FOCAL POINTS OF UKRAINIAN HISTORY

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"*We, ourselves, wish to determine and design our history.
Peacefully. Calmly. Truthfully.*"

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy speech to the
people of Ukraine and Russia, 24 February 2022[1].

Abstract. Based on the broad Ukrainian historiography, this article[2] examines the key points of Ukrainian history. As known, Vladimir Putin, the Russian dictator, used his own interpretation of Ukrainian history to justify the Russian military aggression on 24 February 2022. Within an ideological framework, the focal points of Ukrainian history detectable in Putin's speech and the general Russian history narrative may even make sense. What are the focal points of Ukrainian history that make determining the historical discourse of the nation state of Ukraine so complicated and have paved the way for repeated encounters with Russia?

Keywords: history of Ukraine, Kremlin propaganda, Russo-Ukrainian War, interpretation of history, *casus belli*

1. Introduction

Ukraine became the centre of global attention in 2014, in relation to the aggression of Russia. The armed conflict between Ukraine and Russia has recently become subject to a number of analyses and publications. The dispute between different interpretations of Ukrainian history has become a true battlefield where the Russian Federation is constantly forcing its chauvinistic historical discourse: Vladimir Putin, the Russian dictator, used his own interpretation of Ukrainian history to justify the Russian military aggression[3].

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[1]   **Зеленский обратился к гражданам России**. – Украинская Правда, 24.02.2022. – https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2022/02/24/7325217/ (26.04.2022).

[2]   This article is a modified and complemented version of an earlier publication: **Kopõtin, I**. 2022. Me tahame ise määrata ja kujundada oma ajalugu. Rahumeelselt. Rahulikult. Ausalt. – Horisont, nr 2, lk 8–15.

[3]   **Обращение Президента Российской Федерации от 21 февраля 2022 г**. http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828 (26.04.2022).

To be fair, the complexity of Ukrainian history provides more than enough opportunities for different interpretations. What are the focal points of Ukrainian history that make determining the historical discourse of the nation state of Ukraine so complicated and have paved the way for repeated encounters with Russia? By subjecting Ukrainian history to arbitrary generalisation, we can pinpoint several focal points, mainly from the first half of the 20th century. The following article is an attempt to discuss some of these focal points.

2. Kievan Rus'

The issue of ethnogenesis can be named as the first focal point because it suggests that the people of Russia and Ukraine share the same ancestors[4]. Historians and politicians alike agree that the medieval state-like establishment of Kievan Rus' is the origin of contemporary Russia as well as Ukraine[5]. The Mongol invasion of the 13th century was the beginning of the deterioration for Kievan Rus'; several principalities emerged in its place, two of which took on a dominating role: the Kingdom of Galicia-Volhynia on the territory of contemporary Western Ukraine, oriented toward Catholic Poland, and the principality of Vladimir-Suzdal on the territory of contemporary Russia, invaded by the Mongols[6]. The Grand Duchy of Moscow only emerged in the 15th century during the reign of Ivan III of Russia began conclusive military campaigns against the Mongols and gradually conquered all other Russian principalities. Moscow started to expand in all directions on land and continued to do so during the reign of Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible); essentially, the expansion lasted until the beginning of World War I in 1914. In the Russian official historical narrative, this stage of expansion and colonisation are called "gathering of the Russian lands"[7]. For contemporary Russia, Kyiv

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[4] To some extent, this issue can be associated with the ethnogenesis theory by Lev Gumilev: **Gumilev, L**. 1990. Ethnogenesis and the biosphere. Moscow: Progress.

[5] **Екельчик, С**. 2010. История Украины. Становление современной нации. Киев: Издательство "К.И.С.", с. 29–40. [**Екельчик** 2010]

[6] Русіна О.В. Татарська й литовська доба в історії України. – **Литвин, В. М. (ред.)**. 2008. Політична система для України: історичний досвід і виклики сучасності. Київ: Ніка-Центр, Національна Академія Наук України. Інститут Історії України, с. 57–62. [**Литвин** 2008]

[7] The term was first coined by historian Sergei Solovyov in a historiography of Russian history of the 19th century. In actuality, the term is used to justify the expansion of the Grand Duchy of Moscow and later the Russian Federation. **Соловьев, С. М**. 1896. История России с древнейших времен. Т. 1. С.-Петербург: Общественная Польза.

as the "Mother of Rus' Cities" connotes the principial underlying myth about the creation of Russia, which is why Russia is so reluctant to give up control over Ukraine. Ukraine, on the other hand, emphasises the independent development of Ukrainians separate from the Russians of Moscow. This approach relies on the concept of "Ukrainian Rus" by Mykhailo Hrushevsky, a renowned Ukrainian historian, politician, and professor at Lviv University, which he developed in an attempt to prove that the ethnogenesis of Ukrainians has been independent since the first millennium AD. Hrushevsky considered Ukrainian nationhood to be the successor of Kievan Rus' and strongly criticised the "gathering of the Russian lands"[8].

3. The Cossack Hetmanate

The next important focal point in Ukrainian history is the emergence of the Zaporizhian Host. At the end of the 14th century, after Galicia and most of the territory of contemporary Western Ukraine had been annexed by the Kingdom of Poland, peasants who sought freedom escaped from Polonising and servitude to what was then the border of Poland, i.e., the East coast of the Dnieper river, and formed by the 17th century the republic of Cossacks (known as the Cossack Hetmanate). Poland initially accepted it and deployed the Cossacks to guard the border from Muscovites and Turks, which is the reason why the territory was named *borderland*, or Ukraine. Over time, however, the Kingdom of Poland attempted to Polonise the free Cossacks and restrict their autonomy, which ultimately led to an armed encounter between the Poles and the Cossacks[9].

   In order to get some help in a fight against the Poles, Bohdan Khmelnytsky, head of state of the Cossack Hetmanate, approached the Tsar of Russia. The document signed in 1654, known as the Treaty of Pereiaslav, is viewed in the historical discourse of contemporary Russia as (re)merging the people of Russia and Ukraine, and an obligation of "Great Russians" to protect "Little Russians" from Western influence; the same idea is visible in justifications

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[8]   **Грушевский, М**. 1987. Обычная схема "русской" истории и вопрос рационального упорядочения истории восточного славянства. – Форум: Общественно-политический журнал, вып. 17. Мюнхен: Сучасність, с. 162–171. http://likbez.org.ua/hrushevsky_east_slavs.html (11.05.2022).

[9]   **Литвин** 2008, с. 271–272; **Насонов, А. Н.; Черепнин, Л. В.; Зимин, А. А.** (ред.) 1955. Очерки истории СССР. Конец XV в. – начало XVII в. Москва: Издательство Академии Наук СССР, с. 722–723, 726.

for the current aggression. The Russo-Polish War (1654–1667) ended in 1667 with the Truce of Andrusovo, as a result of which Eastern Ukraine was transferred to Russia and Western Ukraine to Poland. Russians started to call the territory of Eastern Ukraine Little Russia. During the Great Northern War, after Ivan Mazepa sided with King Charles XII of Sweden, the Russian Tsar Peter I started to restrict its autonomy and made it a governorate of Kiev[10]. The actions of Hetman Mazepa are interpreted in Russian historiography as a betrayal and strongly criticised.

About a hundred years after the "remerging", the Russian Empress Catherine II decided to dismiss the Cossack forces of Zaporizhzhia and dissolve their autonomy. The Russians accomplished what the Poles could not. It was somewhat easier for the Cossacks to reach an agreement with the Russians because they were both of the Orthodox religion. Nevertheless, Moscow suppressed the Ukrainians, but unlike the Poles they used wit rather than force[11].

4. National revival

The national revival period of 19th century Europe also impacted Russia and Ukraine. It was a time when people started founding culture associations, literary societies, Ukrainian language societies, etc. Unlike the Baltic provinces and Poland, the imperial government of the Russian Empire was initially not planning to Russify the Ukrainians because, according to the Russian national ideology of the time, the Russian nation was composed of the trinity of Great Russia, Little Russia, and Belarus. The Ukrainian language was, therefore, considered to be a Southern dialect of the Russian language. Nevertheless, national revival in Ukrainian governorates was suppressed by the rulers of the Russian Empire: Emperor Alexander II, known among the Russian people as a liberal who ended servitude and conducted extensive reforms to modernise the Empire and society, did not display the same nobility when

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[10] **Баранович, А. Н. и др**. (ред.). 1956. Очерки истории СССР. Период феодализма. Россия во второй половине XVIII в. Москва: Издательство Академии Наук СССР, с. 577. [**Баранович** 1956]; **Павлов, В.** 2016. Історія Українського війська. Харьків: Клуб сімейного дозвілля, с. 206–207. [**Павлов** 2016]

[11] **Баранович** 1956, с. 582–583; **Якубова,** Л. 2012. Українські землі в складі Російської та Австро-Угорської імперій. – Литвин, В. М. (ред.). 2012. Націонаьне питання в Україні – початку ст.: історичні нариси. Київ: Ніка-Центр, Національна Академія Наук України. Інститут Історії України, с. 18–19; **Литвин** 2008, с. 294–298.

it came to the Ukrainians. He issued the so-called Ems Ukaz in 1876 to ban the use of the Ukrainian language in print. It is noteworthy that, over several decades, Russian was the main language used in the towns of the Ukrainian governorate and the Ukrainian language was primarily spoken in rural areas. Ukrainian standard language was developed in the territory of the Russian Empire only due to the enthusiasm of some professors at the University of Kyiv and associations of Ukrainian scholars, the so-called hromadas that had emerged in several towns. The policy of the Emperors regarding the Ukrainians and the Ukrainian language in the Baltic governorates of Russia during the reign of Alexander III and the Russification that took place in Poland were different in the sense that Ukrainians were considered to be part of the Russian nation. This was, simultaneously, a simplifying and a complicating factor. Since they belonged to the Russian nation, it was not necessary to Russify the Ukrainians but, on the other hand, all independent thinking and development of Ukrainian standard language was perceived as an attempt to destroy the "holy trinity" of the Russian nation[12].

At the time when the Ukrainian language and culture were suppressed in the Ukrainian governorates, the national revival of Ukraine gained more momentum in the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria which was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. They began developing the Ukrainian language, history, and culture in the University of Lemberg (Lviv), among other places. The process of Ukrainian national revival was more liberated in the Austro-Hungarian Empire because it allowed national minorities to develop education in their native language in return for fidelity to the Emperor. Nevertheless, there was a devoted movement of Russophiles in Galicia whose representatives claimed that the Austrian rulers were oppressing the Ukrainians. This was their reason for supporting the Pan-Slavistic expansion of the Russian Empire against Austro-Hungary. The Ukrainian community also had strong conflicts with the Polish people of Galicia because, while the Polish were mostly noblemen and city residents, the Ukrainians were more rural residents[13].

In any case, this national revival contributed to the formation of the Ukrainian nation because the Ruthenians of Austro-Hungary and Little Russians were slowly becoming Ukrainians. Therefore, the Western, Eastern, Northern, and Southern areas of Ukraine historically developed under

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[12] **Екельчик** 2010, c. 68.

[13] **Екельчик** 2010, c. 71–79; **Литвин** 2008, c. 339–347.

different regional influences, mostly Austro-Hungary, Poland and Russia, and to some extent Turkey. As perceived in the past and today, the Ukrainian standard language and culture was primarily developed on Russian territory under the influence of the West—mainly Austro-Hungary—which was perceived as an attempt to undermine Russian power in Ukraine.

5. World War I and the Ukrainian War of Independence

World War I shook the old world and in 1914 its outcomes could not yet be predicted. The Ukrainian territory, mainly Galicia, became a battlefield for the combatants, causing great harm to Ukrainian residents and the economy. On the other hand, the events of World War I turned out to be a catalyst in the development of the contemporary Ukrainian nation. The most important event of that period was the Russian February Revolution of 1917 that opened up new perspectives to the minority nations of the Empire, including Ukrainians who were starting to fight for their rights increasingly harder. It was also the beginning of an event now known in Ukrainian national historiography as the Ukrainian War of Independence (1917–1921) that turned out to be one of the most important stages of development for the Ukrainian state and nation. It was essentially a civil war, strongly intertwined with the concomitant Russian Civil War and events happening in other European countries.

Ukrainians were among the first to reorganise pursuant to the principle of ethnicity. While the Revolution in Russia gave grounds for formatting the dual power of the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, Ukraine complemented these with the Central Council of Ukraine (Central Rada) that was established in Kyiv in March of 1917 and whose power the Provisional Government initially refused to recognise. The Central Council included a representation of almost every Ukrainian party and social group. Essentially, it represented the entire people's parliament of Ukraine so that even central governments were finally forced to recognise its power. Nevertheless, there was an element of insecurity about the Central Council of Ukraine and they ran late in declaring autonomy and independence; an independent Ukrainian National Republic (UNR) was not declared until 22 January 1918 when the war between Soviet Russia and the Central Council of Ukraine broke loose and the Central Powers threatened

to invade the entire Ukraine. It is noteworthy that the Third Universal[14] of the National Council of Ukraine declared the UNR as a composition of nine governorates—Kyiv, Podolia, Volhynia, Chernihiv, Poltava, Kharkiov, Ekaterinoslav, Kherson, and Taurida—but did not include the Crimean Peninsula. The destiny of the governorates of Kursk, Kholm, and Voronezh, today in the composition of Russia, was left to be settled in the future. Interestingly enough, at the Paris Peace Conference, the delegation of UNR also demanded ownership of Krasnodar.

The fact that an incredibly large number of Ukrainians were forced to fight on the fronts of World War I, approximately 3.5 to 4.5 million Ukrainians among the Russian troops and 250,000 to 300,000 Ukrainians in the Austro-Hungarian army[15] also played an important part in the revolution. While Ukrainian volunteers formed a military unit in the Austro-Hungarian army as early as 1914[16], Ukrainian national units could be formed in the Russian army solely as a result of the February Revolution.

One noteworthy process is the Ukrainisation of Russian troops in 1917, during which entire units of the Russian army were submitted to the Central Council of Ukraine, although this mainly concerned the Romanian and southwest front. Many Russian servicemen accepted Ukrainisation to try to postpone being sent to the front; it had nothing to do with them wanting to protect the interests of Ukraine or, more precisely, the Central Council of Ukraine. The spirits of mobilised soldiers were influenced by the propaganda of revolutionary parties and the general exhaustion of war, which is why the Ukrainised units tended rapidly to lose combat capabilities[17]. As a result, when the Red Guards of the Bolsheviks attacked Kyiv in January 1918, the only people to defend the city were a group of nationalistic students. They

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[14]   The Third Universal is a state-political act, universal of the Central Council of Ukraine, proclaiming the formation of the Ukrainian People's Republic. Accepted 20 November 1917 in Kyiv. Overall, during the period of the Ukrainian revolution 1917–1918, the National Council of Ukraine issued four universals. The complete independence of Russia was proclaimed by the National Council of Ukraine by the Fourth Universal on 22 January 1918.

[15]   **Реєнт, О**. (ред.) 2013. Велика війна 1914–1918 рр. і Україна. Київ: Кліо, с. 11–13.

[16]   Read more about the Ukrainian national unit in the Austro-Hungarian army: **Martsenjuk, R**. 2018. Ukraina Sitši küttide leegion (1914–1918). Eesti sõjaajaloo aastaraamat, nr 8, lk 56–84.

[17]   For more on Ukrainisation in the Russian army see **Kopõtin, I**. 2020. Rahvuse kool. Eesti rahvusarmee ja vähemusrahvused aastatel 1918–1940. Tartu: Rahvusarhiiv, lk 63–67. [**Kopõtin** 2020] Also available in Estonian: **Rukkas, A**. 2018. Ukraina rahvusväeosade loomine Vene armees 1917. aastal. – Eesti sõjaajaloo aastaraamat, nr 8, lk 110–129.

were all killed in the Battle of Kruty on 29 January 1918[18]. Today, Ukrainians consider the defenders of Kruty to be heroes. This is somewhat similar to the beginning of the Estonian War of Independence when young students stepped up to defend Estonia. However, unlike Estonia, the Central Council of Ukraine did not have a specially prepared group of professional servicemen that would outnumber the idealistic nationalistic students.

6. The battlefield of the Russian Civil War

The troops of Germany and Austro-Hungary which invaded Ukraine in February 1918 saw the territory mostly as a source of commodities. Since the Central Council of Ukraine had failed to exercise executive power and guarantee the transport of commodities, the occupying forces organised an insurgency that put Hetman Pavlo Skoropadskyi into power[19]. The historiography of Russia and the Soviet Union portrays Skoropadskyi as a puppet of the Germans, but in actuality he successfully developed Ukrainian diplomatic relations with neutral countries and supported the Ukrainian national culture[20]. However, it appears that Skoropadskyi saw the future of Ukraine as an autonomous unit within the future Russian Federation and tried to restore imperial living arrangements in Ukraine. A number of retrogressive Russian monarchist officers who were unwilling to fight for the national interests of Ukraine[21] found service in the armed forces of the hetman Derzhava[22].

  Skoropadskyi had until then relied on German bayonets but after Germany lost in World War I he failed to maintain power and his army quickly disintegrated. Ukraine became a battlefield in an encounter between the Directorate

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[18] **Павлов** 2016, с. 304; **Тинченко, Я**. 2010. Війська Центральної Ради. Березень 1917 – квітень 1918. Темпора: Київ, с. 15

[19] **Пиріг, Р**. 2011. Українська Гетманська держава 1918 року. Історичні нариси. Київ: Інститут історії України НАН України, с. 67–84

[20] **Грицкевич, А. П**. 2011. Борьба за Украину 1917–1921. Минск: Современная школа, р. 118. [**Грицкевич** 2011] See more: **Дацків, І**. 2011. Дипломатична діяльність гетьманату П. Скоропадського із державними утвореннями на руїнах Російської імперії. – Проблеми вивчення історії Української революції 1917–1921 рр. Випуск 6, с. 273–294.

[21] **Тинченко, Я**. 2014. Армія Української держави, травень – грудень 1918 року. Київ: Темпора, с. 44, 63

[22] The official name of Ukraine during the reign of Skoropadskyi was the Ukrainian Derzhava (Українська Держава). Derzhava means 'country' in Ukrainian. In Russian, it means a sovereign independent country. This is a manifestation of the shared roots from the Kyiv Rus'.

(a state committee of the Ukrainian National Republic), the Red Army, and the Volunteer Army of the Russian White Movement who had penetrated Ukraine from the Don Republic[23]. Out of the three combating parties, the Directorate was the one to represent the interests of UNR.

Even though the Central Council of Ukraine had elected Mykhailo Hrushevsky, a renowned Ukrainian historian and politician, as the president of UNR, the Directorate was led by left-wing politician Volodymyr Vynnychenko who decided against forming a regular army in favour of militia, meaning the police. A similar idea was discussed among Estonian politicians during and after the Estonian War of Independence. As a result of Vynnychenko's decision, the defenders of the Ukrainian National Republic were unable to hold Kyiv and the city was seized by the Red Army. In 1919, control over the city was passed back and forth between the Reds and the Whites. This military misfortune of UNR entailed the resignation of Vynnychenko. His position was obtained by Symon Petliura. Although Petliura was also a left-wing politician, he essentially established himself as a dictator[24].

One important event in the history of the Ukrainian War of Independence happened on 22 January 1919: The signing of the Unification Act, or Akt Zluky, to officially unite the Ukrainian National Republic and the West Ukrainian People's Republic, a polity on the territory of Austro-Hungary proclaimed at the end of 1918, establishing a unified Ukrainian People's Republic[25]. However, there was a serious contradiction between the unified Republics. While the West Ukrainian People's Republic saw the Poles as an enemy and the Russians more as an ally, it was the other way around for UNR: the Poles were allies and the Russian Reds and Whites were enemies.

In June of 1919, the Polish army began an attack and managed to force the army of the West Ukrainian People's Republic to recede behind the

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[23] The Don Republic was an independent, self-proclaimed, anti-Bolshevik republic formed by the Armed Forces of South Russia in the territory of Don Cossacks. The Don Republic existed during the Russian Civil War from 1918 to 1920.

[24] **Екельчик** 2010, с. 119–120. **Павлов** 2016, с. 299–301, 313–314, 319.

[25] Even though the two Republics unified, they still carried on under separate names. After unification the West Ukrainian People's Republic (WUPR) officially became the Western Oblast of the Ukrainian People's Republic (WOUPR). Petrushevych, president of WUPR, became a member of the UNR Directorate on 12 March 1919. In the summer of 1919 the territory of WUPR was occupied by Polish, Czechoslovakian, and Romanian armies, and in 1919 Petrushevych denounced Akt Zluky. Despite the Unification Act, the name WUPR was still used because, in essence, the two Republics never integrated.

Zbruch River, a former border of Austria and Russia[26]. Additionally, the West Ukrainian army was seriously weakened by typhus, and as a result of these changed circumstances the West Ukrainian army initially joined with the Russian Whites and then the Red Army. From their perspective, the Galicians were foreigners because they had been Austro-Hungarian citizens before WWI[27].

The army of the Ukrainian National Republic that only controlled a small proportion of the territory of contemporary Ukraine was also in a difficult situation. Unlike the West Ukrainian People's Republic, Petliura entered into a military agreement with Marshal Jozef Piłsudski, the Chief of State of Poland, but it was done at the expense of West Ukraine. As a result, Poland provided UNR with military aid and armament and UNR revoked its rights to West Ukraine. It is important to stress that the Ukrainian National Republic never controlled the entire territory of contemporary Ukraine. Its armed forces were never very successful and, in the end, they were forced to join the Polish army. On 2 December 1920, near the end of the Polish-Soviet War, the UNR army was confined and disarmed[28].

In 1919, the Ukrainian territory was nothing short of anarchistic. In addition to the three combating parties (the Russian White Movement, the Red Army, and both Ukrainian Republics), the French landed in Odesa and the Romanians seized Bessarabia. Actual power over the territory was obtained by the so-called Greens, or local Atamans—an army of numerous armed peasants. Nestor Makhno and Nikifor Grigoriev, the most renowned Atamans, controlled extensive areas and tens of thousands of armed men. This was a way for peasants to defend their land and agricultural products but, from a wider perspective, such a formation was not sustainable. They successfully fought only in domestic areas and failed to achieve strategic success[29].

The Red Army included a remarkably large number of Ukrainians. While in October 1918, their population in the Army was 50,000, in 1920 it had increased to 750,000, comprising 13% of the entire composition of the Red

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[26]   See more **Дєдик, О**. 2013. Чортківська офензива. Частина I. Львив: Астролябія.

[27]   **Солдатенко, В**. 2012. Гражданская война в Украине 1917.1920 гг. Москва: Новый хронограф, с. 487–514.

[28]   **Руккас, А. О**. 2015. "Разом з польським військом": Армія Української Народної Республіки 1920 р. Олег Філюк: Київ, с. 124. [**Руккас** 2015]

[29]   See more: **Шубин, А. В**. 2013. Махно и его время: о Великой революции и гражданской войне 1917–1922 гг. в России и на Украине. Москва: Российская академия наук, институт всеобщей истории, URSS, Либроком.

Army. In other words, the Red Army contained 5–7 times more Ukrainians than all other anti-Bolshevik Ukrainian armed forces combined. Much like today, regarding support for Kremlin ideology, the rule of Bolsheviks was most supported in Ukrainian Russian-speaking Eastern regions, e.g., Donbas and Kharkiv. The first groups of Soviet Partisans were formed in the Chernihiv Governorate in November 1918. One of the most well-known and stable Ukrainian national units in the Red Army during and after the Civil War was the Red Cossack Corps, formed from Ukrainian Central Council troops who had changed sides in Kharkiv[30].

In 1920, Ukraine and Belarus became a battlefield for Poland and the Red Army in the Polish-Soviet War (1919–1921). Soviet Russia wanted to destroy the Polish army and approach Germany, a country that seemed to be on the verge of civil war and anarchy, through Ukraine, Belarus, and Poland, with the purpose of encouraging global revolution. The Chief of State of Poland Jozef Piłsudski, on the other hand, intended to establish a federation to defend against Russian aggression. It was to be led by Poland and incorporate Ukraine and Belarus and, ideally, Lithuania and the other Baltic States. Piłsudski's concept was called Intermarium and its purpose was to form a strong defence area between the West and the East, from the Black Sea to the Gulf of Finland of the Baltic Sea[31]. Initially, the Polish army was successful: they managed to capture Kyiv in tight cooperation with the UNR army in April 1920. The Red Army organised large forces to fight Poland because the primary troops of the Russian Whites had already been destroyed on the fronts of the Russian Civil War, except for Crimea. The Red Army conducted an assault at the end of May 1920, managed to seize Kyiv, and very quickly reached Warsaw where they suffered a devastating defeat from the Poles in August 1920[32].

In conclusion, the Ukrainian War of Independence played an important part in the history of the country because it resulted in the establishment of an independent Ukraine. Unlike the Baltic States, however, the Ukrainians were unable to militarily and politically validate and defend their country. In 1921, the territory of Ukraine was divided in two with the Treaty of Riga, assigning West Ukraine (in addition to Galicia and the Western part of the Volhynian Governorate) to Poland, and East Ukraine (including Kyiv) to Soviet Russia.

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[30] **Kopõtin, I**. 2016. Punaarmee rahvusväeosad aastatel 1918–1922. – Sõjateadlane, nr 1, lk. 201–203.

[31] **Kopõtin** 2020, lk 82.

[32] **Руккас** 2015, с. 12–13, 28; **Грицкевич** 2011, с. 353–355.

Interestingly enough, Soviet Ukraine and Soviet Belarus participated in the signing of the Treaty of Riga alongside Soviet Russia.

7. Ukrainian SSR: Korenizatsiya and Holodomor

In an attempt to justify the Russian military aggression in Ukraine, Putin has stressed the importance of the Soviet period in Ukrainian history. Admittedly, this period does include some positive aspects. One was the so-called Korenizatsiya[33] policy of 1923–1933. The Russian Communist Party came up with it as a measure to help gain the acceptance and support of national minorities for Soviet rule. In Ukraine, Korenizatsiya became known as another Ukrainisation. Ukrainian-language education was developed and speaking Ukrainian became a requirement for members of the Communist Party, while the lower ranks of the Party insisted on conducting administrative proceedings in Ukrainian. As a result, the Ukrainian language, formerly used primarily in rural areas, was also starting to spread in cities. The Ukrainian language was becoming increasingly more used in East Ukraine. For example, Kharkiv, which was the capital of Soviet Ukraine, became acquainted with the Ukrainian language basically for the first time. Ukrainian national units were established in the Red Army in the Kyiv military district alongside a Ukrainian-language military school. Emigrated Ukrainian nationalists were also involved in Ukrainisation. For example, Hrushevsky, a Ukrainian historian and revolutionary who was elected President of the Ukrainian National Republic in 1918 by the Central Council, decided to return to Soviet Ukraine. Culture and heavy industry also developed, fostering urbanisation and societal modernisation. A construction of the deepest subway system in Europe began in Kyiv[34].

   At the beginning of the 1930s, Ukrainisation was put to a halt by order of Stalin. Hrushevsky "accidentally" died on an operating table, and outstanding Ukrainian cultural and societal figures suffered repression. Collectivisation in Ukraine subjugated rural residents and provoked extensive famine; the situation was most severe in the Kharkiv Oblast and the Luhansk Oblast. The Great Famine of 1932–1933, known as Holodomor, cost the lives of

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[33]   Korenizatsiya (Nativization) – the term originates from the Russian korenizatsiia, "indigenization" or literally "putting down roots". It was an early policy of the Soviet Union for the integration of non-Russian nationalities in the periphery.

[34]   **Екельчик** 2010, с. 129, 133–143.

approximately 3.5 million Ukrainians, which is why several contemporary Ukrainian politicians call it a genocide. It was important for Stalin to break the resistance of the Ukrainian peasants and subject them to central power[35].

8. World War II and the Banderites

In World War II, Ukraine became a battlefield once again. Stalin and Hitler had divided Eastern Europe into spheres of influence with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. In September 1939, both parties tried to validate their sphere at the expense of the territory of Poland. On 17 September 1939, the Red Army started a "liberty expedition" to the Eastern regions of Poland "to protect the Ukrainians and Belarusians". As a result of this invasion, the occupied regions of Poland were divided between Ukraine and Soviet Belarus, and Wilno (Vilnius) was assigned to Lithuania. Therefore, Soviet Ukraine gained possession of large areas of land, including Lviv, the biggest city in West Ukraine. On 26 June 1940, after France was forced to surrender to Germany, the Soviet Union delivered an ultimatum to the Kingdom of Romania and demanded that it must give up Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. Two days later, the Red Army penetrated these regions and Northern Bukovinia was assigned to the Ukrainian SSR.

In 1940, the allies who had signed the Pact had also developed mutual distrust and in December of 1940, the dictator of Germany, Adolf Hitler, gave a secret order to prepare the military to attack the Soviet Union. When Germany invaded the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, the Germans were initially greeted in many Ukrainian regions as liberators. The attitude of local residents was quickly turned around, however, primarily due to the strict occupation policy of the Germans.

Germany established Reichskommissariat Ukraine on Ukrainian territory with an administrative centre in Rivne governed by Erich Koch (the Reichskommissar), a devoted Nazi and racist. The occupation forces of the Nazi Party saw Ukrainians as a lesser race, which was their justification for abusing local residents. In general, Ukraine was nothing more than a storage of commodities, whereas in addition to exporting raw materials the Nazis also

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[35] **Васильєв, В.; Верт, Н.; Кокін, С**. 2013. Настрої та моделі поведінки партійно-радянських працівників УСРР (1932–1933 рр.). – *Idem*. 2013. Партійно-радянське керівництво УСРР під час Голодомору 1932–1933 рр. Вожді. Працівники. Активісти. Збірник документів та матеріалів. Київ: Національна академія наук України; Інститут історії України, с. 10–29; **Екельчик** 2010, с. 162–164.

forcibly exported human labour to the Reich. In order to take full advantage of Ukrainian resources, the Nazis maintained kolkhozes in Ukraine that simplified the use of peasant labour for the rulers[36]. This extensive repression on Ukrainian territory by German occupying powers included crimes against humanity: for example, up to 150,000 Jews, Romanis, Ukrainian nationalists, and Soviet prisoners of war were shot in Babi Yar[37].

Local people started to resist the occupiers. One of the most powerful resistance movements was the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), formed in the 1920s in West Ukraine, a territory belonging to Poland at the time, where members of the Organisation would conduct terrorist attacks against the Polish authorities. Ukrainian resistance against the Polish authorities was so strong that in 1930 Poland responded with a police and military operation called Pacification. The League of Nations, a predecessor of the United Nations, condemned this operation that cost countless human lives[38]. In 1938, when the Soviet special services killed Yevhen Konovalets, the leader of the Organisation, his position was assumed by Andriy Melnyk. Stepan Bandera had been sentenced to death by the Polish justice system for his terrorist activities in 1936 but the death penalty was replaced with imprisonment.

After Poland was divided between Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939, and the Red Army also managed to conquer the Western regions of Ukraine, Bandera was released from the Polish prison. He somehow managed to avoid repression by the Soviet Union and hide out in occupied lands. Melnyk and Bandera had very different views on the strategy of the Ukrainian fight for freedom. While Bandera believed that they should only rely on Ukrainian forces and resist all occupants, Melnyk preferred to cooperate with the Germans. This discord triggered the division of the OUN into two: OUN-B and OUN-M, derived from the initial of their leaders' names[39].

In cooperation with the Germans, Ukrainian nationalists formed two special units the size of a battalion that entered the Soviet Union with the purpose of creating a diversion precisely before the German Army invaded

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[36] **Meiser, H**. 2010. Deutschlands Abwehrkampf gegen den Bolschewismus 1918–1943. Tübingen: Grabert, S. 215–227.

[37] **Екельчик** 2010, с. 207.

[38] **Kopõtin** 2020, p. 93.

[39] **Патриляк, I**. 2015. Перемога або смерть. Український визвольний рух у 1939–1960 роках. Харків: Центр досліджень визвольного руху, с. 34–35. [**Патриляк** 2015]

the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941[40]. On 30 June 1941, after the Red Army was forced to withdraw from Lviv, the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists declared an independent Ukrainian People's Republic. The Germans, however, had a negative reaction: they prohibited OUN's operations, arrested Stepan Bandera and sent him to a concentration camp. Nevertheless, his followers, the Banderites, formed the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (abbreviated UPA) that mostly operated underground in West Ukrainian forests and towns. One of the most influential leaders of OUN was Roman Shukhevych who became leader in 1944; he had been imprisoned by the Polish authorities before World War II alongside Bandera. The operation of UPA was somewhat complicated by the division of Ukrainian nationalists because OUN-M had also started to form armed partisan units in addition to the UPA of the Banderites and Polissian Sich, or the Ukrainian People's Revolutionary Army, led by Taras Bulba-Borovets, another influential figure in pre-war OUN[41]. In essence, UPA was an army of partisans which established bases with the help of local supporters; nevertheless, it caused significant damage to German occupation forces. After the Red Army "liberated" Ukraine in 1944, the UPA focused its operations against the Red Army.

In general, UPA resembled the Estonian Forest Brothers, although it had a larger number of members (up to 200,000 active partisans plus their supporters, in total approximately half a million people) and operated with larger tactical units. The largest units had formed divisions that made up territorial military districts[42]. Another aspect that played a role in the history of UPA was ethnicity. Although UPA was not directly involved in anti-Semitic activities, they did have encounters with the Polish-speaking population of Volhynia. In order to break the resistance of UPA, in 1947 the Soviet Union and communist Poland carried out Operation Vistula to forcibly relocate Polish and Ukrainian citizens in order to decrease the support of local citizens for UPA and, consequently, destroy their supply centres. Banderite units operated in

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[40] **Дзьобак, В. В**. та ін. 2005. Організація українських націоналістів і Українська повстанська армія: Історичні нариси. Національна академія наук України; Інститут історії України. Київ: Наукова думка, с. 60; **Дробязко, С.; Каращук, А**. 2000. Восточные добровольцы в Вермахте, полиции и СС. Москва: Аст, с. 41–42. **Дробязко, С. И**. 2004. Под знамёнами врага. Антисоветские формирования в составе германских вооружен-ных сил 1941–1945. Москва: Эксмо, с. 124–126.

[41] **Павлов** 2016, с. 370–373.

[42] **Музичук, С.; Марчук, І**. 2006. Українська Повстанча Армія. Рівне: Одност/рій, с. 10–13.

Ukraine until the 1950s, until the "anti-banditry" operations of the NKVD began to yield results and UPA was destroyed[43].

While the proceedings of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists and UPA were more thoroughly studied back at the beginning of the 1990s, after Ukraine regained independence, President Viktor Yushchenko only declared the Banderites freedom fighters in 2010. This was the result of very lengthy political discussion, a manifestation of a deep societal memory policy discord. No man would be able to unite the entirety of Ukraine, not even Bandera. For one, a grasp of the proceedings of UPA did not reach east of the Dnieper River; residents of East Ukraine rather consider the Red partisans and Red Army troops as liberators[44]. Another complicating factor is that, in 1943, some of the Ukrainians that had been cooperating with the Germans formed the 14th SS-Volunteer Infantry Division "Galicia" which has become a recurring argument for Russian history propagandists to use in accusing Ukraine. In actuality, the Ukrainian SS Division suffered great losses in 1944 battles against the Red Army and became the predecessor of the Ukrainian National Army (UNA) formed in 1945[45]. The Ukrainian National Committee[46] and the Army were both led by Pavlo Shandruk, a former general of the UNR army, who also served in the Tsarist army and the Polish armed forces. UNA did not manage to accomplish much. Another organisation serving within the German Army was the Ukrainian Liberation Army. This, however, was never part of large task forces and only fought the Red Army as a tactical unit within the German Army and Waffen-SS. In total, over 200,000 Ukrainians fought on the side of the Germans in World War II. In summary, Ukrainian national forces were divided in World War II which is why they were unable to achieve their strategic purposes in the Ukrainian fight for freedom.

Furthermore, at least 40,000 Ukrainians fought among the Red partisans and expressly supported the assaults conducted by the Red Amy in Ukraine in 1943–1944. The most well-known Ukrainian Red Army partisan was Sydir

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[43] **Патриляк** 2015, с. 485–499; **Екельчик** 2010, с. 220.

[44] **Кресіна, І. О**. 2008. Проблеми консолідації українського суспільства. – **Литвин** 2008, с. 910, 920–922.

[45] **Гайке, В-Д**. 2014. Українська дивізія "Таличина". Тернопіль: Мандрівец, 2014, с. 177.

[46] The Ukrainian National Committee was established under the leadership of Pavlo Shandruk in March 17, 1945 in Weimar, with the intention of representing Ukraine and the Ukrainian nation, with extraterritorial rights and the right to command the Ukrainian National Army under the Ukrainian flag and national symbols.

Kovpak whose army of 1,600 men carried out an extensive raid at the rear of the German forces in the summer of 1943, from Polesia to the Carpathian Mountains[47].

9. The Ukrainian SSR 1945–1991
and the issue of Crimea

The Ukrainian nation suffered great losses during and after World War II. Combat losses, the Holocaust, the repressions of German and Soviet powers, the guerrilla war, and forced resettlement (operation Vistula) all had their impact on Ukraine. Solely as a result of Soviet repressions, more than 200,000 Ukrainian residents were deported to Siberia in 1944–1950. Reportedly, Stalin had intended to deport the entire population of West Ukraine but his decease interrupted this plan[48].

One of the most significant events of the Soviet period was the establishment of the territory of contemporary Ukraine, also mentioned by Putin in his speech regarding the latest invasion. Putin was right in that it was formed from the Ukrainian SSR and West Ukraine taken from Poland, Bukovina taken from Romania, Carpathian Ruthenia taken from Czechoslovakia in 1939/1945, and Crimea in 1954. The Ukrainian population became more monoethnic in the period following World War II than ever before. On the one hand, an outstanding process of Russification was happening in Ukraine where Ukrainians were forced to speak Russian to run their everyday errands. On the other hand, the preservation of Ukrainian national traits was advanced when Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine during the rule of Stalin, became the leader of the Soviet Union. He considered Ukraine to be his old votchina and secured his power in Moscow by promoting ethnic Ukrainian functionaries to leading positions of the Soviet Union. In order to gain the support of the Communist Party of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people, Khrushchev was one to enhance the process of Ukrainisation. For example, 60–80% of general education institutions conducted studies in Ukrainian. In addition to the Ukrainisation process of 1917–1920 and the 1920s to 1930s, the liberation and nationalisation of Ukrainian society during the Khrushchev

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[47] **Екельчик** 2010, с. 215.

[48] *Ibid.*, с. 219, 221.

Thaw[49] greatly benefitted the formation of a contemporary Ukrainian nation. This, and Korenizatsiya which followed the principles of Lenin, are the reasons why Khrushchev's policy regarding Ukraine was strongly disapproved of by Putin.

In 1954 the 300th anniversary of the historical merging of Ukraine (the aforementioned Treaty of Pereiaslav) was widely celebrated in the Soviet Union, including one unprecedented step: the Russian SFSR transferred the Crimean Peninsula to the Ukrainian SSR. Historically, this territory was populated by Crimean Tatars who were deported to Central Asia in the spring of 1944 by order of Stalin. They were replaced with countless Russian inhabitants, ensuring that the Crimean population would be Russian-friendly for the following decades. There are two other important aspects regarding Crimea: first, it was more tightly involved with Ukraine due to economic relations and its mainland connection; and second, Sevastopol was the main base of the Soviet Fleet and later the Black Sea Fleet that Russia just could not waive. Additionally, Russians considered Sevastopol to be "the honour city of Russian weapons", not only for the events of World War II but also the earlier history of the Crimean War (1854–1856)[50]. Today, it is fair to say that all these aspects contributed to the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

The stagnation that took place during the rule of Leonid Brezhnev had a direct impact on Ukraine. While Russia has talked a lot about the great industrial potential of Ukraine, allegedly developed after the Soviet Union dissolved, in actuality its military-industrial complex is mostly responsible for making Ukraine dependant on Russian commodities. Moreover, heavy industry was inefficient, required extensive capital injections, and failed to provide the desired results. Coal and metallurgy industries used outdated technologies. Despite the fact that Ukraine was always thought of as a "grain bin" for Russia and the Soviet Union, its centrally planned economy paralysed the entire agriculture, making it extremely inefficient[51].

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[49]   **Екельчик** 2010, с. 228–229. **Даниленко, В. М**. 2008. Україна в добу системної кризи радянського ладу. – **Литвин** 2008, с. 567. It is interesting that the proportion of Ukrainian-language schools in the Ukrainian SSR dropped to 47.5% while Ukrainians comprised 72.7% of the population. Later, Ukrainian language schools were unequally divided among regions, and two Ukrainian industrial centres, Donetsk and Luhansk, did not have a single Ukrainian language school during that period. Similarly to Estonia, general education in Ukraine was an instrument of Russification policy and had a significant impact on the formulation of students' world views. **Касьянов, Г**. 2008. Украина 1991–2007. Очерки новейшей истории. Киев: Наш час, с. 133.

[50]   **Екельчик** 2010, с. 229.

[51]   **Екельчик** 2010, с. 250–251; **Касьянов** 2008, с. 72.

10. Regaining independence

For Ukraine, regaining independence was not so much triggered by extensive national movements as the dissolution of the Soviet Union, catalysed by the radical reforms initiated during the rule of Mikhail Gorbachev[52]. Before regaining independence, Ukrainian society went through processes fairly similar to those of Estonia: exaltation over nationalism and political liberation movements inspired by *glasnost* and *perestroika*. Unlike Estonia, however, these processes mostly concerned the section of Ukrainian territory that is located west of the Dnieper. As we can deduce from the above information, this chain of events was primarily derived from historic reasons. In order to avoid an encounter between national democrats and the nomenclature of the Communist Party of Ukraine, the state apparatus of the Ukrainian SSR was Ukrainised. They also Ukrainised the local large military structures of the Soviet Army. On the one hand, it somewhat simplified the reconstruction of the Ukrainian state but, on the other hand, it disabled the functioning of Ukraine as a nation state, where the biggest issue turned out to be the loyalty of officials and servicemen. The liberation of the economy, the moral downfall of society that had followed communist ideology, and a degeneration of values provided fertile grounds for oligarchy and the radical social economic stratification of society[53].

The merging of regions with different historical and cultural backgrounds generated a separatist atmosphere[54] in the newly independent Ukraine that Russia has been skilfully exploiting in the current conflict. In 1994, for the purpose of guaranteeing territorial integrity, Ukraine gave up nuclear weapons (the Budapest Memorandum); in actuality, none of the contractual partners—Ukraine, Russia, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom—ever ratified it. According to the so-called multi-vector foreign policy adopted by President Leonid Kuchma, Ukraine does not have enemies, it only has friends. This brought about an extensive demilitarisation of Ukraine and significantly impaired its national defence.

In retrospect, the main question revolved around the dilemma of whether to continue integrating with Russia and Belarus within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) or start pursuing membership of the European

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[52] **Екельчик** 2010, с. 261. **Литвин, В. М**. 2008. Крах перебудовної політики. – **Литвин** 2008, с. 586–594.

[53] **Касьянов** 2008, с. 15, 72.

[54] *Ibid*., с. 97. **Екельчик** 2010, с. 313.

Union. The first serious attempt at resolving this dilemma and inclining towards Europe was the so-called Orange Revolution in 2004, followed by an attempt by the new president Viktor Yuschcenko to direct Ukraine towards the West. From then on, Russia has tried to affect the internal political affairs of Ukraine to keep the country within its personal sphere of influence. Yuschcenko was poisoned just before the next presidential elections (presumably by Russian special services) and his policy was discredited[55].

Since the new rulers failed to solve the extensive corruption in Ukraine and solve its social economic problems, in 2010 Ukraine got a new Russian-minded president Viktor Yanukovych. In the fall of 2013 a failed attempt to enter into a Ukrainian-European Association Agreement provoked student demonstrations in Kyiv which grew into armed resistance against Yanukovych rule on Maidan Nezalezhnosti (translates as "Independence Square"), the central square of Kyiv. The events of 2014, now known as the Revolution of Dignity that resulted in a democratisation of the state power, were called an illegitimate insurgence by Vladimir Putin. From there on, Russia decided to interfere with the internal affairs of Ukraine, first by means of hybrid warfare, and as of February 2022 with raw force to prevent Ukraine from westernising and to re-establish Russian superiority over the Ukrainian territory and people at any cost.

11. Summary

Putin justifies the military aggression of Russia against Ukraine primarily with an interpretation of history. According to his interpretation, Ukraine does not belong in the Pax Rossica sphere of influence but is rather an integral part of it. This is not an innovative interpretation; it was formed and developed in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. The ideology of the modern Kremlin is a compilation of various Russian philosophical and ideological constructions which contain principles that not only contradict but are mutually exclusive. Without going into a detailed description of the ideology of the modern Kremlin, I would here make one important observation. One of the architects of Putinistic ideology is Aleksandr Dugin, a founder and leading figure of the extremist and extensively fascistic National Bolshevik Party led by Eduard Limonov. Dugin's entire world view revolves around Eurasianism, a concept originally developed by the Russian émigré community but revised

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[55]   **Касьянов** 2008, с. 432–433.

and adjusted according to contemporary policy. In essence, Putinism denies Ukrainian independence and primarily justifies it with historic reasons. This is not novel in Russia: it is rooted in 19th century history and, even farther, 18th century history too.

Within an ideological framework, the focal points of Ukrainian history detectable in Putin's speech and the general Russian history narrative may even make sense. In an extensively generalised manner, these can be categorised as follows:

- The trinity of the Russian nation is composed of Great Russia, Little Russia, and Belarus, where Great Russians are the leaders of this trinity. Little Russia is a part of the Russian people and not a separate nation.

- Concerning the issue of ethnogenesis, Kievan Rus' is the cradle and an important key point for Moscow, or the current Russian Federation, as well as the contemporary Ukrainian nation state. This is connected with the important issue of Orthodox religion which began when Vladimir the Great baptised Kievan Rus' in 988. The issue of ethnogenesis was coined by historian Sergei Solovyov, thoroughly complemented by Lev Gumilev, and essentially challenged by Mykhailo Hrushevsky.

- Historically, Ukraine has been a battlefield for different countries. A number of countries have tried to pursue Ukraine—primarily Russia, Poland and Turkey, and to some extent Germany, Hungary and even Sweden. The Cossack Hetmanate that formed by the 17th century was also caught in the middle of the fight of foreign countries for the Ukrainian territory. The Cossacks would often form an alliance with one foreign country to help them fight another. The Cossack forces of Zaporizhzhia that approached Moscow in 1654 to ask for military aid in a fight against Poland vowed to be loyal to the Tsar, and Russians still consider their vow to be an act of accession between Ukraine and Russia which justifies the Ukrainian position as a part of Russia.

- The national revival of Ukraine was an important trigger for the formation of the contemporary Ukrainian nation. Considering that the Ukrainian national revival was more intense in the territory of contemporary West Ukraine, formerly the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the modern Putinistic ideology considers the Ukrainian nation and nationhood to be a "Western" construction. The oppression of Ukrainian people in the second half of the 19th century differs from the Russification of the Baltic provinces in that Ukrainians were considered to be part of the

Russian nation that did not require separate Russification. Consequently, repressions were directed at the spread of the Ukrainian standard language.

- An important stage of development for Ukrainian nationhood is the Ukrainian War of Independence in 1917–1921 which secured the development of the contemporary Ukrainian nation. Similarly to Estonians, the political self-determination of Ukrainians was made possible by the February Revolution that opened up unprecedented opportunities for forming a national parliament and national units. The Ukrainian War of Independence spread across the national borders of former empires and was tightly intertwined with events in Russia and Poland. Unfortunately, the Ukrainian territory became a battlefield for the combating parties of Russian Civil War because the freshly-declared Ukrainian National Republic (UNR) only had a small area of land at its disposal. The project of Ukrainian nationhood was suppressed in 1917–1921, among other reasons due to rivalry between Ukrainians. This involved a conflict between the Directorate of UNR and Hetman Skoropadskyi, a conflict between UNR and WUPR, and countless conflicts between various Ukrainian atamans. In any case, failure to establish Ukrainian nationhood in 1917–1921 is used by Russia as an argument that, even today, Ukraine is an unviable and unintelligible artificial establishment.

- Putin assigned excessive blame regarding Ukraine to the leaders of the Soviet Union, especially Lenin and Khrushchev. The main accusations concern Ukrainisation, or the Korenizatsiya policy and territorial adjustments, primarily the decision to give away the Crimean Peninsula. We must acknowledge, however, that Crimea as well as other mergences concerning the Ukrainian SSR were conducted by Moscow in the firm belief that Ukraine would always remain a part of Russia. Similarly, although Lenin took a stance against Russian chauvinism and gave minority nations more freedom, the Korenizatsiya policy was still conducted with the purpose of securing the power of Moscow on the peripheries of the Soviet Union. We might assume that Putin has a special respect for Stalin who terminated the Korenizatsiya policy but his true thoughts about the dictator of the Soviet Union would deserve separate analysis.

- An important focal point of Ukrainian history is World War II. From the viewpoint of Russian history interpretation and propaganda, Ukraine currently glorifies the Banderites and German collaborators in World War II. In actuality, the situation is more complicated. Millions of Ukrainians

fought in the Red Army and among the Soviet Partisans. Some Ukrainians even served in positions of national importance. For example, an ethnic Ukrainian Semyon Timoshenko, a Marshal of the Soviet Union, was still the People's Commissar for Defence of the Soviet Union the night before the Great Patriotic War broke loose. On the other hand, Stepan Bandera, a leader of Ukrainian nationalists, plays a rather controversial part. He fails to unite the identity of Ukrainians, whereas East Ukrainians seem to be especially antipathetic towards him. Another controversy surrounds the meaning of the victory of 9 May because both Ukraine and Russia celebrate that day.

In general, the development of contemporary Ukraine is often perceived in Russia through a historic-ideological lens. By deploying the problems of Ukraine with the establishment of a unified national identity, and its economic and internal political difficulties, Russia planned its military aggression probably in the hope that Ukraine would collapse simply as the result of influence activities and limited military interference. For Estonia, this might mean that Russia will probably not use the classic *casus belli* like for the Mainila incident[56] but will justify military aggression with historic reasons.

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[56]   The Mainila incident, or the shelling of Mainila, was a military incident on 26 November 1939 in which the Soviet Union's Red Army shelled the Soviet village of Mainila near the Soviet-Finnish border. The Soviet Union declared that the fire originated in Finland across the border and claimed to have sustained losses in personnel. Through that false flag operation, the Soviet Union gained a great propaganda boost and a *casus belli* for launching the Winter War (1939–1940) four days later.

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