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HISTORICAL POLITICS AS A TOOL OF THE IDEOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATION OF RUSSIAN NEO-IMPERIALISM

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Abstract

A number of modern Russian political discourse provisions which consist of tendentious interpretations of Russian and Ukrainian history and which result in frank and systematic manipulation of historical memory have been analyzed. Their goals are to justify Russia's aggressive policy towards Ukraine to prove and legalize the right to decide the fate of the Ukrainian people and to determine the vectors of the Ukrainian foreign policy. At the same time, they are aimed at discrediting the Ukrainian government and delegitimizing Ukrainian statehood as well as ultimately distorting and leveling Ukrainian national identity. The outdated concept of Ancient Rus as the cradle of "three brotherly peoples", i.e. Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians, or its more archaic version about the existence of a single Russian nation, whose branches are actually Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians, is used. A component of this concept is the idea of Russia being the direct and sole legal heir of Ancient Rus, whose historical mission was and remains the gathering of ancient Russian lands, which include the lands of Ukraine and Belarus. Accordingly, the separate existence of the Ukrainian people, and hence their right to state independence, is either denied altogether or conditionally recognized, if they maintain inseparable ties with Russia and renounce the Western vector of foreign policy. Modern Ukraine is considered by the Russian authorities and the political establishment as "anti-Russia", which has no right to exist.

Attempts to apply the tools of the historical politics of the Russian Federation. In particular, it concerns historical education and memorial practices in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of the Donbas, where the territory temporarily is not controlled by Ukraine. These territories are also considered a model for similar measures used on temporarily occupied territories during the 2022 war.

Key words

historical memory, historical politics, identity, manipulation.

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1. Introduction

Two of the six original demands of Russia put forward at the "negotiations" with Ukraine which have been

held since February 28, 2022, contrary to all the canons of diplomacy, during continuous hostilities and barbaric bombings and rocket attacks on Ukrainian cities, related to humanitarian issues. This is the

granting of the status of the second state language to the Russian language and the cancellation of laws that allegedly limit its use, as well as the so-called “denazification”, in particular, the cancellation of the current laws on “heroization of Nazis and neo-Nazis”. The second of these requirements directly concerns the issue of historical memory or historical politics. It is known what an important role the latter plays in the general aggressive policy of the Kremlin. There is also a special interest in the history of V. Putin, who finds in it ideological justifications for strengthening his own authoritarian regime, which is increasingly taking on the features of totalitarianism, alienation from Western civilization with its democratic and liberal values, and the realization of imperial expansionist ambitions.

Until 2022, the historical policy of the Russian government was an important element of the so-called “hybrid war” of Russia against Ukraine. Five components can be distinguished in it.

1. Attempts to prove through historical excursions the ethnic, cultural and religious kinship/identity of the Ukrainian, Russian and Belarusian peoples, hence the artificiality and unsustainability of the Ukrainian people as a separate ethno-national entity.
2. Discrediting any aspirations of Ukrainians for national self-determination (in socio-political, cultural, religious spheres) and gaining state independence.
3. Discrediting the national liberation struggles of the 20th century, especially the period of the 1930s–40s, as allegedly inspired and supported by the Nazis, hostile to the interests of the Ukrainian people themselves.
4. Discrediting modern Ukrainian statehood as having no historical basis for its existence and being an artificial formation and glorifying people who in Russia are considered to be collaborators of Hitler’s Germany, hence inheritors of their ideology and political traditions.
5. The glorification of Russian statehood in all its historical manifestations as the personification of all political, moral and religious virtues, the legal heir not only of the USSR and the Russian Empire, but also of the Old Russian statehood of the 9th–13th centuries.

An alternative to Ukrainianism was the idea of a “Russian world” and its church equivalent – the idea of a triune “Holy Russia”. In connection with the latter, it can be mentioned that the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, in his sermon on March 9, 2022, called Russia’s war against Ukraine a “conflict” between two parts of one people, divided by external hostile forces.

Therefore, the study of the historical policy of Russia is necessary for an adequate understanding of both the internal transformations taking place in this state, as well as its progress on the path of “restoration” of the former imperial greatness in the confrontation not only with Ukraine, but also with the entire Western civilization, which in the eyes of the Russian elites is the personification of world evil.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the historical policy of Russia in recent years in the part that concerns the falsifications of the history of Ukraine and serves as a justification for Russian aggression against our state.

2. Data and methods

The main research method is a critical analysis of open sources, primarily historical “excursions” of the President of the Russian Federation, V. Putin, and reports on the activities in the field of historical policy of the Russian government on the international arena and its proteges in the occupied areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. It should be taken into account that measures in the field of historical policy in the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) and the Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR), primarily in the field of historical education and memorial practices, can serve as a model for conducting similar measures in the territories occupied by the Russian army in February–March 2022 during the war against Ukraine.

3. Results and discussion

The ideological tools set in Russia’s war against Ukraine include systematic attempts to impose on both the Ukrainian and its own people that version of the historical past that maximally justifies the current policy of the Russian government, proves its legitimacy and traditionality, and at the same time discredits the policy of the Ukrainian government aimed at protecting its country, consolidating the Ukrainian political nation, distancing from aggressive imperial Russia and integrating into the European and Euro-Atlantic communities. In addition to these so-called tactical goals, there are also attempts to pursue the goal of strategic meaning: the deformation of the Ukrainian national identity, whose aspect is a certain image of the past, proving its fictitiousness or lack of independence in relation to the Russian identity. Achieving this goal should make obvious the dubiousness of the historical foundations of Ukrainian statehood. The representatives of

the Russian establishment publicly declare partial or total illegitimacy of the Ukrainian government and even its non-compliance with the interests of the Ukrainian people, whose natural aspiration should be, in their opinion, inseparable unity with the Russian people.

It must be recognized that such a policy of the Russian government, aimed at undermining and, ultimately, at the liquidation of the state sovereignty of Ukraine, is guided not only by modern interests, but really has its roots in the ancient tradition of Russia's attitude towards other East Slavic peoples, namely Ukrainians and Belarusians. Their territory was considered the legitimate heritage of the Russian rulers, and they themselves were artificially separated parts of the single Russian people or possibly separate peoples, but genetically, historically and culturally related to Russians. Their joining Russia was described in Russian historiography as "unity". When it comes to other countries, it was about voluntary joining (in particular, in terms of Georgia, part of the lands of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan), liberation (Armenia, Bessarabia), conquest for geopolitical and security reasons (in particular, the Azerbaijani khanates of the Caucasus, the territory of the Baltic States, Finland, Khanates of Kokand and Khanates of Khiva, Emirate of Bukhara). Accordingly, the attitude to the prospects of independence of these lands and countries in Russia was different.

In 1990, when democratic sentiments in the USSR reached their historical maximum, one of the than opinion leaders of the Russian intelligentsia O. Solzhenitsyn (1990) expressed his attitude in his essay "How should we organize Russia?" as follows:

It is necessary to urgently, loudly and clearly announce: the three Baltic republics, three Transcaucasian republics, four Central Asian republics, and Moldova... will definitely and irreversibly be separated. (Solzhenitsyn, 1990)

However, the independence of Kazakhstan was allowed with certain caveats: only its southern part, where Kazakhs made up the majority of the population, should be independent. As for Ukraine and Belarus, their separation seemed a catastrophe to O. Solzhenitsyn, and his "Word to Ukrainians and Belarusians" (part of the mentioned essay) is nothing more than a persuasion not to "rip themselves off", a recognition of all the injustices and crimes of the tsarist and Soviet governments in relation to "fraternal nations" and an assurance that nothing like this will happen in the future. Nonetheless, almost all of the speech is addressed to Ukrainians, and only in the penultimate paragraph it is stated that "everything that has been said fully applies to Belarus, except that they did not incite reckless separatism

there". Perhaps it was the absence of "separatism" in Belarus that allowed the great Russian writer to solve the "Belarusian question" in one sentence. The uttermost solution that he could offer Ukrainians and Belarusians is voluntary and equal membership in the "Russian Union":

with the exception of these twelve [countries], there will only be what can be called Rus, as it was called from ancient times (the word "Rus" meant Little Russians, Great Russians and Belarusians for centuries), or – Russia (a name used since the 18th century) or... now: the Russian Union. (Solzhenitsyn, 1990)

Although O. Solzhenitsyn criticized the imperial principle of "unity" and admitted that "we do not have the strength for the outskirts, we do not have the strength for the empire", he fully adhered to this principle, when it came to Ukraine and Belarus. Therefore, he thought quite traditionally for Russian intellectual-statesman and similarly traditionally appealed in his "Words to Ukrainians and Belarusians" to the common historical past, "when the same princes ruled us", i.e. to Ancient Rus and "precious Kyiv, from where Christianity dawned on us" (Solzhenitsyn, 1990).

The fundamental conviction of the Russian establishment regarding the artificiality and ephemerality of Ukrainian independence took on new, more aggressive forms, when already independent Ukraine expressed a clear intention not just to be "non-Russia", but to become independent of the Russian influence, develop relations with the West, acquire membership in the EU and NATO. Thus, at the Bucharest NATO summit on April 2nd, 3rd and 4th, 2008, Russian President V. Putin expressed the opinion that "Ukraine is not even a state" and most of its territory was "gifted" to it by Russia (Putin – Bušu..., 2020). V. Putin voiced this opinion repeatedly on various occasions, in particular, during the so-called "big press conferences", at which the President of the Russian Federation demonstrated "free" communication with mass media.

The confidence of the Russian authorities and a significant part of the political community in their right to decide the fate of other East Slavic peoples is based on the idea of the historical rights of Russia to the lands of Ukraine and Belarus, as part of Ancient Rus. This idea arose at the beginning of the 15th century and was based on the beliefs that the Moscow grand princes, later the tsars, were direct heirs of the "Ancient Rus statehood", since they, like the princes of Kyivan Rus, belonged to the Ruryk dynasty. The rights to the ancient Russian heritage of the Romanov family were justified by the continuity of the Russian state and monarchical tradition, in the light

of which the change of the ruling dynasty was not of fundamental importance. In Europe already in the 19th century similar “dynastic” justifications of ownership rights, which in the 18th century served as justification for the wars for the “Spanish” (1701–1714) and “Austrian” (1740–1748) successions, the annexation of Silesia by Prussia (1741), etc., were considered a dangerous anachronism. In Russia, they influenced “real politics” and public consciousness until the very fall of the Russian Empire.

In modern Russia, the “dynastic” argument has repeatedly been “modernized” in order to confirm its continuity in relation to Ancient Rus, hence the decree of the President of the Russian Federation from March 3rd, 2011, “On the celebration of the 1150th anniversary of the birth of Russian statehood” (Ukaz..., 2011). This celebration was supposed to remind the general public in Russia that the year 862 should be considered the beginning of Russian statehood, when the Varangian ruler Ruryk, according to the annals, was invited by some Slavic and Finno-Ugric tribes to “rule and own” them and became the first ruler of Rus. In 2015, the creation of a range of multimedia historical parks “Russia – My History” began. An exhibition on “The Rurykovichs” topic was presented, chronologically covering the period from 862 to 1598. Currently, such parks operate in 23 cities of Russia. On August 25th, 2021, V. Putin instructed the Russian government to include them in the national project “Obrazovanie”. In 2016, a grandiose monument to Prince Volodymyr the Great of Kyiv was unveiled in Moscow, which was supposed to actualize in the public consciousness of Russians both the state-dynastic and religious factors of the unity of the East Slavic peoples.

References to these factors were also used by V. Putin as justification for Russia’s right to Crimea. On November 5th, 2014, at a meeting with young scientists and history teachers, he stated:

Crimea also has some sacred significance for Russians. After all, it was in the Crimea, in Chersonese, that Prince Volodymyr was baptized, and then he baptized Rus... The original baptismal roots of Russia are there... In fact, the Russian people have been fighting for many centuries to firmly claim their historical spiritual roots. (Vstreča..., 2014)

At the same time, the reinterpretation of the history of Ukraine in a neo-imperial key continued. Without it, the development of the “Russian world” would lose its “cornerstone”. The latest and most vivid example of politically motivated interpretations of Ukrainian history was V. Putin’s article “On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians”, published on July 12th, 2021, on the official website of

the President of Russia both in Russian and Ukrainian (Stat’â..., 2021). In it, the President of the Russian Federation gave a detailed justification for his earlier statement that “Russians and Ukrainians are one people”.

The “historical” justification given in the article for the linguistic, religious, cultural, political, and generally national unity of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples does not go beyond the Russian historical narrative of the 19th century, analyzed and criticized by M. Hrushevsky in the article “The Usual Scheme of “Russian” History and Business of the rational structure of the history of the Eastern Slavs” (1904) (Grushevskij, 2014, pp. 203–208). In a slightly modified form, this narrative also dominated Soviet historiography, which merely replaced the concept of a triune Russian nation with the concept of three “brotherly nations”. Its use nowadays can be considered an anachronism. However, despite this, it is indoctrinated into the public consciousness of Russians. Russian scientists, not to mention politicians, support the idea as well.

V. Putin interprets the joining of Ukrainian and Belarusian lands into the Grand Duchy of Moscow and the Russian Empire as “reunification”:

Moscow became the center of reunification, which continued the tradition of “ancient Rus statehood”. The Muscovite princes... threw off the foreign yoke and began to collect historical Russian lands, while in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and later in the Commonwealth of Nations, according to V. Putin, this tradition has ceased. However, in earlier times even Russian historians voiced other views on the very possibility of Moscow’s continuation of ancient Rus statehood tradition. Thus, S. Dumin believed that “in the social system and judicial affairs of the West Russian lands, traces of the Old Rus tradition were often more clearly and vividly revealed than in Volodymyr (later Muscovite) Rus”. (Mironenko, 1991, p. 121)

In his opinion,

the experience of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Rus shows that it was possible to create not only the Asian despotism of Ivan the Terrible in the Eastern Slavic lands, but also for the democratic institutions of a multifunctional state to function quite effectively. (Mironenko, 1991, p. 123)

At the same time, he notes that “Moscow princes, especially since the time of Ivan III, are actively destroying the structures of local governments that were formed earlier..., liquidating (as was the case in Novgorod and Pskov) city freedoms”, that is, destroying the social and political traditions of Ancient Rus (Mironenko, 1991, p. 122).

The fact that the elements of the political system of Kyivan Rus in Southwestern Rus were preserved, in

comparison with Northeastern Rus, was also pointed out by G. Vernadsky (2004). He noted in North-Eastern Rus "a sharp contrast between the pre- and post-Mongol periods in the field of social relations" and noted that "the very foundations of Moscow society were not the same as in the Kyiv period" (Vernadskij, 2004, p. 344). Likewise, L. Gumilev noted in his book "From Rus to Russia" that "Moscow did not continue the traditions of Kyiv, as Novgorod did. On the contrary, it destroyed the traditions of centuries of freedom..., replacing them with other norms of behavior, largely borrowed from the Mongols" (Gumilev, 2008, p. 377). It can be added that these traditions were destroyed by Moscow and in Novgorod itself after its conquest in 1478.

It is worth dwelling on V. Putin's thesis that already in Ancient Rus there was a linguistic, economic, political and religious unity of its population, which, thus, had all the signs of a formed ethnic community. In Russian historiography, the latter received the name of the "ancient Rus people", from which Ukrainians, Russians and Belarusians supposedly trace their origins. However, scientists have proven that in the times of Ancient Rus there was not and could not be a single "ancient Rus" language, if book Old Slavonic or Church Slavonic is not meant. According to M. Brajčevs'kij,

the common literary language for all of Rus can testify to this (linguistic) unity just as little as the commonality of, let's say, the Latin language for all Western Slavs. The Old Bulgarian language is foreign to Rus. A living, vernacular language of the 9th–13th centuries, we don't know. (Brajčevs'kij, 2000, p. 360)

We can only speak of a certain set of tribal dialects, from which the Ukrainian, Belarusian and Russian languages developed. O. Shakhmatov and B. Rybakov believed in the preservation of the dialectal and, to some extent, tribal division in Kyivan Rus until its fall. B. Rybakov thought that its feudal fragmentation also took place according to the old "tribal" scheme, and the newly established separate principalities even geographically coincided with the territories of the chronicled Kryvychi, Slovenes, Polochans, Severians, etc.: "Kyiv Rus was divided into a dozen and a half independent principalities, more or less similar to one and a half dozens of ancient tribal alliances" (Rybakov, 1964, pp. 148–149).

In the same way, under the conditions of natural economy domination, it is hardly possible to talk about the economic unity of a huge territory, much larger than that occupied by any of the European countries at that time. As for religion, Orthodoxy in the pre-Mongol period mainly covered the ruling elite and cities with its influence, that is, it was not

yet widespread and could not serve as a unifying factor. According to M. Hrushevsky,

precisely during the times of the decline of the ancient Ukrainian state and the transitional Lithuanian-Polish times, 14th–16th centuries, the spread of the Christian rite and worship among the masses, the clergy and its influences should be mainly considered. (Gruševs'kij, 1994, p. 6)

As for the political unity, as mentioned above, the policy of the individual princes led to the final destruction of even the relative unity of the country that existed in the period from Yaroslav the Wise to Volodymyr Monomakh.

Therefore, there is no reason to speak of the population of Ancient Rus as one people. It consisted of various ethnic groups of Slavic, Finno-Hungarian, Turkic and Baltic origin, on the basis of which the modern Ukrainian, Belarusian and Russian peoples were later formed. Theoretically, a single "Rus" people could be formed if the centripetal tendencies overcame the centrifugal ones on the territory of Rus, and a single more or less centralized state emerged, as in the countries of Western Europe, but history developed otherwise. Therefore, the "historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians" (as well as Belarusians), as V. Putin understands it, is nothing more than an anti-scientific and politically dangerous fiction.

In general, the idea of the historical and genetic unity of the three East Slavic peoples – Ukrainians, Belarusians and Russians – is only a variety of old political and ethnological concepts with the prefix "pan-" as in pan-Slavism, pan-Turkism, pan-Germanism, etc. The facts of the ethnic closeness of the respective peoples served as justification for the political, economic and cultural integration needs under the auspices and in the interests of the hegemon states – Russia, Turkey and Germany, accordingly. When it comes to Russia, this need has always been expressed in the most dramatic forms: "Will Slavic streams merge into the Russian sea? Will it run out? That is the question" (A. Pushkin "Slanderers of Russia"), and doubts in here were equal to treason. Thus, all those who defended Ukraine's independence from Russia, starting with hetmans I. Vyhovsky, P. Doroshenko and I. Mazepa, and ending with the modern political and military leaders of our country, were considered traitors. The danger of such an ideology, as well as the ideology of the "Russian peace" related to it, lies not only in its aggressiveness, but also in its archaism; it is problematic at the beginning of the 21st century to find common ground with people who interpret reality in the categories of the 19th century.

In addition to outdated historical concepts, V. Putin's article contains frank distortions of historical facts. Thus, he writes that during the protracted war of the Russian state with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, some of the hetmans, the heirs of B. Khmelnytsky, sometimes "moved away" from Moscow, and sometimes sought support from Sweden, Poland, and Turkey. But for the people, the war had, in fact, a liberating character. It ended with the Truce of Andrusovo in 1667. The "Eternal Peace" of 1686 distinguished the final results. However, the article does not even hint at what motivated the Ukrainian hetmans to such an unstable and, at first glance, chaotic foreign policy. Also, nothing is said about the consequences of the aforementioned "protracted war" for Ukrainian people. N. Kovenko (2005, p. 397) described these consequences succinctly but comprehensively: "This is how the Ruin ended. Not because the brothers were horrified, looking back at the rivers of spilled blood, but because there was no one to kill one another". One can learn about the course and consequences of this war for Belarusians from Gennady Saganovich's monograph "The Unknown War: 1654–1667" (Saganovič, 1995).

Likewise, the statement that "during the Northern War with Sweden, the inhabitants of Little Russia did not have a choice whom to join" cannot withstand criticism either. Mazepa's mutiny was supported by only a small part of the Cossacks. In fact, this "mutiny" was supported by all troops of Zaporozhian Cossacks, led by the basket chief Kost Hordienko (for which Sich paid with a terrible massacre by Russian troops), as well as a significant part, if not the majority, of the general and regimental officers, who joined I. Mazepa, and Charles XII was prevented by the occupation of Hetmanship by Russian troops. We can also mention the barbaric destruction of the population of the hetman's capital Baturin by O. Menshikov, as well as the torture and execution of the "Mazepynsis" in Lebedyn, which do not fit into the picture of the general support of the population of Ukraine for Peter I during the Northern War.

The thesis about the brilliant prospects that the Russian Empire created for representatives of the Cossack elders, who "reached the heights of their political, diplomatic, and military careers in Rus", looks clearly tendentious, reflecting only one side of historical reality, while "graduates of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy played a leading role in church life". The mentioned representatives, and not always the senior officers (e.g. brothers Razumovsky, O. Bezborodko, V. Kochubey, I. Paskevich, etc.) reached "career heights", renouncing their identity and turning into Russian nobles and dignitaries, loyal subjects of the empire. The same applies to the role of the Ukrainian

clergy in the theological and liturgical development, spiritual and economic enrichment of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The statement that the works of Ukrainian classics are the "common literary and cultural heritage" of Ukrainians and Russians, as some of them were written in Russian, is also tendentious. The national affiliation of a literary work is determined not so much by its language as by its content and the identity of the author; otherwise, the works of W. B. Yeats and D. Joyce could be unconditionally included in the thesaurus of English literature, and the early poems of O. Pushkin, Yu. Lermontov and "Letters" by P. Chaadaev to be considered works of French literature.

V. Putin explains the emergence of Ukrainianism by the fact that "at the same time, among the Polish elite and some part of the Little Russian intelligentsia, ideas about a Ukrainian nation separate from the Russian one arose and strengthened" (Stat'â..., 2021). In this way, the old, but still popular in certain Russian circles, opinion about the Ukrainian people prevails as a consequence of the "Polish", later "Austro-Hungarian" or "German" intrigues, in the implementation of which the Ukrainian intelligentsia always played a subordinate and, ultimately, treacherous role.

V. Putin in his article (Stat'â..., 2021) could not keep silent about such facts of discrimination of the Ukrainian language and culture as the Valuev circular of 1863 and the Ems decree of 1876 (Miller, 2013, pp. 277–281). However, he interprets the content of these documents only as restrictions on the "publication and importation of religious and socio-political literature in the Ukrainian language from abroad" and justifies these restrictions by the "historical context", namely "the desire of the leaders of the Polish national movement to use the 'Ukrainian question' in their interests". However, despite this, in the Russian Empire, according to V. Putin, "there was an active process of development of Little Russian cultural identity within the borders of the great Russian nation, which combined Great Russians, Little Russians and Belarusians" (Stat'â..., 2021).

In fact, the Valuev circular and the Ems decree played a fatal role in the formation of Ukrainian identity. In the first one, the ban on publishing and importing from abroad extended not only to religious and socio-political literature, but also to educational literature and that which was intended "for the initial reading of the people", i.e., was supposed to develop literacy and form the foundations of its worldview. The Ems Decree, which was issued more than ten years after the last Polish uprising, i.e., had nothing to do with the mentioned "historical context", prohibited primary education in the Ukrainian language

and also demanded that the “libraries of all lower and secondary schools in the Little Russian provinces” be cleared of Ukrainian books. Political supervision was established over the education system on the territory of Ukraine, which was supposed to prevent the penetration of Ukrainophile tendencies. It was supposed to create “a named list of teachers with a mark on the trustworthiness of each of them in relation to Ukrainophile tendencies” and the transfer of “untrustworthy and doubtful” “to Great Russian provinces, replacing them with natives of the latter” (Miller, 2013, pp. 279–281). At the same time, the printing of any original works and translations in the Ukrainian language was prohibited, with the exception of historical monuments and works of belles-lettres (but with mandatory observance of Russian orthography). However, in the absence of Ukrainian education, these works could not be intended for a mass readership. Therefore, on the eve of the revolution, which opened opportunities for raising the question of the state independence of Ukraine, the idea of this independence was understood only in very limited circles of mostly humanitarian intelligentsia. Therefore, despite “the efforts of the creative intelligentsia to establish a special national self-awareness in Ukrainian society, their successes were not comprehensive” (Toločko, 2020, p. 125), because they could not reach the majority of the population of Ukraine, deprived of education and literature in their own language. And the Ukrainian society itself, as a mass phenomenon, practically did not exist at that time, because it could not have arisen in the circumstances that were created by the mentioned documents. That is why, the Ukrainian people turned out to be unprepared for the challenges that the era of revolutions, the collapse of empires and the creation of new national states put before them.

As S. Yekelchik points out, the scheme of the famous Czech historian M. Groh can be applied to the history of the Ukrainian national movement, according to which such movements go through three phases: academic – a period of ethnographic, historical and philological research, cultural – a period of national agitation, when wider strata of patriots, grouped around printed organs, cultural and educational societies, national schools, begin to spread national consciousness among the masses, political – the period when mass national movements arise, political parties and the masses mobilize for the struggle for national independence (Ěkelčik, 2010). The second phase is characterized as follows:

the period when the vernacular colloquial language becomes the language of books and teaching in schools of all levels, the time of the founding of scientific societies,

the opening of departments in universities, the development of the press, the publication of special (scientific) literature in the vernacular. (Ěkelčik., 2010, p. 122)

In Ukraine, this sequence was significantly deformed: the second phase of the development of the national movement actually coincides in time with the third one, and many of its inherent elements arose only after the third phase ended with the collapse of the national liberation struggle and functioned in a limited and distorted form. These are also remote consequences of the Valuev circular and the Ems decree.

Using the example of the Ukrainian People’s Republic of 1917–1920, V. Putin tries to demonstrate the “impermanence” and artificiality of “quasi-state formations that arose on the territory of the former Russian Empire during the Civil War and turmoil” (Stat’â..., 2021). However, the Baltic states and Finland were able to defend their independence during the Civil War, and in the interwar period, they demonstrated the ability both to build the state and to develop economically. The main threat to the independent existence of these and other states that arose on the ruins of the empire, including Ukraine, was not internal instability, but the aggressive policy of the Soviet government, which in 1920–1921 annexed independent Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, and in 1940, through tough military and political pressure, it achieved the accession of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

V. Putin’s article “On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians” traditionally mentions “collaborationists, natives of OUN-UPA”¹, that “served” the Nazis, who “needed not Ukraine, but living space and slaves for the Aryan masters” (Stat’â..., 2021). The understanding of OUN-UPA collaborationism is a typical anti-Ukrainian Russian propaganda. At the same time, deliberately distorted ideas about the Ukrainian national liberation movement of the 1920s and 1940s are projected onto the modern Ukrainian political reality, in which, according to Russian propagandists, the leading positions are occupied by the “Nazis”, under whose influence the military and political leadership of Ukraine is. Since 2014, Russian mass media have been actively spreading theses about the “Nazification” of Ukraine, also doing it abroad. The purpose of these insinuations was to create a repulsive image of our state, which allegedly professes the most odious ideology of the 20th century and is guided by it in its policy.

At the same time, the obvious fact was deliberately ignored that the glorification of individual

¹ OUN – the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists; UPA – the Ukrainian Insurgent Army.

figures of the OUN-UPA did not and does not foresee in any way the introduction of the ideas of integral nationalism (by the way, fundamentally different from German national socialism) into the political practice of the Ukrainian state, just as the glorification of Bohdan Khmelnytsky or Ivan Mazepa does not envisage building a Cossack state in Ukraine headed by a hetman. Similar examples can be found in any democratic European and not only European country, whose heroes and outstanding figures lived in different historical eras, professed different ideologies and were far from democratic values in the vast majority. Nevertheless, they are mentioned in history textbooks and their monuments are preserved as part of the national cultural heritage. The ideas that drove them can remain elements of the national worldview, as a complex multi-level system, but do not become the basis for concepts and programs that guide modern politicians and statesmen.

For a long time in Russia, the cult of the "great victory" in this war and the idea of Russia as the main creator of this victory were planted in Russia with such actions as "The Immortal Regiment" and "Georgievskaya Ribbon", numerous films about the "Great Patriotic War", and other means of mass propaganda. At the same time, the image of Ukraine as an aggressive, hostile to Russia, "Nazi" state was being formed. Consequently, to a large extent, the vast majority of Russians are now convinced that the Russian army in Ukraine is fighting Nazism for the future of their homeland, continuing the traditions of their victorious ancestors. This belief is practically unaffected by the gradual realization that the absolute majority of Ukrainian citizens support the Ukrainian government and the Armed Forces in the fight against the Russian invaders, and the most odious military practices of the German Nazis are demonstrated by the Russian army itself. This situation demonstrates the falsity of the notions that the war in Ukraine is Putin's business, not the Russian people's, unfortunately quite widespread in some European countries. At the same time, it suggests that in order to ensure peace in Europe and the world, it is the Russian people who must go through a process similar to "denazification".

V. Putin declares that "modern Ukraine is entirely and completely the brainchild of the Soviet era" and it "was largely created at the expense of historical Russia" (Stat'â..., 2021). However, the same can be attributed to the modern Russian Federation, which was created largely at the expense of other republics of the USSR, including Ukraine, and their natural and human resources.

V. Putin's attitude towards the collapse of the Soviet Union as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe

of the 20th century" is well known. At the same time, he considers it unfair that the former Soviet republics, in particular Ukraine, "appropriated" territories that did not belong to them at the time of joining the USSR. But such logic calls into question the right of Russia itself to the Kaliningrad Region, South Sakhalin, the Kuril Islands, the northwestern districts of Leningrad and the Pecheneg District of the Murmansk Region, which in 1922, when the Soviet Union was created, belonged to Germany, Japan, and Finland, respectively.

Ultimately, the "historical" part of V. Putin's article can be reduced to two theses:

- 1) The Ukrainian people as an independent ethno-national unit does not exist. It is, like Russians and Belarusians, a constituent part of the Russian people. The very idea of its national independence has a schismatic nature; it arose in the environment of external forces hostile to Russia and can only be evaluated negatively.
- 2) Ukrainian statehood is artificial and only conditionally legitimate. Its existence can be justified only by close relations with Russia and subordination of its domestic and foreign policy to Russian interests.

The following text contains assessments of the situation in Ukraine since the beginning of 2014. It can also be summarized in several provisions:

- 1) Since 2014, Ukraine has been under direct foreign rule, whose goal is to turn it into "anti-Russia", something Russia will never come to terms with. The Ukrainian government is completely subordinated to external influences hostile to Russia. Its internal allies are "radicals and neo-Nazis".
- 2) Millions of Ukrainians rejected the Ukraine project as "anti-Russian". The separatist uprising in Donbas, like the "voluntary" incorporation of Crimea into Russia, was nothing more than an act of self-defense by the local population. Millions of pro-Russian residents of other regions of Ukraine are subject to repression and are deprived of the opportunity to express their opinion.
- 3) Russia will not allow its "historic territories" and "people close to it" who live on them to be used against it. The border of these territories is not delineated, but, taking into account the above, it can be assumed that we are talking about almost the entire territory of Ukraine.
- 4) True sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia, subjecting its policy to its interests.

It is easy to notice that the given theses logically follow from the previous "historical excursion". On the other hand, this excursion itself is determined by the ideological dominants of modern Russian

political thinking. Taken together, these theses can be considered as the doctrinal basis of Russia's policy towards Ukraine. In general, they testify to the fact that further military actions against Ukraine, annexation of its territories and even full unification with Russia were always considered by the Russian leadership as legitimate goals and methods.

An important weapon from the arsenal of historical politics in Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine of 2014–2022 was historical education implemented in puppet quasi-state entities in Donbas, as it has the greatest impact on the formation of the identity of the young generation, and lays the foundations for a valuable attitude to the past and the present. Examples of what is taught to pupils in history lessons in the non-controlled territories of Donbas can be found in the textbooks of the "Local historiography" course, which is taught in the so-called schools. DNR from the fifth to the eleventh grade within the educational field "Social Studies". Yes, in the textbook for 5th grade, "Local historiography. Introduction to the history of the Donetsk region", one can find the following passages:

War has come to the land of Donbas again. No less cruel than in 1941. Again, warplanes bombed the native city. But now it was not the German fascists. It is the Ukrainian government that started a war against its own people. (...). The shells and mines of the Ukrainian punitive forces kill civilians of Donbas every day, destroy houses and schools, and burn crops in the fields. The tragedy of Donbas united all those who considered themselves true patriots of the Russian peace. (Istoričeskoe..., 2016, p. 210).

As examples of "true patriots" on the same page, there are photos of the terrorist group leaders Givi and Motorola. In this way, hatred of Ukraine, respect for terrorists, as well as a sense of gratitude to Russia is cultivated in even younger teenagers, since "the Russian Federation provides the republic with invaluable assistance in the form of finances, construction materials, fuel, equipment, food, medicines, textbooks..." (Istoričeskoe..., 2016, p. 210).

In the textbook for 11th grade, "Local historiography. Pages of the history of Donbass: recent and modern history (from 1939 to the present day)", theses similar to the above are given in more detail:

Mass protests against the illegitimate nationalist government, which came to power as a result of the "Euro-maidan" coup d'état in Kyiv, quickly turned into a broad national liberation movement demanding a return to Russian cultural and historical roots, reunification with Russia, (...) the people of Donbas, despite the paralysis of the central authorities... betrayal by the regional "political elites, (...) could realize their historical choice. (...) The republic survived and became stronger in the brutal

struggle against the external armed aggression of the Kyiv regime (...). DNR built full-fledged state institutions, gained economic independence. Humanitarian aid and comprehensive support provided by the Russian Federation became decisive in the formation of the republics of Donbas, in their subsequent struggle for independence. (Istoričeskoe..., 2019, p. 64).

Similar "educational manuals" are also published in Luhansk, for example, "History of the Luhansk People's Republic from the earliest times (!) to the present day and Luhansk People's Republic: the history of the formation of statehood" (V "LNR" vypustii..., 2020). Their content and assessments of the events of 2014 and subsequent years do not differ from those contained in the above-mentioned Donetsk textbooks.

Russians continue the policy of planting their version of history in the occupied territories with the simultaneous eradication of all manifestations of Ukrainian historical discourse even during the war with Ukraine, which began on February 24th, 2022. Thus, according to the mass media, the libraries of the temporarily occupied territories of Luhansk, Donetsk, Chernihiv and Sumy regions have begun to confiscate Ukrainian historical and literary literature that does not coincide with Kremlin propaganda. This is done by units of the Russian military police. In particular, books covering the history of Ukrainian liberation struggles, the Orange Revolution, the Revolution of Dignity, ATO/OOS² are being removed, as well as school history books. In addition, according to the same reports, the occupiers compiled lists of persons whose memory should be erased from the public consciousness of Ukrainians. These are, in particular, Ivan Mazepa, Simon Petliura, Stepan Bandera, Roman Shukhevich, Vyacheslav Chornovil (Karlovskij, 2022). Thus, under the guise of "denazification", Russians imitate the anti-cultural practices of the most odious totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, which are Nazi Germany and Stalin's USSR.

Over the past seven years, the non-controlled territory of Donbas has formed its own "politics of memory", materialized in memorial objects and related commemorative practices. Since December 2014, more than a hundred such objects (memorial plaques, memorial signs, monuments and memorial complexes) have appeared in uncontrolled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions (Komar, 2021). The most famous are the "Alley of Angels" in Donetsk, opened in May 2015, and the "They Defended the Motherland" monument, opened in Luhansk in 2016. One can also mention the monuments "To the innocent victims of the undeclared war" (Horlivka),

² ATO – anti-terrorist operation; OOS – joint force operation.

"To the brothers and sisters who gave their lives for the liberation of Debaltseve from the Ukrainian punishers" (Debaltseve), "To the miner heroes who gave their lives for freedom and independence of the Luhansk People's Republic" (Anthracite city), "To the dead citizens of the DNR" (Donetsk city), "Sorrow and sadness" (Horlivka city), "To the militiamen who died near Ilovaisk" (Mnogopillya city), "To the dead to the countrymen" (Artemivsk), "In memory of the fallen militiamen and fighters of the LNR People's Militia" (Krasnodon) and others. In some cases, such objects were built next to the monuments to those who died during the Second World War, which emphasized the continuity of the historical memory of the people of Donbas, as well as the historical heritage in the matter of the "fight against fascism", as interpreted in the "hybrid war" in the Russian and separatist propaganda discourse (for example, on the mentioned monument "They defended the Motherland" there is an inscription "Eternal memory and glory to those who stood up for the defense of the Motherland, shielding the Luhansk region from fascist nationalism". In this way, a kind of "martyrology" of the uncontrolled territories of Donbas was formed, in the objects of which, due to their anonymity, every involved local resident can put his/her content.

These educational and memorial events are extremely dangerous from the point of view of the future reintegration of the temporarily occupied by Russians Ukrainian territories of Donbas back to Ukraine. The memorial objects created there in recent years have a clear anti-Ukrainian content and must be liquidated after the return of these territories. However, it will be problematic to do so. The liquidation of memorial objects, as the experience of decommunization shows, is relatively painless when they have already lost their relevance for the population, such as, for example, numerous monuments to Lenin and other communist figures. The mentioned memorial facilities in Donbas, already today representing a rather extensive network, are in the vast majority not personified (that is, dedicated to certain categories of persons – miners, children, residents of the respective settlements, "militias", etc.) and symbolize the memory of the dead, and therefore will remain relevant for the local population for a long time. At the same time, in a few years, a generation of residents of these territories will enter adulthood, for whom their unrecognized "republics" will be the only state-political reality, and whose memory, and therefore the worldview in general, will be largely shaped by anti-Ukrainian history textbooks, based on which children are being taught, and the anti-Ukrainian discourse broadcast by local and Russian mass media. Their integration into Ukrainian society

will be a serious challenge for Ukraine, so it is necessary to analyze all possible options and consequences for national security.

4. Conclusion

Attempts by the Russian authorities and the political establishment to weaken or even eliminate the Ukrainian identity, including through the manipulation of historical memory, testify to the weakness and insufficiency of the Russian identity itself, which needs foreign territories together with their population, foreign history and culture for its confirmation. This situation is typical of nations making the transition from empires, where they occupied a dominant position, to their own nation-states. This transit is never painless; it can last for decades and be interrupted by sharp reactions to the lowering of the status and deterioration of the situation of the mentioned nations due to post-imperial transformations, that is, attempts to revive the empire in one form or another. We are currently observing one of these reactions in Russia.

No matter how controversial it sounds, Ukraine in its historical national formation really was and remains "anti-Russia", not in the sense that it was built on the Russian model, but with the opposite sign, on the denial of Russian spiritual and cultural values, on nurturing negative attitude towards Russians, etc., and because that by the very fact of its existence it denied and denies, firstly, the possibility of the existence of Russia as an empire, of which all East Slavic lands should be an integral part, and secondly, the idea of a great Russian nation, whose offshoots were, and some still are, "Great Russians", "Little Russians" and "Belarusians". In other words, the Ukrainian project has always been and *de facto* remains a negation of the great Russian project, both in the state and national sense, since both projects need the same territory, population, and historical heritage for their implementation. The fundamental difference is that the implementation of the Ukrainian project did not and does not endanger the existence of the Russian nation as such, while the implementation of the project of a great Russia would mean the end of the existence of the Ukrainian nation in a political and cultural sense. As long as the "Great Russian" project remains relevant to the Russian authorities and to a certain part of Russian society, Ukraine will necessarily remain "anti-Russia" and will cease to be so when Russia overcomes the post-imperial transition and becomes open to equal partnership relations with neighboring countries.

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