 1993. The biggest surprise was the landslide victory of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR). In other words, the people voted for an essentially imperial project…

– It wasn't even a project. It was a protest vote and the early stage of backsliding under difficult economic circumstances in a restoration period. The protest, of course, was building. What else could be expected?

You mean that people were willing to give up their democratic prospects just like that?

– To think consciously about democratic prospects requires a different political culture, tradition and voter experience that is almost non-existent in Russia. Look, the English parliament has been running since the twelfth century, the mayor of London has been elected since the thirteenth century, while we elected our leaders for the first time in 1991. It is impossible to bridge the gap of 700 years in 30 years. We are aspiring republicans.

Yeltsin was actually pressured to call off the elections, create a presidential political party, and restrict media freedom. But he resisted this pressure and paid for it with his reputation, although he was a traditionalist in many respects.

For example, when it comes to relations with his neighbours. Although Yeltsin himself never openly voiced territorial claims, he did not enter into polemics on this subject, even with his cronies, like Alexander Rutskoy...

– Rutskoy could not be prevented from speaking out because he was a vice-president elected by the people. He was not an appointee, and that was a big problem. Yeltsin had no right to dismiss him.

...But there was also Minister Andrey Kozyrev, who – like the rest of our diplomatic corps – was very sceptical about the independence of the former Soviet republics...

– In fact, this problem emerged a long time ago. Already at the Congress of People's Deputies of the Russian Federation, the Moscow and St Petersburg delegations had opposite opinions on that. We had no disagreements on the general humanitarian democratic agenda; however, as soon as we got to this issue, it became clear that the Muscovites were mostly imperialists, while the Petersburgers did not support the desire to reign supreme. There was still a chance of transforming the Soviet Union into something like the European Union back then. It was buried by the attempted *coup d'état* of August 1991. The attempt to keep things as they were by force put an end to the idea of a loose federation.

At the moment, Russian society and the Russian authorities want to regain their sense of being the core of an integration project and a serious global player, but this is very difficult to achieve. It requires a serious economic foundation and the goodwill of neighbouring states. Russia is flexing its muscles in its confrontation with the West, but the question is – at what cost? Last time, a forceful confrontation with the Western world resulted in the Soviet economy collapsing under the load of its defence shield.

Of course, Russia may be in conflict with the West, but the latter is the only source of currency and importer of our oil and gas. We buy everything we need based on these revenues. I don't really understand how the Kremlin wants to reconcile Russia's economic model with its current foreign policy. In my opinion, these models are incompatible, and we have to be aware of that. Thus, the original USSR–USA construct cannot be recreated – we cannot bear it economically.

How do you see Russia in ten years?

– I see two options for us. Either we follow in the footsteps of the Swedish Empire, which used to be one of the most powerful empires of Europe but turned into a country that could guard its sovereignty but no longer had much influence on international affairs, or else we will eventually overcome our phantom fears of NATO and solve the problems on the road to NATO membership, which will remove the whole confrontation with the West that we don't really need. Unless the 'hawks' in both Russia and America need it. It is their joint business.

It is in Russia's interests to bridge the technological gap in the spirit of the policies pursued by Peter the Great, Alexander II and to a certain extent Joseph Stalin. The latter carried out industrialization with the help of Western specialists – purchased Western equipment and technology. If Stalin had introduced import substitution everywhere, our military would have been running around with outdated Mosin rifles in 1941. Therefore, today, Russia's strategic task requires the closest possible contacts with the leaders of global economic growth.

Interview conducted by IGOR GRETSKIY

Oleksandr Zaitsev
HISTORY OF UKRAINIAN NATIONALISM THROUGH THE EYES OF A CZECH HISTORIAN

Book review: David Svoboda, *Jablko z oceli: Zrod, vývoj a činnost ukrajinského radikálního nacionalismu v letech 1920–1939* (Praha: Academia; Ú stav pro studium totalitni´chrez'vemu', 2021), 1014 pp.

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The Czech historiography of Ukrainian radical nationalism has been much scanter than the Polish one, not to mention the Ukrainian. And this is despite the fact that interwar Czechoslovakia was the most important centre for the activities of emigrant Ukrainian nationalist groups, out of which the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) emerged in 1929, later becoming the centre of OUN proper. Therefore, the appearance of a very impressive, both in scope and content, book by Prague historian David Svoboda about the Ukrainian nationalist movement of the 1920s–1930s is a celebratory occasion.

In the epigraph, the author clarifies the title of the book, *An Apple out of Steel*:

> The illustrious Czech journalist, Karel Havlíček Borovský, wrote back in his time: "Ukraine is an eternal curse imposed upon themselves by Poles and Russians; it is an apple of discord tossed by fate between these two nations". At their time, the extreme fraction of the Ukrainian national movement, to which this book is dedicated, strived to make a piece of steel out of that 'apple' against which all enemies would break their teeth.[1] (p. 5)

I can't help noting here that this title has sounded particularly appropriate since February 2022: Ukraine has in fact turned out to be a 'steel apple' that could not be swallowed by the Russian invaders.

A quote from Havlíček Borovský is given in full on page 38, where we find out that this fragment was written as early as 1846 and ends with the following words: "Thus, the suppressed freedom of Ukraine takes revenge on Poland and

[1] Here and further down, in brackets, I provide the page numbers of the reviewed monograph.

Russia". The idea of this Czech journalist is clear: the enslavement of other people inevitably turns against the subjugating nations – takes "revenge" on them. Havlíček Borovský's words turned out to be prophetic: in the twentieth century, Ukraine's suppressed freedom repeatedly "took revenge" on the states that divided the country among themselves. Actually, the very phenomenon of Ukrainian radical nationalism, representatives of which fiercely fought against both Poland and Russia/USSR, was generated, according to David Svoboda, by the long-term partition of Ukrainian lands between foreign states.

The first lines of the book clarify that the author had in mind not just a purely academic study of the past, but also a response to the challenges of the present. He gains momentum when speaking about the events of 2013–2014: the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity and the beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, which "put an end to the European law and order that has existed since 1945" (p. 13). Concurrently with the military aggression, Russia

> [...] has made the world feel the power of its propaganda offensive, the centrepiece of which is the resuscitated myths that were defiled long ago, the myths that distort the key events and processes of the 20th century in Europe. The central myth concerns the historical role of Ukrainian radical nationalism, which around the world is associated with the names of Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych, with such concepts as anti-Semitism and collaboration with the Nazis, and, in general, with a certain supra-category of "Ukrainian fascism". To a historian's surprise, this demagogy fell on favourable ground not only in a spiritually devastated Russian society, but also in the Euro-American West. (p. 12)

However, there is nothing to be surprised about here, because the propaganda industry of "exposing the crimes of Ukrainian fascism" was not born in 2014. It was constructed in the Soviet times and already back then had some influence in the West. Many years of efforts formed the 'black legend' of the Ukrainian nationalist movement. In the 1990s, the legend was inherited by post-Soviet historians and political propagandists, who purged it of the class anti-capitalist rhetoric, instead strengthening its 'anti-fascist' trajectory. It is because of the connection between Ukrainian radical nationalism and the painful topics of fascism,

Nazism and anti-Semitism that the 'black legend' gained some popularity in Western historiography and historical journalism long before 2014.

This does not mean that Ukrainian radical nationalism of the 1920s–1940s had nothing to do with fascism and anti-Semitism. In fact, fascism had a far greater impact on the development of the Ukrainian nationalist movement than most Ukrainian historians are willing to admit. I will return to this issue and its analysis as it is presented in David Svoboda's book. Right now, I will just note that the problem is not about the application of a theoretical model of generic fascism to studies of Ukrainian nationalism of the interwar and wartime era; rather, it is about the efforts of Russian propaganda to draw a direct legacy line between the contemporaneous "Ukrainian fascism/Nazism" and the contemporary political regime in Ukraine. It was this propagandistic lie that became a premise for the demand for 'denazification' of Ukraine, and Putin used it to justify the Russian invasion in February 2022.

Based on the aforementioned quote, one should not jump to the conclusion that the main goal of David Svoboda is to refute Russian propaganda myths and that, in terms of interpreting the history of Ukrainian radical nationalism, he is in complete agreement with that side of Ukrainian nationalist historiography which represents Bandera, Shukhevych and their associates as national heroes. In fact, we are looking at a serious study, the author of which is (almost) equally distant from both denigrating and glorifying its object. In his interview with the online newspaper *Istorychna Pravda (Historical Truth)*, he describes his intentions as follows:

> One of the main motives that compelled me to work was the desire to show an image like "Ukrainian nationalists and their epoch". [I wanted] to understand the spirit of the time and its impact on the mentality of that generation of Ukrainians and to make the role of the two main emotions – frustration and violence – more pronounced. Without this look into the soul of the actors back then, we will not be able to understand the reasons for the emergence of Ukrainian radical nationalism, as well as its program.[2]

The very attempt to "look into the soul" of history's actors lends a beneficial quality to David Svoboda's book when compared with the works of many other historians who, having reconstructed the course of events and appointed some actors as 'heroes' and others as 'villains', consider their

2 Radomyr Mokryk, '"Jabluko zi stali": Istorija OUN Davida Svobody', *Istoryčna Pravda*, 2 September 2021 <https://www.istpravda.com.ua/articles/2021/09/2/160110/> [accessed 5 April 2022].

mission accomplished. While it might be easy to judge from the standpoint of today's moral norms, it is much harder to understand the deep motives behind the actions of people of the past. To do so, a historian needs empathy that does not necessarily allow for justification of historical characters but involves an attempt to comprehend their thoughts, feelings, and mental states. Although I'm getting ahead of myself, I can say that David Svoboda has largely been successful in this task.

In the Introduction, the author also touches upon terminological issues while considering whether such concepts as "Ukrainian nationalism", "integral nationalism", "struggle for national liberation", and "terrorism" are suitable for his work. Reflecting on how to terminologically outline the phenomenon he has been studying, he prefers the optimal, in his opinion, concept of "integral nationalism", even though some historians consider it a euphemism created during the Cold War era to obscure the fascist nature of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists. According to David Svoboda, rather than the category of "Ukrainian fascism", the term "integral nationalism" is much better suited to highlighting the problematic activity of the OUN. I share this choice of terminology, with the caveat that "fascism" and "integral nationalism" are not mutually exclusive concepts. Therefore, in the case of the OUN and similar movements, one should clarify that we are talking here about integral nationalism in a stateless nation, while "full--fledged" fascism develops in nation-states. Characterizing the OUN ideology and practice as integral nationalism, Davide Svoboda agrees that the latter, by its very nature, contained potential for terror and ethnic cleansing (p. 25). This opinion requires further clarification. The reason is that integral nationalism imagines a nation to be a living organism, while separate individuals are its cells. If foreign "bacilli" enter a nation's organism and, furthermore, infect some of its "cells", it becomes morally justifiable and even necessary to rescue said organism, to clear its body of "bacilli" and surgically remove hopelessly affected tissues. Similar biology-inspired analogies can be frequently found in the writings of integral nationalists of the 1930s.

David Svoboda also considers the term "struggle for national liberation", which is preferred by fans of the OUN, while its critics deem the latter not worthy of such characterization, choosing instead to speak of "fascism" and "collaboration". The author reminds us that, from an ethical standpoint, the national liberation movements of the twentieth century were far from chaste purity, and the insurgent formations of the third world, as well as the leftist protest movements, were no more humane in terms of their methods of struggle than the excluded-from-decent-society "Banderites". In the end, David Svoboda does not refuse to use the word "liberation": he uses it only in specific contexts, but not as a general attribute of

the studied movement (such as in the title of the Lviv periodical *Ukrains'kyi Vyzvol'nyi Rukh [Ukrainian Liberation Movement]*).

Since the book addresses one of the most debated topics in the history of Ukraine, one would expect the author to provide an overview of the historiographic discussion around the OUN, in either the Introduction or a separate chapter, but the author does not do so; instead, he has inserted his critical remarks regarding certain historical works in the relevant fragments of the main narrative, often resorting to polemics. This somewhat unusual approach has both its benefits and shortcomings.

Although the chronological framework of the monograph covers the years 1920–1939, the author begins his account in 1908, with the murder of the Governor of Galicia, the Polish Count Andrzej Potocki, by Myroslav Sichyns'kyi – an event that twenty years later was characterized as the beginning of the Ukrainian revolution by the Ukrainian socialist-revolutionary Mykyta Shapoval. However, even this date is used to step further into the past, describing the development of the Ukrainian national movement and its relationship with the Polish national movement of the nineteenth century. Thus, in the first three chapters, David Svoboda describes the years preceding World War I (1908–1914), the evolution of the Ukrainian movement during the war, and the beginning of the Ukrainian Revolution (1914–1918), followed by the unsuccessful attempt to create and protect the Ukrainian state (1918–1923). The subject of the Polish-Ukrainian struggle runs through these chapters with a golden thread. It is only in the fourth and longest chapter, entitled "Irreconcilable, 1923–1930" (pp. 227–546), that the author finally reaches his main theme: the Ukrainian nationalist movement of the interwar era. Such an extended introduction into the subject may seem excessive, but it is quite justified since the book is addressed to Czech readers who are, perhaps, getting familiarized with the modern history of Ukraine for the first time with the help of David Svoboda's book. However, the Ukrainian reader will find a lot of new material here as well. This applies, in particular, to the Czech perception of the Ukrainian issue and its international aspects, as reflected in quotations from the articles and speeches of Czech politicians, journalists, and public figures. These Czech narratives are frequently present in the introductory chapters (I–III). They demonstrate that the liberal Czech figures of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sympathized with the Ukrainian movement, seeing it as a fair "plebeian" struggle against the Polish "lords" (pp. 55, 71, etc.). It is not surprising that Ukrainian emigrants were later welcomed in Czechoslovakia, under the presidency of Tomáš Masaryk. Little-known (or completely unknown to the experts) Czech topics appear once more in the last chapter, which describes the dramatic events in the Carpathian Ukraine of 1938–1939 (pp. 774–860).

As the author of a book whose subject almost completely overlaps with the subject of the reviewed monograph, I was mostly interested in chapters IV–VI, which are devoted to the history of the Ukrainian nationalist movement in the interwar period. It turned out, however, that despite the similarity in terms of titles and the chronological span, our books are very different. I was interested in the intellectual history of Ukrainian integral nationalism, so I focused mainly on its ideology and ideologues (Dmytro Dontsov, Mykola Stsibors'kyi, Mykola Shlemkevych, etc.), trying to fit them into the European historical context. David Svoboda has written, for the most part, about the history of the organizations and developments within Ukrainian radical nationalism, while understanding the latter as a political movement rather than an ideology. Only the last four subsections of chapter IV are devoted to questions of ideology; these subsections analyse Dontsov's work, the OUN's attitude to fascism, enemy states and nations, and the "Jewish problem".

The content of David Svoboda's monograph is simultaneously wider and narrower than the subject declared in the subtitle. It is wider because, as I have already mentioned, chronologically the book reaches far beyond the timeframe of 1920–1939. And it is narrower because, out of the three main directions that Ukrainian integral nationalism took, the author describes in some detail the history of only one: so-called "organized nationalism", which found its embodiment in the OUN in 1929. One subsection focuses on Dmytro Dontsov's "nationalism of the deed" to explain the extent of its impact on the OUN, while the ideologist of the "creative nationalism" of the Front of National Unity, Mykola Shlemkevych, is mentioned only twice – not as an ideologist and politician of the interwar era, but as the author of the book *Halychanstvo (Galicianism)*[3] that was written in emigration, after World War II. However, narrowing down the subject matter exclusively to "organized nationalism" seems to be justified. The history of the OUN as the main embodiment of Ukrainian radical nationalism presents a completely self-sufficient object of the research; if the author had tried to describe the story of Dmytro Dontsov, the circles of his *Vistnyk*, and Dmytro Paliiv's Front of National Unity with the same amount of detail, this already humongous book would have become impossible to digest.

I will not comment in detail on the content of the last chapters of the book, which are devoted to the formation and activities of the OUN; suffice to say that David Svoboda's analysis is very thorough and is completely free of the myths accumulated by both nationalist and 'denunciatory' historiographies about the OUN. This is the most detailed critical study

3 From Eastern Galicia (Halychyna).

of the interwar history of "organized nationalism" that I have ever read. I will dwell only upon a few points that are of particular interest to me.

Although Dmytro Dontsov is a secondary character for David Svoboda, in comparison with the first leader of the OUN, Yevhen Konovalets', as well as Stepan Bandera, Dontsov's doctrine – one of the ideological sources of the OUN – is given due attention in the subsection *Evangelist from Melitopol'. Teachings and Contributions of Dmytro Dontsov* (pp. 418–42). The author convincingly demonstrates the complexity and ambiguity of Dontsov's teachings, which are difficult to incorporate into classification schemes such as "totalitarian nationalism". In particular, contrary to the widespread stereotype of Dontsov as a fierce anti-democrat, the author concludes that "Dontsov was perhaps even more impressed with democracy represented by strong individuals than authoritarian but unstable regimes. Therefore, Dontsov paid homage to the great democrats of his day, among them the French statesmen Poincaré, Clemenceau, or the American President Theodore Roosevelt" (pp. 433–34). This is an entirely apt observation, but it should be clarified to which period it refers. Until the early 1930s, Dontsov could still use the word "democracy" in a positive sense and even wrote a genuine eulogy to American democracy in 1929.[4] At the time, he did not consider dictatorship (*Napoleonism*) the optimal form of government – for him it was a necessary transitional state of affairs which later should yield to the permanent state system, as exemplified by the American one. However, for the ideologist of the "nationalism of the deed", the most important thing was not this or that political regime but the strength of a particular nation, its vitality, desire for power and expansion, regardless of the political form in which this strength manifested itself. According to Dontsov, the British and Americans could be considered as examples of strong and healthy nations, while Italian fascism was seen as a successful revival of a nation undergoing a state of extreme decline. Therefore, in his articles fascination with Theodore Roosevelt and Winston Churchill may have come hand in hand with reverence for Benito Mussolini. Dontsov finally rejected democracy in 1932–1933, when – under the noticeable influence of fascism and Hitlerism – he formulated the Order concept of national leadership. Dontsov's anti-democratic evolution reached its completion in his totalitarian theory of the "caste of lords", first formulated between 1938 and 1944 and later finalized in his book *The Spirit of Our Antiquity* (1944).[5]

4 Dmytro Doncov, 'Duch amerykanizmu', *Literaturno-naukovyj vistnyk*, 28.4 (1929), 357–71.

5 Dmytro Doncov, *Duch našoji davnyny*, 2nd edn (Mjunchen, 1951). In his comments on the question of the totalitarian orientation of Doncov's views, David Svoboda writes that Oleksandr Zajcev finds totalitarian characteristics in Doncov's writings, while Mychajlo Čuhujenko, "on the contrary", finds a conservative and traditionalist component. I should note that, contrary to Čuhujenko's assessment, Doncov's totalitarianism did not contradict his conservatism and traditionalism – these concepts generally lie in different planes. The conservatism of the ideologist was closer to the German "Conservative Revolution", one of the sources of Nazism, than to, say, British conservatism.

David Svoboda expresses some interesting and generally relevant considerations in the rather large *Ordinary fascism? Difficulties with the OUN Ideology* (pp. 443–98) subsection. He starts with a claim that the OUN has never become a unanimous army under a single leadership with a consistent strategy, as was the main characteristic of the fascist parties. He does not join the camp of those researchers who define the OUN as fascist; rather, he thinks it is more appropriate to describe it as a representative of integral nationalism. At the same time, he does not deny that the OUN and similar stateless Eastern European groups have gradually become more and more embracing of fascist ideology. Further on, he examines in detail the arguments of the participants of the debate on 'fascism' within the OUN; specifically, he comments quite favourably on my writings in which I distinguish the type of integral nationalism within non-state nations that is characteristic of the OUN from fascism, the full-fledged development of which is possible only within a state. David Svoboda also mentions my concept of 'ustashism', formulated on the basis of a comparison of the OUN with the Croatian Ustaša movement. Nevertheless, he maintains that I ignore the fact that "the two groups differed markedly in the aesthetics of rituals. The Ustaša cult of death bordered on necrophilia and was far more strongly imbued with Catholic religiosity" (p. 472). In fact, I do not ignore these and numerous other differences; however, despite the differences between OUN and Ustaša, I still think that they (and several other similar nationalist organizations under a single type of ideological and political movement) belong to the same category of fascist organizations: revolutionary integral nationalism within non-state nations, which I provisionally call 'ustashism'.[6]

Summarizing the debate on the 'fascist' nature of the OUN, David Svoboda writes, "Although it is necessary to recognize the fairness of those who claim that, as a non-state actor, the OUN could not fully develop into a fascist formation, it cannot be excluded that such self-identification was prevented only by a coincidence" (p. 492). He then goes on to consider alternative history and speculates as to what the evolution of the OUN might have looked like had Hitler not been defeated on the Eastern front, and if the Wehrmacht armies had mastered the European territory of the Soviet Union. In this case, according to David Svoboda, Ukrainian radical nationalism would most likely have become a full-fledged version of fascism. However, he also allows for another possibility: that, despite the fashion for fascism, Ukrainian nationalism could have been dominated

6 See: Oleksandr Zaitsev, 'Fascism or Ustashism? Ukrainian Integral Nationalism in Comparative Perspective, 1920s–1930s', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 48.2–3 (2015), 183–93; Oleksandr Zaitsev, 'On Ustashism and Fascism: A Response to Critics', *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society*, 7.1 (2021), 125–43.

by aspiration for the preservation of its original identity. I would add that the OUN would only have faced such a dilemma had Hitler given his consent to the creation of a Ukrainian state; however, there are good reasons to believe that this was not his intention. Ukraine was to become a German colony, part of the German *Lebensraum* in Eastern Europe. If this had happened, the OUN would have had to face a completely different dilemma: to engage in armed resistance against Nazism or to be satisfied with the role of collaborators in the colonial administration. Without a doubt, most Ukrainian nationalists would have chosen the first route.

Equally balanced and many-sided is the consideration of the 'Jewish problem' in the subsection titled *The "Problem" Named "Jews"* (pp. 517–46). Unlike some Ukrainian historians, such as Volodymyr Viatrovych, the author does not take on the hopeless task of proving that "the OUN [...] did not allow itself to descend into anti-Semitism in the ideological and political plane'.[7] Instead, he carefully examines the causes and trajectory of the rise of anti-Semitism within the OUN ranks in the European context, and he comes to the following conclusion:

> The Jewish problem [within the organization] was assessed for the most part not on its own terms but with Moscow's position in mind, although theoretical analyses based on the notion of race began to appear as well (Volodymyr Martynets', Yaroslav Stets'ko). This indicated the existence of a totalitarian trend within the OUN and the desire for a radical solution to the "problem". [...] The OUN's collective suspicions regarding the Jews testify not so much to the specifics of Ukrainian nationalism as to the fabric from which it was weaved – the broad pan-European current of nationalist and biased selfishness, with which Ukrainian nationalism was associated. (p. 546)

Among the unquestionable accomplishments of the author of the reviewed book, one should include the vivid historical portraits of the nationalist leaders Yevhen Konovalets', Andriy Mel'nyk, and especially Stepan Bandera, to whom a special subsection is dedicated (pp. 609–36). Transitioning from a strictly academic to a journalistic style, as in many other instances in this book, David Svoboda writes that there existed four Banderas: the first one – the head of the regional OUN in 1933–1934, who gained prominence thanks to the Lviv trial of the OUN members in 1936; the second one – a former political prisoner hardened by Polish prisons, who in 1939–1940

7 Volodymyr V'jatrovyč, *Stavlennja OUN do jevrejiv: formuvannja pozyciji na tli katastrofy* (L'viv, 2006), p. 101.

led a revolt of young OUN members against Andriy Mel'nyk's leadership; the third one – a fanatic-nationalist who remained unbroken when the Nazis in 1941 demanded the renunciation of independence that had been declared; and finally, the fourth one – an emigrant during the Cold War era who could no longer cope with a world that was changing right before his eyes (pp. 613–14). We can only add that all these four sides of Bandera as a human have been superseded by a fifth: Bandera as a symbol, practically obscuring the real Bandera, whose historical portrait the Czech historian recreated quite successfully.

In the Conclusion, David Svoboda revisits the ideological characteristics of the OUN and offers a number of brief and apt generalizations, such as "Bidding farewell to universal ideals and focusing on the firm concreteness of the nation should have provided a cure [for Ukrainian nationalists] for the mistakes of the past and a key to achieving the goal of living in a free state" (p. 919). Explaining the influence of fascism on Ukrainian nationalism, the author draws an interesting parallel: "Just as Ukrainian revolutionary elites were influenced by the socialist ideals relevant within the international milieu before 1917, Ukrainian nationalists learned from fascists without necessarily adopting their ideology" (ibid.). Indeed, after World War I, a "fashion for socialism" changed to a "fashion for fascism", and Ukrainian nationalists did not escape this predicament. David Svoboda reminds us that the OUN leaders' bet on the alliance with revisionist states – Germany, Italy, and Japan – looked quite acceptable in the interwar period: "They played by the rules that gave rise to the international order after 1918. According to this order, the winning parties settled the fate of entire nations in the interests of the former, guided by not sympathy but cold calculation" (p. 920). These were the rules that Neville Chamberlain and Edouard Daladier espoused when signing the Munich Agreement in 1938, or that Joseph Stalin embraced when signing the notorious Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact a year later. The calculations of Ukrainian nationalists later turned out to be wrong, but this was difficult to predict in the late 1930s. The task that the OUN aimed to achieve – to create the Ukrainian state – was carried out by other Ukrainians at a different time and by other means (p. 922).

The shortcomings of the book under review are an extension of its virtues, and the main drawback is this volume's enormous (over one thousand pages!) size. It is difficult for me to imagine even a proficient Czech reader, let alone a foreign-language reader, who would manage to read the entire work carefully. I think that making the book more concise would only be for the better.

Although I appreciate David Svoboda's monograph, in particular its polemical charge, I am not ready to agree with all the statements expressed by the author. Reflecting on the assessment of the historical path taken by Ukraine in the twentieth century, David Svoboda makes an interesting and controversial case against Andreas Kappeler and his like-minded supporters of taking a multi-ethnic and transnational perspective when studying the history of Ukraine and the politics of memory:

> The assertion of the respected historian Andreas Kappeler that while assessing its past Ukraine cannot avoid the application of a multi-ethnic and transnational perspective is certainly based on noble motives. However, such noble calls are rarely heeded by the countries that promote their version of the past far more arrogantly than Ukraine (Russia, Poland, Hungary, and many others). In addition, such advice will remain empty talk until foreign advisers take into consideration the threat faced by Ukraine. And not only that: the statement regarding the insufficient adherence to the "multiple perspectives" and "transnationality" of Ukraine became a kind of justification for the Russian aggression against this country in 2014. At that time, there was a lack of understanding in the world of the fact that "multiple perspectives" in the hands of an aggressive state became no longer just a call but a diktat, and that Ukraine can walk along the postmodern route only when it has comfortable and peaceful conditions for its development, as is the case with societies that are not being threatened by anyone. An important prerequisite for this scenario is a society boasting a consolidated, indisputable national consciousness, and a sense of patriotism that is grounded in such consciousness. (pp. 104–05)

Thus, Kappeler and his like-minded associates (to whom I also belong) find themselves in the unattractive role of unconscious accomplices of Russian aggression. Here, David Svoboda repeats the arguments of those Ukrainian historians who insist on the need to establish a purely Ukrainian (in the ethno-national sense) historical narrative, considering a multi-ethnic and transnational approach an unacceptable luxury in the current Ukrainian conditions. I have no doubt that the considerations offered by the Czech historian are dictated by sympathy for Ukraine and its fight against the aggressor, but I cannot agree with them. In fact, they are based on the belief that each national community should assert only its own historical "truth", different from the "truths" of other communities.

This approach has already caused a lot of damage to Ukraine, both in terms of the internal consolidation of the Ukrainian civic nation and in relations with its neighbours, especially Poland. Suffice to mention the damage to Polish-Ukrainian relations which was caused in the recent past by the opposition of the two national 'historical truths' in disputes about the Volyn tragedy of 1943. The failure of the Polish-Ukrainian historical reconciliation to resolve this and other difficult issues of common history was due to the inability, or unwillingness, to consider the problem from an inter-ethnic, transnational, and humanistic perspective. The fact that Putin, to justify his aggression, accuses the Ukrainian authorities of ignoring the territorial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of Ukraine and the complexity of its historical formation by no means leads to the conclusion that Ukrainians should really ignore this diversity and complexity while trying to build some kind of an ethnic-national homogeneity. What David Svoboda proposes would mean the legitimization of an ethno-national historical narrative for many years to come since, with a neighbour like Russia, Ukraine is hardly in a position to expect "comfortable and peaceful conditions for its development" in the near future. I think that if Ukrainians want to be a civic, not an ethnic, nation and have reliable friends among their Western neighbours, it is necessary to affirm a multi-ethnic and transnational view of history right now, and not after the final consolidation of the national consciousness.

As I mentioned, David Svoboda denies the fascist nature of the OUN. However, not all his arguments are convincing enough. He argues, for example, that the rebellion of the younger generation of the OUN against its leader, Andriy Mel'nyk, in 1940 "was entirely 'non-fascist'", since by taking this action the Banderites "demonstrated free thinking which is hard to imagine within totalitarian systems" (p. 922). In fact, the struggle against the opposition and the splits are typical of totalitarian movements and regimes, both fascist and communist. The same "free thinking" was demonstrated, for example, by the Romanian fascists – members of the Legion of Archangel Michael – when, following the death of Corneliu Codreanu in 1938, a factional struggle for succession escalated within the Legion that was highly reminiscent of a somewhat later conflict between the OUN Banderites and Melnykites. Let us also remember the factional struggle within the Bolshevik Party after the death of Lenin, and the struggle for succession following Stalin's death. Even though I do not agree with the idea of including OUN among the fascists either, David Svoboda's argument does not work in this case.

Clearly, in a thousand-page-long book, some inaccuracies and inconsistent statements are inevitable. I will mention some of them.

When describing the role of Yevhen Konovalets' in the founding of the Ukrainian Military Organization (UVO), the author is rather inconsistent. In the third chapter, he reports in passing that, in the summer of 1920 in Czechoslovakia, Konovalets' founded the Ukrainian Military Organization, the predecessor of the OUN (p. 195). Here, David Svoboda adheres to the tradition of Ukrainian nationalist historiography, according to which the decision to create the UVO was made in July 1920 in Prague at the last meeting of the *Sich* Riflemen Council under the leadership of Yevhen Konovalets'[8]. Instead, in the fourth chapter, when describing the process of establishment of the UVO in more detail, the author reports that Konovalets' joined its activities only in July of 1921, when he arrived in Lviv from Vienna, and until then he had had no influence on its formation (pp. 305–06). This second statement is closer to the truth, but it also needs to be clarified. According to a thorough study carried out by Mykhailo Koval'chuk which David Svoboda also references, Konovalets' did not participate in the creation of the UVO (as Koval'chuk argues, the creation of an underground military organization was kept secret from the colonel). The actual founders of the UVO were Yaroslav Chyzh and Mykhailo Matchak (captains of the *Sich* Riflemen), as well as Osyp Naroc'kyj (a captain of the Ukrainian Galician Army). In July of 1921, Konovalets' returned to Lviv, and in September he made the last attempt to revive the *Sich* Riflemen's organization under his leadership. However, the Lviv *Sich* Riflemen, having created the Military Organization, did not want to subordinate it to their former commander. The situation changed after the first significant military action of the Military Organization: the unsuccessful attempt on Józef Pilsudski's life during his visit to Lviv in September 1921. In a timespan of a few weeks, the police arrested almost the entire leadership of the Military Organization; only Yaroslav Chyzh managed to escape by fleeing abroad. It is probably at this time that the representatives of the decapitated organization appealed to Konovalets' to become their leader.[9]

As I have already mentioned, one section of the book is devoted to an examination of Dmytro Dontsov's ideology; however, the author of the book does this based on the conclusions of his predecessors to a far greater extent than on analysis of Dontsov's texts per se. This tendency at times leads him to inaccurate conclusions. Following Anatol Bedrii, David Svoboda believes that the book *Nationalism* (1926) marked the stage when Dontsov abandoned the concept of the leading role of the peasantry, moving instead to the idea of a nation as a single supra-personal entity (p. 430). That is not

8 See, for example: Petro Mirčuk, *Narys istoriji OUN 1920–1939*, 3rd edn (Kyjiv, 2007), p. 18.
9 For more details, see: Mychajlo Koval'čuk, 'Bilja vytokiv UVO: vijs'kovo-polityčna dijal'nist' Je. Konoval'cja u 1920–1921 rr.', *Ukrajins'kyj vyzvol'nyj ruch*, 7 (2006), 5–78; Mychajlo Koval'čuk, *Na čoli Sičovych stril'civ. Vijs'kovo-polityčna dijal'nist' Jevhena Konoval'cja v 1917–1921 rr.* (Kyjiv, 2010), pp. 129–217; Oleksandr Zajcev, *Ukrajins'kyj integral'nyj nacionalizm (1920–1930-ti roky). Narysy intelektual'noji istoriji* (Kyjiv, 2013), pp. 241–43.

quite accurate. Indeed, in his *Nationalism* Dontsov viewed a nation as a single supra-personal entity that has common ideals. At the same time, however, when providing an answer to the question of "what class will embody these ideals?" he replied, "Without judging the further development of Ukraine prematurely, I will say that as of this moment, it is the class that represents the majority of the nation – the peasantry".[10] Thus, at the time of writing the book, Dontsov had not yet definitively got rid of his previous views, according to which he positioned himself as a peasant democrat. However, in comparison with his earlier works, the author of *Nationalism* no longer categorically adhered to the idea of the peasantry's leading role, and he indirectly suggested that the further development of Ukraine could bring forward a different segment of society. This ideological evolution ended in 1929 with the article *"To the Cities"*, in which the ideologist of "nationalism of the deed" – contrary to his own repeated thesis about the leading role of the peasantry – put forward the idea of "conquering the city", because "that city, your own city, does not allow foreign thorns to nestle in the living body of the people. These thorns destroy all attempts to organize the peasant crowd into a fully developed people with all its organs and functions".[11] It is no coincidence that the idea of a special role played by the peasantry is no longer present in the subsequent editions of *Nationalism*.

However, these and some other minor inaccuracies are of little importance compared to the advantages of David Svoboda's book. Still, one finds no sensational discoveries or conceptual breakthroughs that would force specialists to radically revise their ideas about the history of Ukrainian integral nationalism. And yet, the vast factual material, some of which is little known or unknown to historians, the well-grounded generalizations and conclusions, as well as the relative impartiality and the transnational perspective (whose application the author considers premature for Ukrainian historians) make the reviewed book a significant contribution to world historiography of Ukrainian radical nationalism. Let us also add a very impressive list of sources and historiographic grounding. A hard-working Czech historian used materials from as many as 23 archives located in several countries in Europe and the United States, and almost 90 periodicals; the list of published documents and the bibliography are 64 pages long! All these points prompt me to recommend David Svoboda's book not only to specialists, but also to all those who are interested in the modern history of Ukraine (and who are not afraid of the humongous size of the book). It would be good if someone took on the difficult task of translating the book into Ukrainian, as well as Polish.

10 Dmytro Doncov, *Nacionalizm* (L'viv, 1926), p. 252.
11 Dmytro Doncov, 'Do mist!', *Istoryčnyj kaljendar-al'manach Červonoji kalyny na 1930 rik*, 1 (1929), 53–54.

Andrzej Grajewski

AN INCOMPLETE SYNTHESIS

Book review: Marek Šmíd, *Vatikán a sovětský komunismus, 1917–1945*, Praha: Tryton, 2020, 280 pp.

The role of the Holy See in twentieth-century history has long been a subject of interest, resulting in the publication of both primary literature and academic texts. The opening of the collection of the Vatican Secret Archive from the time of the pontificate of Pius XI allowed researchers to examine new documents concerning these issues and to test various hypotheses present in world historiography. These researchers were particularly interested in the Holy See's relationship with the totalitarian systems of the twentieth century: German Nazism, Italian fascism, and Soviet communism. In this context, the Czech scholar Marek Šmíd's monograph on the Vatican's relations with Soviet communism is worthy of note. Šmíd works at the Department of Ecclesiastical History and Literary History in the Catholic Theological Faculty of Charles University in Prague. He has been researching the Vatican archives, mainly from the time of Pius XI's pontificate, for many years. This work has led him to write two monographs on the Holy See's interwar relations with fascist Italy and the Third Reich. Šmíd is among the leading Czech experts on these issues, also publishing extensively in Italian and German. His latest book, *The Vatican and Soviet Communism 1917–1945*, attempts to describe this important period from the perspective of the latest research as well as previously unknown archival sources.[1] It is undoubtedly an important event in Czech historiography, in which only books written from a Marxist point of view – without a broader familiarity with the source base – have previously been published.

1 Marek Šmíd, *Vatikán a sovětský komunismus, 1917–1945* (Praha: Tryton, 2020).

His book also contributes several interesting findings and reflections to the international historiography of this subject.

It would, however, make more sense for this book to cover a time frame until 1939 because the final part – the chapters about the situation after 1941 – clearly stands out from the rest. In the introduction, the author admits that his archival research only went up to the end of Pius XI's pontificate. He had not yet been able to study Pius XII's archives, as the decision to open them was made only two years ago (in 2020). Consequently, the final section of the book, which concerns the Second World War period, is not an academic analysis but a popular journalistic essay that is somewhat lacking in documentation. The chapter about the Holy See's relations with Spain and Mexico during the Spanish Civil War in 1936–1938 is also misplaced. It is obvious that these events were entirely different for the Holy See than relations with the Soviet Union, while communism in Spain and Mexico was also different in nature from the Soviet variety. The decision to add these two chapters, largely borrowed from the author's other books, was an artificial move without substantive justification.

The book's foreword was written by Archbishop Cyril Vasiľ SJ, the former secretary of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and currently apostolic administrator *sede plena* of the Greek Catholic Eparchy of Košice. Part One is an introduction, in which the author justifies the concept of the book. Part Two is entitled "The Holy See and Soviet communism in the era of Leninist repressions" and encompasses the years 1917–1926. It begins with a description of the situation of Catholics in Tsarist Russia and Russia's relations with the Holy See before 1917. It concludes with a description of the mission of Bishop Michel d'Hebigny, which was an attempt to create a clandestine Catholic Church structure under Bolshevik rule. Part Three, "The Holy See and Soviet communism in the era of Stalinist repressions", encompasses the period until the end of the Second World War.

Šmíd's main sources are subject literature published in Italian, English and German, supplemented by documents found in the archive of the Secretariat of State of the Holy See, the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, the Commission for Russia, as well as the published documents *Actes et documents du Saint-Siège relatifs à la période de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*. The author also uses publications from *L'Osservatore Romano* and *Acta Apostilicae Sedes*. Unfortunately, his failure to refer to any primary literature or academic publications in Russian weakens the book's value and has major methodological consequences in every part

of it.[2] He is also unfamiliar with any of the numerous works on the subject in Polish,[3] only citing four brief articles by Roman Dzwonkowski that were published in Italian in monographs edited by Jan Mikrut.[4] Yet he is not aware of Dzwonkowski's essential works on the history of the Roman Catholic Church in the Soviet Union, in which, based on Russian sources, he describes in detail both the fate of Catholics and relations between the Soviet authorities and the Holy See.[5]

It escapes Šmíd's attention that the largest group of Catholics in this area held Polish nationality. Admittedly, he does note in one sentence that the biggest groups were Lithuanians, Poles and Germans, but this statement is imprecise. In Tsarist Russia, Lithuanians never formed major Catholic communities. Germans dominated in two areas: in the Volga region, the site of the Saratov diocese with its capital in Tiraspol, and in Crimea and the southern governorates of Tsarist Russia. The nucleus of Catholicism in Russia, and later in the Soviet Union, was formed by the Polish faithful, who were dominant not only in the lands that belonged to the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth until the First Partition of Poland, but also in Russia – in Moscow, Saint Petersburg and Siberia. They formed the most important Catholic organizations in the region and dominated the clergy and Catholic hierarchy. They comprised 75% to 80% of all Catholics in the country, and more than 90% in Soviet Ukraine and Belarus.[6] In total, according to the calculations of Mikołaj Iwanow, there were around 950,000 Poles living in the Soviet Union in 1921, the vast majority of them Catholic.[7] It is worth adding that the Polish state, on the basis of article VII of the Treaty of Riga, was at least formally entitled to defend the rights of Polish Catholics.

2 There is in fact a lot of primary literature and research published in Russian. It suffices to mention such publications as: *Russkaja pravoslavnaja cerkov' i kommunističeskoe gosudarstvo 1917–1941. Dokumenty i fotomaterialy*, ed. by Ol'ga Vasil'eva (Moskva: BBI, 1997); *Vlast' i cerkov' v Vostočnoj Evrope. 1944–1953. Dokumenty rossijskich archivov. 1944–1948*, ed. by Tat'jana Volokitina, and others, 2 vols (Moskva: ROSSPÈN, 2009), I; *Dokumenty vnešnej politiki SSSR* (Moskva: Meždunarodnye otnošenija, 1992); *Rossija i Vatikan v konce XIX – pervoj treti XX veka. Materialy kollokviuma, sostojavšegosja v Moskve 23–24 ijunja 1998 goda*, ed. by Evgenija Tokareva, and Aleksej Judin (Moskva: Alletejja, 2003); Aleksej Judin, 'Papstvo i Rossija: istorija diplomatičeskich otnošenij', *PostNauka*, 25 March 2013 <https://postnauka.ru/longreads/10520> [accessed 12 October 2022]; *Mogilëvskaja Rimsko-katoličeskaja archieparchija: svidetel'stva živoj pamjati. 1783–1939, Meždunarodnaja konferencija v Sankt-Peterburge 6–9.12.2018 g.*, ed. by Christofor Požarskij, and others (Gatčina: RasCvet, 2019); Antoine Wenger, *Rome et Moscou. 1900–1950* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1987); Ol'ga Licenberger, *Rimsko-katoličeskaja Cerkov' v Rossii: istorija i pravovoe položenie* (Saratov: Povolžskaja Akademija gosudarstvennoj služby, 2001). Šmíd's book also fails to refer to an important work published in German: Wim Rood, *Rom und Moskwa. Der Heilige Stuhl und Russland bzw. die Sowjetunion von der Oktoberrevolution 1917 bis zum 1 Dezember 1989* (Altenbeberge, 1993).

3 In this context we can mention, for example, the memoirs of Walter Ciszek, *Z Bogiem w Rosji (1939–1963)* (London, 1988), or Bohdan Cywiński's still-relevant study *Ogniem próbowane. Z dziejów najnowszych Kościoła katolickiego w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej, ("... i was prześladować będą")* (Lublin–Rzym, 1990).

4 Jan Mikrut, *La Chiesa cattolica in Unione Sovietica. Dalla Rivoluzione del 1917 alla Perestrojka* (Verona: Gabrielli, 2017).

5 Roman Dzwonkowski, *Kościół katolicki w ZSRS 1917–1939. Zarys historii* (Lublin: Prace Wydziału Teologii, 1997); id., *Religia i Kościół katolicki w ZSRS oraz w krajach i na ziemiach okupowanych 1917–1991. Kronika* (Lublin, 2010); id., *Leksykon duchowieństwa polskiego represjonowanego w ZSRS 1939–1988* (Lublin: KUL, 2003).

6 Roman Dzwonkowski SAC, and Andrzej Szabaciuk, *Bolszewicy w walce z religią. Kościół rzymskokatolicki w Związku Sowieckim w polskich dokumentach dyplomatycznych 1922–1938* (Warszawa: Centrum Polsko-Rosyjskiego Dialogu i Porozumienia, 2021), Introduction, p. X.

7 Mikołaj Iwanow, *Pierwszy naród ukarany. Polacy w Związku Radzieckim 1921–1939* (Warszawa–Wrocław: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1991), pp. 72–87.

The author's failure to appreciate nationality as a factor in the Catholic Church's position in the Soviet Union also prevents him from noting that it was in fact ethnic and political considerations that motivated the largest repressions experienced by Catholics in the interwar period, in the years of the Great Terror.[8] The Polish Catholics who were repressed and murdered in the years 1937–1939 were victims of the NKVD's so-called Polish operation, when they were classified as spies and a potential threat to the security of the Soviet Union. Šmíd does not mention this at all, although the Holy See was aware of the political context of the persecution of Catholics, receiving detailed information from, among others, Polish diplomats.

The book also contains simple factual and interpretational errors. Discussing the journey of Archbishop Achille Ratti (later Pope Pius XI), then apostolic nuncio, from Warsaw to Kaunas in March 1920, the author writes that Vilnius was at this time under Polish occupation (p. 104). This is an ahistorical assessment. In April 1919, Vilnius (Wilno) was liberated by the Polish army from Bolshevik rule. The city's status was unresolved, with Polish leader Józef Piłsudski seeking a modus vivendi with the Lithuanian side on the matter. The decision to incorporate Vilnius and Central Lithuania was only made in 1922. It is worth adding that the entire international community recognized Vilnius as belonging to the Polish, not the Lithuanian, state. The description of the events in Ukraine (p. 105) contains no mention of the fact that when Ukrainians declared the formation of the West Ukrainian People's Republic in Lviv (Lwów) on 1 November 1918, it contained disputed territories largely inhabited by Polish populations. The response to these actions was Polish self-defence in Lviv, which allowed the city to remain in Polish hands. Yet the capture of Eastern Galicia by the Polish army resulted not from the Polish-Russian war but from the Polish-Ukrainian war in 1918–1919. On 15 March 1923, the Conference of Ambassadors recognized this territory as belonging to Poland. There is also a mention of the Kiev Offensive, undertaken in April 1920 on Piłsudski's orders (p. 106). In this context, it appears that the Polish side was interested in territorial acquisitions in Ukraine. Šmíd does not mention that the objective of this military expedition was for a sovereign Ukrainian government to regain control over Ukraine and oust the Bolsheviks from Kyiv, as shown by the agreement concluded in April 1920

8 Krzysztof Pożarski, 'Historia prześladowań Kościoła katolickiego w Rosji i w ZSRS', in *Z Chrystusem do końca. Męczeństwo Sług Bożych w Związku Sowieckim*, ed. by Krzysztof Pożarski (Kraków: AA, 2019), pp. 474–525; Rostislav Kolupaev, 'Russkaja katoličeskaja cerkov' vizantijskogo obrjada, in *Katoličeskaja enciklopedija*', ed. by Vitalij Zadvornyj, and others, 5 vols (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo franciskancev, 2002–2013), IV (2011). Many references to relations with the Vatican can also be found in M.V. Shkarovskiy's study: Michail Škarovskij, *Russkaja Pravoslavnaja Cerkov' pri Staline i Chruščeve (Gosudarstvenno-cerkovnye otnošenija v SSSR v 1939–1964 godach)* (Moskva, 1999).

between Piłsudski and Symon Petliura, ataman of the Ukrainian army. In addition to Polish units, Ukrainian forces also participated, parading in Kyiv on 9 May 1920. There is also no academic justification for the author's reference to the lands of Western Belarus and Ukraine, which were incorporated into Poland following the Treaty of Riga (p. 106). Western Belarus and Western Ukraine are political terms that were introduced into international circulation by the USSR in the interwar period as propaganda tools to justify anti-Polish policy and secure the support of a section of the Ukrainian and Belarusian population in interwar Poland. These efforts were manifested in 1923 in the formation of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus. The correct terms to use for Ukrainian territories that fell to Poland are therefore Eastern Galicia and Volhynia, while for Belarus one should speak of the southeastern part of the Vilnius Region, the Navahrudak region, and part of Polesia.

When discussing the situation of the Church under Bolshevik rule, the author makes no mention of the Council of People's Commissars' decree dividing the Orthodox Church from the state and schools from the Church – a fundamental legal act determining an entirely new situation for all religious communities in Soviet Russia. This meant adopting a model not so much of hostile separation as total domination of the communist authorities over all spheres of spiritual life. The decree's most important points were written personally by the Bolshevik leader, Lenin. Šmíd does not mention that the struggle against religion was one of the Bolsheviks' main ideological goals. This was demonstrated by the activity of the League of Militant Atheists, founded in 1923 by Yemelyan Yaroslavsky (born Minei Izrailevich Gubelman). Thanks to state subsidies, the league soon grew from being a voluntary civic organization into one of the USSR's most important educational institutions.

In my view, the most interesting section of the book describes the Holy See's attempt to set up a hierarchy in the Soviet Union in 1926 through the Jesuit Michel d'Herbigny, who was secretly consecrated as a bishop. D'Herbigny, we recall, arrived in Moscow in 1926 on a French diplomatic passport. His official objective was to visit the four French pastoral institutions founded in Tsarist Russia in Moscow, Leningrad, Odessa, and Makiivka, the last of which is in Eastern Ukraine, near Yuzivka (today Donetsk). However, the true goal of the expedition was different. In Moscow, on 26 April 1926, d'Herbigny, using papal powers, secretly consecrated the French assumptionist Father Eugène Joseph Neveu, who had been parish priest in Makiivka since 1907. d'Herbigny also made Father Eugène Joseph Neveu apostolic administrator of Moscow. He then made further clandestine nominations, the most important of which was the consecration

of the rector of the clerical seminary in Saratov, the German priest Alexander Frison. He became the bishop responsible for the southern part of the Tiraspol diocese, which also included Odessa and Crimea. Most of the Catholics there were German. Least significant was the consecration of the Latvian priest Boļeslavs Sloskāns, the vicar of Saint Catherine parish in Leningrad, who became apostolic administrator of the Mohilev and Minsk diocese. D'Herbigny left Russia on 15 May 1926, convinced that his clandestine mission had been a success. At the Vatican he met Pius XI, giving a detailed account of his stay and receiving a placet for further actions. He returned to Moscow on 3 August 1926 and again visited Mohilev and Leningrad, where he secretly consecrated another bishop during his mission.

The Polish priest Antoni Malecki of Saint Catherine parish in Leningrad, the organizer of the local clandestine seminary, became apostolic administrator, to be permanently based in the former Russian capital. The feast of the Assumption of Mary on 15 August 1926 was d'Herbigny's first public appearance in the role of bishop. This was undoubtedly an attempt to legalize the earlier clandestine consecrations of bishops. During the liturgy in Saint Louis church, the French hierarch informed the congregation that, as papal delegate, he would permanently look after Catholics in the country. The next day, in the nearby Saints Peter and Paul church, he administered confirmation to many parishioners, mainly Poles. His mission was interrupted on the night of 3–4 September 1926, when militia entered the hotel where he was staying. He was informed that his visa had expired on 2 September and he had to leave the Soviet Union immediately. During his stay in the Soviet Union, Bishop d'Herbigny not only consecrated clandestine bishops but also reorganized church life in Russia and appointed apostolic administrators, although he did not precisely designate the territorial division of the units under their jurisdiction. Šmíd provides a detailed account of these events, using hitherto unknown documents from the Vatican archive. He also gained access to d'Herbigny's reports and his correspondence with the Secretary of State. He makes the interesting statement, deserving wider discussion, that d'Herbigny's mission was not so much an attempt to build a clandestine Church hierarchy in the Soviet Union as it was a form of communication of the Holy See with the Soviet authorities and Catholics in the country (p. 169). Also intriguing is the observation that, during d'Herbigny's travels to Moscow, the apostolic nuncio in Berlin, Archbishop Eugenio Pacelli (the later Pope Pius XII), was holding informal talks with representatives of Soviet diplomacy (p. 169). While Pacelli knew about d'Herbigny's mission, the French Jesuit had no idea that other discussions with the Soviet authorities were taking place at the same time.

However, this chapter also contains errors resulting from the author's lack of detailed knowledge about the Soviet realities of the period. He writes, for example, that d'Herbigny's interlocutor in Moscow was the Soviet justice minister, Pyotr Smidovich (p. 156). No such position existed at the time: there was only a People's Commissariat of Justice. This was headed by the people's commissar, Dmitry Kursky, later Soviet ambassador to Italy. Smidovich was in fact a senior official in the commissariat, and at the same time head of the religious affairs department in the Central Executive Committee, the supreme body of the Soviet government. The Soviets did not want the talks with the Holy See's envoy to be official, but they appointed a competent person with knowledge of the realities of Soviet religious policy to represent them. I also disagree with the assertion that d'Herbigny's mission had three stages and lasted from October 1925 to September 1926 (p. 153). His first stay in 1925 was more of a reconnaissance, with no expectations of consequences for the Church in Russia. At this time, he was not a bishop and had no special powers. In my view, we should speak of d'Herbigny's two missions, completed from April to September 1926, and a preparatory visit. Šmíd's claim that d'Herbigny's downfall in 1933 took place as a result of the Polish Church milieu, and particularly the Jesuit superior-general Wlodimir Ledóchowski SJ, is also not supported by evidence. Bishop d'Herbigny was compromised not only by the fact that his personal secretary, the Greek Catholic priest Alexander Deubner, proved to be an agent of the Soviet Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU), but also by a scandal that supposedly took place in Moscow. This was probably a provocation by the Soviet secret services. The fact is that Ledóchowski and the Polish Church and diplomatic community were concerned by the concept of Russification of the Church in Russia that was represented by d'Herbigny. They regarded it as false and did not take into account the fact that Poles constituted the vast majority of the faithful in Russia. The Polish lobby also did not believe in the extraordinary potential of the Russian Greek Catholic Church. According to the Vatican's intentions, meanwhile, Greek Catholics were to be a bridge to the Russian Orthodox Church. This notion had been conceived before the First World War by the metropolitan bishop of Lviv and Halych, Andrey Sheptytsky, OSBM. In the conditions of Soviet Russia, however, it had no chance of success. While the Bolsheviks were willing to tolerate some forms of presence of Roman Catholic communities in their territory, they never agreed to attempts to create a Russian Greek Catholic Church. D'Herbigny was an advocate of these Uniate plans, but in practice they all came to nothing. His mission from the outset was under the OGPU's operational control. This French Jesuit was permitted to familiarize himself with the personal

details of individuals designated for leadership roles in the Church in the Soviet Union. After some time, they were all arrested, effectively breaking up the clandestine Church structure d'Herbigny had set up. This experience paralyzed the Holy See's activity in relation to the Soviet Union until the end of the interwar period. It also resulted in numerous deaths among clergy who were most active and faithful in the region.

Despite the deficiencies, errors, and evident gaps in the author's knowledge of the subject literature that I have highlighted, his book is still an important event. It demonstrates that exploration of the Vatican's archives can not only enrich our knowledge with new facts, but also contribute to revisiting views and judgements previously entrenched in historiography.

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