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JOURNAL FOR CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN
HISTORY AND POLITICS

DO HISTORIANS FAIL IN LISTENING TO EACH OTHER?

METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES FOR HISTORICAL DIALOGUE

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ADAEQUATIO REI ET INTELLECTUS

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Methodological Challenges for Historical Dialogue

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WHY AREI

Veritas est adequatio rei et intellectus – this is how St Thomas formulated the definition of truth in his treatise ‘De Veritate’. Truth is the correspondence between a thing and a judgment, or, to explain it in another way, the correspondence between our judgment and the actual state of affairs. This so-called correspondence definition, which goes back to Aristotle, has formed the basis of Europeans’ thinking about the world for centuries, from ancient times onwards, and has inspired them to discover ways of approaching the truth. What is more, it is still shared by a considerable number of philosophers as well as by the overwhelming part of humanity, which usually intuitively takes for granted the existence of the truth as well as untruth or lies. This is the foundation on which European civilisation has grown.

St Thomas’s definition has, of course, important epistemological implications: it assumes that truth as such objectively exists; it is not merely a product of human minds or our senses; it is not dependent on subjective factors such as cultural conditions or the existence of a social consensus as to what that truth is. Aquinas’ *adequatio rei et intellectus* is a denial of Pilate’s doubt: *quod est veritas*.

Why am I writing about this? Because in contemporary Europe this truth is being questioned more and more. It is not even that, on the eastern edges of the continent, the Russian Federation – its authorities and official propaganda – does not shy away from the biggest lies and cynical manipulation, if only to convince their own public opinion of the validity of the objectives of the aggressive war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine and to deny the responsibility of the Russian military for the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed after 24 February 2022 on a daily basis on the territory of this sovereign state. Fortunately, the world has not for a moment given credence to these deliberate falsehoods, promulgated by criminals who will sooner or later face justice – may it be mundane.

In the long run, there is another problem with truth which is much more dangerous. This is reflected by epistemological relativism, accompanied by moral and cultural relativism, which are spreading in many countries of Western Europe. Their influence on the humanities and social sciences is growing, thereby undermining the foundations of classical scientific methodology. After all, for centuries scholars have strived to possess certain knowledge, and even though they assumed that it was rather inaccessible to human cognition, they believed that it was possible and necessary to move towards it. But how? By means of the comprehensive, unbiased study of the facts – that is, of what has happened, which can be

established in an unquestionable manner with the methods available to human cognition – and by interpreting them in accordance with clearly articulated criteria of evaluation. The point is, however, that such an approach must be accompanied by the conviction that the search for truth, the pursuit of truth, makes any sense at all – and this, again, is impossible without the belief that truth exists at all, established by God or by the Perfect Being, however understood. Adopting the opposite position, i.e., ontological and epistemological nihilism, leads to relativism. The existence of certain knowledge is then negated – or at least the need to strive for it is downplayed because, in this view, knowledge becomes not so much an unattainable ideal for which striving for it constitutes the essence of objective research – as pure illusion. In the latter view, one can only study various positions, paradigms, ‘narratives’, without attempting to attach value judgements to them. Relativism as a basis for research discourages attempts to verify claims or judgements because it voluntarily renounces the measure by which they can be judged – that is, conformity to truth, certain knowledge. Yes, the study of discourse is an important and necessary trend, but research cannot, of course, be limited by it because our reality is made up not only of the constructs of the human mind.

To these arguments from philosophy and the methodology of scientific research can be added a political argument: questioning the existence of objective truth makes us weaker and vulnerable to domination by those who do not have such doubts. By raising doubts, our will to defend fundamental values and principals, our attachment to imponderables, is weakened. In this way, historiography ceases to describe what happened, to explain how it happened and, possibly, to assess the significance of what happened. The traditional triad of factual description, analysis and evaluation is being replaced by a new approach that focuses primarily on the analysis of how one describes and evaluates what occurred, and sometimes on a presentist reflection of how this relates to the values of liberal democracies in the 21st century.

This unfortunate intellectual fashion has dominated many universities in Western Europe and is also spreading in other parts of the world, including Central and Eastern Europe, not bypassing such disciplines as history, political science, international relations or memory studies. In these disciplines, too, there is a tendency to postpone source research – which is laborious and time-consuming as it requires identification of facts and their subsequent analysis – in favour of research which might be methodologically flawed but it is effective in terms of image, and which is aimed not so much at reconstructing reality as at confirming assumptions made *a priori*.

This phenomenon is compounded by another tendency of a completely different nature, but one that is equally harmful and, what is more, is imposed by the current solutions of the system of financing science in various European countries, including those that are outside the EU, such as Ukraine, or outside political Europe, such as Belarus or Russia. This is the tendency to focus on publications in English in reputable English-language journals. It goes without saying that there are still a considerable number of scholars who do not speak English well, or in any case do not speak this language well enough to write in it at an academic level. This circumstance makes it difficult for them to publish in an international language, and therefore in English-language journals. Moreover, even researchers with a good command of this language are often unable to write articles with a sufficient level of linguistic editing to be accepted for publication by prestigious journals. What is more, these journals are necessarily focused on an international audience, so they prefer texts that have supra-local or supra-regional significance, which in turn has a feedback effect on the topics that researchers take up in their research.

The Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding (a Polish public institution established by a special act of the Polish Sejm in 2011 in order, among other things, to conduct scientific research on Russia and its relations with Poland and Europe, as well as dialogue with Russian civil society) has repeatedly received requests to help researchers from the region to popularise their scientific output in English. This is particularly important for researchers from Eastern Europe who have limited access to Western funding, and in Russia and Belarus, which are deprived of public funding for political reasons.

At the same time, we have observed problems resulting from Western European or American researchers' insufficient knowledge of the achievements of their colleagues from the CEE region and Russia, as the latter have very difficult access to English-speaking intellectual or scientific communities.

We have also noticed the under-representation or even marginalisation of certain issues in leading Western English-language journals because they do not fit in with the dominant trends in the humanities there, just as we have noticed the effects of the one-sided view of the situation in Central and Eastern Europe, propagated – for various reasons – both by some Western European intellectual and political circles and by propagandists of the Russian state.

In trying to change this situation, we have decided to establish a magazine which will popularise research based on traditional epistemological assumptions, i.e., on the conviction that a scientist's duty is to

analyse and evaluate the phenomena he studies in such a way that one can, if not learn, then come closer to the truth, whose existence in itself is not questioned. The word AREI from the title of the journal is an acronym of the traditional definition of truth: *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, that is, the correspondence between reality and (our) judgment. In this way, the journal will also mark its opposition to the assumptions of the intellectual fashions in question that question the need to strive for objective knowledge or even deny the sense of using the term at all: 'truth'.

The aim of AREI will be not only to disseminate the results of innovative research work on the past of Poland and other Central and Eastern European countries, as well as Russia, but also to conduct a critical dialogue with Western European and American intellectual circles. We want to conduct such dialogue especially with those who view the history of the region through the prism of stereotypes propagated by nationalist or imperialist historiographical traditions, or who are influenced by various intellectual fashions that erode the foundations of classical historiography. In addition, we wish to publish valuable analyses of contemporary issues affecting Russia's policy and its relations with Poland, the EU, and NATO states, and other countries in the region. These will refer in their assessments to international law and to the axiological criteria that underpin European political culture. At the same time, the journal will disseminate articles that polemicise with research circles calling for the revision of such an order. We also intend to promote articles by scholars who do not speak English well enough to be published in English-language journals, thus helping them to get a proper audience for their work. The journal will offer such researchers the possibility of submitting proposals for texts to be published in several languages of the region and will, where possible, provide an honorarium for authors and reviewers.

Finally, we wish to bring together a select group of historians and scholars of international affairs from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe around Mieroszewski Centre for Dialogue – a new Polish public institution for intellectual dialogue between Poles and the nations of Eastern Europe, established by an act of the Polish parliament of 7 July 2022 through the transformation of the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding. We intend to use this network as a valuable channel for promoting the achievements of historiography and analytical thought in the region. It is our wish that the journal will eventually, i.e., within a few years, be included in prestigious international indexed databases, which will make it possible to significantly increase the opinion-forming power of the journal and the international citability of the articles published in its pages.

The magazine will be published three times a year with the prospect of changing to a quarterly rhythm if the target audience is interested. It will be published in electronic form, on a dedicated website, and in paper form.

It will accept for publication articles that meet the criteria of academic analysis and concern the history of diplomacy, international relations, political and legal thought, as well as texts devoted to any other aspect of history, provided their content contains comparative potential that goes beyond local or national history or presents a given scientific problem in an innovative way that is likely to arouse the interest of a wider circle of researchers. The journal will also accept articles for publication which analyse contemporary international relations or issues affecting them, such as the politics of memory, as well as reviews. In particularly justified cases, analytical essays or interviews will be published. Monographic issues are also welcome. Each article will undergo a double-blind review by two other specialists in the relevant scientific discipline.

The level and reputation of the journal will be ensured by an international Editorial Board which consists of internationally renowned scholars. The narrower editorial board, i.e., the people who will run the journal on a daily basis, includes Dr Igor Gretsky (until recently, St Petersburg State University), Dr Jana Prymachenko (Institute of History, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine), Dr Anna Wylegala (Warsaw University), Dr Paweł Libera (Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences), Dr Magdalena Semczyszyn (Institute of National Remembrance), as well as the director of the Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding Centre, Dr Ernest Wysocki, and myself, the undersigned Łukasz Adamski.

In the hands of our Dear Readers we are presenting the first issue of the journal, prepared before Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. As well as describing the effects of the spread of the phenomenon of the deformation of the description of socio-political reality, it will contain articles addressing the problems of poor methodology and the manipulation or violation of analytical rigour.

Hoping that the idea of publishing AREI will appeal to you, Dear Readers, I cordially invite all researchers of good will to cooperate in the development of this intellectual initiative.

ŁUKASZ ADAMSKI
Editor-in-Chief

Interview with Sergey Mironenko

IT IS TERRIBLE THAT WE HAVE SUCH A LOW LEVEL OF HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE

SERGEY MIRONENKO

Head of Research of the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF). Historian, PhD in Historical Sciences, Professor, Associate Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS). Director of GARF since May 1992. Head of Research at GARF since March 2016.

A Panel Member of the Federal Archival Agency of Russia. Head of the nineteenth to early twentieth century Russian History Department at the Faculty of History, Lomonosov Moscow State University. Member of the editorial boards of the journals *Istoricheskiy Arkhiv* (History Archive), *Rodina* (Motherland), and *Voyenno-Istoricheskiy Zhurnal* (Military Historical Journal).¹

¹ Quoted from the GARF website: Mironenko Sergej Vladimirovič
Naučnyj rukovoditel' Gosudarstvennogo archiva Rossijskoj Federacii <<https://statearchive.ru/446>>
[accessed 28 September 2021].

Mr Mironenko, you were the director of the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), one of the most important Russian archives, for a very long time. However, there are many other archives in Russia: the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI), the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), the Russian State Military Archive (RGVA) and others. Why are there so many archives? Why are the archival holdings in Russia scattered among various archives, unlike in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe? Is this a legacy of the Soviet era?

– On the eve of the Great Patriotic War in 1941, a new system of central state archives was introduced in the USSR. At the time, the Central State Archive of the October Revolution, the Central State Archive of Ancient Documents, and the Central State Literary Archive were established. These archives existed until 1991, i.e., until the collapse of the USSR, and most of them still exist today. Historically, for the Soviet Union, the national archive was a set of these central state archives: military, literary, etc. For the new, post-1992 Russia, the national archive is the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF). Let me repeat, this is the archive for the state of the Russian Federation, which emerged in 1992. This has been taken note of and recognised by the international community of archivists: GARF is a category a member (national archives) of the International Council on Archives (ICA).

To what extent have archives been transformed in the new Russia? Have they changed?

– The 1990s witnessed an ‘archival revolution’ in Russia mainly due to the fact that millions – let me emphasise – millions of files and tens or even hundreds of millions of documents were declassified. One of the most closely guarded secrets in the Soviet Union was – as strange as it may seem at first glance – the secret of national history, which could not be studied freely and which the Soviet people received in a censored version following strict guidelines. First, the *Short Course of the History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)* appeared in 1938, followed by textbooks on the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and other similar publications. The archival revolution and its consequences transformed Russian archives, which are fundamentally different from those of the Soviet period.

It is true that in the 1990s a huge number of documents were published and many interesting studies appeared. However, the Law on the Archives, which introduced the term ‘personal family secret’, was adopted in Russia in 2004. This is the term that is referred to in order to retain the ‘classified’ stamp on documents concerning the activities of NKVD officers. To what extent did this law change the process of declassification and publication

of documents? Did it simplify the process of access to documents or, on the contrary, complicate it?

– I have raised this issue on numerous occasions and my position remains unchanged. Russian legislation, like the rest of Russian life, is very contradictory. For example, the law on state secrets stipulates that documents shall be classified for 30 years. What does that mean? Well, it is 2021² now, and if we follow a strict interpretation of the law, all documents classified before 1991 should be automatically declassified. In fact, that was the point of introducing a 30-year period of protection of state secrets.

It has been well known since Soviet times that it is impossible to keep scientific discoveries secret for a long time. Our outstanding mathematician Mstislav Keldysh spoke³ about this at a meeting of the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences. He believed that modern science is so international that it is simply impossible to keep secret any important discovery for more than six months. That's why the law on state secrets introduced a 30-year period after which documents with restricted access are, in theory, automatically declassified. By contrast, the law on criminal intelligence and surveillance operations and other regulations created a very complex and extremely costly system of declassifying documents.

I can explain this using the example of GARF. We store records of the Council of Ministers of the USSR. A large number of ministries were involved in the development of any resolution of the Council of Ministers. Dozens of departments drafted, negotiated, and reviewed them. To declassify any document today we need an expert opinion. If ten ministries were involved in the preparation of a Council of Ministers' resolution, ten experts had to visit the archive, study it, and then give their opinion. This is an incredibly cumbersome and costly way of declassifying archival documents. I have said many times that there is one way out: the law on state secrets. There is a 30-year period of classification; so, in my view, we have to introduce a mode of classification instead.

Undoubtedly, a state will always have secrets. Every state has secret files and documents. The difference is in their volume, quantity, and the duration of their classification. I think it would be reasonable if the law on state secrets ruled that all documents aged more than 30 years should be examined, and relevant state agencies should say which ones are subject to further classification. However, they should not be classified forever, but there should be a certain period of time (5, 10, or 20 years) after which

² This interview was recorded on 17 September 2021.

³ Mstislav Vsevolodovich Keldysh (1911–1978) was a Soviet scientist in the field of applied mathematics and mechanics, Academician of the USSR Academy of Sciences (1946). From 1953, he was a member of the presidium; in 1960–61 he was vice-president; and between 1961 and 1975 he was president of the USSR Academy of Sciences. See: Vladimir Millionščikov, *Keldysh Mstislav Vsevolodovich* <<https://bigenc.ru/mathematics/text/2059304>> [accessed 4 October 2021].

documents automatically lose their classification status. This is a common worldwide practice. But Russia is a rich country and it does not have to spare money. Just imagine how many man-hours each ministry has to devote to this work. All over the world, except for our country, it is believed that this work is a waste of money. Therefore, if during the 'archival revolution' we were declassifying hundreds of thousands of files every year, now we are declassifying 5, 10, or 20 thousand a year, but the declassification process is not over. We need to understand that. The declassification process goes on, it continues, although not at such a pace as back in the 1990s.

Overall, the number of classified documents in GARF is in line with international standards. It does not exceed 5 per cent the total number of documents stored in the archive. Moreover, it should be taken into account that GARF is an expanding archive. It regularly receives records from the top legislative, executive and judicial authorities of the Russian Federation to be stored.

To follow up on this topic, let me ask you about why such huge obstacles are created. For instance, a Polish colleague of mine who worked with the documents of General Leopold Okulicki⁴ in GARF discovered that some of them were classified. As you know, General Okulicki's death is shrouded in mystery. Officially he died of a heart attack, but there is a suspicion that he was murdered. Why can the whole file not be declassified? What kind of information could the classified pages hide? And what is the point of this secrecy?

– This is not a question for me but for those who classified these documents. I have never looked into General Okulicki's case – never took any interest in his fate. There is a law on criminal intelligence and surveillance operations which bans the public disclosure of the names of unofficial informants and officers who worked undercover. I think this explains why the documents in this case or other similar files are under restricted access or secret storage.

Let me return to the issue of GARF acquisitions, namely the Archive of 'White' Russian Emigration in Prague.⁵ It is partly stored in GARF and

⁴ Leopold Okulicki (1898–1946) – Brigadier General; from October 1944 head of the Home Army, that part of the Polish armed forces that operated underground in occupied Poland. He was arrested by the NKVD in March 1945 in Pruszków when, together with fifteen other Polish leaders, he had been invited for a meeting and negotiations with the Soviet command. In June 1945, he was in 'The Trial of the Sixteen', which was held by the Soviet authorities in Moscow on 18–21 June 1945. He was sentenced by the Military Collegium of the USSR Supreme Court to 10 years in labour camps. According to the official Soviet version, he died on 24 December 1946, in prison as a result of a heart attack and his body was burned at the NKVD crematorium at Donskoye cemetery. There is, however, some reliable evidence that the general was murdered.

⁵ The Archive in Prague (in 1923–24 the Archive of Russian Emigration; in 1924–45 the Russian Historical Archive Abroad) is one of the largest repositories of documents on Russian emigration. It was established in Prague in September 1923 following the compilation of the records of the Archive of Russian Emigration and the Archive of Czechoslovakia that had been run since February 1923 by the Cultural and Educational Department of the Library of the Prague *Zemgor* (the Association of Russian Rural and Municipal Officials in the Czechoslovak Republic). On 14 August 1924, it became the Russian Foreign Historical Archive Abroad. It compiled historical documents removed from Russia and related to the activities of Russian emigrés in various countries. It was financed by the government of Czechoslovakia in the framework of the 'Russian campaign'. Quoted after: Lidija Petruševa, *The Archive in Prague* <https://bigenc.ru/domestic_history/text/3165883> [accessed 4 October 2021].

partly in the National Library in Prague. Some of the collection relating to Ukrainian emigration is stored in Ukraine. It is known for a fact that the records of the Prague archive are divided between different Russian archives. Was there any attempt to collect the documents from this archive under one roof to simplify the work of historians?

– Soviet archival science took pride in its principle of the indivisibility of holdings. In practice, the entire history of domestic archival science is a history of redistribution and relocation of archival records from one archive to another. It is a history of never-ending fission and fusion. Even experts find it difficult to make sense of this whirlwind.

As for the Russian Historical Archive Abroad, we have not touched the issue of actually recreating it. It was important to create an information system that would make it possible to restore this archive.

And, in the late 1990s, we published a special inter-archive directory which identifies all of the elements of the former Russian Historical Archive Abroad that are stored in different places. From my point of view, such directories (all of which are available in electronic format nowadays) solve the issue of reuniting what was once dismantled. This is the right and most painless way.

Mr Mironenko, I would like to ask you about the Special Archive.⁶ This archive has also changed hands several times, and it is now part of the Russian State Military Archive (RGVA). How is the issue of document restitution now being resolved? Which documents are to be returned and under what conditions?

– The recovery of archives is the result of intergovernmental agreements. Some of these agreements were approved by the State Duma and are part of international policy. For example, France regained the Secret Police archives under the condition that copies were made, and we microfilmed all the holdings returned to France. This was done with all the holdings of any historical value for Russia and for world history.

Another example is the archive of the Principality of Liechtenstein, which was seized by the Germans in Vienna. When our troops liberated Vienna, this archive became a trophy of the Soviet Army. It was part of those holdings which were taken away after World War II. It was kept in

⁶ The so-called Special Archive, the Central State Special Archive (TsGOA), was created in March 1946 to preserve the holdings and collections of foreign origin removed by the Soviet Army from Germany and Eastern Europe at the end of World War II. Later, the documents of the Archive of the Main Administration for Affairs of Prisoners of War and Internees (GUPVI) of the USSR Ministry of the Interior were transferred to the Special Archive. In July 1992, TsGOA was transformed into the Centre for the Preservation of Historical and Documentary Collections (TsKhIDK) and opened to researchers. In 1999, TsKhIDK was merged with the Russian State Military Archive (RGVA) and ceased to exist as an independent institution. Quoted from the RGVA website: *Istorija arkhiva* <<http://rgvarchive.ru/ob-arkhive/istoriya-arkhiva.shtml>> [accessed 28 September 2021].

the Special Archive and returned under an intergovernmental agreement with the Principality of Liechtenstein. This archive consisted mainly of economic documents from the nineteenth and earlier centuries. This archive was of no particular interest to us, so it was not microfilmed and was transferred to the Principality of Liechtenstein, for which it is a part of their national history. In return, the reigning Prince of Liechtenstein, Hans-Adam II, purchased at a Sotheby's auction the archive of the investigator Sokolov⁷ that was on sale at the time, thus providing us with unique documents that shed light on the fate of the royal family, their execution in Yekaterinburg, and the suppression of traces of this crime.

**Why were the holdings of the Special Archive not transferred to GARF?
Why such a complicated path?**

– The issue of merging the Special Archive with GARF has never been considered. If you have ever been to RGVA, you know that the two archives are located in two adjacent buildings. That is why we decided not to mess with it, especially since there was no spare storage capacity in GARF. Mind you, even now we are facing problems with storing new acquisitions. A new building is under construction for this purpose. I hope that when it is completed, we will proceed with acquisitions of the complete holdings.

Where are these holdings kept at the moment? Are they kept as some sort of reserve stock?

– No, to date they have been stored at state agencies. Of course, we accept some of them. For example, the documents of the USSR Council of Ministers, which were kept in the Archive of the President of the Russian Federation (formerly the Archive of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union), are some of our latest arrivals. These are the documents of two Special Committees established under the Council of Ministers that were dealing with the atomic bomb and missile industry. Now these holdings are in our possession.

In 2009, we organised a landmark exhibition here, at Bolshaya Pirogovskaya Street,⁸ dedicated to the first atomic bomb test in the Soviet Union. We even borrowed documents from the Harry S. Truman Library Archive in the United States. We cooperate with other archives and do our best to exhibit collections that come not only from Russian but also from foreign archives.

⁷ Nikolay Sokolov (1882–1924) was a lawyer and an investigator into major cases at Omsk District Court. He was commissioned by the Supreme Leader and Imperial Admiral Alexander Kolchak to investigate the case of the execution of the tsarist family. He later emigrated to France.

⁸ The exhibition hall of the Federal State Archives is located in the main building of GARF in Moscow at 17 Bolshaya Pirogovskaya Street.

At a recent exhibition on the history of the alliance of the three great powers in the fight against Nazism in World War II, a unique document from the UK's National Archives was displayed. It was a sheet of paper torn from a notebook featuring Churchill's notes concerning which part of South-Eastern Europe would be in whose sphere of influence. This sketch was made during his meeting with Stalin. As a rule, our colleagues do not refuse us access to documents. For obvious reasons, nowadays we are talking about copies of documents, but an electronic copy is not much different from the original.

As far as I can tell, the 2014 international conflict had no effect on Russia's cooperation with foreign archives? Am I right?

– I think you are right. In any case, in my practice we have not met with any refusals when we have asked our colleagues to make the necessary documents available. If we know that documents that can play an important role in an archival exhibition are stored at certain premises, we request them and receive them. Similarly, we do not refuse our colleagues access to our documents. The only thing is that COVID has interfered with cooperation a bit. In 2021, a large exhibition about the Trans-Siberian Railway was planned to be held at the UK's National Museum of Science and Industry. I hope this exhibition will take place in 2022, and we will present our originals. Thus, international cooperation between archives continues.

You are a renowned expert on nineteenth-century history. Recently, the Rothschild family acquired the correspondence of Alexander II and handed it over to GARF. It is also a well-known fact that Boris Savinkov's relatives⁹ handed over his documents to GARF. How often do philanthropists, big business people, or relatives donate something to the archive?

– The Rothschilds bought the correspondence between Alexander II and his morganatic wife, Princess Yurievskaya. That was over ten years ago. We got a whole suitcase of letters between Alexander II and Yurievskaya at that time. One researcher embarked on the gigantic task of reading these letters and published a study of the relationship between the emperor and Princess Yurievskaya based on their correspondence.

It is not uncommon for large companies to acquire certain documents that come up at foreign auctions and donate them to us. The most recent purchase was that of Admiral Kolchak's Archive. Leonid Mikhelson's company Novatek helped us with that.

⁹ Boris Savinkov (1879–1925), a Russian revolutionary, one of the leaders of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, member of the 'White' movement, writer.

Two volumes of documents, entitled 'Admiral Kolchak', have just been published.¹⁰ The first volume, which was prepared jointly with our colleagues from the Russian State Archive of the Navy, presents Kolchak as a naval commander, naval officer, and Arctic explorer. The second volume presents him as the Supreme Leader of Siberia. Most of these documents have been published for the first time.

I cannot avoid mentioning Viktor Vekselberg, who purchased extremely interesting documents of the Yusupov family at an auction in Paris. They were placed on auction, and some of the most valuable and interesting items were bought by Mr Vekselberg and transferred to GARF.¹¹

Konstantin Malofeev once bought some of the diaries of Duchess Xenia Aleksandrovna of Russia, the sister of Emperor Nicholas II. They were part of his private collection for some time. Later on, I persuaded Konstantin to donate them to GARF, which has a rich collection of Xenia Aleksandrovna's items. Now these diaries are stored in GARF, and we are preparing them for publication.

Many people donate documents to the state archive. Unfortunately, the archive has no budgetary funds to acquire records, but the search for benefactors generates positive results. The Federal Archival Agency of Russia helps us immensely with this. Of course, this does not happen every day, but it is not every day that rare collectors' items pop up at auctions either.

After all this, who is it that comes up with the initiative? Does the archive initiate the process or do business people approach you of their own volition?

– Undoubtedly, this is the initiative of archivists. How would business people know exactly what to buy? The only exception is Malofeev, who bought Xenia Alexandrovna's diaries on his own initiative; however, as a rule this is the archive's initiative. We contact the government, and the government apparently advises certain businessmen to perform a patriotic deed and buy some archival records for the preservation of Russian history.

It is no secret that there are certain fashions in scientific research. For example, certain topics have lost their attractiveness in recent years. Nowadays, there are practically no researchers who deal with the history of the working class and the working-class movement, and there are few historians addressing economic issues. Therefore, I would like to ask about the topics that are currently not on the radar of historians from Central and Eastern Europe as well as researchers who deal with the history of Russia's

¹⁰ A.V. Kolčak. 1874–1920. *Sbornik dokumentov v dvuch tomach*, ed. by Julija Orlova (Moskva: BLIC, 2021).

¹¹ For more details see Pavel Gerasimenko, 'The Yusupov Princes' Archive Donated to the State', *The Art Newspaper Russia*, 14 February 2015 <<https://www.theartnewspaper.ru/posts/1292/>> [accessed 28 February 2021].

relations with neighbouring states. What other archival holdings are awaiting compilers and researchers?

– Unfortunately, I cannot but agree with you. You are right that many topics which were once very popular are now downplayed. This means not only the history of the working class but also the history of the peasantry. Pre-revolutionary Russia was a peasant country. We have practically no specialists in the history of the Russian peasantry left. It is really out of fashion. So, what can be done about this? This is a big problem!

I do not agree that researchers have stopped studying economics. They do study economics. The history of economics and the history of the working class are very closely interrelated. Still, there is a definite shift towards economic history. There's a field in economics which is separate from history. There are now congresses of historical sciences and there are congresses of historians of economic development. They have sort of separated themselves from the science of history. Mathematical methods and interpretation of huge arrays of statistical data have occupied an essential place in the study of economics.

We can observe fashions, but it was like that before. In Soviet days, the focus was on the revolutionary movement. When I started my professional career, the Decembrists were heroes. Now it is said that they are traitors of the Motherland – that they are renegade revolutionaries. I personally fail to understand why they are renegade revolutionaries. Today, little attention is paid to the Russian Liberation Movement (this is a broader term than the notion of a revolutionary movement).

You know our difficult relations with our Slavic brothers, the Poles and the Czechs. The Russian-Polish commission of historians, which was supposed to resolve complex issues in mutual history, has discontinued its work.¹² It is counterproductive to sweep problems under the carpet or to use the 'takes one to know one' approach. People need to meet, respect each other's point of view, debate, and prepare joint publications.

Unfortunately, I learnt from my personal experience that our Polish colleagues were reluctant to work with us even though we proposed compiling collections of documents with a foreword by both Russian and Polish partners for a number of our joint projects which were launched

¹² The Polish-Russian Group for Difficult Matters was a commission of historians and experts in international affairs that operated under the Polish and Russian Foreign Ministries in 2008–13. The group was chaired by former Foreign Minister Adam Daniel Rotfeld on behalf of Poland and by MGIMO Rector Anatoly Torkunov on behalf of Russia. The group met every six months and provided the authorities of both countries with recommendations on how to solve existing problems in relations between the two countries. The work of the group resulted in a comprehensive study: *White spots – Black spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918–2008*, ed. by Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015). The most recent joint meeting of the Group was held in Kaliningrad in November 2013.

5–8 years ago.¹³ After all, it is possible to present two points of view – two versions of historical events or a historical process. Let the reader decide what he or she prefers rather than announce that ‘I know everything, I am absolutely right’. If a researcher claims that his or her position is the ultimate truth, then he or she is history as a historian.

You know, Piotr Vyazemsky – the famous poet, a friend of the Decembrists and Pushkin, the one who collected anecdotes in his [Old] Notebook – once wrote that you have to live for a long time in Russia because it takes many, many years to see any results (*laughter*). I think that history will judge and will put everything back in order, but unfortunately this process takes time.

Mr Mironenko, could you be more specific about which joint Russian-Polish project it was? What documents were you planning to publish?

– At the moment, we are working on a multi-volume history of relations between the Soviet Union and the Polish political underground movement with our colleagues from the Institute of Slavonic Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS). The first three volumes have already been published. At the very beginning, our Polish colleagues used to visit us. There were talks about joint efforts, but gradually it all came to naught. Now we are carrying out this project on our own, without our Polish colleagues, but we hope that they will provide us with the documents. Hopefully, there will be no problems in this regard. The problem is in the interpretation and differences of opinion as regards this really complex relationship between Russia and Poland during the pre-war period, and during and after the war.

The interview you gave to *Kommersant* in April 2015¹⁴ comes to my mind. At that time, you brought up the plot of Panfilov's 28 Men¹⁵ and noted that

¹³ These were two projects that were to be implemented under the auspices of the Group for Difficult Matters: one of them on the relations between the Soviet authorities and the Polish underground movement in 1943–46; the other on diplomatic relations between Poland and Russia in 1918–45. Prof. Mariusz Wołos, who supervised the second project on the Polish behalf, presented an opposite view of the reasons behind the cooperation fiasco: ‘Initially, it seemed that the cooperation was starting well and the original arrangements would bring tangible results. However, this did not happen. From 2014 onwards, the Russian researchers involved in the project began to avoid contact with the Polish team without a word of explanation, despite our inquiries. Perhaps they assumed that the deterioration of the relations between the two states was such an obvious “fundamental change of circumstances” that it did not require embarrassing justifications for withdrawing from the commitments undertaken’. See: *Dokumenty do historii stosunków polsko-sowieckich 1918–1945*, ed. by Mariusz Wołos and Jan Jacek Bruski, vol. 3 (Warsaw: Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding, 2020), I (1918–1926), p. 5.

¹⁴ See Sergej Mironenko, ‘Razoblaczenie fałsifikatora i izgotovlennoj im fał’sivki neizbežno’, *Kommersant*, 20 April 2015, Society section <<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2712788>> [accessed 28 September 2021].

¹⁵ The essence of the myth of Panfilov's 28 men is as follows: On 16 November 1941, not far from Dubosekovo station (Riga direction of the Moscow railway, in the Volokolamsk area of the Moscow region), 28 Soviet soldiers of different nationalities fought 50 German tanks which were heading for Moscow. The political instructor of the division, Vasily Klochkov, inspired the guardsmen and famously said, ‘Russia is a vast land, yet there is nowhere to retreat – Moscow is behind us’. All the protagonists were killed during the battle, but 18 enemy tanks were destroyed and hundreds of Nazis perished. In reality there was no battle, and this beautiful story was invented by the staff of the *Krasnaya Zvezda* newspaper.

fictional heroes were more important than real ones for Soviet historiography. You even delivered a speech on the subject. You entered into a polemic with the Minister of Culture, Vladimir Medinsky, who defended the relevance of a mythologised version. And then the film *Panfilov's 28 Men* was released, and more than 3 million people in Russia watched it in the following year. And then this film was shown on Channel One. This situation makes it clear that historical facts take a back seat to the historical myth that goes viral.¹⁶ It turns out that there is no demand in society for historical truth – for objective history. How can one deal with that? Is it possible to modify the demand?

– My position on this issue is very simple: as a child, were you taught to tell the truth and not to lie? I think I was. We were all taught to tell the truth. We were taught that it was wrong to lie. I am addressing those who persist in defending the idea that there were Panfilov's 28 men. This is a lie. There was no fight at Dubosekovo station. There was no heroic deed by Panfilov's 28 men, as was confirmed by the Chief Military Prosecutor's Office in 1948. This was clearly stated in the report by Lieutenant-General Nikolay Afanasiev. You can find this document on the GARF website.¹⁷ As a matter of fact, the need to verify whether or not Panfilov's 28 heroes existed arose because Panfilov's soldiers began appearing after the war. They should have been resting in peace, but they would appear in the flesh and say, 'Here we are – we are alive'. This does not minimise the heroic feat of General Panfilov's division at all. They are undoubtedly heroes, but at the same time this story exposes the hypocrisy of the Soviet system.

Were there no real heroes? Couldn't they find real heroes among the hundreds of thousands of people who selflessly sacrificed their lives for the freedom and independence of their homeland? It did not matter for the Soviet propaganda. I have already said this, and I will say it again: the truth will come out into the open sooner or later. No matter how hard one tries to hide it, it will always come to light, and it is necessary to tell the truth.

Why did the creators of the film *Panfilov's 28 Men* continue to reproduce the myth? The fact is that the film was very nearly finished when I made this data public. But I was not the first one to raise this issue. The press just hyped it all up, and it turned into a newsbreak. But even before then it was known for a fact that this heroic feat did not happen.

By the way, 10 years earlier we had shot a film with Tatiana Komarova specifically about Panfilov's 28 men which was shown on Russian TV.

¹⁶ Here and below reference is made to falsification and construction of certain historical events to please ideologists and meet political demand. In a broader sense, it is about the instrumentalisation of history. Such an attitude to history was widespread during the Soviet period and is still widespread in post-Soviet countries. Most of these myths are associated with World War II, which was the central event in the Soviet historical calendar. From the scientific point of view, all these myths require refutation and deconstruction.

¹⁷ See *Spravka-doklad glavnogo voennogo prokurora N. Afanas'eva 'O 28 panfilovcach'* (2015), <<https://statearchive.ru/607>> [accessed 4 October 2021].

For some reason, nobody has mentioned this film. I remember Tatiana visited the Society of the Heroes of the Soviet Union and spoke about it. She was insulted and criticised. Only one Afghan hero¹⁸ stood up and said, 'You are doing the right thing; it is important to tell the truth; people should know this truth'. It is important that those who falsify history know that their fabrication will be nailed down. This is my position, in fact. It is quite simple, and it did not waver even slightly after Vladimir Rostislavovich Medinsky said that it was a myth and there were saints who should be venerated. If he wants to worship myths, go ahead! As someone who has lived a major part of his life in the mythologised history of the Soviet Union, I do not feel like idolising myths.

And what about the Soviets' mythologised legacy? After all, all these myths are personified by the growing numbers of monuments. Thousands, tens of thousands of people pass them every day, and they are part of a certain political and historical discourse.

– History will judge. White will be white and black will remain black. That is my deep belief. I am a natural born optimist. You know, the task of history is to restore truth whenever possible. History should be based on facts. History cannot be based on myths. And education cannot be based on myths either. Therefore, I'm profoundly convinced that the history of your small homeland does much more in terms of nurturing patriotism and love for your motherland than any war games. Nowadays, studies of Moscow and the history of various cities is developing; people are engaged in the history of the place where they live and this is the best form of nurturing patriotism from my point of view – not myths which will always be nailed down in the end.

You have touched upon the subject of historical truth and the exposure of myths and mythologised Soviet history. Currently, the Institute of Russian History at RAS is working on a 20-volume history of Russia and you are one of the authors. Could you tell us about this project? What is the idea behind this publication? Can we say that we are talking about writing a new grand narrative of Russian history? What is the focus?

– Better ask Yuri Alexandrovich Petrov (Director of the Institute of Russian History at RAS – *Eds*), who initiated this project and supervises it. I am only responsible for the volume on the history of Russia in the first half of the nineteenth century. The best national historians are involved in work on these volumes, and the work is nearing completion.

¹⁸ Veteran of the 1979–89 war in Afghanistan.

In my opinion, we have come across a huge problem, and I do not know how it will be resolved by the leaders of this project. Does each volume present an author's view or a summary of what has been done in historical science to date, i.e., a résumé? I have participated in discussions on several volumes, and they are very different from each other. There are volumes in which the editor-in-chief has his or her own view – his or her own conception of the period the volume covers. And there are volumes that summarise everything that has been done by previous historians. These are two different approaches. We should wait to see the final result.

Most conceptions that were created during the Soviet era require revision to a large extent, and everyone understands that. The same goes for the first half of the nineteenth century: quite a number of events must be revised; for example, an event such as the abolition of serfdom. I could talk about this for a long time, but I will say it briefly: in Soviet historiography there was a clear concept of replacement of one social and economic system with another. In accordance with this concept, the process of the decay of the feudal system began in the last third of the eighteenth century and this led to a crisis in the first third of the nineteenth century. The capitalist system was germinating and gradually developing within the feudal formation, which led to the replacement of one formation with another. However, this conception raises many questions, not only because it is Marxist, Soviet, but also because it contradicts the facts.

Where was this capitalist order in Russia in the first half of the nineteenth century? As a matter of fact, it did not exist. The Marxist theory of the replacement of one socio-economic formation with another presupposes the presence of several preconditions. In this case, one of the main preconditions for the development of capitalism is the replacement of manual labour with mechanical labour. Are you telling me that in the first half of the nineteenth century manual peasant labour was replaced by mechanical labour in a peasant country? Of course not (*laughter*). Moreover, the development of capitalism is impossible without a free labour market. Of course, there was no free labour market in Russia at that time and there could not be any.

There is the important question of why landlords did not want to free their peasants. After all, as early as in the late eighteenth century, the great economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo proved that free labour was much more productive and profitable than servile labour. Alexander I, who issued a decree on free agriculturalists in 1803 which, for the first time in Russian history, allowed the freeing of entire villages (and not peasants one by one!) and the endowing of former serfs with land was, in my opinion, convinced that he was encouraging the gradual emancipation of peasants. But no, the landlords were not willing to follow the lead.

Hence, there was no economic necessity. Thus, there were some other reasons that pushed Russian society and the emperor to abolish serfdom. This requires reflection.

You have mentioned the need to revise the theses and views formed in previous eras – in the Soviet period – but today some state officials can easily label such a position as that of a ‘falsifier’. The state directly or indirectly influences the ethics of scientific research, particularly when it comes to certain periods of Soviet history. How can historians maintain objectivity and professional standards in such a situation? How can we fight this, and can we fight it at all?

– You know, let the cobbler stick to his last. In other words, problems start when someone starts doing things that aren't his or her field of expertise. I would like everyone to mind their own business: politicians for politics, and historians for history. The less the government tells professionals about the interpretation of our past, the better.

In general, frankly speaking we are facing a huge problem of a lack of historical knowledge among schoolchildren and students. I teach at university and, unfortunately, I can see that there are students who are admitted to the History Faculty of the Lomonosov Moscow State University who do not even have a secondary-school level of history knowledge. One can only scratch one's head and wonder! And what can one say about schoolchildren?! Did you see that famous poll in the Victory Park (*Park Pobedy*), when journalists asked young people, 'What do you know about the heroic defence of Omsk?'' And one girl answered, 'Well, of course, it's a famous battle'.¹⁹ (*laughter*)

It is terrible that we have such a low level of historical knowledge – that people do not know who Lenin was. Perhaps this is a public response to state violence in this area. It thrusts people back. The state's pressure in one area or another is repulsive. When a historian from Novosibirsk is summoned to the Investigative Committee and accused of falsifying history²⁰ after having posted about Alexander Nevsky, that is absurd! That is going back to the twelfth century. What will become of us if we use such methods to promote the historical truth? It is impossible and, most importantly, unnecessary.

Interview conducted by IGOR GRETSKIY and YANA PRYMACHENKO

¹⁹ There was no heroic defence of Omsk during World War II. See Moy Gorod TV, *Opros na znanie istorii Velikoj Otečestvennoj Vojny*, online video recording, YouTube, 15 May 2013, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKNzgKhn4As>> [accessed 28 September 2021].

²⁰ See Andrey Schwartz, 'Esli u strany net buduščego, ona kopaetsja v prošlom.' *Istorika vyzval sledovatel' SK za post o Nevskom i Sverdllove* (2021) <<https://www.sibreal.org/a/istorika-vyzvali-v-sledstvennyj-komit-et-za-post-o-nevskom-i-sverdllove/31413529.html>> [accessed 28 September 2021].

Ernest Wyciszkiewicz

THE IRRESISTIBLE APPEAL OF PLAYING ON A GLOBAL CHESSBOARD

ABSTRACT

International relations suffer from a plethora of pseudo-theoretical approaches. Some of these approaches claim the right not only to explain but also to shape the international reality. These will quite often become instrumental in the legitimization of a given state's policies. Nuances, caveats, and an awareness of limitations give way to simplicity, unambiguity and self-confidence. The aim of this article is to critically deconstruct certain ways of thinking about inter-state relations and international policy that are usually attributed to advocates of geopolitics and naïve realism. What makes vague but attractive geopolitical jargon, belief in determinism, enchantment with maps and admiration for the 'concert of powers' so popular, and what consequences might the adoption of geopolitical assumptions have for contemporary political practice? The popular mono-causal approaches that are full of hasty but firm generalizations about the laws of history have the upper hand over pluralist ones that look for a multitude of usually inconclusive explanations. The reason for this might not simply be analytical laziness; the fact is that the aforementioned popular, simplistic, even trivial observations dressed in quasi-scientific costume serve as a convenient source of legitimacy for revisionist leaders who wish to be seen as defenders of the status quo.

KEYWORDS:

geopolitics, determinism, concert of powers, maps, legitimization

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Polish politicians underestimate the power of words as an instrument for political influence. Homegrown 'realists' constantly warn us that only facts matter in politics. But they forget that the origin from which facts appear and grow is always words.¹

Juliusz Mieroszewski, *Kultura*, no. 10/252, Paris 1968, p. 84

Prisoners of Geography: Ten Maps that Tell You Everything You Need to Know about Global Politics – this international bestseller argues that geographical concerns are the key to understanding the past, the contemporary and the future world, and that conflicts arise mainly from ignoring the laws of geopolitics, which are determined by topography, geology, hydrology, climate, and resource abundance.² Here is an example of the author's reflections on Russia. 'Vladimir Putin says he is a religious man [...]. If so, he may well go to bed each night, say his prayers, and ask God: "Why didn't you put any mountains in Ukraine?"'.³ If there were, the author reasons, the North European Plain would not have invited repeated attacks from Russia. 'As it is, Putin has no choice: he must at least attempt to control the flatlands to the west'.⁴ Since the dawn of time, all states, large and small, have had to cope with awkward situations that restrict their freedom to manoeuvre. The land we live on has always shaped us – playing a decisive role in wars, power, politics and social development.

To carelessly follow this line of reasoning – to grasp the essence of international relations – one might conclude that it would be enough to simply consult an atlas or climb to the top of a nearby hill and look around. This peculiar picture of international politics is rather popular. It was not by chance that the aforementioned book became a bestseller in many countries of the world. Why would this be the case? Of course, one might shrug and say it is simply an easy, pleasant read using tired tropes to confirm its readers' common-sense judgements. Yet, an ironic comment is not enough. It would be unwise to play down views that have significant social resonance and thus also a certain level of influence on the elites. It seems more reasonable to consider what makes the school of thought commonly referred to as geopolitics so readily lauded, and, more

¹ Juliusz Mieroszewski, 'Kronika angielska', *Kultura*, 10.252 (1968), 84.

² Tim Marshall, *Prisoners of Geography: Ten Maps that Tell You Everything You Need to Know about Global Politics* (London: Elliott & Thompson, 2015). I will take the liberty to include a comment here from one of the reviewers of the article. Instead of weaving the thought into the main text, I thought that it would be worthwhile to quote it at length as it provides a good illustration of one characteristic geopolitical argument – forming generalizations based on anecdotal evidence: 'The mere uncritical repetition of the theory that a former KGB colonel is a religious person ought to lead us to treat the author's other conclusions with caution, including those based on absolutization of the geopolitical element. The argument about "repeated attacks on Russia" should lead to a similar conclusion (about the need for caution). If their number were compared with the number of Russian aggressions, the picture would be entirely different, and the call to take away the "Smolensk gate" (the strip between the Dvina and Dnieper rivers) from Russia would be, as a justified geopolitical necessity, a natural goal of the politics of the nations threatened by the Kremlin's expansion'.

³ Ibid., p. ix.

⁴ Ibid.

importantly, what are the practical consequences of adopting geopolitical premises and interpretations of international relations?

As a rule, theoretical considerations expand the cognitive horizon, even when they are ultimately proven wrong. The proposing, challenging and rejecting of a paradigm is always a positive step towards the development of science and the understanding of reality. Most representatives of various schools of thought about international relations are aware of the natural limitations of their models. There are also some, however, who steadfastly claim the right to a universalism clad in catchy maxims, which often also triggers a process of self-fulfilling prophecy.⁵ Research hypotheses then become political axioms. To a great extent, this problem concerns what is known as geopolitical thinking.⁶

As far as possible, the starting point for a reliable assessment of any school of thought should be the accuracy of its description. In this case, that means an answer to the question of what geopolitics is and what its characteristics are. Even this first step entails venturing into hazy and muddy territory.

Hans Morgenthau, an important figure of the realist school, in his opus magnum, *Politics among Nations* from 1948, called geopolitics 'pseudo-science erecting the factor of geography into an absolute that is supposed to determine the power, and hence the fate, of nations'. Morgenthau classed geopolitical analysis, along with militarism and nationalism, as 'the single factor fallacy'.⁷ In 1954, the American geographer Richard Hartshorne wrote that the origin of geopolitics is steeped in error, exaggeration, and intellectual poison. In his view, thanks to Haushofer, geopolitics supplied a pseudo-scientific rationalization for the Nazi policy of expansion.⁸

Advocates of geopolitics paint a different picture. Colin S. Gray writes:

The claim that *all* politics is geopolitics, though perhaps perilously imperial, on reflection is little more than a necessary truth [...] *all* international political life is played out on a game board displaying spatial relationships which lend themselves to assertion and argument concerning alleged patterns. [...] *all* political matters occur within a particular geographical context; in short, they have a geopolitical dimension.⁹

⁵ For more on this phenomenon, see Stefano Guzzini, "Self-fulfilling geopolitics?" Or: the social production of foreign policy expertise in Europe', *Danish Institute of International Studies Working Paper*, 23 (2003), 4–22.

⁶ The term 'geopolitics' is often used in literature and journalistic commentary as a synonym of international policy or international relations. This understanding is not the subject of this analysis, for which the starting point is the views of people consciously and intentionally referring to the tradition of geopolitical thought.

⁷ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations. The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), p. 116.

⁸ Richard Hartshorne, 'Political Geography' in *American Geography: Inventory and Prospect*, ed. by Preston E. James, Clarence F. Jones (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1954), pp. 211–14.

⁹ Colin S. Gray, 'Inescapable Geography', in *Geopolitics, Geography and Strategy*, ed. by Colin S. Gray, Geoffrey Sloan (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 163–64.

The underlined universal quantifiers show that we are dealing with axioms, not research hypotheses.

The Polish author Jacek Bartosiak frames the problem as follows:

Geopolitics is the everyday reality in which those exercising power in a specific geographical space move. It allows one to more accurately analyse and conceptualize a state's chances for development, evaluate the effectiveness of a system of alliances and be aware of the systemic changes occurring, which are determined by geopolitical phenomena. These conceptual methods form the basis of pursuing policies and international relations among the leadership elites of the main powers. There is therefore no escape from geopolitics if one wishes to survive.¹⁰

Gerard Toal, a representative of critical geopolitics, refers to a broader concept of geopolitical culture that determines a state's identity and role in the world, formed by its geographical position, historical experience, and state institutions; the character of its social relations and intellectual debates; its dominant ideas about the world; and its preferred methods of conducting foreign policy. According to Toal, a geopolitical culture comprises (1) geopolitical imaginations, i.e., the positioning of one's state in relation to others; (2) geopolitical traditions, encompassing various schools of thought that try to translate imaginations into an ideological and political program by defining such concepts as national interest or identity; (3) geopolitical discourse, meaning the debate going on within three subgenres: (a) formal geopolitics, which seeks to create a coherent model explaining foreign policy and international relations; (b) practical geopolitics, meaning political practice that applies the conclusions resulting from theory; and (c) popular geopolitics, or the narratives and ideas about world politics that are dominant in public opinion and pop culture.¹¹

What, then, is geopolitics? Is it an academic discipline (lying somewhere at the intersection of geography, political science, state theory and international relations), a method for analysing international politics, an instrument for major powers to legitimize their foreign policy, an intellectual fashion, or perhaps a pop-culture version of international relations that combines the visions of members of general staff and video gamers? To paraphrase Alexander Wendt, a major figure in social constructivism, 'geopolitics is what we make of it'.¹² Every observer, whether they are

¹⁰ Jacek Bartosiak, *Rzeczpospolita między lądem a morzem. O wojnie i pokoju* (Warszawa: Zona Zero, 2018), p. 43.

¹¹ John O'Loughlin, Gerard Toal, and Vladimir Kolossov, 'The Geopolitical Orientations of Ordinary Russians: A Public Opinion Analysis', *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 47.2 (2006), 129–52.

¹² Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy Is What States Make of It. The Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Relations*, 46.2 (1992), 391–425.

well-disposed or critical towards geopolitics, will outline their own definition which they then praise, condemn or downplay. Of course, this is the irresistible appeal of vague concepts and notions that are difficult to define and thus to prove false. If something cannot be subjected to a falsification test, then essentially it should be sent to the dustbin of science; however, unfortunately, that will not stop it becoming popular. How, for example, can one use academic arguments to disprove an attractive literary theory about the eternal conflict between Sea and Land built on a Manichean vision of the world and the forces governing it?

The aforementioned ways of looking at geopolitics need not be treated as distinct or competing. Sometimes they complement each other. Indeed, an intellectual fashion, which by definition is transient, usually has no scientific value, but it may be useful for politicians as a means of gaining support. Geopolitics that is based on motifs from pop culture may provide an attractive tool for persuasion.¹³ The specific geopolitical jargon creates a sense of both accessibility and exclusivity, which makes it useful for rationalizing political actions. Moreover, the popularity of geopolitical thinking tends to grow at moments of palpable anxiety or intensity, where it directs people towards easy explanations and recipes.¹⁴ It is therefore no surprise that popular geopolitics has gained traction in an era which has seen a dramatic increase in China's international aspirations.

To be recognized as a science, however, geopolitics must meet criteria that distinguish it from common knowledge. The starting point should be the principle of the rational recognition of convictions, which states that the degree of conviction with which a given view (theory or claim) is declared should correspond to the degree of its justification.¹⁵ Otherwise, there is a risk of either surrendering to dogmatism or to extreme scepticism. Working hypotheses should therefore not be presented as mature theories (or worse, axioms) – just as well-founded views should not be reduced to the role of preliminary hypotheses. Caution and prudence are important, particularly in fields in which the impossibility of performing experiments makes it hard to replicate research results.¹⁶ Postulates should derive from clear premises and should be subject to constant critical

¹³ An entire trend within so-called critical geopolitics that has appeared in recent years deals with 'popular geopolitics' among both elites and the people, examining the perception of international relations in popular culture in its various forms (film, comics, literature, and games).

¹⁴ On the explosion of interest in geopolitics after the turning point of 1989/1991 in Central and Eastern Europe, see Stefano Guzzini: 'Which puzzle? An expected return of geopolitical thought in Europe?', in *Return of Geopolitics in Europe*, ed. by Stefano Guzzini (Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 9–17.

¹⁵ 'The rational approach towards the claims we accept demands that the firmness with which we state them, a firmness that can be measured by the size of the risk we are willing to accept regarding these claims, be proportional to the degree of their justification. That is, that the stricter and less forgiving the tests to which we subject a given claim and before which it stands, the more firmly we may accept it', Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz, *Język i poznanie*, 2 vols (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1965), ii (1965), p. 269.

¹⁶ In the words of the philosopher of science Karl Popper, 'non-reproducible single occurrences are of no significance to science', *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London–New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 66.

analysis and questioned so that they do not succumb to the appeal of common-sense metaphors proffered as the laws of science (might is always right, international politics is a great game, etc.).

However, criticism should always retain a level of moderation and caution. Critics who judge geopolitics in the absence of a coherent definition also run the risk of hasty generalizations with their use of the straw-man fallacy. In other words, they hold themselves aloft and attack a figure that they have themselves created. It is always problematic to assess an entire school of thinking. This usually involves deconstruction and reconstruction in a way that suits the critic, be that through literature review and the careful selection of quotations from major figures and commentators or from an individual angle. The former method offers certain opportunities to capture the essence of the problem, but the latter usually ends up contesting views that are twisted in such a way as to reinforce the scholar's polemical discourse. One example might be the introduction to this article, which is deliberately tinged with irony to direct the reader's attention in the desired direction. Let me repeat, however, that following this path is taking the intellectual easy way out. After all, the point is not to chastise for errors and distortions of entire schools of thought about the world, which are by definition diverse yet also full of banalities, internal contradictions and fascinating observations; it is to point to the cognitive and practical dilemmas that emerge when certain attributes of international relations are accepted as always true (i.e., independent variables).

The aim of this article is therefore not to criticize geopolitics as such but to undertake a critical deconstruction of certain ways of thinking about inter-state relations and international politics that are usually attributed to advocates of geopolitics but in reality are far more widespread. To satisfy the demands of the genre, however, I offer a brief outline of the development of geopolitical thought as seen through the eyes of its representatives and critics.¹⁷ Geopolitics has historically taken various forms, which is worth bearing in mind when moving forwards with this analysis.

¹⁷ This description is of course highly abbreviated, and I therefore suggest reading ones that are more exhaustive. An excellent reconstruction of geopolitical thought was given in Polish literature by Piotr Eberhardt, who devoted a separate article to each of the important figures of the movement in *Przegląd Geograficzny*. The analyses are rich in quotations from the works of major contributors to geopolitics. As a rule, these are rather kind to the writers of this school of thought, but they are also conducted in a critical, non-apologetic spirit. Together with the collection *Studia and geopolitykę XX wieku* and the source texts, these articles form the basis of the author's discussion in this subchapter. 'Poglądy antropogeograficzne i geopolityczne Friedricha Ratzla', *Przegląd Geograficzny*, 87.2 (2012), 199–224; 'Podstawy teoretyczne i ideowe geopolityki według Rudolfa Kjelléna', *Przegląd Geograficzny*, 84.2 (2012), 313–32; 'Koncepcje geopolityczne Karla Haushofera', *Przegląd Geograficzny*, 81.4 (2009), 527–49; 'Koncepcja Heartlandu Halforda Mackindera', *Przegląd Geograficzny*, 83.2 (2011), 251–66.

OUTLINE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF GEOPOLITICAL THOUGHT

Modern advocates of geopolitics tend to cite several key figures, including Friedrich Ratzel, Rudolf Kjellén, Halford Mackinder, Nicholas Spykman and Karl Haushofer. They were all united by 'geographical determinism, social Darwinism and a belief that the struggle for existence and the advantages between competing states is the engine of growth and an inescapable necessity'.¹⁸ The success of Darwin's theory of natural selection at the turn of the twentieth century led many humanists to apply its conclusions to the social sciences. Geopolitical reflections grew from a biological-mechanistic interpretation of the world that was imposed on the international system. These reflections fell on fertile ground in places where an apotheosis of military power appeared, national egotisms flourished, and rivalry for and over colonies took place.

The German geographer Friedrich Ratzel – a firm Darwinist – saw social phenomena as being the outcome of geographical factors. He developed the concept of the state as an organism and introduced the term 'living space' or *Lebensraum*, which was deemed essential for any state struggling to survive in a time of ruthless conditions. He argued that the disappearance of nations or states was due to the laws of natural selection, i.e., how successful one is compared to another in terms of their ability to adapt to changing conditions. Ratzel's geopolitical visions were in tune with his support for Germany's claim to be an imperial power and were used to legitimize expansionist foreign policy. This geographer's predictions were therefore mixed up with the desires of a political activist, who expected the imminent emergence of two global powers: Germany and the United States. Ratzel developed a system of metaphors that fetishized space, seeing the world of inanimate and animate nature as closely linked to the social world. He compared the expansion of states to a flood, during which it was natural and inevitable for the swelling water to inundate lower-lying areas. In Ratzel's eyes, a state's power and survival were inexorably connected with larger entities absorbing smaller, less developed geopolitical units. Moreover, for him, the struggle for space was the driving force of humanity's development, and fluid borders simply reflected civilizational advancement. The views he promoted provided an ideal instrument to legitimize the elimination of states and nations as a process allegedly in accordance with the requirements of nature and science.

Rudolf Kjellén, who popularized the term 'geopolitics', saw it as 'the science which conceives of the state as a geographical organism or

¹⁸ *Studia nad geopolityką XX wieku*, ed. by Piotr Eberhardt, Series: Prace geograficzne (Warszawa: PAN, Instytut Geografii i Przestrzennego Zagospodarowania, 2013), p. 10.

as a phenomenon in space'. This Swedish scholar expanded Ratzel's ideas of state-organisms functioning in specific territories based on the law of the biological struggle for survival.¹⁹ Kjellén used a simple analogy between the state and the human being. States, he said, had their own needs, were born, grew and died, while constantly competing for survival, dependent in particular on their location and natural conditions. Only major powers were to have a say in international politics. Other countries were patronage-seeking clients, important only as an element in the game of the great nations in the process of ensuring balance. Possessing a large territory with significant material and human resources was the foundation of the imperial powers that usually comprised the centre and periphery and which competed for buffer areas which – to use contemporary military terminology – were to be a permanent theatre of war. 'The day of small nations has long passed away. The day of Empires has come', as Kjellén wrote.²⁰

Condemned for collaborating with and being an inspiration for Hitler, the German general and geographer Karl Haushofer was an important figure for the tradition of geopolitical thinking as he combined Darwinist theorizing with a political program. Haushofer called for a new world order to be built around extensive political units (pan-regions) at the cost of small and medium-sized states. He saw the absorption of smaller organisms as a natural and desirable process. He also extolled nations constituting pan-regions, especially Germany, which were to bring civilization to primitive peoples that naturally depended on them and needed help (the Slavic nations among others). Geopolitics as understood by Haushofer was a moral duty to the homeland; it offered scientific justification for the policy of consolidation of German power, which was in need of additional space to ensure its survival.

Haushofer also expanded upon the idea of eternal competition for world domination between continental and maritime powers, between 'land' and 'sea'. As Piotr Eberhardt put it: 'continental civilization, characterized by its close attachment to the land, mysticism and egalitarianism, is able to defeat maritime civilization, in which the only value is pragmatism and money'.²¹ This division – elegant in its simplicity and weak in nuance – which led Haushofer to a rather convoluted theory of the geopolitical unity of the area between the Carpathians and Manchuria, has its staunch supporters even today.

¹⁹ A good indication of Kjellén's approach is provided by the very title of his classic work *The State as a Life-Form*, published in 1916, which began the development of geopolitics, tellingly dubbed the 'catechism of geopolitical knowledge'.

²⁰ An argument formulated by the British politician Joseph Chamberlain in Birmingham in 1904 and borrowed by Kjellén in many of his works.

²¹ Eberhardt, 'Konceptje geopolityczne Karla Haushofera', p. 534.

In the English-speaking world, the main role in shaping geopolitical thought was played by Halford Mackinder, the British author of perhaps the most popular geopolitical 'law': 'Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland: Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island: Who rules the World-Island commands the World'.²² Geopolitics in its Anglo-Saxon form abandoned biological metaphors and no longer focused on what states needed to stay alive, instead seeking patterns at the level of the international system. It suffices to look at the Mackinderian world, which consisted of the 'World-Island' (Europe, Asia and Africa combined) and its core area ('the Heartland'), including Russia and Central Asia, the inner crescent (Germany, Turkey, India and China, among others), and the outer crescent (Great Britain, southern Africa), with islands scattered around the 'Great Ocean' (North and South America, Japan). The 'World Island' was a theatre for the struggle of civilizations and was decisive for global fortunes. At this point, the language of geopolitics is drawing from Mackinder's mechanistic vision of international politics constricted around an axis, pivot or core – all metaphors which aspire to the role of fundamental analytical categories.

Mackinder anticipated the emergence of a continental power that, after capturing the Heartland, would seek to bring the inner crescent under control and reach the world ocean to achieve global hegemony over all continents. Painting the history of humanity (the conquests, invasions, rises and falls of empires) in broad brushstrokes, he considered the aforementioned hypothesis as self-evident and requiring no proof. As Eberhardt notes, Mackinder 'was convinced that this was an absolute truth confirmed by history and geography. This dogmatic and deterministic approach runs through his reasoning and his ultimate conclusions. Mackinder formulated a geopolitical doctrine that, despite its arbitrariness and subjectivity, was accepted by many geographers who had high regard for its originality and uniqueness. It was adopted and used in actual political actions, despite being an essentially abstract concept that was the product of a brilliant imagination rather than rational substantiation'.²³ Although Mackinder's views were strongly criticized by the academic community, this British strategist still managed to create a vision that was attractive enough for popular recipients and for the world of politics and that even today continues to be reproduced by both experts and politicians. It seems irrelevant, therefore, that Mackinder's theory cannot be falsified; it is sufficient that it offers a useful and colourful rationale for policies. As befitting of a geopolitical thinker, the American strategist Nicholas

²² Halford John Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality. A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Washington: National Defence University Press, 1942), p. 106.

²³ Eberhardt, 'Koncepcja Heartlandu', pp. 211–62.

Spykman highlighted the importance of power and imperial inclinations as being the main driving forces of great powers. He proposed the concept of Rimland (a rival to Mackinder's Heartland), i.e., the frontiers of Eurasia, as the fundamental object of confrontation for world dominion. The strategic importance of the core/heart/pivot was shifted to the periphery. Spykman emphasized the importance of geographical factors without questioning the significance of others, although he made them dependent on location and military capacities. He wrote his main work during the Second World War²⁴ (he died in 1943), which undoubtedly affected his fatalistic view of the international system, his profound lack of faith in institutions and his perception of war as an almost natural state. Spykman accentuated the need to search for balance between powers as the fundamental means of stabilizing the international system. The concept of defence of the Eurasian fringes against the Soviet Union became a part of America's containment strategy during the Cold War (how much actual influence Spykman's ideas had on decision makers remains a matter of dispute).

In the American approach, later developed by such strategists as Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski, geopolitics moves away from mysticism and earth-bound organic metaphors. In effect, it becomes the manifestation of a superpower's perception of international reality. The sinister term *Geopolitik* (although restored to grace in the 1970s), in fact began to refer more to 'great power politics', which was realism in a somewhat simplified version that could more easily be politically operationalized.

Kissinger and Brzezinski reintroduced certain elements of geopolitical jargon, seeing them as a useful tool for rationalizing various actions: from justifying US policy in Vietnam (a response to the domino theory), via the détente process (ensuring the geostrategic balance), to proxy wars (seeking control over buffer zones). Above all, for Kissinger, geopolitics meant aiming for systemic balance in the spirit of the Vienna concert of powers²⁵; for Brzezinski, it was a 'great game on the global chessboard' in the Mackinderian spirit of competition for the Heartland.

The collapse of the Soviet empire, the fall of communist ideology and the pace of transformations in the world contributed to increased interest in geopolitical thinking.²⁶ Uncertainty about the consequences of the collapse of the USSR and the growing complexity of the international system made analyses compiled from geopolitical components increasingly popular. The discourse on oil and natural gas resources in the Caspian Sea basin was seen to be in the spirit of the new 'great game', for

²⁴ Nicholas J. Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942).

²⁵ Collin S. Gray, Geoffrey Sloan, *Geopolitics, Geography and Strategy* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 1.

²⁶ *Return of Geopolitics in Europe*, ed. by Stefano Guzzini (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

example. A similar process is now taking place on the back of the increasing popularity of views about already perceptible or imminent 'tectonic shocks', 'the geopolitical reconfiguration of powers', or the inevitability of the Thucydides Trap concerning escalating US-Chinese rivalry. The high degree of uncertainty accompanying the international situation today has led many observers to cite the supposedly invariable laws of geopolitics once again as determinants for the future course of events.

However, the popularity of referencing geopolitical jargon, with its captivating simplicity, leads to the reinforcement of a rather peculiar approach both to analysis of international relations and to the formulation of practical conclusions. In particular, it is worthwhile to reflect on the consequences of overemphasizing the map as well as the use of geopolitical metaphors for forming a specific, strictly hierarchical image of the world in which only a few have agency and responsibility rests on history.

'JUST LOOK AT THE MAP...'

The above phrase appears in international commentary quite often, serving as the final and indisputable explanation for various phenomena. The authors using it are not necessarily proponents of geopolitics, yet they unwittingly reach for methods of analysis developed in the field, eschewing nuances and context in favour of rather abstract but visually attractive explanations.

Space and its representation in the form of a map are, of course, important for the analysis of international politics but only as one of many explanatory tools and strongly dependent on the socio-political context. Yet, there is no end to the love the 'geopolitical' commentator has for maps. This is, of course, not surprising, as the groundwork for this school of thought was laid by geographers. In his article 'Inescapable geography', the important geopolitical researcher Colin S. Gray notes: 'The principal tool of geopolitics is the political map, and its methodological approach consists in the examination of its characteristics with a view to understanding the phenomena which it reveals and the processes which have produced its morphology'.²⁷ a geophysical map offers a sense of permanence to the structures that are decisive for periodical fluctuations on the political map. Rivers, seas, lowlands, highlands, and mountains are the most important elements of the theatre of war, which, according to geopolitical thinkers, is played out incessantly in various forms. Peace, after all, is just a dream from which the powers occasionally awaken the world.

²⁷ Gray, Sloan, *Geopolitics*, p. 165.

Mackinder, Spykman and their contemporary followers, such as George Friedman and Robert Kaplan, tirelessly treat maps as a source of knowledge about reality. Yet a map proves nothing on its own. One merely has to look at the Mercator projection, which was born out of navigational needs and leads to major deformations the further one gets from the equator. A map is never an objective reflection of reality; especially a political map, which is a projection of the authors' ideas and knowledge about political divisions at a given historical moment. The first decades of the Cold War, for example, saw an increase in the popularity of maps depicting the world from the perspective of the North Pole; these were used by American strategists to make the threat caused by the geographical proximity of the Soviet Union – which is hard to visualize using traditional maps showing the USA as an island surrounded by oceans – more visible to the public. Today, meanwhile, China's increasing importance is moving the centre of gravity of popular maps to the Pacific Ocean. A map, then, is simply one of the methods of expressing analytical judgements or political aspirations. It is an extremely evocative and very powerful means, thus it is a convenient starting point for conducting a superficial geopolitical analysis.

Apart from its evocativeness, of course, a map also carries operational-strategic value in the military sense of the word. Foreign policy in the 'geopolitical world' concentrates on the question of war, almost in the spirit of the recommendations of Machiavelli, who thought that 'a prince ought to have no other aim or thought, nor select anything else for his study, than war and its rules and discipline; for this is the sole art that belongs to him who rules [...]'.²⁸ The natural consequence of this approach is the use of language and metaphors that refer to the topography of the battlefield. Yves Lacoste, the French representative of geopolitical thought, noted that geography speaks above all to military strategists and planners, who – as a rule by sheer inertia – interpret the political environment from the perspective of bygone or past wars.²⁹ In its extreme version, this premise goes: 'the life of a state is governed by the law of force, just as the law of gravity governs physical bodies'.³⁰

In the late 1940s, Hans Morgenthau, a key figure for realism in international relations, criticized the tendency to view international politics solely in military terms, arguing that sometimes the proverbial big stick is better left at home as it might get in the way of political goals.³¹ He considered the identification of foreign policy strategy with military aims, which was quite characteristic of geopolitics at the time, to be erroneous. Raymond

²⁸ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. by William K. Marriott, <<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1232/1232-h/1232-h.htm>> [accessed 17 January 2022].

²⁹ Yves Lacoste, *La géographie, ça sert, d'abord, à faire la guerre* (Paris: La Découverte, 2012).

³⁰ Bartosiak, *Rzeczpospolita między lądem a morzem*, pp. 35–36.

³¹ Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, p. 121.

Aron, meanwhile, warned against the reductionism of turning Clausewitz's theory about 'war as a continuation of politics by other means' (meaning an instrument subordinated to politics) into the conviction that 'peace is a continuation of war by other means'.³² He noted that the adage 'if you want peace, prepare for war' is only apt in a situation in which the strategist thinks first about the conditions of peace, and only then concentrates on military planning. To do otherwise would be to put the cart before the horse. Here we see an important difference between various forms of realism, which are far from supporting militarism in foreign policy, and geopolitics, which sees military capabilities as a fundamental tool of geostrategy and foreign policy.

A map appeals to staff officers, as it is essential for planning and the effective execution of topography-dependent manoeuvres. From a military perspective, maps and wars complement each other. During the Vietnam War, when commenting on American bombing raids, Lacoste wrote:

It is important that we gain (or regain) an awareness of the fact that the map, perhaps the central referent of geography, is, and has been, fundamentally an instrument of power. A map is an abstraction from concrete reality which was designed and motivated by practical (political and military) concerns; it is a way of representing space which facilitates its domination and control. [...] it actually transposes a little-known piece of concrete reality into an abstraction which serves the practical interests of the State machine.³³

Although this may appear to be a trivial observation, it is still worth citing in view of the fascination with maps as a supposedly objective tool that can be to explain international politics.

In addition to the book *Prisoners of Geography*, which was mentioned in the introduction, another book published in the past decade by the American author Robert Kaplan places the map as its central character to demonstrate what maps reveal about forthcoming conflicts. Kaplan claims that without maps world politics cannot be understood, that 'geography is the backdrop to human history itself', 'at root, realism is about the recognition of the most blunt, uncomfortable, and deterministic of truths: those of geography', and 'a state's position on the map is the first thing that defines it, more than its governing philosophy even'.³⁴ He quotes Mackinder, who argued that one glance at a map was enough to convey 'a whole series of generalizations'.³⁵

³² Raymond Aron, 'Reason, Passion, and Power in the Thought of Clausewitz', *Social Research*, 39.4 (1972), 599–621.

³³ Yves Lacoste, 'An Illustration of Geographical Warfare: Bombing the Dikes on the Red River, North Vietnam', *Antipode*, 5 (1973), 1–13.

³⁴ Robert Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography. What the Map Tells Us about Coming Conflicts and the Battle against Fate* (New York: Random House, 2012), pp. 27–28.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

For a map supposedly strips the world of its apparent equality, recalling its natural inequalities that lead to conflicts.

Let us take a look at the history of Central Europe from the perspective of Kaplan's map and his undisguised fascination with Mackinder. In Kaplan's view, Central Europe's geographical position made it into something of a tragic land, non-existent, in fact, on the geopolitical map, characterized by the 'fatal geographical flaw' (Mackinder) of being located in the 'crush zone' between maritime Europe and continental Eurasia. The agency secured by Central Europe is little more than a brief respite from geopolitics.³⁶

This brings to mind another key figure in academic geopolitics, Saul Bernard Cohen, who claimed that the border between West and East Germany established after the Second World War was in fact natural as it corresponded to one of the oldest historical borders, separating the Frankish and Slavonic tribes.³⁷ This view was also prefaced with the Mackinderian conviction that West Germany was a reflection of 'maritime Europe', and East Germany of 'the Continent'. The division of Germany was thus seen as a geopolitical and strategic necessity since it stabilized the eternal struggle between Sea and Land. In fact, this line of reasoning came from an error of retrospective determinism. Since Germany had been divided, this meant that there must be profound geopolitical reasons, and it was therefore sufficient to move backwards methodically to discover the true source of the current situation. What happened had to happen. The seeds of division sown for almost a millennium had borne fruit in the guise of the post-Yalta division of Germany.

Echoing Metternich's view of Italy from the mid-nineteenth century, Cohen wrote that Central Europe was simply a 'geopolitical expression without geopolitical content', arguing that the unification of Germany would not lead to the rebirth of Europe as an entity but would only usher in a new rivalry over it.³⁸

Kaplan was aware of the risk of exaggerating the importance of geography, couching his conclusions with such warnings as 'geography, history, and ethnic characteristics influence but do not *determine* future events'.³⁹ Very often, however, popular geopolitical literature repeats such caveats solely in order to reject the anticipated stigmatizing accusations of determinism, despite at the same time giving credence to the geographical logic of history. Taking the example of Kaplan again, in spite of said caveats he also writes: 'You do not have to be a geographical determinist to realize that geography is vitally important. The more we remain preoccupied with

³⁶ Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography*, p. 9.

³⁷ Saul Bernard Cohen, *Geography and Politics in a World Divided* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 79–83.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

³⁹ Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography*, p. 36 (emphasis in the original).

current events, the more that individuals and their choices matter; but the more we look out over the span of the centuries, the more that geography plays a role'.⁴⁰ Geographical determinism, deriving from a profound fascination with the map, is a constitutive feature of geopolitical thinking, whose denial is in effect tantamount to rejection of this school of thought.

BRIDGES, GATEWAYS, PIVOTS

In geopolitical writings, fascination with maps comes with references to numerous spatial metaphors as analytical categories. The most common of these include the bridge, pivot, gateway, buffer, crush zone, core, and tectonic shifts. These very general terms defy precise definition and lead to confusion, but they also embellish geopolitical interpretations. Here is an example: Regarding Ukraine after the Russian aggression in 2014, the aforementioned representative of academic geopolitics Saul Bernard Cohen advised:

A far better solution would be for Ukraine to remain unified, serving as a bridge between the two geostrategic realms. This would require a guarantee from Europe and the United States that there would be no further attempts to include the Ukraine within the EU and NATO. In addition, establishment of a federal structure of government would provide the Russian-speaking region with linguistic autonomy. Were such a Ukraine to have access to a customs-free agreement with Russia and a trade partnership with the EU, the interests of the country would be best served. This would enable it to become a gateway between the heartland and maritime realms.⁴¹

This extract displays several characteristics of geopolitical orthodoxy. First, the belief in meta-laws that provides states with the best possible strategies for survival: Ukraine does not exist here as an entity with agency but solely as a geopolitical unit situated 'in between' that must choose a strategy resulting from this position in its own well-understood interest. Second, there is a penchant for figurative spatial metaphors, which are supposed to explain something but in fact only create confusion. Apparently, Ukraine should serve as a 'bridge' and a 'gateway' at the same time. One can, of course, conclude that Cohen was thinking of a bridge as a passage from one shore to another. Yet, more likely, it is simply a lack of discipline in the use of concepts, which is quite characteristic of analyses that are overly rich in metaphors. Finally, this quotation is a good illustration of the trap of theory-based reasoning: the need to fit an actual situation to

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. xix.

⁴¹ Saul Bernard Cohen, *Geopolitics: Geography of International Relations* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), pp. 253–54.

a theoretical model that results in factual errors caused by an attempt to save the hypothesis; for example, the idea of a traditional deep division of Ukraine into two hostile camps, deliberately stoked by the West and Russia.⁴²

Geopolitical preoccupation with space is illustrated well by passages from Jacek Bartosiak's book *Rzeczpospolita między lądem a morzem* [The Commonwealth of Poland between Land and Sea]: 'Space – the main protagonist of geopolitical stories told from the perspective of the geopolitical suspension between Land and Sea powers. This extremely demanding position represents the primary geopolitical feature of the entire Baltic-Black Sea bridge, culminating in an overwhelming pressure from external forces on Poland. This bridge is a "grey area" on the geopolitical crossroads of important places in Eurasia'. Further on comes a reference to the idea of *Lebensraum*: 'From the perspective of power relations, he who does not have space does not have power. In other words, to give up space and its use is to give up life'. Furthermore, 'geography determines the distribution of power and gives advantages to specific places and regions compared to others'. 'Other variables followed the climate: the arrangement of seas and the coastline, the location of islands, length of rivers and their navigability, the relief and shape of continents, in part serve to explain laws of history and inflection points in the course of world history (in the language of geopolitics – pivotal). In geopolitics, therefore, pivotal places are decisive for the balance of power or lack thereof'. Rather trivial questions are thus elevated to the status of historical laws, which testifies to the determinism inherent in (yet denied by) geopolitical thinking. The simple claim that geographical factors have always had an impact on states' actions (military strategies, alliances, conflicts, trade) is self-evident. No international relations school of thought disregards geography, yet only geopolitics seeks to turn it into the main driving force. As a result, geopolitical analyses are ahistorical, almost entirely lacking any political, social, economic or cultural context of a given era.

In geopolitics, to use Marxist terminology, states are only the superstructures, as determined by the base, which is not the total of the factors of production but geopolitical properties shaped by geography. States are seen as geopolitical entities affected by practically unchanging geographical circumstances and are therefore forced to pursue interests dictated by those circumstances (if they are to survive). A separate geopolitical conceptual apparatus has thus developed that is rich in axes, pivots, cores and shatterbelts – very vivid categories that appeal to the spatial imagination yet are essentially

⁴² Cohen introduced the notion of the 'shatterbelt' to the geopolitical debate, meaning lands that lie on the borderlands of regions and are the subject of continual rivalry between powers. He included Ukraine among them, which influenced his analysis of the situation and his recommendations.

undefinable, allowing the semantic scope to be sketched at one's discretion. A reliance on ephemeral concepts has deepened the chasm separating geopolitics from the most important research program in international relations and foreign policy. Pushed into the margins, geopolitics began to seek legitimization through increased verbal proximity to realism, especially by underlining the importance of power and rivalry for hegemony as an independent variable. Essentially, what this amounts to is an alliance between geopolitics and naive realism that is useful in seeking social resonance among a broad audience who prefer colourful stories to solid, often ambiguous analyses.

INTERNATIONAL CONCERTS

Mechanistic and spatial metaphors and a preoccupation with maps would be just a journalistic curiosity were it not for the practical consequences of adopting this perspective for analysis and policy-making. The mechanisms for explaining relations between the states cited here serve, in essence, to protect a specific status quo. They create the belief that certain forms of relations between states are natural, and thus opposition to them is irrational. Certain properties of international reality are said to have remained unchanged for centuries; phenomena that break away from the entrenched image are seen as merely temporary aberrations. This allegedly indisputable state of affairs is the strictly hierarchical structure of the international system. The conviction persists – common also to some schools of realism – that international relations should be viewed exclusively from the perspective of the great powers' struggle for hegemony based on the distribution of power within the system. In such an order, the interests of all other entities are just derivatives of the plans and actions of more powerful actors. A model interpretation looks like this: the primary objective is a stable international system, the prerequisite of which is a strategic balance between responsible powers whose task is to discipline other actors when their actions threaten to upset this balance. Taking the specific nomenclature out of this language, we are left with a picture of powers concerned with maintaining and consolidating their privileged position in the international system, a cause very much furthered by the supposedly objective geopolitical description of the world. In this perspective, the 'concert of powers' constitutes a natural *modus operandi* and an optimal method of stabilizing the international system. This view makes sense when expressed by politicians of states with aspirations to be great powers (or those experiencing post-imperial trauma), as it offers

an excellent tool to legitimize their policies. However, it becomes problematic when it is portrayed as a meta-principle of international relations.

This vision of a world controlled by concerts/directorates is attractive because of the popularity of the perception of diplomacy as a game played out behind closed doors among just a few leaders of great powers. It echoes the era of traditional empires, the last act of which was the collapse of the USSR. As a rule, the system that emerged after the Congress of Vienna serves as an unrivalled model for an optimal method of managing world affairs. Occasionally, the Yalta Conference is cited – mainly by Russian politicians and experts⁴³ – which symbolizes the aspirations of the US, the UK and the USSR to decide on the fate of other smaller states and nations. Both approaches stem from the erroneous belief that decisions dictated by a specific political and strategic context can be treated as universal solutions. The changes that have taken place in international relations since the days of behind-closed-doors diplomacy in the nineteenth century leave such ambitions detached from modern realities.

Additionally, these systemic generalizations stem from a very modest data sample. To notice the superficial roots from which the idea of the great powers' battle for domination stem, one merely has to recall the political landscape of the post-Westphalian Europe of the seventeenth or eighteenth century, with a Germany fragmented into dozens of states and cities, dynastic wars, and a scarcely nascent concept of sovereignty. It was not until the nineteenth century that the consolidation of nation-states in the continent and competition for colonies put this issue into the mainstream of political and then academic discussions. It was then that the tendency to assign universal value to the characteristics of that specific era arose.

The concert of powers established at the Congress of Vienna was therefore a political answer to the consequences of the Napoleonic Wars, which were clad in the quasi-religious guise of a Holy Alliance for a purpose of legitimization. Austria, Russia, Prussia and Great Britain saw this – and the principle of the balance of power upon which it was based – above all as a tool for looking after long-term interests and buying time for reconstruction after the conflict. This meant a kind of 'freezing' of the political context. At the level of inter-power relations, the Vienna system endured without too much upheaval up to the Crimean War, but it was at breaking point owing to simmering internal and international tensions. Nevertheless, even today, many continue to cite it as a model. Perhaps one of its leading advocates was Henry Kissinger, who, incidentally, devoted

⁴³ Fyodor Lukyanov, 'What the World Needs is "19th-Century Behavior"', *Russia in Global Affairs* <<https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/what-the-world-needs-is-19th-century-behavior/>> [accessed 22 March 2014]; Sergei Karaganov, 'Russia's Victory and a New Concert of Nations', *Russia in Global Affairs* <<https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/russias-victory-and-a-new-concert-of-nations/>> [accessed 31 March 2017].

his doctorate – completed before he began to work for the government – to the diplomacy of this period.⁴⁴

In the twentieth century, the idea of the concert of powers began to be transformed from an instrument for regulating the relations between the states of Europe into a supposedly scientifically valid model solution. Advocates of geopolitics played a significant role in this process, as we saw when discussing their views. The Yalta pact and the Cold War helped to reinforce this conviction, which essentially served to legitimize the position of the largest actors. Being for only two voices, this was a different sort of concert – with two scores and untuned instruments – that did not have the flexibility inherent in a multilateral system; however, the performers preserved a unique status quo and sought to prevent ‘mutual assured destruction’, while at the same time competing through proxy wars. The price for stability at the macro level (preventing nuclear war) was dozens of conflicts – between states and within them – in various parts of the world. Yet over time, this system also failed to withstand exposure to an increasingly complex international reality, the appearance of new state actors, the increasing emancipatory aspirations of the communist satellites, and internal tensions within the Soviet empire.

The view of international policy as absolutely subordinate to the ambitions of great powers can be discerned in many arguments that continue to surface today: be it the need for a new grand bargain, or a new architecture of global security – to be determined, it is assumed, by states that see themselves as regulators of the international order. Such a vision, however, is difficult to reconcile with decades-long processes of democratization of the international system and an increased influence of medium and small states, greater significance of international law and institutions, and the role of non-state actors (corporations, NGOs, terrorist organizations), social media, financial markets or identity disputes. The major powers continue to flex their muscles, despite having much less room for manoeuvre.

Even within the consensus-based European Union, the larger member states often demonstrate, with varying degrees of subtlety, their desire to steer the community, whether this is by shaping treaties in the right way or by ignoring inconvenient procedures. Yet, the possibilities of achieving quasi-imperial aspirations today are incomparably smaller than they were in the nineteenth century, owing to the complex network of political, economic and social interdependencies as well as the dense system of legal and procedural restrictions that apply. Therefore, some want to and indeed can do more than others can, but usually not as much as they would

⁴⁴ Henry Kissinger, *a World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812–22* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957).

like to, and they certainly need to put much more effort into selling their ideas than was previously the case.

Geopolitical thinkers steer well clear of the problem of the growing complexity of the international system, treating all these variables as the results of the great powers' battle for domination. Yet even adopting such a problematic premise demands constant attention to ever-evolving circumstances. The current growth in China's power, after all, is taking place in different conditions than was the case of the rise of Great Britain, the United States or the Soviet Union. One should therefore be cautious with analyses and forecasts drawn from the reservoir of historical analogies, especially those suggesting the existence of enduring models of the actions of states in what may only seem to be a similar situation. Would Metternich or Bismarck, often held up as models of diplomatic realism, today be guided by similar motivations and look for similar recipes to the challenges they faced? Rather than from a belief in the laws of history, their craft resulted from the ability to exploit the conditions of the time in order to pursue effective foreign policies.

In this light, therefore, the 'concert of powers' can hardly be seen as the overriding rule regulating international relations; rather, it is an instrument in the pursuit of political objectives by states that hold an advantage over others at any given historical moment. Thinking in geopolitical terms is therefore understandable among American, Russian, French and Chinese commentators (frequently involved in promoting the interests of their states), as it gives the appearance of a panoramic view to a rather narrow viewpoint. It also offers supposedly objective arguments for talks with other actors to make them accept this 'natural state of affairs'. This approach, however, is contrary to a fundamental characteristic of every social system: change, which occurs at various speeds, with varying intensiveness, but incessantly. While the debate over the evolution of the role of the state and non-state actors, globalization, interdependence, international law, and international organizations might therefore be unending, it would be difficult to debunk the general idea of the increasing complexity of the international system. This conclusion, however, demonstrates that recipes from a century or several decades ago should be subject to continual critical analysis and adaptation to changing conditions.

The important consequences of attaching excessive weight to historical laws and placing faith in the impersonal forces that determine global politics were discussed by Isaiah Berlin in his essay *Historical Inevitability*. He pointed to the risk of eliminating individual responsibility for any action that would be seen to have been following the rhythm of history. Referring to the logic of history gives political leaders the opportunity to legitimize their actions while reducing personal risk, since historical forces are not brought before a tribunal. Indeed, it would be hard to find a better

way of rationalizing expansion or aggression. Taking away responsibility for their deeds may encourage states to violate custom and the law in the name of historically justified interests. It might also lead to fatalistic attitudes among weaker countries out of a sense of their inability to shape policy independently. Such states are left to struggle between the role of a satellite orbiting around the 'core' and a victim of the 'crush zone'.

One illustration of this abdication of responsibility is the debate on the causes and culprits of Russian aggression against Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. At the time, President Putin referred to being forced into reacting to alleged attempts by the West to encircle Russia.⁴⁵ Interestingly, he was not short of supporters in the West for this point of view, headed by the well-known theoretician John Mearsheimer, who blamed NATO for the crisis.⁴⁶ What both men had in common was their faith in determinism, but with one difference: for Putin, as head of state, determinism served as a convenient instrument to legitimize his actions; on the other hand, for the academic Mearsheimer it served as the legitimization of a research approach that had lost salience after the end of the Cold War.

Additionally, the passage from the book *Prisoners of Geography* cited at the beginning of this article cast Putin as a helpless executor of the will of higher forces, which might lead to the conclusion that the takeover of Crimea was inevitable. Following this line of thought, Russia has never been aggressive towards its neighbours of its own accord; it simply creates the impression among those who do not understand that it must act in this way to survive. This interpretation is very reminiscent of Stalin's argument from the late 1940s, which used an excuse of self-defence to rationalize the USSR's aggression against Poland of 17 September 1939. In this understanding of reality, there are no perpetrators or victims, only correct or false geopolitical instincts.

CONCLUSIONS – REFLECTIONS ON THE UTILITY OF THEORY

Appreciating the political significance of space need not mean succumbing to determinism; acknowledging conflict as the driving force of international relations need not mean disregarding institutions of cooperation and integration; and recognizing powers as the main actors need not mean overlooking the importance of secondary and tertiary ones. Classical geopolitics and popular realism reduce the political reality to a handful of truisms ('large ones

⁴⁵ President of Russia, Address by President of the Russian Federation, the Kremlin, Moscow, 18 March 2014 <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>> [accessed 18 December 2021].

⁴⁶ John Mearsheimer, 'Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin', *Foreign Affairs*, 93.5 (2014), 77–89.

can, small ones must'), which are then enveloped in a network of colourful but unclear metaphors lacking descriptive, explanatory and predictive value.

In a cognitive sense, Geopolitics is simply a certain interpretation of the world that is rooted in an organic theory of the state and a tradition of strategic thinking of the world as a theatre of war, treated as a constitutive element of the international system. State policy thus essentially oscillates between preparations for war, waging war and gathering strength afterwards. Yet this is just one of many possible interpretations, and it is a marginal one in the most important international debates. Every social theory, in a certain sense, strives for universalism while being just a story about the world at a specific historical moment. However, there are theories that have more precisely expressed premises, better-defined concepts, and carefully caveated conclusions; and there are theories that construct a picture of the world formed from dogmas rather than observations, based on ambiguities and malleable but empty metaphors. Geopolitics and naive realism are in the latter category.

As a rule, however, when making reference to any theory, a certain caution is required in order to avoid twisting an auxiliary tool into dogma. Reasoning through the prism of a theory is the result of excessive attachment to a single approach, an attempt to find the one key to reality.

In his essay *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, Isaiah Berlin cites a passage from a work by the Greek poet Archilochus to create a parabola showing two model types of mentality. The titular hedgehogs have the tendency to reduce things to one central, organizing idea, seeking to create around it as coherent a system as possible that is capable of explaining a wide range of phenomena. They are characterized by an attachment to one intellectual tradition and high self-confidence, often leading to dogmatism and a disregard for the natural limits of the applicability of any theory. In political science, something resembling a system of beliefs emerges that is equipped with its own criteria of evaluation, useful historical analogies, its own pantheon of heroes and villains, which essentially serve to confirm their belief in the supremacy of the guiding principle. This is a kind of escape into simplicity from the complexity of social systems.

On the other side are foxes, which aim for multiple goals via various paths without choosing one, invariable, all-encompassing perspective. They profess research pluralism and accept uncertainty and complexity. Rejecting reductionism, they assume that reality is caused by the incessant interaction of many different factors and forces whose importance varies over time, with a degree of luck added in. Foxes are uncertain and sceptical, but they retain cognitive flexibility unless they fall into the trap of another kind of dogmatism: the belief that, essentially, you cannot reduce

social processes to patterns – they are simply the fruit of chance. This is, in turn, an intellectual resignation from trying to understand complex reality.

A continuum stretches between the two approaches, with numerous schools of thought and scholars in between that incorporate characteristics of both in different proportions. Therefore, rather than evaluating certain intellectual trends which are by definition impermanent and temporary, it seems more worthwhile to analyse the assumptions underlying certain approaches to the world and international politics, in particular paying attention to the need to beware of dogmatism, reductionism, and belief in historical laws. Rather than searching for universal truths, it is worth focusing on a more practical and definitely more achievable objective: to reflect on why, in specific historical, political and cultural circumstances, a certain way of thinking about international politics becomes popular. The response will often say much more about the condition of society and its elites than it will about the essence of relations between states.

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HOW TO AVOID THE GENOCIDE TRAP

Genocide as a concept in historiography and social sciences

ABSTRACT

This article argues that instead of using inconsistent and often tautological ad hoc definitions from social sciences and the humanities, the legal notion of genocide as it emerges from the Genocide Convention and the jurisprudence of international criminal tribunals should also be applied to historical atrocities. This helps to prevent the inflationary use of the term 'genocide', whose inevitable consequence is that this term is voided of any meaning. Using instead the legal concept makes it possible to disentangle genocidal from non-genocidal violence and to prevent this notion from becoming obsolete. Three examples from German colonial history in Africa illustrate the need for such an approach.

KEYWORDS:

genocide, war crimes, German, Africa, Schutztruppen, colonial, international criminal tribunals

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In 1945, the Allied Powers elaborated the concept of ‘crimes against humanity’ to penalize crimes committed by Nazi Germany against its own citizens (which until then had not been codified as crimes under international law but were left to the domestic judiciary of each country wishing to prosecute them). Some authors¹ regard genocide as a special case of a crime against humanity, therefore they can argue in favour of retrospectively applying it to events that occurred even before The Convention came into force; however, this does not enable us to apply it to contexts from before 1945, i.e., before it was adjudicated at the Nuremberg and the Tokyo Tribunals.

Nevertheless, applying the genocide concept,² as codified in 1948, to earlier contexts is still very popular in popular science books, journalistic reports, op-eds, comments and historical accounts. It is especially popular among victims’ communities, because the genocide label is more likely to trigger recognition, empathy and even material benefits (compensation) for victims than any other crime. Today, a trip to Bosnia and a glimpse into bookshops in Sarajevo reveals how many authors in Bosnia regard not only the Srebrenica massacre of 1995 as a genocide but also each and every other violent crime that took place in Eastern and Central Bosnia during the breakdown of Yugoslavia. There, all the crimes adjudicated by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) that were committed against the Bosniak population, which the ICTY classified as crimes against humanity or war crimes, are presented as examples of a general Serb genocide against Bosniaks.³

The same can also be observed in Serbia, where victims’ organisations and media workers claim that the Croatian operations ‘Flash’ and ‘Storm’, which drove Serb insurgents and the civilian Serb population out of the Croatian-Bosnian borderland in 1995, were also genocide. There is

¹ There is considerable controversy about the legal concept of genocide, with some authors supporting the view that genocide and crimes against humanity are the same crime (with the only difference that crimes against humanity include more victim groups than genocide, i.e., political groups), while others regard both crimes as entirely distinct from each other. See, for the first opinion: Alexander R.J. Murray, ‘Does International Criminal Law Still Require a ‘Crime of Crimes’? a Comparative Review of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity’, *Goettingen Journal of International Law*, 3.2 (2011), 589–615. For the second: David L. Nersessian, ‘Comparative Approaches to Punishing Hate: The Intersection of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity’, *Stanford Journal of International Law*, 43 (2007), 221–64.

² For the details of the concept of genocide in International Criminal Law see: William Schabas, *Genocide in International Law. The Crime of Crimes*, 2nd edn (London: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

³ There are also English-language publications extending the genocide claim to all of Bosnia. See: Eric Markusen, ‘Case Study 9: Genocide in Bosnia’, in *Teaching About Genocide. Issues, Approaches and Resources*, ed. by Samuel Totten (Fayetteville: IAP Publishing, 2004), pp. 193–202; Edina Becirevic, *Genocide on the Drina River* (London: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. 81–143. For the discussion about the ICTY’s impact on social attitudes about the war and, more specifically, the Srebrenica massacre, see: Marko Milanović, ‘The Impact of the ICTY on the Former Yugoslavia: An Anticipatory Postmortem’, *American Journal of International Law*, 110.2 (2016), 233–59; Klaus Bachmann, ‘The Loathed Tribunal. Public Opinion in Serbia Toward the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia’, in *The Legacy of Crimes and Crises. Transitional Justice, Domestic Change and the Role of the International Community*, ed. by Klaus Bachmann and Dorota Heidrich (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2016), pp. 113–34.

some judicial sense in applying the genocide notion to these events because the atrocities committed could fulfil the criteria of genocide in legal terms, and the International Criminal Tribunal of the former Yugoslavia had jurisdiction over the respective crimes. From a purely legal perspective, one cannot ignore the reluctance of the ICTY to apply the genocide concept to atrocities committed in Bosnia rather than in Srebrenica. The ICTY never made genocide findings regarding crimes outside Bosnia, and it treated the atrocities committed during the Croatian attack on the Serb settlements bordering Bosnia in 1995 as war crimes and crimes against humanity. German courts have made wider genocide findings which were not overturned by subsequent verdicts of the European Court of Human Rights.⁴

When the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) established the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), it limited its timely jurisdiction to the events that took place in 1994 in Rwanda and neighbouring countries. Based on the respective UNSC resolutions, the ICTR never investigated atrocities committed before 1994; hence, the massacres against the Bagogwe (a Tutsi sub-group in the rural countryside of Rwanda's north) were never recognized as genocide because they occurred before 1994. Post-genocide Rwanda acted differently, extending the timely scope of its genocide legislation to the period between October 1990 and August 1994. Therefore, Rwandan courts can also adjudicate genocide regarding atrocities which are outside the ICTR's timely jurisprudence.⁵

Courts tend to apply the same judicial concept differently to various real-world situations, and public opinion regards actions as genocide that may not strictly legally be genocide. However, in all these cases, binding rulings about what is and is not genocide are possible because the underlying legal concepts exist and there are courts and tribunals that can adjudicate them.

Yet, there is much less sense in doing the same regarding the massacre of Armenians in the late Ottoman Empire, the German *Kaiserreich's* colonial policy in German Southwest-Africa, or the expansion of European settlers to the West in North America. Back then, there was no concept of genocide, and in many cases it is even possible to show a lack of colonial actors' understanding of the moral background of the concept of genocide. In other words: they neither understood nor shared our conviction concerning the moral recklessness of extinguishing entire ethnic, national,

⁴ Marko Attila Hoare, 'A Case Study in Underachievement: The International Courts and Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina', *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, 6.1 (2011), 81–97.

⁵ Christian Garuka, 'Genocide Prevention and the Punishment of Genocide Ideology in Rwanda', in *Criminalizing History. Legal Restrictions on Statement and Interpretations of the Past in Germany, Poland, Rwanda, Turkey and Ukraine*, ed. by Klaus Bachmann and Christian Garuka (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020), pp. 89–106.

racial or religious groups; nor did they recognize the moral requirement to protect civilians, the wounded, or surrendering enemies.

This does not prevent lawmakers from enacting laws and resolutions which declare certain past atrocities as genocide. The French and the German parliaments did this regarding the massacres of Armenians in the late Ottoman Empire; German ministers also did so regarding the German Empire's war against the Nama and the Herero in what was then German Southwest-Africa; and the Polish parliament did so concerning the massacres of the Polish civilian population in Volhynia (now Ukraine) in 1943–44. There are many other examples of such political rather than legal declarations.⁶ In some cases, these declarations were preceded by legal analysis; in others, they were mere political declarations which only testified to their authors' outrage about the underlying atrocities (and eventually the perpetrators' refusal to admit they were genocide).

Against this background, applying the legal concept of genocide to such a distant context becomes either a purely intellectual endeavour or forms part of victims' groups' competition for acknowledgement, recognition and compensation, or, in other words, for better access to resources which would otherwise be unavailable. One may regard such attempts as justified or not, but they are hardly helpful when trying to derive a precise notion of genocide for the purposes of historiography or social sciences. The inflationary use of this label tends to deprive it of any precise meaning. By invoking genocide for each large atrocity, victims' groups – willingly or not – contribute to the trivialization of this concept in popular culture and politics. If everything is genocide, then nothing is genocide: the concept then loses any distinct meaning and no longer enables us to distinguish between genocidal and non-genocidal actions.

But the popular use of the genocide label is not only inflationary: it is also often ill-informed in presupposing a legal hierarchy of crimes, according to which genocide is something like the crime of all crimes or the worst of all possible atrocities. This is the often unreflected but always underlying supposition of those who invoke the genocide label in the contest for awareness, resources and recognition: they want to be regarded as survivors of a genocide rather than of any other crime because they regard genocide as the worst crime of all. However, the genocide concept itself does not support such an interpretation. Many war crimes and crimes against humanity caused more victims than many (judicially

⁶ See, for example: Nikolay Koposov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia* (Cambridge University Press, 2017). Most of these declarations do not involve criminal sanctions for denial and hence are only declarative; others rely on criminal sanctions. For the latter: Klaus Bachmann et al., 'The Puzzle of Punitive Memory Laws: New Insights into the Origins and Scope of Punitive Memory Laws', *East European Politics and Societies*, 4 (2020), 996–1012.

recognized) genocides: their perpetrators used more (and more atrocious) violence, and their actions had longer and harsher consequences for the targeted communities. While this article was being written, the wars in Syria and Yemen were ravaging these countries, causing the death of many more victims (including non-combatants, civilians and even children) than the massacre of Srebrenica, which, according to the most recent forensic investigations, cost the lives of about 8,000 Bosniaks. Nevertheless, no international body has so far accused the Syrian or Yemenite governments, rebel groups or third parties of committing genocide in Syria or Yemen.⁷ Some of the crimes committed during the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 were adjudicated as crimes against humanity (for example, cases in which Hutu activists killed other Hutu civilians) or war crimes (crimes committed during the clashes between government forces and Tutsi rebels). Does this make them more atrocious than massacres which were adjudicated as acts of genocide? Under today's International Criminal Law – as it has emerged from international conventions, humanitarian law and the jurisprudence and doctrine of international tribunals – one can commit a war crime, a crime against humanity or genocide without killing a single person. At the same time, a large-scale massacre of civilians can be a war crime, a crime against humanity, or an act of genocide. It all depends on the circumstances and, first and foremost, on the intention of the perpetrators.

IS THERE A NON-LEGAL CONCEPT OF GENOCIDE?

These are not the only problems which occur when the legal concept of genocide is invoked without the necessary legal rigor and precision. Neither history, social sciences nor anthropology have so far created a concise, coherent and consensual definition of genocide which could be used to settle the controversies about which mass crimes fulfil the genocide criteria and which do not. In many cases, historians and social scientists (not to speak of journalists) adopt their own deliberate notions of genocide which they compare against publicly known facts about mass atrocities.⁸ These definitions are usually tailored in such a way that makes a genocide finding inevitable, thus creating circular conclusions: the analysed crime must be regarded as

⁷ Recently, a German court sentenced a couple to long prison sentences for murder as a count of genocide (against the Yazidis, an ethnic minority in Iraq). Both had joined the Islamic State movement as fighters, had held Yazidis as slaves and killed a child from that group. The court did not adjudicate genocide against the Yazidis as such but concluded that both were culpable of genocide because they had committed murder and slavery in the framework of a genocide. 'German Court Finds Former 'IS' Member Guilty of Genocide', *Deutsche Welle*, 30.11.2021 <<https://www.dw.com/en/german-court-finds-former-is-member-guilty-of-genocide/a-59976226>> [accessed 30 November 2021].

⁸ See, for example, the various concepts of genocide in Adam Jones, *Genocide. A Comprehensive Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2006).

a genocide because the underlying definition was designed with the sole aim of making it one.⁹ For some authors, the decisive element of genocide is the perpetrators' intent to annihilate another group and whether this intent could actually be achieved. Taking this approach, genocide occurs when one group manages to extinguish another group, but genocide does not occur if the victimised group survives the onslaught.¹⁰ For other authors, genocide is every massacre which targets a lot of people, no matter what the perpetrator intended to achieve by slaughtering others. If such a massacre appears (according to historical evidence) smaller than 'we used to think', then it is no longer regarded as genocide by these authors. In these cases, these authors usually fail to indicate a clear minimum number or percentage of casualties which must be regarded as genocide.¹¹ Since there is no generally accepted definition of genocide in social sciences and the humanities, and since the different ad-hoc concepts created by every author in order to prove or disprove that a specific atrocity was genocide are likely to very quickly become tautological, it seems necessary to transpose the legal definition of genocide into these disciplines.

Applying the ICL definition of genocide not only facilitates the distinction between different kinds of mass atrocities, it also helps to disentangle genocidal actions from non-genocidal ones within the same course of events.¹² This definition is likely to shed new light on well-known and thoroughly researched events, some of which will no longer appear to be genocide, while others may unexpectedly appear to be so. Several cases will be presented in the following subchapters. They were chosen in order to demonstrate the consequences of applying the legal notion of genocide to (historical) real-world cases in historiography and how this differs from the use of arbitrary and often tautological ad hoc notions of genocide. These cases are:

⁹ In many cases – which are outside of this article's scope – social scientists invoke genocide concepts in order to explain an escalation of violence or the actions of various actors involved in large massacres. The legal concept does not enable us to understand why and how genocide occurred; it only provides a precise definition which makes it possible to distinguish genocide from non-genocidal mass violence without resorting to circular conclusions.

¹⁰ See, for example, Vahakn Dadrian's definition as reported by Jones, *Genocide*, pp. 15–16. Jones provides a whole number of definitions, some of which would make German colonial policy genocidal, while others would not.

¹¹ Claus Nordbruch, *Völkermord an den Herero in Deutsch-Südwestafrika? Widerlegung einer Lüge* (Tübingen: Grabert Verlag, 2004); Gert Sudholt, *Die deutsche Eingeborenenpolitik in Südwestafrika. Von den Anfängen bis 1904* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1975); Brigitte Lau, 'Uncertain Certainties. The Herero-German War of 1904', in *History and Historiography. Four Essays in Reprint*, ed. by Brigitte Lau (Windhoek: National Archives of Namibia, 1995); Rainer Tröndle, *Ungewisse Ungewissheiten. Überlegungen zum Krieg der Herero gegen die Deutschen, insbesondere zu den Ereignissen am Waterberg und danach* (Windhoek: Namibia Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft, 2012), pp. 7–25.

¹² For the most recent update on the legal genocide definition, see Schabas, *Genocide*; regarding its use in historical research, see Klaus Bachmann, 'Germany's Colonial Policy in German South-West Africa in the Light of International Criminal Law', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43.2 (2017), 331–47.

- the German war against the Herero and the Nama, which is widely regarded as the first genocide of the twentieth century; however, if the actual ICL definition of genocide is applied, this war appears in a light which is very different from most historical and popular science accounts of these events;
- the German war against the Maji-Maji uprising in German East Africa, which is usually not regarded as genocidal even though it led to many more victims than the events in German Southwest Africa;
- The fate of the Bushmen under German colonial rule, which some authors regard as genocide, mainly because they ignore the legal meaning of the notion and neglect the intention of the perpetrators.

GENOCIDE IN GERMAN SOUTHWEST AFRICA?

Between 1904 and 1907, German troops carried out a military campaign to first quash the uprising of most (but not all) of the Herero and then also the Nama clans in the German colony. The Herero war had several phases. During the first, the Germans lost most battles because the Herero knew the landscape better, avoided open battles, and stayed out of the reach of the modern German weapons (mostly canons and machine guns). Then, the German cabinet replaced the colony's governor with a new commander and the colony was put under a military regime; a state of war was declared and the German troops surrounded the Herero, who had gathered in the Waterberg area to prepare for negotiations. The new commander in chief, Lothar von Trotha, rejected the idea of negotiations and, as he told his superiors in Berlin (who approved the plan), he planned to encircle the Herero and deliver a 'battle of extermination' to extinguish them 'as a nation' (and not only as a military threat).¹³ This was clearly genocidal and testifies to the German leadership's 'genocidal intent'; thus, under current ICL, every war crime committed in the course of this campaign would count as genocide.¹⁴ However, the genocide von

¹³ Von Trotha an den Chef des Generalstaabs der Armee, Berlin-Lichterfelde, Bundesarchiv (hereafter BArch), R 1001/2089. The original wording of the letter (which is also slightly ambiguous in German) is the following: 'Es fragte sich nun für mich nur, wie ist der Krieg mit den Herero zu beenden. Die Ansichten darüber, bei dem Gouverneur und einigen 'alten Afrikanern' einerseits und mir andererseits gehen gänzlich auseinander. Erstere wollten schon lange verhandeln und bezeichnen die Nation der Herero als notwendiges Arbeitsmaterial für die zukünftige Verwendung des Landes. Ich bin gänzlich anderer Ansicht. Ich glaube, daß die Nation als solche vernichtet werden muß, oder, wenn dies durch taktische Schläge nicht möglich war, operativ und durch die weitere Detail-Behandlung aus dem Land gewiesen werden wird'. The document does not bear any date, but it mentions that the notorious 'extermination order' had been issued a few days before.

¹⁴ The nexus between war crimes and genocide only exists if the (very controversial) notion of a 'Joint Criminal Enterprise' is applied. It was developed by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and also applied by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. The International Criminal Court rejected it. See: Klaus Bachmann and Aleksandar Fatić, *The UN International Criminal Tribunals. Transition without Justice?* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 199–231.

Trotha wanted to commit did not take place because the Herero fled into the desert, where many of them perished, whereas others managed to get asylum on the British territory in what today is Botswana and the Western Cape. In other words, von Trotha had a genocidal plan but failed to implement it. Chasing the Herero into the desert, however, was neither genocide nor even a war crime. What was illegal (under current ICL and the humanitarian provisions of von Trotha's time) was the lack of distinction between combatants on the one hand (killing whom was and is legal in war), and wounded fighters, people surrendering, and civilians (whom humanitarian law already then required the German army to treat 'humanely') on the other hand. Frustrated by his inability to deliver the 'battle of annihilation' he had promised his superiors in Berlin, von Trotha issued an order which required his soldiers to shoot at every Herero (no matter whether armed or not, no matter whether wounded or not) and to chase away civilians from water holes. His order that 'no quarter be given' was already a war crime under the humanitarian law of the day. However, he never managed to implement his order in full because his soldiers did not get hold of the Herero. There are strong indications that his order was a means to convince his superiors in Berlin of his resolve and determination and to obfuscate his failure to surround and exterminate the Herero. Von Trotha's leading officers knew that the order had been issued in order to convince Berlin rather than to be carried out in practice. Before the army managed to act according to this 'extermination order', the government in Berlin forced him to rescind it and to allow the Herero to surrender without being shot. Next, the army had to build camps to accommodate the surrendering Herero and their families, but it proved unable to create conditions in these camps that would actually guarantee the inmates' survival. After 1907, when the hostilities had ended and the Emperor lifted the state of war from the colony, the army had to set free the surviving camp inmates. However, because of the fear of the German settlers, who were wary about another uprising, the administration decided to deport the Herero and Nama leaders with their families to other German colonies in Africa, where more or less half of them perished due to disease and starvation. These actions caused far fewer casualties than the open hostilities in 1904 and 1905, but it was them – not the Waterberg battle, the desert campaign and the 'extermination order' – which were genocidal. Conditions in the camps were such as to make the survival of the group unlikely, and the removal of the group leaders to other colonies constituted a count of deportation under the Genocide Convention. Because conditions in these other colonies were detrimental to the survival of the prisoners (and the German authorities were reluctant to improve

them or sent the prisoners back to German Southwest Africa), they also fulfilled the criterion of 'creating conditions calculated to bring about the destruction of the group'.¹⁵

The crucial argument supporting the genocide claim with respect to Germany's policy towards the Herero and the Nama usually consists in the death toll among both groups that was caused by the war and the subsequent persecutions. Estimations are difficult because the initial number of Herero and Nama remains unknown, and the number of those who survived the war, the camps, and the deportations is disputed. Approximations range from 60,000 to 100,000 casualties, which means that from 50 per cent to over 80 per cent of the pre-war Herero population perished.

But in the light of the current ICL genocide doctrine, a high number of casualties is not necessary to establish whether a genocide took place. What is of utmost importance is the intention of the perpetrators and whether this intention was carried out in some way, regardless of its success. In the light of modern ICL, it is enough to prove the existence of a JCE (Joint Criminal Enterprise) among various German players (in Berlin, Cameroon, and German South-West Africa) whose common plan was to remove the Herero and the Nama as they were an obstacle to German policy. Some of these (among them von Trotha) had such an intent, and it was apparent to the others that genocide would be a possible consequence of implementing such a plan. Various institutions contributed to the committing of this crime: some by actively engaging in the persecution of the Nama and the Herero; others by not taking crucial measures that would have prevented the Herero and the Nama from perishing in camps and during deportation. Even if one rejects the JCE concept and instead applies the concept of command or superior responsibility, the government of the *Kaiserreich* is still criminally liable for the genocide carried out in German South West Africa. Genocide took place in German South West Africa, but it happened after the Nama and the Herero uprisings had been quelled by the *Schutztruppe*. During the Waterberg battle and the sealing off of Omaheke, von Trotha revealed his genocidal intent, but he did not execute it because he lacked the means to do so. This changed after

¹⁵ It must be mentioned here that modern ICL sees the destruction of a group as more than just the destruction of some or all its members. Theoretically, it is now possible to commit genocide in the terms of the above-mentioned count by creating conditions in which no single group member must die and the group will vanish because of (for example) clandestinely applied methods of birth control or because the internal hierarchy of the group is destroyed. In such a case, all group members remain alive and healthy, but the group ceases to exist and becomes a mere sample of individuals which no longer belong to their former group. This is what the deportations in German Southwest Africa were meant to achieve: to destroy the groups as polities and to harm their internal hierarchies and decision-making processes so that the Herero and the Nama would no longer be able to act as groups or polities. This development of this doctrine is logical if one assumes the objective of The Convention is not only to protect a group as the entirety of all group members, but, as an amendment to the ICC Statute recently puts it, 'the group as such', because the existence of various ethnic, racial, national and religious groups is a value which The Convention intends to uphold.

the Herero and the Nama had surrendered. Now the German authorities could carry out the genocidal intent, as transpires in the correspondence between von Trotha and the General Staff of the Army in Berlin. And so they did – instead of applying the regulations from Humanitarian Law, which required them to regard the Nama and the Herero as POWs and to treat them humanely.

GENOCIDE IN GERMAN EAST AFRICA?

Compared to German South West Africa, the situation in German East Africa was different in almost every aspect. The territory was much bigger (German East Africa was twice the size of the German Empire before World War II), and far fewer Germans had settled there due to the inhospitable climate and health conditions. Most of them either had plantations or were working as traders or administrative staff. The plantations were mostly in the northern part of the country, but there was never anything like the settler community in German South West Africa, and the only towns with a dense white population were coastal ones. German East Africa was also more diverse in social, religious and ethnic terms. It had been penetrated by Arab trader caravans, which had spread Islam among the local population and set up chieftaincies, but Indian traders were also present. A multitude of tribal organisations permeated the country, thus creating a difficult equilibrium of local power structures and hierarchies in which the Germans were only one of many factors of authority. The German authorities relied on indirect rule, which ranged from constant pressure and military presence in some regions to an almost complete absence in others.¹⁶

Extreme violence had already taken place before the turn of the century. During the 1890s, German-led Askari troops, recruited from various other tribes, had outfought the mighty Wahehe kingdom in the central part of the colony. The Wahehe, inspired by Zulu war tactics, had resorted to a kind of partisan warfare, which in turn had triggered a German counterinsurgency. The abolition of humanitarian constraints was not only motivated by the interests of the warring groups but also by the absence of a common moral framework. After the submission of the Wahehe, the German administration introduced the hut tax, and the region became

¹⁶ In Rwanda and Burundi, the German authorities had imposed a ban on white settlers and almost entirely relied on the local Rwandan and Burundian kingdoms, trying to avoid any friction to maintain peace and avoid being dragged into a war in a territory they hardly knew and were unable to penetrate without a disproportionately strong military effort.

a popular destination for missionaries and traders.¹⁷ In the war with the Wahehe, both sides committed atrocities against the civilian population. Mkwakwa, the Wahehe king, even ordered the killing of renegade leaders and the mutilation of their women. In 1897, Tom von Prince, a British-born *Schutztruppen* officer, issued an order which may be seen as the precursor of von Trotha's October order. He put a ransom on Mkwawa's head and declared that no prisoners should be taken. Every Wahehe who was seen with a weapon was to be hanged; prisoners of war were to be killed. Von Prince's wife, who wrote a diary about her experiences in the colony, remarked that 'The Wahahe had wanted their annihilation, they have again launched a murder campaign'.¹⁸ The Governor at the time, Eduard von Liebert, labelled the final phase of the war 'a campaign of annihilation and destruction'.¹⁹

The Maji-Maji uprising was different from previous rebellions and the Herero and the Nama uprisings in German South-West Africa. It was the first inter-ethnic uprising of more than 20 different ethnic groups that united against the German administration. It started as a rebellion against Arab traders and cotton plantations in the coastal town of Samanga. Missionaries were not spared. The war that started was not directed against German rule alone. Many of the groups that fought against the *Schutztruppe* were also fighting against each other, and the *Schutztruppe's* use of Askaris from different ethnic groups only contributed to these antagonisms. Other groups used the mere fact that their former enemies were now fighting each other to increase their power, rid themselves of former constraints, or just rob their neighbours.²⁰ The main target of the initial violence was the cotton plantations, and for good reason. Cotton was foreign to East African agriculture; it yielded relatively high profits, and harvesting it was labour intensive. These features made the plantations the perfect vehicles for producing export surpluses on the one hand, and for spreading a system of forced labour in the country on the other hand.

In the ensuing war, war crimes were the rule rather than the exception. The German Empire committed these crimes even though it had ratified the Red Cross Convention and the Hague Convention on the Customs of War on Land, whose Martens Clause clearly also protected wounded

¹⁷ Many Wahehe later supported the German troops in their campaign against the Maji. They came from the Northern part of the colony, where resistance against the Germans was weak, although German settler presence was higher than in the South – another argument against the concept of a 'war of independence', an 'anti-colonial' or 'anti-imperialist' fight, which was promoted later by German Democratic Republic (GDR) historians and Tanzania's independence movement.

¹⁸ The original German word is 'Vernichtung'. Magdalene Prince, *Eine deutsche Frau im Innern Deutsch-Ostafrikas* (Salzwasser Verlag, 2012), p. 93, quoted according to Tanja Bührer, *Die Kaiserliche Schutztruppe für Deutsch-Ostafrika. Koloniale Sicherheitspolitik und transkulturelle Kriegführung 1885–1918* (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2011), p. 262.

¹⁹ Eduard Liebert, *Neunzig Tage im Zelt. Meine Reise nach Ubehe, Juni–September 1897* (Berlin, 1898), p. 9, quoted according to Bührer, p. 262.

²⁰ Bührer, *Die Kaiserliche Schutztruppe*, pp. 229–32.

and surrendering non-state fighters (like the Maji-Maji combatants and the Herero and the Nama fighters) from arbitrary violence.²¹

In 1905, many Wahehe cooperated with the German troops, despite the bitter fights eight years earlier. Under the orders of *Schutztruppen* officers, they embarked on a scorched-earth policy which included the abduction of women and children in order to prevent them providing assistance to the warriors in the bush, the killing of prisoners of war, the looting of villages, the destruction of crops, and the torture of surrendering enemies to extort intelligence.²² Their commander, Theodor von Hirsch, the former station chief of Mpapua, wrote a diary in which he admitted that he felt 'like a murderer, arsonist and slave trader', but he did nothing to stop the war crimes. He even paid his warriors a cash reward for severed heads.²³ He was not the only one. Fighters on all sides of the conflict tended to kill not only combatants but entire populations of raided villages – destroying food and crops during their marches to weaken support for their enemies. This often left civilians without any means to survive. Reports from the local administration to the Governor did not hide these facts. 'A lot of crops were destroyed by us. Food shortage is not excluded', wrote the head of the Lindi district to the governor, who wondered whether the locals would be able to pay the fee the Governor had imposed on villages that had joined the insurrection: 'Their huts and stocks are destroyed'.²⁴ In a message to Berlin, general Glatzel in Daressalam described the actions of a Navy officer who had 'attacked and destroyed a village'.²⁵ Usually, even after surrendering, insurgents (and especially their local leaders) were executed immediately in short and cursory proceedings which were called 'martial courts'.²⁶

It remains to be established whether the war crimes committed during the Maji-Maji war can be regarded as genocide within the meaning of ICL's genocide definition. As pointed out previously, the commanders' weak influence on their Askari troops does not exonerate them from command responsibility, at least not if they were either able to exercise effective control over their soldiers in the field or were able to punish them afterwards. Punishment of Askaris was frequent and harsh, but it hardly

²¹ At the time of the uprisings, the German Empire had the second Hague Convention about the Laws and Customs of War on Land (in 1900). The Convention on the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded on the Field of Battle (the Red Cross Convention of 1864) was formally ratified in 1907 (hence after the uprisings in the German colonies), as was the fourth Hague Convention (ratified in 1909). Nevertheless, the German authorities were aware of the Red Cross Convention being customary law and applied it in practice even before it entered into force in Germany.

²² Bührer, *Die Kaiserliche Schutztruppe*, pp. 265–66.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

²⁴ Ewerbeck an Gouverneur, n.d., BArch, R 1001/723.

²⁵ Telegramm aus Daressalam, Gen. Glatzel an Admiral Berlin, BArch, R 1001/723, p. 147.

²⁶ Kaiserlicher Bezirksamt in Lindi an Gouverneur, 15 September 1906, BArch, R 1001/723, pp. 59–62. The report describes the district officer's personal experience from an excursion into territories where the uprising was about to be extinguished.

ever happened as a result of war crimes. Usually, Askaris were punished for lack of loyalty, ignoring orders, or committing errors in battle. But was there a genocidal *mens rea*? Von Hirsch's diary reveals that genocidal considerations were not foreign to *Schutztruppen* commanders. The open question is whether the genocidal intentions from 1897 continued to exist and influence military decisions a few years later in regard to other groups. There are strong indications of genocidal intent in some of the German commanders. In October 1905, Hauptmann von Wangenheim presented the scorched-earth strategy as a means of ending partisan warfare by starvation: 'If the remaining food is consumed and people's homes are destroyed and they lose the possibility to cultivate new fields because we conduct continuous raids, then they will have to give up their resistance.'²⁷ Even some missionaries joined the call to fight the insurgents through starvation.²⁸ Subsequently, the German troops destroyed fields and crops to the extent that they endangered their own food supplies. Von Götzen justified this hunger strategy by pointing to the alleged civilisatory inferiority of the enemy.²⁹ The strategy was a success: the Maji-Maji uprising ended in a three-year-long mass starvation which devastated a large part of the southern part of the country. Young mothers were unable to feed their new-born babies, who perished in large numbers. Southern Usagara was entirely depopulated by 1906; in Ulanga, 25 per cent of the women had become unfit to become pregnant. According to some estimations, one third of the pre-war population had died, with up to 300,000 casualties.³⁰ The ecological consequences of the war triggered an expansion of the tsetse-infected parts of the country because the flies followed game which migrated to the depopulated regions. Thus, the German authorities had 'deliberately inflicted conditions of life calculated to bring about the physical destruction' of other ethnic groups, as the ICL genocide concept requires. But did they do this because of the intent to destroy these groups in whole or in part? Here again, as already demonstrated in the case of the Nama deportees, the fate of these groups' elites is crucial. There is no written evidence of an order that would point to such an intent by at least one of the German commanders or a possible member of a Joint Criminal Enterprise. Even the decision to apply scorched-earth policy in the colony cannot be attributed to one central order; instead, it was rather the

²⁷ Quoted according to Karl-Martin Seeberg, *Der Maji-Maji Krieg gegen die deutsche Kolonialherrschaft. Historische Ursprünge nationaler Identität in Tansania* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1989), p. 79, who relies

on Gustav Adolf von Götzen, *Deutsch-Ostafrika im Aufstand 1905–1906* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1909), p. 149.

²⁸ For example, the superintendent of the Berlin Mission, C. Schumann, wrote in an affidavit to the military outpost in Iringa (19 January 1901): 'The enemy refuses to hand himself in. He can only be overwhelmed by hunger'. BArch, R 1001/724, p. 66.

²⁹ Seeberg, *Der Maji-Maji Krieg*, pp. 80–82.

³⁰ Susanne Kuß, *Deutsches Militär auf kolonialen Kriegsschauplätzen. Eskalation von Gewalt zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: CH. Links Verlag, 2010), pp. 111–12. There were only a few casualties on the German side: 15 white soldiers, 389 African soldiers and 66 porters died.

result of several initiatives by commanders in German East Africa and the result of the escalation of violence.³¹ There is some circumstantial evidence suggesting that the German administration wanted to destroy not only the members of the hostile ethnic groups but also the entire groups themselves by depriving them of their elites and leadership. In November 1905, von Götzen issued an order regulating the duties to be imposed on surrendering insurgent groups and villages. The first condition was the surrender of the local leaders (of the uprising) and those whom the German authorities referred to as 'the wizards', i.e., those who spread the Maji-Maji cult.³² The order to the commanders in the field does not specify how these people were to be treated, but from the entirety of the records one may conclude with little doubt that it was expected that they would be executed, which would likely deprive the respective ethnic groups of their traditional leaders. This was not justified as a means of shattering the traditional order but as a punishment for participating in the uprising. Groups which had stayed away from the Maji-Maji were not repressed at all. From the beginning of the Maji-Maji uprising, the traditional leaders of the affected groups were targeted deliberately, and the war led to the extinction of 'a whole generation, whose members had learned to think in categories which exceeded the horizon of their own tribe', as Seeberg puts it.³³ 'The Africans not only lost their traditional groups of rulers, as far as they had participated in the uprising, their very existence was threatened because of the destruction of villages, harvests and stocks'. Because of the German war strategy, some groups also were deported to other parts of the country – a case of 'forcible transfer' which would today be punishable either as a war crime (if committed during a war and against belligerents) or as a crime against humanity (if carried out against a civilian population, which was the dominant pattern in German East Africa).³⁴ Economic considerations rather than ideology motivated the punishment. Some authors who reject the genocide claim with respect to East Africa argue that the German authorities had no economic interest in exterminating tribes under their jurisdiction because they needed them as workers. But this is wrong for several reasons: it assumes genocide to be a rational strategy from which a perpetrator can expect material benefits, and it neglects the existence of irrational genocides committed on the basis of ideological motivations (like, for example, racism, communism or extreme nationalism).

³¹ KuIS, *Deutsches Militär*, p. 120.

³² Befehl an die Truppenführer im Aufstandsgebiet, 11.9.1905, BArch, R 1001.724, p. 119 and BArch, R 1001.728, p. 16.

³³ Seeberg, *Der Maji-Maji Krieg*, p. 89.

³⁴ KuIS, *Deutsches Militär*, p. 124.

The case of the Maji-Maji uprising illustrates the paradox behind these popular and widespread understandings of the genocide concept. Quashing the uprising caused many more casualties than von Trotha's campaign in German South West Africa and it clearly had genocidal consequences for the affected population. Large parts of the traditional leadership of the ethnic groups and tribes were destroyed by the German war conduct; however, because it is not (yet) possible to prove the genocidal intent of the perpetrators, the atrocities and mass murders, the scorched-earth policy, and the attempt to quell the uprising through starvation, they must be regarded as war crimes (punishable under Hague II) or – if one wants to apply a modern legal concept – as a crime against humanity in so far as it was directed at the civilian population. But if there is no proof of the existence of a Joint Criminal Enterprise among the German elites and of at least one participant with a genocidal *mens rea*, the mass murder in German East Africa cannot be regarded as genocide.³⁵ The Germans did kill many leaders of the groups which rose against them, but there is no proof they did so to destroy these groups 'in part or in whole'. In many cases they killed leaders to punish them or eradicate them as potential security threats. Therefore, genocidal intent is easier to prove in the case of the Wahehe campaign a few years earlier.

THE CASE OF THE BUSHMEN

The high casualty numbers and the devastation during the quashing of the Maji-Maji uprising are usually presented as the result of a spiral of military escalation which was triggered by partisan warfare and led to war crimes committed by both sides. Some authors interpret the low-intensity repressions of the Bushmen in German South-West Africa, which took place after the wars against the Nama and the Herero, as another genocide. For example, Robert J. Gordon even wrote about several allegedly forgotten 'Bushman genocides', basing his claims mainly on records from the National Archive of Namibia in Windhoek.³⁶

German accounts of colonial violence in Namibia which focus on the more widespread persecutions against the Nama and the Herero people

³⁵ It is possible to invoke the concept of 'culpable acts' as indication of genocidal intent from the judgement in the trial between the prosecutor and Krstić (IT-98-33), but that would exclude the use of the JCE III concept because 'culpable acts' cannot be regarded as elements of a joint plan and the (potential) other participants in the plan cannot not know about them before they take place. For the argument in the Maji-Maji context see: Klaus Bachmann and Gerhard Kemp, 'Was Quashing the Maji-Maji Uprising Genocide? An Evaluation of Germany's Conduct through the Lens of International Criminal Law', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 35.2 (2021), 235–49.

³⁶ Robert J. Gordon, 'Hiding in Full View: The "Forgotten" Bushman Genocides of Namibia', *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*, 4.1 (2009), 28–57. See also: Robert J. Gordon, *The Bushmen Myth: The Making of a Namibian Underclass* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992).

often neglect the Bushmen. Compared to the Herero and the Nama, the San³⁷ were more vulnerable and had much weaker polities. They lived in relatively small groups and made a living from hunting and gathering. They were the object of various stereotypes among other groups, both white and native, who regarded them as unreliable, unpredictable, empowered by magic, but at the same time as very knowledgeable about and adapted to the conditions of the bush. The Herero, the Nama, and the Germans feared them because of their use of poisoned spears and arrows and their ability to move almost undetected in the bush, but they also admired them for their endurance, their supreme knowledge of geography and animal life, and their abilities as pathfinders. Without a central authority comparable to the chieftaincies of the Nama and the Herero, they were unable to respond jointly to dangers, but they also were much more difficult to control and steer. When the German authorities introduced their notorious pass and control regulations, which subordinated the surviving Nama and Herero to German farmers' labour needs, the Bushmen became a disturbing factor in the new system. The Bushmen were subjected to comprehensive control, which criminalized any attempt to pursue a life outside of the German regulations and the German-controlled labour market. Those who refused to carry passes (which restricted their mobility) and work for German settlers were regarded as outlaws. German farmers, wary of a new uprising and full of fear of the remnants of the Herero and the Nama fighters who roamed parts of the country in search for food, animals and weapons, often shot at Bushmen. After the quashing of the Nama and the Herero uprising, the number of *Schutztruppen* soldiers was reduced, but the colony then created a police force which tried to rein in Bushmen who refused to register and work for settlers.

But it was not only the German post-uprising policy that put pressure on the Bushmen. The Grootfontein district, a Bushmen stronghold, saw the development of a strong mining sector after 1908 which attracted many workers from outside – Ovambo recruited from the North and even immigrants from Transvaal and the Cape. At the same time, Nama were resettled from the south to the Grootfontein District. As herders of small cattle, they occupied the same landscape the Bushmen used for hunting, and the mere existence of so many other newcomers reduced the area available to the Bushmen even more. They did what the Nama had done when their polities had been destroyed by the German war effort: they started to raid the environment and make a living from banditry. There are records

³⁷ San is today's ethnic label for the Bushmen.

of Bushmen robbing farmers and traders; there were also cases in which Ovambo mine workers were assaulted and robbed.³⁸

There were two kinds of responses to this 'Bushman problem'. The first was blind and irrational retaliation by farmers, who often started to shoot at Bushmen as if they were game. There are no indications that Bushmen hunting was more than the sum of individual acts of violence undertaken by farmers. There are no traces pointing to collective action by farmers, and there is no indication of the existence of a plan to exterminate the Bushmen as a group.

The second attempt to solve the 'Bushman problem' was more bureaucratic and was aimed at deterring Bushmen raids and preventing vicious and indiscriminate attacks against them. It had two main objectives: to limit or eradicate the security threat which some Bushmen posed, and to protect the Bushmen from excessive violence by the farmers and the police. In other words, it was an attempt to establish and strengthen the state's monopoly of violence over the colony with regard to the Bushmen. In 1911, the Government in Windhuk issued a regulation which allowed the police to destroy Bushmen settlements (the so-called 'werften') only if the respective Bushmen had stolen cattle or assaulted workers or farmers.

Contrary to Gordon's claim that 'Bushman genocides' had taken place in Namibia before World War I, it was the policy of the German authorities to preserve the Bushmen as a group. There is no single document showing genocidal intent from representatives of the German state in the colony; at most, there is some evidence that indicates genocidal thinking by farmers. However, there was no widespread and systematic attack on the Bushmen population that could be construed as a framework which would make individual acts of violence genocidal. Instead, the German administration moderated the farmers' calls to eradicate the Bushmen and tried its best to preserve them as a potential source of labour for the colony's economy. This does not exclude incidental violence, personal retaliation during Bushmen raids (in which farmers who had been robbed were often allowed to participate), and atrocities against Bushmen. But it does exclude genocide in the sense of ICL.

³⁸ Lüderitzer Minenkammer an Kaiserliches Gouvernement Windhuk, 29 April 1912, National Archives of Namibia, Gouvernementsakten W1102, betr. Buschleute speciala. The background of the intervention was fear of the mines; the Bushmen raids would deter Ovambo from migrating to the mines and thus exacerbate the labour shortage.

CONCLUSIONS

There can be no doubt about the cruelty and arbitrariness which guided the policy of the German colonial authorities when they dealt with the Herero, the Nama, the Bushmen, and the various ethnic groups involved in the Maji-Maji uprising, and one is tempted to call all these actions, which caused so much pain and so many casualties, 'genocidal' just because of their often-genocidal consequences for the victim groups. However, in the light of modern ICL, in East Africa and with regard to the Bushmen in South West Africa, no genocide took place and even the war campaign which the Germans waged against the Herero and the Nama was not genocidal. Genocide occurred only later, in the camps and during the deportations, and it caused far fewer victims than the fighting before. Actually, most casualties in all these cases were victims of war crimes or – if we want to apply a modern concept which did not yet exist back then – crimes against humanity. This, however, should not be a normative assessment: the Maji-Maji campaign was not better (or less cruel) than the war against the Herero and the Nama just because it does not (or not entirely) deserve the genocide label. The same is true if we reverse this logic: persecuting the Nama and the Herero in camps and sending them to other countries where they had no chance of surviving was not worse than shooting unarmed surrendering Herero belligerents during the war.

Crimes against humanity and war crimes can be crueller than genocide and can also cost more lives. Applying the legal genocide notion to real-world cases from the past neither diminishes nor increases their gravity or repugnance. This notion's purpose is twofold: to obtain a means to distinguish different cases of mass violence, and to avoid a normatively driven inflationary use of the genocide label, which threatens to deprive this notion of any precise meaning, making it instead a tool for victims' groups (and sometimes perpetrator communities) in the fight for access to scarce resources and symbolic capital.

If an inflation of genocides in history and social science must be avoided, then these disciplines need to apply a coherent, non-tautological, comprehensive, and relatively precise notion of genocide. So far, there is none, and almost all attempts to apply the genocide concept in these areas are tainted by their authors' academic or even political or ideologically motivated interest to either prove or disprove that something was genocide. In these cases, the underlying purpose of the definition of genocide is not to enable us to distinguish one massacre from another but to prove that a massacre which an author wants to be a genocide actually was one. The opposite also happens, in which case the author uses a genocide concept of his own making which is tailored in accordance to his wish to prove

that a massacre was not a case of genocide. Open-ended argumentation is scarce in this field, and almost every genocide definition (if an author bases his argument on a definition and does not fail to provide one at all) is tainted by the result which its author wants to achieve. It is an eristic tool rather than an instrument which enables us to distinguish between different kinds of massacres and cases of mass violence.

If historians want to avoid this, they need to adopt the only concept which is currently available, is rooted in law and jurisprudence, and is narrow and precise enough to provide them with a tool for the unbiased assessment of mass violence. This would make it clear that the number or percentage of victims is irrelevant for a genocide finding and that it is the perpetrators' intentions, plans and interactions that are more important than the cruelty of their (or their executors') actions and the damage they did to the victims.

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RUSSIA AND THE US IN THE MIRRORS OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH

ABSTRACT

The article offers a comparative analysis of Russian and American scholarship on each other states and society. The author overviews the study of US history in Russia, the study of Russian history in the US, the study of the history of Russian-American relations, and the discourse of each country on the contemporary political reality in the other. Both Russian and the US research agendas demonstrated some degree of dependence of the other country's policies, they were engaged in a limited dialogue, but most heavily they were influenced by domestic politics. The author claims also that the image of Russia in the United States and the image of America in Russia play important roles in the home debates making it difficult to separate foreign policy from domestic disputes. Such a vantage point calls for the use of the social constructivist approach to the study of the US – Russian relations with its heavier focus on identity construction and nation-building.

KEYWORDS:

US-Russian relations, US history, Russian history, study of the other, enemy studies, area studies, constructivism in IR

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The study of Russia and the USSR in the US and the study of the United States of America in the Soviet Union and Russia were some of the first examples of 'area studies' in the contemporary world.¹ Given the additional impetus provided by the Cold War, 'enemy studies' embraced a wide range of not only social sciences but also the humanities, and such studies were not necessarily applicable in political or even military planning. The institutional and discursive legacy of these area studies survived the Cold War, although scholars engaged in studies of the other country have had a difficult time. The reasons for this are different in Russia and the United States.

The overlapping of Russian and American historical and related political science can be divided into the study of US history in Russia, the study of Russian history in the US, the study of the history of Russian-American relations, and analysis in one country of the contemporary political reality in the other. For obvious reasons, the latter analysis is most in demand among political elites, who spend the most time on it. It should be noted, however, that political analysis often relies on knowledge of the other country's history (recall George Kennan's classic text 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct', which explained contemporary Soviet politics by describing the problems that Russia had faced throughout its history). This is why the role of advisers to American presidents on relations with the Soviet Union was performed not only by political scientists but also by reputable historians such as Richard Pipes.

This article is an overview of the state of each of these three fields in terms of their mutual influence and dialogue. It offers an explanatory framework for knowledge about the Other in Russian and American societies.

EXPLORING THE HISTORY OF THE OTHER

Let us begin with the interrelations between these two scholarly communities' historians' knowledge of the research on their own history conducted in the other country. There has been a clear and growing role of American scholarship in Russian-American academic relations in recent decades.

The history education researcher James Leuven once (in the early 2000s) made a statement which seems paradoxical at first glance: 'It would be better for the USA if American history textbooks were written

¹ On the links between the emergence of area studies and the outbreak of the Cold War, see: David C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts* (Oxford University Press, 2009); Guido Franzinetti, 'The Strange Death of Area Studies and the Normative Turn', *Quaderni Storici*, 50.150 (3) (2015), 835–47.

by experts from another country'.² Apparently, this American scholar assumed that the outside view was not distorted by inner political conflicts and passions, therefore history written abroad can be more objective. When countries have been in a state of rivalry for a long time, however, or when one country has been a key benchmark for the other in internal political disputes, historians are under pressure by this agenda and find it difficult to remain impartial. This is not to say that historians become involved in political disputes on one side of a political conflict (although this is also not uncommon), but even objective works by historians are often interpreted in a political sense when emotions are high. Whether Leuven was right or not, it is almost impossible to use textbooks written by foreigners to study one's own history. I know of only one such instance: in the very early 1990s, when *Histoire de l'Union soviétique* (History of the Soviet State, 1992),³ written by the French historian Nicolas Vert, was officially recommended as a school textbook in Russia. Moreover, the opinions of Russian scholars about the problems of American history are virtually unknown in the United States, even though Russia is still one of the largest hubs of historians who specialise in American history outside of the English-speaking world.⁴ It must be said that some of the relative freedom of expression that scholars in the other country enjoy makes it rather difficult for their own citizens to be aware of these freedoms. For example, a leading Russian expert on American history, Vladimir V. Sogrin, Head of the Centre for North American Studies at the Institute of World History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, described the advantages of the view from abroad as follows:

Experts from other countries who study US history from the outside have certain advantages in taking an unbiased scholarly stance. There is an issue with so-called *political correctness* in American historiography.⁵

It is unlikely that a politically incorrect version of American history written in Russia would be in demand in the US nowadays.

Back in the 1980s and 1990s, several volumes of *Russian-American Dialogues* inspired by *perestroika* and interest in Russia were published in the United States. These collections pursued the idea of introducing American readers to works on key issues of US history written in Russian by Russian authors. The issues were devoted to Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, the American War of Independence, the history of Russian-American cultural relations, and the history of American political parties.

² Džeims V. Lēven, 'Prepodavat' podlinnuju istoriju', *Amerikanskij ežegodnik*, 2005 (2007), 167–79.

³ Nikolja Vert, *Istorija Sovetskogo gosudarstva. 1900–1991* (Moskva: Progress-Akademija, 1992).

⁴ See: *Historians across Borders*, ed. by Nicolas Barreyre and others, 1st edn (University of California Press, 2014).

⁵ Vladimir V. Sogrin, *Istoričeskij opyt SŠA* (Moskva: Nauka, 2010), p. 17.

Each article was translated by a Soviet scholar (the editors selected articles published in the USSR) and was accompanied by a commentary by an American historian. The first issue was published back in 1989; the last, the fourth one, was published in 2000.⁶ The selection of articles for translation is a disputable issue as they were not always the best examples of Soviet and Russian historiography. Still, the very fact that these collections of articles were published shows interest in the works of Russian scholars among the American academic community.

Apparently, the American academic community tends to believe that decades of ideological dictate in Soviet historical scholarship and scarce research funding in post-Soviet Russia make it impossible for interesting studies of American history to emerge in this country.

It is noteworthy that Sogrin, whose articles were selected for the above-mentioned project, was very critical of the state of Russian-American historical dialogue that was revealed in the aforementioned volumes. In his subsequent article, published in English, he lamented the fact that American authors believed that 'Russian historians can't say anything that Americans do not already know'. He also mentioned: 'The mentor tone, an indicator of messianic consciousness and sense of national superiority [...] typical of American scholars in their analysis of Russian society today'.⁷ One may disagree with these bitter statements but they are not true of all American historians. Still, the underestimation of the accumulated work of Russian historical scholarship would be a mistake.

It could be expected that – given the lifting of ideological constraints and access to the press, monographs and archives of the other country – the quality of research would improve and the dialogue on American history could continue. In practice, however, such public dialogue between the two historiographies has been non-existent in the last two decades.

At the same time, dozens of books by American scholars on both US and Russian history have been published in Russia in the years since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the 1990s, a number of books were translated and published with the financial support of the US Embassy. Subsequently, such initiatives were supported by various scientific foundations. It is noteworthy that the US Embassy has provided Russian translations of classic American consensus history books. In the last decade, Russian publishers have been vigorously publishing translations of

⁶ *Soviet-American Dialogue on the New Deal*, ed. by Otis Livingston Graham Jr. (University of Missouri, 1989); *Russian-American Dialogue on the American Revolution*, ed. by Gordon S. Wood (University of Missouri, 1995); *Russian-American Dialogue on Cultural Relations, 1776–1914*, ed. by Norman E. Saul and Richard D. McKinzie (University of Missouri Press, 1996); *Russian-American Dialogue on the History of U.S. Political Parties*, ed. by Joel H. Silbey (University of Missouri Press, 2000).

⁷ Vladimir V. Sogrin, 'Contemporary Dialogue of Russian and American Historiographies', in *Russian/Soviet Studies in the United States, Amerikanistika in Russia. Mutual Representations in Academic Projects*, ed. by Ivan Kurilla and Victoria I. Zhuravleva (Lanham: Lexington, 2016), pp. 231–42 (pp. 234–35).

radical authors who are critical of American society in a variety of ways. However, there are also academic translation projects of American experts on Russia. Noteworthy are the three-volume compilations of articles on Russian history by American authors published in Samara in the early 2000s;⁸ the book series 'Sovremennaya zapadnaya rusistika' (Contemporary Western Russian Studies, 2001) published by the Academic Studies Press;⁹ and numerous translations of monographs by American authors published by Russian publishers (especially by the publishing house Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye).¹⁰

Thus, an asymmetry can be observed: works on US history and on Russian history written by American authors reach Russia and are translated and studied. Works on US history written in Russia do not reach the United States and are not within the academic interest of American scholars. Actually, there has been no bilateral discussion between Russian and American historians on US history since the publication of *Russian-American Dialogues* was discontinued.

EXPLORING THE HISTORY OF RUSSIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS

The dialogue between Russian and American scholars (in both languages) continues to develop when it comes to the study of Russia as well as works on the history of Russian-American relations and the history of Russian America.

The most notable changes have occurred in the community of historians specialising in the Cold War period. This is the area of the closest cooperation between researchers from the two countries. Since the publication of a book on the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis by a Soviet scholar of an older generation, Aleksandr A. Fursenko, in co-authorship with the American Timothy Naftali,¹¹ it has been clear that works based on the study of documents from both sides and taking into account the logic of

⁸ *Amerikanskaya rusistika: vechi istoriografii poslednich let. Period Kievskoj i Moskovskoj Rusi. Antologija*, ed. by Džordž P. Madžeska (Samara: Izdatel'stvo Samarskogo universiteta, 2001); *Amerikanskaya rusistika: vechi istoriografii poslednich let. Imperatorskij period. Antologija*, ed. by Majkl Dèvid-Foks (Samara: Izdatel'stvo Samarskogo universiteta, 2000); *Amerikanskaya rusistika: vechi istoriografii poslednich let. Sovetskij period*, ed. by Majkl Dèvid-Foks (Samara: Izdatel'stvo Samarskogo universiteta, 2001).

⁹ *Izdatel'stvo Bibliorossika / Academic Studies Press, series: Sovremennaja zapadnaja rusistika*, 2021 <<https://www.bibliorossicapress.com/%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%8F>> [accessed 15 January 2022].

¹⁰ See, for example: Džejms Billington, *Ikona i topor. Opyt istolkovanija istorii russkoj kul'tury* (Moskva: Rudomino, 2011); Èrik Lor, *Rossijskoe graždanstvo: Ot Imperii k Sovetskemu Sojuzu* (Moskva: NLO, 2017); Majkl Dèvid-Foks, *Pereseckaja granicy: Modernost', ideologija i kul'tura v Rossii i Sovetskom Sojuze* (Moskva: NLO, 2020), etc.

¹¹ Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble: The Secret History of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997). There are two translations and several editions of this book in Russian: Aleksandr A. Fursenko and Timoti Naftali, *Adskaja igra: sekretnaja istorija karibskogo krizisa 1958–1964* (Moskva: Geja, 2001); Aleksandr A. Fursenko and Timoti Naftali, *Bezumnyj risk: Sekretnaja istorija kubinskogo raketnogo krizisa 1962 goda* (Moskva: ROSSPÈN, 2006).

both American and Soviet elites are more interesting than those based on the archives of only one side.

The volume edited by Kieron Skinner and prefaced by people who were at one point close to the decision-making centre (George Schultz and Pavel Palazhchenko¹²) is an example of a compilation of articles on the history of the Cold War. It includes articles by politicians and political scientists from both countries and is organised in the form of a debate: each article is accompanied by a commentary by the 'other side'.

Prominent scholars proposed their own interpretations of the Cold War at the beginning of the new century, sometimes revisiting the conclusions of their earlier studies.¹³ Still, most noteworthy are new works in which the focus of the study of the Cold War shifts from strategic rivalry to cultural interactions and to the impact of the Cold War on the domestic politics of these two countries. This methodological shift occurred simultaneously in both American and Russian historical scholarship.¹⁴

While the history of the Cold War attracts comparable attention in both countries, the preceding period of cooperation between these two countries during the Second World War is of markedly greater interest to Russian historians than to their American counterparts. This may be explained by the quasi-ideological role that the history of the Great Patriotic War plays in contemporary Russia. At the same time, reference to the period of Soviet–American cooperation is a reminder of an alternative to the state of confrontation in which Russian–American relations find themselves today. The history of the establishment and operation of the coalition of the Allies – personified in the interactions between Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill – as well as the history of the Lend-Lease policy are of greatest interest to historians.¹⁵

Finally, the history of Russia–US relations from the eighteenth century to the early twentieth century has attracted the attention only of not

¹² *Turning Points in Ending the Cold War*, ed. by Kieron K. Skinner (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2008).

¹³ See, for example: John L. Gaddis, *The Cold War: a New History* (Penguin Books, 2005); Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007). In Russia, such a generalising work was published by Vladimir Batjuk: Vladimir I. Batjuk, *Cholodnaja vojna meždu SSA i SSSR (1945–1991 gg): Očerki istorii* (Moskva: Ves' mir, 2018).

¹⁴ Jennifer M. Hudson, *Iron Curtain Twitchers: Russo-American Cold War Relations* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019); Rósa Magnúsdóttir, *Enemy Number One: The United States of America in Soviet Ideology and Propaganda, 1945–1959* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Cadra Peterson McDaniel, *American-Soviet Cultural Diplomacy: The Bolshoi Ballet's American Premiere* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015); Toby C. Rider, *Cold War Games: Propaganda, the Olympics, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2016). See also: Eduard I. Ivanjan, *Kogda govoriat muzy. Istorija rossijsko-amerikanskich kul'turnych svyazej* (Moskva: Meždunarodnye otnošenija, 2007); Eduard Ja. Batalov, Viktorija Ju. Žuravleva, and Ksenija V. Chozinskaja, "Ryčaščij medved'" na "dikom Vostoke": *Obrazy sovremennoj Rossii v rabotach amerikanskich avtorov. 1992–2007* (Moskva: ROSSPĖN, 2009). Quite a number of young scholars have defended dissertations on this subject. See, for example: Anastasija S. Kurljandceva, 'Chudožestvennye svyazi SSA i SSSR v 1950–1970-e gody: chudožniki, politiki, vystavki' (unpublished thesis for the defence of a candidate of sciences degree, HSE University, 2021).

¹⁵ See Robert F. Ivanov, *Stalin i sojuzniki. 1941–1945 gody* (Moskva: Veče, 2005); Vladimir O. Pečatnov, *Stalin, Ruzvelt, Truměn: SSSR i SSA v 1940-ch gg.* (Moskva: Terra, 2006); Michail N. Suprun, *Lend-liz i severnye konvoi, 1941–1945* (Izdatel'stvo Andreevskij flag, 1997); Irina V. Bystrova, *Poceluj čerez okean: «Bol'saja trojka» v svete ličnyh kontaktov (1941–1945 gg.)* (Moskva: ROSSPĖN, 2011); Irina V. Bystrova, *Lend-liz dlja SSSR. Ekonomika, tehnika, ljudi* (Moskva: Kučkovo pole, 2019), etc.

historians who have a positivist approach to collecting new data in archives and describing new details of these bilateral relations, but also their colleagues who apply constructivist approaches to historical research.¹⁶ In addition, the history of Russian America is another field of research in which both American and Russian scholars have long worked together.¹⁷

It can be argued that the history of Russian-American relations has already become a field of joint research. The *Journal of Russian American Studies*, which has a joint Russian-American editorial team,¹⁸ has been published since 2017.

CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH

Let me open this section with a non-academic digression. Almost a quarter of a century ago, in the autumn of 1997, while working at the Kennan Institute in Washington, I read articles about Russia regularly in American newspapers over several months. It was a new experience for me. I soon discovered that, although I could usually agree with the conclusions of the articles, I could not accept the line of arguments of their authors as they seemed detached from Russian reality. The conclusions about the need to democratise Russia and further integrate it into the world community and about the importance of fighting corruption (which was a hot topic in the American media that year) resonated with my views.¹⁹ However, the way American authors reached these normative conclusions showed, it seemed to me, little familiarity with the subject.

A few years later, as a member of the PONARS international academic network, I started regularly reading works about Russia written by American academics. I discovered that participants of the debates possessed advanced expert knowledge, and I heard a lot of interesting things about

¹⁶ See, in particular: Viktorija I. Žuravleva, *Ponimanie Rossii v SŠA: obrazy i mify, 1881–1914* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo RGGU, 2012); Ivan I. Kurilla, *Zaokeanskije partnery: Amerika i Rossija v 1830–1850-e gody* (Volgograd: Izdatel'stvo VolGU, 2005); David C. Foglesong, *The American Mission and the 'Evil Empire': The Crusade for a 'Free Russia' since 1881* (Cambridge University Press, 2007). Both Russian and American researchers study interesting individual topics: Dmitrij M. Nečiporuk, *Vo imja nigilizma: Amerikanskoe obščestvo družej russkoj svobody i russkaja revoljucionnaja emigracija (1890–1930 gg.)* (Sankt-Peterburg: Nestor-Istorija, 2018); Lee A. Farrow, *Alexis in America. A Russian Grand Duke's Tour, 1871–1872* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014); Matthew L. Miller, *The American YMCA and Russian Culture: The Preservation and Expansion of Orthodox Christianity, 1900–1940* (Lexington, 2012); Norman E. Saul, *The Life and Times of Charles R. Crane, 1858–1939: American Businessman, Philanthropist, and a Founder of Russian Studies in America* (Lexington, 2012); and others.

¹⁷ See, for example: *Istorija Russkoj Ameriki (1732–1867)*, ed. by Nikolaj N. Bolchovitinov, 3 vols (Moskva: Meždunarodnye otnošenija, 1997–1999); Kenneth N. Owens and Alexander Yu. Petrov, *Empire Maker: Aleksandr Baranov and Russian Colonial Expansion into Alaska and Northern California* (University of Washington Press, 2015); Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire, 1804–1867* (Oxford University Press, 2011) (its Russian translation: *Il'ja Vin'koveckij, Russkaja Amerika. Zaokeanskaja kolonija kontinental'noj imperii. 1804–1867* (Moskva: NLO, 2015); and others.

¹⁸ See the journal's website: *Journal of Russian American Studies*, 2021 <<https://journals.ku.edu/jras>> [accessed 10 February 2022].

¹⁹ See, for example: Peter Reddaway, 'The West's Spoilt Russian Son', *New Statesman*, 22 August 1997, 26–27, later developed by the author into the book: Peter Reddaway and Dmitri Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms: Market Bolshevism Against Democracy* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001).

my country for the first time. Academic methods and concepts developed by Western scholars and applied to Russia offered new insights into Russian society and the country's political system, thus achieving a heuristic richness. At the same time, I was under an impression that some of these publications were prepared for the domestic American agenda and had little to do with what was happening in Russia: the hierarchy of issues of interest to American colleagues differed from that of Russian participants in this academic network.

Years later, during Donald Trump's presidency, one could see that the production of balanced scholarly knowledge about Russia was once again put on the back burner: amidst the scandal about 'Russian interference in the election', mainstream American media published articles by journalists and politicians who had a poor understanding of the country they were writing about. The quality of scholarly expert knowledge about Russian society far exceeded the quality of popular journalism at the time, although one could observe misconceptions also among reputable American academics.²⁰

On the other hand, in Russia, perceptions of the USA have always been heavily mythologised. Despite the activity of a large cohort of academics specialising in American studies in the country since Soviet times, political and everyday discourse about America has been entrenched not in works by American scholars but in non-academic literature. Apart from the problem of the low status of academic scholarship in society in general, the Russian view of the United States, like the American view of Russia, can be seen as influenced by the domestic political agenda.

The study of this impact has become a popular scholarly activity in recent years as a sociological view of knowledge production has become widespread, and the study of the Other can be seen as a response to political and social demands.²¹ Thus, for example, there are reasons to believe that American historians' different approaches to Stalinism reflected their views of the ongoing Cold War.²²

²⁰ Thomas Graham, 'Europe's problem is with Russia, not Putin', *Financial Times*, 31 May 2015; Ivan Kurilla, 'To Thomas Graham: We Should Understand Russian History Differently', *PONARS Eurasia – The Program on New Approaches to Research and Security in Eurasia*, 5 June 2015 <<https://www.ponarseurasia.org/to-thomas-graham-we-should-understand-russian-history-differently/>> [accessed 30 January 2022].

²¹ David C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts* (Oxford University Press, 2009); Sergei Zhuk, *Soviet Americana: The Cultural History of Russian and Ukrainian Americanists* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018); Sergei Zhuk, Nikolai Bolkhovitinov and American Studies in the USSR: *People's Diplomacy in the Cold War* (Lanham, MD and Boulder, CO: Lexington Press, 2017); *Russian/Soviet Studies in the United States, Amerikanistika in Russia: Mutual Representations in Academic Projects*, ed. by Ivan Kurilla and Victoria I. Zhuravleva (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2015).

²² See: Mark Edele, *Debates on Stalinism* (Manchester University Press, 2020).

WHAT AFFECTS MUTUAL PERCEPTIONS

Knowledge about the United States of America in Russia and about the USSR and Russia in the USA is shaped by several factors.

The first factor is the cumulative body of knowledge and stereotypes amassed by previous generations of Americans and Russians: scholars, journalists, politicians, and emigrants who took part in shaping perceptions of Russia in America. This body of knowledge – with all its discoveries and misconceptions, prejudices and insights – constitutes the fundamentals and building blocks that shape the contemporary image of the other country.

Second, each country's domestic agenda has an impact on how these two countries perceive each other. For more than a century, Russia and the US have been each other's constituent Other: they use the other to define and redefine themselves. The other country may fulfil the role of an ideal and of a role model for one's own country, although more often the other country and its people are ascribed those traits which certain political forces would like to eradicate at home. Thus, these traits are projected onto the other and are labelled as alien characteristics which are trying to penetrate one's own society.

Third, mutual perceptions are, of course, influenced by both countries' activities in the international arena and their bilateral relations. However, I would not overestimate the importance of this factor, which is often presented as fundamental in works that apply the methodology of 'political realism': experience shows that the choice of images from the repertoire constantly communicated by the other country is primarily governed by the first two factors. Moreover, when a country starts to communicate something new that does not fit into what is already known about it and is not in demand in the internal disputes of the partner, the other society can ignore this novelty for a long time.

Let's take a closer look at these factors.

THE RUSSIAN VIEW OF THE US

Three different and historically entrenched views of America can be distinguished in Russia. The first view is that of revolutionaries or radical reformers, starting with Alexander Radishchev. In Russia, Catherine the Great's words about Radishchev are well known: 'He is a rebel worse than Pugachev'. The empress's statement has a less frequently quoted ending: 'he

praises Franklin as an instigator and sees himself as such'.²³ Radishchev was a rebel because he saw a future of Russia similar to that of America. Of course, the Decembrists who translated the American Constitution, the late-nineteenth-century revolutionaries, and the dissidents who criticised the Soviet regime all belonged to this tradition. For the most part, America was an image of a better world, a utopia, not a real country. Few of its enthusiasts of the time had been there. Therefore, the US was ascribed the characteristics of the ideal that the revolutionaries wanted to instil in Russia; the anarchists saw America as a country with no central government, with local self-government being a decision-maker on all issues. On the contrary, the supporters of centralisation among the Bolsheviks argued that the US was a unitary state without a trace of federalism.²⁴

The second approach is typical of the conservative part of society, namely proponents of a strong, centralised Russian state, who have a tendency to perceive fellow citizens' fascination with the US as a threat, especially when they perceive their own political position at home as fragile. The fact that America served as an ideal for revolutionaries automatically made it a threat for the conservatives even in the nineteenth century, when the United States was in no way able to interfere in Russian affairs and was weak both economically and politically. This was true both of Catherine II, who perceived Franklin, who had fascinated Radishchev, as a threat, and of a Russian diplomat in New York, Alexey Yevstafiev, who described the US in 1852 as a 'bright ignis fatuus, enticing millions to perdition, [...] a wilful bigot sparing none opposing to her, [...] and sowing where she can the Dragon-teeth of Revolution'.²⁵ The perception of America as a threat is reinforced every time the position of the Russian government is shaken. This may explain the suspicious attitude of conservative governments even to academic study of the United States.

Every time the Russian leadership, be it Nicholas I or Dmitry Medvedev, tried to carry out reforms and talk about modernisation, America immediately acquired its third identity: a land of technological marvels from which to borrow technology, economic forms, and even elements

²³ *Pamjatnye zapiski A.V. Chrapovickago, stats-sekretarja imperatricy Ekateriny vtoroj* (Moskva: V/O 'Sojuzteatr', 1990), p. 227. See also: David M. Griffiths, *No Collusion! Catherine the Great and American Independence*, ed. by George E. Munro (Slavica, 2020).

²⁴ The anarchist leader Mikhail Bakunin wrote in 1867: 'We must reject the [French] policy of the State and resolutely embrace the North American policy of freedom'. For Bakunin's views on the US as a country of 'victorious federalism', see Andrej Teslja, 'O ponjatii "federalizm" v social'no-političeskich teorijach M.A. Bakunina', *Sociologičeskoe obozrenie*, 14.3 (2015), 136–52. On the contrary, Stalin argued in 1917 that the US had long turned 'into a unitary (merged) state with unified constitutional norms'. Iosif V. Stalin, 'Protiv federalizma. "Pravda", 28 marta 1917 goda', in *Stalin I.V. Sočinenija* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo političeskoj literatury, 1946), III, pp. 23–31 (p. 24). Clearly, the 'real' US did not coincide with either view, which was only a projection of one's own political projects.

²⁵ The Great Republic Tested by the Touch of Truth (Manuscript), New York, New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division, Aleksyey Grigoryevich Yevstafiev Papers, 1814–1852. See in detail: Ivan Kurilla, 'Debates about Russia, America, and New World Order: Four Books from the 1850s', *Vestnik Volgogradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Serija 4, Istorija. Regionovedenie. Meždunarodnye otnošenija*, 26.5 (2021), 225–31.

of governance. Nicholas I recruited American engineers to build the Moscow–St Petersburg railway. The Bolsheviks invited huge numbers of American specialists to implement industrialisation in the 1930s. Stalin's intelligence officers in the 1940s were all out for US nuclear secrets. Nikita Khrushchev brought home American ideas – from self-service shops to corn cultivation. Even Konstantin Chernenko (the then-head of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) flew to America in 1974 to study modern organisational solutions and their possible application in the USSR. When Mikhail Gorbachev uttered the word 'acceleration', he launched a rapprochement with the US. Finally, when Dmitry Medvedev evoked the notion of 'modernisation', he went to Silicon Valley.

THE AMERICAN VIEW OF RUSSIA

David Foglesong and Victoria Zhuravleva proved that, by the end of the nineteenth century, the United States had developed its own traditions of perceiving Russia. Namely, conservatives saw Russia as a stagnant, conservative country with an authoritarian government living in harmony with a population that expects a paternalistic approach. The American Society of the Friends of Russian Freedom (established at that time) had a different opinion: they saw Russians as a good, democratically minded people oppressed by a repugnant, authoritarian government. Finally, at the same time, a number of American politicians, journalists and translators who were engaged in translating books by Russian writers invited P. A. Tchaikovsky and A. Rubinstein to America, thus creating a 'non-political' image of Russia as a country of high culture. These people are commonly referred to as Russophiles.²⁶

The prominent Russian historian Vladimir O. Pechatnov singles out two approaches to Russia that emerged in the United States in the twentieth century: the so-called Riga and Yalta traditions. The former developed in the 1930s in Riga, which operated as a 'surveillance hub' that monitored the USSR until 1933, when the US finally recognised Soviet Russia. The Yalta tradition was created by the Roosevelt administration in the first half of the 1940s. The former tradition sees Russia as an aggressive power

²⁶ Viktorija I. Žuravleva, and Dëvid S. Foglesong, 'Konstruirovanie obraza Rossii v amerikanskoj političeskoj karikature XX veka', in *Mify i realii amerikanskoj istorii v periodike XVIII–XX vekov*, ed. by Vadim A. Koleneko and others, 3 vols (Moskva: IVI RAN, 2008), I, pp. 189–262.

inherently hostile to the West, while the latter perceives it as a problematic country capable of change under internal and external pressure.²⁷

I believe that the description of the other country in comparison with the 'norm' (represented by one's own society), as was characteristic of the Riga tradition, focuses on the gap between the other country and one's own reference state, and on something that is missing in the society being described. It is from this position that Russia is seen as unwavering in its archetypal values over the centuries (this view was represented by Richard Pipes, who passed away a few years ago). The limited freedoms and the lack of democracy are what has remained unchanged in Russia.

This very notion of a 'norm' triggers enthusiasm that overwhelms American society every time Russia changes, be it the reform of the economy and technical rearmament along American lines, or the revolutionary demolition of the old system. Each time, at the initial stage of these revolutionary changes (in 1905, 1917 and 1991), American observers readily accept the descriptions of events coming from Russian democrats and liberals, who, according to Americans, are trying to turn Russia into a new 'United States', that is, 'to get closer to the norm'.

ASYMMETRY IN STUDYING EACH OTHER

In the United States, the study of the USSR (Russia) has intensified and received more funding and resources at times of deterioration in bilateral relations. Funding has been discontinued during periods of détente/reset. This rule has applied both to universities in the United States that receive public grants and to international think-tanks for Soviet studies sponsored by the United States, such as the Institute for the Study of the USSR, which operated in Munich from 1950 to 1972 and whose funding was terminated with the onset of détente. One of the consequences of the fact that the study of Russia in the US intensifies during periods of poor relations is the anticipatory approach to the publication of books and articles describing Russia as a hostile power.

In the USSR and Russia, US studies have received resources when relations improve and encounter difficulties during periods of poor relations. The USA Institute (now the Institute for US and Canadian Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences) was established in the USSR in anticipation of détente. Newly opened centres of US studies proliferated

²⁷ Vladimir O. Pečatnov, 'O nekotorych konstantach vzaimnogo vosprijatija Rossii/SSSR i SŠA', *Amerikanskij ežegodnik* (2020), 13–20.

in Russia when the confrontation ended in the 1990s, and their number began to decline after 2007.²⁸

The opposite logic that governs the institutionalisation of Russian studies in the US and American studies in Russia can be explained, in my view, by the different roles played by the Other in each country. When the American state sees Russia solely as an external threat, it funds 'enemy studies', but the Russian attitude to the United States is more complex. The Russian state not only (or maybe not so much) sees America as an external military threat but is also afraid that the American example is appealing to Russian citizens; this is precisely what Joseph Nye calls 'soft power'. The liberal-democratic model of governance is attractive to a significant number of Russians and, as such, is a threat to the ruling elites. Thus, studying the US in Russia may be perceived as one way of implanting a hostile model in the country and is therefore restricted at times of confrontation. On the contrary, US studies are encouraged when reforms in Russia are introduced as such research becomes a source of ideas for improving the efficiency of the Russian economy and state governance.

CURRENT PROBLEMS IN RUSSIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS AS SEEN BY EXPERTS

Russia's foreign policy expansion after the beginning of President Putin's third term predetermined a deterioration in Russia-US relations. The annexation of Crimea and support for separatists in eastern Ukraine created all the conditions necessary to perceive Russia as an aggressor. The real earthquake to hit American media came as late as 2016 and involved allegations of the Kremlin's interference in the US election in favour of Donald Trump. The response to the apparent violations of international law from outside of American domestic politics was relatively mild. When Trump's opponents realised they could link him to Russia, however, the Democrats immediately used this hypothetical link as a tool to put pressure on him. On the eve of the 2020 election, a debate about Russia and the proper attitude to it unfolded in the public space of American politics, in which several positions arose. The main arguments were outlined in a series of open letters published on the website of the influential *Politico*. Let us examine

²⁸ See: Ivan I. Kurilla and Victoria I. Zhuravleva, 'Teaching U.S. History in Russia: Issues, Challenges, and Prospects', *The Journal of American History*, 96.4 (2010), 1138–44.

them in more detail as examples of a combination of lasting stereotypes and the current agenda of American Russian studies.

The first letter was published on 5 August 2020 under the title 'It's Time to Rethink Our Russia Policy'.²⁹ The letter was written by six 'heavy-weights' of US foreign policy: Rose Gottemoeller, the then-US Undersecretary of State and Deputy Secretary General of NATO; Thomas Graham, a former assistant to President George W. Bush and Director for Russia and Eurasia at the US National Security Council; Fiona Hill, an assistant to President Donald Trump for Russian and European affairs until very recently; Jon Huntsman, US Ambassador to Russia in 2017–19; Robert Legvold, Professor at Columbia University; and Thomas Pickering, US Ambassador to Russia from 1993 to 1996, former Undersecretary of State and former US Representative to the UN.

The letter was also signed by 103 experts, including a former Secretary of State, a former Secretary of Defence, senators, two other former ambassadors to Russia, and a host of other experts and professors.

In the letter, the current state of Russia–US relations was described as a 'dangerous dead end' that leaves 'the existential threats of nuclear war and climate change unattended'. Having enumerated Russia's wrongdoings that are traditionally listed by American experts (seizing territory from Georgia and Ukraine, challenging America's role as world leader, challenging the world order constructed by the US, and interfering in American domestic politics to deepen the divide and undermine its democratic reputation), the authors stated that despite the need to confront all these issues the US must 'engage Russia through negotiations out of the public glare, focused on each side's capabilities to do great damage to the other side's critical infrastructure'.

Experts believe that, strategy-wise, the US should return to the policy it pursued during the Cold War: 'a balanced commitment to deterrence and détente'. Concrete proposals include stepping up work on extending the New START Treaty and maintaining confidence-building measures in Europe (such as the Open Skies Treaty). The authors pay special attention to Russia's possible role as an ally in the event of increased tensions in US–China relations: 'Our current policies reinforce Russia's readiness to align with the least constructive aspects of China's U.S. policy. Moving the needle in the opposite direction will not be easy but should be our objective'.

The authors also drew attention to the fact that the sanctions adopted by Congress were no longer working, while the accumulation of

²⁹ Rose Gottemoeller and others, 'It's Time to Rethink Our Russia Policy', *Politico*, 5 August 2020 <<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/08/05/open-letter-russia-policy-391434>> [accessed 14 February 2022].

sanctions made it difficult for diplomats to work, hence the 'need to restore flexibility to our sanctions regime'.

In the concluding part of the letter, the authors expressed their belief that 'Russia, under Vladimir Putin, operates within a strategic framework deeply rooted in nationalist traditions that resonate with elites and the public alike. An eventual successor [to Putin], even one more democratically inclined, will likely operate within this same framework'. Therefore, US policy cannot be devised with the aim of changing this framework: 'We must deal with Russia as it is, not as we wish it to be'.

Less than a week later, *Politico* published a response to the first open letter which undermined its main points. The second open letter, titled 'No, Now Is Not the Time for Another Russia Reset', was written by David Kramer, a US Assistant Secretary of State from 2008 to 2009 and former President of Freedom House.³⁰ His letter was signed by 33 US politicians and diplomats, including former US ambassadors to Poland, the Czech Republic and Ukraine. The message is apparent from the title: Now is not the time for a new reset. Instead, 'the actions and behaviour of Vladimir Putin's regime pose a threat to American interests and values, requiring strong pushback'. The author insisted that any policy addressing Russia should clearly state that 'the main responsibility lies with the Putin regime' when it comes to the dire state of current Russia–US relations. Similarly to the authors of the first letter, Kramer enumerated the main crimes committed by the Russian regime. Additionally, he listed 'shooting down a civilian airliner resulting in the deaths of 298 passengers and crew' and killings of 'Russian critics in Western countries with highly dangerous radioactive and chemical agents'. Until Putin admits his guilt, 'further dialogue won't go very far'.

The author of the letter rejected any 'trade-offs' with Russia when it comes to NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine, Russia's control over Crimea, or 'ignoring the ugly human rights situation inside Russia'. Such an approach contradicts 'America's values, interests and principles'. Kramer also disagreed with the first letter's opinion that Putin's strategic framework is rooted in the Russian nationalist tradition, recalling that the majority of Russians, according to polls, do not perceive the US as an enemy.

According to Kramer, American policy towards Russia must rely on cooperation with allies, 'especially NATO and the European Union'. US policy should focus on containing the Russian threat, differentiating between the Russian regime and the Russian people, maintaining and enhancing

³⁰ David J. Kramer, 'No, Now Is Not the Time for Another Russia Reset', *Politico*, 11 August 2020 <<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/08/11/russia-reset-response-open-letter-393176>> [accessed 07 February 2022].

sanctions, and bolstering 'Russia's neighbours through military, diplomatic and economic support'. 'America should signal our readiness to work with a Russian government only when it is clear that Moscow doesn't view the United States as the enemy'. Until that point, 'we must avoid pointless, endless dialogue that never resolves problems'.

A few days later, *Politico* published two more letters urging the US elite to take a tough stance on Russia.³¹ Finally, the authors of the first letter responded to their critics.³² The authors of the third and fourth letters published on *Politico's* website were politicians and experts from Eastern Europe and Ukraine, i.e., their views cannot be attributed to the American expert debate. Still, having contributed to it with their letters, they participated in the debate, using the opportunity to express their stance and their concerns. Remarkably, the point of view of the Russians – both pro-governmental and opposition-minded – was missing from the debate. Judging by the fact that no open letter from Russia appeared on *Politico* or any other online platform, it is not a matter of refusal to publish but of a lack of desire on the part of Russians to engage in a debate about US policy towards their country. As a result, Russia only serves as an object of the application of American policy as early as at the stage of discussion of possible options, while Eastern European and Ukrainian perspectives are integrated into this discussion.

It is noteworthy that the American experts who have an alternative, third view of Russia–US relations did not take part in this debate. This is *Nation* weekly magazine's circle of contributors. To understand their approach, one may refer to an article published by this magazine in July 2020. David Foglesong, a professor at Rutgers University, wrote: 'The demonization of Russia is driven by the desire to deflect attention from misconduct by the United States, to affirm American moral superiority in contrast to Russian depravity, and to smear domestic political opponents by associating them with Russia'.³³ *Nature's* renowned authors, including the prominent scholar Professor Stephen Cohen, who passed away in the autumn of 2020, have called for abandoning the Cold War approach and moving to planning a future without confrontation between the two states.

³¹ Sławomir Dębski, James Sherr, and Jakub Janda, 'Take It From Eastern Europe: Now Is Not the Time to Go Soft on Russia', *Politico*, 31 August 2020, <<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/08/31/open-letter-not-time-to-go-soft-on-russia-405266>> [accessed 25 December 2021]; Ariana Gic, Hanna Hopko, and Roman Sohn, 'Appeasing Vladimir Putin's Russia Will Only Embolden It', *Politico*, 25 September 2020, <<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/09/25/open-letter-russia-ukraine-421519>> [accessed 22 January 2022].

³² Rose Gottemoeller and others, 'Why We Still Need to Rethink Russia Policy: a Rebuttal', *Politico*, 25 September 2020, <<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/09/25/russia-open-letters-rebuttal-421546>> [accessed 2 February 2022].

³³ David S. Foglesong, 'With Fear and Favor: The Russophobia of "The New York Times"', *The Nation*, 17 July 2020, <<https://www.thenation.com/article/world/new-york-times-russia/>> [accessed 15 February 2022].

To the best of my knowledge, such an open letter was being prepared but was never published.

Looking at this discussion from the perspective of the long history of Russia–US relations, continuity can be observed in American authors' views of Russia. The options available in the discourse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, described by Viktorija I. Zhuravleva, are clearly visible. These include the conservative pessimistic myth 'of Russia doomed to perpetual backwardness [...], of the authoritarian nature of its political system [...], of the primordial "Russianness" and negative consequences of the "Russian way" for US foreign policy interests and the entire civilised world'. Again, like in the early twentieth century, this conservative pessimistic myth prevails over the liberal universalist myth 'of the ability of the Russian people to make a Western-style revolution and create a "United States of Russia", of a democratic society at heart and its xenophobic, retrograde government', of Russia 'which has no other destiny but to gradually follow the path laid down by the countries of the West led by the US'.³⁴ The lasting prevalence of these – the two most widespread – views of Russia in the United States is indicative of the structural stability of perceptions of the world over that period of time.

There is no such open debate about the United States in Russia. Growing authoritarianism and restrictions on freedoms make certain opinions unacceptable in the case of those experts who wish to remain among foreign policy decision-makers in organisations such as the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy, the Valdai Club, and the Russian International Affairs Council.

Nevertheless, these experts can easily be divided into supporters of the 'reformist' tradition, who see rapprochement with the US as an opportunity for Russia, and 'conservatists', who view America as a subversive force in Russian society. This logic underpins, in particular, the policy of labelling independent non-profit organisations and media outlets as 'foreign agents'. Thus, all activities outside state control are labelled as 'foreign', with the United States of America being regarded as the main foreign actor by default. There is a reason why a spike in anti-Americanism in state propaganda coincided with the mass civil protest in the winter of 2011/12. It was at that point that the classification of the United States as a subversive anti-Russian force, coupled with the labelling of the entire Russian opposition as friends of America, helped the state to successfully marginalise the protest movement. As a side effect, this manoeuvre had a dramatic impact on Russia's relations with the US and made it difficult for experts to speak

³⁴ Žuravleva, *Ponimanie Rossii*, pp. 1014–15.

in favour of Russia–US cooperation.³⁵ The state applied a practice known from previous centuries and censored those experts who believed that the American democratic experience is applicable in Russia.

Despite the state's increasing control over political discourse, however, there are clearly differences in opinion within the Russian expert community when it comes to Russian foreign policy addressing the US.

A number of Russian scholars are inclined to blame the United States alone. For example, V. I. Batyuk, the head of the Centre for Regional Aspects of US Military Policy at the Institute for US and Canadian Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, writes in the final chapter of his monograph on the history of the Cold War that, 'In the minds of the American elite, victory over communism in the Cold War was first transformed into victory over the USSR (although "communism" and "the Soviet Union" are not the same thing) and victory over the USSR into victory over Russia (although "the USSR" and "Russia" are also completely different notions)'.³⁶ Batyuk comments on the current state of American expert knowledge about Russia:

The American political-academic mainstream is divided between those who believe that Russia is too weak and therefore it makes no sense to deal with it, and those who believe that Russia, on the contrary, is strong and therefore it should be fended off. Either way, whether the Russian Federation is strong or weak, no business-as-usual Russian-American dialogue is possible.³⁷

Another prominent expert in American history, Tatiana A. Shakleina, Head of the Department of Applied International Analysis at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), part of the Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs, shares Batyuk's views: 'Does the USA *really* think about the future of mankind, does it *really* fear a major regional or global conflict or war? [...] Interest in mutual understanding on the part of the American ruling elite has been lacking'.³⁸

There are, however, other points of view within the expert community. For example, in an article published in the Spanish newspaper *El País* shortly after the above-mentioned exchange of open letters by US experts on Russia, Andrei V. Kortunov, Director General and member of the Presidium of the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), calls on the US to resume dialogue with Russia:

³⁵ Keith A. Darden, 'Russian Revanche: External Threats & Regime Reactions', *Daedalus*, 146.2 (2017), 128–141.

³⁶ Batjuk, *Cholodnaja vojna*, p. 322.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Tat'jana A. Šakleina, *Rossija i SŠA v mirovoj politike*, 2nd edn (Moskva: Aspekt-Press, 2017), p. 285.

The above does not at all mean that Europe or the United States should adopt a policy of 'appeasement' towards Moscow and uncritically accept any artistry of the Kremlin as a natural phenomenon beyond human influence. This only means that power politics cannot and should not remain a universal substitute for diplomacy. The ostentatious withdrawal from dialogue, the defiant blocking of the lines of communication and treating Russia as a pariah state only multiply problems for all of us in the East and in the West.³⁹

Similarly to the American case, a debate in Russia on relations with the US is taking place between proponents of a hard-line approach, who blame America for the poor relations (and therefore expect the US to take the first step towards normalisation), and those experts who believe it is important to restore dialogue but see no potential for a radical change. The voices of those who could call for a more far-reaching change for the better can hardly be heard today.

CONCLUSIONS

Russia and the United States have accumulated a large body of literature about each other. In the US, there are think-tanks for the study of Russia that were established during the Cold War and more recently. This enables in-depth analysis of political issues and the historical reality of the other country. Since the collapse of Marxist–Leninist ideology, all participants in the historical study of Russia and the United States have used roughly the same repertoire of research methodologies. However, this fact has not made the study of each other conflict-free.

During this period, these two countries have also accumulated huge experience of the discursive use of the Other as an antithesis or model for the sake of domestic disputes. This makes Russia in the US, and the US in Russia, a permanent 'actor' in domestic politics, making it difficult in turn to separate foreign policy proper from the resolution of domestic disputes.

This is particularly true of politically laden debates about identity and contemporary politics. Historians who study Russia–US relations have long worked together despite international tensions. However, the opinions of Russian historians specialising in the topic of the US are of little interest to their American counterparts.

³⁹ Andrei Kortunov, 'Los rusos no se rinden', *El País*, 2 October 2020, <<https://elpais.com/opinion/2020-10-01/los-rusos-no-se-rinden.html>> [accessed 2 October 2020]. The quotation is given according to the Russian translation: Andrej V. Kortunov, 'Russkie ne sdajutsja!', *Rossijskij sovet po meždunarodnym delam*, 4 October 2020, <<https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/russkie-ne-sdayutsya/>> [accessed 4 October 2020].

The institutional logic of the development of centres of area studies aimed at studying each other differs in the two countries: American think-tanks develop during years of strained relations between Russia and the US, while Russian think-tanks gain more discretion during periods of détente, which is explained by the different nature of the threats perceived by the political elites of these two countries. To conclude, the freedom of mutual studies largely depends on the extent of political control in either country. Although this control is not absolute, it distorts perceptions and can lead to mistakes in foreign policy decisions.

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HISTORIES OF NATIONS AND BORDERS: CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

ABSTRACT

Examining the question of 'which history' of a nation emerges over time and why, this article interrogates the ways in which histories and borders come to acquire symbolic significance and become 'national histories' and 'national borders'. It begins with a thorough analysis of the elements that contribute to and the forces which have an impact upon the development of national identity, national symbolism, and national memory. Then, drawing from a range of examples, it provides serious critical reflection on the work of historians and the nature of the questions that need to be asked in order truly to understand the processes of nation building and identity formation.

KEYWORDS:

borders, nationalism, memory, national history, identity, conflict

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Borders shift. To write a history of the borders in Europe is to write a history of conflict, competition and contestation, be it diplomatically, militarily, or – the subject of this paper – interpretively. For individual border histories themselves can become the subject of conflict: rival interpretations develop regarding the origins of borders, the reasons behind past movements (or stability), the ‘meaning’ of a border in terms of what it divides (religions, peoples, languages, states), and relations between populations in the area of a border itself and the people on the other side. At stake in the interpretive histories of borders is the nature of the identity of those who have a claim in one or another of these histories, as well as the political implications of where these borders should be.

Similarly to borders, the histories of nations themselves are also often contested from within but without regarding who are members of these nations, what the key identifying factors of a nation are, which events form part of the national story, and how they should be interpreted. For both nations and borders, rival histories are advanced and compete with one another for acceptance as the ‘true’ history. Sometimes different versions will compete with one another within what Krijn Thijs has called a ‘narrative hierarchy’, which ranges from ‘abstract master narratives to concrete told histories’.¹ The process of ‘selection’ – from the original interpretation of the history of a nation or a border through to its widespread acceptance by at least one group with a stake in the past – is complex and controversial. This will be the subject of this article, which will cover some basic definitions and examine a series of individual cases of nations and borders as examples of the process of identifying ‘which history’ emerges. I will advance several critical reflections on this process and the ways in which historians, political scientists and other scholars can and have analysed it. It will begin with some definitions and basic concepts.

WHAT IS A NATION?

This was the question famously asked by Ernest Renan in his speech at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1882.² He used quite a few metaphors, including the notion of the nation as a ‘daily plebiscite’, which refers to the voluntary desire to be a part of a nation that its members need to exhibit. He thereby emphasised the will of individuals to form a nation through identifying with it, with its cultural attributes, with its territory, and with its history.

¹ Krijn Thijs, ‘The Metaphor of the Master: “Narrative Hierarchy”’, in *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories*, ed. by Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), p. 69.

² Ernest Renan, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?’, in *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation? et autres essais politiques* (Paris, 1992).

Each nation has a past or a history, and for Renan 'forgetting' certain events was every bit as important as remembering others. He thus clearly identified that the process of establishing and defining national histories was one of selection – of choosing to link particular historical events with the nation whilst excluding others. He did not dwell on or analyse the process of selection – how, why or by whom the choice to forget or remember was made – he merely observed that it was 'necessary' for all national histories. Renan also wrote that a nation was 'a soul, a spiritual principle'. By this he meant that nations were more than simply the groups of people that comprised them, that the reality of nations could be felt, and that though they could be described and their histories written, the essence of the nation was something which was invisible. Not only that, a nation was also – if not eternal – above, beyond and more fundamental than the humans who comprised it.

From Renan's late-nineteenth-century understanding of a nation, we can retain the understanding that nations are groups of people who have been identified as sharing some number of objective characteristics (language, culture, religion, or ethnicity, to name a few), who are consciously identified with one another – with some kind of territory – and whose collective history can be written.³ Not every nation has the same combination of characteristics – some may have a national language, for example, and others not – but all will have some kind of objectively defined characteristics. As stated above, Renan argued that the process by which a nation's history is written is necessarily selective – remembering some things and forgetting others – but this can also be said for other defining characteristics of a nation. A conquered territory needed to 'forget' that it had once belonged to another nation, but so too did minority language speakers need to 'forget' that their immediate forebears (sometimes including parents, or even themselves as children) were not a part of the national language group. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger go beyond Renan's idea of a process of selection and suggest that in many cases national characteristics and elements of national histories are in fact invented.⁴ In their book *The Invention of Tradition*, a group of scholars identify how national histories often draw upon and identify with what they call national traditions, but which were in fact simply created later in an effort to portray nations as long-standing and old. Some of the most obvious of the national traditions which can be invented are national holidays, which are designed to give the members of a nation a day off and associate it directly with the nation, or the singing of national anthems,

³ For more definitions, see Timothy Baycroft, *Nationalism in Europe 1789–1945* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), pp. 3–5.

⁴ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992).

which bring people together in an outburst of patriotism which makes them feel like they are participating in something traditional, even if the anthem was only made 'national' recently. Many traditions are in fact symbols, created or invented in order to provide frames of reference which are 'national'. Here, examples include flags, national animals, coats of arms, uniforms (military, police, etc.), and also monuments built to commemorate a nation's great individuals or moments.

Although the nature of invented traditions varies – just as the objective characteristics used to define them also vary from nation to nation – one thing they all have in common is reference to a national history. Traditions directly imply links to the past, and the choice of national commemorative days or the subjects of national commemorative monuments are indicative of the kinds of choices that Renan described: remembering certain events and leaving others to be forgotten. For the newly unified German Empire in the late nineteenth century, argues Hobsbawm, 'buildings and monuments were the most visible form of establishing a new interpretation of German history'.⁵ In this spirit, the choice of 'national' monuments or the large prevalence of figures of Germania helped to create an atmosphere in which the most significant event in the nation's history – if not indeed 'the *only* national historical experience' – was the Bismarckian unification.⁶ Similarly, when the French chose to make 14 July their national holiday in 1880, commemorating the storming of the Bastille in 1789, they were choosing to remember a moment of popular revolt and make that the event that would be the most important in their national history of the French Revolution.⁷ They could have chosen instead to commemorate the execution of the king (21 January), the September massacre of the enemies of the Revolution (and thus of the French nation), or the foundation of the constitutional and legal principles which would underpin the modern democratic Republic at the Tennis Court Oath (20 June). But they did not. By the twenty-first century, only ardent students of history still remember these other dates (or even events), but everyone still remembers the storming of the Bastille because of the holiday, and so it was that history which became the national one.

Whether specifically historical or simply a part of the cultural make-up and definition of a particular nation, the primary reason that traditions can be invented is that they are fundamentally mythical. To say mythical does *not* mean false, only that reality becomes charged with meaning such that real events, people or places acquire symbolic significance as 'national'.

⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, 'Mass Producing Traditions: Europe 1876–1914', in Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, pp. 274–75.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁷ Charles Sowerwine, *France since 1870: Culture, Politics and Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 34.

An individual becomes a national hero; a cultural practice becomes a national tradition; and even a dish of food can acquire mythical and thus 'national' significance when those who sit down to eat it believe or imagine themselves to be in communion with the rest of their nation while they do so.⁸ What makes something national is that it serves as a source of identification and identity for the members of the nation. Staying with historical examples, at the battle of Valmy (20 September 1792) the French Revolutionary forces defeated the Austrian army that was invading France with the aim of restoring King Louis XVI to his rightful position. In later (pro-revolutionary) French national histories, it was said that at the battle of Valmy 'the French nation was born' out of the glorious victorious efforts of the people in arms.⁹ Such a version of national history is a clear illustration of what it means to say that national histories have huge elements which are mythical, but this is true of all national histories. A history is 'national' because some members of the nation call it 'our' history, identifying personally with the historical events and people described, charging and ascribing symbolic meaning to it. Benedict Anderson called nations 'imagined communities',¹⁰ but it is also true that in this sense national histories are 'imagined histories'. For the nation is imagined because an individual does not know the other members personally, and its history is imagined because individuals did not live through it, but they associate themselves and personally identify with those other people or past events.

The process by which a particular history becomes 'national' – by which certain events become infused with the symbolic meaning identified with a particular nation – is complex. Certainly, the agents of the state play a part alongside the various national elites, but this by no means implies that no contribution comes 'from below'. Peoples cannot simply be made to believe any symbolic association that is put forward: they must be convinced and come to believe it. One thing is certain, though: this is not a 'natural' process, and nations do not simply arise spontaneously and without any effort on the part of nationalists promoting their nation (inventing traditions and producing national histories).¹¹ Nor do nations exist 'subconsciously' throughout history. The will to be a part of a nation is essential, and it must be conscious, for it is about identity: individuals identify themselves as belonging; the national history is 'their' history; the national characteristics are 'theirs'. As nations, national histories and characteristics are created or invented; they can be presented as having

⁸ For further examples of this type, see Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1995).

⁹ See Timothy Baycroft, *France: Inventing the Nation* (London: Hodder Education, 2008), p. 205.

¹⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 2nd edn (London: Verso, 1991).

¹¹ On this debate from the other side, see Anthony D. Smith, 'Nations and History', in *Understanding Nationalism*, ed. by Montserrat Guibernau and John Hutchinson (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), pp. 9–31.

always been there, perhaps needing a national 'awakening', but this is a part of the national story itself – part of the mythical reality that constitutes the nation through the development of its history. Understanding the way in which a national history is written means understanding the history of the development of consciousness, of the formation of and origins of symbolic associations, but not the history of nations.

One of the most prominent ways that national histories are developed or that one particular history emerges as the widely accepted version is through the direct actions of states or those who control them. Perhaps the most obvious means is through the control of school curricula, so that selected versions of history are taught in schools to all future citizens. Another means that has already been alluded to is through the selection of national anthems, holidays, flags and other symbols, and then promoting them so they become more widely recognised and accepted. States can also construct monuments and encourage public ceremonies to commemorate particular moments in history or specific individuals who can be linked to the nation's past. State representatives can also control the spread of other images of the nation and its history, making sure that they appear in places where they simply become the fabric of national life. Examples of this include the images on currency (coins and notes), on postage stamps, and in public places – from village squares to the names of streets, schools, hospitals or other public buildings. In this way, references to the state-promoted version of the national history become a part of the background frame of reference for daily life in ways which are not obvious. This is what Michael Billig called 'banal nationalism', where references to the nation pervade society in little and apparently insignificant ways but add up to the official version of national history that becomes omnipresent in modern society.¹²

In addition to state agents who promote a particular version of national history, others contribute too. Hobsbawm divided these inventing traditions loosely into two groups: the political or official, and the social or unofficial.¹³ By social, he meant organisations such as clubs or fraternities whose objectives are not 'specifically or consciously' political. I would contend that while it is true that the process is not always deliberate (or 'conscious'), the promotion of one version of national history always implies a political choice and thus always has a political dimension to it. When analysing the ways in which the past was mobilised in France, Robert Gildea investigated the ways in which what he referred to as collective memory was elaborated.¹⁴ For the purposes of this article, collective memory

¹² Billig, *Banal Nationalism*.

¹³ Hobsbawm, 'Mass Producing Traditions', p. 263.

¹⁴ Robert Gildea, *The Past in French History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994).

is another way to refer to a specifically 'national' history through creating a 'personalised' vision of the past that is referred to by the members of the community as 'our' history. It is memory because it is expressed as a personal (and collective) experience of the past rather than as history, whether individuals' actual ancestors were genuinely there or not. Gildea asserts that such collective memories are constructed 'not objectively' but as a history 'constructed collectively by a community in such a way as to serve the political claims of that community'.¹⁵ In this sense, competing visions of the national past are put forward by those with different political objectives; these might be those already in power – agents of the State using the resources of the State to promote their vision – or they might be in some form of opposition, or representing some kind of social group or strata within a given society hoping to promote their own interests or possibly even take control of the State. Such groups can use similar means – promoting celebrations of alternative dates, using rival symbols or images, celebrating different national heroes – and also things as simple as writing and different histories. Many of these will be compatible or exist for a time in parallel, as some emerge slowly as a selection of images, and events become a part of the more dominant history.¹⁶

Let us now turn to some concrete historical examples of the kinds of political conflicts which have mobilised alternative versions of the histories of nations. One of the most straightforward and common sorts of conflict is that between a region that is a would-be nation and the nation that claims it to be an integral part of an existing state (sometimes a nation-state, or possibly an empire). Rival histories have been written which particularly use the terms 'region' and 'nation' in such a way as to privilege the political attitudes (separatist or unifying) of the group sponsoring that viewpoint, with all of the attendant different dates, heroes, images and language(s).¹⁷ 'Which history' comes to be successful is the one which emerges alongside the successful political movements, which may be successful (partly) because of their mobilisation of history, though this success can also arise from other factors (military victory being the most obvious), and the resultant national history is a by-product of that success. In this way, a national history of Hungary emerged in the teeth of the centralising narratives of the history of the Austrian Empire, but a national history of Burgundy did not take off against the centralising national history of

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁶ Thijs, 'The Metaphor of the Master', pp. 60–74. For an example of alternative versions, see Timothy Baycroft and Lianbi Zhu, 'A Chinese Counterpart to Dominion Day: Chinese Humiliation Day in Interwar Canada, 1924–1930', in *Celebrating Canada*, vol. 1: *Holidays, National Days and the Crafting of Identities*, ed. by Matthew Hayday and Raymond B. Blake (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), pp. 244–74.

¹⁷ For examples of this, see *Region and State in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Nation-Building, Regional Identities and Separatism?*, ed. by Joost Augusteijn and Eric Storm (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012).

France. Maciej Janowski argued that the writing of a national history was a prerequisite for any nation hoping to become 'respectable' and recognised by its neighbours.¹⁸ In some cases, regional sentiment led to would-be national histories being established, even though they remained regions without attaining political independence, such as Catalonia or Brittany. Similarly, what regions to include in a nation can also be contested via national histories. In the pre-unification period in the Germanic states, the nation was defined culturally in terms of language, and yet Austria was not always included by those who wanted a unified Germany to be dominated by Prussia (or at least not dominated by Austria) and who could present Austrian history as distinct from that of greater Germany. Other versions did include Austria and were used by those who wanted to promote 'greater Germany'. Hitler, among others, used such a vision of the past to justify his territorial expansion in all directions, claiming not only Austria but also the Sudetenland, areas of Poland, as well as territory across the Rhine and into France. This is a good example of the use of history, for the Third Reich claimed not only Alsace-Lorraine but also territory in the north of France using an historical argument, claiming that the cultural border between the Germanic peoples and the Latin-speaking peoples should be traced back to that of Lotharingia, a state created following the death of Charlemagne in the early ninth century.¹⁹ For Italy, unified in 1871, Massimo D'Azeglio was famously attributed to have said that 'We have made Italy, now we must make Italians'.²⁰ The implication was that a series of smaller territories had been brought together, but few cultural ties could be found across the population: the Italian language was almost unspoken, and divergent views of identity and history from region to region meant that a concerted campaign to create a common culture and spread a common vision and identity needed to be undertaken.

Political conflicts over which national history is the true history cover areas not only concerning territory but also alongside more straightforward political conflicts about the nature of society and which political groups should dominate it. Within France, this took on significant proportions across many generations as rival political groups sought to write 'their' history of the entire nation. At a simple level, during the nineteenth century this was about whether or not the French Revolution was a 'good thing' or a 'bad thing'. Republican nation builders wanted a history of France which was the long and inevitable rise of the Republic and the

¹⁸ See Maciej Janowski, 'Mirrors for the Nation: Imagining the National Past among the Poles and Czechs in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', in *The Contested Nation*, ed. by Berger and Lorenz, p. 442.

¹⁹ More will be said in the section on borders, see below.

²⁰ See Joep Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe: a Cultural History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), p. 153.

triumph of republican values which had always been a part of the French character but which had been suppressed by the monarchy, the aristocracy, and the Catholic Church that supported them. Meanwhile, opponents of republicanism characterised France as fundamentally Catholic throughout history (the 'eldest daughter of the Church'), occasionally plagued by a small minority of agitators who misled the people into outbursts of revolutionary excesses. Presenting French national history as fundamentally secular or fundamentally Catholic – and getting that history accepted (each of these two visions have their accompanying heroes, dates to be commemorated, monuments) – was one of the most significant elements of the political conflict which saw a new regime at each generation throughout the century following the 1789 Revolution.

A similar conflict about 'which history' which has obvious political dimensions is the rivalry between the various national histories on the one hand, and that of the working man's socialist International on the other. Karl Marx overtly claimed that working men should have no country and sought to re-conceive of and re-interpret history in terms of a type of class conflict which spread across and throughout different nations. In this way, the French Revolution was all about the bourgeoisie overthrowing the aristocracy, and nineteenth-century national histories were 'bourgeois' histories which (Marx argued) were there to keep the workers from forming an appropriate (for him) primary class consciousness. The historical interpretive conflict was central to the rise of socialism throughout Europe during the nineteenth century and is exactly the kind of political conflict which lies at the heart of choices regarding 'which history' should be accepted.²¹

When political elites seek to promote a vision of the national collective past with all of its symbolic associations, it does not always work, even when it is an accepted elite that is offering the historical interpretation. Symbols do not always take off, holidays are not always widely celebrated, heroes are not always accepted, cultural practices are not always practiced. In Quebec, as a statement of rejection of Canada, celebrations of the national holiday (Canada Day, 1 July) are often muted; it has become the traditional day to move house for many who overtly ignore the national holiday, even for anti-separatist, pro-Canadian union individuals.²² In France, the republican government tried to construct statues of the figure called Marianne, the female allegorical incarnation of the Republic, in all of the village squares throughout rural France. These were traditional market squares, and even in mostly republican communities these monuments

²¹ See Baycroft, *Nationalism in Europe*, pp. 42–50.

²² For more on the ways in which the national holiday traditions were debated and established, see Matthew Hayday, 'Canada's Day: Inventing a Tradition, Defining a Culture', in *Celebrating Canada*, vol. 1, ed. by Hayday and Blake, pp. 274–305.

were rejected as being out of place. In the end, they were put up in village, town and city halls, which, as the seats of local government, were seen as acceptable places for such a new and overtly republican national symbol. Thus, though it is clear that national histories emerge out of the successful political discourses of rival communities, populations do not simply passively accept every element of the 'history' that even victorious political communities put forward: they are a part of the gradual negotiations surrounding which history becomes widespread.

With respect to nations, what we have seen so far is that the answer to the question 'which history?' will be determined by the successful attachment of symbolic, 'mythical' significance to particular events and people to the national story through a process of selection and forgetting. The choices are always political, and although not always deliberate and conscious the national history will for the most part be the direct result of a political community promoting its visions of the national past for politically motivated reasons, 'inventing traditions', and creating associations between the past and the present. There will almost always be conflicting histories which at the very least emphasise different events, where they are not downright contradicting one another as to how the national past should be interpreted. These conflicting visions of the national past grow out of internal political rivalries rather than because of external 'enemies' (though political rivals may of course be presented as traitors or enemies from within by their political rivals), and from these rivalries some versions will prove more successful and enduring. The process by which national histories emerge is therefore not 'natural' or spontaneous (as successful nation-builders would have everyone believe) but is born of political conflict. Mark Hewitson has argued that all nationalism emerges in situations of political conflict and has outlined five sources of conflict in which nationalist arguments (and their historical justifications) may become radicalised:²³ economic dislocation; the process of democratisation; tensions between contiguous, culturally different nationalities; state intervention; and foreign rivalries or wars. In each of these types of conflict, the selection of an associated vision of the national past is often a significant contributing factor. In such situations of conflict, nationalism and the mobilisation of one version of national history will not be restricted to particular types of political groups, for nationalism has at one time or another been successfully combined with just about any other political agenda, be it liberal or conservative, authoritarian or democratic, progressive or reactionary. It is this very flexibility of possible definitions

²³ See Mark Hewitson, 'Conclusion', in *What is a Nation? Europe 1789–1914*, ed. by Timothy Baycroft and Mark Hewitson (Oxford: OUP, 2006), pp. 312–55.

and potential compatibility with a wide range of political circumstances which make nations and their histories so adaptable and nationalism potentially so powerful as a motivating political force.

At this stage, I want to provide two further critical reflections on this process of the selection and delineation of national histories for scholars and historians. The first is that one needs to be wary of the 'truth claims' of national histories. As it has been shown, national histories, like national cultures or indeed nations themselves, are not false, but their reality and truth are mythical and symbolic and need not be confused with actual history, for which facts can be established with evidence. The evidence of a symbolic reality of association is, after all, simply that people believe it. The second problem for scholars is that when addressing the question of 'which history?', the conclusion that a specific national history will become dominant when it is championed by a political community that becomes successful runs the risk of historical tautology. To say that the political group that 'wins' will have its vision of national history accepted ignores the potential role that historical interpretation may have had in its success in the first place. We do though now write the national histories of nations that emerged successfully, but not of those that lost, and historians can never completely escape this fact. To avoid being historically deterministic, therefore, requires at least an awareness that the choice of 'which history?' is not only political: it also plays a part in the success or failure of political movements. So, the right questions to be asking are what were the different histories on offer, by whom and for what purposes, and how were the different histories themselves involved in the process of conflict resolution?

BORDERS

While the reality and truth of nations can be seen to be mythical, in the realm of the symbolic this is not true for many borders which have a tangible reality as the limits of and places of contact between populations and states. As was seen in several of the examples discussed above, national histories contain an understanding of which a territory (or territories) belong to a nation, and – either directly or by implication – they also contain an understanding of the limits or borders of the nation in question. Although they are not purely myth, as nations are, insofar as they are elements of a national story or a national identity, they do still have a mythical dimension and are put into particular places through human action and human conception. By this I mean that there is nothing 'natural' about a border falling in a particular place, even if it happens to coincide with a feature of

the landscape (such as a body of water, a river or a mountain range), or even with some form of human cultural reality, such as a language. In some versions of the legend of King Arthur, he is turned into a bird by Merlin when a boy, and the lesson he learns looking down from the sky is that the borders which cause wars cannot be seen and are not real.²⁴ Within national histories, borders are often presented as if they are natural, historic or even eternal, but the limits are simply an integral part of the symbolic association of the national group with its territory. In many cases, national histories include the history of the relationship of the national group with their neighbours across the border (friends, allies, cousins, rivals, subordinates, traditional enemies, ...). The selection of 'which history' is more complicated when examining borders in situations in which the two populations or nations on either side of a border do not agree on how it should be interpreted (or perhaps where it should be), particularly in circumstances where borders have shifted over time.²⁵

As was seen in the first section, for nations much of the selection process of 'which history' is about the success or failure of particular political positions that associate themselves with one or another of the rival histories, and for the most part this is an internal process. Where there are two nations which disagree about a border, there will be rival successful political interpretations which make a resolution more complicated. When borders have shifted, part of each national history – mythical history – is to assert that a particular place for the border, which may only have been the border at a particular (and possibly quite limited) time, is the 'authentic' or 'legitimate' (or simply the right) one. In practice in many cases, such conflicts have been decided simply by wars, but there is a purely historical dimension as well. Across central Europe, national borders shifted constantly throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nations such as Germany saw their borders regularly shifted, with (as we saw in the first section) historical as well as cultural arguments justifying expansion. As we have already seen, creating histories of nations means ascribing symbolic meaning to past people and events, identifying with them, and claiming them as a part of a national story. In the territory of

²⁴ For one such version, see T.H. White, *The Once and Future King* (Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co., 1958), pp. 152–75, 192–93.

²⁵ For theoretical, comparative and specific analysis of borders and identity, see Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson, *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State* (Routledge, 1999); *Borders, Nations and States: Frontiers of Sovereignty in the New Europe*, ed. by Liam O'Dowd and Thomas M. Wilson (Aldershot: Avebury, 1996); Daniel Power and Naomi Standen, *Frontiers in Question: Eurasian Borderlands, 700–1700* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999); Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Stefan Berger, 'Border Regions, Hybridity, and National Identity: The Cases of Alsace and Masuria', in *The Many Faces of Clio. Cross Cultural Approaches to Historiography. Essays in Honor of Georg G. Iggers*, ed. by Q. Edward Wang and Franz L. Fillafer (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), pp. 366–81; and Timothy Baycroft, Carolyn Grohmann, and Paul Lawrence, 'Degrees of Foreignness' and the Construction of Identity in French Border Regions during the Interwar Period', *Contemporary European History*, 10.1 (2001), 51–71.

Alsace and Lorraine, the schools taught French and French history up until 1871; however, when they became a part of the newly unified Germany in 1871, this changed and the students began to learn German and German history. This was not only reversed again when the territory came back to France in 1919, but then it changed a further two times in 1940 and 1944 as this territory went back to Germany and then back again to France. A related type of problem associated with shifting borders is the kind of case in which a national hero lived in – or a past event happened in – a place that later came to be on the other side of the border. Staying with the German example, Emmanuel Kant continued to be considered a great German within the national cannon, though he lived his entire life in Königsberg, which has not been a part of Germany since 1945. Whether that disqualifies him as a great German or not is an example of the kind of political question posed by writing the history of nations and borders. Similarly, events that are claimed by nations that occurred before that particular nation even existed can be problematic. Flemish nationalists claim the battle of the Golden Spurs to be the ‘origin’ of their nation, even though it occurred several centuries before ‘Flanders’ had any kind of legal autonomy as a region within the state of Belgium.

A final reflection upon the writing of the history of borders deals with what can be called the ‘creative function’ of borders in the period since the early nineteenth century. One of the significant changes in what historians call the late modern or contemporary period which began at the end of the eighteenth century was the ever-increasing ability of states to control borders and to influence the populations that live within their territories. One result of this is that they are able to assert their vision of the past and inscribe national symbolism and culture not only on the population but also on the landscape. What this means is that borders can come to take on greater reality on the ground than they ever had before. A good example of this is the area that I have been studying and writing about for the past few decades: the Franco-Belgian border area separating French Flanders from Belgian Flanders.²⁶ In the early nineteenth-century, this border would have been hard to distinguish, since the populations on either side spoke the same language, built the same sorts of houses, and socialised and inter-married as if the border were not there. By the late twentieth century, not only did these two groups speak different languages, but many elements in the landscape – car licence plates, the colour, shape and name of public buildings or things like mail boxes, the

²⁶ For the most complete analysis, see Timothy Baycroft, *Culture, Identity and Nationalism: French Flanders in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: The Royal Historical Society Studies in History Series, The Boydell Press, 2004).

symbols on display (flags and so on) and the more recent street names created by urban expansion – had all become easy to distinguish, and the rate of cross-border marriage had dropped to almost zero. In summary, over a century and a half, a border which was originally drawn through the middle of a culturally homogenous region had become the limit of a real cultural division that was felt to be real by local inhabitants and was visible to any outside observers who crossed the border.²⁷ What this tells us about writing the history of borders which have shifted is that part of the process of selecting ‘which history’ is determined by which state happens to have control over the territory alongside the border, and how long these people have had to put their national version into the landscape, local culture and the consciousness of the people who live near it.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has presented a series of reflections that scholars need to bear in mind when analysing the histories of nations and borders and asking the question ‘which history?’. Because of the mythical and invented quality of nations, and the political implications contained in all potential answers to the question of ‘which history?’, scholars must not seek simply to understand the ‘truth’ of national histories or the ‘legitimacy’ of borders; they should uncover and analyse the alternatives presented by rival political groups (or individuals) with a stake in the answers (to questions about the character of a nation or the place of a border) and explore when, why and how interpretations of a nation’s past or its borders gained more widespread acceptance or popularity than others. For what is at stake is why certain events are remembered and others forgotten, as well as how and why certain events or people acquire symbolic (mythical) associations and become ‘ours’ for certain national groups. Some of the key questions to ask are whose interests are supported by a particular narrative interpretation of the past, and in the context of which conflicts – internal and external, ideological, social, political or economic – did the successful interpretations of the past emerge. This article has drawn together elements from different sorts of scholarship and takes its examples primarily from Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but the conclusions are likely to hold anywhere that rival histories have political implications.

²⁷ For a specific study of the creative function of the border, see Timothy Baycroft, ‘Changing Identities in the Franco-Belgian Borderland in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries’, *French History*, 13.4 (December, 1999), 417–38.

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NATIONAL MASTER NARRATIVE: VICISSITUDES OF METHOD

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the historiographical, cultural and political phenomenon known as the national master narrative. Its cognitive, interpretative and explicatory potential is analysed together with its advantages and shortcomings. Drawing on Ukrainian historiography, the place of the national master narrative on the historiographical, cultural and political map is discussed. Its influence on the writing of history in modern Ukraine is also addressed.

KEYWORDS:

national master narrative, essentialism, nation, Ukrainian historiography, analytical history

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This essay addresses the issue of the national historical narrative,¹ or the national master narrative, and its functions in the contemporary world. It is not a purely scholarly article packed with ritual references: it is rather an essay on a topic of possibly perennial relevance.

My reflections and arguments are mostly of a general nature, but I will illustrate them with cases of historical narratives which I believe to be most indicative of the topic under discussion. I cannot and do not intend to claim that I am offering innovative generalisations and arguments about the historical master narrative: all fundamental assessments were made at least half a century ago; hundreds of articles and dozens of seminal monographs have since been written on this and related topics. It would seem that the national master narrative has already become a purely historiographical phenomenon – a withered branch on the tree of historical knowledge, a museum exhibit.

Surprisingly, once in a while this withered branch starts sprouting leaves all of a sudden when brought to life by yet another ‘springtime of peoples’. A highbrow attitude or shrugging in bewilderment might be expected and even justified, but the mummy regularly acquires a new lease of life and shows remarkable resilience at the level of both affirmative and didactical history and, oddly enough, even in that part of historiography which tends to represent itself as analytical. For a variety of reasons (too numerous to be listed here), the national narrative remains attractive and popular in this brave world. For obvious reasons, adherents to and promoters of this narrative are, as a rule, incapable of self-reflection (which under certain circumstances, might be considered a benefit). Thus, the national master narrative requires reflection from the outside.

Finally, it is difficult to ignore the fact that, to begin with, practice makes perfect, and that the need to take a critical look at the master narrative and deconstruct it will be a useful exercise. Secondly, we are experiencing a renaissance of the master narrative yet again, especially in those places where the ethnocentric version of the past is again becoming the lifeblood of *sacro egoismo* and populism. One has to deal with the fact that the new generations of ‘persons of letters’, or rather ‘persons of bytes and pixels’, are for the umpteenth time discovering the simple and very user-friendly formulas of the national master narrative. Sometimes, or nearly always, they fail to realise that they are using rather worn-out formulas that have been replicated many times.

¹ The adjective ‘national’ which accompanies the term ‘master narrative’ may seem like a tautology. In this case, it is both deliberate and necessary.

It is these circumstances that make one recall and bring to attention well-known reflections and conclusions. I have chosen contemporary Ukrainian historiography as a specific example. Since we are talking about some generic features and characteristics of this phenomenon, I believe the reader will be able to use this example to recognise any other national historiography that pays tribute to the master narrative.

THE NATIONAL MASTER NARRATIVE – GENERAL OUTLINE

One could formulate a brief definition of the master narrative as follows: it is a systematised, canonical version of a nation's past which claims the status and power of the universal norm.

The national master narrative is a phenomenon of the age of modernity and nationalism. Actually, the national master narrative is part of the 'project of modernity' in Habermas's sense. Its emergence and development is part of a general process of transition from an agrarian to an industrial society, the birth of the nation state, the advance of a mass politics, the formation of standardised national languages and high cultures, and the expansion of mass education, including history education.

Industrial society not only determines the birth of nations but also creates organisational, technical and cultural prerequisites for the formation of homogeneous forms of 'collective consciousness', described in detail by Karl Deutsch and Ernest Gellner a while ago. The spread of literacy on the basis of standardised and codified national languages, the emergence of the mass media, the standardisation of mass education together with transformation of schools and universities into a mass phenomenon, the technological advancement of information storage and transmission – all this creates an infrastructure for the formation of not only certain standard forms of 'mass/collective homogeneous consciousness' but also for activities that can have a great influence on the formation of collective consciousness, in particular the writing and teaching of history. Using a national master narrative to bond the nation together and ensure citizens' loyalty to the state would be impossible without mass literacy, standardised literary language, mass industrialised schooling that provides a stereotypical standard view of society, and the media.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the deliberate use of history and collective memory to impose dominant political discourses and form a system of loyalties became an integral part of states' domestic and foreign policy – a means of forming and legitimising nations as 'imagined

communities', a tool for political mobilisation.² 'Invented tradition', ideological unification and mobilisation achieve a certain level of cultural and political homogeneity that is necessary not only to ensure collective loyalty to the nation and state, but also in the waging of modern warfare; all this would not be possible without using history and creating a master narrative that endorses the existence of a certain nation on the space-time continuum.

In cases in which states did not exist or ceased to exist, the legitimising function of the master narrative was supplemented by the idea of emancipation – liberation from alien national or imperial oppression. It is also interesting to observe that the 'liberating' national master narratives of oppressed peoples often turned into instruments of dominance over minorities who claimed their own histories within the newly created states. In this sense, the history of Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans and the Baltic states in the 1920s–1930s and in the 1990s–2000s serves as an excellent example.

A well-founded critical and somewhat ironic attitude towards the national master narrative gradually developed in the professional writing of history after World War II. Of course, the reputation of this type of history writing was undermined by the fact that it became the ideological underpinning of two world wars, genocides, and crimes against humanity. Moreover, the development of domestic historiography could not but lead to a thorough reassessment of the national master narrative and identification of its numerous sins. Nevertheless, it was too deeply entrenched in political, cultural and educational practices to be easily abandoned. It moved from the shelf of analytical history to the rack of 'affirmative and didactical history'. At the same time, advanced historians resorted to collective exorcisms in order to expel from the writing of history the demons of ethnocentrism as well as cultural, gender, racial and other forms of intolerance. It is worth recalling that the first attempts to review national school history textbooks at the international level were undertaken in the interwar period, and this practice became global after 1945.

With further sophistication of the methods of humanities and social sciences and especially after a series of various 'turns' dating back to the 1960s which upended many professional criteria, norms and procedures in history writing, it seemed that the national master narrative had finally occupied its niche as a methodologically antiquarian phenomenon. Its potential aspirations or real ambitions to set standards for analytical historiography looked like an amusing joke.

² Of the most recent publications on this topic, see Stefan Berger and Christoph Conrad, *The Past as History. National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Modern Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), a seminal review in terms of both scope and interpretation.

With the advent of globalisation, the development of communication and digital technologies, and the unprecedented permeability of political and cultural borders, the national master narrative became obsolete for advanced professional historiography. As a metanarrative, it circulated freely in the school environment and popular history. When it came to metanarratives associated with the history of peoples, it was more likely to be about transnational or supranational histories.

The collapse of the world communist system, the dissolution of the USSR and other quasi-supranational states (e.g., Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia), the reunification of Germany, and the radical change of the political, cultural and economic geography of the 1990s marked a renaissance of national master narratives. The volcanic eruption of national master narratives occurred in the 1990s. Nearly all nations that had achieved or regained national sovereignty faced the task of (re)constructing their 'true' past and inevitably resorted to the national master narrative. The reasons were obvious and prosaic: need for the legitimisation of new and 'old new' nation-states and their political and cultural elites; restoration of a 'proper' national identity which had been claimed to be distorted or almost destroyed by the communists.

In all cases, the revival or reconstruction of the national master narrative was presented as a restoration of 'historical justice', 'historical truth', 'national revival' or going 'back to one's roots'.

Undoubtedly, legitimacy was provided not only by political expediency or a nation's natural right to self-determination but also by scientific underpinnings, in particular by the existence of a ready-made national master narrative. Then, it transpired that some roots were strong and centuries old, and it was enough to add a favourable ideological climate and political care to turn them into Jack's magic beans, which gave rise to the powerful trunks and crowns of revived national narratives.

In Poland, for example, there were at least two quite credible variants of the national master narrative which did not seem to have suffered too much during Communist rule. In Ukraine, one can also speak of two variants of the historiographical tradition, both of which were officially banned at some point, but at least one of which was implicitly present throughout the Soviet period: this was known as Mykhailo Hrushevsky's scheme. Its populist essence fitted well into the class theory that dominated Soviet historical epistemology. In pre-1917 Russia, powerful schools

of historiography offered their own versions of the national master narrative.³ Whenever such a historiographical tradition was lacking, the national master narrative was created from scratch, but its novelty was based on a canon that was more than a century old.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

The national master narrative ensures the formation of the national identity and provides continuity; in this sense it also aspires to the role of collective memory, which often creates confusion when one tries to distinguish between history and memory. This incestuous connection, which seems quite natural to promoters of the master narrative, often sets a trap for its critics, who sometimes themselves fail to notice that they are being influenced by memory in historical discourse. One of the most striking examples is Pierre Nora's megaproject *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (realms of memory), in which the deconstruction of the national master narrative in fact provides strength to it – regardless of the intentions of the authors and the promoters of the project.

How does this type of narrative fulfil its important function? Firstly, it provides a description of the past, usually covering all key aspects of the nation's existence, a kind of biography of the nation. Secondly, it provides an explanation (which inevitably includes a clarification of the present and sometimes a projection of the future of the nation). Thirdly, it offers an interpretation – a meaningful account of the past which differs from the past of other communities and makes this particular community unique. Fourthly, it provides rationalisation – legitimisation of the uniqueness of a given community whose members recognise themselves as a nation.

Finally, as already mentioned, the essence of the master narrative is that it prescribes norms of description, explanation and interpretation, as it is essentially a set of canons whose acceptance or rejection determines one's loyalty to the community. In other words, it defines markers of national identity, compliance with which makes each particular individual a member of the nation. The most exhaustive form and formula of the national master narrative are definitely school textbooks, especially those published under the auspices of the state.

Ultimately, the national master narrative invests in civic education by setting norms for describing, explaining and interpreting the nation's

³ In the case of Russia, 'national master narrative' is, in a sense, an oxymoron, since only a supranational narrative in the form of the history of multinational state (*gosudarstvo Rossiiskoie*) can act as a unifying scheme (given that the new version of the Russian Constitution of 2020 refers to 'the Russian people' as constituting 'the state-forming' entity). Even in its expansionist variant ('Russkij mir' [the pan-Russian world] and 'compatriots abroad'), the Russian national master narrative speaks Russian ethnocentrism into the concept of 'one people' and Orthodox unity.

past. This is why it becomes an instrument of indoctrination and patching the nation from within – a means of political mobilisation, a tool which is, as a rule, ultimately owned by the state. It ensures the political loyalty of citizens.

These ideological and political functions together with the normative power provoke the temptation to sacralise it in part or in full; in this case, it might morph into an ersatz civic cult.

What about the cognitive function of the national master narrative? Without it, the whole enterprise loses its fundamentality. Now, we have reached the 'fifth element'.

The formation of the master narrative accompanied the development of historiography as scholarship, as 'science'. Any self-respecting propagator of national history will definitely mention the 'solid scientific foundation' of the life history of a given nation. Thus, it would be at least impolite not to mention the master narrative's cognitive function. Nor should we forget that the canonical national narrative was shaped in the heyday of positivism, so its inherent feature would be an appeal to the 'proper' or 'true' knowledge based on 'documentary evidence', to national history as 'science'. Science, of course, means credibility, this latter being the truth.

Moreover, the national master narrative has been formed precisely as a scientific rationale for a nation's existence: it is a traditional toolkit of tricks and methods that give historiography the status of a scientific discipline. Notably, the invention of national master narratives in fact triggered the development of history as a scientific discipline.

However, it would not be out of place to mention Jean-François Lyotard's scepticism concerning the cognitive potential of the 'grand narrative' (*grand récit*) in which the master narrative fits. Of course, the national master narrative leaves some room for manoeuvre even for contemporary historians, but they will have to follow its prescriptions and conventions. By discovering new facts, finding previously unknown documents and dealing with new themes, a historian can indeed carry out inquiries, perform cognitive and analytical tasks, and formulate critical opinions, i.e., formally observe the procedures referred to as research.

The only problem is that the direction of the inquiry is predetermined, and the research procedure itself is meant to confirm the predetermined conclusion. The hypothesis (which is to be proved, specified or rejected by means of the research procedure) is in fact either absent or illusory (even if the researcher has good intentions). Moreover, this research procedure usually seeks to elucidate features of certain elements of the whole without questioning this bigger picture. Accounts of past events in the genre of national history must necessarily fit the context, descriptive

strategy and discourse of the master narrative. As already mentioned, school textbooks are an extreme version of such representation. For instance, in Ukraine and Russia, teachers or other interested parties can usually choose from several textbooks for one grade. However, all these different textbooks represent one meta-text.

Even if one discovers new evidence of crimes committed by a communist or colonial regime – calls something a crime for the first time, reaches the depths of archival wells and publishes all the documents proving the oppression of one nation by another or justifying a nation's eternal desire for freedom and statehood – in cognitive terms these efforts are like trying to crack a walnut whose kernel has already been eaten by other species of fauna.

In other words, the research takes place within an object which no longer evolves, and within a rather rigid interpretative or explanatory scheme. Although the national master narrative can reproduce itself endlessly, it will be unable to produce qualitatively new knowledge, new senses, new enquiries, since any such quest is focused on proving what is already proven and unquestionable within the broader albeit strictly limited framework. You are predestined to a perpetual Ground Hog Day; the only option is to make the existing picture more perfect.

A rather simple rhetorical question may arise: if the canon of the national narrative is true, and any such metanarrative denies the possibility of its being untrue or incompletely true – that is, the truth has been identified/discovered/established – where do we go from here? The cognitive process is over. We know everything.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

This is the fourth time in the last twenty years that I have had to refer to the standard common features of the national master narrative.⁴ During this time, the details or rhetoric might have been modified somewhat, but there is still a monolith of methods, principles and characteristics at its core

⁴ I have addressed this topic on several occasions since 2002: Heorhij Kasianov, 'Šče ne vmerla ukrajins'ka istoriografija', *Krytyka*, 54.4 (2002), 20–22; Georgiy Kasianov, 'Sovremennaja ukrainskaja istoriografija: metodologičeskie i institucional'nye problemy', *Ab Imperio*, 2 (2003), 491–519; Georgiy Kasianov, 'Nationalized History: Past Continuous, Present Perfect, Future', in *a Laboratory of Transnational History: Ukraine and Recent Ukrainian Historiography*, ed. by Phillip Ther and Georgiy Kasianov (New York–Budapest: CEU Press, 2009), pp. 7–24; Georgiy Kasianov, Oleksii Tolochko, 'National Histories and Contemporary Historiography: The Challenges and the Risks of Writing a New History of Ukraine', in *The Future of the Past. New Perspectives on Ukrainian History*, ed. by Serhii Plokhy (Harvard University Press, 2016), pp. 69–96.

that are little affected by weather conditions. Moreover, these favourable conditions have lately made it flourish.

I will limit myself to a very brief enumeration of its generic features. Based on my previous experience in publicising and discussing these theses, let me make one important remark up front: the list below is not a description of the *sins* of the national master narrative; it is a simple description; I do not intend to defile or repudiate this narrative, if only because in this case this is *mission impossible*.

Its teleological nature predetermines all other features. Here, the meaning and direction of the historical process are determined by a pre-defined goal: the creation/formation/becoming of a nation and, of course, the emergence of its state. The goal (or effect) is directly or implicitly identified with the cause; as a result, the idea of the genuine, natural and organic nature of the nation and nation state emerges of its own accord. Cognitive, explanatory and interpretative functions – let alone ideological and educational ones – serve this goal.

Essentialism is the other profound feature of the national master narrative that is closely related to its teleological nature. While the national master narrative implies the birth, lethargy, death, or revival of the nation, the latter is perceived as non-temporal. Time and space may simply not matter. Moreover, historians need a space-time continuum only in order to correctly identify the place and time of a nation's being. The historian's task is to adequately describe the nation in space-time with the help of the proper tools, i.e., to adequately identify the existence or absence of its essential attributes and prove the *historical necessity* and inevitability of the birth and existence of the nation. The historian finds these essential features in 'historical reality', which in turn becomes the measure of 'historical truth'.

The teleological and essentialist traits are most salient in the claim to cultural uniqueness and exclusivity, and often in the ethnocentrism of the national master narrative. A paradox of the internal contradiction of the national narrative lies in the fact that it is meant to make the world's history more complete and more exhaustive by incorporating the biography of one's own nation. That is, on the one hand, we are unique and incomparable; on the other hand, our history is at least not worse than anyone else's. In other words, the task of this narrative is to make one's own nation the sovereign actor of world history by concurrently singling it out and separating it from the general flow of similar narratives of Others.

The flip side of this inner contradiction is that the national master narrative aspires to be the most complete, comprehensive, exhaustive version of history, at least at the level of the key events and facts that

determine the nation's existence. However, this aspiration or intention is fulfilled at the expense of an intentional selection of facts, events, and lines of argumentation. Anything that deviates from the main line is either rejected, silenced, or ignored. Whenever something contradictory pops up, it is used to confirm the validity of the main thesis.

This main line predetermines another important feature of the national master narrative: the absolutization of the continuity of national history – its linearity. Historians working in the genre of the national narrative are reminiscent of a bobsledder: having begun the journey, they cannot but arrive at the predetermined endpoint; options are available only in terms of the speed. It is also noteworthy that continuity is not ensured by justifying its necessity; the continuity needs no proof, as it is contained in the very idea of the transcendence of the nation's being. Explanation is required in the case of a rupture, a caesura, the absence of a nation in space-time. This is the focus of the stories associated with the basic metaphor of those national narratives which emerged in the absence of the state and its support, among 'non-historical nations', to use Hegel's term.

Here we approach the concept of 'national revival' or 'national awakening'. Somewhat ironically, this applies not only to 'historical' nations but also to 'non-historical' nations which did not have a state at the time of the formation of nation states. *Deutschland erwache!* refers to a nation which once suffered from a quantitative overabundance of states. All the mystical symbolism of the nations of this vast region, which subsequently became the epicentre of two world wars, is associated with the metaphor of awakening and revival. The awakenings and revivals of the nations of this region would hardly have acquired this rhetoric without the romantic renditions of folk tales – sleeping or dead beauties awakened or resurrected by the kisses of beautiful princes played by bearded men dressed in dull costumes.

A historical narrative containing the metaphor of 'national revival' inevitably points to other distinctive features of the discourse of the national master narrative. The metaphorical nature of the national master narrative implies mythologisation: any national narrative contains a set of founding myths – an origin, a 'golden age', a cultural and/or civilizational mission, world-beating achievements, certain innate traits of a community (business acumen, adherence to democracy, a big heart, etc.). Abundance in metaphors is always accompanied by anthropomorphisms. The nation is presented as a living being that suffers, struggles, dies and reborn. It has a brain, a mind, a conscience, a backbone, a head, willpower, etc. Finally, the language of the national narrative is characterised by anachronisms that stem from the very procedure of forming such a narrative according

to the principle of retrospective history, where contemporary territory and community are projected into distant ages. A Frenchman of Arab descent lighting up a Galois is unlikely to realise that he is holding in his hands a certificate of belonging to a nation with a continuous history of a thousand years. However, historians who have traced the roots of modern France back to Gallic tribes are well aware of this.

Let us illustrate these general reflections with a concrete example. Over the last thirty years, I have observed several attempts to (re)construct a specific variant of the national master narrative in Ukraine; at some point, I even took part in this exciting enterprise.

THE UKRAINIAN MASTER NARRATIVE

The classic Ukrainian master narrative was created by Mykhailo Hrushevsky from the late nineteenth century to the 1920s.⁵ Conceptually, this project, which is gargantuan in length (ten volumes) and in terms of the amount of time it took to write it (almost thirty years), took shape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when its author was an Austrian professor holding a passport as a subject of the Romanov Empire. His seminal ideas were originally presented in an article entitled 'Zvichajna skhema "russkoj" istoriji i sprava ratsional'nogo ukladu istoriji skhidnogo slov'anstva' (The Traditional Scheme of 'Russian' History and the Problem of the Rational Organisation of the History of East Slavs, 1903).

This version of the Ukrainian master narrative is usually described as representing 'populist' historiography. The people are the main actor here. Another variant of the Ukrainian master narrative associated with Vatslav (Viacheslav) Lypynsky is the so-called statist or conservative school of Ukrainian historiography. Although this division is an oversimplification, it provides grounds to speak of two variants of the Ukrainian national master narrative.

The 'Hrushevsky school' of historiography developed relatively freely in Soviet Ukraine until the mid-1930s and was banned as 'bourgeois and nationalist' during the repression of the 1930s and 1940s. The 1920s also saw an attempt to create an alternative school by Matvii Yavorsky, a legal expert from Galicia who studied the history of Ukraine in the 'Marxist way' and was in charge of its 'official historiography'. Yavorsky was first criticised for his obvious lack of professional historical knowledge; then,

⁵ A rather detailed analysis of Hrushevsky's history of the construction of the Ukrainian national master narrative is provided by Serhii Ploky, Professor of Ukrainian History at Harvard University. See Serhii Ploky, *Unmaking Imperial Russia: Mykhailo Hrushevsky and the Writing of Ukrainian History* (University of Toronto Press, 2005).

in the 1930s, his unsuccessful 'school' was dismissed as 'nationalist', while its founder was executed in 1937.

In the late 1930s, the Soviets established special institutions charged with the task of developing the Soviet Ukrainian master narrative. In 1936, the Institute of the History of Ukraine of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR) was established. It compiled and published the first synthetic collective work on the history of Ukraine⁶, designated to replace Hrushevsky's version. During the ideological purges of 1946–1951, this version was purged as 'bourgeois and nationalist'. One of the main accusations was that it followed the canons of the Hrushevsky school. The then-First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, Lazar Kaganovich, uttered the following metaphor: 'Hrushevsky and his school left thin, invisible threads which must be "chemically removed"'.⁷ The Institute's 1947 plan included such topics as 'Criticism of Hrushevsky's bourgeois and nationalist concept and school'.⁸ Paradoxically, this purely ideological label had a solid basis. Any attempt to construct a linear, coherent and comprehensive narrative could not ignore the monumental work of the 'father of Ukrainian history', not to mention the fact that the populist components of *Istoriia Ukraïny-Rusy* (History of Ukraine-Rus', 1898) fitted nicely with the new orthodox Marxist format of the official metanarrative based on the idea of the evolution of socio-economic formations and class struggle. It is well known that the model common to all historians was introduced by *Istoriia Vserossijskoj komunističeskoj partii (bol'shevikov). Kratkij kurs* (History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course, 1938). Officially, Joseph Stalin is considered to be its author.

The *Istoriia Ukraïns'koji RSR* (History of the Ukrainian SSR, 1953–56) followed the lead. It was published twice, in 1951 and 1956,⁹ in two volumes in both Russian and Ukrainian. It practically became the first standard Soviet master narrative of Ukrainian history to be endorsed by the authorities as an acceptable standard, and it survived with slight modifications until the late 1980s. This standard was reproduced in a megaproject in the 1970s and 1980s, when the *Istoriia Ukraïns'koji RSR* (History of the Ukrainian SSR, 1977–79) in eight volumes and ten books was published,¹⁰ first in Ukrainian and subsequently in Russian. The Soviet Ukrainian master narrative did not reject the national component. The latter was secondary to the general idea of humanity's progress towards a classless,

⁶ *Istoriia Ukraïny. Korotkyj kurs*, ed. by Serhij Bjelousov and others (Kyjiv: Vydavnytstvo AN URSR, 1940).

⁷ Mykola Koval', Oleksandr Rubl'ov, 'Instytut istoriji Ukraïny: pershe dvadecjatyrichchia (1936–1956)', *Ukraïns'kyj istoričnyi žurnal*, 6 (1996), 50–68 (p. 61).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁹ *Istoriia Ukraïns'koji RSR*, ed. by O. Kasymenko and others, 2 vols (Kyjiv: Vydavnytstvo AN URSR, 1953–1956).

¹⁰ *Istoriia Ukraïns'koji RSR*, ed. by Arnol'd Shevelev and Yurii Kondufor, 8 vols (Kyjiv, Naukova dumka, 1977–1979).

internationalist (or rather nationless) society. It is worth noting that an important shift took place: the idea of a movement towards a society without nations shifted to a paradigm for the formation of a 'new historical community – the Soviet people'. In the mid-1980s, a new project *The History of Classes and Social Groups in the Ukrainian SSR* was launched. This version of the master narrative was supposed to show the path towards a classless society. The journey itself and further implementation of the scheme collapsed together with the Soviet Union.

Later adventures of the Ukrainian master narrative followed a standard scenario. In the second half of the 1980s, during 'perestroika and acceleration', with the advent of the glasnost era, the Soviet master narrative began to disintegrate. At first, it was criticised for silencing and tabooing uncomfortable topics (which was not solely its fault), and an attempt was made to review it by filling in the so-called blank spots of history. Then came the rejection of the Soviet master narrative as a basis of collective identity. The centrifugal processes in the USSR involved the revision and subsequent denunciation of the All-Soviet supranational master narrative as false, and a return of 'true' national histories.

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the triumphant return of the Ukrainian national master narrative in its classical form. The whole selection of Hrushevsky's works, ranging from popular and journalistic writings to the *History of Ukraine-Rus*, were reprinted, as a result of which he was considered a classic of Ukrainian historiography. The new nation-builders, among them those who castigated Hrushevsky's concept, deliberately and without any serious reassessment or revision utilised it as a foundation for a new official historiography. The preface to the third edition of a collective volume on the history of Ukraine, which claimed to be an official version of the history of Ukraine, stated that the authors drew 'upon the solid foundation of Ukrainian historiography from the late nineteenth to the first third of the twentieth century, first of all the works of Hrushevsky'.¹¹ It is noteworthy that this collective work was to a certain extent a response to a challenge from outside.

In 1992, the book *Ukraine: a History*, by a Canadian professor of Ukrainian descent, Orest Subtelny (1941–2016),¹² reached Ukraine and became a bestseller (almost one million copies in total) not only as a popular version of history but also as a scientific guide (one could come across academic articles citing the book as a source).

¹¹ *Istoria Ukraïny: nove bachennia*, ed. by Valeriy Smolii (Kyiv: Al'ternatyvy, 2002), p. 6.

¹² Subtelny himself was somewhat perplexed by this success. When he was preparing the book for publication in Canada, he had a rather modest objective, as he put it: to present to the English-speaking world a popular outline of the history of a country whose existence came as a surprise to the majority of readers. In a private conversation with me at his home in Toronto (1990), he mentioned another reason: pointing to his five-year-old son, he said he had written the book for him.

This concise and reader-friendly book demonstrated the potential to update the national master narrative by reconceptualising some of its tenets. For example, teleology and essentialism were somewhat rejuvenated by placing the narrative in the context of modernisation theories. Still, on the whole, it fits into the canon of the master narrative by Hrushevsky. Interestingly, Subtelny's book immediately became an unofficial teaching guide at schools and institutions of higher learning. It also strongly affected the process of reconstruction of the Ukrainian national master narrative at the level of school history. As the author of a school textbook for the fifth grade wrote in his memoirs, 'Orest Subtelny helped us in the early 1990s to learn our own past, he awakened our consciousness, restored the genetic code which for centuries they had tried to erase, remove, wipe out by famines and executions'.¹³

In the early 1990s, work on a multivolume edition of the history of Ukraine began. The master narrative was to take shape in a solid form that was not inferior in scale to the previous Soviet megaproject. During an official event in 1993, President Leonid Kravchuk lamented that 'the Ukrainian people have no history of their own'. In response, the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine started working on a fifteen-volume *History of the Ukrainian People* – the title spoke for itself.

Rem Symonenko, an employee of the Institute of the History of Ukraine at the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, who struggled against the 'Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism' in history in Soviet times wrote about the major task of this work: 'the reinstatement of national history per se, its reinstatement as the past of the Ukrainian ethnos occupying its own autochthonous territory. Ukrainian history is understood here as a distinctive continuous process, whose main actor is the Ukrainian people, from its origins to modern sovereign statehood'.¹⁴

The dramatic socio-economic crisis of the 1990s halted this project: the state had no funds to finance it. A kind of semblance, a 'brief outline' of the updated and supplemented master narrative emerged in the form of the two-volume *Istoria Ukrainy: nove bachennia* (History of Ukraine: a New Vision, 1995–96),¹⁵ subsequently reprinted as a textbook.

A new attempt to create a contemporary master narrative took the form of the fifteen-volume edition of *Ukraina kriz' viky* (Ukraine Through the Ages, 1998–99).¹⁶ This project was financed mainly by private sponsors,

¹³ Viktor Misan, 'Jak my včyly istoriju: osobysti notatky pedahoha pro perše desjatlittja škil'noji istoričnoji sovity u nezaležnij Ukrajinі', *Ukraina Moderna*, 22 August 2016 <<https://uamoderna.com/event/mysan-history-education-ukraine>> [accessed 22 September 2018].

¹⁴ Rem Symonenko, *Do koncepciji bahatotomnoji 'Istotorniji ukrains' koho narodu' (mižnarodnij nyj ta mižnarodnyj aspekty)* (Kyiv: Instytut istorii Ukrainy AN Ukrainy, 1993), p. 7.

¹⁵ *Istoria Ukrainy: nove bachennja*, ed. by Valeriy Smolij, 2 vols (Kyiv: Vydavnytstvo Ukraina, 1995–96).

¹⁶ *Ukraina kriz' viky*, ed. by Valeriy Smolij, 13 vols (Kyiv: Al'ternativy, 1998–99).

while the authors were mostly scholars from the Institute of the History of Ukraine of the National Academy of Sciences. The publication was awarded a State Prize. It is noteworthy that, despite the unambiguous title, which follows the standard national narrative's idea of the 'Ukrainian millennium', the project in fact challenged some parts of the master narrative. Of course, some of the authors followed a century-old standard (for example, there was a separate volume devoted to the 'national revival of the nineteenth century'), but some clearly deviated from this canon. In fact, each volume represented its author's vision of a particular period of Ukrainian history. There were instances, as in the case of the volume devoted to Kievan Rus', where the co-authors had different approaches to some aspects of the topic.

This project is interesting in two ways. To begin with, apart from the comprehensive title and the agreement between the authors of individual volumes to fit their period into the general chronology of Ukrainian history, there was no prescriptive concept behind it (unlike in the case of the planned *History of the Ukrainian People*). Secondly, it was based on sources the authors had already collected at the time of writing. Thus, it did not imply lengthy research, reinterpretation or debate. That is, the author of each volume (and some of the books were written within two months) presented their own version of their period of Ukrainian history. In this sense, the project revealed the presence of historians in Ukraine who were clearly outside the mainstream – the classical Ukrainian master narrative.

This could also be traced in another international endeavour to write a regional history of Central and Eastern Europe which resulted in the publication of books by Natalia Jakovenko and Jaroslav Hrytsak. The outcome was paradoxical: as expected, the book by Jakovenko¹⁷ went beyond the standards of the national master narrative, whereas, surprisingly, the volume written by Hrytsak, which was devoted to the history of Ukraine during the era of nationalism and communism, reproduced the standard narrative of 'nation-building' and 'national revival'¹⁸ in terms of structure, description and, in many ways, interpretation, despite the ornamental use of modernist theories and rhetoric. Both pieces were published as textbooks.

In the 2000s, the national master narrative in Ukraine took the shape of the monumental *Encyklopedija istoriji Ukrajinjy* (Encyclopaedia of the History of Ukraine).¹⁹ In 2003–13, almost seven hundred historians in Ukraine worked on this project. They produced ten volumes (two additional

¹⁷ Natalija Jakovenko, *Narys istoriji Ukrajinjy z najdavnijšych časiv do kincja XVIII stolittja* (Kyjiv: Heneza, 1997).

¹⁸ Jaroslav Hrycak, *Narys istoriji Ukrajinjy: formuvannja modernoji ukrajins'koji naciji XIX–XX stolittja Navč. posibnyk* (Kyjiv: Heneza, 1996).

¹⁹ An electronic version of this publication is available here: <http://www.history.org.ua/?l=EHUs>.

summary volumes, *Ukrajina-Ukrajinci* [Ukraine – Ukrainians] were published in 2018–19). Although in this case the conceptual unification and editing were inevitable, different approaches among both the adherents of the standard national master narrative and its critics and deconstructionists could also be traced in the encyclopaedia.

The most recent attempt to offer the state and society a national master narrative in the form of a multivolume publication occurred between 2010 and 2014. This initiative came from the leadership of the Institute of the History of Ukraine. Development of this publication's concept began in 2010 with the formation of a working group at the Institute. In 2012, the *Ukrajins'kyj istoryčnyj žurnal* started a column titled 'The Modern Ukrainian Grand Narrative: Approaches, Concepts and Implementation'.²⁰

Discussions about the present and future of the Ukrainian national master narrative identified two main approaches. One was an attempt to modernise the national master narrative, in particular its rhetoric and theoretical underpinnings. The other approach implied that the national master narrative was 'unrepairable'; therefore, if it is to be a scholarly publication which fits the principles of analytical history, one should write not so much the 'history of Ukraine' but rather the 'history of Ukraine'.²¹ In fact, discussions in the *Ukrajins'kyj istoryčnyj žurnal* were motivated by this second approach, although they had no practical implication.²²

Moreover, the events of the Fall-Winter of 2013/14 (called the Revolution of Dignity), the annexation of the Crimea, and the war in Eastern Ukraine have essentially taken these discussions off the table. The last articles based on these debates were published during the war, in which Russia played the role of aggressor. The national master narrative went off to war and became a tool for combatting the aggressor in hybrid warfare, primarily information warfare. Purely academic debates about the potential and limitations of the national master narrative contradicted the needs of war-time mobilization and propaganda.

²⁰ Valerij Smolij, 'Laboratorija ukrajins'koho naratyvu (vstupne slovo holovnoho naukovoho redaktora)', *Ukrajins'kyj istoryčnyj žurnal*, 5 (2012), 4–5.

²¹ The material for a wider discussion was never published: *Istoriia Ukraïny: Materialy do rozrobky koncepciji nacional'noho brand-naratyvu. Zaprošennja do dyskusiji* (Kyjiv: Instytut istoriji Ukraïny NAN Ukraïny, 2011). Document provided by courtesy of Genadij Boryak.

²² See Heorhij Kas'janov, Oleksij Toločko, 'Nacional'ni istoriji ta sučasna istoriohrafija. Vyklyky j nebezpeky pry napysanni novoji istoriji Ukraïny', *Ukrajins'kyj istoryčnyj žurnal*, 6, (2012), 4–22; Kyrylo Haluško, 'U pošuku common sense. Do dyskusiji z pryvodu nacional'noho brand-naratyvu', *Ukrajins'kyj istoryčnyj žurnal*, 1 (2013), 4–23; Oleksandr Majboroda, 'Nacional'na istorija zasluhovuje buty bil'se žyvoju niž mertvoju', *Ukrajins'kyj istoryčnyj žurnal*, 1 (2013), 24–28; Vadim Adadurov, 'Teoretčni zasady ta metodolohija vypsuvannja ukrajins'koi istoriji v jevropejs'kyj kontekst (pohlad istoryka-vsesvitnyka)', *Ukrajins'kyj istoryčnyj žurnal*, 2 (2013), 4–23; Robert-Pavlo Magočij, 'Konstruivannja čy dekonstrukcija? Jak povynna vyhljadyt 'majbutnja istorija Ukraïny'?', *Ukrajins'kyj istoryčnyj žurnal*, 4 (2013), 4–7; Jaroslava Vermenyč, 'Lokal'no-rehional'ni rivni vitčyznjanoho naratyvu', *Ukrajins'kyj istoryčnyj žurnal*, 5 (2013), 4–23; Stepan Vidnjans'kyj, Andrij Martynov, 'Nacional'ni istoriji v metanaratyvi procesy globalizaciji: z jevropejs'koho dosvidu', *Ukrajins'kyj istoryčnyj žurnal*, 6 (2013), 4–16; Volodymyr Potul'nyč'kyj, 'Ščodo doslidnyč'kych pryoritetiv u spravi stvorennja novoho akademičnoho syntezy ukrajins'koi istoriji v konteksti istoriji svitovoji', *Ukrajins'kyj istoryčnyj žurnal*, 1 (2014), 4–20; Oleh Horenko, 'Ukrajins'kyj metanaratyv v epochu propagandy', *Ukrajins'kyj istoryčnyj žurnal*, 2 (2014), 4–21.

The above-mentioned discussions, of which I was a participant, reveal two major tendencies. Firstly, in Ukrainian professional historiography, a clear demarcation line between analytical history, on the one hand, and affirmative and instructive history, on the other, has been drawn. It is no longer necessary to argue that, despite the semblance of scholarship, the national master narrative belongs primarily to the sphere of ideology and politics. Its promoters openly claim its validity by the needs of the time. Moreover, among professional historians, one can easily find those who insist on the indispensability and usefulness of the ideological functions of the master narrative and who are willing to develop, promote and amplify these functions in every possible way. The same tendency can easily be found in neighbouring countries, such as Poland, Russia, Lithuania and Hungary. Here I am only listing examples that I know relatively well. The general dynamics of political development in the world, the rise of ethnic nationalism and populism as well as discursive totalitarianism indicate that the list of cases might be much more extensive.

CONCLUSIONS

The national master narrative in either its classical or modified form looks rather archaic in the twenty-first century, at least from the point of view of history as a scientific discipline.

At one time, the national master narrative emerged as part of the movement towards modernisation, and its historiography was part of the modernity project. Currently, the appeal to the national master narrative, especially in its classical retro version, looks like an attempt at de-modernisation (the Ukrainian case being a classic example). Reference to the national master narrative can also be observed in countries that are catching up (all post-Soviet countries except for Russia and the Baltic states). It could also be a response to the challenges of globalisation, a defence mechanism (in this sense, it is heart-piercing to see the West and the East of Europe so united in that all pan-European historical projects proposed by supranational European structures are losing in an unequal competition against national master narratives).

In any manifestation, the cognitive function and potential of the national master narrative is exhausted. Its further use belongs to the field of ideology and patriotic education. This is where it rules despite numerous attempts at its revision from a variety of perspectives – historiographical and political, ethical, religious, gender, cultural, etc.

Of course, the reason for this sustainability has to do primarily with the role of the national master narrative in identity formation. Despite internationalisation, globalisation and the development of transnational and supranational cultural, political, economic, social and other structures, the division of the world into nations remains relevant. Moreover, globalisation, growing transparency and the non-obviousness of national borders create impulses that provoke the strengthening of ethnocentric national identities. Paradoxically, there emerge conditions and temptations for writing a 'global history of national historiographies', all of which – without exception – represent different examples of the same phenomenon: the national master narrative.²³

Another paradox of the interaction between globalisation and the national master narrative is a new quality of the conflict. The birth of the national master narrative in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and two world wars are closely intertwined. Its renaissance in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, combined with a global information revolution, the transparency of cultural and political borders and rapid development of technological means of manipulating consciousness, create a new quality of conflicts between homogeneous narratives, especially those with an exclusive ethnocentric component. The exhausting and pointless conflict between Ukraine and Poland over the past is one of the best illustrations. The use of the elements of the national master narrative in information warfare is a distinctive feature of our times, whether the warfare takes place in Europe (Russia–Ukraine–Poland), Asia (China–Japan, Japan–Korea, India–Pakistan) or in North America, where emotions over the outcome and causes of the US Civil War run high even now.

It is noteworthy that in Europe a surge of ethnocentric versions of national history originated precisely in the integration processes. The collapse of the Communist system was only the first invitation to go back to one's roots and restore the 'true' past that the communists had allegedly distorted. The full reinstatement of the national master narrative also marked a return to a 'proper' life and 'proper' identity. The second act of the revival of the national master narrative and associated identity coincides precisely with the creation of a 'united Europe' in the mid-2000s. In this case, the national master narrative turned out to be a way of protecting the cultural sovereignty of the new member states of the EU.

The subsequent decade, mired by the immigration crisis, the collapse of the politics of multiculturalism, the Euro-area crisis, Brexit and the

²³ *Writing the Nation. A Global Perspective*, ed. by Stefan Berger (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 1

prospect of further EU exits, at least in terms of values, has only strengthened the legitimacy of nation states and their respective narratives.

The third decade of the twentieth century, which has opened with a global economic crisis, a pandemic, an infodemic and a crisis of confidence in transnational structures, is only likely to fuel the demand for nation states and 'to serve and to protect' national master narratives.

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Šarūnas Liekis

THE CLASH OF THE SOVIET- RUSSIAN AND NATIONALIST NARRATIONS OF THE PAST

ABSTRACT

Formerly occupied states or modern national movements have to develop narratives of resisting invaders or occupiers in order to teach the young never to be defeated in the future. Narratives of resistance explain temporary or permanent failures by employing resistance storytelling, which puts forward compensatory and defensive mechanisms for repressed peoples. This article is a case study of the narratives of resistance in Lithuania. The article explores the Lithuanian anti-Soviet resistance, the pro-Soviet Lithuanian partisan groups, the Polish Home Army, or the Jewish partisans in Soviet partisan formations in the framework of narratives of resistance.

KEYWORDS:

resistance, narratives, partisans, Poland, Lithuania, Russia, Israel

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Resistance to foreign occupiers and stories of fighting overwhelmingly superior enemies can be traced back to the classical world of Greece. Formerly occupied states or modern national movements have to develop narratives of resisting invaders or occupiers in order to teach the young never to be defeated in the future.

Narratives of resistance explain temporary or permanent failures by employing resistance storytelling, which puts forward compensatory and defensive mechanisms for repressed peoples. Soviet anti-Nazi resistance in the Soviet Union, the treatment of anti-Soviet resistance in the Baltic States and Ukraine, the Israeli cult of Jewish partisans, and the French and Dutch resistance movements – these are all well-known examples in academic literature. The story of the Polish Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*, AK) during the Second World War is worthy of particular mention. State-sponsored support of research into the history of the ‘cursed soldiers’ (*‘żołnierze wyklęci’* – the post-Second World War Polish Home Army armed resistance) is another example of a modern resistance story and its usage in the politics of memory.

The Lithuanian Republic is often the subject of angry arguments in the politics of memory. Very often, participants of historical debates, namely highly ideological interest groups, fail to maintain a mutually tolerant attitude towards the legacies, mythologies and desires of interest groups that support the cause of the Lithuanian anti-Soviet resistance, pro-Soviet Lithuanian partisan groups, the Polish Home Army, or Jewish partisans in Soviet partisan formations.

In between the two world wars, the Vilnius Region, including its south-eastern corner of Lithuania and the Rudniki forest, later home to numerous partisan groups, was part of the Polish eastern border lands – *Kresy Wschodnie* (Pl.). Before World War II, Poles, Lithuanians, and Belarusians comprised the majority in this ethnically mixed rural area, where Poles and Jews lived in urban areas and dominated the local economies.

Ethnic Poles ran the administration, the police force and the school system. From 1918 to 1938, the Lithuanian-Polish territorial dispute provoked resentment and fuelled Lithuanian-Polish conflicts on both sides of the border. The inter-ethnic balance of power started to change after the incorporation of the Vilnius Region into Lithuania in November 1939. This allowed the Lithuanian administration to dominate in the recently incorporated area of the former Second Polish Republic, and the policies and balance between different ethno-religious groups began to change. Lithuanian citizens as well as ethnic Lithuanians (including any nationality entitled to Lithuanian citizenship) living in this region (including the

Vilnius Region in the 10 years prior to 1914) were given priority treatment for moving up the social ladder.¹ Refugees from the territories of the Polish Republic, occupied by Germany and the USSR, and those who settled in the territories newly acquired by the Lithuanian Republic in the interwar period were treated with suspicion and were disadvantaged. Short-lived Lithuanian rule ceased as a result of the Soviet occupation in June 1940, with the ensuing annexation turning the country into the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic. This period under Soviet ideology did not relieve tensions between different ethno-religious groups in the area.

The Soviet-Nazi war started on June 22, 1941. Within three days, the Lithuanian territory was occupied by Nazi Germany. As a result, the German military government co-existed with the civil administration in Lithuania from the summer of 1941.

The German repressions and hostage taking in retaliation for the Soviets' resistance actions started in 1942 after attacks by Soviet partisans from Belarus. Overall, the population cooperated with the German authorities against the Soviet partisans' raids from Belarus. Police reports contain numerous messages from the local population and even accounts of active armed participation in operations against partisans.

The first move towards the 'Great Patriotic War' (as the Soviet Union called the German-Soviet war of 1941–45, a tradition resurrected by contemporary Russia) in Lithuania, i.e., raising an indigenous partisan force, was made when 19 partisan groups were sent to Lithuania in 1942 from a training camp in Balakhna, near Gorkyi (now Nizhny Novgorod in the Russian Federation). Nine groups were parachuted in; the other 10 groups (in three units) had to cross the front line on foot, but the arrival in Lithuania of the groups crossing on foot was not reported until 1943. The first of these groups, the so-called Pranevičius partisan unit (made up of five groups) arrived in Belarus in April 1943 (the group did not even attempt to cross into Lithuania). All the other groups arrived in May 1943. Some of them were ambushed by the police, and two groups were completely annihilated on marshland. Other groups lost several people too. However, these groups became the basis of the partisan movement.²

Out of the total of 3,910 Soviet partisans in Lithuania, there were 1,388 Lithuanians, 1,477 Russians, 676 Jews, and 367 people from other ethnic groups. There were also 1,020 escaped Soviet POWs among them. These numbers are reliable, although they create the illusion of a large partisan fighting group. This is especially so because the partisan lists included

¹ 'Laikinas įstatymas Apie Lietuvos Pilietybę', *Laikinosios vyriausybės žinios*, 1 (1919), 5.

² Report, Lithuanian Special Archives (hereafter LYA), Vilnius, col. 1771, inv. 16, f. 95; Jonis Arvasevičius and others, *Lietuvos liaudis Didžiajame Tėvynės kare (1941–1945): dokumentų ir Medžiagos Rinkinys* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1982), pp. 401, 408.

teenage males and women. Taking into consideration traditional patterns of dominant behaviour that attribute fighting to men rather than women in guerrilla movements in the past, one should assume that even if they were able to take part in the fighting, their active participation was unlikely. The lists also included partisan informants amongst a widely varied mix of supporters. There were 425 partisans in the Communist Party: 55 were candidates for the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), and 472 were Communist Youth members.

The movement suffered substantial casualties as a result of military encounters. According to the list of partisans killed in action whilst fighting against the 'German-Fascist occupants', the units subordinate to the Lithuanian Headquarters of the Partisan Movement suffered the following casualties: 404 killed in action (177 Russians, 119 Lithuanians, 75 Jews, 8 Poles, 4 Belarusians, 21 unidentified fighters) and 9 who were taken prisoner in 1943–44. In addition, 12 partisans were executed for treason, and 4 deserted.³ The age and social profile of Jewish partisans confirms the theoretical supposition that Jews were drawn into the Soviet Lithuanian partisan units exclusively as a part of the Soviet partisan recruitment effort, with the aim of mobilising for warfare but not of saving people from the horror of the Holocaust. The main purpose was to draw upon the human resources of the ghettos that were of conscription age. Additionally, the crucial element that allowed entry into the Soviet Lithuanian partisan units was having links to the Communist Party underground and to informal Jewish youth networks that were directed against the educated white-collar ghetto establishments in Vilnius and Kaunas.⁴

The Soviet partisans competed with German and Lithuanian officialdom over power and the resources of the local population. The main competitor for living quarters and resources in the forests was the Polish Home Army (AK), which corresponded with the Soviet partisan movement in Lithuania in terms of its founding and its expansion in building military forces. The AK eventually had to come into conflict over the zones of influence in this country, which lacked resources. The AK's military structure in the eastern parts of the pre-war Second Polish Republic was based on the regional division of the country into 'Wojewodztwa' – the AK districts roughly corresponded to the 'Wojewodztwa'. The units around Vilnius were part of the AK Wilno (Polish for Vilnius). The territory of the AK Nowogródek (Polish for Navahrudak) also overlapped with Lithuanian

³ Data about the number of partisans, 4 November 1945, LYA, col. 1, inv. 1, f. 136, p. 6. The list of partisans killed in action by the German occupation authorities, and the lists of traitors of the Headquarters of the Lithuanian Partisan Movement 1943–45, LYA, col. 1, inv. 1, f. 185, p. 1–63.

⁴ Šarūnas Liekis, 'Soviet Resistance and Jewish Partisans in Lithuania', in Polin: *Studies in Polish Jewry*, ed. by Šarūnas Liekis, Antony Polonsky, and Chaeran Freeze, xxv (Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 331–56 (p. 349).

territory. The whole area of Poland's Nowogródek Województwo was administratively included in Reichskommissariat Ostland as part of Generalkommissariat Weissruthenien; the areas around Eišiškės, which had large forests, were included in Generalkommissariat Litauen. The AK Nowogródek maintained that these areas were under their jurisdiction, despite the fact that the real borders of the Lithuanian SSR and the Belarusian SSR had been drawn differently from the original borders of the Polish 'Województwa' by the German administration, and even earlier by the Soviet Union. All units of the AK Wilno and AK Nowogrodek were under the command of the Territorial Operational Headquarters, under the supreme commander Col. Alexander Krzyżanowski (nom de guerre 'Wilk').⁵

The competing Soviet Lithuanian Partisan groups, some with predominantly Jewish membership, as well as Polish Home Army groups in the Vilnius area and elsewhere, are alleged to have shed the blood of a few hundred civilian people charged with collaboration, as well as members of the administration and some innocent bystanders. Local Nazi collaborators – from different local police forces that were maintained by Nazis – killed several thousand during punitive operations while fighting guerrilla movements in the territory of Lithuania,⁶ not to mention the genocidal extermination policies of repression and exploitation of the local population.

The partisan warfare and the saving of a few hundred Jews by the Soviet Lithuanian resistance became a part of Jewish history, culture and tragedy. It also became an integral part of Lithuanian history and culture. The Polish context was no less important. Since 2004, efforts to bring Jewish and Polish culture into the mainstream of cultural and ideological discourse have increased. The inclusion of Polish-Lithuanian common cultural heritage into Lithuanian contemporary culture was closely connected to acceptance of the political concept of nationhood.

This nationhood had to be based on civic nationalism and in order to be as favourable to multiculturalism as elsewhere in the EU (Lithuania became a member of the EU in 2004). Its presence in a large portion of Lithuanian society could have been of importance when forming a strategic Lithuanian-Polish partnership and integrating into the Western milieu.

However, processes of constructing civic nationalism based on multiculturalism in education and in public life have not only encountered resistance from population groups that view the past in terms of a national struggle for survival and see neighbouring countries as historical

⁵ Šarūnas Liekis, 'Soviet Resistance and Jewish Partisans in Lithuania', in Polin, pp. 346–47.

⁶ Arūnas Bubnys, *Pasipriešinimo judėjimai Lietuvoje Antrojo pasaulinio karo metais: lenkų pogrindis 1939–1945 m.* (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, 2015), p. 108; Rimantas Zizas, *Ne žydų kilmės Lietuvos piliečių persekiojimas, civilių gyventojų žudynės* (Vilnius: Tarptautinės komisijos nacių ir sovietinio okupacinių režimų nusikaltimams Lietuvoje įvertinti užsakymu, n.d.), p. 114.

competitors. They have also been met with an international campaign of obfuscation (mainly led by certain authorities of the Russian Federation) aimed at undermining Lithuania's efforts to reach an understanding of its past and to deal with the historical issues of the extermination of its Jewish citizens, antisemitism, and Polish-Lithuanian conflicts and struggles in South-Eastern Lithuania during the Second World War.

The Russian Federation's propaganda war was (and still is) based on the premise that the policies of the Baltic States and the East Central European countries seek to 'equate' the crimes of the Soviet and Nazi systems and thus somehow subvert the memory of the Holocaust as a unique event. A certain lecturer claimed that 'A sophisticated template for deleting the Holocaust "as such" from European history, without denying a single murder, has been developed in the Baltics. Far from contenting itself with revisionism locally, this ambitious project seeks to win over the European Parliament and, increasingly, the European Union. The strategy is to replace the Holocaust with a new and bogus paradigm of "two equal genocides, Nazi and Soviet"'.⁷

It is claimed that there has been a 20-year resurgence of ultra-nationalism in the former Soviet states and among Soviet satellites; this has resulted in a new narrative of Stalinism as the greater evil of the Second World War. These statements have been spearheaded by a few individuals as a result of Baltic claims for compensation for the Soviet occupation in which the Presidential Commission of the Nazi and Soviet Crimes of Lithuania is alleged to have been instrumental.

In 2007, roundtable discussions under the patronage of Mikhail Margelov, the Head of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Russian Federation, marked a turning point in historical debates on the Russian Federation's counteraction against the Baltic States, Ukraine and Poland.⁸

Using its proxies in the West, the Russian Federation facilitated an attack on the tradition of writing academic history and, more specifically, academic histories of the Second World War and of the post-world war period.

These attempts to attack academic writing also ignored the task of historians: to build a sufficient argument based on evidence and made up of sources in which historians are not judges of behaviour. Historians have to have multiple perspectives, and justifying or comparing is by no means tantamount to equating.

⁷ The Baltic Project to Delete the Holocaust from European History. Observations from Lithuania, Herbert Berman Memorial Series, on Tuesday 23 June 2009, 1 Tammuz, 5769, 10:00 am at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 13 Tel Hai Street. This was also echoed at a roundtable discussion with the participation of Efraim Zuroff. 'Pribaltika i Ukraina podderživajut nacizm', KM.RU, 11 December 2006 [accessed 10 September 2009].

⁸ 'Ochotnik za nacistami bol'se ne boitsja ezdit' v Rossiju', BBC Russian Service, 1 November 2007 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/russian/russia/newsid_7072000/7072730.stm> [accessed 15 September 2009].

These highly ideological attacks ignored the fact that historical narratives give coherence to disparate elements (events, icons, metaphors) by assembling a sequence in time that is made meaningful by the resolution of four features: setting, plot, a challenge/obstacle to overcome, and the set of characters or actors deemed relevant for possible outcomes/resolutions. Cultural and socio-democratic filters very often bring historical research close to art or craft. Reinhart Koselleck's concept of Experiences and Expectations in his work *Critique and Crisis* (in which he claimed that the experience of being part of a defeated nation or culture enabled a more self-reflexive form of historical understanding, and that the most interesting perspectives on history are often written by the vanquished rather than the victors) indirectly defended diverse forms of presentation and took into account the stories of both those who win and those who lose.⁹

Questions of responsibility for the violence in the forests, including the abuse and plunder of the surrounding villages by different partisan groups, were tabled for discussion without consideration of the larger historical context. The blaming of Jews and Holocaust victims who had joined the Soviet partisan groups for alleged participation in crimes against civilians and Nazi collaborators led to discussions on the nature of warfare and posed ethical questions regarding the responsibility for the misdeeds committed.

Conventional wisdom holds that the war in the East – the bloodiest conflict in history – differed dramatically from the Western front in terms of human cost, ideological fanaticism and brutality – a contrast easily visualized in the starkly different fates of different countries in the west and east of Europe.

The Baltic States face the dilemma of comparing the evils of Nazism and Stalinism, although the main object of Hitler's hatred was the Slavs, in particular Poles and Russians. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were victims of both totalitarian regimes. This episode in history has left an open wound at the most painful point of Lithuanian, Jewish and Polish historical imaginations, where divided wartime memories are at their most irreconcilable. The Lithuanian arguments, which emphasize anti-Soviet rhetoric, have been perceived as justifying Nazi crimes and According to Efraim Zuroff of the Wiesenthal Center, the questioning of the former partisans amounted to a 'deliberate campaign [...] to discredit the brave Jewish heroes of the anti-Nazi resistance and help deflect attention from

⁹ Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), p. 214.

the infinitely more numerous crimes by Lithuanians against Jews during the Holocaust'.¹⁰

Very often, historians treat any form of story as a narrative. The term itself has many meanings; however, the most appropriate in terms of its explanatory power is the concept of systemic narratives that concern the past, present, and future of the international system as a whole. Historians also deal with identity narratives concerning the identity and character of the actors in the system. Persuasion on an issue or on the shape of the world order depends on narrative alignment between imagery of (a) what a country is like, (b) in what international space it operates, and also (c) problem narratives which connect all types of narratives in system-identity-issue narratives.¹¹ There is no doubt that the systemic narrative in Lithuania was important for understanding divided wartime memories and the manner in which they impact Lithuanian society's ongoing struggle with the narratives of the Holocaust, both Nazi and Soviet.

One of the persistent themes that has gained new momentum is the rise of anti-Semitism, which, according to some, is expressed in Lithuania as politicized attempts to compare (but not to equate) Nazism with Communism. Partisan warfare in Lithuania during World War II became an important beacon of the divide between the systemic narratives presented by different historiographies.

PRESENT-DAY NARRATIVES ON PARTISAN WARFARE IN EASTERN LITHUANIA

We know that actors craft narratives in particular ways to achieve political goals: to legitimize policy, to mobilize the political public, and to maintain alliances and (re)construct identity claims in international relations. Strategic narratives are a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics in order to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors.

In the global environment, it is very easy for competing narratives to be heard. Some may be deliberately combative: those of our adversaries, for example, or perhaps hostile media outlets.

¹⁰ More on these arguments in: Saulius Sužiedėlis and Šarūnas Liekis, 'Conflicting Memories: The Reception of the Holocaust in Lithuania', in *Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Post-communist Europe*, ed. by John-Paul Himka and Joanna Beata Michlic (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), pp. 319–51.

¹¹ Alistair Miskimmon and Ben O'Loughlin, 'Russia's Narratives of Global Order: Great Power Legacies in a Polycentric World', *Politics and Governance*, 5, 3 (2017), 111–20.

Where narratives meet, they are referred to as a battle of narratives, although the reality is that this is a never-ending competition rather than a battle with winners and losers.

In general, the Great Patriotic War has been presented in Russia as a continuation of the heroic struggle, under Russian leadership, of the many Soviet nations against the historic Teutonic aggressor. While there have indeed been some useful academic works published on the German occupation, the Jewish specificity of the Holocaust was generally camouflaged as the murder of 'peaceful Soviet citizens'.¹² The Jewish resistance in Soviet partisan groups has been described as an effort of the Soviet people, while the Soviet historiography scheme talks about 'the victims of Hitlerism'. It is obvious that Lithuanian society is facing difficulties while trying to look at the Holocaust through the great Soviet historical narrative perspective.¹³

The old Soviet version of the Russian agenda suffers from both its transparent political agenda and its selectivity of documentation. The Russian agenda has now been muddled into what legitimately borders on a conspiracy theory and continues to propagate division and exclusivity. This makes it different from the Soviet agenda. This type of extremist rhetoric is deployed in order to incite pathological fear of the Lithuanian government and its institutions and individuals within world Jewry, and it reduces a multi-layered and extremely complex situation to black and white.

The crux of the issue is this: Lithuanian Jewish history is not viewed as Lithuanian, and Lithuanian history is not viewed as Jewish-Lithuanian history (Litvak). They are mutually exclusive. An exclusive system of thinking will always yield exclusive rights and privileges and historical ghettoization. Members of the Jewish resistance are treated as a separate entity born without local context, acting exclusively out of hatred for its persecutors.

On the other hand, the anti-Nazi struggle and anti-Nazi stand of the Soviet Union and Russia is well integrated into contemporary Israeli and Russian systemic narratives. This systemic narrative of international order has been largely consistent with the anti-Nazi struggle and the narrative of the Soviet Union as a liberator from Nazism in the 21st century that corresponds with Vladimir Putin's tenure as President and Prime Minister of the Russian Federation.

¹² *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje 1941–1944. Dokumentų rinkinys. 1 dalis*, ed. by Genovaitė Erslavaitė and others (Vilnius: Mintis, 1965); Juozas Bulavas, *Vokiškųjų fašistų okupacinis Lietuvos valdymas, 1941–1944 m.* (Vilnius: LTSR Mokslo Akademija, 1969); Kazys Rukšėnas, 'Hitlerininkų politika Lietuvoje 1941–1944 metais' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Vilnius University, 1970).

¹³ Sužiedėlis and Liekis, 'Conflicting Memories', pp. 319–52.

There was and still is a propaganda and conspiracy claim that a sophisticated template for deleting the Holocaust 'as such' from European history, without denying a single murder, has been developed in the Baltics. Far from contenting itself with revisionism locally, the Baltics' alleged project seeks to win over the European Parliament and, increasingly, the European Union. The strategy is to replace the Holocaust with a new and bogus paradigm of 'two equal genocides, Nazi and Soviet'.¹⁴

This attempt at allegedly equating Nazi and Soviet crimes has been called the 'double genocide' theory in what many see as an attempt to shirk responsibility by claiming Jews also committed genocide against Lithuanians, so essentially everyone is 'even'. The events of 1941–1944 in the forests of Rudniki have been called upon to equate the crimes of local Nazi collaborators with the misdeeds of Soviet partisans, among which there is alleged to have been a large percentage of Jews.¹⁵

However, the reality is much more trivial. Most Lithuanians remember the 1940s quite differently to the 'good war' narrative that is prevalent in the West, as exemplified, for instance, in the United States. For one, there are the chronological anomalies. The usual dates given for the Second World War (1939–45) have little relevance to the experience of the majority of the population of Lithuania: demonstrably more ethnic Lithuanians were killed in the war's aftermath (1945–1953) than during the six preceding years of global conflict, and this brutal period has come to be reflected in the language itself by the term *pokaris* (Lith. 'the post-war period').¹⁶ Moreover, Lithuanian historiography has reflected three main trends: Marxist (social progress through revolution), liberal (stressing the empowerment of once socially subjugated groups), and nationalist (collective self-realization through the national state). Such historical narratives are usually characterized by a grand political mission, pretensions to objectivity, and a teleological world view which excludes other perspectives. The nationalist narrative – with its paternalistic attitudes towards minorities and appeals to the sensitivities of present-day Lithuanian society – serves to please self-esteem and self-perception, as similar narratives do in other territorial states of the world where any one of the three aforementioned trends is dominant.¹⁷

¹⁴ For example: Dovid Katz, *Holocaust Revisionism, Ultranationalism, and the Nazi/Soviet "Double Genocide" debate in Eastern Europe*, 7 March 2011 <<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/holocaust-revisionism-ultranationalism-and-the-nazisoviet-double-genocide-debate-eastern>> [accessed 10 September 2021].

¹⁵ Leszek Żebrowski, 'Virtuti Militari za dokonanie masakry w polskiej wsi Koniuchy', *WP Opinie*, 8 October 2014 <<https://opinie.wp.pl/virtuti-militari-za-dokonanie-masakry-w-polskiej-wsi-koniuchy-6126042173597313a>> [accessed 15 September 2021]; Redakcja PMN, 'Zbrodnie żydowskich „partyzantów” na polskiej ludności – Koniuchy i Naliboki', 24 November 2012 <<https://myslnarodowa.wordpress.com/2012/11/24/zbrodnie-zydowskich-partyzantow-na-polskiej-ludnosci-koniuchy-i-naliboki/>> [accessed 8 September 2021].

¹⁶ Zizas, *Ne žydų kilmės Lietuvus*, p. 114.

¹⁷ Sužiedėlis and Liekis, 'Conflicting Memories', pp. 325–26.

THE CASE OF KONIUCHY

In 1943–44, the Jewish resistance in Kaunas organized escapes into the eastern Lithuanian forests and western Belarus, where conditions for guerrilla activity were more favourable. Of all the Lithuanian resistance movements, the one that emerged from the Vilna Ghetto has garnered the most worldwide attention and admiration. The Vilnius fighters were the first Jewish resistance organization that originated in the ghettos. The Jews who made up the Jewish resistance groups in 1943 and 1944 had at the time a contentious relationship with the Soviet partisans who had been operating in Lithuania since 1942. The village militias that were equipped and supported by the German and Lithuanian administration had significant popular support stemming from resentment with the requisitions exacted by the pro-Soviet partisans. The well-documented friction and even fighting between the Home Army and Jewish partisans added to the mix of clashing forces. One interesting factor which further complicated the situation was that Lithuanian-speaking villages sometimes preferred the 'Red partisans' as a lesser evil as a result of the depredations of the Home Army units, which often raided their homesteads in continuation of the bitter internecine rivalry which had long characterized Polish and Lithuanian communities of the region. While there is evidence indicating that the Jewish and Soviet resistance movements encountered a friendly reception in some villages, this was hardly the norm in the Lithuanian countryside. Jewish participation in the partisan groups became an issue during debates over the extent to which local collaborators were involved in the Holocaust. Accusations of collaboration with the Nazis were often countered with claims of alleged Jewish crimes against local non-Jewish populations. For detractors of the partisans, there is an ideal opportunity here to besmirch them, but it is important to understand the context of the violence. It is, of course, egregious to suggest any equivalence (moral or otherwise) between, for example, Koniuchy (Kaniūkai) and the massive singular crimes of the Nazis.

The case of Koniuchy was a case of perplexed memory issues. This village was situated on the present border between Lithuania and Belarus. The village apparently cooperated both with the Lithuanian police and Polish AK units. What happened there? The years 1943 and 1944 witnessed an increase in fighting between Soviet partisans and the village's defence force, which had been set up by the German and Lithuanian police in the eastern part of Lithuania. During this period, many encounters between Soviet partisans and the *Hilfspolizei* (Ger. auxiliary police) took place. There were many fierce encounters and arbitrary killings on both sides, including the killing of many innocent as well as suspected civilians. One such

episode was an attack by Soviet partisan units on Koniuchy village, during which innocent civilians were killed. The village was taken by surprise and alleged members of the auxiliary police did not manage to put up any resistance. Moreover, the attack took place at a time when the AK partisans were not in the vicinity of the village. According to an official report (Report no. 53) from the commander of the Baltininkų Lithuanian police defence station to the commander of the 253rd Lithuanian Police Battalion Vladas Žibas, January 31, 1944:

1A. 1944.01.29 at 6 am around 150 bandits (Jews and Russians) armed with 1 heavy machine gun, 3 light machine guns, machine pistols, rifles and grenades attacked Koniuchy village. The village was burnt down, people were killed and cattle were slaughtered. (There were 35 KIA and 15 WIA.) The bandits had arrived from the directions of Dauciunai and WLK Salky. They spent one hour, then retreated in the same directions.¹⁸

The same day, at 7 am, 52 men armed with machine guns from the 252nd Police battalion marched to Koniuchy but did not manage to catch the retreating Soviet partisans. Additionally, platoons from the battalion's defence stations had organized hideouts in order to ambush Soviet partisans, but their attempts failed.

It is evident from the 253rd battalion's diary that Soviet partisans threatened and ordered the removal of firearms from the nearby Lithuanian villages of Klepociai, Butrimonys, Jononiai, Sauliai and Pasalis. The partisans attacked and robbed Kiemeliškės village that same day.

Other sources confirm the number of casualties. According to Soviet partisan reporting, the attack on Koniuchy village was a joint action by the Rudniki forest partisans. Genrikas Zimanas (First Secretary of the 'South Area' Underground Committee of the Communist Party of Lithuania) reported to the head of the Lithuanian Partisan Movement Headquarters:

The joint forces of the Vilnius partisan units ('Death to the Occupants', 'Margiris', and General Headquarters Special Group [Soviet Military Intelligence – GRU]) destroyed the fiercest Eishyshok self-defence village, Kaniūkai. Kaniūkai not only objected to the Soviet partisans entering the village but also organized ambushes on the roads, attacked partisan-friendly villages, and forcibly took firearms to partisan-neutral villages. The defence force suffered heavy casualties. We did not have casualties on our side.¹⁹

¹⁸ Lithuanian Central State Archive, Vilnius, fol. R-666, inv. 1, f. 7, p. 29.

¹⁹ Lithuanian Archive of Public Organizations, fol. 1, inv. 1, f. 410, p. 173.

With regard to the national composition of the partisans, it has only been possible to identify a small number of those who personally participated in the attack. We can only estimate the number of people of each nationality that were in these units by their personal files in the archive. The popular argument that these were Jews does not survive scrutiny. We know the ethnic composition of the groups that contributed to the composite force attacking Koniuchy. The partisan group 'Death to the Occupants' had 224 partisans with 79 Jews; 'Margiris' at that stage had 51 partisans, of whom 30 were Jewish. The Soviet Military intelligence group (the GRU Special Group, often designated as the 14th) at that time was predominantly Russian and had 250 men, of whom very few were locals. It is correct to state the following: of the 3,910 Soviet partisans in Lithuania, there were 1,388 Lithuanians, 1,477 Russians, 676 Jews, and the remaining 367 were from other ethnic groups. There were also 1,020 escaped Soviet POWs among them.²⁰ These numbers are reliable, although they create the illusion that these partisans made up a large fighting group. We might allege that there were more Russians and Lithuanian members than Jewish partisans because, as a rule, more experienced and better-armed partisans would be used for this kind of operation. The core of the group was more experienced and was armed with automatic weapons; these members of the core groups had arrived from the Soviet Union or were members of the Soviet military intelligence groups.

In the AK reports, this event was presented as an anti-Polish massacre in which 300 alleged victims were killed by Jewish partisans. Later, it was included in the Polish martyrology of the Second World War. The post-1990 Lithuanian independence movement treated the Soviet partisan attack on the village as an anti-Lithuanian action.²¹ Rimantas Zizas writes that Soviet records lack any precise facts regarding alleged resistance and activities by Koniuchy, and no events or combat operations involving the village are recorded in the Soviet archives. The Soviet partisans tried to intimidate or punish local villagers. The Polish Institute of National Remembrance initiated a formal investigation into the incident on 3 March 2001 at the request of the Canadian Polish Congress. The institute examined a number of archival documents, including police reports, encoded messages, military records and personnel files of the Soviet partisans. Requests for legal assistance were then sent to state prosecutors in Belarus, Lithuania, the Russian Federation and Israel.

The Lithuanian prosecutor general's office subsequently opened its own investigation into the massacre in 2004. As part of its investigation, Lithuanian prosecutors sought out Jewish veterans of the partisan movement.

²⁰ Data about the number of partisans, 4 November 1945, LYA, Vilnius, col. 1, inv. 1, f. 136, p. 6.

²¹ Rimantas Zizas, 'Žudynių Kaniūkuose pėdsakais', *Genocidas ir rezistencija* 11 (2002), 149–65.

One of these was Yitzhak Arad, an expert on the Holocaust in Lithuania and former chairman of Yad Vashem. Arad had also served as a member of a commission appointed by Lithuania's president in 2005 to examine past war crimes. The widely perceived failure of the Lithuanian judiciary to investigate pro-Nazi collaborators while choosing to prosecute Jewish partisans led to charges of hypocrisy concerning Lithuanian motivation. The work of an international commission to investigate war crimes in Lithuania was derailed by the Lithuanian investigation. Further attempts to investigate elderly Jewish survivors were perceived as an attempt at victim blaming. Following wide international criticism (and some domestic criticism), the Lithuanian investigation was closed in September 2008.²²

Upon a request from Poland, a couple of former Soviet partisans, Fania Yocheles Brantsovsky and Dr Rachel Margolis, were placed under investigation because of accusations of 'war crimes'. This caused the campaign for the cause of the Jewish partisans to provoke a public outcry. The argument that was raised on the international stage is that the only chance of survival for Jewish partisans in the Soviet units was to fight alongside Soviet-backed partisan groups, who were both fighting against Hitler and trying to restore communist rule in Lithuania.²³ No proof was found of any involvement of women in the events of Koniuchy.

As a result, the IPN investigation was closed in February 2018. The official reason that was given for this was that the investigators were not able to establish "beyond a reasonable doubt" that any perpetrators of the massacre were still alive; as a result, they concluded that there was no one who could be charged with a crime.²⁴

According to Antony Polonsky, Professor of Holocaust studies at Brandeis University, ethno-nationalists in both Lithuania and Poland have portrayed Koniuchy as a 'Jewish action'. Although exact determination of the ethnicity of the Soviet partisans is not possible, it is clear that Jews were a minority in these formations. While discussing anti-Semitic stereotypes and historical exaggeration of the role of Jews in Soviet atrocities, Antony Polonsky stated that the time had come for Jews to accept that [some of] their compatriots also carried out atrocities, and that partisans involved in the Koniuchy massacres did 'very evil things'.²⁵

²² Saulius Sužiedėlis, 'The International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania: successes, challenges, perspectives', *Journal of Baltic Studies* 49.1 (2018), 103–16.

²³ Edward Lucas, 'Prosecution and persecution. Lithuania must stop blaming the victims', *The Economist*, 21 August 2008 <<https://www.economist.com/europe/2008/08/21/prosecution-and-persecution>> [accessed 10 September 2021].

²⁴ 'Information on the Investigation in the Case of Crime Committed in Koniuchy', *Institute of National Remembrance*, 13 September 2005, News <<https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/69,Information-on-the-Investigation-in-the-Case-of-Crime-Committed-in-Koniuchy.html>> [accessed 10 September 2021].

²⁵ Piotr Zychowicz, 'Winni i tak nie przepraszają', *Plus Minus*, 20 September 2008 <<https://www.rp.pl/plus-minus/art16030371-winni-i-tak-nie-przepraszaja>> [accessed 10 September 2021].

Despite failed attempts to persecute the Jewish partisans, the Russian media continue to claim that the East Europeans that critically assess Russian politics are Nazis or Nazi sympathisers. Russia has invested millions of dollars in a campaign to infiltrate U.S. media markets with English language news, opinion, conspiracy, and troll content, often interlocking with the most popular U.S. conspiracy theory websites. The partisan warfare issues of the Second World War continue to be well integrated into their ideological scheme.

In this one-sided approach, promoters of the official Russian narrative claim that 'in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union was often the only escape route from certain death, both for Jews who fled eastward to escape Nazi rule, and for those who escaped ghettos to join up with the anti-Nazi partisans supported by the Soviets'.²⁶

A controversial figure in the debate, prof. Dovid Katz, goes on to point out that even attempting to discuss an incident such as Koniuchy is tantamount to a 'hatchet job against Jewish partisans' that resorts to 'a number of abuses of academic structure to mask the genre of the nationalist polemic'.²⁷

These arguments echoed larger debates on the possible obfuscation of the Holocaust, debates on double genocide, and the comparison-equation of Soviet and Nazi crimes, etc. They were also included in conflicting debates on the issues and conflicts of the resistance groups in the forests of East Central Europe. A statement by Efraim Zuroff is an interesting exposé of these kinds of views:

One of the biggest problems we are facing now is something called the 'double genocide theory', which is prevalent throughout Eastern Europe, where governments are trying to say that Communist crimes amounted to genocide. They were not. If they were, then that means that Jews committed genocide. There were Jews – not out of any loyalty to the Jewish people, and usually Jews who had left the Jewish community – who worked in the KGB, in the Communist security apparatus, and did horrible things. It's true... The pernicious subtext of this argument', he said. 'If Jews committed genocide, what right do they then have to complain against the genocide committed in eastern Europe during the Holocaust by people who collaborated with the Nazis?

²⁶ David Katz, review of *Intermarium: The Land between the Black and Baltic Seas*, by Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 7.2 (2013), 1–7 (p. 4).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

According to Zuroff, Communist crimes should not be characterized as genocide because the Communists did not want to wipe a people off the face of the earth.²⁸

As professor Barry Rubin noted in 2010, this kind of pro-Soviet and pro-Russian treatment of history makes Jews the defenders of a Communist totalitarian system that murdered and tortured millions of people, including hundreds of thousands of Jews; it also buries the fact that the Soviet Union systematically destroyed Jewish society, including religion, community and the Yiddish language; it makes it impossible to fully acknowledge the sufferings of Jews under Communism, which emerged as a major world force for anti-Semitism in the post-1945 period; and it divides Jews from those who suffered under Communism, at least the non-Russians, thus intensifying the friction between them.²⁹

The other source of purported moral legitimacy seems to be this: since the representatives of Putin's regime have only very selectively distanced themselves from Stalinism, they are therefore reliable inheritors of Soviet history and should be seen as the automatic opposite of Nazis, therefore they should be trusted to oppose the far right. It will be more difficult in the future to refer to the Holocaust in the service of any good cause, be it Jewish history specifically or human rights more generally.

For those who do not like contextualization of the Holocaust and the accompanying events of partisan warfare in the East European 'Bloodlands',³⁰ the drawing of any substantial similarities between Nazism and Communism in terms of their horrific and appalling character and their crimes against humanity is unacceptable. The Stalinist version of history is being introduced under the disguise of a critique of Holocaust obfuscators, or it is being muddled into what is legitimately bordering on a conspiracy theory, thus continuing to propagate the divisionism and exclusivity that are at the ideological core of East European xenophobia.

This rhetoric incites pathological fear within world Jewry against the Lithuanian government and its institutions and individuals, reducing a multi-layered and extremely complex situation to black and white, right and wrong, innocent and guilty.

Any exclusive system of thinking will always yield restrictive rights and privileges and historical ghettoization. This system of thinking ignores attempts to construct Lithuanian strategic narratives that are a means for

²⁸ Herb Keinon, 'Zuroff: Israel should not recognize Holodomor as genocide', *The Jerusalem Post*, 22 January 2019 <<https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Zuroff-Israel-should-not-recognize-Holodomor-as-genocide-578308>> [accessed 15 September 2021].

²⁹ Barry Rubin, "'Those who neglect their past have no future'", *The Jerusalem Post*, 13 August 2010 <<https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/Those-who-neglect-their-past-have-no-future>> [accessed 15 September 2021].

³⁰ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (Basic Books, 2010).

political actors to create a shared meaning of the past, present and future. This is assessed by communication scholars as a battle without winners and losers. Nevertheless, the battle of the systemic narratives presented by different countries' elites does not necessarily have to be won by one over the other. There is always an expectation that any competition between narratives will be a zero-sum game. However, a more realistic view is that the narratives remain until the individuals and institutions – or, at the larger end of the scale, states propagating narratives – live and reproduce these narratives. The only feasible strategy to overcome the dilemma of not being able to win is to engage in dialogue and educational efforts.

LESSONS FOR EDUCATORS

Education is usually multi-layered and complex and involves many institutions and interest groups as well as individual agendas. In the past, the majority of Lithuanian émigrés were unable to accept the Western narrative of the war, including the enormous sacrifice of the Soviet people in the struggle against fascism, and many failed to fully appreciate Nazism's genocidal nature. The émigré story rested on an intensely anti-Soviet attitude and a denial of native participation in the murder of the Jews, sometimes accompanied by open or disguised anti-Semitism.

Much Lithuanian scholarship, especially during the 1990s, tended towards the nationalist narrative, which largely mirrors attitudes dominant during the interwar period and also reflects the intellectual world of the country's influential Western diaspora, which has had a considerable impact on interpretations of the national past. The educational institutions of the post-Soviet Lithuanian state embraced a 'national school' concept which claimed that the Republic of 1990 was the legal restoration of the independent state of 1918–40.

With the post-Soviet, often revisionist Russian dialogue, which is willing to rehabilitate Stalinism, is it possible for educators to build a sensible dialogue for the memory groups that still clash in the framework of the nationalist ideologies of Lithuanians and Poles? The Holocaust is the standout event in the shadow of the Second World War and has been appropriated by practically all nations and minorities.

When it comes to the Lithuanian context, this country suffers all the actual and potential problems of the post-Communist era, as well as those which are European in scope: a population buffeted by social and economic crises and thus susceptible to populist demagoguery; an extremist nationalist fringe; xenophobia expressed in openly racist discourse,

although hardly ever in physical violence. Despite the official attachment to liberal democracy and tolerance, anti-Jewish prejudices still play a limited role in political imagery.

Only minor issues surface in local crimes against other groups during the Second World War and the Holocaust. Lithuanian and Polish underground fighting and crimes against civilians are noted by observers in public debates and during commemoration events.

These conflicting narrative clashes are downplayed by Lithuania and Poland, which reserve them for internal narratives among respected audiences and allow equal participation by former adversaries. An example of this is the *Tropem Wilczym* marathon (Pol. On the Path of the Wolf) in January 2019, organized jointly by Polish organizations and the Lithuanian army to commemorate AK soldiers who died after the beginning of the Second Soviet Occupation of 1944–45 in Lithuania and Poland.³¹ The Soviet partisan story in Lithuania could not be remembered in the same way as Polish AK heroism. The Polish AK was on the side of the Western war effort, and the Soviets were members of the same coalition. However, the Soviet resistance still has to wait to be integrated into what is still a rather hostile reception in Lithuania.

Educators should pay greater attention to media literacy. Most public debates on historical topics seem to be played out on the pages of mass media publications. Looking at how one or another question is integrated or not integrated into allegedly 'critical national history', the media most often follows the line of monumental national history that underscores the nationalist version of history and its heroes. The creative aspects of 'critical history' are being constrained by media representations that usually strive for a stereotypical presentation of foes and friends.

This fundamentalist approach to history within the media is of high concern indeed. Predominantly, the current state of affairs is one of increased information wars and propaganda (the latter issue became especially sensitive in the context of the information attacks, trolling, falsification and lies that are incessantly found in the digital space). Although the Lithuanian government has outlined certain future directions (such as the activation of media-related analysis skills training in schools), related policies are still underdeveloped and lack realism; the measures that are being taken only address certain specific and fragmented matters, leaving us in a world of fundamental national stereotypes.

³¹ 'Wilno oddaje hold Żołnierzom Wyklętym', *TVP Info*, 1 March 2019 <<https://www.tvp.info/41541632/wilno-oddaje-hold-zolnierzom-wykletytm>> [accessed 5 May 2019].

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Veranika Laputka

ANTI-POLISH WORLD WAR II NARRATIVES IN THE RUSSIAN INTERNET MEDIA SPACE

a Case Study of the period from December 2019 to April 2020

ABSTRACT

The article touches upon the anti-Polish narratives in the Russian Internet media space that appeared during the period between December 2019 and April 2020. An anti-Polish media campaign initiated by the speech of Russia's president Vladimir Putin in December 2019 gradually unfolded into a large-scale information war that included multiple actors disseminating the relevant narratives. For the purpose of the study publication of the following segments of the Russian Internet were analyzed: Russia's state and official sources, Russian main TV programs, Russian leading historical societies, Russian independent historians and their social media channels where applicable.

KEYWORDS:

politics of memory, Poland, Russia, World War II, Vladimir Putin, Russian media, Internet discourse

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INTRODUCTION

On 19 December 2019, Russian President Vladimir Putin condemned the Resolution of the European Parliament of 19 September 2019 on the equal responsibility of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in initiating the Second World War. This narrative was further developed during a number of Putin's speeches and meetings on 20 December 2019 and 24 December 2019, in which Vladimir Putin and state-funded Russian media put practically all the blame for the outbreak of the World War II not only on Nazi Germany but also on Poland.

Polish authorities immediately responded to these statements and thus a range of mutual accusations of manipulations with history started. The Russian authorities and media continued their anti-Polish rhetoric and brought to the discussion many issues which have been disputed with Poland for many years. The goal of this paper is to present an overview of the recent Russian-Polish dispute – both on official levels and in the media – and provide a brief analysis and assessment.

In particular, this paper aims to:

1. establish the main sources of anti-Polish rhetoric in the Russian internet media space;
2. review video, audio and printed materials on this topic;
3. extract the main anti-Polish narratives in the Russian internet media space.

The period of the analysis specifically covers the propaganda campaign which started in December 2019, when Vladimir Putin for the first time publicly commented on the resolution of the European Parliament of 19 September 2019 and paid specific attention to Poland and its role in World War II. Usually, the main propaganda campaigns in Russia that are connected with the Second World War or the Great Patriotic War (the notion widely used in Russia's public discourse covering the 1941–45 war period) coincide with big anniversaries.¹ For this reason, the whole information campaign preceding May 2020 (the 75th anniversary of the end of the Great Patriotic War and World War II in Europe) became the object of this research.

¹ See: Maria Domańska and Jadwiga Rogoża, 'Naprzód, w przeszłość! Rosyjska polityka historyczna w służbie "wiecznego" autorytaryzmu', *Raport OSW*, May (Warszawa: Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, 2021), p. 9; Maria Domańska, 'Dr Domańska: Rosja aktywizuje się na polu historii przed okrągłymi rocznicami', *Polskie Radio 24*, 6 January 2020, <<https://polskieradio24.pl/130/5548/Artykul/2431610,Dr-Domanska-Rosja-aktywizuje-sie-na-polu-historii-przed-okraglymi-rocznicami>> [accessed 28 August 2021].

This study will focus on the following discourses in the December 2019 to April 2020 period:

- those of Russian official bodies, institutions and leaders, their social media channels (where applicable) and their interviews and speeches in mass media;
- those of Russian media outlets: newspapers, TV channels, official YouTube channels of Russian TV Channels;
- those of semi-official institutions that realise politics of memory;
- those of independent Russian historians and their social media channels (where applicable).

The historical policy of Russia serves as one of the main instruments of the legitimization of the authoritarian regime and intensifies when other economic, political, social and international legitimization factors weaken.² The Russian Federation began to abuse its historical policy on the international arena on a larger scale during Vladimir Putin's third term as Russia's president in between 2012 and 2018,³ although the initial traits of such an approach appeared for the first time in 2003.⁴ In 2009, Dmitry Medvedev established a special commission to investigate historical falsifications that signalled an alarming trend of instrumentalisation of history and abuse of the politics of history.⁵

Since 2014, after the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Donbas and the annexation of Crimea, the usage of historical policy intensified dramatically⁶ with an implementation of neoimperial historical narration.⁷ On 5 May 2014, Vladimir Putin signed amendments for the Russian Criminal Code which implied imprisonment for up to five years for intended proliferation of untruthful information about the role of the USSR in World War II.⁸ Simultaneously, another trend was strengthening: increasing consolidation of authoritarian power and the necessity to substitute the lack of national ideology with 'past legitimization' of Russia's external policy and 'reanimation of the past national project' instead of creating a future one.⁹

² For more about this Great Patriotic War myth in Russian Ideology, see: Maria Domańska, 'Mif Velikoj Otečestvennoj vojny kak instrument vnešnej politiki Rossii', *Sprawy Międzynarodowe*, 72.4 (2019), 208.

³ Domańska and Rogoża, 'Naprzód, w przeszłość!', p. 10.

⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

⁵ Łukasz Adamski, 'Dr Łukasz Adamski: Pamięć pod specjalnym nadzorem. Ile lat więzienia grozi za zajmowanie się historią w Rosji?', *Kresy24.pl – Wschodnia Gazeta Codzienna*, 31 May 2021, *II wojna światowa na Kresach* <<https://kresy24.pl/dr-lukasz-adamski-pamiec-pod-specjalnym-nadzorem-ile-lat-wiezienia-grozi-za-zajmowanie-sie-historia-w-rosji/>> [accessed 1 September 2021].

⁶ Domańska, 'Mif Velikoj Otečestvennoj vojny', p. 204; Domańska and Rogoża, 'Naprzód, w przeszłość!', p. 9.

⁷ Maria Domańska, 'Mocarstwowy mit wojny we współczesnej polityce zagranicznej Kremla',

OSW commentary, 316 (Warszawa: Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, 2019).

⁸ Adamski, 'Pamięć pod specjalnym nadzorem'.

⁹ Domańska, 'Mif Velikoj Otečestvennoj vojny', p. 208.

The politics of memory in Russia and Poland demonstrate many divergences, specifically in their perception of the common history and the history of the lands between these two countries, especially Belarus and Ukraine.¹⁰ Multiple elements of Russia's and Poland's approach towards Belarusian and Ukrainian territories create a dividing cleavage between these two states with an annual discussion of one of the most tragic episode of 17 September 1939,¹¹ among many other issues. Moreover, both nations remain very sensitive towards their history and historical memory,¹² thus their polemic over history hardly ever stops.

The largest recent information attack targeting Poland took place in December 2019.¹³ After six months of ongoing development of aggressive rhetoric towards Poland, Polish politicians, Polish politics of memory and Polish perception of history and Russia, Russian President Vladimir Putin continued the World War II narrative with his article in the *National Interest* that dealt with his explanation of the outbreak of World War II and included assessment of the behaviour of most European countries before 1939.¹⁴ In this article, the Russian President once again stated his negative opinion towards Poland and the Polish pre-1939 government; he presented a summary of his thoughts, which confirmed how crucial this narrative remains for Russian political elites and state historical ideology.

STATEMENTS OF RUSSIAN OFFICIALS AND STATE BODIES

Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation

On 19 December 2019, Russian President Vladimir Putin held an annual press-conference.¹⁵ The Russian leader discussed a number of domestic and international issues, but the topic which attracted immense attention was Putin's comment¹⁶ about the beginning of the Second World War and the

¹⁰ Łukasz Adamski, 'Russian politics of memory towards Poland. The bones of contention between Poland and Russia', *Polishhistory.pl* <<https://polishhistory.pl/russian-politics-of-memory-towards-poland/>> [accessed 2 September 2021].

¹¹ Łukasz Adamski, 'Dr Łukasz Adamski: Putinizm i II wojna światowa. Mechanizm wyparcia', *Kresy24.pl – Wschodnia Gazeta Codzienna*, 17 September 2020, II wojna światowa na Kresach <<https://kresy24.pl/dr-lukasz-adamski-putinizm-i-ii-wojna-swiatowa-mechanizm-wyparcia/>> [accessed 2 September 2021]; Łukasz Adamski, 'Tężkość bremlja 17 sentjabrja 1939 goda', *Novaja Pol'sha*, 17 September 2019, Idei <<https://novayapolsha.pl/article/tyazhkoe-bremlja-17-sentyabrya-1939-goda/>> [accessed 2 September 2021].

¹² Rafał Stobiecki, 'Historians Facing Politics of History. The Case of Poland', in *Past in the Making. Historical Revisionism in Central Europe after 1989*, ed. by Michal Kopeček (CEU Press, 2007), pp. 179–192.

¹³ Domańska, 'Mocarstwowi mit wojny'.

¹⁴ Vladimir Putin, 'Vladimir Putin: The Real Lessons of the 75th Anniversary of World War II', *The National Interest*, 18 June 2020 <<https://nationalinterest.org/feature/vladimir-putin-real-lessons-75th-anniversary-world-war-ii-162982>> [accessed 2 September 2021].

¹⁵ Prezident Rossii, 'Bol'saja press-konferencija Vladimira Putina', 19 December 2019 <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62366>> [accessed 2 September 2021].

¹⁶ 'V Pol'she otreagirovali na slova Putina o Vtoroj mirovoj vojne', *Gazeta.Ru*, 20 December 2019 <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2019/12/20/n_13838498.shtml> [accessed 4 September 2021].

European Parliament's (EP) resolution that was adopted on 19 September 2019 and condemned the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact.¹⁷

A journalist from *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* asked the Russian President to comment on the resolution of the EP adopted on 19 September 2019.¹⁸ Putin stated that he condemned totalitarianism and confirmed that the cult of Stalin had also been condemned [in Russia]. But he also condemned the EP resolution and believed it was incorrect and unprecedented, and comparing the Soviet Union to Nazi Germany was extremely cynical. Then the Russian president recalled the Munich agreement and the partitions of Czechoslovakia which happened in 1938. Vladimir Putin quoted a diplomat and said that 'Poland did everything to take part in the partitions of Czechoslovakia'.¹⁹

The Russian President added that he intended to write a separate article on that topic and show how various states contributed to the appeasement of the Nazi Germany leader Adolf Hitler. Putin stated that Stalin – unlike the leaders of France and the United Kingdom – never met with Hitler or signed any papers. However, it is true that the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact with secret protocols was signed.²⁰

At the same time, the USSR was the last country to sign a non-aggression pact with Germany. They say that there were secret protocols and partitions of Poland, but Poland itself participated in the partitions of Czechoslovakia. Vladimir Putin admitted that Soviet troops had entered Polish territory in line with secret protocols. However, troops marched in 'after the Polish government had lost control over its domestic affairs and military forces, which had already reached the Polish-Romanian border themselves'.²¹

The Russian leader concluded that the Red Army entered Brześć nad Bugiem (Putin used the name of the city from the period of the Russian Empire, i.e., 'Brest-Litovsk') after the fascist German troops had left; hence, it just walked in into an empty Brest fortress. Putin opined that the same principle should have been applied to the whole Polish territory. The German troops invaded the territory, then left it, then the Soviet troops entered the territory, 'so they did not capture it'.²² Then, Vladimir Putin invited the audience to join him at a meeting with the leaders of

¹⁷ European Parliament, 2819 (RSP) – *Resolution on the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe*, 18 September 2019 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-9-2019-0097_EN.html> [accessed 4 September 2021].

¹⁸ Prezydent Rosji, 'Bol'shaja press-konferencija Vladimira Putina'.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), where he was planning to disclose a few archival documents.²³

The Russian President kept his promise and shared a number of details from the disclosed archival documents the next day, 20 December 2019, during an informal summit of the CIS leaders in Saint Petersburg.²⁴ Vladimir Putin repeated his negative assessment of the EP resolution from 19 September 2019, which condemned the Molotov–Ribbentrop non-aggression pact and assigned equal responsibility for the initiation of the Second World War to the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

Then, the Russian leader quoted several pre-World War II documents. Many such details touched upon Poland. Putin denied that Russian authorities had ever asserted that Poland, the Baltic States and Western countries initiated the war. Then, he mentioned the so-called Piłsudski–Hitler pact of 1934,²⁵ when Poland and Germany agreed not to fight each other. Putin quoted French pre-war Foreign Minister Édouard Daladier, who did not trust Poles, according to the cited documents. Moreover, Poles denied that they had the ability to help France if it was attacked by Germany. Putin said that Daladier concluded that, in such a case, military union between France and Poland would be pointless.²⁶

Vladimir Putin subsequently read out several passages about the annexation of Czechoslovakia. He described how Poland ‘simultaneously with Germany’ invaded Czechoslovakia on 1 October 1938.²⁷ In Putin’s opinion, Poles were aware that ‘without Hitler’s support’ their intention to annex part of Czechoslovak territory had no chance. The Russian President stated that Poland had also dragged Hungary into the partitions of Czechoslovakia. Thus, Germany got what it wanted: Poland and Hungary supported it in its operation against Czechoslovakia, whilst France and the UK remained silent. The Russian president also noted that ‘within the special operative group “Silesia”, Poles were preparing and deploying special fighters to the territory of Czechoslovakia, in this way preparing to divide and occupy Czechoslovakia’.²⁸

On 23 September 1938, the Soviet Union stated that it had to denounce its non-aggression pact with Poland due to Poland’s aggression towards Czechoslovakia. Putin continued by saying that Poland did everything possible not to allow the Soviet Union to provide assistance to Czechoslovakia: Poland did not let Soviet troops cross the country and

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Prezident Rossii, ‘Neformal’nyj sammit SNG’, 20 December 2019 <<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62376>> [accessed 5 September 2021].

²⁵ The name of the pact is non-aggression declaration between Poland and Germany, signed by Piłsudski from Poland’s side and von Neurath from Germany’s side, or the Hitler–Piłsudski pact.

²⁶ Prezident Rossii, ‘Neformal’nyj sammit SNG’.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

threatened to bring down Soviet airplanes.²⁹ Putin concluded that during the Nuremberg Tribunal, the defendants – former Nazi leaders – admitted that they would have not attacked further if Western states had supported Prague: ‘The Munich agreement had an aim: to remove Russia from Europe’.³⁰ The Munich agreement made World War II inevitable.³¹

Furthermore, Vladimir Putin quoted Hitler, who stated that ‘Germany was interested in the preservation of a strong national Poland’, and the strong Polish army at the Polish-Russian borders would enable Germany to save money on military expenses. Putin interpreted this as ‘looking like a military union against the Soviet Union’.³² Hermann Göring also confirmed that Germany needed a strong Poland. Later, on 6 January 1939, according to Putin, the German and Polish Foreign Ministers agreed that the ‘Ukrainian question’ would remain a prerogative of Poland.

The next quote shared by Vladimir Putin related to the note of the French Ambassador to Poland after a meeting with his Polish colleagues on 31 May 1939. Léon Noël stated that for Poles ‘a Russian is a barbarian’, a person from Asia. Putin opined that this statement was very racist, similar to *Untermensch*, which is what not only Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians but also Poles were later called by the Nazis.³³

Finally, the Russian President touched upon ‘the Jewish question’ in his speech. Hitler initially wanted to deport European Jews to Africa, which would be ‘the first step to genocide’, according to Putin. In response to that, the Polish Ambassador in Germany wrote to the Polish Foreign Minister: ‘If this happens, we will erect a nice monument to Hitler in Warsaw’.³⁴

Subsequently, Vladimir Putin came to the conclusion that ‘Poles, with their increasing ambitions, facilitated the beginning of the Second World War. So today we see that the graves of people who were winning the war, were dying in Europe, liberating such countries from Nazism, are desecrated’.³⁵

Putin repeated once again that the Red Army entered Brest when the Polish government lost control over its territories. Hence, the Red Army did not even have to fight anyone there.³⁶

The Russian First Channel later shared the video from the event.³⁷ Special attention was paid to the role of Poland in initiating the war as well as to

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ ‘Ob istinnykh pričinakh načala Vtoroj mirovoj vojny govoril Vladimir Putin na neformal’nom sammite SNG’, *Vremja*, Pervyj kanal, 20 December 2019 <<https://www.itv.ru/news/2019-12-20/377765-ob-istinnyh-pričinah-načala-vtoroy-mirovoj-vojny-govoril-vladimir-putin-na-neformalnom-sammite-sng>> [accessed 5 September 2021].

³² Prezident Rossii, ‘Neformal’nyj sammit SNG’.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ ‘Ob istinnykh pričinakh načala Vtoroj mirovoj vojny’.

the monuments to Soviet soldiers. Vladimir Putin commented that Europeans remove Soviet monuments in order to 'hide their crimes, not to revenge the Soviet Union'. The Russian President added that aggressive Russophobia and anti-Semitism occur simultaneously in some European countries.³⁸

On 24 December 2019, Vladimir Putin took part in the assembly of the Ministry of Defence, where he again discussed the secret documents he had shared previously. The Russian President noted that the fact that struck him most was the discussion between Poles and Germans of 'the Jewish question'.³⁹ 'Bastard, anti-Semitic swine', added Putin, referring to the Polish Ambassador in Germany in 1939, Józef Lipski.⁴⁰

On 23 January 2020, Vladimir Putin gave a speech in Jerusalem,⁴¹ to which he had been invited to commemorate Holocaust Remembrance Day. Putin said that collaborators in many European countries had contributed greatly to the Holocaust: 'On territories of the Soviet Union where such criminals [collaborators] operated, the majority of Jews were killed. Thus, 1.4 million Jews were killed in Ukraine, 220 thousand Jews were exterminated in Lithuania, 77 thousand in Latvia'.⁴² Putin added that the Nazis planned to also exterminate Belarusians, Poles, Russians and Ukrainians, whom they called *Untermenschen*. However, the Soviet Union made this plan impossible, as it not only defended itself but also brought liberation to Europe. However, it had to pay a high price for that: 27 million Soviet citizens died. Putin concluded that nowadays historical memory increasingly often becomes a political instrument, which is unacceptable.⁴³

Polish President Andrzej Duda did not go to Jerusalem for the ceremony. Although he was invited, his intention was to give a speech, like the presidents of Russia, France and Germany, but Israel did not satisfy his request, according to the BBC.⁴⁴

As Polish-Russian relations were not improving, the participation of the Polish delegation in the Victory Parade to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War became questionable. Putin's Press Secretary, Dmitry Peskov, announced on 4 February 2020 that the invitation had not been sent to the representatives of Poland.⁴⁵ According to Peskov, this question was not 'on the agenda yet'.⁴⁶

³⁸ Prezident Rossii, 'Neformal'nyj sammit SNG'.

³⁹ Sputnik na ruskom, 'Svoloč', *svin'ja antisemitskaja*: Putin o posle Pol'si v nacistskoj Germanii, online video recording, YouTube, 24 December 2017, <<https://youtu.be/RJjM-5nZwsc>> [accessed 6 September 2021].

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ RT na ruskom, Putin učastvuet v meroprijatijach v pamjat' o žertvach cholokosta – LIVE, online video recording, YouTube, 23 January 2020, <<https://youtu.be/LMoHGUP4S14>> [accessed 6 September 2021].

⁴² RT, Putin učastvuet v meroprijatijach v pamjat' o žertvach cholokosta.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Svjatoslav Chomenko, 'Dva Osvencima. Kak Pol'sa i Rossija vojujut vokrug Vtoroj mirovoj', BBC Russian Service, 27 January 2020 <<https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-51272629>> [accessed 5 September 2021].

⁴⁵ 'Peskov soobščil ob otsustvii priglašenija Pol'si na parad Pobedy', RBK, 4 February 2020 <<https://www.rbc.ru/politics/04/02/2020/5c393ca49a7947101d1625d6>> [accessed 7 September 2021].

⁴⁶ Natal'ja Anufrieva, 'Kreml' projasnil vopros s priglašeniem Pol'si na prazdnovanie Dnja Pobedy', *Vzgljad.Ru*, 4 February 2020 <<https://vz.ru/news/2020/2/4/1021854.html>> [accessed 5 September 2021].

THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of the Russian Federation regularly publishes information on diplomatic meetings with representatives of various countries, including Poland.

On 3 December 2019, Russian Ambassador to Poland, Sergei Andreyev, gave an interview to the *Rossija 24* channel. The Ambassador pointed out that 'those countries which were liberated by the Red Army had no doubt that this was not just a liberation but a rescue'.⁴⁷ The journalist added that a Polish law from 2017 implicates the destruction of all Soviet memorials in Poland and 230 monuments to the deeds of the Red Army are now doomed. The Russian Ambassador replied that Polish officials pretended not to notice that an exhibition had opened in Warsaw [they ignored its opening] and were fighting against contemporary Russia. The interview took place on the day when the exhibition 'The Way to the Victory: Historical Chronicles Testify', organized by the Russian Historical Society, opened in Warsaw.⁴⁸

On 4 December 2019, the First Deputy Minister of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Titov, met with the heads of diplomatic missions from Austria, Hungary, Germany, Poland, Slovakia, Czechia and Switzerland, with whom he discussed bilateral relations, exchanged opinions on relations between Russia and the EU and between Russia and the NATO, and they touched upon the issues of military actions in Ukraine and Syria.⁴⁹

The tone of such notes later changed. On 22 January 2020, the Information and Press Department of the Russian MFA published an official commentary regarding the Russian-Polish dialogue on the history of their bilateral relations.⁵⁰ This commentary called the Polish state's publications on the history of the World War II 'a hysterical denial of inviolable facts'.⁵¹ It also stressed that 'it was not Russia who initiated termination of the bilateral dialogue' and 'Warsaw should initiate steps to correct the situation on the basis of an unpoliticized approach'.⁵²

⁴⁷ RIO, *Put' Pobedy pokažut žiteljam Varšavy*, online video recording, YouTube, 4 December 2019 <<https://youtu.be/XR9MtzKlkAU>> [accessed 7 September 2021].

⁴⁸ Vera Marunova, 'V Varšave otkrylas' vystavka "Put' k Pobede: istoričeskie istočniki svidetel'stvuyut'", *Rossijskoe istoričeskoe obščestvo*, 4 February 2019 <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/v-varshave-otkrylas-vystavka-put-k-pobede-istoricheskie-istochniki-svidetelstvuyut.html>> [accessed 7 September 2021].

⁴⁹ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, 'O vstreče pervogo zamestitelja Ministra inostrannykh del Rossii V.G. Titova s glavami diplomatičeskikh missij gosudarstv Central'noj i Vostočnoj Evropy', 4 December 2019 <https://archive.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/393420> [accessed 7 September 2021].

⁵⁰ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, 'Kommentarij Departamenta informacii i pečati MID Rossii o rossijsko-pol'skom dialoge po istorii našich otnošenij', 22 January 2020 <https://archive.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4003966> [accessed 7 September 2021].

⁵¹ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, 'Kommentarij Departamenta informacii i pečati MID Rossii o rossijsko-pol'skom dialoge po istorii našich otnošenij'.

⁵² Ibid.

The next message published neutral information on the meeting of the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, Andrei Rudenko, and the Polish Ambassador to Russia, Włodzimierz Marciniak, on 4 February 2020, when they discussed relations within the Commonwealth of Independent States and the 'conflict in Ukraine'.⁵³

The last message within the studied period related to the postponement of the visit of the Polish delegation to Katyn and Smolensk. The Russian authorities criticized Poland for stating that it had not received information on logistics in a timely manner, although in the official diplomatic note received by the Russian MFA the stated reason was the COVID-19 pandemic. The commentary concluded that such behaviour of the Polish authorities, who 'speculate on the tragedy of the Polish citizens who died in the catastrophe', became a 'terrible ingratitude'.⁵⁴

Several Russian media outlets published a number of pieces containing statements by acting Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov (formally on that day he was an 'acting minister due to the resignation of then Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's cabinet'), on current Russian-Polish relations. The Head of Russian MFA gave a regular press-conference on 17 January 2020 to sum up the results of 2019.⁵⁵ The Russian-Polish disputes became one of the main subjects of the conference.⁵⁶ Lavrov stated that Polish President Andrzej Duda had refused to go to Israel to commemorate Holocaust Remembrance Day and had tried to persuade European and American colleagues to support his point of view on the common past. He also condemned Poland's initiative to remove Soviet monuments.⁵⁷ However, he noted that historians from both countries should cooperate; Polish Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz also supported this idea later.⁵⁸

In January–February 2020, the official MFA website published a number of articles devoted to the Polish Ambassador in Russia and a discussion of these countries' responsibility in the Second World War.

On 27 January 2020, in his interview for *Izvestiya* newspaper, the Russian Ambassador in Poland, Sergei Andreyev, opined that the attitude Polish authorities towards World War II is conditioned by the Polish politics

⁵³ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, 'O vstreče zamestitelja Ministra inostrannykh del Rossii A.Ju. Rudenko s Poslom Pol'shi v Moskve V. Marčinjakom', 4 February 2020 <https://archive.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJEo2Bw/content/id/4018838> [accessed 7 September 2021].

⁵⁴ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, 'Kommentarij Departamenta informacii i pečati MID Rossii o perenosie vizita pol'skoj delegacii v Smolensk i Katyn', 3 April 2020 <https://archive.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJEo2Bw/content/id/4094520> [accessed 7 September 2021].

⁵⁵ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, 'Vystuplenie i otvety na voprosy SMI i.o. Ministra inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii S.V. Lavrova v chode press-konferencii po itogam dejatel'nosti rossijskoj diplomatii v 2019 godu, Moskva, 17 janvarja 2020 goda', 17 January 2020 <https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJEo2Bw/content/id/4001740> [accessed 7 September 2021].

⁵⁶ Ekaterina Zabrodina, 'Lavrov: Pol'sha navjazyvaet Zapadu svoju versiju itogov Vtoroj mirovoj', *Rossijskaja gazeta*, 17 January 2020 <<https://rg.ru/2020/01/17/lavrov-polsha-navjazyvaet-zapadu-svoiu-versiiu-itogov-vtoroj-mirovoj.html>> [accessed 7 September 2021].

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Evgenij Pudovkin, 'Glava MID Pol'shi ocenil vozmožnost' razrjadki v otnošenijach s Rossiej', *RBK*, 12 March 2020 <<https://www.rbc.ru/politics/12/03/2020/5e61141a9a79475a0825462f>> [accessed 8 September 2021].

of history. The Russian Ambassador added that the Polish state does not honour members of the Polish Army (*‘Vojsko pol’skoe’* in Russian) and recognizes only war veterans who fought in the underground Home Army and regular military units subordinated to the Polish government in exile in London. The Ambassador said that the Polish government tries to forget that the Red Army had liberated concentration camps.⁵⁹ The interview ended with a discussion of another controversial issue: removal of monuments to Soviet soldiers in Poland. Andreyev stated that around one hundred of them that are not at burial places still remain untouched and confirmed that several hundreds of such monuments had been removed between 2014 and 2019 in Poland.⁶⁰ According to the BBC, he also stated that ‘Neither Poland nor Poles would exist on earth had the Victory of the Soviet Union not happened’ and that ‘Poland should be thankful to the Soviet Union’.⁶¹ On 28 January 2020, the Russian MFA labelled as fake news⁶² an article published by *The Telegraph*, entitled ‘Europe “has a duty” to stand up to Russia over the rewriting of holocaust history’,⁶³ which cited the Polish Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki.

On 5 February 2020, the Russian Ambassador to Poland, Sergei Andreyev, gave an interview to the international news agency RIA Novosti. Sergei Andreyev commented on the Polish resolution regarding the shared blame between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in initiating the Second World War, saying that the Nuremberg process had confirmed that Germany was the only country that started World War II, but it was not stopped on time by the United Kingdom, France and Poland.⁶⁴

The Ambassador mentioned the Munich agreement, when part of Czechoslovakia was annexed by Poland, whereas the Soviet Union was doing everything possible to stop the aggressor, Nazi Germany, despite hindrance from the UK, France and Poland.⁶⁵ Andreyev added that as a result the USSR had to make a non-aggression pact with Germany on 23 August 1939 to secure itself independently. In September 1939, the Soviet Union entered the territories of Western Belarus and Ukraine so that the Ukrainian and

⁵⁹ Èl’nar Bajazarov, ‘Fakt spaseniya Pol’shi Krasnoj armiej starajutsja zatuševat’, *Izvestija*, 27 January 2020 <<https://iz.ru/968040/elnar-bainazarov/fakt-spaseniia-polshi-krasnoi-armiei-staraiutsia-zatushevat>> [accessed 8 September 2021].

⁶⁰ Konsul’skij otdel Posol’stva Rossii v Pol’she, ‘Otvety Posla Rossii v Pol’she S.V. Andreeva na voprosy gazety “Izvestija”’ (Facebook post, 30 January 2020) <https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1422897637869986&id=580221758804249> [accessed 8 September 2021].

⁶¹ Chomenko, ‘Dva Osvencima. Kak Pol’sha i Rossija vojujut vokrug Vtoroj mirovoj’.

⁶² Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, ‘O popytke britanskoj The Telegraph perepisat’ istoriju Vtoroj mirovoj vojny’, 28 January 2020 <https://archive.mid.ru/nedostovernie-publikacii/-/asset_publisher/nTzOQTrrCFd0/content/id/4006076> [accessed 7 September 2021].

⁶³ Mathew Day, ‘Europe “has a duty” to stand up to Russia over re-writing of holocaust history’, *The Telegraph*, 26 January 2020 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/01/26/europe-has-duty-stand-russia-re-writing-holocaust-history/>> [accessed 8 September 2021].

⁶⁴ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, ‘Interv’ju Posla Rossii v Pol’she S.V. Andreeva meždunarodnomu informacionnomu agentstvu “RIA Novosti”, 5 fevralja 2020 goda’, 13 February 2020 <https://www.mid.ru/ru/press_service/publikacii-i-oproverzenia/publikatsii/1427099/> [accessed 7 September 2021].

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Belarusian nations could be reunited, and the Soviet Union had secured time to prevent Germany invading the USSR quickly, and this had enabled the Soviet Union to win the Great Patriotic War.⁶⁶ Such statements of the Russian Ambassador fully repeat the narratives adopted by Soviet historiography in the 1950s, which were challenged during *perestroika* and which had returned to the official discourse since the second half of the 1990s.

Sergei Andreyev also confirmed that the Soviet Army had liberated Poland and Auschwitz and had not waited to do so, as the Polish Prime Minister had previously stated. The Russian Ambassador pointed out that only one hundred monuments to Soviet soldiers out of the 561 present in 1997 in Poland remained untouched. He concluded that such 'memory wars' serve the contemporary political conjuncture in Poland.⁶⁷

On 9 February 2020, Director of the Third European Department of the Russian MFA, Oleg Tyapkin, gave an interview to the international news agency Russia Today in which he discussed various issues of bilateral Polish-Russian relations.⁶⁸ Tyapkin commented on the resolution adopted by the Polish parliament concerning the Second World War. This Russian diplomat opined that Warsaw tries to falsify and distort the history of World War II using anti-Russian rhetoric in order to distract the global community from the shameful politics of pre-war Warsaw, i.e., participation in the partitions of Czechoslovakia and anti-Semitism. The interview also touched upon the removal of the monuments to Soviet soldiers in Poland as well as another painful issue for Russian diplomacy: the planned removal of the monument to Marshall Ivan Konev in Prague.⁶⁹

On 13 February 2020, the Russian Ambassador in Poland, Sergei Andreyev, gave an interview to the *Russian Business Channel*. He stated that Polish-Russian relations at this point were 'the worst since the end of the Second World War'. He accused Poles of trying to 'turn the tables' in history in order to weaken the international position of Russia. The Ambassador stressed the fact that the 'undemocratic Soviet Union' had saved the European countries which had been occupied by Germany.⁷⁰

Andreyev said that 2014 became a turning point in bilateral relations: 'when myth construction crossed all possible limits', Russia decided to start calling things by their proper names. Later, the Russian Ambassador

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, 'Interv'ju direktora Tret'ego evropejskogo departamenta MID Rossii O.N. Tjapkina Meždunarodnomu informacionnomu agentstvu "Rossija segodnja", 9 fevralja 2020 goda', 10 February 2020 <<https://www.mid.ru/ru/detail-material-page/1426510/>> [accessed 7 September 2021].

⁶⁹ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, 'Interv'ju direktora Tret'ego evropejskogo departamenta MID Rossii O.N. Tjapkina'.

⁷⁰ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, 'Posol Rossii v Pol'she — RBK: «U nas samye plochie otnošenija posle vojny», 9 fevralja 2020 goda', 19 February 2020 <https://www.mid.ru/ru/press_service/publikacii-i-oproverzenia/publikatsii/1427644/> [accessed 7 September 2021].

repeated the theses expressed in his previous interview with RIA Novosti on 5 February 2020 regarding the inevitability of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact as a result of the Munich agreement and the unwise politics of the Western states that had failed to stop Germany. He stated that the Russian President had received no official invitation to take part in the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau: only diplomatic representatives in Poland received such invitations, and Putin did not come for that reason. Sergei Andreyev concluded that it would be pointless to re-establish a joint group composed of historians from both countries to discuss controversial issues.⁷¹

Similarly to other state entities, the Russian MFA also organized a few activities to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Victory Day. To commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Great Victory (9 May 1945), the Russian Foreign Ministry decided to publish a number of important documents from their archives. Thus, on 4 February 2020, the Russian MFA shared a series of documents from the Crimean (Yalta) Conference of 4–11 February 1945,⁷² drafts of speeches for 9 May 1945,⁷³ as well as a large number of documents entitled ‘Diplomacy and the Liberation Mission of the Red Army in Central and Eastern Europe’.⁷⁴

The Director of Information and the Press Department of the Russian MFA (‘MFA Official Representative’), Maria Zakharova, played a vocal role in the recent Polish-Russian conflict. On 22 December 2020, Zakharova stated that Poland was the one to blame for the deterioration of bilateral relations because of its aggressive rhetoric, removal of monuments to anti-Nazi fighters, and encouragement of the European Union to impose anti-Russian sanctions.⁷⁵ This was Zakharova’s response to Warsaw’s official rebuttal of Vladimir Putin’s words concerning Poland’s negative role in the beginning of the World War II, when the Polish government disagreed with the Russian President’s interpretation of the inception of the war. This message was also published by Vesti.ru⁷⁶ and Gazeta.ru.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, ‘Dokumenty Jaltinskoj (Krymskoj) konferencii 4–11 fevralja 1945 goda’, 4 February 2020 <<https://www.mid.ru/ru/detail-material-page/1426048/>> [accessed 7 September 2021].

⁷³ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, ‘Dokumenty IDD ko Dnju Pobedy’, 27 April 2020 <<https://www.mid.ru/ru/detail-material-page/1431048/>> [accessed 8 September 2021].

⁷⁴ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federacii, ‘Diplomatija i osvoboditel’naja missija Krasnoj armii v central’noj i vostočnoj Evrope’, 12 March 2020 <<https://www.mid.ru/ru/detail-material-page/1429444/>> [accessed 8 September 2021].

⁷⁵ Rossijska 24, ‘Zacharova uličila Pol’su v podryve dvustoronnich otnošenij s RF’, online video recording, YouTube, 12 March 2020 <<https://youtu.be/AgfF5oDFyRk>> [accessed 9 September 2021].

⁷⁶ ‘Zacharova uličila Pol’su v podryve dvustoronnich otnošenij s RF’, Vesti, Vesti.Ru, 22 December 2019 <<https://www.vesti.ru/article/1297333>> [accessed 8 September 2021].

⁷⁷ ‘Pol’sa mnogo let podryvala otnošenija s Rossiej, zjavila Zacharova’, Gazeta.Ru, 22 December 2019 <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2019/12/22/n_13843958.shtml?updated> [accessed 9 September 2021].

Two days later, on 24 December 2019, Maria Zakharova provided a further interpretation to Poland's politics towards Russia. She opined that contemporary Polish authorities created the conditions of modern politics' dependence on history, and this prevents both countries from building friendly relations.⁷⁸

Zakharova responded officially to the fact that the Russian Ambassador was summoned to the Polish Foreign Ministry in Warsaw on 27 December 2019. On 29 December 2019, Maria Zakharova took part in the 'Voskresnyi Vecher s Vladimirom Solovyovym' talk show on the *Rossija 1* channel. Russian pro-Kremlin journalist Solovyov asked Zakharova several questions regarding the recent dispute with Poland.⁷⁹

The Russian diplomat spoke about modern European authorities' initiatives that involve glorifying criminals and making heroes from anti-heroes. She added that the Nuremberg Tribunal had made all the necessary conclusions. Zakharova said that the fact that the Russian Ambassador was summoned to the Polish MFA was part of diplomatic routine; however, the question remains why this had been done.⁸⁰ The Official Representative of Russia's MFA stated that by doing this Poland was trying 'to turn the tables in their own interest'.⁸¹

In the continuation of Zakharova's talk with Solovyov, she reminded the audience that Russia had never tried to rewrite history, had always been committed to the results of the Nuremberg process, and had never tried to manipulate history for political reasons.⁸² Russia's Official MFA Representative confirmed that Soviet monuments abroad should not be touched and Russia would always react if they were.⁸³

Solovyov changed the subject by emphasizing that France hardly fought against Nazi Germany and officially joined the Allies only thanks to Stalin's efforts and his personal relations with Charles De Gaulle.⁸⁴ Zakharova replied that democracy and tolerance in Europe became possible only thanks to the Soviet Union's help during the Second World War, but that Europe is incredibly ungrateful – as shown by the fact that it now votes for anti-Russian sanctions.⁸⁵

The next subject of the conversation between Maria Zakharova and Vladimir Solovyov was anti-Semitism in Europe during World War II.

⁷⁸ Stanislav Krasil'nikov, 'Zacharova: Pol'sha prodolzhaet uvjazivat' istoriju s nyneshnimi otnošenijami s Rossiej', TASS, 24 December 2019 <<https://tass.ru/politika/7418305>> [accessed 9 September 2021].

⁷⁹ *Rossija 24*, *Voskresnyj večer s Vladimirom Solov'evym ot 29.12.19*, online video recording, YouTube, 30 December 2019 <<https://youtu.be/yeOJD4zl8HA>> [accessed 11 September 2021].

⁸⁰ *Rossija 24*, *Voskresnyj večer s Vladimirom Solov'evym*.

⁸¹ 'Marija Zacharova otvetila na vyzov posla RF v MID Pol'shi', *REN.Tv*, 30 December 2019 <<https://ren.tv/news/v-rossii/642702-mariia-zakharova-otvetila-na-vyzov-posla-rf-v-mid-polshi>> [accessed 9 September 2021].

⁸² *Rossija 24*, *Voskresnyj večer s Vladimirom Solov'evym*.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Zakharova recalled the end of 1960s in Poland, when the Socialist Polish government initiated an anti-Jewish campaign. Both interlocutors agreed that it was also the Soviet Union's mistake not to interfere then.⁸⁶ The next day, on 30 December 2019, Zakharova's interpretation of Poland's recent behaviour was published online by a number of media outlets.⁸⁷

In following weeks in 2020, Zakharova remained very active in her comments on the activities of the Polish authorities in this dispute. On 21 January 2020, Russia's Official MFA Representative stated that the article in *Politico* by the Polish Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, about World War II was full of lies and manipulations. She added that Morawiecki 'killed the human being in himself'⁸⁸ by publishing such information. A number of media outlets reprinted this message, including the newspaper *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*.⁸⁹

On 23 January 2020, *Russia Today* published an article citing Maria Zakharova, who declared that Poland had initiated a large scale disinformation war against Russia in regards to World War II.⁹⁰ The Director of Information and the Press Department of the Russian MFA had ensured that she had obtained information proving that the Polish government made a decision to launch a disinformation war against Russia concerning the Second World War (or the Great Patriotic War, as they say in Russia), which would serve certain political interests. Russian media immediately spread this information further.⁹¹

On 31 January 2020, after the Polish MFA publicly declared that the Polish state is entitled to reparations from Russia for Second World War damages,⁹² Zakharova appealed to the Polish Deputy Foreign Minister, Paweł Jabłoński, on her Facebook page: 'Paweł, stop living at other people's expenses'.⁹³ This message was immediately spread by the mainstream Russian media.⁹⁴

On 3 February 2020, Maria Zakharova again posted on Facebook, referring to the recent statement of the Polish Foreign Minister, Jacek

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ 'Marija Zacharova otvetila na vyzov posla RF v MID Pol'shi', *REN.Tv*.

⁸⁸ Maria Zakharova, '21 janvarja v izdanii "Politiko" vyšla stat'ja prem'er-ministra Pol'shi Moraveckogo' (Facebook post, 21 January 2020) <<https://www.facebook.com/maria.zakharova.167/posts/10221853370233112>> [accessed 9 September 2021].

⁸⁹ 'Zacharova nazvala samoubijstvom stat'ju prem'era Pol'shi o vojne', *Moskovskij komsomolec*, 21 January 2020 <<https://www.mk.ru/politics/2020/01/21/zakharova-nazvala-samoubijstvom-statju-premera-polshi-o-vojne.html>> [accessed 9 September 2021].

⁹⁰ *Rossija 24*, *Eženedel'nyj brifing Marii Zacharovoj* ot 23.01.2020. *Polnoe video*, online video recording, YouTube, 23 January 2020 <<https://youtu.be/DB-tGJsrfGU>> [accessed 11 September 2021].

⁹¹ 'Zacharova zajavila o dezinformacionnoj kampanii Pol'shi po Vtoroj mirovoj', *RT na russkom*, 23 January 2020 <<https://ru.rt.com/f8p7>> [accessed 10 September 2021].

⁹² Paweł Nadrowski, 'Wiceszef MSZ: za 2–3 dni decyzja ws. ewakuacji Polaków z Wuhan', *Radio ZET*, 29 January 2020 <<https://wiadomosci.radiozet.pl/Gosc-Radia-ZET/Gosc-Radia-ZET.-Pawel-Jablonski-u-Beaty-Lubeckiej.-29.01.2020>> [accessed 11 September 2021].

⁹³ Maria Zakharova, 'SMI: "Varšava imeet "bezogovoročnoe" pravo na reparacii ot Rossii za uščerb"' (Facebook post, 31 January 2020) <<https://www.facebook.com/maria.zakharova.167/posts/10221960165942938>> [accessed 13 September 2021].

⁹⁴ 'Zacharova obvinila zamglavy MIDa Pol'shi v šaromyžničestve', *Izvestija*, 31 January 2020 <<https://iz.ru/970993/2020-01-31/zakharova-obvinila-zamglavy-mid-polshi-v-sharomyzhnichestve>> [accessed 13 September 2021].

Czaputowicz, that Poland had won the history dispute with Russia. Zakharova noted: 'This is what all Napoleons think: Bonaparte and the ones in hospitals',⁹⁵ meaning that it would be insane to say this. (In Russian language, mentally ill people are often called Napoleons, which refers to the personality disorders that such individuals might have.) This message was immediately published by the Russian news agency TASS.⁹⁶

In March 2020, Zakharova changed her tone in response to the proposal from the Polish diplomacy to facilitate bilateral relations. The Russian diplomat agreed that it would be a good idea if they aimed to develop relations as the Polish side had previously been blocking that.⁹⁷

The most recent comment by the Director of Information and the Press Department of the Russian MFA concerning Poland and the ongoing Polish-Russian conflict referred to the anniversary of the catastrophe in Smolensk on 10 April 2020, when Polish President Lech Kaczyński and representatives of the Polish political and military elites died on their way to Katyn near Smolensk. On 3 April 2020, Maria Zakharova stated that the Russian MFA had been doing everything to prepare for this visit.⁹⁸ However, the Polish MFA publicly announced that they had not received sufficient support from Russia's side to prepare for the visit, but the Russian authorities later said that in reality the visit had been cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹⁹

On 10 April 2020, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs inquired about the wreck of the TU-154 aircraft that had crashed ten years earlier near Smolensk. However, the Russian MFA reminded the Polish MFA that this task could not be accomplished until the criminal case on the catastrophe was closed.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Maria Zakharova, 'SMI: "Glava pol'skogo MIDa Jacek Čaputovič zajavil"' (Facebook post, 3 February 2020) <<https://www.facebook.com/maria.zakharova.167/posts/10221984336827195>> [accessed 13 September 2021].

⁹⁶ 'Zacharova prokommentirovala slova glavy MID Pol'shi o pobeде v istoričeskom spore s Rossiej', TASS, 3 February 2020 <<https://tass.ru/politika/7672293>> [accessed 13 September 2021].

⁹⁷ Evgenij Pudovkin, 'Zacharova otvetila na predloženiya glavy MID Pol'shi ob ulučšenii otnošenij', RBK, 12 March 2020 <<https://www.rbc.ru/politics/12/03/2020/5e6a3ef59a79471f646ca542>> [accessed 13 September 2021].

⁹⁸ Galina Dudina, 'Otnošenija Rossii i Pol'shi otložili do postkoronavirusnyh vremen', *Kommersant*, 3 April 2020 <<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4311363>> [accessed 15 September 2021].

⁹⁹ Ariadna Rokossovskaja, 'Vlasti Pol'shi otmenili vizit v godovščinu katastrofy Tu-154 iz-za koronavirusa', *Rossijskaja gazeta*, 4 April 2020 <<https://rg.ru/2020/04/04/vlasti-polshi-otmenili-vizit-v-godovshchinu-katastrofy-tu-154-iz-za-koronavirusa.html>> [accessed 15 September 2021].

¹⁰⁰ Natal'ja Anufrieva, 'Pol'sha potrebovala ot Rossii vernut' oblomki samoleta Kač'in'skogo', *Vzglyad*, 10 April 2020 <<https://vz.ru/news/2020/4/10/1033606.html>> [accessed 15 September 2021].

RUSSIAN MASS MEDIA

Newspapers, journals and radio

On 29 December 2019, *Kommersant* published an article 'As long as there is Poland, the reason will occur', authored by Galina Dudina, who stated that Poland had at the end of 2019 become the harshest critic of Russia and its role in the Second World War. She also condemned Poland for the lack of commemoration of not only the USSR's contribution to the victory, but also the Soviet victims, including soldiers murdered in the Nazi German camps located in Poland, and Soviet soldiers fallen during the liberation of Poland in 1944–45.¹⁰¹

On 31 December 2019, the *Rossija v Global'noj Politike* website gathered several prominent Russian historians to discuss the issue of historical memory: special correspondent of *Vzgljad*, Yury Vasilyev; associate professor of Moscow State University History Department, Fyodor Gayda; deputy director of the Institute of Scientific Information and Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Dmitry Yefremenko; deputy director of the Institute of the World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Alexander Lomanov; professor of the European University in Saint-Petersburg, Alexey Miller; senior research fellow of the Baltic Federal University Institute of Humanities, Andrei Teslya; and professor of the Research University Higher School of Economics, Alexander Fillippov.¹⁰²

The conversation started with a reference to the speech of Vladimir Putin on 19 December 2019, when the Russian President condemned the EP resolution that assigned equal responsibility to two regimes (Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union) for initiating the Second World War. Alexey Miller noted that the European narrative of World War II is changing because of the growing role of the Eastern European States, which have a different perception and experience of these two totalitarian regimes. Miller stated that Russian state bodies should not intervene in historical discussions as this is not their prerogative. Instead, Russian leadership should create a positive agenda so as not to exacerbate this conflict.¹⁰³

Associate professor of Moscow State University History Department, Fyodor Gayda, stated that in order to be fair the real beginning of the war should be taken into consideration, namely the 1937 military clashes between China and Japan. A realistic assessment of Stalin's personality is also

¹⁰¹ Galina Dudina, 'Byla by Pol'sha, a stat'ja najdetsja', *Kommersant*, 29 December 2019 <<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4207710>> [accessed 15 September 2021].

¹⁰² Fëdor Gajda, and others, 'Istoričeskaja pamjat' – eščë odno prostranstvo, gde rešajutsja političeskie zadači', *Rossija v global'noj politike*, 31 December 2019, <<https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/istoričeskaja-pamyat-eshe-odno-prostranstvo-gde-reshayutsya-politicheskie-zadachi/>> [accessed 15 September 2021].

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

necessary and the roles of state leaders are understudied. Thus, Piłsudski was hardly better than Mussolini. Now, the main scapegoat for Russians is Poland, therefore the issue of Poland's role in World War II should be studied most thoroughly.¹⁰⁴

Deputy Director of the Institute of Scientific Information and Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Dmitry Yefremenko, concluded that the European Parliament resolution of 19 September 2019 should be analytically deconstructed wherever possible.¹⁰⁵ This resolution is extremely convenient for the political elites of Poland, the Baltic States and some other countries as it will shape the cosmopolitan culture of memory of the twentieth century and in the end might justify the collaboration in Nazi crimes.¹⁰⁶ Deputy Director of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Alexander Lomanov, concluded that the growing estrangement between Europe and Russia would not disappear soon.¹⁰⁷

One of the most popular Russian newspapers, *Izvestiya*, published a number of articles related to the recent Polish-Russian dispute. On 28 January 2020, *Izvestiya* published a big article entitled 'Warsaw Sect: How Poland re-writes the History of the Second World War', authored by Ksenia Loginova. This author stated that 'our [Polish] neighbours try to blank out anti-Jewish pogroms, annexation of territories and union with Hitler'.¹⁰⁸

The article not only described the current situation in the history disputes between Poland and Russia. It also mentioned Polish-German relations, Poland's request for German reparations, disputes with Israel over Holocaust history in Poland, and the lack of cooperation on this topic between Russia and the Western states that were Allies during World War II. It also mentioned in detail all the disputable issues between the Russian and Polish perceptions of the Second World War, such as the removal of Soviet monuments in Poland, differing understandings of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, and the lack of celebration of the 17 January Warsaw liberation anniversary (Warsaw was liberated thanks to a joint effort of the Red Army and Soviet Union-organised Polish Armies).¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ksenija Loginova, 'Varšavskaja sekta: kak Pol'sha perepisyvaet istoriju Vtoroj mirovoj vojny', *Izvestija*, 28 January 2020 <<https://iz.ru/969067/kseniia-loginova/varshavskaia-sekta-kak-polsha-perepisyvaet-istoriiu-vtoroi-mirovoi-voiny>> [accessed 16 September 2021].

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Ksenia Loginova accused Poland of annexation of Czechoslovakia in 1938, but she also stated that Polish nationalists had also had plans to move all Polish Jews to Madagascar, which would then be colonized.¹¹⁰

The Russian Office of Radio Liberty / Radio Free Europe (RL/RFE) published a piece in the aftermath of Holocaust Remembrance Day.¹¹¹ After the European Union issued a statement that Auschwitz-Birkenau had been liberated by 'the Allies',¹¹² not solely the Soviet Union, this signalled that the 'memory wars' between Poland and Russia would continue. In his interview with RL/RFE, British historian and journalist Edward Lucas opined that he supported Poland in that recent dispute, but compromise between the two countries is 'unrealistic'.¹¹³ Lucas concluded that 'the common perception of history is unnecessary' and 'vivid discussion based on facts and mutual respect should be the goal'.¹¹⁴

Television and talk shows

One of the first talk shows to discuss the statements of Vladimir Putin during the press conference on 19 December 2019 was *Voskresnyj večer s Vladimirom Solov'evym*, which was aired by *Rossija 1* on 22 December 2019. The description of the show on the official web-site of *Rossija* (Russia.tv) states that Poland was one of the first countries to make a non-aggression pact with Germany, thus it bears enormous responsibility over European affairs at the end of 1930s.¹¹⁵

The show itself started with a reference to a resolution adopted by the European Union (on 19 September 2019)¹¹⁶ which put the blame for initiating the Second World War on both Nazi Germany and the USSR, which were counterparties of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 23 August 1939. TV Presenter Vladimir Solovyov said that he was waiting for Poles to reveal documents which would negate the documents shown by Putin at the meeting of 20 December 2019. Later, the participants of the show stated that Poland and the Baltic States were fascist regimes during the

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Jaroslav Šimov, "Pol'sha prava, kompromiss nerealen". Vojna za istoriju ne končetsja, *Radio Svoboda*, 29 January 2020 <<https://www.svoboda.org/a/30404527.html>> [accessed 16 September 2021].

¹¹² Statement by Presidents Michel, Sassoli and von der Leyen on the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Council of the European Union, 23 January 2020 <<https://europa.eu/CJ64qB>> [accessed 16 September 2021].

¹¹³ Šimov, "Pol'sha prava, kompromiss nerealen".

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ *Rossija 1*, *Večer s Vladimirom Solov'evym*. Ėfir ot 22.12.2019, online video recording, Smotrim, 22 December 2019 <<https://smotrim.ru/video/1978657>> [accessed 18 September 2021].

¹¹⁶ European Parliament, 2819 (RSP) – Resolution on the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe.

inter-war period but now try to forget this fact when they ask the European Union to initiate certain resolutions dealing with the politics of memory.¹¹⁷

Dean of the World Politics Department of Moscow State University, Andrei Sidorov, reminded the audience that the Russian President had initially touched upon the issue of this EU resolution on World War II during an informal summit of CIS states. He added that it was a shame that Vladimir Putin had to address the distortion of historical politics as there are many state institutions and bodies which should get involved when such situations happen, not only the President.¹¹⁸

Vladimir Solovyov replied that Russians had suffered during the 1990s, when history books started to put all the blame for many historical events on the Soviet Union and its citizens. He also added that the politics of the first president of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, and the first president of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, towards the West had been a big mistake, including their politics of memory.¹¹⁹

In the concluding remarks of the TV show, Alexander Sosnovsky, editor-in-chief of World Economy magazine, Germany, said that he was aware of German documents which showed that Poles had not been going to fight Nazi Germany initially, and there had been no military conflict between these states.¹²⁰ Sosnovsky also added that Poles were directly involved in the murder of Jews, and they let Hitler exterminate many Jews – after all, the vast majority of death camps exterminating Jews were situated on Polish territory. After the end of World War II, Poles attempted to reconstruct Jewish life in their country to create an alibi, but it was hardly possible as there was practically no Jewish population left there.¹²¹

Sosnovsky continued that due to the lack of Jews in Poland, the authorities there started to convert people on a large scale to Judaism and began to reconstruct Jewish communities in Poland using fake Jews. However, Vladimir Solovyov responded that because the participants of the show wanted to follow the real historical truth, they must be fair and mention the fact that many Poles were honorifics of Righteous among the Nations and no nation should be labelled as bad or good as they all consist of different people.¹²²

The next talk show to address this topic, *Kto protiv?* (in English, Who is against?) was aired by *Rossija 1* on 25 December 2019.¹²³ The show started with a video from the conference at which Vladimir Putin declared

¹¹⁷ *Rossija 24, Voskresnyj večer s Vladimirom Solov'evym.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Rossija 1, Kto protiv? O roli Pol'shi v razvujazyvanii Vtoroj mirovoj vojny (Èfir ot 25.12.2019)*, online video recording, Smotrim, 25 December 2019 <<https://smotrim.ru/video/1979868>> [accessed 18 September 2021].

that the Polish Ambassador in pre-war Germany, Józef Lipski, supported Hitler's idea of sending all Jews to Africa and promised to erect a monument to him in Warsaw.¹²⁴ The show also cited the Polish onet.pl website, which had written about Putin's statements. The TV presenter accused it of manipulation with information as it did not use the word 'anti-Semitic', but only 'swine', when referring to Putin's statement about Józef Lipski. The presenter also criticized several Polish historians who had joined the discussion and blamed Poles for being anti-Semitic. Participants of the discussion shared information on the destiny of the Polish Ambassador who lived in the US and worked as an Ambassador of the Polish state in-exile after the end of World War II.¹²⁵

One of the participants of the show, a journalist from Russia Today called Vladimir Kornilov, compared Lipski's after-war life with the lives of Ukrainian and other Nazi collaborators who were anti-Semitic but ended up living and working in the US for American global media, including Voice of America. Kornilov added that it was great that the Russian President had brought to the table the discussion of Poland's role in the Second World War, as Poland's role in the development of anti-Semitism in Europe is incredibly understudied.¹²⁶ Then, Kornilov shared photos of the pogrom in Kielce which took place in 1946, stating that Poland had been extremely anti-Semitic and had played a massive role in Adolf Hitler's consolidation of power in Germany.

The TV presenter added that in the aftermath of World War II the Home Army and the government in London had wanted to use the discontent of Poles who were unwilling to hand back property to the returning Jews. The declaration of Władysław Gomułka, Secretary of the Polish Workers' Party, that Jews should leave Poland in 1968 was a continuation of a long-standing Polish anti-Semitic tradition.¹²⁷

Rodion Miroshnik, a representative of the non-recognized Luhansk People's Republic at the Minsk negotiations process, spoke about the Warsaw uprising and the 600,000 Soviet soldiers who died in Poland during the liberation. He recalled that Poland had attempted to divide Sudetenland with Germany and to negotiate with Hitler a new order in Europe.¹²⁸ Vasyl Vakarov, a political scientist from Ukraine, stressed that Poland had participated in the partition of Czechoslovakia together with Hungary and Germany, all of which were aggressors.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Rossija 24, *Kto protiv? : social'no-političeskoe tok-šou s Dmitriem Kulikovym ot 25.12.2019*, online video recording, YouTube, 25 December 2019 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSUH-pSKoIw>> [accessed 18 September 2021].

¹²⁵ Rossija 1, *O roli Pol'shi v razvjazyvanii Vtoroj mirovoj vojny*.

¹²⁶ Rossija 24, *Social'no-političeskoe tok-šou s Dmitriem Kulikovym*.

¹²⁷ Rossija 1, *O roli Pol'shi v razvjazyvanii Vtoroj mirovoj vojny*.

¹²⁸ Rossija 24, *Social'no-političeskoe tok-šou s Dmitriem Kulikovym*.

¹²⁹ Rossija 1, *O roli Pol'shi v razvjazyvanii Vtoroj mirovoj vojny*.



Screenshot. Source: Vesti nedeli. Ėfir ot 29.12.2019. Kak Pol'sha byla zaodno s Gitlerom <<https://vesti7.ru/video/1981175/episode/29-12-2019/>>

On 26 December 2019, Russia.tv published an episode of *Voskresnyj večer s Vladimirom Solov'evym* in which participants discussed Polish anti-Semitism. One of the participants, political scientist Yevgeniy Satanovskiy, claimed that almost 250,000 Polish Jews had been killed in World War II by their Polish neighbours. He added that the inter-war regimes in Eastern Europe had been saturated with the worst type of Nazi ideology.¹³⁰

On 29 December 2019, pro-Kremlin Russian journalist Dmitry Kiselyov stepped into the Russian-Polish polemics. He made a video entitled 'How Poland was together with Hitler' and had a background photo of Józef Piłsudski and Adolf Hitler portraits as a reference to Piłsudski and Hitler's non-aggression agreement of 1934. The journalist spoke about the Polish MFA's request to talk to the Russian Ambassador in Warsaw and said that this had happened because Vladimir Putin had devoted most of his time in his speeches on 19 and 20 December 2019 to discussing Poland's behaviour before World War II.¹³¹

Kiselyov then pointed out that Poland had formed a union with Nazi Germany before the Second World War and had coordinated its actions to annex the territories of other states with Nazi Germany. Moreover, anti-Semitism in Poland, according to Kiselyov, became a state ideology, and this united Polish leadership with Nazi Germany. Hence, Poland was the second country that was responsible for initiating the Second World War, not the USSR.¹³²

Kiselyov added that Poland had invaded the territories of contemporary Czechia and Slovakia as 'a predator'. In addition to that, Hitler had

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Rossiya 1, *Vesti nedeli. Ėfir ot 29.12.2019. Kak Pol'sha byla zaodno s Gitlerom*, online video recording, Smotrim, 29 December 2019 <<https://vesti7.ru/video/1981175/episode/29-12-2019/>> [accessed 18 September 2021].

¹³² Rossiya 1, *Kak Pol'sha byla zaodno s Gitlerom*.

promised Poland access to the Black Sea, thus reviving Poland 'from the sea to the sea'. Poland had prevented Soviet troops from passing through Polish territory to help Czechoslovakia in its fight against Germany, and France had decided against military assistance without Soviet help. As a result, the UK also abstained from doing so.¹³³ Hence, Poland paralyzed France and the UK, and this is how World War II began.

Furthermore, in relation to Polish anti-Semitism, Dmitry Kiselyov added that 'it was not incidental that Hitler decided to locate death camps in Poland'. Only death camps on Polish territory exterminated so many people. This was not the case in German camps.¹³⁴

Germans exploited Polish anti-Semitism, Kiselyov continued. For instance, a Polish teenager revealed the hiding place of a Polish Jewish historian named Emanuel Ringelblum to the Nazis. The programme cited Ringelblum's memoirs, in which he stated that Poles became bystanders of the Nazi policies against the Polish Jews.¹³⁵ Kiselyov spoke about the victims of the Warsaw ghetto who had been sent to gas chambers in Treblinka. Polish police helped Nazis to gather Jews for deportation to Treblinka. Many Poles ignored the Warsaw ghetto uprising and participated in holiday events happening at the same time in the city centre. And, after the end of World War II, Polish anti-Semitism revived, Kiselyov concluded.¹³⁶

On 12 January 2020, *Voskresnyj večer s Vladimirom Solov'evym* discussed the resolution on the shared responsibility for initiating World War II between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany that had been adopted by the Polish Sejm. Participants of the discussion condemned the resolution and Poland's intention to review the history of World War II. They also remembered the European Parliament's resolution of 19 September 2019 on the Molotov–Ribbentrop non-aggression pact and expressed the idea that Poland is the leading country in the EU that promotes such ideas in the EP. TV Presenter Vladimir Solovyov declared that Russians are actually 'real Europeans' as they defend anti-fascist values.¹³⁷

Member of the Russian Duma, Alexander Khinshteyn, stated that Poland was much more responsible for the Second World War than Russia. In terms of the destructive force of the consequences, the 'pact between Hitler and Piłsudski in 1934'¹³⁸ had caused much more harm than the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 1939. The Soviet Union was the last country to sign the non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939 and 'had no other

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ SMOTRIM. Ves' Solov'ev, *Voskresnyj večer s Vladimirom Solov'evym* ot 12.01.20, online video recording, YouTube, 12 January 2020 <<https://youtu.be/6AUuODsOOok>> [accessed 19 September 2021].

¹³⁸ The name of the pact is non-aggression declaration between Poland and Germany, signed by Lipski from Poland's side and von Neurath from Germany's side, or the Hitler–Piłsudski pact.

choice as all other European countries had already made such pacts'. Poland was then a very dangerous neighbour, not only for the Soviet Union but also for other European countries, and it possessed an army bigger than the French one.¹³⁹

Alexander Sosnovsky, editor-in-chief of World Economy magazine, Germany, remembered the words of the Chief Rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich, who condemned Putin's comment about Józef Lipski being 'and anti-Semitic swine', and he said that 'Poles had actually saved ten per cent of the Jewish population during the war'. Sosnovsky guessed that the Rabbi had been probably forced by the Polish authorities to say that.¹⁴⁰

In the final part of the program, Alexander Khinshteyn stated that Russians actually do not remind Poles about the Soviet prisoners of war killed during the Soviet-Polish war by the Polish army, whereas Poles do talk about the Katyń massacre of 1940.¹⁴¹ TV host Vladimir Solovyov asked the audience whether Polish authorities had even apologized for the shooting of these soldiers, as Russia had made official statements regarding the Katyń massacre.¹⁴² Participants of the discussion were urged to remember that.

Prominent Russian director Karen Shakhnazarov also participated in the discussion. He opined that if Russia is the successor of the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Union is compared to Nazi Germany, then Europeans might start treating Russia as an aggressor and even initiate a war against it. Vladimir Kornilov from Russia Today recalled a few more of Poland's deeds from history. Firstly, Poles destroyed a beautiful Orthodox church in Warsaw after the Polish-Soviet war. Secondly, they had always dreamt of a Poland 'from the sea to the sea'.¹⁴³

On 25 January 2020, Russian TV channel NTV aired the programme *Svoja Pravda*, which was devoted to the recent Polish-Russian conflict.¹⁴⁴

Another talk show, *60 Minut* on *Rossija 1*, devoted its time to Poland on Holocaust Remembrance Day. The description of the program dated 27 January 2020 stated that Russian President Vladimir Putin had not been invited to Poland because 'the truth hurts'.¹⁴⁵ The Russian Ambassador to Poland was invited instead, but no one let him speak.¹⁴⁶

The video of the show started with an introduction by TV host Olga Skabeyeva, who called the meeting in Auschwitz 'an aggressive get

¹³⁹ Solov'ev, *Voskresnyj večer s Vladimirom Solov'evym* ot 12.01.20.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ NTV, "Svoja pravda": Istoriju pišut pobediteli?, online video recording, YouTube, 26 January 2020 <<https://youtu.be/EVda7laqSgM>> [accessed 19 September 2021].

¹⁴⁵ *Rossija 1*, 60 minut. Ėfir ot 27.01.2020 (17:25). V Pol'se prochodit Den' pamjati žertv Cholokosta, online video recording, Smotrim, 27 January 2020 <<https://smotrim.ru/video/1989439>> [accessed 19 September 2021].

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

together'.¹⁴⁷ She added that the Russian Ambassador had been forbidden to speak. The Polish authorities invited 'their new friend' the Ukrainian president. Skabeyeva noted that both the Polish and the Ukrainian presidents avoided the usage of the 'Red Army' notion and accused not only Germany but also Russia of being involved in the Holocaust. Leader of the Law and Justice party, Jarosław Kaczyński, demanded reparations from Russia to compensate their losses during World War II, commented the TV hosts, laughing. The programme hosts and participants labelled such requests as nonsense and reminded the audience that Hungary, Poland and Ukraine remain the most anti-Semitic states in Europe.¹⁴⁸

RUSSIAN HISTORICAL AND MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

The Russian Historical Society

The Russian Historical Society (RHS) was 're-established' on 20 June 2012, claiming to be a successor of tsarist Russia's Imperial Historical Society by 'leading education, scientific and cultural institutions, research foundations and mass-media in order to respond to the challenges of modern times'.¹⁴⁹ Among the co-founders of the RHS are leading Russian universities, museums and libraries, as well as media giants such as All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (Rossija).¹⁵⁰

Of the main co-founders of the Russian Historical Society is the Foundation of the Fatherland's History, which was established by the Decree of the Russian president on 6 April 2016. The main goal of the Foundation is 'the popularization of Russian history in Russia and abroad, preservation of Russian historical heritage and the traditions of its peoples, as well as support for programs of historical enlightenment'.¹⁵¹

Today more than 60 organizations and more than 50 regional offices comprise the Russian Historical Society. One of the aims of the RHS is to 'stand against the falsification of historical facts'.¹⁵²

The Russian Historical Society leads a number of major projects devoted to the end of the Great Patriotic War – a notion which is still used in Russia as a continuation of the Soviet historiography tradition. Several

¹⁴⁷ Rossija 24, 60 minut po gorjačim sledam (večernij vypusk v 17:25) ot 27.01.2020, online video recording, YouTube, 27 January 2020 <<https://youtu.be/bGea1QUIUC8>> [accessed 19 September 2021].

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ 'O Rossijskom istoričeskom obščestve', *Rossijskoe istoričeskoe obščestvo* (hereafter RIO) <<https://historyrussia.org/ob-obshchestve/o-nas.html>> [accessed 28 September 2021].

¹⁵⁰ 'Učrediteli i členy Rossijskogo istoričeskogo obščestva', RIO <<https://historyrussia.org/ob-obshchestve/nashi-partnery.html>> [accessed 28 September 2021].

¹⁵¹ 'O fonde "Istorija otečestva"', RIO <<https://fond.historyrussia.org/>> [accessed 28 September 2021].

¹⁵² 'O Rossijskom istoričeskom obščestve', RIO.

initiatives aim to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the 'Great Victory': 9 May 1945 and the 'liberation of Eastern Europe from Nazism'¹⁵³:

- an international competition among school teachers and school children to commemorate the Victory in the Great Patriotic War – Lessons of the Victory,¹⁵⁴
- the Steps to the Victory project – chronicles of the last days of the (Great Patriotic) war;¹⁵⁵
- an international exhibition The Way to the Victory: Historical Chronicles Testify, which includes several exhibitions with approximately the same content and travels to the countries of Central and Eastern European Countries, the Balkans and inside Russia.¹⁵⁶

Such activities were planned at the beginning of 2019.¹⁵⁷ Russia's *First Channel* broadcast a report about the RHS's agenda, stressing the fact that such measures are important in order to 'fight the falsification of history'.¹⁵⁸ The report quoted official Soviet documents that specified how welcomed Soviet troops felt in Bulgaria, Romania and Germany. The journalist also mentioned secret testimonies of Lieutenant-General Shatilov from the First Ukrainian Front concerning the fact that the Red Army was greeted by the local population in Poland: 'Our military units were greeted in an especially kind way by the local population, they treat us as liberators. Almost all inhabitants of towns and cities come out to greet us, bring us water and milk, treat us with berries, carry flowers for us'.¹⁵⁹ The information on the details of the international Lessons of the Victory competition are absent from the RHS website.

The Steps to Victory project describes the last days¹⁶⁰ of the Great Patriotic War, starting from mid-April 1945;¹⁶¹ it also publishes documents and reveals details from the Soviet perspective. Thus, this project only mentions the (People's) Polish Army's (Pol. *Ludowe Wojsko Polskie*)¹⁶²

¹⁵³ '75-letie osvoboždenija Vostočnoj Evropy ot nacizma', RIO <<https://historyrussia.org/proekty/75-letie-osvoboždeniya-vostočnoj-evropy-ot-nacizma.html>> [accessed 28 September 2021].

¹⁵⁴ 'Meždunarodnyj konkurs "Uroki Pobedy"', RIO <<https://historyrussia.org/proekty/meždunarodnyj-konkurs-uroki-pobedy.html>> [accessed 28 September 2021].

¹⁵⁵ 'Šagi k Pobede', RIO <<https://historyrussia.org/shagi-k-pobede.html>> [accessed 28 September 2021].

¹⁵⁶ 'Put' k Pobede: istoričeskie istočniki svidetelstvujut', RIO <<https://historyrussia.org/proekty/put-k-pobede-istoričeskie-istočniki-svidetelstvujut.html>> [accessed 29 September 2021].

¹⁵⁷ '75-letie osvoboždenija Vostočnoj Evropy ot nacizma', RIO.

¹⁵⁸ Aleksandr Ljakin, 'Unikal'nye dokumenty publikuet Rossijskoe istoričeskoe obščestvo', *Pervyj kanal*, 5 June 2019 <https://www.itv.ru/news/2019-06-05/366367-unikalnye_dokumenty_publicuet_rossijskoe_istoričeskoe_obschestvo> [accessed 29 September 2021].

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ 'Proekt «Šagi k Pobede» (chronika poslednich dnei vojny). 20 aprelja 1945 goda', RIO <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/20-aprelja-1945-goda.html>> [accessed 29 September 2021].

¹⁶¹ 'Proekt «Šagi k Pobede» (chronika poslednich dnei vojny). 21 aprelja 1945 goda', RIO <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/proekt-shagi-k-pobede-khronika-poslednikh-dnej-vojny-21-aprelja-1945-goda.html>> [accessed 29 September 2021].

¹⁶² 'Proekt «Šagi k Pobede» (chronika poslednich dnei vojny). 22 aprelja 1945 goda', RIO <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/proekt-shagi-k-pobede-khronika-poslednikh-dnej-vojny-22-aprelja-1945-goda.html>> [accessed 29 September 2021].

cooperation with the Red Army in their advancing operation towards Berlin¹⁶³ and liberation of various European cities and territories from Nazi troops. Polish forces such as the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa* in Polish) or other forces which operated under the legal government in exile in London (and recognised as legal by all members of the international community except the Soviet Union) are excluded from that narrative.¹⁶⁴

The international exhibition *The Way to the Victory: Historical Chronicles Testify* is a visual project that is accompanied by a number of videos made by the *Rossija 1* channel of interviews from cities where the exhibition was displayed as well as photos of the exhibits.

The exhibition was first displayed in Sofia¹⁶⁵ on 10 September 2019, where it faced a diplomatic scandal. The Bulgarian MFA issued an official statement standing against the notion of the 'liberating role of the Soviet Army in Bulgaria' which was used in the exhibition.¹⁶⁶ In addition to that, a few dozen Bulgarians came out to protest in front of the building where the exhibition was taking place. In their reportage, *Rossija 24* criticised the protesters and showed alternative opinions of Bulgarians who expressed their gratitude to the Red Army and Russians and remembered how Alexander II liberated their country from Turks in the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁷

Then, the exhibition moved to Bucharest, where it opened on 23 October 2019. The organizers proclaimed that 'the Soviet warrior came to Europe as a warrior-liberator – not to carry out revenge – and sacrificed his life for a sacred duty and a humanitarian mission for the sake of peace and liberty'.¹⁶⁸

The video that accompanies the exhibit items clearly reveals elements of the Soviet narrative in terms of the beginning of the Second World War and the Great Patriotic War. It avoids mentioning the simultaneous attack on Poland by the Nazi Germany and Soviet Union and its partition after 17 September 1939; the Soviet-Finnish War (Winter War) of the winter of 1939/40 is also not mentioned.¹⁶⁹ The video also shows the Polish state on the map of Europe during World War II in borders which never existed as Poland encompassed only the territory occupied by Germany in 1939;

¹⁶³ 'Proekt "Šagi k Pobede" (chronika poslednich dnei vojny). 25 aprelja 1945 goda', RIO <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/proekt-shagi-k-pobede-khronika-poslednikh-dnej-vojny-25-aprelja-1945-goda.html>> [accessed 29 September 2021].

¹⁶⁴ "Šagi k Pobede" (chronika poslednich dnei vojny)', RIO <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/shagi-k-pobede-khronika-poslednikh-dnej-vojny.html>> [accessed 29 September 2021].

¹⁶⁵ Vera Marunova, 'V Sofii otkrylas' vystavka "Put' k Pobede: istoričeskie istočniki svidetel'stvujut", RIO, 10 September 2019 <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/vystavka-v-bolgarii.html>> [accessed 29 September 2021].

¹⁶⁶ RIO, *Vesti 9 09 2019 Otkrytie vystavki v Bolgarii*, online video recording, YouTube, 10 September 2019 <<https://youtu.be/VlFRt-uR-kk>> [accessed 29 September 2021].

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Vera Marunova, 'V Buchareste otkrylas' vystavka "Put' k Pobede: istoričeskie istočniki svidetel'stvujut", RIO, 24 October 2019 <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/v-bukhareste-otkrylas-vystavka-put-k-pobede-istoričeskie-istočniki-svidetel'stvuyut.html>> [accessed 29 September 2021].

¹⁶⁹ RIO, *Prezentacija vystavki "Put' k Pobede: istoričeskie istočniki svidetel'stvujut". Osoboždenie Rumynii*, online video recording, YouTube, 24 October 2019 <<https://youtu.be/I2H2cxk4h4g>> [accessed 29 September 2021].



The Beginning of the Second World War and the Great Patriotic War. Source: V Moskve prochodit vystavka 'Put' k Pobede: Istoricheskie Istochniki Svidetel'stvuyut'. <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/v-moskve-prochodit-vystavka-put-k-pobede-istoricheskie-istochniki-svidetelstvuyut.html>>

the video did not show the other part of Poland that was occupied by the USSR but now belongs to Eastern Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine.

In November 2019, the exhibition moved back to Moscow to the Museum of Contemporary History of Russia.¹⁷⁰ The article describing the exhibit items paid special attention to a number of items connected to Poland. Among them one can find the military uniform and personal items of Marshall Rokossovsky, who 'liberated Central Poland and Warsaw', and several items from the Nazi Majdanek and Auschwitz concentration camps that operated on the occupied Polish territories and which were liberated by the Red Army.¹⁷¹

The article concludes that 'they [the organizers] wish to believe that one of the final expiations which will take place in Poland, where 600,000 Soviet soldiers died, will become an occasion to remember and rethink this chapter of our common future, no matter whether one likes it or not, so that it does not serve the political conjuncture, but taking into consideration the price that was paid for the Victory. After all, 600,000 dead Soviet warriors on Polish soil could not know anything about NATO'.¹⁷²

On 3 December 2019, the exhibition opened in the Russian Centre of Science and Culture in Warsaw.¹⁷³ During the opening ceremony, the Chairman of the Russian Historical Society, Sergei Naryshkin, reminded

¹⁷⁰ Anna Chrustalëva, 'Kak osvoboždali Evropu: vystavka v Muzei sovremennoj istorii Rossii', RIO, 21 November 2019 <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/kak-osvobozhdali-evropu-vystavka-v-muzej-sovremennoj-istorii-rossii.html>> [accessed 1 October 2021].

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Marunova, 'V Varšave otkrylas' vystavka «Put' k Pobede: istoricheskie istochniki svidetel'stvuyut».

visitors that 'thanks to the bravery and military skills of the Soviet soldiers, we saved the pearls of Polish cultural heritage and hundreds of thousands Polish citizens convicted to death', and 'the Soviet Union provided Poland with massive economic assistance'.¹⁷⁴

In *Rossija 24* channel's video, Andrei Petrov from the Russian Historical Society criticized the removal of the monuments to the Soviet soldiers in Poland.¹⁷⁵

In mid-December 2019, the exhibition moved to the centre of Moscow.¹⁷⁶ Similarly to its previous editions, the online photos of the exhibits lacked information on the attack on Poland by the Soviet Army and Nazi Germany and its partition between these states on 17 September 1939; only photos from the liberation of Poznań and other Polish cities and territories were displayed.

An exhibition designated for Slovakia with the same narratives opened on 14 December 2020,¹⁷⁷ when the Russian version was still open for visitors in Moscow. Similar messages were conveyed during the exhibition in Romania in March 2020 in the Russian Centre of Science and Culture.¹⁷⁸

In January 2020, The Way to the Victory: Historical Chronicles Testify exhibition opened in Sarajevo.¹⁷⁹ Its opening coincided with the adoption of a special resolution by the Polish Sejm which claimed that both the USSR and Nazi Germany held equal responsibility for the outbreak of World War II.

Member of the Russian Historical Society and executive director of the Foundation of Fatherland's History, Konstantin Mogilevskiy, criticised this decision and stated that 'historians know very well that Poland moved consequently during the 1930s to the tragedy of 1939'. Mogilevskiy added that 'all German politics of the second half of 1930s were filled with attempts to annex new territories, whereas the Soviet Union was working on a new system of international security, postponement of the war, and moving it away from the Soviet borders. However, Poland's politicians tried to dig pits for others into which they themselves eventually fell'.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁴ RIO, *Privetstvie S.E. Naryškina k organizatoram i gostjam vystavki «Put' k pobede»*, online video recording, YouTube, 3 December 2019 <<https://youtu.be/8t5u8pK5FSY>> [accessed 1 October 2021].

¹⁷⁵ RIO, *Put' Pobedy pokažut žiteljam Varšavy*.

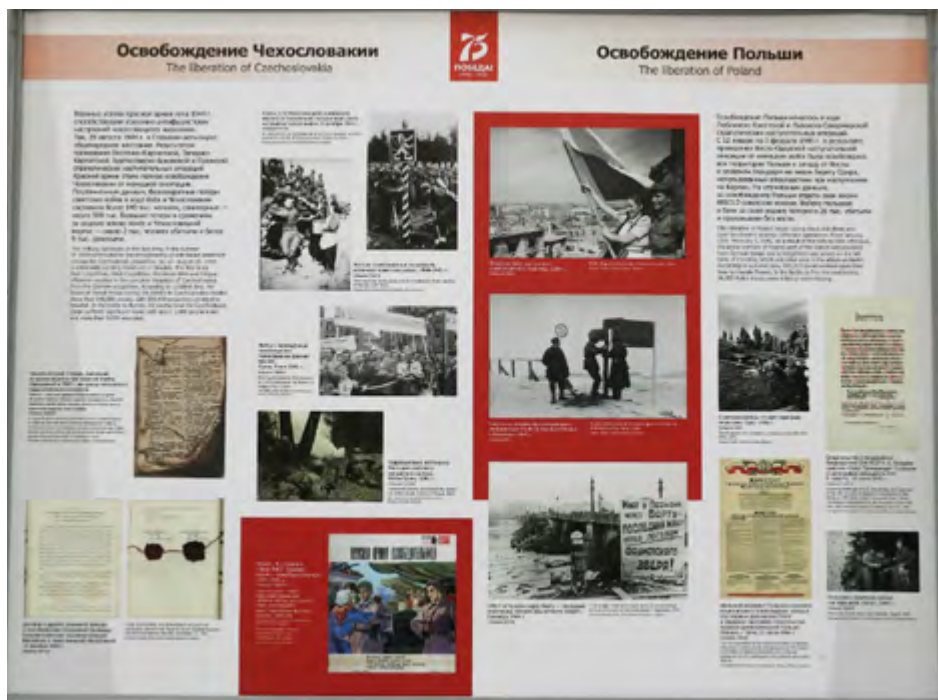
¹⁷⁶ Vera Marunova, 'V Moskve prochodit vystavka "Put' k Pobede: istoričeskie istočniki svidetel'stvujut"', RIO, 16 December 2019 <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/v-moskve-prochodit-vystavka-put-k-pobede-istoricheskie-istochniki-svidetelstvuyut.html/>> [accessed 1 October 2021].

¹⁷⁷ Anna Chrustalëva, 'V Slovakkii otkrylas' vystavka k 75-letiju osvoboždenija Evropy ot nacizma', RIO, 14 December 2019 <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/v-slovakkii-otkrylas-vystavka-k-75-letiyu-osvoboždeniya-evropy-ot-nacizma.html>> [accessed 1 October 2021].

¹⁷⁸ Vera Marunova, 'V Rumynii prochodit vystavka "Put' k Pobede: istoričeskie istočniki svidetel'stvujut"', RIO, 13 March 2020 <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/v-rumynii-prochodit-vystavka-put-k-pobede-istoricheskie-istochniki-svidetelstvuyut.html>> [accessed 1 October 2021].

¹⁷⁹ Vera Marunova, 'V Saraevo otkrylas' vystavka "Put' k Pobede: istoričeskie istočniki svidetel'stvujut"', RIO, 17 January 2020 <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/v-saraevo-otkrylas-vystavka-put-k-pobede-istoricheskie-istochniki-svidetelstvuyut.html>> [accessed 1 October 2021].

¹⁸⁰ Marunova, 'V Saraevo otkrylas' vystavka "Put' k Pobede: istoričeskie istočniki svidetel'stvujut"'.



Liberation of Czechoslovakia and Poland. Source: V Moskve prochodit vystavka 'Put' k Pobede: Istoricheskie Istochniki Svidetel'stviyut'. <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/v-moskve-prochodit-vystavka-put-k-pobede-istoricheskie-istochniki-svidetelstvuyut.html>>

In his interview with the organizers of the exhibition, Russian Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Pyotr Ivantsov, criticised the countries who were trying to demonize the liberation role of the Soviet Army and the Polish authorities and the Baltic States for their anti-Russian historical rhetoric.¹⁸¹

In February 2020, the exhibition opened in the Headquarters of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Vienna, where member of the Board of the Russian Historical Society and Director of the History Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Yury Petrov, underlined that 'the Soviet Army came to Europe not as a conqueror but as a liberator. It was Europe's liberation: the Soviet Army saved Europe from the fascist occupation'.¹⁸² Deputy Chairman of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, Pyotr Tolstoy, pointed out that 'unfortunately, 75 years later we have to defend the memory of those who sacrificed their lives to save Europe from fascism'.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ RIO, *Inter'yu s Črezvyčajnym i Polnomočnym Poslom RF v Bosnii i Gercegovine P. Ivancovym*, online video recording, YouTube, 29 January 2020 <https://youtu.be/_5kQA8K-S8I> [accessed 1 October 2021].

¹⁸² Vera Marunova, 'Vystavku "Put' k Pobede" predstavili v štab-kvartire OBSE', RIO, 22 February 2020 <<https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/vystavku-put-k-pobede-predstavili-v-shtab-kvartire-obse.html>> [accessed 2 October 2021].

¹⁸³ RIO, *Vystavku "Put' k Pobede" predstavili v štab kvartire OBSE*, online video recording, YouTube, 27 February 2020 <https://youtu.be/wg4N_mP430A> [accessed 2 October 2021].

The Russian Military Historical Society

The Russian Military Historical Society (RMHS) was established by the Decree of the Russian President, dated 29 December 2012, 'to consolidate the forces of the state and society in studying the military and historical past of Russia, encourage the studying of Russian military history and stand against the attempts to distort it, support the popularization of the achievements of military historical science, and increase the prestige of military service and patriotic education'.¹⁸⁴

Previously, the RMHS organized a number of exhibitions devoted to the Great Patriotic War, but none of them are active at the moment.¹⁸⁵

RMHS also demonstrated a number of activities related to the 75th anniversary of the Great Victory (9 May 1945). In a special calendar that was created to commemorate 1945, a visitor can find all important dates, including the date of the start of the Wisła-Oder military operation on 12 January 1945, the 'Liberation of Warsaw' on 17 January 1945, and the 'Liberation of Auschwitz prisoners' on 27 January 1945.¹⁸⁶ The 'Liberation of Warsaw' and the start of the Wisła-Oder military operation are also listed among the dates under the category of 'memorable dates in Russian military history' on the project page.¹⁸⁷

The Russian Military Historical Society is undertaking another big project together with *Russkaya Gazeta* (rg.ru) and the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation: 'Stars of the Victory'. There, these three entities publish information on soldiers who should have been awarded a medal or order and arrange its delivery to their families.¹⁸⁸

Independent Historians

Remarkably, the recent Russian-Polish conflict was completely ignored by the Free Historical Community (FHS). There have been no publications on this topic on their website.¹⁸⁹

However, independent historians, including those from FHS, took an active part in discussions concerning Russian-Polish relations on independent Russian media platforms. On 13 January 2020, professor of the

¹⁸⁴ 'Ukaz № 1710', *Rossiiskoe voenno-istoričeskoe obščestvo* (hereafter RVIO) <<https://rvio.histrf.ru/official/decreed-no-1710/>> [accessed 4 October 2021].

¹⁸⁵ 'Muzejno vystavočnaja dejatel'nost', RVIO <<https://rvio.histrf.ru/projects/museum-activity/>> [accessed 4 October 2021].

¹⁸⁶ '1945 GOD', RVIO <<https://web.archive.org/web/20200907045306/https://rvio.histrf.ru/activities/projects/item-6999/>> [accessed 4 October 2021].

¹⁸⁷ 'Pamjatnye daty voennoj istorii Rossii', RVIO, 10 January 2020 <<https://rvio.histrf.ru/activities/projects/dates/1/>> [accessed 4 October 2021].

¹⁸⁸ 'Zvezdy pobedy', *Rossiiskaja gazeta* <https://rg.ru/zvezdy_pobedy/> [accessed 4 October 2021].

¹⁸⁹ Vol'noe istoričeskoe obščestvo, *Vol'noe istoričeskoe obščestvo* <<https://volistob.ru/>> [accessed 6 October 2021].

European University in Saint-Petersburg, Alexey Miller, gave an interview to *Novaya Gazeta* to discuss the recent 'memory wars'.¹⁹⁰

In Miller's opinion, the Russian President became very angry with the resolution of the European Parliament (19 September 2019), hence his aggressive statements such as 'anti-Semitic swine' towards the Polish Ambassador in Nazi Germany. Another tactical reason for doing this might have been Putin's plan to discourage Polish President Andrzej Duda from going to Israel for Holocaust Remembrance Day.¹⁹¹

Miller opined that Putin had probably been waiting since September 2019 for European politicians to speak up about the fact that the EP Resolution had been adopted by consensus voting. As this never happened, he decided to make a point. Importantly, the Professor believed that the Baltic States and Poland promoted the very convenient notion of the responsibility of the two totalitarian regimes in World War II and the Holocaust, although in the interwar period their state models were authoritarian and contained 'anti-Semitic excesses'.¹⁹² Miller pointed out that the politics of the previous Polish Prime-Minister, Donald Tusk, was wiser and he had found a common language with Vladimir Putin in terms of interpretation of the historical past. When the government in Poland changed, the situation deteriorated.

Alexey Miller added that the Russian Historical Society and the Russian Military Historical Society had been established in 2012 to take an active part in the formation of the historical policy in Russia. The Russian 'Law on Foreign Agents' was also adopted in 2012 to protect Russian historical policy from foreign influence, in his opinion.¹⁹³ However, Russia started to work on historical narratives much later than other countries.

Miller confirmed that the topic of the Holocaust remained a cornerstone in historical policies. The Holocaust Remembrance ceremony of 23 January 2020 demonstrated that the previous war narrative regarding the Holocaust was still applicable. For this reason, Israeli authorities refused to let Polish President Andrzej Duda speak during the Holocaust Remembrance ceremony, and he decided against going, in Miller's opinion.¹⁹⁴

Finally, Alexey Miller condemned Putin's decision to become involved in this 'memory war'. Previously, the countries of Old Europe and big European countries treated Eastern European countries as 'younger brothers' and never interfered in their propagation of the narratives they imposed. If Russia decides to step in, it means that it equates itself to such

¹⁹⁰ Andrej Lipskij, 'Vojny pamjati i pervoe lico', *Novaja gazeta*, 13 January 2020 <<https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2020/01/13/83431-voyny-pamyati-i-pervoe-litso>> [accessed 6 October 2021].

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

countries, which is a strategic mistake. Instead, representatives of official historical institutions, like Sergei Ivanov, Naryshkin and Medinsky, should be the ones who debate history.¹⁹⁵

On 16 January 2020, a professor of the European University in Saint-Petersburg, Ivan Kurilla, shared his views on 'memory wars' with Russian Radio Liberty.¹⁹⁶ He condemned Vladimir Putin's attempts to get involved in a historical debate about Poland's role in World War II. Complicated periods of history should not become instruments for political attacks, in Kurilla's opinion. Kurilla added that each nation formulates its own historical memory, similarly to individuals who have different memories about the same event. This is an objective truth and should not be politicized. Nowadays, opponents in 'memory wars' try not only to propagate their views but also to eliminate their opponents' versions of historical memory, but this might be impossible.¹⁹⁷

Kurilla also opined that laws on historical memory should not be imposed by a state as there should be space for free expression even about history. This Russian Professor concluded that had it not been for the events of 2014 in Ukraine, Russia would probably have more supporters in their 'memory wars' these days.¹⁹⁸

On 23 January 2020, the leaders of the European Union published their view on the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau camp 'by the Allies'.¹⁹⁹ On 27 January 2020, Prof. Miller condemned such an approach because, in Russian historiography, 'the Allies' relates to the Western partners of the Soviet Union in World War II.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Jaroslav Šimov, 'Chronika pol'skoj vojny. Moskva i Varšava deljat istoriju', *Radio Svoboda*, 16 January 2020 <<https://www.svoboda.org/a/30380646.html>> [accessed 6 October 2021].

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Statement by Presidents Michel, Sassoli and von der Leyen.

²⁰⁰ Alexey Miller, 'Vynesu v otdel'nyj post to, na čto Jurij obratil moe vnimanie v komentarii k predyduščemu postu' (Facebook post, 28 January 2020) <<https://www.facebook.com/alexey.miller.7/posts/1775867212547038>> [accessed 07 October 2021].

CONCLUSIONS

The Russian internet media space has demonstrated a drastic increase of anti-Polish rhetoric since Vladimir Putin's press-conference in 19 December 2019. The leading actors who participated in the proliferation of anti-Polish historical narratives were as follows:

- The President of the Russian Federation;
- The Russian MFA, represented by minister Sergei Lavrov; the Head of Information and Press of Russian MFA, Maria Zakharova; Russian Ambassador in Poland, Sergei Andreyev; and other members of Russian diplomatic corps;
- semi-official comments of Russian diplomacy that were published on social media, primarily those of Maria Zakharova;
- state-funded historical societies, i.e., the Russian Historical Society, and their members, high-ranking historians such as executive director of the Foundation of Fatherland's History, Konstantin Mogilevskiy, or often influential state officials such as the director of Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, Sergei Naryshkin;
- mainstream Russian mass media, controlled directly or indirectly by the Kremlin, as well as their internet platforms and YouTube channels.

All these sources utilized the following narratives to discredit Poland:

1. The 'Piłsudski-Hitler' non-aggression agreement of 1934;
2. Poland's participation in the division of Czechoslovak territories in 1938;
3. Poland's support for Germany during the 1938 division of Czechoslovakia; prevention of assistance to Czechoslovakia from the Soviet Union;
4. Poland's ambition to stretch 'from the sea (the Baltic) to the sea (the Black Sea)';
5. The absence of the Polish government and lack of resistance from the Polish Army against Nazi Germany in 1939, when Soviet troops entered Polish territory;
6. Polish anti-Semitism and the fact that this was shared with Nazi Germany;
7. Poland's friendship with Hitler's Germany before 1939;
8. The location of Nazi Germany's death camps in Poland due to Polish anti-Semitism;

9. Polish post-war anti-Semitism; the anti-Jewish campaign of 1968, initiated by Władysław Gomułka; contemporary Polish anti-Semitism;
10. The disgraceful removal of monuments to Soviet soldiers and the Red Army in Poland since 2017;
11. Poland's initiatives on the international arena to discredit Russia's past and worsen its present by encouraging anti-Russian sanctions;
12. Historical manipulations by contemporary Polish authorities; distortion of facts for the sake of Poland's victimization;
13. Demonization of Russia's role in the 2010 Smolensk catastrophe.

Historical events ignored or diminished by the Russian internet media space:

1. USSR's and Germany's partition of Poland on 17 September 1939;
2. Soviet-Finnish (Winter) War of 1939–40;
3. Katyn massacre of 1940;
4. The Allies' assistance to the Soviet Union in various instances, from 1941 until the end of World War II;
5. The origin of Anders' Army, which was formed from Polish POWs and GULAG prisoners on the territory of the Soviet Union in 1941–42;
6. Repressions and deportations of Polish civilians, from 1939 until the end of World War II;
7. Lack of assistance to the Polish population during the 1944 Warsaw Uprising;
8. Military campaigns against the Polish Home Army and fights between them and the Soviet Army during the war.

The main approaches utilized by the Russian media were:

- Manipulation with information;
- Hate speech;
- Biased historical narratives;
- Narratives adopted and integrated into the historical narrative of contemporary Russia that are not impartial and illuminate only one historical perspective, mainly reinterpretation of the Soviet historical narrative.

A number of opinion polls were carried out right after the period of the information campaign. Interestingly, a poll conducted on 13–20 June 2020 revealed that around ten per cent of Russian citizens believed that Poland was guilty for the outbreak of World War II.²⁰¹ Similar trends were visible in an opinion poll carried out closer to the 75th anniversary of the end of the Great Patriotic War, on 14–21 April 2020.²⁰²

The results of both surveys suggested another important observation: some of the Russians' negative stereotypes or perception of Poles stem from the nineteenth century. However, official Russian historical propaganda exerts little effort to change this image. On a positive note, representatives of the young Russian generation see Poland and Poles in a much more pleasant light and are eager to visit Poland and have friends from there. Thus, despite massive information campaigns operating on multiple levels that aim to shape a certain agenda and attitude amongst the Russian population, the development of information technologies and the proliferation of the online and social media make it almost impossible to prevent Russian youth from reaching out to alternative historical narratives. This process seems to be inevitable and unstoppable, therefore there is hope that historical policy will soon cease to be an instrument in the hands of politicians.

²⁰¹ *Obraz Poliski w Rosji przez Pryzmat Sporów Historycznych. Raport z badania opinii publicznej* (Warszawa: Centrum Polsko-Rosyjskiego Dialogu i Porozumienia, 2020).

²⁰² *Wojna informacyjna i propaganda historyczna. Raport z badania opinii publicznej* (Warszawa: Centrum Polsko-Rosyjskiego Dialogu i Porozumienia, 2020).

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Marek Kornat, Mariusz Wołos

JÓZEF BECK. BIOGRAFIA

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It is difficult to imagine narratives on the period preceding the Second World War that do not include Józef Beck. As minister for foreign affairs, he was not just a key figure in Polish diplomacy; because of the important role that he played at a critical moment in global history, historiography pays much greater attention to him than it does to other representatives of the political elite of the Second Polish Republic.

Written in English by the Scottish commentator and politician John Hunter Harley in 1939, the first 'authentic biography' of Józef Beck contains a foreword by Edward Raczynski, the Polish ambassador to London. Raczynski, who two years later became Polish foreign affairs minister, called Harley's biography 'especially needed at the present hour', claiming 'Beck has for a long time been regarded by many as the "mystery man of Europe"'.¹

Since this first autobiography, written shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, there have been many publications on the subject of Beck, who continues to be vigorously debated in public discourse. The fact that the former head of Polish diplomacy remains of such unstinting interest for historians is clear from the publication of more recent academic biographies.² As the authors of this book note, Beck is one of 'the best-known as well as most controversial' (p. 7) and 'fiercely contested' (p. 872) figures in Polish history. Beck, who is usually discussed solely in the context of the *annus horribilis* of 1939, is frequently a personification of 'wrong': the great loser, and the 'gravedigger' of the Second Republic. A dark legend surrounded him, carefully nurtured both by advocates of the appeasement policy and by the anti-Sanation Polish government-in-exile

¹ Foreword by the Polish Ambassador, in *The Authentic Biography of Colonel Beck*, ed. by John Hunter Harley (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1939), p. 9. The book is based on a biography of the reportage writer and journalist Konrad Wrzos. Konrad Wrzos, *Putkownik Józef Beck* (Warszawa: Nakład Gebethnera i Wolffa, 1939).

² *Płk Józef Beck (1894–1944), Żołnierz, dyplomata, polityk*, ed. by Sławomir M. Nowinowski (Łódź–Warszawa: IPN – Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2017); Jerzy Chociłowski, *Najpierw Polska. Rzecz o Józefie Becku* (Warszawa: Iskry, 2019).

(including Prime Minister Gen. Władysław E. Sikorski³). This legend developed not just because of the official historiography of the Polish People's Republic; it was also disseminated on various occasions (e.g., in December 2019) by the president of the Russian Federation and the Kremlin propaganda machine.

The first academic biography of Józef Beck that covered his entire life (1894–1944) is the culmination of more than two decades of research by Marek Kornat and Mariusz Wołos, professors and authors with an impressive academic output to their names.⁴ One of the reasons why it is considered a ground-breaking work is the rare breadth of content, which results from the authors maximizing all of the available archival and bibliographical sources.

Unlike Józef Piłsudski, a statesman ubiquitous in the public space and collective memory of today's Poland, Beck 'lost the battle for historical remembrance among his compatriots' (p. 7). Kornat and Wołos' monumental biography goes some way towards making amends for this 'loss'; its scope exceeds that of all other academic biographies of eminent figures in Poland's recent history (the only comparison that comes to mind is Marcei Handelsman's three-volume biography of Adam Jerzy Czartoryski). Almost 1,000 pages of text (close to 900 of which are the authors' original work, together with references to sources) is the result of an enormous heuristic effort, including research from 40 archives in 11 countries around the world.

The book is divided into 10 chapters of chronological order. Each of these consists of several subchapters which are not listed in the contents. These unnumbered chapters make working with the book somewhat harder, especially when frequently checking the footnotes. However, these remarks are of a technical nature and are addressed to the publishing house that opted for this approach.

The author of the first four chapters, Wołos, fills in the gaps in Beck's curriculum vitae from the period before he became minister. He presents Beck's long evolution from being one of Piłsudski's many ardent followers to becoming his closest colleague. Józef Beck never completed any diplomatic courses and never finished school. He perceived himself as a soldier

³ For example, in a conversation with the interim chargé d'affaires of the US Embassy in France, Sikorski complained that Beck's conduct in Romania had been scandalous ['spending large sums of money in pursuit of pleasure'] while Poles were dying of hunger. The National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Records of The Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Poland, 1916–1944, Microcopy 1197, Roll 70 (1940–1944), pp. 534–36. R.D. Murphy's note from a conversation with Gen. W. Sikorski on 21 March 1940, sent to the Department of State on 22 March 1940.

⁴ For example: Marek Kornat, *Polska 1939 roku wobec paktu Ribbentrop-Mołotow. Problem zbliżenia niemiecko-sowieckiego w polityce zagranicznej II Rzeczypospolitej* (Warszawa: PISM, 2002); Marek Kornat, *Polityka równowagi 1934–1939. Polska między Wschodem a Zachodem* (Kraków: Arcana, 2007); Marek Kornat, *Polityka zagraniczna Polski 1938–1939. Cztery decyzje Józefa Becka* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Oskar, Muzeum II Wojny Światowej, 2012). Mariusz Wołos is the author of several biographies of politicians and military figures (including Gen. Bolesław Wieniawa-Długoszowski) and the editor of the volume *Polskie Dokumenty Dyplomatyczne 1931*, ed. by Mariusz Wołos (Warszawa: PISM, 2008).

serving the foreign policy of the reborn Poland, and more specifically as the implementer of the Supreme Commander's orders and ideas. Beck learnt diplomacy as he went, through practice. He received his first stripes in 1919, carrying out special diplomatic and military missions in Romania, Hungary, Brussels and France, which were entrusted to him by Piłsudski. As the Chief of State's personal emissary, he held confidential discussions on close Polish-Hungarian cooperation with Miklós Horthy in October 1920; he participated actively in negotiations on the proposed Polish-Lithuanian military convention in spring 1921; in 1922–1923 he acted as Polish military attaché in France (which Wołos illustrates with hitherto unused documents, including from the Russian State Military Archive in Moscow). After the May Coup, Lt Col Beck became chief of staff to Piłsudski, the minister for military affairs. After four years of collaboration, the Marshal allowed Beck full access to all areas of Polish foreign policy, seeing him as a future head of the foreign ministry. It is clear that this key period in Beck's career launched him on the proverbial trampoline to a much higher state position. The penultimate chapter examines the final five years of Beck's life. It diverges somewhat from the other chapters: there is a large amount of information about his worsening health, and it contains personal accounts from those close to Beck, including colleagues who were with him in his final days. This is also a depressing chapter which exposes the true and tragic extent to which he became a hostage of the Romanian government. The final chapter, 'Life and politics in review', reiterates the salient arguments raised by earlier chapters, with the authors' conclusions and reflections on alternative positions.

The dominant theme, which takes up five chapters and more than 600 pages of the book, is Beck's career at the helm of the Second Republic's diplomacy in the position of deputy minister (December 1930 – November 1932) and then minister of foreign affairs (2 November 1932 – 30 September 1939). Wołos and Kornat follow the rule that no biography of Beck is complete without a precise analysis of this foreign policy, particularly during the period when he was serving as minister. This approach enabled the authors to strike a good balance between their profile of the main figure in the book and the historical context, but one might have few reservations about how successfully they achieve this. Although there are a few passages where Beck's presence somehow gets lost amid the wealth of detail, in general his reflections and moves remain clear despite the thicket of exhaustive descriptions of events in the international arena.

From 1932–1935, Beck followed the guidelines set by Piłsudski, who was the *de facto* head of foreign policy at the time. After the Marshal's death, Beck stuck to the canons of this diplomacy: a balance of power

policy, maintaining an alliance with France, drawing Great Britain into to the affairs of Central European states, bilateralism, and the idea of creating an 'Intermarium' bloc based on the foundation of Poland's alliance with Hungary and Romania. The basis of both Piłsudski and Beck's foreign policy was a belief in the need for Poland's complete independence: a striving for maximum sovereignty. This is not to say, however, that Beck merely 'copied' Piłsudski – which was in any case impossible given the dynamic of change in the international arena after 1935. In his relatively brief period of less than seven years as head of Polish diplomacy, Beck faced an exceptionally dynamic period in international politics which was abounding in radical changes in geopolitics, especially in Central Europe.

Did Beck violate the policy of 'equal distance' by forming closer relations with the Third Reich and increasing the gap with the Soviet Union, as critics of this policy suggest? The equal distance policy theory is controversial, as it suggests that Polish-German and Polish-Soviet relations were analogous. This understanding might be misleading, considering the fact that diplomatic contact between Warsaw and Berlin was very intensive under Beck and, one might say, warmer than it was between Warsaw and Moscow. This disproportion is particularly visible in 1938 when viewed against the backdrop of the Czechoslovakian crisis. Beck himself confirmed this when boasting to his close colleagues in November 1938 about Poland's successful collaboration with Germany ('we are in a good political place'), while Poland's political relations with the Soviet Union at the same time were 'icy'. Yet, the authors argue that it was not the hard-to-gauge atmosphere in mutual relations or the number of official visits that was the true indicator of the balance of power policy. In their view, Beck stuck consistently to this key principle, citing geopolitical concerns and a fundamental opposition to the policy of creating blocs (pp. 440–41), since Poland had not made any commitments to Germany over the USSR (e.g., in November 1937, when Beck deemed Poland's entry to the anti-Comintern pact impossible) or vice versa (e.g., by not approving the Eastern Pact proposed by France, a replication of Locarno containing Poland, USSR and Czechoslovakia).

The book's consistent narrative is to present Józef Beck as a pragmatic politician whose moves were guided by absolute rationalism. In keeping with this perspective, the authors offer their views on Beck's most important decisions as foreign affairs minister: the rejection of the Eastern Pact projects proposed by France; his attempts to maintain an alliance with France (1936); his refusal of Germany's territorial demands, and his acceptance of Great Britain's political guarantees in 1939.

Certain passages in the book are characterised by the authors' tendency to rationalise Beck's moves as minister *ex post*, taking the events of 1939 as a reference point. In particular, this concerns Beck's policy towards Czechoslovakia, and indirectly also towards France. The Czechoslovakian state held a crucial position in Beck's thinking. In common with his mentor Piłsudski, he regarded the Czechoslovak Republic as an artificial construct doomed to failure. Relations between the two states were characterised by antagonism, with several justifications from Poland's point of view (for example, the Czech armed action in 1919 that resulted in Zaolzie being incorporated into Czechoslovakia, and more generally the perception of Czechoslovakia as Russia's 'aircraft carrier' in the middle of Europe following the signing of the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty of 1935). The Czechoslovakian crisis was the only moment in Beck's ministerial career when he categorically rejected holding a common position with the Western states, turning down the opportunity to join Great Britain and France's joint protest in Berlin in May 1938. Beck, the author explains, predicted that England and France would not be able to meet their obligations to Czechoslovakia. In his view, Czechoslovakia would have no chance of survival without the Sudetenland. The foreign ministry's decision to deliver an ultimatum to Prague demanding that parts of Cieszyn Silesia be incorporated into Poland was determined by historical factors and took into account the dangers of Polish diplomatic inaction after the Munich Agreement. Beck did not intend to allow a situation to exist in which Hitler would be the arbiter between Poland and Czechoslovakia. According to the authors of his biography, 'it is extremely difficult to see an alternative to Beck's actions in September 1938' (p. 575). Eighty years after the events in question, they assume that 'it might seem that utter passivity towards events would have been the best solution in 1939' (p. 580), but they have no doubt that 'no Polish policy could have ensured that the Czechoslovak state would be saved' (p. 579). At the same time, following the motto that 'a good policy will defend itself', Beck refused to recognise the importance of Poland's international image, which suffered greatly as a consequence of the ultimatum to Prague. The authors are correct in their assertion that it suited Great Britain and France to present Poland as a troublemaker. These countries, as architects of the disastrous appeasement policy in which Nazi Germany's territorial appetites were sated at the cost of sovereign Central European states, followed similar logic in forcing Czechoslovakia to accept the Munich diktat. The authors do not see any common line of action between Beck and Germany in the period of the Czechoslovak crisis, or any violation of the balance of power policy, since Polish policy merely replicated Germany's demands of Czechoslovakia,

without prior agreement with Berlin. Beck failed to take the initiative to counter views unfavourable to Poland, which included rumours of a clandestine pact with Germany in its action against Czechoslovakia, alluding to speculation regarding the 'secret clauses' of the Polish-German declaration of non-aggression of 1934. This lack of activity by Poland's diplomatic chief of public relations can be explained by his general attitude towards rumours, to which he did not respond (such as the fantastical reports of his supposed role in the death of Włodzimierz Ostoja-Zagórski in August 1927). On the other hand, did issues of image really have an impact on the concrete decisions of the powers in questions of territory in 1938 and 1939? 'After all, Beneš, popular in the West, did not manage to secure help for his country in 1937, while the fiercely criticised Beck obtained an alliance with Great Britain a year later' (p. 878), the authors conclude. Leaving aside the actual importance of this alliance for Poland, it is not entirely accurate to assert that in spring 1939 'nobody was talking about Poland as Germany's partner anymore' (p. 639). In March that year, for instance, the secretary general at the Quai d'Orsay, Alexis Léger, warned Eric Phibbs, the British ambassador in Paris, against Beck, calling him a fraud who is 'entirely cynical and false'.⁵

Beck's foreign policy did not always correspond with Poland's true potential in the international arena. He overestimated the capabilities of the Polish army, which was supposed to be the mainstay of this policy. Contrary to his expectations, Beck was not invited as an equal partner to conferences held in Munich and Vienna that were intended to solve Czechoslovakia's territorial questions. His determination in securing Poland's interests did not win the country any sympathy, as shown by the aforementioned reaction of Western powers to the Polish ultimatum to Prague. Moreover, Beck's policy towards Czecho-Slovakia was based on an erroneous calculation of the consequences of his decisions. He was not far-sighted in the case of Slovakia, which represented 'the most difficult problem of all questions' (p. 590) in the 'jigsaw puzzle' known as the 'Third Europe'. In order for Beck's idea (referring to the concept of Intermarium) to become a reality, the fundamental condition that had to be met was a common Polish-Hungarian border. However, this was not achievable without a revision of the Versailles order, which, specifically, would reduce or partition Czechoslovakia. It is worth emphasising that the topic of Slovakia was an integral and, unfortunately, overlooked part of Beck's policy towards Czecho-Slovakia in 1938–1939, which did not end with the annexation of Zaolzie and joint

⁵ 'Telegram from E. Phibbs to Lord Halifax, 18 March 1939', in *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919–1939*. Third Series, vol. 4: 1939 ed. by Ernest Llewellyn Woodward and Rohan Butler, 10 vols (London: H.M.S.O., 1949–61), iv (1951), p. 373.

Polish-Hungarian actions in Subcarpathian Ruthenia. The omission of Poland at the Vienna arbitration probably affected the decision to remove all territorial claims over Slovakia, described in Warsaw as correcting the existing border. As was the case with Munich, Poland emphasised its regional position, acting 'in parallel' with the powers and demanding territories in the areas of Čadca, Orava, and the Spiš region. The 'reclamation' of several villages, during which armed incidents resulted in deaths and injuries on both sides, thwarted work on rapprochement with the Slovakian autonomists, and the psychological damage done significantly outweighed the scraps of land that Poland secured. In Polish diplomacy, Beck included, there was a naïve conviction that the Slovaks would treat these border 'corrections' as proof of Polish self-limitation. In reality, they considerably weakened the position of Slovakian Polonophiles (K. Sidor) and the possibility of Polish influence in Slovakia, thus facilitating the German anti-Polish campaign there. For Polish diplomacy, being encircled from the south 'was a surprise' (p. 666), which begs the question: what caused this 'surprise'? Leaving aside Wincenty Witos' problematic view of Czechoslovakia with its pre-monarchy borders as a 'bastion' covering Poland's southern border, Beck failed to take advantage of the opportunity to shape Poland-friendly moods south of the Carpathians. His active participation in Central Europe's 'territorial reconstruction' led to destabilisation of the Versailles system. Beck's hope that the disintegration of Czecho-Slovakia would usher in Polish-German collaboration proved illusory.

There is a palpable hint of sympathy in the tone that the authors use when writing of Beck (as well as Piłsudski). Yet this is not to say that they defend all his decisions and views unconditionally. Among Beck's actions that they criticise are those following the May Coup, when he 'played an inglorious role in the harsh trial of the previous government and harassment of the vanquished opponents' (p. 205). Beck's assessment of Polish-German relations was overly optimistic (not only in November 1938, but also earlier, in May–June 1935); the minister's optimism was not shared by the Polish ambassador in Berlin, Józef Lipski. Beck did not reckon on the possibility of a tactical German-Soviet alliance, stating in July 1939 that 'any stories about Rapallo are not realistic' (p. 729). He genuinely believed that in the event of war Great Britain would help Poland in accordance with the guarantees offered in March 1939, and that France would consistently follow England in such a move.

Historians customarily consider possibilities other than the decisions actually taken. However, they should always base these on the facts and realities of the times, rather than on conjecture. The authors of this book are also guilty of this practice. The concluding chapter abounds in their

reflections on alternatives to Józef Beck's policies. Were there better opportunities to fight for the Polish *raison d'état* in the most controversial period of his career (1938–1939)? Were there alternatives to his foreign policy?

The authors' verdict is unequivocal: 'It cannot be negative' (p. 876). They do not discern 'major errors in the minister's actions – in any case none that threatened the Polish *raison d'état*, and most importantly, they occurred where there was an opportunity to choose a better option' (p. 876). Beck neither wanted nor was able to follow the path of vassal to Nazi Germany. He was profoundly aware of the value of Berlin's guarantees to its neighbours (for example, those given to Czecho-Slovakia in the Munich agreement, which had already been broken by March 1939), and rejected Hitler's territorial demands of Warsaw. Beck demonstrated realism by accurately reading the intentions of Poland's aggressive Western neighbour. In the long term, this intention was proved to not be about creating *Mitteleuropa*. Instead, National Socialist Germany's intention was the gaining of *Lebensraum*. Beck's actions in 1939, as expressed in his speech of 5 May 1939 (his most famous as well as the only one he gave during a plenary session in the Sejm), were about honour as the supreme value in the life of nations and states; as such, his actions were devoted to defending Poland's sovereignty and independence. If we treat these values as imponderables, Beck's decisions cannot be seen as irrational. The authors assess Beck's policy as one of success, as he did not allow other states to impose their interpretation of the Polish *raison d'état*. I fully agree with the conclusion of the authors of the biography, which one cannot fail to repeat even though it seems obvious: facing two totalitarianisms – German and Soviet – geared towards territorial expansion, and given the lack of effective initiatives from the Western powers, Great Britain and France, there was no real prospect of preserving the independent, sovereign existence of Central European states (including Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland).

Edward Raczynski, the doyen of the Polish diplomatic services, concluded his foreword to Beck's biography 83 years ago with the following words:

I shall be exceedingly happy if, thanks to this book, there may emerge a deeper understanding of Colonel Beck which will correspond more exactly with the real man as he is and as he works. Perhaps in that progress he will drop some of these qualities which embroider the 'man of mystery'.⁶

It would be no exaggeration to state that the authors of this new biography were motivated by a similar goal. They have compiled an admirable

⁶ Foreword by the Polish Ambassador, p. 11.

collection of documents which were not just from official provenience but also included documents from new or little-known sources from Russian, French and other archives. Combined with solid methodology, they have created a wide range of tools for examining Józef Beck, his reasoning, and the decisions he made.

The cover photograph, depicting Beck with a subtle smile on his face, portrays a different image from that of the minister's 'sphinx'. This stereotypical perception could potentially be countered by attempting to sketch his complex personality, including presenting the aspects of his characteristics not necessarily associated with his professional duties. Some readers would no doubt be interested in getting to know Józef Beck as a private individual, including gaining insights into his family life, hobbies, and interests. This is also suggested by the subtitle, 'Biography', but it should be stressed that this is, above all, a political biography, and the authors were only able to cover those episodes of Beck's life that were available in the source material. The reason for this is that there is a huge shortage of sources; this hinders any attempt to understand the reasons for the break-up of Beck's first marriage, the minister's views on Poland's internal problems in the late 1930s, or the content of discussions at the top of the Polish state. Beck did not leave behind any personal notes or a private archive and he did not keep a diary. Private letters written by him are a rarity. His work *Dernier rapport* (1951) is not a memoir but a subjective and unfinished analysis of Polish foreign policy.

Biography is a difficult art. Not all authors manage to escape the trap of excessive emphasis on the positive or negative characteristics of their subject, which can result in hagiographic tendencies or character assassination. In the context of the 'black legend' surrounding Beck, how did the authors deal with this dilemma in his case?

Above all, Wołos and Kornat's writing technique is not polemical but factual. The authors deliberately avoid directly disputing Beck's black legend, as they are aware that to do so could limit the context and topics covered. Among the works they cite, the reader will not find any pseudohistorical pieces full of insinuations and judgements on Beck. Following the rule of *sine ira et studio*, their objective was to give their readers material to think about. The best target for the book is an expert with substantive knowledge of the intricacies of interwar international politics. Readers seeking unequivocal judgements and a 'quick fix' to decipher Beck might be disappointed (regardless of the fact that history enthusiasts of this kind seldom reach for 'thick' academic books). Yet, this is certainly not to say that the authors do not express their observations and conclusions concerning Minister Beck's specific views, ideas, and decisions.

Wołos and Kornat's book caught historians' attention shortly after publication. This is demonstrated by the numerous discussions of it in the press, history websites, reviews, and specialist journals,⁷ in which the authors also had their say.⁸ The debate on the foreign affairs minister of the Second Polish Republic is therefore not going to go away, but the information on which it is based has now grown considerably.

- ⁷ Wojciech Mazur, 'Józef Beck w roku 1939 – kilka uwag na marginesie najnowszej biografii', *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny*, 86.3 (2021), 160–75; Stanisław Żerko, 'O najnowszej biografii Józefa Becka', *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny*, 86.3 (2021), 176–82; Marcin Furdyna, Marek Rodzik, 'Beck sportretowany, czyli kilka słów o centryzmie w historiografii', *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny*, 86.3 (2021), 183–98.
- ⁸ Marek Kornat, Mariusz Wołos, 'Polemika wokół biografii Józefa Becka', *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny*, 87.4 (2021), 155–72.

Vitaliy Churkin

TRUDNOSTI PEREVODA

Moskva: Abris, 2020

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The appearance on the book market of memoirs by high-ranking Russian Foreign Ministry officials has been a rarity in recent years, so the recently published memoirs of Vitaliy Churkin, Russia's former Permanent Representative to the United Nations and one of Russia's most experienced and talented diplomats, are particularly noteworthy. Gorbachev's perestroika heralded a new generation of extremely bright individuals, a large number of whom came to the fore in public life because of the collapse of the USSR. With the departure of some of the old Soviet nomenklatura, unprecedented career opportunities opened up for young people. Today, it is hard to imagine a 40-year-old deputy to the Russian Foreign Minister, but back in the early 1990s it was common practice.

Churkin's early start and impressive career made him a part of history. He was witness to and sometimes an actor in negotiations on decisive topics in international relations: the nuclear disarmament process, the end of the Cold War, and the armed conflicts in Yugoslavia, Syria, Libya and Ukraine, to mention a few. Undoubtedly, he could have written a separate volume on each of these topics, but unfortunately Churkin left behind only this book. According to his relatives, he had just managed to finish *Trudnosti perevoda* before his unexpected death in February 2017, as he died one day shy of his 65th birthday. The only involvement his widow, Irina, had with the book was to add the photographs of her husband with the politicians and diplomats he had met throughout his career.

In his book, Churkin describes his professional journey to becoming a diplomat, beginning with his early student days and culminating in his work as Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations. Immediately upon graduation, he had the opportunity to work with high-ranking Soviet officials, such as Nikolay Podgorniy, the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet Ambassador to the United States. However, his rise to prominence was boosted by the Soviet Foreign Minister and

co-creator of perestroika, Eduard Shevardnadze. Churkin served as his press secretary and was quickly promoted to director of the Soviet Foreign Ministry's Information Department. He generally shared his superior's ideas and promoted glasnost within the agency. It is with a measure of great pride that Churkin describes his contribution to Gorbachev's seminal work *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and Our World*, which outlined the key tenets of the USSR's new political course.

In addition to Shevardnadze, Churkin pays tribute to another figure who played a crucial role in his development as a diplomat: Sergey Lavrov. He is mentioned repeatedly in the text in an extremely complimentary manner, which is probably in part because – thanks to his acquaintance with Lavrov – Churkin managed to retain senior positions within the Foreign Ministry during the Kozyrev staff reshuffle in the early 1990s, which reduced¹ some Foreign Ministry officials to despair.

Generally, the vast majority of the colleagues and superiors Churkin encountered during his career are described in either neutral or positive terms. However, the author of these memoirs fails to maintain 'diplomatic neutrality' with regard to two individuals: Russian President Boris Yeltsin, and Russian Ambassador to the United States, Vladimir Lukin.

Churkin was politically at loggerheads with Boris Yeltsin. He considered the Belovezh Accords unconstitutional and accused the Russian president of hastening the collapse of the USSR in order to come to power as quickly as possible. Interestingly, he does not judge the constitutionality of Yeltsin's decision to order tanks to shell Russia's White House in October 1993. Although Churkin occasionally shared his political views with the press, this did not affect his position at the time because the Yeltsin administration was poor at monitoring statements made in public by his top officials.

Churkin found Yeltsin's distrust of the Foreign Ministry repugnant. Yeltsin's distrust was justified by the fact that Soviet diplomats did not particularly resist the masterminds behind the August 1991 coup. So, in the early years of his presidency, Yeltsin actively advocated reducing the number of Ministry staff, which, of course, did not please any of them. Churkin was also displeased with the Russian president's impulsiveness and lack of reserve. In early August 1995, for example, Yeltsin, who was notorious for his reckless behaviour, disclosed to journalists confidential information about secret negotiations to be held in Moscow between the Serbian and Croatian leaders, Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman,

¹ Stanisław Ciosek, *Wspomnienia (niekoniecznie) dyplomatyczne: opowiadki z Polski i Rosji* (Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2014), pp. 210–12.

which derailed Russian diplomatic efforts to build bridges between the conflicting sides in Bosnia.

Churkin was disturbed to receive complaints about the inappropriate behaviour of the Russian president during international summits, which often left foreign partners bewildered and perplexed. Against this backdrop, it seems unlikely that Churkin would have enjoyed the interventions of his successors as Russia's permanent representatives to the UN Security Council, in speeches that went far beyond diplomatic etiquette and were overly familiar.

Churkin's discontent with Lukin is of a somewhat different nature. The author of the book criticises Lukin for not attending fully to his duties as Russia's Ambassador to the United States and for being a diplomat who preferred to spend his weekdays at his dacha rather than at his workplace. Furthermore, Churkin clearly suspected Lukin of being overly jealous of his popularity and diplomatic success in the Yugoslav settlement process.

At the launch event for Churkin's book, Lavrov described him as someone who always had an opinion of his own. However, Churkin does not go so far as to make any bold statements regarding Russian foreign policy under Vladimir Putin. On the contrary, when it comes to the post-2000 period, the book mirrors the Kremlin's official position and does not deviate from it in any way. Therefore, the book is likely to disappoint those who had been expecting any new revelations. Churkin, like a soldier, does not undermine the decisions taken by the country's political leadership or reflect on what could have been done better. In general, his outline of post-2013 events is effectively done in a copy-paste style, with profuse quotations from his public speeches and UN Security Council resolutions, which undoubtedly affects the way in which the text has been received. I think this is the first time I have read memoirs that contain such a copious compilation of the author's own speeches. Churkin occasionally dilutes the accumulation of self-citations with tall tales and amusing anecdotes. Were it not for these, the book could be described as a collection of abstracts of Kremlin propaganda which could have been compiled by virtually any employee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

As Churkin's wife admits, the book might have been completely different if he had written it once retired rather than squeezing time out of his busy schedule of meetings and appointments, in which case the section of the book devoted to the events of 2000–2017 would probably have been less formal and tedious.

Regarded by Churkin as the greatest tragedy in Europe since World War II, the resolution of the armed conflicts in former Yugoslavia is at the core of the memoirs. He was clearly sympathetic to the Serbs (and Milošević

personally), but in the book he still outlines instances of non-compliance by the Serbian side, such as the 1994 shelling of the city of Goražde. Even when Milošević abandoned negotiations, Churkin blamed the organisers rather than the Serbian leader, accusing them of being unwilling to see negotiations through to their conclusion. However, Churkin fails to address why the Kremlin had provided substantial political support to Belgrade for years and he fails to acknowledge events for what they really were – that is, that the genocide in Srebrenica was genocide and the Serbian war criminals were criminals.

Another key theme of the book is the accession of Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries to NATO. Without going into the details here, in the book Churkin alleges that Gorbachev was assured that the Alliance would not expand. While unconvincing attempts are sometimes made in academic circles to elaborate on the myth of alleged ‘security guarantees’ given by the West,² there is no doubt that there were no negotiations between Moscow and Western leaders on the part of the CEE countries concerning NATO membership, and the Alliance made no promises³ to Moscow. Moreover, Gorbachev himself repeatedly stated that the USSR would not interfere in the internal affairs of the CEE⁴ countries under any circumstances, and there were no negotiations on this issue with NATO whilst he was President of the USSR.

However, Churkin follows the general line of today’s Russian leadership in insisting that the opposite was in fact the case, although he fails to provide any proof of this. In an act of diplomatic doublespeak, he asserts that when a communiqué outlining the prospect of the enlargement of the Alliance was adopted at the NATO ministerial meeting of 1 December 1994, this came as a great surprise to Moscow. But it could hardly have come as a surprise, especially after Yeltsin’s visit to Poland in August 1993, where he and Polish President Lech Wałęsa signed a joint statement saying that Russia had nothing against Poland joining the Alliance. Churkin called the document ‘an unpleasant surprise’, as he believed the only reason why Yeltsin would have signed the document was that Wałęsa allegedly ‘threw a tantrum’ at him. Nevertheless, the CEE countries were already actively raising the question of their NATO membership, and the Kremlin, of course, was aware of this. Interestingly, Churkin attributes Russia’s negative attitude to NATO enlargement to the need to ‘regulate the distance

² Mary Elise Sarotte, ‘A Broken Promise? What the West Really Told Moscow About NATO Expansion’, *Foreign Affairs*, 93.5 (2014), 90–97; *The Last Superpower Summits: Gorbachev, Reagan, and Bush. Conversations That Ended the Cold War*, ed. by Svetlana Savranskaya, Thomas S. Blanton, and Anna Melyakova (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016).

³ Hannes Adomeit, ‘NATO’s Eastward Enlargement: What Western Leaders Said’, *Security Policy Working Paper*, 3 (2018) <<https://www.baks.bund.de/en/working-papers/2018/natos-eastward-enlargement-what-western-leaders-said>> [accessed 20 December 2021].

⁴ Michail Gorbačev, *Sobranie sočinenij*, xxi (Moskva: Ves’ mir, 2012), pp. 377–80.

between the Alliance and CEE countries', but why? Churkin himself had already admitted that the expansion of the Alliance was not in and of itself an anti-Russian idea. Furthermore, Yeltsin had not ruled out Russia itself one day becoming a member.

The author is taciturn when it comes to the 2008 Russian-Georgian armed conflict in Georgia. In line with the official narrative, he argues that it was Georgia, encouraged by Washington, that instigated the conflict and invaded South Ossetian territory. Extensive literature has been published which calls this line of argument⁵ into question. In addition, there are no documents confirming that the US was behind the 'Georgian aggression'. On the contrary, according to the memoirs of former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Washington persuaded Mikheil Saakashvili not to react to possible provocations by separatists and the Russians.⁶

Commenting on the actions of the Russian troops, Churkin sees their actions as justified and reasonable. In doing so, he refers to Article 51 of the UN Charter on a state's right to self-defence. However, he disregards the fact that Georgia did not attack a Russian state: CIS peacekeepers were attacked. Such a position does not hold up to criticism as there are no precedents in international relations of cases in which a country that lost its peacekeepers somewhere abroad treated that loss as an attack on its own territory.

Churkin comments readily on Ukrainian affairs, sharing Russian President Putin's thesis that Russians and Ukrainians are one people. He devotes a lot of space in his book to Euromaidan, although his description of those events is completely muddled and illogical. For example, he blames the bloody climax to the Revolution of Dignity on snipers working with the protesters and names 'fear of physical reprisals' as the reason why Ukrainian President Yanukovych fled the country, even though much of the security services, police and army remained loyal to him.

All in all, the section on Ukraine is the most controversial part of the book. The author turns a blind eye, for example, to gross violations of the Ukrainian constitution during the so-called referendum in the Crimea, while positioning himself as in support of resolving the Ukrainian political crisis from within the constitutional framework. In his sense, the account of the UN Security Council meeting on 3 March 2014, in which Churkin read out loud to the world a most unusual document – an appeal from Yanukovych to Putin to bring Russian troops to Ukraine

⁵ Ronald D. Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*, 1st edn (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Johanna Popjanevski, 'From Sukhumi to Tskhinvali: The Path to War in Georgia', in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, ed. by S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), pp. 143–61.

⁶ Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor: a Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2011), pp. 355–66.

‘to restore the rule of law, peace, order, stability and protect the people of Ukraine’ – is also interesting. Whilst presenting this appeal to the UN Security Council meeting, the Russian diplomat withheld the fact that it is the exclusive constitutional right of the Ukrainian parliament, not the president, to authorise the deployment of foreign troops.

After a Buk missile, fired from separatist-controlled territory, had been used to down a Malaysian airliner in the skies over Ukraine, Churkin commented on the incident more frequently than any other Russian official. The book clearly shows that Moscow spared no effort to remove the investigation into the MH17 crash from within the framework of the Chicago Convention and create special formats for it within the UN and OSCE, where the Kremlin had plenty of bureaucratic means (other than simply vetoing) to influence it and fend off any charges. Although Russia had no rights under the Chicago Convention to conduct the investigation, Churkin insisted that the investigation could only be ‘truly international’ if Russian experts were involved in it.

Churkin presents a one-sided and, one might say, biased view of the UN Security Council’s debate on the use of chemical weapons in Syria. On this issue, in full accordance with Moscow’s general line, he covers up for the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad, which, prior to July 2012, had lied to the international community and refused to acknowledge the existence of a chemical warfare programme. Churkin blames the attacks involving the nerve agent sarin and other toxins on the Syrian opposition. But he does not comment on the fact that most of the attacks were carried out using aircraft, which the Syrian opposition simply does not have.

Overall, Churkin’s memoirs could the reader with mixed feelings. The book touches upon the most pertinent topics in Russian foreign policy and skilfully introduces readers to the nuances of diplomatic protocol and work in the UN Security Council; however, the author fails to focus on a number of important issues. For example, if the Kremlin is such a strident defender of the principle of the right of all peoples to self-determination, why does it not recognise Kosovo’s independence; and, vice versa, since Russia supported Serbia’s integrity, the loss of which would have created a ‘precedent of victory of separatism’ that would have reverberated throughout many regions of the world, why does Russia not follow this principle in its relations with Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova? How can one explain Moscow’s frequently changing official position on the causes of the MH17 crash? Why did Lukin not sign the political settlement agreement despite the fact that he was present at Yanukovych’s talks with the opposition in February 2014?

Interestingly, in almost every episode of the book – whether dealing with the Iranian nuclear programme or the conflict in Yugoslavia or Ukraine – one can see Churkin's obsessive desire to poke fun at his American counterparts, even when it is wholly inappropriate. It is as if he is constantly competing with them and trying to prove something. This irrational desire to outsmart Washington was in fact the *raison d'être* for his entire diplomatic career and relegated all other tasks to the back burner. In his obsession with this war of words, Churkin seems to have forgotten about the real strategic objectives of ensuring the well-being and security of Russians. The main goal of Russia's foreign policy was, according to him, advancing its ephemeral geopolitical interests and restoring its status as a great power rather than joining the ranks of the world's leading democracies.

It is safe to assume that Churkin was not the only one in his milieu to have such an outlook. Yeltsin's distrust of the diplomatic corps that had supported the coup and the planned downsizing of Foreign Ministry staff following the collapse of the USSR put diplomats in a difficult position. In fact, they had to somehow prove their usefulness to the country's political leadership. This could only be done by constantly maintaining a level of tension in their relations with other countries. In other words, Foreign Ministry officials, many of whom had been considered genuine supporters of their country's democratic path,⁷ were in fact not interested in normalising relations with the West and were very sceptical about the idea of the expansion of Euro-Atlantic structures to include CEE countries. In this sense, Churkin's book reminds us of the importance of a competent approach to foreign ministry staffing in the case of a shift in foreign policy paradigms.

⁷ Alexei G. Arbatov, 'Russia's Foreign Policy Alternatives', *International Security*, 18.2 (1993), 5–43 (p. 5).

