



# **THE WAR OF NARRATIVES: UKRAINE'S IMAGE IN THE MEDIA**

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This report provides an analysis of narratives about Ukraine spread in the mass media from 1991 to 2022. The publication is designed to help politicians, journalists and the expert community develop a deeper understanding of the narratives that have shaped Ukraine's image in the Western, Russian and Ukrainian mass media in recent decades.

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## SUMMARY

In Russia's war against Ukraine and the "collective West", the media is a real and effective force, indeed a weapon. To achieve its political and military goals, the Russian Federation actively uses "asymmetric" information campaigns to intentionally distort facts and spread false information with the aim of manipulating and influencing mass consciousness and shaping political processes. As for Ukraine, in the conditions of open aggression against it, and even hybrid special operations, we are talking not only – and perhaps not so much – about propaganda, but about a veritable war of ideas.

In order to spread Russian narratives about Ukraine that create a false impression of the country among external and internal audiences, the Russian Federation uses a whole complex of information and communication channels. Their main task is to replace the target audience's existing ideas about the real, factual state of affairs with ideas that are considered to be more beneficial to the aggressor country. Russia rejects democratic principles and Ukraine's desire for a European future. Depending on the tasks and results (successes/failures) of operations to influence the internal politics of Ukraine and the formation of its image among the Western audience, Russian narratives changed from a presentation of Ukrainians and Russians as "brotherly" peoples or even one people to the importance of the complete extermination of "Ukrainian nationalists and Nazis," denial of the very existence of Ukrainians as a distinct ethnic group (thereby "justifying" genocide), returning supposed "historical territories of Russia," and promoting the idea that Ukraine has never really been a proper state or is a historic mistake.

The narratives of Russian propaganda intertwine, sometimes reinforcing and sometimes contradicting each other. But whatever the Russian narrative may be, its main goal is to undermine Ukraine's democratic development and its integration into the Western world, to weaken the desire of Ukrainians to determine their future outside Russian influence, within the European family, as well as to weaken international support for Ukraine.

The Kremlin's disinformation campaign led to the emergence of a number of stereotypes that influenced the decision-making of Ukraine's partners at the beginning of the full-scale invasion, which led to numerous human casualties, the destruction of Ukrainian economy and infrastructure, and a real threat to the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Fortunately, Ukraine has persevered. Unbreakable people of an unbreakable country continues its fight not only for itself but the whole democratic world.

# INTRODUCTION

"The world" might be described as, in a sense, a collection of stories about nations and states. Such stories may unite nations or unleash wars, glorify the past or strike terror with predictions about the future, debunk policies (or ideologies) or give hope for a better future. Often, narratives are a means of constructing meaning, interpreting reality, and explaining or justifying domestic and foreign policies. With their help national interests may be voiced and implemented. Methodical and consistent promotion of narratives may form a stable image of the state, what may become its established image. Or inversely, they may be used for manipulation, to create an alternative, imagined reality, and become a tool of disinformation and propaganda. At a meeting with an international delegation of rabbis, Vladimir Putin remarked: "Goebbels said: the more incredible a lie is, the faster it will be believed. And he achieved his goals, he was a talented person.<sup>1</sup>" Needless to say, his use of such "talents" in managing the state and "mobilizing" the masses led to the commission of some of the most terrible crimes against humanity. History is repeating itself, and the country (and its predecessor the Soviet Union) that has devoted itself to "appropriating" the victory over fascism in the Second World War is itself now resorting to the most inhumane methods of the past.

Modern political narratives are used mainly in adversarial, conflictual discourse and are part of contemporary "hybrid" warfare. The political narrative seeks to shape the picture of the world not only for ordinary citizens, but also for the international community and political elites, because it is presented as factual material that reflects reality. Perceptions and interpretations of political events are shaped by narratives disseminated by key political actors, changing meanings in accordance with the situation. If narratives are used as propaganda tools, the result is that fiction or manipulation may become fact, and myth may be perceived as reality.

Thus the narratives about Ukraine created by Russian propaganda influenced the Russian population's attitude to Ukrainians, as well as that of Western partners of Ukraine and their decisions in the first weeks after the full-scale invasion. Clearly it is of the utmost importance for the country to formulate an image based on reality and that corresponds with its strategic goals.

This publication focuses on the key narratives about Ukraine that have been distributed in Western, Russian and Ukrainian mass media since Ukraine achieved its independence (1991). Since 1991 and until 2022, Russian narratives depicted Ukraine as a semi-failed state, asserting Russian claims on Ukrainian territory and even demonizing democratic and European integration processes.

We intend to track the transformation of the image of Ukraine and the influence of Russian propaganda on this process by means of narratives: from the "triune fraternal people of Russians-Ukrainians-Belarusians" and the "wise care of the elder brother (Russia cares for Ukraine)" to talk of a "Ukrainian coup", "the struggle between Russia and the Collective West on the territory of Ukraine", "Ukrainian Nazism" and the denial of Ukraine's very existence as a nation.

Therefore, the publication is designed to help all interested parties to free themselves from the captivity of Russian propaganda and to separate myths from reality to enable more informed policy formation regarding Ukraine, as well as to help Ukrainians themselves on the path of self-awareness and self-determination.

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<sup>1</sup> A meeting with representatives of international public and religious organizations, Sobytya, 2014. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46180>

# ABBREVIATIONS

- AA** – Association Agreement
- ATO** – anti-terrorist operation
- BBC** – British Broadcasting Corporation (national broadcaster of the United Kingdom)
- CIS** – Commonwealth of Independent States
- CJSC** – Closed joint-stock company
- CNN** – Cable News Network (US broadcasting company)
- CPRF** – Communist Party of the Russian Federation
- DPR** – Donetsk People's Republic
- DW** – Deutsche Welle (German media company)
- FSB** – Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation
- ISIS** – Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
- KGB** – Committee for State Security
- LGBT** – lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender
- LPR** – Luhansk People's Republic
- MAP** – Membership Action Plan
- NATO** – North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- NEPLP** – National Council of Electronic Media of Latvia
- OC** – Operational Commands
- PMC** – Private military company
- RF** – Russian Federation
- Roskomnadzor** – Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media

**RT** – Russia Today

**SDPU(u)** – Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (united)

**SMO** – Special military operation

**Sr** – Senior

**SSR** – Soviet Socialist Republic

**UN** – United Nations

**UNA-UNSO** – Ukrainian National Assembly – Ukrainian People's Self-Defense

**US** – United States of America

**USSR** – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics / Soviet Union

**VPN** – Virtual private network

# CHAPTER 1. THE NATURE OF NARRATIVES: AN INSTRUMENT FOR DECODING REALITY, CONTROLLING THE MASSES AND WARFARE

The term “narrative” derives from the Latin word “narratio”, a story. Narratives, from one perspective, are designed to help the human psyche understand complex reality and make sense of a diverse and rapidly changing world. From the other perspective, they may be used as weapons in information wars justifying blood-thirsty ideologies and genocides, misleading nations in their self-perception or explaining unjust political decisions. The basis of narratives is myth – in other words, a narrative is a story about a certain event or phenomenon (as an explanation of political or social realities, or an interpretation of historical events), in which the interpretation of their nature and meaning may prevail over facts.

Jean-François Lyotard points out that the narrative type of discourse is characterized by constant repetition, while factual (scientific) discourse is supported by facts, accurate data. Narrative knowledge does not require legitimation, does not need arguments, and its foundations comprise customs, authorities, superstitions, prejudices, stereotypes, or ideology.<sup>2</sup> Wolf Schmid claims that narratives have the property of presenting and transforming reality through the lens of the narrator.<sup>3</sup> Psychologists Brockmeyer and Harré note that a narrative is not a description of reality, but an instruction for understanding (decoding) it.<sup>4</sup>

Three levels of narrative can be distinguished for the purposes of this report: geopolitical (systemic), national (identity narrative) and policy.<sup>5</sup>

- (i) Geopolitical narratives explain the world. These are stories about how the world functions, what laws govern it, including the concepts of “good” and “evil”. Conventionally, these are narratives on a planetary scale, or grand narratives, such as the narratives of religions and ideologies, for example about a struggle between communism and capitalism.
- (ii) National narratives (identity narratives) are stories about states – their history, aspirations, desires, actions; about how they see themselves and how others see them. Conventionally, such narratives are an answer to the question “Who are we?” and “What do we want?” This is the visionary concept of the nation.
- (iii) Policy narratives are a tactical tool for explaining current state policy: why certain decisions are made, how they will contribute to development, who are the participants in these decisions, what the problem is, how certain events should be perceived, and so on.<sup>6</sup>

Narratives may be used to try to control the masses. The strength of narratives from this perspective lies in the fact that, having absorbed a series of meanings and concepts, they are able to repackage

2 Lyotard, J.-F. (1984): *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

3 Schmid, V. (2003): “Narratology”, *Languages of Slavic Culture*. Moscow.

4 Brockmeyer, Y./Harré, R. (2000): Narrative: problems and promises of one alternative paradigm. *Questions of Philosophy*, No. 3, pp. 29–42.

5 Miskimmon, A./O’Loughlin, B./ Roselle, L. (2013): *Strategic Narratives. Communication Power and the New World Order*. New York: Routledge (1st edition).

6 In the research, we focus on geopolitical and national narratives that influence the formation of the image of Ukraine.

them into a short, understandable form that provokes people to form an attitude towards an event or phenomenon and may even prompt them to act.

Modern narratives may reach the broad mass of the population because they are broadcast in the information space. They may be embedded in mass consciousness by repetition, especially in conditions in which there is a low level of development of critical thinking or limited access to alternative sources of information. According to communication theory, repeated exposure to media content may lead to a perception of statements as completely true. Cultivation theory states that media influence is based on repetition, confirmation and reinforcement, and ultimately the cultivation of values and beliefs.

Narratives can reproduce themselves in society. The basis for reproducing a narrative arises from the fact that people tend to believe familiar things, based on things that they have already seen, heard, felt, or thought. Anything new and unknown, however, may lead to confusion, manifest as discomfort, causing anxiety. Therefore, new messages are much less likely to be received. Conversely, if in response to a story a person says: "I thought something like that myself" or "I always knew it", the message has a better chance of achieving its goal.<sup>7</sup>

With the help of narratives, states may try to articulate their interests and values,<sup>8</sup> shape their country's image in the international arena, and seek to enforce the legitimacy of foreign and domestic policies.<sup>9</sup> Because in our multipolar world there is confrontation in the political, economic, security and other spheres between centers of power, battles may take place, if not on the battlefield or in the form of economic wars, then in the form of so-called "narrative wars". Narratives used for misinformation, propaganda, or populist mobilization can undermine the value base of society and destabilize a state, or help to expand the influence of a country, an ideology, or a regime. In the framework of hybrid wars, propaganda and disinformation become tools of information and psychological influence, and narratives become weapons.

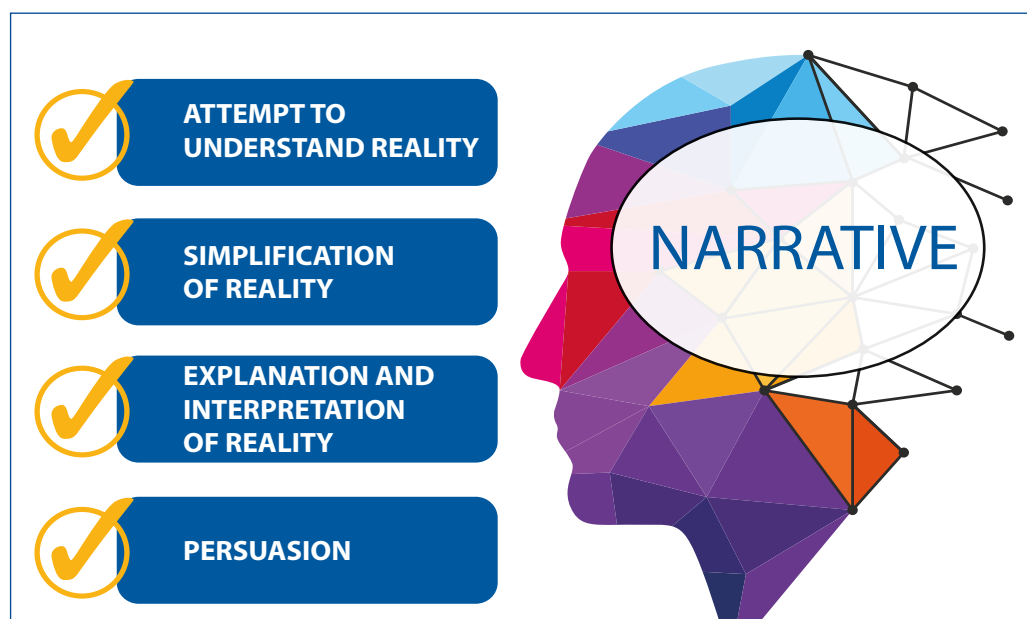


Figure 1. Narrative as a means of influencing public consciousness

<sup>7</sup> Zolotukhin, D. (2022): Ukrainian strategic narrative: "basics" [Electronic resource]. Ukrinform. Available at: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/2620105-ukrainskij-strategicnij-narativ-matcastina.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ozhevan, M.A. (2016): Global war of strategic narratives: challenges and risks for Ukraine. Series: Politics, No. 4, pp. 30–40. Available at: [http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/sppol\\_2016\\_4\\_6](http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/sppol_2016_4_6)

The question arises of why, despite access to information from primary sources enabled by the latest technologies, harmful narratives may capture people's consciousness en masse and cannot quickly be refuted?

Propaganda narratives often rely on "mythologemes", images and symbols embedded in the historical development of a particular society. Therefore, such narratives may have a special (sacred) meaning for people who perceive them, because their content corresponds to their worldview. Narratives take into account certain deep cultural codes, peculiarities of the national character, myths, imperatives, traditions inherent in a certain culture, conditioned, among other things, by religious and historical factors. Even people with similar or shared historical backgrounds often have different attitudes to such concepts and phenomena as the right to personal freedom, life and work, attach different meanings to the concept of "success" and the markers of "us" and "them". Taking these codes into account allows people to compose narratives and direct them to specific target audiences.

The historical and cultural plane is the basis for the construction of metanarratives, narratives under whose umbrella others can be articulated and promoted. Historical and cultural metanarratives assume the existence of an unlimited number of interpretations of certain stories and their free use by all interested agents.

Modern Russian propaganda narratives are formed on the basis of exploitation (or twisting) of cultural norms and historical facts. The "historization" of Russian domestic and foreign policy is aimed at legitimizing the political regime with the help of historical arguments and aggressive imperial policy. This may include interference in the internal affairs of independent neighboring countries, as well as military campaigns aimed at changing the democratic order and seizing new territories. Such "historization" is also used to mobilize the aggressor country's own population for the sake of "protecting the state and the regime in the sacred struggle against the enemies of Russia", which may include the collective West, the "Nazis", NATO, and others.

In general, we can distinguish three main metanarratives promoted by Russia that form the basis for its geopolitical and national narratives. The first is built around an idea of the "powerful USSR" and "Russia as its rightful successor". This makes up the framework for Russia's geopolitical ambitions. However, this metanarrative naturally omits such topics as the oppression of nations and ethnic groups, mass repressions and forced displacements of population, the Holodomor (the severe famine in Ukraine artificially created by the Stalin regime), the 1939 Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact between the USSR and Hitler's Germany, and the division of Poland and other crimes perpetrated by the oppressive Soviet regime. Attempts to critically rethink Soviet history are also sharply condemned: Russia opposes the policy of decommunization, including the removal of Soviet monuments or change of toponyms, and the work of the NGO Memorial (an international human rights organization founded in Russia to examine the human rights violations and other crimes committed under Stalin's reign – ed.). Decommunization is usually equated with fascism and the revival of far-right sentiments.

The victory in the "Great Patriotic War" (1941-1945) and not the WWII (1939-1945) is presented as the outstanding event not only of the twentieth century, but in the whole of history. Russia attributes this victory exclusively to itself, "forgetting" the cooperation between the USSR and Nazi Germany before 1941, as well as role of the Western countries in defeating Nazis, in particular their supply of vast quantities of weapons. The Russian Federation's interpretation of historical events looks even more shaky in light of its backing for far-right movements and parties in the EU in order to try to destabilize it. Russia has created a false sense of guilt in Germany and its allies exclusively towards the Russian Federation, although the territory of Ukraine and Belarus (the "Bloodlands", ed.) suffered the most. It also seeks to justify the repressive regime of Joseph Stalin as the "leader of a great victorious country", thus equating the concept of a "repressive (authoritarian) regime" with the concept of a "strong country", as opposed to "weak democracy".<sup>10</sup>

10 Gromenko, S. (2022): Putin. How the historical machine of the Russian Federation works. Kyiv: Ukrainian Institute of the Future.

The main goal of this metanarrative is to shape perceptions of the common Soviet history as positive and of Russia as the leader in the region, positioning Ukraine as complimentary and subordinate to the Russian Federation.

The second metanarrative is the historical and cultural narrative about “brotherly nations”. In this narrative, Ukraine may claim a share of the common cultural heritage, which is often labeled “Soviet”, but only on condition that Ukraine renounces its own subjectivity and assumes the role of “younger brother” (or satellite). It is this paradigm that justifies the alleged “inauthenticity” of Ukrainian statehood and tries to inculcate the idea of “one people” (Russians and Ukrainians are one people, not two different ones – ed.).

In this context, Russia is presented as a civilizational and cultural center for countries that were part of the USSR or were in its zone of influence. The purpose of this narrative is the erosion of national identity, the strengthening of the hybrid influence of the aggressor state in the cultural sphere, the marginalization of Ukrainian cultural heritage, and the strengthening of the so-called “kinship of nations.”

This metanarrative is reinforced by the third one, the concept of a “Russian world”. In its modern politically-colored version it appeared in 1990s and reflects Russian ambitions to unite peoples who, according to the Russian regime, are or should be in the Russian sphere of influence, which is determined not by the borders on the political map, but by the halo of the Russian-speaking population, a common vision of Russian culture, history, and Russian Orthodoxy. In 2000, a co-ideologists of a modern version of the “Russian World” concept Pyotr Shchedrovitsky in the article “Russian World and Transnational Russian Characteristics” emphasized the importance of the Russian language rooted in the ideas of Johann Herder about the principle of linguistic relativity.<sup>11</sup> In other words, those who speak Russian come to think Russian, and eventually to act Russian. Protection against Russification is so important, because it is primarily a matter of national security, and not an issue of the rights of linguistic minorities. Everything Slav-related is presented as “historically Russian”. The history of Rus’ (Kyivan Rus’ was a state in eastern and northern Europe with its capital in Kyiv from the late ninth to the mid-thirteenth century – ed.) is rewritten as the history of “Russia”, and other Slavic cultures are presented as derived from it. This concept is used in tandem with the concept of Russia as a country constantly under attack by enemies. The “hostile West” is presented as “morally corrupt”, somewhere where “family values” are being eroded and “sanctuaries” are not respected. Russia has used this narrative more aggressively since 2014 to try to legitimize its aggression in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, claiming that these territories are culturally, historically and in terms of values supposedly Russian.

Particular narratives are often instigated by Vladimir Putin himself through speeches and articles on historical topics. The promotion of the official narrative in accordance with a single historical and cultural standard is carried out by state institutions, the Russian Orthodox Church and its representative branches in other countries, such as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), which actually performs the function of intelligence gathering and engages in sabotage and spreading propaganda on foreign soil. In addition, a well-built and generously funded propaganda machine is reinforced by “troll factories”, which, in combination with a complete absence of independent media in Russia, can be considered tools of information and even hybrid warfare.

Ukraine has also created metanarratives. The most important in the context of Russia’s imperialistic ambitions is “Ukraine’s European future” and its affiliation to the “European family”. It substantiates Ukraine’s historical ties with other European states, starting from the time of Kyivan Rus’, underlining Ukrainians’ European identity. This narrative is aimed at strengthening European integration processes and is presented as a civilizational choice.

11 Kudors, Andis. “Russian World”—Russia’s Soft Power Approach to Compatriots Policy. Russian Analytical Digest #81, 16 June 2010. Available at: [http://efaidnbnmnnibpcajpcgclcfindmkaj/https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/117631/Russian\\_Analytical\\_Digest\\_81.pdf](http://efaidnbnmnnibpcajpcgclcfindmkaj/https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/117631/Russian_Analytical_Digest_81.pdf)



The metanarrative “Ukrainian choice as a national idea of Ukraine” is based on the idea of national identity and Ukrainians’ heroic struggle for their own national state and independence. Ukraine is portrayed as a post-genocide society that has managed to survive, preserve its culture and language, and achieve independence. However, Ukrainian culture, language and history are still under threat and need to be protected from Russia. The purpose of this narrative is to unite society around democratic Ukrainian traditions and strengthen statehood.

Throughout its independence, Ukraine has tried to find its own geopolitical place, which at certain historical stages has been interpreted differently: “buffer zone”, “outskirts of the ‘Russian world’”, part of Eastern Slavic Orthodox civilization, “gateway of Europe”, “a crossroads of civilizations”, “part of the European family”, and so on.

## CHAPTER 2. A WESTERN LENS FOR UNDERSTANDING UKRAINE

Since 1991 Western media's coverage of events in Ukraine sometimes lacks a sense of context, reflecting Russian propaganda narratives and passing on prejudices and stereotypes about Ukraine.

Russia aggressively uses its entire information arsenal to influence the international community, in particular via TV channels such as "Russia", "RTR-Planeta", CJSC "Pervyi Kanal – World Network" and others. For example, the 24-hour TV channel Russia Today (hereinafter RT) was broadcast in more than 100 countries around the world until recently, with its own branches in Washington and London. In addition, RT publishes its own product on YouTube. At the end of 2014, the internet portal "Sputnik" was additionally launched to spread RT TV channel content to a broader audience.

Although after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the European Union, by decision of the Council of the EU, suspended the broadcasting of the propaganda TV channels Sputnik and Russia Today, including RT English, RT UK, RT Germany, RT France and RT Spanish, Russia continues to conduct its global disinformation campaign.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, during the past 30 years, the image of Ukraine in the Western media has been formed in an environment of aggressive Russian anti-Ukrainian narratives, which are reviewed in detail in Chapter 3.

### SUICIDAL NATIONALISM AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS

In the 1990s, Ukraine's image in the West was perceived through the lens of Soviet history. Given the shock of the rapid collapse of the Soviet Union<sup>13</sup> and the fear that decentralization processes could lead to destabilization of the region, Ukraine's independence was presented rather in the context of an uncertain future and possible risks for the world security system. A new country with the largest territory in Europe after the Russian Federation, nuclear weapons and no clear self-identification, at that time Ukraine seemed unpredictable to the rest of the world.

Even then, Ukrainians' aspirations for independence were labeled "nationalist", which carried negative connotations. US President George Bush Sr., when speaking in Kyiv, called on the deputies to support Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms and abandon "suicidal nationalism".<sup>14</sup> "I come here to tell you: we support the struggle in this great country for democracy and economic reform. In Moscow, I outlined our approach. We will support those in the center and the republics who pursue freedom, democracy and economic liberty... Americans will not support those who seek independence in order to replace a far-off tyranny with a local despotism. They will not aid those who promote a suicidal nationalism based upon ethnic hatred."<sup>15</sup> The US president supported democratic developments in the USSR and emphasized the need for close cooperation between the USA and the USSR. This speech went down in history as the "Chicken Kyiv Speech" and in retrospect "may have been the worst speech ever by an American chief executive".<sup>16</sup>

12 Council of the EU (2022): EU imposes sanctions on state-owned outlets RT/Russia Today and Sputnik's broadcasting in the EU. Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/02/eu-imposes-sanctions-on-state-owned-outlets-rt-russia-today-and-sputnik-s-broadcasting-in-the-eu/>.

13 Gordienko, T. (2017): Eight publications about the independence of Ukraine – a review of foreign media. Media Sapiens. Available at: <https://ms.detector.media/presa-u-sviti/post/19533/2017-08-24-visim-publikatsiy-pro-nezalezhnist-ukrainy-oglyad-inozemnykh-media/>

14 "Chicken Kyiv. How the USA and Bush Sr. tried to save the Soviet Union from collapse", Om TV. 2021. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wo\\_3-\\_UNgwU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wo_3-_UNgwU).

15 Ibid.

16 Carafano, James (4 квітня 2011): How to be a freedom fighter. The Washington Examiner. Original archive, June 10, 2014. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20140610060102/http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-28353164.html>



Screenshot 2. Article: "In Pictures: Ukraine's Path to Independence in 1991", Radio Free Europe, August 24, 2022. Source: <https://www.rferl.org/a/31994070.html>

The speech was labelled so disparagingly by New York Times columnist William Safire to underline its "colossal misjudgment", very weak tone and miscalculation.<sup>17</sup>

#### NOTE:

The nickname for the speech given by US President George H.W. Bush in Kyiv, Ukraine, on August 1, 1991, the Chicken Kyiv speech, was intended to reflect the moderate US position on decentralization processes in the USSR (Chicken Kyiv is the name of a famous local dish – chicken cutlet). The scenario of the peaceful collapse of a multinational state with nuclear potential did not seem the most realistic, especially because the open aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, launched in 2014, can be regarded as a seizure of a collapsing totalitarian empire. The speech was given three weeks before Ukraine's Declaration of Independence and four months before the December independence referendum, in which 92.26 percent of Ukrainians voted to leave the Soviet Union. The speech was written by Condoleezza Rice, later Secretary of State under President George W. Bush. It outraged Ukrainians longing for independence and also American conservatives.

In fact, the US President's attempt to convince Ukrainian parliamentarians to remain part of the USSR contradicts V. Putin's thesis that the West wanted the "collapse of the USSR." It is clear that the West did everything it could to prevent the break-up of the Soviet Union as it was afraid of destabilization in the region. On the contrary, the USA did not want to lose a reliable ally in the person of Gorbachev, and was also worried of the unforeseen consequences of the USSR's deconstruction. "In fairness, President Gorbachev has achieved astonishing things, and his policies of glasnost, perestroika and democratization point toward the goals of freedom, democracy and economic liberty."<sup>18</sup>

In reality, the collapse of the Soviet Union was the result of a natural process of collapse of an empire under the weight of its internal economic and political problems, as well as historical oppression of minority nations, including the genocide of Ukrainians in 1930s, which, in turn, intensified decentralization processes.

However, already on November 30, 1991 The New York Times published another article covering these historical events, which from today's standpoint demonstrates that Russian-Ukrainian relations had been misunderstood, along with Ukrainians' aspirations and motives: "Minority rights are also far from secure. Ukrainians justly hold Moscow responsible for their predicament, but too many associate Moscow [as the USSR decision-making center – ed.] with Russians, as if no Ukrainians served in the higher reaches of the party or the army. That narrow nationalism makes the many Russian residents of Ukraine fear

<sup>17</sup> Safire, William (1991): "Ukraine Marches Out", Opinion Essay, The New York Times, November 18, 1991. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/11/18/opinion/essay-ukraine-marches-out.html>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

for their rights... Nationalist-minded Ukrainians are planning for a 400,000-man army – twice the size of neighboring Poland's, larger than united Germany's and far larger than Ukraine's economy can afford. And some Ukrainians prefer to share control over nuclear arms instead of getting rid of them."<sup>19</sup>

The world community was especially worried because of Ukraine's nuclear status. The collapse of the former Soviet republics was portrayed in the Western media as a threat because of the potential loss of control over nuclear weapons, and there was a demand to reduce the number of "Nuclear Club" members. The New York Times wrote that even though "the Soviet state, marked throughout its brief but tumultuous history by great achievement and terrible suffering, died today after a long and painful decline. It was 74 years old", nevertheless "the great Eurasian entity on which it fed remained very much alive, as Russia, as a new Commonwealth of 11 republics, as a culture and a worldview, as a formidable nuclear arsenal, as a broad range of unresolved crises."<sup>20</sup>



Being aware of the threat of Russia's nuclear potential, Ukraine at the beginning of its independence tried to preserve its nuclear status, which led to calls in the media to put pressure on its government: "Ukraine, which once promised to get rid of all its nuclear weapons, has begun to balk. Unless the Bush Administration exerts pressure promptly, Ukraine could become the third-biggest nuclear power in the world."<sup>21</sup>

Ukraine was even accused of nuclear blackmail: "The world received an implied threat of nuclear blackmail last month from a country whose president – supported by an Army infiltrated by officers loyal to the current regime – maintains an iron grip on the government and the economy. North Korea? Libya? Iraq? Hardly. The culprit is one of the newest members of the international community, Ukraine."<sup>22</sup>

19 Opinion. "Chicken Kiev, the Sequel", The New York Times, November 30, 1991.

Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/11/30/opinion/chicken-kiev-the-sequel.html>

20 "End of the Soviet Union. The Soviet State, Born of a Dream, Dies", The New York Times, December 26, 1991.

Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/26/world/end-of-the-soviet-union-the-soviet-state-born-of-a-dream-dies.html>

21 "Nuclear Backsliding in Ukraine", The New York Times, May 4, 1992.

Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/05/04/opinion/nuclear-backsliding-in-ukraine.html?searchResultPosition=19>

22 Nichols, T. (1992): "Nationalism and Nukes", The Christian Science Monitor.

Available at: <https://www.csmonitor.com/1992/1201/01181.html>



Linking the narrative of “Ukrainian nationalism” to the “nuclear danger” allegedly created by Ukraine initiated the wrong interpretation of Ukrainian nationalism – which is essentially a liberation movement from a repressive totalitarian empire – as a threat to collective security.

#### NOTE:

Media and political pressure on Ukraine led to the signing of the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances on December 5, 1994, in accordance with which Ukraine gave up the third most powerful nuclear arsenal in the world, and the USA, Russia and the United Kingdom became guarantors of Ukraine's territorial integrity within the borders as they stood in 1991. However, the annexation of Crimea, the beginning of the war in Donbas in 2014 and the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation in Ukraine in 2022 have undermined other countries' trust in such guarantees and the feasibility of giving up nuclear weapons.

Only nuclear disarmament, which took place under political pressure from the international community, changed the narrative regarding Ukraine. In 1997, during his visit to Kyiv, NATO Secretary General Dr. Javier Solana stated: “Ukraine's decision to renounce nuclear weapons and to accede to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty greatly contributed to the strengthening of security and stability in Europe. It has earned Ukraine special stature in the world community.”<sup>23</sup> The events of 2014 and 2022 have called this statement into question.

## RUSSIA–UKRAINE – UNBREAKABLE TIES

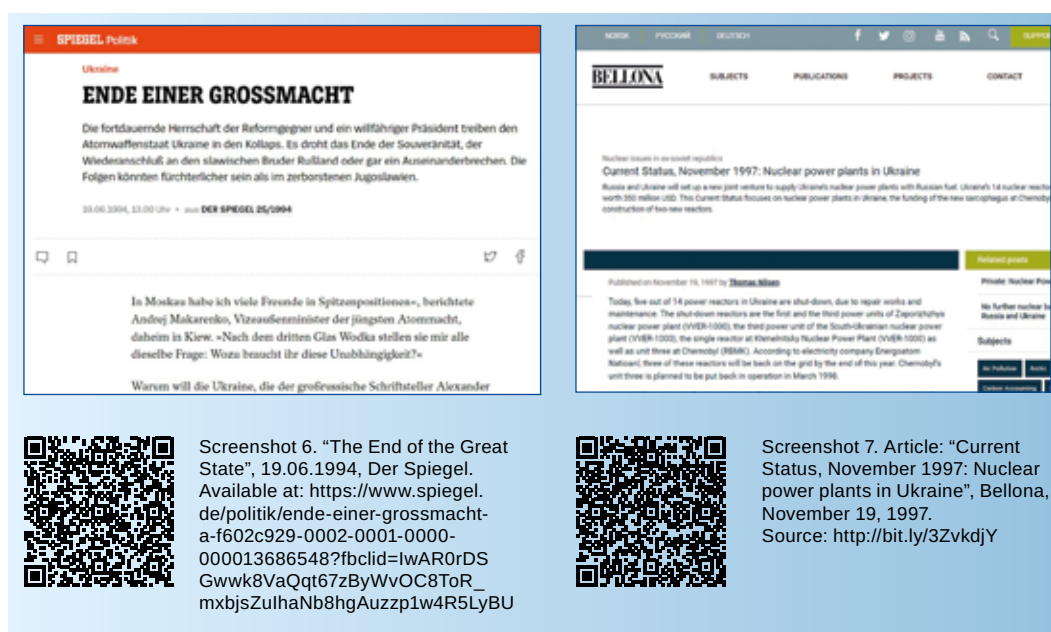
This narrative is very complex and includes socio-economic, security, cultural, historical, linguistic and other aspects. It has been exploited in all kinds of ways since the time of the Russian Empire, receding somewhat only since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. That is why it will reappear in one form or another elsewhere in this discussion of narratives.

Ukraine inherited systemic socio-economic problems from the Soviet Union, as a result of which it is perceived to have a weak economy, a low standard of living, large-scale corruption, political instability and unbreakable historical and economic ties with Russia. It cannot be claimed that these “labels” do not correspond to reality at all, but such problems are faced by all post-Soviet republics, including the Russian Federation, which has solved its economic problems, to the extent it has, virtually exclusively through rising energy prices. Russia has invested considerable effort in portraying itself in the foreign

<sup>23</sup> Speech by the Secretary General at the “Ukraine House” Kyiv, Ukraine, NATO Speeches, 1997. Available at: <https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/1997/s970507a.htm>.

media as the heir of the Soviet Union and as the leader ("elder brother" or "big brother") among the states of the former socialist camp, while Ukraine has been portrayed as apparently incapable of building its own effective state, remaining dependent on the Russian Federation. According to this "historical logic", Ukraine should remain in the Russian sphere of influence.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, to the West, Ukraine looked like Russia, only smaller in size. Even in 2022, after eight years of war, some in the West did not expect such fierce resistance from Ukrainians, simply because it considered Ukrainians and Russians much more similar than different. This narrative has found its continuation in others, for example, concerning the "fraternal nations", "the one nation", "attempts of the West to cause 'unnatural separation' of Ukrainians and Russians", "split of Ukraine", and others. Amidst debates on "gas wars" or European or NATO integration, the "close ties" narrative is used to explain the slow pace of rapprochement with the West. In fact, this expression should be understood exclusively as a euphemism to indicate the Russian Federation's desire to maintain control over Ukraine, at any cost.



"Why does Ukraine, which the great Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn likes to call 'Little Russia', want so badly to be an independent state? Many of its citizens queuing for bread doubt themselves: the independent state of Ukraine is nearing economic collapse, and it could soon split in two... The way back, the longing for common ground with Russia grows, as the plate is filling up again [the standard of living improves]."<sup>24</sup> This article in Der Spiegel absorbed all the stereotypes and Russian narratives: about the deep canyon dividing Ukrainian society (a Russian- and Ukrainian-speaking population), about alleged "Nazi" sentiments in the western regions of the country, although it also referred to crimes committed by the Russians against the Ukrainian nation. But more damaging was a misconception of Ukrainians' motivation for independence. The author believed that it was the sheer size of Ukraine's territory, its rich soil ("black earth", amounting to nearly one quarter of the world's most fertile soil), its industry, though unreformed for a decade, the second largest army in Europe and the third biggest nuclear arsenal that fueled what he called its "national arrogance". In fact, what drives Ukrainians is the desire to use another historic opportunity to finally get rid of moribund totalitarianism, reestablish social justice and finally put human beings, rights and liberties at the center of its value system, something which is absolutely foreign to the Russian mentality.

<sup>24</sup> "The End of the Great State", Der Spiegel, 1994. Available at: [https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ende-einer-grossmacht-a-f602c929-0002-0001-0000-000013686548?fbclid=IwAR0rDSGwwk8VaQqt67zByWvOC8ToR\\_mxbjsZulhaNb8hgAuzzp1w4R5LyBU](https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ende-einer-grossmacht-a-f602c929-0002-0001-0000-000013686548?fbclid=IwAR0rDSGwwk8VaQqt67zByWvOC8ToR_mxbjsZulhaNb8hgAuzzp1w4R5LyBU)





**Ukraine and Russia seal a deal**

Their treaty is good for everyone, so long as Russia does not think it has a veto over NATO

Jan 24 1997

IT WOULD be nice if Russia now accepts that Ukraine should and will exist as an independent nation-state. That is something many Russians, all of whom still learn in primary school that Russian history begins with Prince Vladimir of Kiev, have found hard to stomach. But, after a long series of blunders, the "Treaty of Friendship" signed on May just by the two presidents, Boris Yeltsin and Leonid Kuchma, should make Ukraine feel more confident of its sovereignty—and may, with luck, mark another step by Russia on the road to better relations with all its neighbours. Still, a certain edginess is bound to persist until, perhaps in a generation's time, Russia becomes prosperous and democratic enough to lose the chip on the shoulder that still makes it so bad tempered, clod-hopping and



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**Losing Ukraine**

Oct 27, 1999 12:01 am ET

peculators in the "Who lost Russia?" game may soon have another puzzle on their hands in the form of Ukraine. Since gaining independence in 1991, this vast and strategically important land of 52 million citizens has seen market-oriented reforms stall. Soon, depending in so small part on the outcome of this Sunday's presidential election, Ukraine could cease to be a viable state. This ought to be a topic of concern among Western policy makers. That it is not should be a topic of even greater concern for the rest of us.

The race, which pits incumbent Leonid Kuchma against 14 challengers, cannot yet be called, not least because Mr. Kuchma has obscured public opinion by seizing control of the media. But no one doubts that Mr. Kuchma could lose. Since coming to power in 1994, this self-described reformer has presided over five consecutive years of economic decline. Land



**Svenska Dagbladet** Nyheter Näringsliv Kultur Ledare Debatt eSvD

Ledare Kolumner Intervjuer Gästinlägg Larsson läser

**Hopp om reformer**

Publicerad 2002-04-03

Det här är en text från SvD Ledare. Ledarredaktionen är partipolitiskt oavhängig med beteckningen obunden moderat.

Ukraina | Kujmas nederlagParlamentsvalet i Ukraina blev en motgång för den sittande presidenten Leonid Kujma. Oppositionspartierna var framgångsrika. Det reformvänliga Vårt Ukraina blev under ledning av Viktor Jusjtsjenko landets största parti, med drygt 23 procent av rösterna. Kujmas parti fick bara 12 procent. Dessvärre blir dock kommunistpartiet med sina 20 procent en viktig faktor i det politiska förhandlingspel som följer efter valet. Reformvänerna får ingen egen majoritet. Det är glädjande att oppositionen, trots allt, har kunnat göra sig gällande i den forna Sovjetstaten Ukraina. Ledaren för Europarådets observatörsdelegation, danskan Hanna Severinsen, konstaterade att valet



Guerre en Ukraine Politique International Société Vie Économie Sport Culture Voyages

**LE FIGARO**

« Sans la liberté de l'écrit, il n'y a pas de liberté d'expression »

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**La Russie et l'Ukraine font la paix**

Par Pierre Rousselin

Publié le 22/04/2010 à 11:24 , mis à jour le 20/02/2020 à 06:02

**Ce média n'est plus disponible L'accord entre Moscou et Kiev prévoyant la fourniture de gaz russe à l'Ukraine à des prix subventionnés en échange de la prolongation pour 25 ans de la présence de la fl...**

Ce média n'est plus disponible

Another Der Spiegel article claimed that most residents of Eastern Ukraine and Crimea long for a return to the Soviet Union and a planned economy, citing the fact that Ukrainians voted for Leonid Kuchma in the presidential election.<sup>25</sup> It is worth noting that such an interpretation of Ukrainian elections can be attributed to a misunderstanding of Ukrainian politics, because Leonid Kuchma never declared a desire to restore the USSR and even wrote a book entitled 'Ukraine Is Not Russia'. However, such articles cemented the narrative about an alleged deep mental division of Ukraine along territorial and linguistic lines.

At the same time, American editorials emphasized that it was Moscow that mentally was unable to let Ukraine go. Commenting on the collapse of the Soviet Union, Washington Post journalists emphasized that "Unlike the Baltic republics, which also have declared their independence, Ukraine is regarded by

25 "Wieder Sklaven Rußlands", Der Spiegel, 1994. Available at: <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/wieder-sklaven-russlands-a-487815cb-0002-0001-0000-000013683557?fbclid=IwAR1RjSJRKss3bWN23XjI4OvxdoQxmHJTUXgj50NqKlhTa6vGAH1RncisXEY>

many Russians as part of a Slavic homeland."<sup>26</sup> The Guardian (UK) notes: "Moscow has always seen Russia and Ukraine as inseparably linked."<sup>27</sup> The Economist described Ukraine in that period as follows: "While Americans are delighted with their new friendship with Russia, Western policy towards Ukraine and Belarus in the past ten years has been much less successful, though Ukraine has managed at least to maintain its independence without being badly hamstrung by Russia. But Belarus and Ukraine are worrying messes on Europe's eastern frontier. It would be an irony if it were Russia, their old imperial master, that had to start nudging them in the right direction. No sign of that—yet."<sup>28</sup>

## UKRAINE BETWEEN THE WEST AND THE EAST – NATIONAL AWAKENING AND PRO-EUROPEAN SELF-AWARENESS

Because of its geographical location, Ukraine has always been strategically important for both the Russian Federation and the West. Moreover, with the onset of democratic transformations on the territory of the former USSR, Ukraine was viewed as a country that had to make a choice between the West and the East. And when authoritarianism reasserted itself in the Russian Federation, it became an arena for a clash of mindsets.

During his 1992 election campaign US presidential candidate Bill Clinton said: "In my view, a democratic Ukraine should be an important stabilizing factor in Europe. Assisting the successful transformation of Ukraine into an integral part of the democratic community of nations will be an important foreign policy priority for a Clinton administration."<sup>29</sup>

Several year later, during his visit to Kyiv in 1997, the Secretary General of NATO said: "The Alliance acknowledges that Ukraine has an important and even unique place in the European security order. An independent democratic and stable Ukraine is one of the key factors of stability and security in Europe. Its geographical position gives it a major role and responsibility."<sup>30</sup>

The process of Ukraine's transformation into a truly democratic state was a thorny one. For more than two decades the country was considered to be underdeveloped, not only economically, but also in terms of civil society, protection of civil rights and freedoms, and the rule of law, which many took to indicate that Ukraine was not yet part of the Western world.



26 Antonov, N. (1991): "Ukraine Declares Independence, Sets Referendum", The Washington Post. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/08/25/ukraine-declares-independence-sets-referendum/ee9266e3-dd83-4568-b7e5-40715ca0c77a/>.

27 Steele, J., Marta, D. and Meek, J. (1991): "Ukrainians push USSR to brink", The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1991/dec/02/ukraine.jamesmeek>.

28 "Sour Slavs in the slow lane", The Economist, May 30, 2002. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/europe/2002/05/30/sour-slavs-in-the-slow-lane>

29 "Campaign' 92: Gov. Bill Clinton on the record for Ukrainian Americans", Ukrainian Weekly, 1992, №. 45. C3. Available at: [http://ukrweekly.com/archive/1992/The\\_Ukrainian\\_Weekly\\_1992-43.pdf](http://ukrweekly.com/archive/1992/The_Ukrainian_Weekly_1992-43.pdf)

30 Speech by the Secretary General at the "Ukraine House" Kyiv, Ukraine, NATO Speeches, 1997. Available at: <https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/1997/s970507a.htm>.



Periodically, the topic of Moscow's efforts to keep Ukraine within its sphere of influence and the post-Soviet republic's difficulties at the ideological crossroads of the West and Russia arises: "With a significant Russian-speaking minority (30 percent of the population) living in the eastern regions of the country, with four churches (Orthodox, Uniate, Catholic, Protestant), this state [Ukraine – ed.] aspires to one day integrate into the EU and NATO, at the same time maneuvering within the limits of its relations with Russia, its indispensable partner, on which a large part of its economy depends."<sup>31</sup> The Economist notes that the Russian Federation is interested in maintaining control over Ukraine "because of Russia's business interests in Ukraine; partly because of Russia's naval base in the Crimea, and [because Russia – ed.] worries about what might happen to it if Ukraine really did join NATO. But mainly because of post-Soviet neuroses..."<sup>32</sup>

#### NOTE:

In the course of the presidential elections in Ukraine in 2004, Russia actively supported the pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovich, who was declared the winner, despite the obvious election fraud. The evidence of numerous violations at the polling stations led to the beginning of the Orange Revolution, when tens of thousands of Ukrainians joined in mass protests across the country. The main result of the revolution was the decision of the Supreme Court to rerun the second round of presidential elections and the initiation of constitutional reform, which provided for a reduction in presidential powers. After the rerun, the pro-Western politician Viktor Yushchenko became the President of Ukraine.

The Orange Revolution (November 22, 2004 to December 26, 2004 – ed.) became a catalyst for the discussion about the value of Ukraine for the West, when the Ukrainian people loudly declared their intention to make Ukraine a true European democracy.



SCREENSHOT 14. Article: "Ukraine is attracted by Brussels and held back by Moscow", Le Monde, April 12, 2004. Source: [https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2004/04/12/l-ukraine-attiree-par-bruxelles-et-retendue-par-moscou\\_360809\\_1819218.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2004/04/12/l-ukraine-attiree-par-bruxelles-et-retendue-par-moscou_360809_1819218.html)



SCREENSHOT 15. Article: "Open the door to Ukraine", Wyborcza, May 21, 2005. Source: <https://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/7,124059,2086886.html>

The coverage of the revolution in the Western media was diverse, sometimes focusing on public demonstrations of the country's pro-democratic and pro-European choice, sometimes on the interventions of the USA or Russia and their confrontation on the territory of Ukraine. Some openly

31 "Ukraine is attracted to Brussels and is kept back by Russia", April 12, 2004, Le Monde. Available at: [https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2004/04/12/l-ukraine-attiree-par-bruxelles-et-retendue-par-moscou\\_360809\\_1819218.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2004/04/12/l-ukraine-attiree-par-bruxelles-et-retendue-par-moscou_360809_1819218.html)

32 "On the border and on the brink", The Economist, October 28, 2004. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2004/10/28/on-the-border-and-on-the-brink>

spread Russian narratives about a “coup organized by the collective West / USA” and the “revenge of Ukrainian nationalism.”

British online political magazine Spiked noted: “We can admire the verve of the crowd, demonstrating in Kiev’s central square for four freezing nights. But they are little more than a stage army playing a part written for them by Western governments. The fraught standoff in Ukraine is less the result of an internal dispute, than of a geopolitical tussle between East and West. The country shares a border with Russia on one side and the European Union (EU) on the other.” (Spiked was founded in 2001 with the same editor and many of the same contributors as the journal *Living Marxism*, but since the 2022 invasion it has largely supported Ukraine – ed.).<sup>33</sup>

The Guardian emphasized that “Ukraine, traditionally passive in its politics, has been mobilized by the young democracy activists and will never be the same again. But while the gains of the orange-bedecked ‘chestnut revolution’ are Ukraine’s, the campaign is an American creation, a sophisticated and brilliantly conceived exercise in western branding and mass marketing that, in four countries in four years, has been used to try to salvage rigged elections and topple unsavory regimes.”<sup>34</sup> Later the column published a response to opinions expressed in the article: “Steele’s determination to interpret the events entirely in the context of the Cold War is misleading and patronizing... The current crisis is not about divisions between eastern and western Ukraine or Russia and the US. Ultimately it’s not even about Yushchenko and Yanukovich. People across Ukraine took to the streets in their hundreds of thousands because they were blatantly deprived of their democratic right for free and honest elections... people are euphoric because for the first time in their history they feel they are a nation that got up from its knees.”<sup>35</sup>

Western journalists actively covered the protests involving hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians.

NBC News called the protesters pro-democracy and the protests historic. It is interesting that the TV channel called Viktor Yanukovich not just a pro-Russian, but even a pro-Soviet candidate.<sup>36</sup>

According to *The Economist*, the Orange Revolution “changed the perception of ordinary Ukrainians. ... The majority simply wanted honest government and fair elections,” thus reinforcing the opinion that the driving force of democratization in Ukraine is the Ukrainian people. It also noted that “because of its size and location, Ukraine matters more to America and the European Union than most of the former Soviet Union”.<sup>37</sup> Victory for pro-Western candidate Yushchenko would be a serious blow for Putin, who visited Ukraine twice during the election campaign in support of Yanukovich (although he denies that he went to Ukraine specifically for this). It would thus become much more difficult for the President of Russia to continue to establish control over the former Soviet republics if one of them (the second largest) were to slip out of his hands and go West.

In the European and US media, which covered the Orange Revolution objectively, there were differences in emphasis. Two narratives were promoted in the European media, about the confrontation between the West and Russia on the territory of Ukraine, as well as about Ukraine’s European choice. In the US media, interpretations of the event focused on liberation from Russian authoritarian rule and the struggle for freedom and justice.

33 “Ukraine takes the strain”, Spiked, 2004. Available at: <https://www.spiked-online.com/2004/11/25/the-ukraine-takes-the-strain/>

34 “US campaign behind the turmoil in Kyiv”, *The Guardian*, November 26, 2004.  
Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/nov/26/ukraine.usa>

35 “Ukraine gets off its knees”, *The Guardian*, November 27, 2004.  
Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/nov/27/ukraine.guardianletters>

36 “Ukraine’s 2004 Orange Revolution”, NBC News, 2004. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nYAM-Jbfh4>.

37 Ibid.







The victory of the Orange Revolution gave impetus to the discussion about the need for the European Union to review its attitude towards Ukraine. In particular, the media wrote about the need to increase European investments,<sup>38</sup> albeit on condition that relations between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, not to mention between the West and the Russian Federation, should not deteriorate.

Almost a decade after the 2004 events, the well-known German media outlet Deutsche Welle emphasized that the Orange Revolution had become an example for citizens of other countries to follow, for example, Tunisia, Egypt and Libya.<sup>39</sup>

## FAILED DEMOCRACY AND FAILED REVOLUTION

The slow pace and minor successes of democratic reform in that period created the basis for the narrative of the "failed" Orange Revolution.

Already in 2006, the Financial Times, describing the results of the Orange Revolution, noted that "the events of 2004 were not a revolution in the sense of a fundamental change of the Ukrainian state. The Orange coalition split, economic growth plummeted, reforms stagnated, and in free and fair parliamentary elections this March, a pro-Russian group led by the ousted 2004 candidate Viktor Yanukovich became the largest party. After months of political chaos, including hooliganism by both sides in the Ukrainian parliament, Mr Yanukovich is now likely to lead a coalition government under his rival, Viktor Yushchenko."<sup>40</sup>

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|  <p>Screenshot 22. Article: "What's the Matter with Kiev?", Slate Online magazine, March 27, 2006. Source: <a href="https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2006/03/what-s-the-matter-with-kiev.html">https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2006/03/what-s-the-matter-with-kiev.html</a></p> |  <p>Screenshot 23. Article: "Rivals weigh up options after Ukrainian poll", The Guardian, March 28, 2006. Source: <a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/mar/28/ukraine.tomparritt">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/mar/28/ukraine.tomparritt</a></p> |  <p>Screenshot 24. Article: "The failure of the Orange Revolution is an opportunity", Financial Times, July 24, 2006. Source: <a href="https://www.ft.com/content/9842d50a-1b39-11db-b164-0000779e2340">https://www.ft.com/content/9842d50a-1b39-11db-b164-0000779e2340</a></p> |

Journalists cited the following as the main reasons for Ukrainians' disappointment in the Orange Revolution: Viktor Yushchenko had failed to introduce reforms in Ukraine and to embark on a path of

38 "Ukraine: Impuls für ausländische Investoren", Wiener Zeitung, December 28, 2004.

Available at: <https://www.wienerzeitung.at/nachrichten/politik/europa/301250-Ukraine-Impuls-fuer-auslaendische-Investoren.html?fbclid=IwAR1fkGgaJyCr-kdVsfY2T9gtEr78IS85piTAhnQfQBLwTXIWMMyuEIKwgdQ>

39 Schaeffer, U. (2013): "Failed revolution", Deutsche Welle.

Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/failed-revolution-ukraine-heads-back-to-soviet-past/a-16794088>.

40 "The failure of the Orange Revolution is an opportunity", The Financial Times, 2010.

Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/9842d50a-1b39-11db-b164-0000779e2340>

transformation from an oligarch-capitalist system to a market-oriented economic model; he had failed to fulfill his revolutionary promise to eradicate corruption and “put all bandits behind bars”; and finally he had concluded an agreement with Viktor Yanukovich.<sup>41</sup>

The New York Times noted that the collapse of the democratic coalition occurred “due to political disputes, clashing egos and mutual accusations of corruption.”<sup>42</sup>

The narrative was strengthened by the results of the 2010 presidential elections, when the Ukrainian people, tired of economic troubles, elected Viktor Yanukovich, who, despite his criminal record, was presented by political spin doctors as an effective manager capable of ensuring stability and economic development.

#### NOTE:

Viktor Fedorovich Yanukovich is a former Ukrainian politician and statesman. He was twice elected Prime Minister of Ukraine (November 21, 2002—January 5, 2005 and August 4, 2006—December 18, 2007). He was twice a candidate for President of Ukraine (2004, 2010), as well as Chairman of the Party of Regions (2003–2010). Fourth President of Ukraine (from February 25, 2010 to February 22, 2014). The period of his presidency was marked by a strengthening of authoritarianism, rampant corruption, rapprochement with the Russian Federation and the failure of European integration. As a result of the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, he was stripped of the title of President and found guilty of treason. He fled to Russia, which supported him and in 2022 planned to return him to Ukraine as President after the planned military seizure of Kyiv.

The Wall Street Journal in its analysis indicated that internal political struggles, corruption and lack of progress in European integration paved the way for Yanukovich’s victory in the 2010 presidential election.<sup>43</sup> According to Deutsche Welle, “The failure to stamp out corruption, speed up the reform process or run the country in a more inclusive way stopped the advance of democracy and ultimately put the opposition at the helm.”<sup>44</sup> Supposedly, Ukraine began to return to its Soviet past because of the failure of the revolution.

This led to a strengthening of Russia’s influence in Ukraine. Among the most significant events of that period was the agreement on extending Russia’s lease of the port in Sevastopol until 2042, although the term of this lease was due to expire in 2017. In exchange for the continued basing of the Black Sea Fleet, Ukraine received a price reduction on Russian natural gas. The Guardian said: “The deal is the most concrete sign yet that Ukraine is now back under Russia’s influence following Yanukovich’s victory in February’s presidential elections. It appears to mark the final nail in the coffin of the Orange Revolution of 2004.”<sup>45</sup>

41 “Ukraine: Why Are Ukrainians Disappointed with the Orange Revolution?”, Radio Free Europe, 2005.  
Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/1063129.html>

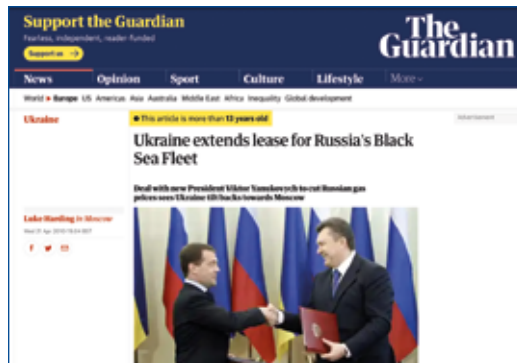
42 “After the Vote, Ukraine Faces Uncertainty Over Coalition”, The New York Times, March 28, 2006.  
Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/28/world/europe/after-vote-ukraine-faces-uncertainty-over-coalition.html>

43 Marson, J. (2010): “Yanukovich Declared Victor in Ukraine Vote”, The Wall Street Journal.  
Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB1000142405274870344770457506522889490594>.

44 Schaeffer, U. (2013): “Failed revolution”, Deutsche Welle.  
Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/failed-revolution-ukraine-heads-back-to-soviet-past/a-16794088>.

45 Harding, L. (2010): “Ukraine extends lease for Russia’s Black Sea Fleet”, The Guardian.  
Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/apr/21/ukraine-black-sea-fleet-russia>.





Screenshot 25. Article: "Ukraine extends lease for Russia's Black Sea Fleet", The Guardian, April 21, 2010. Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/apr/21/ukraine-black-sea-fleet-russia>

This is how CNN covered this historic decision: "Russia's president and the newly elected president of Ukraine signed a landmark agreement on Wednesday that signals an end to years of enmity between the two former Soviet republics... Ukraine and Russia had been at odds ever since the 'Orange Revolution' swept Yanukovych's anti-Russian predecessor Viktor Yushchenko to power in 2005."<sup>46</sup>

Overall, in the Western media during this period, the image of Ukraine underwent a significant transformation, from hero to loser; a country that, after the Orange Revolution, could not maintain a pro-European vector, demonstrated the weakness of pro-democratic forces and large-scale corruption.

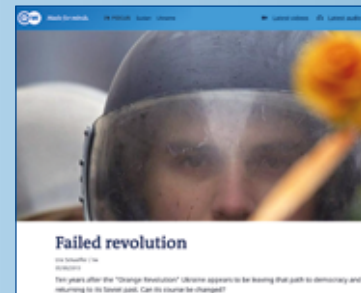
Western media generally expressed disappointment in the Orange Revolution even ten years later. "We are disappointed. We don't believe the improvement, justice and honesty that we were waiting for will come,"<sup>47</sup> according to Ukrainians quoted by Deutsche Welle, adding that the population blamed the political elite.



Screenshot 26. Article: "Telia Sonera develops in corrupt countries", SvD Näringsliv, June 15, 2005. Source: <https://bit.ly/3KZaRHV>



Screenshot 27. Article: "Government of Ukraine preparing to hand over gas pipelines", Wyborcza, December 3, 2006. Source: <https://bit.ly/3JNxAgj>



Screenshot 28. Article: "Failed revolution", Deutsche Welle, August 5, 2013. Source: <https://bit.ly/3YX20w4>

## UKRAINE UNDER THE PROTECTION OF "BIG BROTHER" – NON-ALIGNED STATE OR RUSSIA'S NEXT MILITARY TARGET?

One stumbling block was Ukraine's aspiration to strengthen its security, in particular by becoming a NATO member. This is in the shadow of the territorial claims of the Russian Federation since 1991.

46 Watson, I. and Tkachenko, M. (2010): "Russia, Ukraine agree on naval-base-for-gas deal", CNN, April 21, 2010. Available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/europe/04/21/russia.ukraine/index.html>

47 Failed revolution. Deutsche Welle, August 5, 2013. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/failed-revolution-ukraine-heads-back-to-soviet-past/a-16794088>

After Ukraine's nuclear disarmament and the signing of the Budapest Memorandum, Russia became one of the guarantors of Ukraine's territorial integrity, which is absurd from a historical standpoint. Although the Russian Federation in this context created a narrative about being the "elder brother", which emphasizes not only its readiness to defend "younger" Ukraine, but also the close – "blood" – even unbreakable ties between the two countries (in the Russian Federation, this narrative has a positive tone), the Western media tends not to use the expression itself, but takes a descriptive approach, comparing size of territory, economic indicators, military strength, the language issue and common history. However, in English-language media, the term "big brother" is also associated with Orwell's dystopian 1984. In fact, this is a far more accurate reflection of reality. "After hundreds of years ...Ukrainians are forging a new relationship with Moscow – one of equals, whether Russia likes it or not. Russians love to refer to relations between Russia and Ukraine as the relations between an older and a younger brother," said Anatoly Z. Moskalenko, a prominent Ukrainian historian and journalist. "But in reality, the relationship is like that of a horse and a rider. The rider – Russia – has always done everything it can to prevent the horse – Ukraine – from getting free."<sup>48</sup>

The narrative about an "elder brother" who helps and protects Ukraine is a complete myth that is not supported by historical facts. Besides several centuries of occupation of Ukraine, first by the Russian Empire and later by the USSR, since 1991 the Russian Federation has periodically expressed territorial claims on Ukraine. In these circumstances, Ukraine began to insist on signing an agreement between the parties, which would first of all guarantee the inviolability of its borders. This became the Treaty on friendship, cooperation and partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, which contained an article stating that the "High Contracting Parties, in accordance with the provisions of the UN Charter and obligations under the final act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, respect each other's territorial integrity and confirm the inviolability of existing borders between them".<sup>49</sup> In exchange, Ukraine was forced to sign agreements on the division of the Black Sea Fleet, the status and conditions of stay of the Russian Black Sea Fleet on the territory of Ukraine, and a number of other matters.

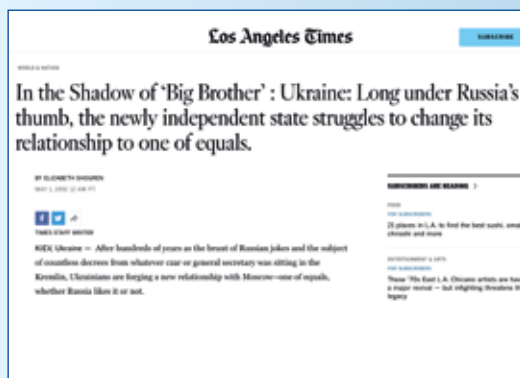
#### NOTE:

The press secretary of President Boris Yeltsin stated that Russia reserved the right to tackle the unresolved – in his opinion – issue of borders with republics of the former USSR that had become independent states. He was supported by Mayor of Moscow Gavril Popov in a speech on Central Television. The general claims made by the President's press secretary were made concrete in the Mayor's speech: Ukraine's sovereignty over Crimea and Odesa region was called into question. Such statements caused serious complications in Ukrainian–Russian relations, and Yeltsin, in order to ease tensions, had to send a representative delegation to Kyiv headed by Vice President Rutskoi. However, territorial claims against Ukraine at the official level in Russia continued. On January 30, 1992, Alexander Rutskoi published an article in Pravda in which he accused "political leaders of national-careerism", wanting to bring Russia back to the borders of the twelfth century. In May 1992, an official statement was published, which claimed that the legal acts transferring Crimea to Ukraine had no legal force. In July 1993, the Parliament decided to grant Sevastopol the status of a city of the Russian Federation. Yeltsin distanced himself from this resolution, and the UN Security Council declared it to be groundless and dangerous.<sup>50</sup>

48 "In the Shadow of 'Big Brother': Ukraine: Long under Russia's thumb, the newly independent state struggles to change its relationship to one of equals", Los Angeles Times, May 1, 1992. Available at: <https://lat.ms/3EI8iMG>.

49 Law of Ukraine "On the Ratification of the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation", N 13/98-BP of January 14, 1998. Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine, 1998, N 20, p. 103. Available at: <https://bit.ly/45Nu0V6>.

50 Kulchytsky, S.V. (2004): "Agreement on friendship, cooperation and partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation 1997", in Smoliiy V.A. et al. (eds), Encyclopedia of Ukrainian History, Vol. 2, Institute of History of Ukraine, published in Scientific Thought. Available at: [http://www.history.org.ua/?termin=Dogovir\\_pro\\_druzhbu\\_Ukr\\_Ros\\_1997](http://www.history.org.ua/?termin=Dogovir_pro_druzhbu_Ukr_Ros_1997)



Screenshot 29. Article: "In the Shadow of 'Big Brother': Ukraine: Long under Russia's thumb, the newly independent state struggles to change its relationship to one of equals", Los Angeles Times, May 1, 1992. Source: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-05-01-mn-1422-story.html>



Screenshot 30. Article: "Ukraine: Europe's Linchpin", Foreign Affairs, May-June 1996. Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/1996-05-01/ukraine-europes-linchpin>



Screenshot 31. Article: "Setting Past Aside, Russia and Ukraine Sign Friendship Treaty", The New York Times, June 1, 1997. Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/06/01/world/setting-past-aside-russia-and-ukraine-sign-friendship-treaty.html>



Screenshot 32. Article: "Against the wind: setting course for Europe", Wiener Zeitung, June 26, 2002. Source: <https://bit.ly/42LDyxO>



Screenshot 33. Article: "Ukraine is attracted by Brussels and held back by Moscow", Le Monde, April 12, 2004. Source: [https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2004/04/12/l-ukraine-attiree-par-bruxelles-et-retendue-par-moscou\\_360809\\_1819218.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2004/04/12/l-ukraine-attiree-par-bruxelles-et-retendue-par-moscou_360809_1819218.html)



Screenshot 34. Article: "NATO promises Ukraine, Georgia entry one day", Reuters, April 3, 2008. Source: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-idUSL0179714620080403>



In fact, from the early 1990s, the Russian Federation sought to “restore” not only Crimea, but much larger territories that are part of sovereign Ukraine: “Much of the Russian political spectrum, obsessed with reclaiming great power status and reuniting the former Soviet republics, recognizes that Ukraine is the key to its plans and openly espouses reabsorption.”<sup>51</sup>

These facts not only deny the moral right of the Russian Federation to act as a guarantor of the territorial integrity of Ukraine, and call into question Russia’s motives as a self-declared “elder brother”, whose history of relations with Ukraine resembles the story of Cain and Abel, but they also repudiate arguments that seek to justify Russian aggression as a response to NATO’s expansion to the East.

Commenting on the signing of the Treaty, the New York Times indicated that Russia had taken this step with an eye to NATO expansion: “But now, with NATO ready to expand eastward, Russia is looking to bolster its defense and prove to the West that it still has power worth worrying about.”<sup>52</sup>

From the ascension to power of Vladimir Putin (May 7, 2000), who launched an aggressive foreign policy towards the former Soviet republics, and in the face of Ukraine’s determination to develop as a democratic sovereign state looking to the West, tensions between the countries increased. Western media began to write about the disputes between the two states. The Austrian Wiener Zeitung wrote that Kyiv had expressed a desire to join the EU and become a member of NATO, but also that such a prospect was distant (long-term for the former but perhaps medium-term for the latter) because Russia still has a strong influence on its “smaller neighbor” in the energy sector.<sup>53</sup>

One such dispute, which was widely covered in foreign media, was the conflict in the Kerch Strait, near the island of Tuzla. Western media noted that tensions between Ukraine and the Russian Federation were so high that it threatened to turn into a full-scale military conflict. Probably, this was the first time in Western information space that a war between Ukraine and Russia was deemed possible.

#### NOTE:

In the fall of 2003, Russia began building a dam in the Kerch Strait in the direction of the Ukrainian island of Kosa Tuzla. Kyiv perceived this as an attempt to redefine borders and annex its territory.<sup>54</sup> The conflict was resolved after a personal meeting between the presidents. Construction was halted.

Analyzing the conflict in the Kerch Strait, The Los Angeles Times drew attention to the fact that the “issue of who owns Tuzla Island has been a matter of extreme inconsequence for as long as anyone can remember. When Ukraine and Russia were adjoining republics in the Soviet Union, it hardly mattered. When Ukraine declared independence more than a decade ago, it faced no serious argument from Russia when it penciled its national boundary around Tuzla and began administering the narrow shipping strait nearby that links the Black Sea with the Sea of Azov... Since independence, Ukraine’s political fulcrum has turned on whether its interests lie eastward, with Russia, or westward, with the United States and Europe. The balance appears now to have tipped. Parliament members across the political spectrum united in a resolution condemning Russia’s actions as ‘hostile,’ and there are widespread calls for speeding up Ukraine’s drive for membership in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.”<sup>55</sup>

51 Mroz, J. and Pavliuk, O. (1996): “Ukraine: Europe’s Linchpin”, Foreign Affairs.

Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/1996-05-01/ukraine-europes-linchpin>.

52 Specter, M. (1997): “Setting Past Aside, Russia and Ukraine Sign Friendship Treaty”, The New York Times.

Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/06/01/world/setting-past-aside-russia-and-ukraine-sign-friendship-treaty.html>

53 “Gegen den Wind: Kurs auf Europa”, Wiener Zeitung, 2002. Available at: <https://bit.ly/45L9lku>

54 Lambroschini, S. (2003): “Russia/Ukraine: Prime Ministers Meet Today Over Tuzla Dam Dispute”, Radio Svoboda.

Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/1104782.html>.

55 Murphy, K. (2003): “Russia-Ukraine Ties Founder on the Shore of Tiny Isle”, Los Angeles Times.

Available at: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2003-nov-03-fg-ukraine3-story.html>.

**NOTE:**

Ukraine launched a dialogue with NATO the same year it got its independence and joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (1991) and the Partnership for Peace program (1994). Already in 1997, the parties signed the Charter on a special partnership, on the basis of which the Ukraine–NATO Commission was launched, the main task of which was to develop cooperation.

It is worth noting that the Russian Federation generally sought to undermine Ukraine's national security and opposed its efforts to become a member of NATO. Those intentions became especially obvious at the NATO Summit in Bucharest in 2008, when Ukraine and Georgia were not invited to join the Alliance Membership Action Plan. "Moscow lobbied hard to head off Georgia and Ukraine's ambition for membership at last month's NATO summit in Bucharest".<sup>56</sup> Later, The Guardian assessed Ukraine's aspirations to join NATO as "unrealistic". "Since then [since the summit – ed.], most NATO countries, including the US and Britain, have realized membership of Ukraine and Georgia would provoke conflict, notably with Russia."<sup>57</sup>

**NOTE:**

On April 4, 2008, the NATO summit ended in Bucharest, at which prospects for expansion of the Alliance were considered. Because the interests of Russia and the EU's economic interests were prioritized,<sup>58</sup> and there were concerns about growing tensions in security relations with the Russian Federation, the decision on Ukraine's accession to the «Action Plan for the Acquisition of Membership» was postponed.

The British news agency Reuters published an article by David Brunnstrom and Susan Cornwell entitled "NATO promises Ukraine, Georgia entry one day."<sup>59</sup> It emphasized the role of the United States: "Germany, France and smaller NATO states withstood pressure from U.S. President George W. Bush to offer the two countries a Membership Action Plan (MAP), a first step towards entry, saying neither was ready and Russia could be antagonized... Bush did not specifically refer to his failure at his farewell summit to push Ukraine's and Georgia's MAP bids through but said NATO must continue to be open to enlargement."<sup>60</sup> Despite the refusal, the presidents of Ukraine and Georgia perceived this summit as historic and were extremely positive. However, as the publication points out, thousands of protesters gathered in Ukrainian cities to denounce the prospect of NATO membership, which highlighted deep differences in society on the question of which direction should Kyiv look in, the East or the West.

It is worth noting that the Russian Federation invested significant resources in a propaganda campaign aimed at the Ukrainian population about the threat to Ukraine posed by efforts at NATO rapprochement. "According to opinion polls, the Ukrainian population is also opposed to the plan. During the Cold War, Soviet propaganda portrayed NATO as the enemy."<sup>61</sup> According to sociological surveys, as of 2008, NATO support in Ukraine was no more than 25 percent.<sup>62</sup>

56 "Talking Tough", Deutsche Welle, 2008. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3qQUtCm>.

57 "Ukraine drops 'unrealistic' plans for NATO membership", The Guardian, May 27, 2010. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/may/27/ukraine-drops-nato-membership-plan>

58 "Losing business", Deutsche Welle, 2008. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/german-industry-leaders-warn-against-isolating-russia/a-3599534>

59 Brunnstrom, D. and Cornwell, S. (2008): "NATO promises Ukraine, Georgia entry one day", Reuters. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-idUSL0179714620080403>.

60 Ibid.

61 "Eastward Expansion", Deutsche Welle, March 18, 2008. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/ukraine-turns-to-germany-france-to-back-nato-bid/a-3200273>

62 "Half of Ukrainians opposed to Ukraine's membership of NATO, poll indicates", Interfax-Ukraine, February 11, 2008. Archived from the original on 4 June 2008. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20080604014018/http://www.interfax.com.ua/en/press-center/press-conference/106882/>

As of 2008, the Western media, when discussing Ukraine and Georgia, still referred to them as former Soviet republics, which emphasizes their recognition of Russian Federation influence in the region and nullifies the subjectivity of such independent countries and their right to self-determination when it comes to foreign and security policy: "Rather than enhancing NATO security, both post-Soviet countries represent a security risk for the alliance, argues the west European camp."<sup>63</sup> Another view was that Germany does not support NATO accession for Georgia and Ukraine out of respect for Russia. The German government believed that these countries need to become more stable and gain significant popular support for joining NATO before starting the membership process. According to Deutsche Welle, "Putin did criticize the Western military pact for promising Georgia and Ukraine eventual membership, although NATO did not go so far as to put former Soviet states Georgia and Ukraine on a definite track for membership by granting them so-called Membership Action Plans."<sup>64</sup>

In another article about the results of the summit, Deutsche Welle emphasized that the reason for refusing Ukraine and Georgia was the Russian Federation. "Russia opposes the plan to grant membership on the grounds that such a move would pose a direct threat to its security and endanger the fragile balance of forces in Europe. It also sees NATO's willingness to enlarge eastward as the continuation of the Western Cold War containment policy and the spread of a foreign military bloc along its border."<sup>65</sup>

In fact, this was direct blackmail of the international community with threats of military aggression. But it should be noted that the invasion of Ukraine in 2014 had nothing to do with NATO expansion to the east. The NATO issue was always raised by the Russian Federation for the purpose of manipulation and to justify its aggressive imperialism.

A few months after the summit, the Russia-Georgia war began (August 8–12, 2008), which formed the basis for the narrative about Ukraine as the next military target of the Russian Federation.

#### NOTE:

On August 1, 2008, South Ossetian militarized groups, supported by the Russian Federation, opened fire against Georgian forces, violating the 1992 ceasefire agreement. On August 7, Georgian army units were sent to the conflict zone in South Ossetia and quickly took control of most of Tskhinvali, a separatist stronghold. In response, Russia accused Georgia of «aggression against South Ossetia» by launching a full-scale invasion of Georgia on August 8, 2008. Russian troops occupied part of the territory of Georgia and stopped near Tbilisi. At the time, Moscow accused the country of trying to forcibly restore the separatist region of South Ossetia, and called its operation «forcing Georgia to make peace.» Instead, Georgia, like some Western countries, called that war an act of aggression by the Russian Federation.

In September that year, The Guardian published an article by Andrew Wilson, "Is Ukraine next?"<sup>66</sup> According to the author, the "EU should be thinking about how it can extend a commitment to security, democracy and prosperity to neighbours. The war in Georgia has clearly exposed the security vacuum in the surrounding region, as well as a lot of raw nerves."<sup>67</sup> The article in a way predicted the fate of Ukraine. The author emphasized that the European Union should advise Ukraine and help it to prevent

63 "NATO allies divided over Ukraine and Georgia", The Guardian, 2008.  
Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/dec/02/ukraine-georgia>.

64 "NATO Summit", Deutsche Welle, April 4, 2008.  
Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/nato-summit-ends-on-positive-note-fails-to-heal-rifts/a-3244743>

65 "Talking Tough", Deutsche Welle, November 4, 2008.  
Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/russia-talks-tough-in-response-to-natos-eastward-expansion/a-3261078>

66 Wilson, A. (2008): "Is Ukraine next?", The Guardian.  
Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/sep/05/ukraine.russia1>.

67 Ibid.

challenges to its territorial integrity and sovereignty, especially in view of Russian interference in Ukrainian elections, as well as to think about its own energy security.

Both democracies (Ukraine and Georgia – ed.), born as a result of bloodless revolutions, want to join NATO and the European Union, and to establish close ties with the United States. This has led not only to threats, but also to open aggression from the Russian Federation. The news agency Reuters also emphasized that Ukraine may become Russia's next military target: "Russia's brief war in Georgia over South Ossetia this month raised fears in Ukraine that it could be the next target of Russia's campaign to reassert influence over countries it long dominated in the Soviet Union."<sup>68</sup> Max Boot in The Los Angeles Times noted: "the Russian attacks on Georgia, if left unchecked, could easily trigger more conflict in the future... Today, Georgia; tomorrow, Ukraine; the day after, Estonia?"<sup>69</sup> Gary Schmitt wrote about these events in The Wall Street Journal: "It is also about resisting Russia's openly hegemonic designs on its neighbors – including Ukraine, which Mr. Putin reportedly described as 'not a real nation' to President Bush at their meeting in Sochi earlier this year."<sup>70</sup> Bill O'Reilly on Fox News made a fairly accurate prediction: "Putin is a real villain. Now the Third World War is upon us, ladies and gentlemen."<sup>71</sup>



Media stressed Russia's influence on EU and US politics. Commenting on the pressure Putin exerted on NATO countries that led to their refusal to grant Ukraine a membership plan, it was noted that such behavior encourages "a mistaken 'neo-Ostpolitik' in Berlin" and "will certainly encourage Vladimir Putin to make further geopolitical advances"<sup>72</sup> and demonstrate that "EU 'soft power' can be shown to be nothing more than wordy weakness."<sup>73</sup>

Some analysts warned against fear-mongering and said Ukraine could avoid confrontation by taking a pragmatic stance and reforming its economy in the long term. While Politico noted that "Rapid accession to either NATO or the EU is simply not realistic for several reasons, the least of which is that Ukraine is nowhere near ready."<sup>74</sup>

Ukraine's aid to Georgia was also mentioned in the media. In 2009, a Radio Free Europe article on the Russia-Georgia war aired the position of Russia, which stated that Ukrainian troops and volunteers fought for Georgia in its war with Russia last year, in the latest sign of strained relations between

68 Elizabeth, P. and Kulikov, Y. (2008): "Ukraine condemns Russia's move on Georgia regions", Reuters. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-georgia-ossetia-ukraine-interview-idUSLR66952420080828>.

69 Boot, M. (2008): "Stand Up to Russia", Los Angeles Times. Available at: <http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/asection/la-oe-boot12-2008aug12,0,6144433.story>.

70 Schmitt, G. and De Lorenzo, M. (2008): "How the West Can Stand Up to Russia", Wall Street Journal. Available at: [http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121850039382131705.html?mod=opinion\\_main\\_commentaries](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121850039382131705.html?mod=opinion_main_commentaries).

71 O'Reilly, W. (2008): "World War III is on the horizon", Fox News. Available at: <https://archive.thinkprogress.org/oreilly-on-russia-world-war-iii-is-on-the-horizon-118386913442/>

72 "Diversifying and liberalising to control the 'Heartlands'", Politico, April 16, 2008. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3qQUA0K>

73 Ibid.

74 "Time for Ukraine's leaders to rise above politics", Politico, February 9, 2009. Available at: <https://politi.co/3R1uzXh>

the neighbors. Quoting Russian sources, the author speculated on the topic of Ukrainian nationalism, mentioning the participation of UNA-UNSO: “Dozens of members of the UNA-UNSO paramilitary group fought for Chechen rebels against Russian troops in the 1990s.”<sup>75</sup>

**NOTE:**

UNA-UNSO (Ukrainian National Assembly — Ukrainian People's Self-Defense) is a Ukrainian political party and public movement with a nationalist orientation. It was created in 1991.

After President V. Yanukovych came to power in 2010, in the wake of the signing of agreements on prolongation of the stationing of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea, tensions between the countries subsided. American and European media widely covered the “Kharkiv Agreements” of 2010.

**NOTE:**

The agreement signed in Kharkiv by the President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovych and President of the Russian Federation Dmytro Medvedev provided for the extension of permission for the Russian Black Sea Fleet to remain in Crimea at least until 2042. In exchange Ukraine received a discount on Russian gas in the amount of USD 100 for every 1,000 cubic meters.

Reuters depicted the events following the vote in the Parliament: “Opposition lawmakers hurled eggs and smoke bombs inside Ukraine’s parliament on Tuesday as the chamber approved an agreement allowing the Russian Navy to extend its stay in a Ukrainian port until 2042... Crowds of supporters and opponents scuffled outside the Parliament building”.<sup>76</sup> It called the pro-Ukrainian forces “Ukrainian nationalists, led by Tymoshenko and former President Viktor Yushchenko”,<sup>77</sup> who view the decision as a betrayal of Ukraine’s national interests. However, in the best traditions of journalistic ethics, the author presented all the arguments of opponents and proponents alike. While some emphasized the threat to the security of Ukraine, others talked of the Russian Black Sea Fleet guarantor of the security of the Black Sea region; and while some highlighted the violation of the Constitution of Ukraine, others pointed to the influx of significant revenues and prevention of an economic crisis.

The Guardian described that move as “the most explicit sign yet of his [Yanukovich’s – ed.] new administration’s tilt towards Moscow.”<sup>78</sup> Luke Harding finds himself caught here in a somewhat simplified dichotomy encompassing Ukraine’s split between a Russian-speaking east and a Ukrainian-speaking west, which was viewed predominantly as a political division. It is on that basis that Harding views Viktor Yushchenko’s vow to eject Russia’s Black Sea Fleet from the port of Sevastopol – on the grounds that its presence was an affront to Ukraine’s sovereignty and a destabilising factor in Crimea – as illegitimate. He states Crimea is “a majority ethnic Russian region with a strong pro-Soviet mood”,<sup>79</sup> seemingly neglecting the rights and aspirations of Crimean Tatars and the fact that the matter under question is not merely one of local but of regional security importance.

That year’s official refusal to allow Ukraine to join NATO, which was opposed by Russia, significantly contributed to the “thaw”. “Mr Yanukovych has wasted no time in re-shaping Ukraine’s foreign policy in

75 “Russia Says Ukrainians Fought for Georgia in 2008 War”, Radio Free Europe, 2009.

Available at: [https://www.rferl.org/a/Russia\\_Says\\_Ukrainians\\_Fought\\_For\\_Georgia\\_In\\_2008\\_War/1806528.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/Russia_Says_Ukrainians_Fought_For_Georgia_In_2008_War/1806528.html).

76 Balmforth, R. (2010): “Protests as Ukraine approves Russian base extension”, Reuters, April 27.

Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-russia-fleet-idUSTRE63Q0YG20100427>

77 Ibid.

78 Harding, L. (2010): “Ukraine extends lease for Russia’s Black Sea Fleet”, The Guardian.

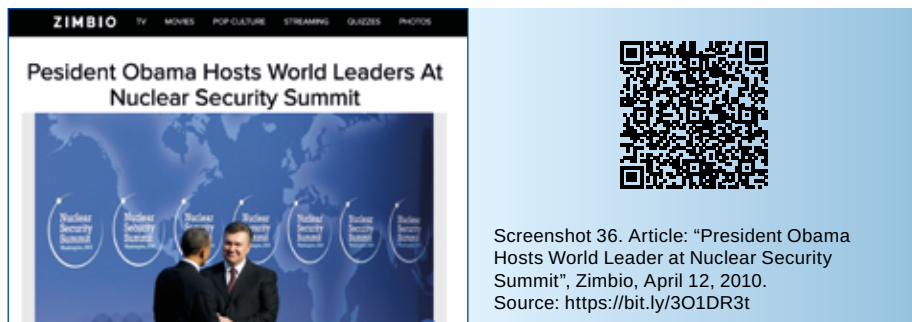
Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/apr/21/ukraine-black-sea-fleet-russia>.

79 Ibid.



a more Moscow-friendly way,”<sup>80</sup> wrote the BBC’s David Stern in Kyiv. It should be noted, however, that Ukraine declined Moscow’s invitation to join the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation, which groups Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan.

President Yanukovych even received favorable remarks from high-ranking Western officials and the media for his promise to abandon all highly enriched uranium by 2012, which generally helped to improve Yanukovych’s image as a president who understands current trends in world development and is ready to include Ukraine in them. The statement was made during the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington in 2010 with the participation of US President Barack Obama.<sup>81</sup>



The article cites a White House statement in which Obama “praised Ukraine’s decision as a historic step and a reaffirmation of Ukraine’s leadership in nuclear security and nonproliferation [of nuclear weapons]”.<sup>82</sup> It continues with the words of White House spokesman Robert Gibbs, who described the step as “something that the United States has tried to make happen for more than 10 years... The material is enough to construct several nuclear weapons. And this demonstrates Ukraine’s continued leadership in nonproliferation and comes in an important region where we know a lot of highly enriched uranium exists.”<sup>83</sup>

It should be noted that such a decision was particularly in the interest of the Russian Federation, which had long been conducting special operations to undermine the Ukrainian state’s defense capabilities.

After the military aggression of the Russian Federation against Georgia and the postponement of Ukraine’s prospects of joining NATO, the narrative of Ukraine as a “buffer zone” began to spread in the Western media. The West’s aim in these terms was not to spoil relations with Russia because of the Ukrainian issue, and for Russia to maintain its influence in Ukraine and to regard itself as thereby diminishing the influence of the developed countries, democracy and NATO, keeping them as far as possible from its borders. The New York Times, in justifying the preservation of Ukraine’s status as a buffer zone, noted that some “might say these policy prescriptions amount to a defeat for America. On the contrary, Washington has a deep-seated interest in ending this conflict and maintaining Ukraine as a sovereign buffer state between Russia and NATO. Furthermore, good relations with Russia are essential, because the United States needs Moscow’s help to deal with Iran, Syria, Afghanistan, and eventually to help counter China, the only genuine potential rival to the United States.”<sup>84</sup>

In his piece for Politico Edward Lucas summarized all the Western pro-Russian sentiments of the time – “new version of history is gaining traction. The crisis in Ukraine is overwhelmingly the West’s fault. We abused and provoked Russia by heedlessly and recklessly enlarging NATO and the European

80 “Ukraine’s parliament votes to abandon NATO ambitions”, BBC, June 3, 2010. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/10229626>

81 “Ukraine to get rid of ‘all’ highly enriched uranium”, France 24, 2010. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/20100412-ukraine-get-rid-all-highly-enriched-uranium>.

82 Solash, R. (2010): “Ukraine Pledges to Dispose of Weapons-Grade Uranium”, Radio Free Europe. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3YTHaOc>.

83 Ibid.

84 “Getting Ukraine Wrong”, The New York Times, April 13, 2014. Available at: <https://bit.ly/44rtk6F>

Union. If we halt, or – better – reverse this process, all will be well.” And then he depicted the actual consequences of this mistaken approach: “Imagine what this would mean in practice. First, lift all sanctions and accept the occupation of Crimea. Second, make a public and irrevocable commitment to stop NATO and EU expansion... It is certainly true, as Walter Russell Mead put it, that the West’s behaviour has created “a restless, hostile Russia with a zone of instability around it”. But the real lesson of the past is not that we were too tough. We were way too weak.

The countries of central and eastern Europe have been warning policymakers in Brussels and elsewhere since 1991 that Russia was unpredictable and potentially menacing. The collapse of communism did not free Russia of the legacy of its imperial past in the way that West Germany shed the Nazi legacy in the years after 1945. That meant that no Russian neighbour could be fully safe.”<sup>85</sup>

## UKRAINE BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE CUSTOMS UNION

With the coming to power of President Viktor Yanukovych, the Western media echoed the narrative about the buffer zone in its security aspect, and the narrative about Ukraine’s balanced cooperation with both the EU and Russia – in particular, economic cooperation – gained strength. The New York Times wrote that “Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych said his country planned to sign an Association Agreement with the EU in the course of 2013. But he also stressed that the country would develop its relations with Russia’s Custom’s Union in areas which do not contradict other “international obligations”.”<sup>86</sup>

It was quite obvious that Russia was putting pressure on Ukraine to join the Russian-led Customs Union instead of signing the Agreement with the EU. The BBC reported that “contrary to the popular view, Mr Putin did not start with sanctions. He offered Ukraine’s President Viktor Yanukovych major incentives: significantly lower gas prices, large-scale industrial co-operation projects, and soft credits. In doing so, he appealed to the spiritual unity of two fellow Slav peoples, both largely adhering to the Orthodox Christian tradition, and to the prominent role that Ukrainians had played in the history of the Russian empire and then the Soviet Union.”<sup>87</sup>

### NOTE:

The Customs Union is a form of interstate trade and economic integration of the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union. The Union includes Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia.

The Customs Union came into being on January 1, 2015 and is the legal successor of the Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, which was in effect from January 1, 2010.

It was Ukraine, with the second largest economy in the region (after Russia), that was supposed to provide the economic strength of the Customs Union, which Vladimir Putin sought.

In retrospect, it could be said that Yanukovych’s main mistake was not so much his refusal to sign the Association Agreement, but a broad information campaign about a quick and successful rapprochement with the EU. Ukrainians themselves were surprised to see how, after so many efforts by weak pro-Western forces in Ukrainian politics, the so-called pro-Russian president was confidently leading the country to rapprochement with the West. And when the realization of the dream of many Ukrainians was already almost within reach, a sharp change of course in one night left many disappointed people

<sup>85</sup> “The wages of weakness”, Politico, April 15, 2014. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-wages-of-weakness/>

<sup>86</sup> “Getting Ukraine Wrong”, The New York Times, April 13, 2014. Available at: <https://nyti.ms/45xTHcK>

<sup>87</sup> “Analysis: Russia’s carrot-and-stick battle for Ukraine”, BBC, December 17, 2013. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25401179>

with little choice. If Yanukovych intended to conduct politics with the aim of “sitting on two chairs at once” (to develop balanced relations with the EU and Russia – ed.) or negotiating better terms of cooperation with the Russian Federation in order to avoid the events that unfolded later on (the Revolution of Dignity and the war – ed.), a better narrative would have been to the effect that the road to the EU was long and thorny, Ukraine was doing its best, but it had not yet completed its “homework”. The last straw for Ukrainians was the unsuccessful information campaign inside the country, bringing the matter almost to the point of actually signing the Agreement, but then refusing to do so, offering only weak excuses, and signing another agreement with the Russian Federation, followed by beating up protesting students on Euromaidan. Ukrainians had finally had enough of perhaps the largest-scale corruption in their history, the strengthening of authoritarianism, the curtailment of rights and freedoms, and the rollback of the achievements of democracy.

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| <p>Screenshot 37. Article: “Ukraine wants trade agreements with EU and Russia”, EURACTIV, January 4, 2013. Source: <a href="https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/news/ukraine-wants-trade-agreements-with-eu-and-russia/">https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/news/ukraine-wants-trade-agreements-with-eu-and-russia/</a></p> | <p>Screenshot 38. Article: “Russia behind Ukraine U-turn on EU”, Politico, November 23, 2013. Source: <a href="https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-behind-ukraine-u-turn-on-eu/">https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-behind-ukraine-u-turn-on-eu/</a></p> | <p>Screenshot 39. Article: “Russia steals ‘Ukrainian bride’ at the altar”, Reuters, November 23, 2013. Source: <a href="https://bit.ly/3O2eYVz">https://bit.ly/3O2eYVz</a></p> |

#### NOTE:

Although the illusion was created that Viktor Yanukovych and his party made significant efforts to complete Ukraine's «homework» for European integration, the President's refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the EU in 2013 provoked the protests that began on November 21, 2013, and grew into the Revolution of Dignity after the violent dispersal of a demonstration in Kyiv on the night of November 30, 2013.

Speaking about the reasons for refusing to sign the Association Agreement with the EU, some Western journalists actually repeated the narrative created in the interests of Russia about Ukraine as an “unsuccessful country” that depends completely on Russia's economic support, will and decisions. They argued that an economic gap with the Russian Federation would be fatal for Ukraine. Viktor Yanukovych's decision is also explained by external and internal reasons: the pressure from the President of the Russian Federation, his proposal for integration in the alternative geopolitical project of the Eurasian Union, and the economic crisis in Ukraine.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>88</sup> “Ukrainians want the EU more than the Customs Union”, BBC Ukraine, 2013. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3R4l6gH>.



In fact, it can be said that it was the reluctance of the pro-Russian leadership of Ukraine to carry out real reforms, and economic, political and judicial corruption at the highest levels that held back Ukraine's economic development and access to new markets. In particular, as of 2013, the economic situation in Ukraine worsened, so it was necessary to look for cheap energy sources, support its own industrial producers and safeguard sales markets.<sup>89</sup>

## UKRAINE DIVIDED AND A "CIVIL WAR"

The narrative created by Russian propaganda about the "split/division" of Ukraine along linguistic and regional (territorial) lines began to spread in the Western media in the first years after Ukraine gained independence and was not really subject to critical reassessment until the beginning of the large-scale invasion of the Russian Federation in 2022. In general, the division of the population of Ukraine into pro-Western and pro-Russian on linguistic or territorial grounds is a myth. After centuries of Russification, a large part of Ukrainians considered Russian their native language, but this did not mean they automatically belonged to the camp of "Russian world" adherents. In fact, this narrative was used to support the Russian Federation's territorial claims and its promotion of the idea of the disintegration of the Ukrainian state.

What long served as the framework for a distorted view of processes in Ukraine is a deep misunderstanding of the complexity of the new Ukrainian self-awareness, the main basis of which is not language, but the desire for freedom, to take another historical opportunity to finally get rid of stifling totalitarianism, to change the post-Soviet social contract and organize life in accordance with a system of democratic values, which puts human beings at the center, along with human rights and freedoms.

The narrative of a "split" based on pro-Russian or pro-Western moods prevailing in particular regions is often illustrated by the results of the 2004 and 2010 presidential elections. But it is worth following the full history of important votes, starting with the vote for independence. Except for Crimea, all regions voted "for" by 83 to 98 percent of the votes. The presidential elections of 1991, 1999, 2014, and 2019 demonstrated the absence of large gaps that would make it possible to speak of a "split." Rather, it is worth taking into account the greater influence of the Russian Federation in the eastern regions of Ukraine and the fact that during these elections not all Ukrainians were guided by the candidates' promises regarding future foreign policy as a factor influencing their decision-making. And although the demonstrative elections of 2004 and 2010 did indeed have significant regional differences in voting results and were a confrontation over the dilemma of whether Ukraine should move towards the East or the West, it is unlikely that Ukraine can really be called irreconcilably divided, and wrong to talk of a "left-bank Ukraine", one that sought to return to Russia. After all, the majority of citizens when voting for a candidate vote in the hope of a better life, choosing between narratives according to which the standard of living in the country will improve due to deeper cooperation with either Russia or the West.

Therefore, when Euromaidan began after the refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the EU, it turned into the Revolution of Dignity, which led to the overthrow of the Yanukovich regime after the beating of protesting students. In its essence, the Revolution was not about rapprochement with the West, but about defending the hope of a democratic, not an authoritarian Ukraine. When security forces in cooperation with the Russian special forces began killing protesters on the Maidan and the Heavenly Hundred appeared, Russia began to invoke separatist sentiments (Russian special forces armed and supervised separatist groups in all South-Eastern regions but operations were successful only in two of them—Donetsk and Luhansk). After the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the war in the east of Ukraine, it became clear to many that the Russian Federation is not the country that would help Ukrainians to live better. Therefore, both the 2014 and 2019 elections showed what Ukrainians are

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89 Konończuk, W. (2013): "Ukraine withdraws from signing the Association Agreement in Vilnius: The motives and implications", OWC. Available at: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2013-11-27/ukraine-withdraws-signing-association-agreement-vilnius-motives-and>.

actually voting for (for changes, cleansing of the government, and a democratic, developed country), and demonstrated the absence of a pro-Russian/pro-Western “split”.

#### NOTE:

The “Heavenly Hundred” are the 104 people who lost their lives on February 18–20, 2014, when Yanukovych's government ordered the shooting of protesters on Kyiv's main square. Some experts believe that the decision was made with the support or directly by order of Russian special forces. These were the days of the fiercest confrontation, which became a turning point in the Revolution of Dignity.

After February 24, 2022 and the thousands of war crimes committed against the civilian population of Ukraine, there is little room for different interpretations in information space in relation to questions about the true attitude of the Russian Federation to Ukraine and of Russians to Ukrainians, or the future that Russia has prepared for its western neighbor (namely genocide). Despite regional, linguistic, and religious differences, Ukrainians have united to protect the country from being taken over by a totalitarian regime and to protect themselves in an existential fight. It is noteworthy that most affected by the actions of the Russian army have been precisely those regions traditionally considered Russian-speaking, and therefore, according to the logic of the Russian Federation, pro-Russian.

But in 2004, the narrative about a “split” dominated. The Atlantic emphasized in its articles that the country is divided into East and West. According to William Schneider, a senior political analyst at CNN and a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, Ukraine is deeply divided internally. Eastern Ukraine is mostly Russian-speaking, Orthodox and pro-Russian. Most people in western Ukraine speak Ukrainian and are members of the Roman Catholic Church. The population of the regions in the west is extremely nationalistic and does not trust Russia.<sup>90</sup>



**Ukraine on the brink**

To the wrong Victor the spoils?

Nov 25th 2004 |

EPA

**“YU-SHCHEN-KO”.** Such rhythmic chanting by the demonstrators in Independence Square and in front of the Rada, Ukraine's parliament week has been both depressing and uplifting. Depressing, because Ukrainian people were protesting against a naked attempt by sup-

**Yulia Tymoshenko under pressure to concede defeat**

**Monitors praise ‘impressive display’ of democracy**

Ukraine's prime minister, Yulia Tymoshenko, was today under pressure to concede defeat in the country's presidential election after international observers this afternoon hailed yesterday's poll as fair and “truly competitive”.

Observers from the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) said there were no indications of serious fraud and described the vote as an “impressive display” of democracy. “For everyone in Ukraine this election was a victory,” João Soares, president of the OSCE's parliamentary assembly, said.

With almost all votes counted, the Russian-leaning opposition leader, Viktor Yanukovich, had a clear 2.6% lead over Tymoshenko. So far, however, Tymoshenko has refused to recognise her opponent's victory, cancelling a press conference scheduled for this afternoon.



**Yanukovych set to become president as observers say Ukraine election was fair**

Yulia Tymoshenko under pressure to concede defeat

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Screenshot 40. Article: “Ukraine on the brink”, The Economist, November 25, 2004. Source: <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2004/11/25/ukraine-on-the-brink>



Screenshot 41. Article: “Yanukovych set to become president as observers say Ukraine election was fair”, The Guardian, February 8, 2010. Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/feb/08/viktor-yanukovych-ukraine-president-election>

<sup>90</sup> Schneider, W. (2004): “Ukraine's ‘Orange Revolution’”, The Atlantic.

Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2004/12/ukraines-orange-revolution/305157/>.



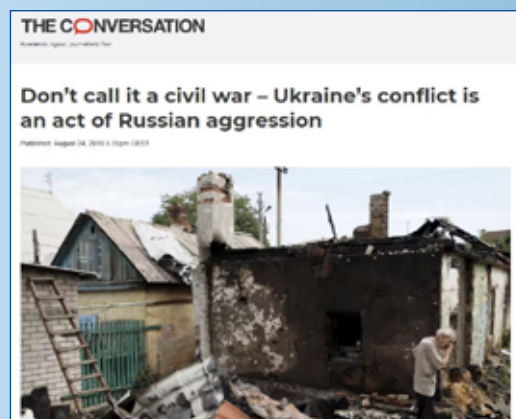
Screenshot 42. Article: "Ukraine Remains Divided after Runoff Election", Der Spiegel, February 8, 2010. Source: <https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/tymoshenko-vs-yanukovich-ukraine-remains-divided-after-runoff-election-a-676466.html>



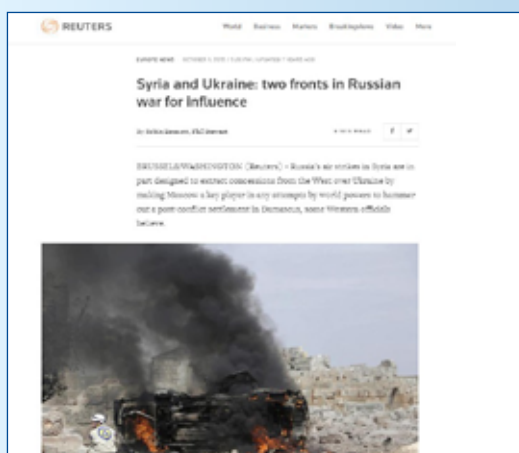
Screenshot 43. Article: "Civil war spreads in eastern Ukraine amid attacks by Kiev government", World Socialist Web Site, May 6, 2014. Source: <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2014/05/06/eukr-m06.html>



Screenshot 44. Article: "Ukraine conflict: Why is east hit by conflict?", BBC, February 18, 2015. Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28969784>



Screenshot 45. Article: "Don't call it a civil war – Ukraine's conflict is an act of Russian aggression", The Conversation, August 24, 2015. Source: <https://theconversation.com/dont-call-it-a-civil-war-ukraines-conflict-is-an-act-of-russian-aggression-46280>



Screenshot 46. Article: "Syria and Ukraine: two fronts in Russian war for influence", Reuters, October 1, 2015. Source: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-ukraine-idUSKCN0RV4RS20151001>



Screenshot 47. Article: "East Ukraine: on the frontline of Europe's forgotten war", The Guardian, August 28, 2016. Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/28/east-ukraine-frontline-europe-forgotten-war>

Observers noted: "By the official count, over 44% of voters, mostly in the Russian-speaking south and east, backed Mr Yanukovich. The danger of the country splitting apart can be exaggerated, but it undeniably exists."<sup>91</sup>

It was this narrative that Yanukovich's campaign headquarters used in 2010. Political consultant Paul Manafort, later convicted and jailed in the United States for fraud, advised Yanukovich to build his campaign on the idea of seemingly radical ideological, linguistic, cultural differences and irreconcilable opposition of Ukrainians on a regional basis. In this campaign, Ukrainians living in the eastern and southern regions were portrayed as fully supportive of rapprochement with Russia and different from the residents of the western regions, who were characterized as nationalists/"Nazis" with pro-Western sentiments.

The "split" card was played once again in 2014, when the Russian Federation began to seriously destabilize the situation in the country, supporting pro-Russian actions and separatist movements.

"The country has been divided more or less evenly between Ukrainians who see Ukraine as part of Europe and those who see it as intrinsically linked to Russia. An internal political crisis over that disagreement may have been inevitable."<sup>92</sup>



**Screenshot 48.** Article: "An end to the war in eastern Ukraine looks as far away as ever", The Economist, October 11, 2018. Source: <https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/10/11/an-end-to-the-war-in-eastern-ukraine-looks-as-far-away-as-ever>



**Screenshot 49.** Article: "EXPLAINER: What's behind the conflict in eastern Ukraine?", AP, April 15, 2021. Source: <https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-shootings-donetsk-moscow-russia-3d2e732cc1a88c0d1b36fe856b45a8a9>

American, Russian and Ukrainian politicians called for "a halt to violence in Ukraine!" and condemned "all extremism, racism and religious intolerance, including anti-Semitism, in the country."<sup>93</sup>

This is how the narrative about the possibility of a civil war appeared. On February 20, 2014, Spiegel Online International, reflecting on the significance of the confrontation in Ukraine, warned of the

91 Schneider, W. (2004): "The future is orange", The Economist, December 29, 2004. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2004/12/29/the-future-is-orange>

92 "Everything you need to know about the 2014 Ukraine crisis", Vox, September 3, 2014. Available at: <https://www.vox.com/2014/9/3/18088560/ukraine-everything-you-need-to-know>

93 "Ukraine crisis talks: Diplomats urge end to violence, security for all", CNN, April 17, 2014. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/04/17/world/europe/ukraine-crisis/index.html>



possible “civil war” in Ukraine.<sup>94</sup> In fact, through the narrative of the civil war, Russia tried to hide the fact that it had launched a war against Ukraine in 2014 and its direct participation in hostilities in the east of Ukraine.<sup>95</sup>

“Too often, the crisis is talked about as if it’s entirely internal to Ukraine, a domestic affair presumably brought on by language politics, identity clashes and historical grievances. Best, therefore, to leave it alone. Wrong. Ukraine is waging a war of self-defense against an international aggressor – the Russian Federation – whose conduct threatens our collective security. This war is now 18 months old, and we should know better by now.”<sup>96</sup>

#### NOTE:

It should be noted that the narrative of the «civil war» was created by the Russian Federation to cover up its role in the start of hostilities in eastern Ukraine. In fact, the Russian Federation launched a war against Ukraine in 2014. Euphemisms such as «anti-terrorist operation» and «joint force operation» were used in an effort to avoid calling it a war until 2022. Despite the lively political life and active civil society, the prerequisites for civil war were created exclusively by Russian special operations. The same applies to the interpretation of the Revolution of Dignity as a «coup organized by Ukrainian nationalists with the support of the West» and «the illegitimacy of the Ukrainian government after 2014.»

After the Revolution of Dignity, Russia organized widespread anti-revolutionary pro-Russian protests in southern and eastern Ukraine. Because they were not successful in most territories, the Russian Federation resorted to military support for the separatists. The hostilities in Donbas began with the seizure in April 2014 of Ukrainian cities in Donetsk and Luhansk regions by Russian units led by officers of Russian special forces. Armed separatists seized Ukrainian government buildings, organized «pseudo-referendums» and declared the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DPR and LPR) independent states. In response to the invasion of subversive units, and with the aim of stopping terrorists and separatists, Acting President of Ukraine Oleksandr Turchynov announced the start of a large-scale anti-terrorist operation (hereinafter – ATO) with the involvement of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. In 2018, it was renamed Operation United Forces.

Those events were not called the Russian–Ukrainian war, because at the beginning the Russian Federation did not acknowledge its participation as a party to the conflict. By 2022, 29 cease-fire agreements had been signed and were not implemented. The Russian Federation transferred heavy weapons and personnel, whom the Russian Federation called volunteers, to Ukraine across the border under the guise of «humanitarian convoys.» All sides agreed to a roadmap to end the war on October 1, 2019, but the fighting has not stopped. Russia officially recognized the DPR and LPR as independent states on February 22, 2022 on the borders of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine. On September 30, 2022, Putin signed documents on the incorporation of the new entities into the Russian Federation, namely Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions, and not only their occupied parts.

By the time the full-scale invasion began on February 24, 2022, more than 14,000 people had died (more than 6,000 pro-Russian separatists, more than 4,000 Ukrainian forces, and more than 3,000 civilians), and another 1.4 million Ukrainians had been forcibly displaced.

In April 2014, the US ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, said on ABC’s “This Week” that the latest events in Ukraine bore “the telltale signs of Moscow’s involvement.”<sup>97</sup> “Freezing the situation in

94 “How the EU Lost Russia over Ukraine”, Spiegel Online International, 2014. Available at: <https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/war-in-ukraine-a-result-of-misunderstandings-between-europe-and-russia-a-1004706.html>.

95 “War, not peace”, The Economist, August 28, 2014. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/europe/2014/08/28/war-not-peace>

96 “Don’t call it a civil war – Ukraine’s conflict is an act of Russian aggression”, The Conversation, August 24, 2015. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/dont-call-it-a-civil-war-ukraines-conflict-is-an-act-of-russian-aggression-46280>

97 Chiacu, D. (2014): “More US sanctions on Russia if Ukraine actions continue: Power”, Reuters, 13 April 2014. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-usa-idUKBREA3C0DM20140413>

Ukraine... serves Putin because it allows him to turn on and off the conflict at will.”<sup>98</sup> In general, most publications called the Russian–Ukrainian war a “conflict” or a “Ukrainian crisis”.

## UKRAINIAN RIGHT-WING RADICALISM

The narrative of Ukrainian nationalism appeared as a Russian interpretation of Ukraine's desire to become a state independent of Russian influence. Unfortunately, it was widely circulated by Western media until the full-scale Russian invasion of 2022 began. After Ukraine gave up nuclear weapons under pressure from the international community, which was accompanied by talks about the threat of Ukrainian “suicidal” nationalism, information bursts about the strengthening of radical right-wing attitudes among the Ukrainian population and the threat of right-wing radicals coming to power always coincided with gains by pro-democratic movements in the country, or the coming to power of democratic and pro-Western forces. In relation to the Orange Revolution (2004), the Revolution of Dignity (2014), and the beginning of the war in the east of Ukraine (2014) the narrative of Ukrainian nationalism has been used again and again for the purpose of manipulation: anti-Russian forces have been called nationalists and Nazis by the Russian Federation.

Since 2014, efforts to highlight the alleged “problem of growing right-wing radicalism” in Ukraine have been used systematically to undermine trust in Ukraine.<sup>99</sup> Although the Revolution of Dignity brought together people of different views, professions, ages, religions, ethnic origins, regions, income levels and even party affiliations on the Maidan, foreign media characteristically focused on protesters with radical views. The purpose of such a narrative is to degrade Ukraine's image in the West and slow down European integration efforts, as these issues are sensitive for the EU.

The protests were demonized because of the participation of Ukrainian right-wing radicals. In particular, Seumas Milne [regarded by many as pro-Russia – ed.] wrote in *The Guardian*: “For the past couple of months street protests in Ukraine have been played out through the western media according to a well-rehearsed script. Pro-democracy campaigners are battling an authoritarian government... You'd never know from most of the reporting that far-right nationalists and fascists have been at the heart of the protests and attacks on government buildings.”<sup>100</sup>

It should be emphasized that radical groups made up a very small share of the patriotic population. Without denying the dangerous tendencies of ultra-nationalism, Ukrainian right-wing forces cannot be compared to Western European ones. Historical fascism, which was created in Germany, Italy, and Spain, seeks the hegemony of its own national state. Instead, Ukrainian nationalism is a rebel nationalism fighting against an occupying power, a totalitarian regime, for its own independence. In fact, radical groups enjoy approval only when their actions are designed to protect Ukrainian statehood. As for the ideas about oppression of national minorities or other groups, the use of violence or the disruption of events, this part of the agenda contradicts the Ukrainian people's struggle for freedom – not only of Ukraine from the Russian Federation, but for the personal freedom of every single person in a democratic and inclusive society.

Without diminishing the need for a critical attitude towards right-wing radical movements, it is worth noting that in Ukraine, far-right ideas have never enjoyed popular support, unlike in the Russian Federation. In the entire history of Ukrainian parliamentarianism, representatives of the extreme right entered the Parliament only once, as a result of the elections in 2012, receiving 10.44 percent of the vote. This was a response to the strengthening of authoritarianism during the Yanukovych presidency.

98 Emmott, R. and Stewart, P. (2015): “Syria and Ukraine: two fronts in Russian war for influence”, Reuters, October 1. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-ukraine-idUSKCN0RV4RS20151001>

99 Matuszak, S. and Olszański, T. (2012): “Euro 2012 – Ukraine's wasted opportunity?”, OSW. Available at: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2012-06-08/euro-2012-ukraines-wasted-opportunity>

100 Milne, S. (2014): “In Ukraine, fascists, oligarchs and western expansion are at the heart of the crisis”, *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jan/29/ukraine-fascists-oligarchs-eu-nato-expansion>



And already after his flight, in the extraordinary elections of 2014, the “Freedom” (Svoboda) party won only 4.71 percent of the votes (742,022 citizens of Ukraine voted for it). Because it had failed to surpass the 5 percent threshold, the party did not enter Parliament. In the same year, Svoboda chairman Oleg Tyagnibok ran in the presidential elections and received the support of only 1.16 percent of voters (210,476 votes).

#### NOTE:

The All-Ukrainian Association “Svoboda” is a Ukrainian conservative-nationalist party launched in 1991 and officially registered in 1995.

On the agenda of this party, which ultimately proved being relevant and reflecting national security interests only after the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation, are the achievement of energy independence for Ukraine, opposition to the policy of Russification, the creation of a single Ukrainian church, the restoration of historical justice (recognizing the fact of the occupation of Ukraine by Bolshevik Russia in 1918–1991, the genocide of Ukrainians in the twentieth century, decommunization, and in particular the prohibition of communist ideology as misanthropic), orientation towards European Ukrainian centrism, introduction of a visa regime with Russia, reform of the armed forces, restoration of Ukraine’s nuclear power status, termination of the Kharkiv Agreement on the extension of the lease on the base of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Ukraine until 2047 and the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukrainian territory, as well as enhanced cooperation with NATO.

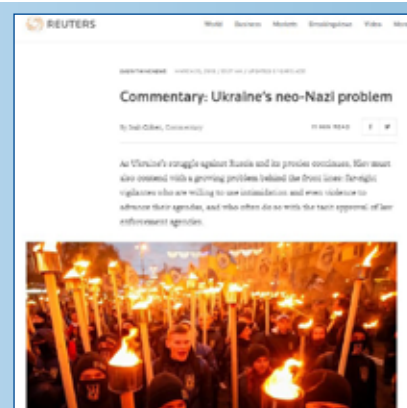
In addition to the “Svoboda” party, there are two more parties whose views can be described as right-wing radical: “National Corps” (chairman Andriy Biletskii entered Parliament as a self-nominated candidate); and “Right Sector” (in the 2014 elections, the party failed to pass the threshold, receiving 1.8 percent of the vote; its only representative in the Verkhovna Rada, Dmytro Yarosh, left the party).



Screenshot 50.  
Article: “The Ukrainian Nationalism at the Heart of ‘Euromaidan’”, The Nation, January 21, 2014. Source: <https://bit.ly/3JNZ6Ua>



Screenshot 51.  
Article: “Far-right party jeopardizes Ukraine's path to democracy”, The Conversation, March 7, 2014. Source: <https://bit.ly/3O21k4x>



Screenshot 52. Article: “Commentary: Ukraine's neo-Nazi problem”, Reuters, March 20, 2018. Source: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cohen-ukraine-commentary-idUSKBN1GV2TY>

The BBC investigation reflected how complex and controversial the topic of the far right movement in Euromaidan was: “even though the far right are a minority, for their numbers they have played an outsized, though not decisive, role.... Bandera for them is nothing more than a symbol of national liberation and defence of Ukraine – which is partly true. Their ubiquitous battle cry, ‘Hail Ukraine!’

Hail the heroes!’, taken from the UPA, has now been largely stripped of its fascist and ethno-centric meaning. Now it means simply what it says: Glory to Ukraine.”<sup>101</sup>

Another perspective on the narrative about Ukrainian right-wing radicals and nationalists emerged at the beginning of the war in the east, which the Russian Federation tried to present as a “civil” war. Coverage of the affiliation of some military personnel to formations of a nationalist nature was intended to call into question the legality of the Ukrainian army’s efforts to protect state sovereignty, to characterize the confrontation with Russian Federation-backed separatists and groups of Russians operating in parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions as a violation of the rights of the Russian-speaking population (in the Russian media it was called a “genocide of the people of Donbas”). The representation of the Ukrainian military as “Nazis” was an attempt to add toxic connotations to the actions of Ukrainian defenders, drawing parallels with the events of the Second World War (this twisted logic is described in more detail in the section devoted to the Russian media).



Articles devoted to "Azov", an unofficial paramilitary organization, were distributed by many international publications. Here are just a few vivid examples in which the concepts of "neo-Nazis" and "fascists" are used as a permanent characteristic of this Ukrainian regiment:

- material published in The Guardian (2018) called "Azov" a "notorious Ukrainian fascist militia";<sup>102</sup>
- The Week (2018) depicted "Azov" as a "militia", and the head of the "National Corps" party, Andriy Biletsky as the current commander of "Azov", although he had not been the military commander of the unit for a long time by that point;<sup>103</sup>
- The Times (2021) mixed up the official "Azov" regiment and the "Azov movement" (the latter is not related to Ukraine's National Guard) and stated that "Azov" is a whole system, consisting of a political party, a "militia", children's camps and recruitment of foreign right-wing radicals.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Ukraine's revolution and the far right, BBC, March 7, 2014. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26468720>

<sup>102</sup> Rawlinson, K. (2018): "Neo-Nazi groups recruit Britons to fight in Ukraine", The Guardian. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3KZQomc>.

<sup>103</sup> "Britons join neo-Nazi militia in Ukraine", The Week, 2018. Available at: <https://bit.ly/44BfoqQ>.

<sup>104</sup> Shuster, S. and Perrigo, B. (2021): "Like, Share, Recruit: How a White-Supremacist Militia Uses Facebook to Radicalize and Train New Members", Time. Available at: <https://time.com/5926750/azov-far-right-movement-facebook/>.

**NOTE:**

This involves an attempt to label Azov, a separate special forces unit of the National Guard of Ukraine, as a foreign terrorist organization.<sup>105</sup> Guided by a false, propagandistic media image, the initiators did not even understand that it was an official unit, not some informal paramilitary formation. In the end, «Azov» never made it onto the list of terrorist organizations.

In fact, Azov was an official organization from the very beginning — first as a battalion of the special police patrol service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and later as part of the National Guard of Ukraine.

The myth promoted by Russian propagandists that the Ukrainian nationalist party “National Corps” is the political wing of “Azov” remains alive in foreign media to this day. For example, the London Times on March 21, 2022 still referred to the “neo-Nazi roots of the regiment” and also used an image of a rally of “National Corps” supporters with the caption “volunteers of the right-wing paramilitary formation ‘Azov’ rally in 2018.”<sup>106</sup> Everything is disinformation here.

The Guardian managed to reflect the full complexity of real life when it comes to assessing the role of far-right groups, however. On one hand, members of right-wing radical groups were among the most fearless defenders of democracy on the Maidan and of the territorial integrity of Ukraine in the east. On the other hand, their radical views on domestic politics, in particular their attitude towards national minorities and the LGBT community, cannot but cause concern. “Despite the presence of these elements, Russian propaganda that claims Kiev’s ‘fascist junta’ wants to cleanse east Ukraine of Russian speakers is overblown. The Azov are a minority among the Ukrainian forces, and even they, however unpleasant their views may be, are not anti-Russian; in fact the lingua franca of the battalion is Russian, and most have Russian as their first language...”<sup>107</sup>

Currently, the duration of the war with Russia is an open question, and even after the signing of a peace agreement, Ukraine will never be able to afford to hope for long periods of peaceful coexistence with its eastern neighbor, unless there are “tectonic” socio-political shifts in the Russian Federation, which in the medium term are unlikely. However, we can confidently expect the growth of radical anti-Russian sentiments in society, and to the same extent among the Ukrainian-speaking and Russian-speaking populations. Ukraine, which has experienced the most brutal atrocities since the Second World War, will not be ready for a “reconciliation dialogue” with the Russians for many years, especially given the dim prospect of punishing war criminals, starting with the leadership of the Russian Federation.

## OCCUPATION, ANNEXATION AND FEDERALIZATION

After 2014, the Russian Federation implemented its policy of dividing Ukraine and absorbing Ukrainian territories in two ways: military intervention and an information operation to promote the idea of federalization. And if in the Western media, the narrative about the non-recognition of the occupation of Crimea and Russia’s support for separatists in the east of Ukraine quickly killed the Russian narrative about the legitimacy of the referendum in Crimea and the “civil war”, then the promotion of the narrative about federalization during the next eight years posed a threat to Ukraine.

The occupation and annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea is a unique historical and political event: “the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea not only constituted the most serious breach of

<sup>105</sup> «Azov» regiment: about us. Available at: <https://azov.org.ua/pro-nas/>.

<sup>106</sup> “Fighting Russia takes focus off Azov Battalion’s Nazi roots”, The Times, 2022. Available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/fighting-russia-takes-focus-off-azov-battalions-nazi-roots-x07lkjl7r>.

<sup>107</sup> “Azov fighters are Ukraine’s greatest weapon and may be its greatest threat”, The Guardian, September 10, 2014. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/10/azov-far-right-fighters-ukraine-neo-nazis>

Europe's borders since the Second World War, but it has undermined global efforts to curb the spread of nuclear weapons,"<sup>108</sup> as Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada (2017–2019) put it, quoted on CTV News. During 2014–2018, the media wrote that Crimea is a powder keg,<sup>109</sup> explained the security threats,<sup>110</sup> tried to understand why it is so important for the Russian Federation,<sup>111</sup> and investigated the history of the peninsula,<sup>112</sup> checking the veracity of Russian statements about their historical "right" to this territory and "Khrushchev's mistake".<sup>113</sup> There were also articles about the reaction of the West<sup>114</sup> and the impact of sanctions.<sup>115</sup>

"For Putin, and for many Russians, Crimea has been a small part of Russia, heavy with historic and symbolic importance, trapped in a foreign land since the 1991 collapse of the USSR which saw it become part of an independent Ukraine."<sup>116</sup> The New York Times emphasized that Russia has significant military and strategic interests in Crimea, and also wrote that Russia's "deep historical ties" with Crimea and its interest in Crimean naval bases explain why President Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin have been so adamant against European efforts to strengthen ties with Ukraine.<sup>117</sup>

The Western press wrote a lot about non-recognition of the illegal referendum on the annexation of Crimea as Russian territory, organized under the muzzles of Russian machine guns. The Economist in its articles devoted to the annexation of Crimea emphasizes that Russia actually occupied Crimea, a part of sovereign Ukraine, under the false pretext of protecting the Russian-speaking population.<sup>118</sup>

Observers wrote a lot about the population structure of the peninsula, emphasizing the fact that ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers predominate on the territory of Crimea. This can be seen as playing along with the Russian narrative about protecting Ukraine's Russian-speaking population. There were even assumptions that sooner or later Crimea would have to be recognized as Russian. "The U.S and European Union may want to save Crimeans from themselves. But the Crimeans are happy right where they are... Little has changed over the last 12 months. Despite huge efforts on the part of Kiev, Brussels, Washington and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the bulk of humanity living on the Black Sea peninsula believe the referendum to secede from Ukraine was legit. At some point, the West will have to recognize Crimea's right to self rule. Unless we are all to believe that the locals polled by Gallup and GfK were [influenced by] FSB bogey men standing by with guns in their hands."<sup>119</sup>

108 Blanchfield, M. (2018): "Freeland's view of global clash of ideologies has Putin, Russia at its heart", CTV News, April 20, 2018. Available at: <https://bit.ly/47WG6xd>

109 "Black Sea Powder Keg", Radio România Actualități, December 9, 2018. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3EBQUU5>

110 "West warns Russia amid rising tensions in Crimea", BBC, February 27, 2014. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26366700>

111 "Crimea, a symbol of Russian identity vital for Putin's legacy", Reuters, March 12, 2014. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-crimea-putin-idINDEEA2C08H20140313>

112 "Applying history in Crimea", DW, August 3, 2014. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/caucasus-history-almost-repeats-itself-in-crimea/a-17482549>

113 "Why Putin's wrong to blame my great-grandfather Khrushchev", CNN, March 21, 2014. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/03/21/opinion/putin-khrushchev/index.html>

114 "Crimea an 'inseparable' part of Russia, Putin tells parliament", France 24, March 18, 2014. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3R3mG3w>

115 "Crimea: The cost of sanctions and the risk of retaliation", EURACTIV, October 4, 2016. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3L6LLqv>

116 "Crimea, a symbol of Russian identity vital for Putin's legacy", Reuters, March 12, 2014. Available at: <https://reut.rs/300FAZ6>

117 Herszenhorn, D. (2014): "Crimea's Bloody Past Is a Key to Its Present", The New York Times. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/28/world/europe/crimeas-bloody-past-is-a-key-to-its-present.html>

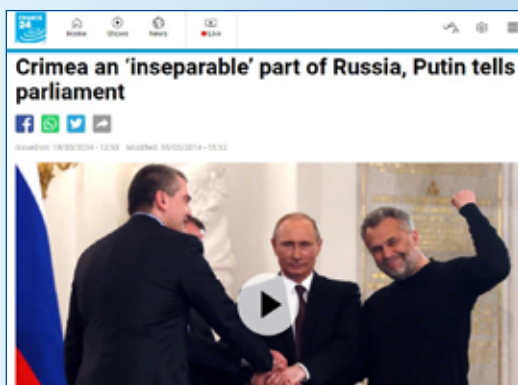
118 "The end of the beginning?", The Economist, 2014. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3srcY0y>

119 "One Year After Russia Annexed Crimea, Locals Prefer Moscow To Kiev", Forbes, March 20, 2014. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2015/03/20/one-year-after-russia-annexed-crimea-locals-prefer-moscow-to-kiev/>





Screenshot 55. Article: "Black Sea Powder Keg", Radio România Actualități, December 9, 2018. Source: <https://www.romania-actualitati.ro/news-in-english/black-sea-powder-keg-id118073.html>



Screenshot 57. Article: "Crimea an 'inseparable' part of Russia, Putin tells parliament", France 24, March 18, 2014. Source: <https://www.france24.com/en/20140318-crimea-inseparable-part-russia-vladimir-putin-tells-parliament-ukraine>



Screenshot 58. Article: "The end of the beginning?", The Economist, March 6, 2014. Source: <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2014/03/06/the-end-of-the-beginning>



Screenshot 56. Article: "Crimea, a symbol of Russian identity vital for Putin's legacy", Reuters, March 12, 2014. Source: <https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-crimea-putin-idINDEEA2C08H20140313>



Screenshot 59. Article: "Why Putin's wrong to blame my great-grandfather Khrushchev", CNN, March 21, 2014. Source: <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/03/21/opinion/putin-khrushchev/index.html>

Given that the Russian Federation has long pursued a policy of genocide of the ethnic population, its deportation and substitution with ethnic Russians, as well as Russification of peninsular inhabitants of all ethnicities, and taking into consideration the status of the peninsula, which had wide autonomy before annexation, such comments can be considered an attempt to reconcile the world community with the fact of aggression and promote a fast return to business as usual with RF. This is why the sanctions introduced after 2014 had almost no effect on the Russian Federation and were considered by some experts as too moderate. "Despite pressure from many European Union member states and the US, Steinmeier and Chancellor Angela Merkel initially managed to prevent swifter sanctions. They wanted to attempt to resolve the Crimean crisis through talks. The strategy ultimately failed because of Putin's intransigence."<sup>120</sup>

In this context, there is also a counter-narrative: "The Kremlin media's well-known narrative of a supposedly almost unanimous support among Crimea's population as well as of the allegedly profound historical justification for the annexation has many supporters not only in Russia, but also among numerous Western politicians, journalists, experts, and diplomats. Often, these commentators consider themselves – in distinction to 'idealistic' defenders of international law – as geopolitical 'realists', or even – in contrast to their overly emotional colleagues – as more 'balanced' observers. To a yet greater extent, this problem is relevant for the discourse of the various German and other so-called Russland- or Putinverstehers [Russia/Putin-understanders], meaning those publicists interested in Eastern Europe who consider themselves as exceptionally empathetic interpreters of the Russian 'soul'. Based on their ostensibly deep knowledge of Russia's character, past and destiny, the Russland-/Putinverstehers typically expose considerable understanding and voice elaborate justifications for the Kremlin's current foreign policies."<sup>121</sup>

Considerable attention was paid to violations of the rights of the Crimean Tatars, who suffered at the hands of Moscow as early as 1944, with the mass deportation of the indigenous population of the peninsula (in 2015, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine recognized this deportation as genocide of the Crimean Tatar population). Repressed during Stalin's time, the people again fell victim to Russian totalitarianism under Putin's rule: "Crimea was hailed as an object of universal pride in Russia. But the enthusiasm is over now. Two years later, another side to Russia's integration of Crimea is more evident: the constant and unshakeable feeling of suspense, Western sanctions, the blockade, intolerance of dissent, and the exiling and persecution of the Crimean Tatars."<sup>122</sup>

The Washington Post covered the referendum as follows: "Russian military action ... was launched Feb. 27 with the seizure of the Crimean parliament building by armed men. Crimea was ultimately annexed by Russia."<sup>123</sup> It emphasized that Russia struck when Ukraine was at its weakest – it was mourning the dead protesters on the Independence Square in Kyiv and trying to form a new government. Analysts underlined that Putin intends to use Crimea as a destabilizing factor and a lever for the further division of Ukraine. Russia's ultimate goal may be to transform Ukraine into a federation with tight Russian control over the eastern regions in order to stop its European integration.

Since 2014, the Russian Federation has demanded that the new government of Ukraine carry out a constitutional reform to transform the state from a unitary to a federal one. Such a change in the administrative system would enable Moscow to strengthen its influence on the "left-bank regions" of Ukraine and put pressure on the central government through them. They would have the right to directly elect their legislative and executive power, to form policies on the economy, social matters,

120 "A High Price for German Business", Der Spiegel, March 17, 2014. Available at: <https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/germany-to-play-central-but-expensive-role-in-sanctions-against-russia-a-959019.html>

121 "Whom Does Crimea Belong to?", Vox Ukraine, August 29, 2018. Available at: <https://voxukraine.org/en/were-there-any-real-historical-grounds-for-the-annexation-of-crimea-by-russia-no/>

122 Abalkin, L. and Bari Urcosta, R. (2016): "Crimea: Russia's stronghold in the Black Sea", European Council of Foreign Relations. Available at: [https://ecfr.eu/article/essay\\_crimea\\_russias\\_stronghold\\_in\\_the\\_black\\_sea/](https://ecfr.eu/article/essay_crimea_russias_stronghold_in_the_black_sea/).

123 Nakashima, E. (2017): "Inside a Russian disinformation campaign in Ukraine in 2014", The Washington Post. Available at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/inside-a-russian-disinformation-campaign-in-ukraine-in-2014/2017/12/25/f55b0408-e71d-11e7-ab50-621fe0588340\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/inside-a-russian-disinformation-campaign-in-ukraine-in-2014/2017/12/25/f55b0408-e71d-11e7-ab50-621fe0588340_story.html)



language, education and external interregional relations, which would allegedly reflect the cultural and historical specificity of each region. These demands were argued on the grounds of the protection of national minorities.

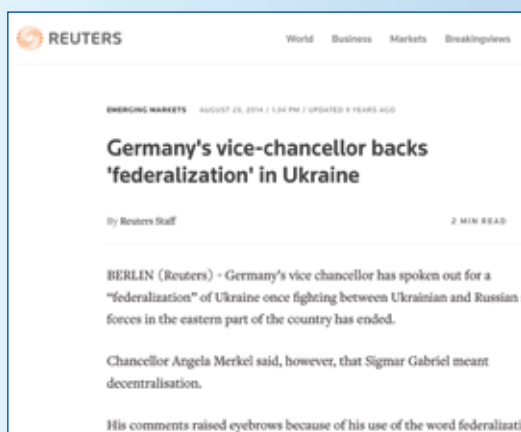
Moscow insisted on the creation of a Constitutional Assembly, which would guarantee the approval of decisions dictated by Russia. In fact, in an ultimatum, Russia demanded that Ukraine give up one of the fundamental rights of a sovereign state, the right to freely determine its own governance, and wanted to render Ukraine incapable of conducting its own domestic and foreign policies. In addition, Russia demanded that the Russian language be given the status of a second official language (the question of the threat that such a decision poses for Ukraine is discussed in the next two sections).



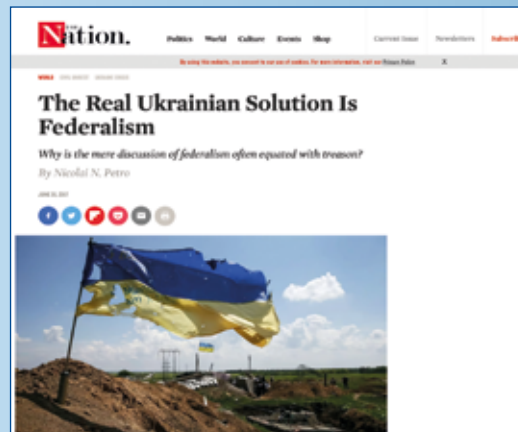
Screenshot 60. Article: "Germany's vice-chancellor backs 'federalization' in Ukraine", Reuters, August 23, 2014. Source: <https://opencanada.org/a-solution-for-ukraine-federalism/>



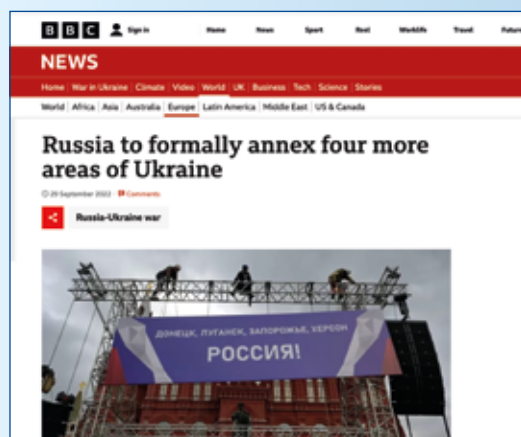
Screenshot 61. Article: "What is Russia's vision of a federal Ukraine?", BBC, April 1, 2014. Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26828625>



Screenshot 62. Article: "Germany's vice-chancellor backs 'federalization' in Ukraine", Reuters, August 23, 2014. Source: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-germany-gabriel-idUSKBN0GN08X20140823>



Screenshot 63. Article: "The Real Ukrainian Solution Is Federalism", The Nation, June 30, 2017. Source: <https://www.thenation.com/archive/the-real-ukrainian-solution-is-federalism/>



Screenshot 64. Article: "Russia to formally annex four more areas of Ukraine", BBC, September 29, 2022. Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63072113>



Screenshot 65. Video: "Putin illegally annexes 4 occupied regions, escalating war as Ukraine applies to join NATO", NBC, September 30, 2022. Source: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/putin-annex-ukraines-donetsk-luhansk-herson-zaporizhzhia-rcna50133>



Screenshot 66. Article: "Russia to annex four Ukrainian regions after sham referendums", Financial Times, September 29, 2022. Source: <https://www.ft.com/content/2a2243cb-d386-4e34-9c34-3ddb84acc9>



Screenshot 67. Article: "Putin signs annexation of Ukraine regions as losses mount", AP, October 6, 2022. Source: <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-international-law-donetsk-9fcd11c11936dd700db94ab725f2b7d6>

"But those suspicious of Russia's motives fear that the real intention is to weaken the central Kiev authorities. This could turn into a mechanism to allow regions to secede and join Russia or decision-making would be constantly subject to approval from regional governments, some of which Russia might hope would be closely allied to Moscow, thereby allowing it to influence Ukraine's allegiances and policies."<sup>124</sup>

However, there were those who were ready to support the idea of the Russian Federation: "The territorial integrity of Ukraine can only be maintained if an offer is made to the areas with a Russian majority. A clever concept of federalization seems to be the only practicable way," as Reuters quoted German Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel as saying. The same opinion was expressed in 2012 by the

<sup>124</sup> "What is Russia's vision of a federal Ukraine?", BBC, April 1, 2014. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26828625>

pro-Russian politician and oligarch, Viktor Medvedchuk: “Federalization is the only medicine against Ukraine’s breaking apart, there’s no alternative.”<sup>125</sup> But after Russia’s annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, a categorical rejection of federalization and decentralization were the only way for Ukraine to preserve its sovereignty and protect its territorial integrity, while at the same time providing greater freedom to the regions.

The idea of transforming Ukraine into a federal state is unacceptable, primarily because of Russia’s prime motive, namely undermining Ukraine’s sovereignty. “By creating a federalist structure you would create regions that are almost autonomous... That relative autonomy could undermine the strength of the central government in Kiev and is a step away from Russians being able to have a referendum along the lines of Crimea – which could then lead to a breakaway... It’s kind of like taking Ukraine one slice at a time.”<sup>126</sup> In order to protect its sovereignty, Ukraine carried out a successful decentralization. The correctness of this approach is confirmed by the Russian Federation’s decision in 2022 to annex the occupied parts of the Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk regions to Russia. “The event echoes Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014, which also followed a discredited referendum and was heralded by a Kremlin signing followed by a presidential victory speech in parliament. That initial annexation has never been recognised by the vast majority of the international community, and nor will this. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said the ‘pseudo-referendums’ were worthless and did not change reality. ‘The territorial integrity of Ukraine will be restored. And our reaction to recognition of the results by Russia will be very harsh’ ”.<sup>127</sup>

## CONFRONTATION BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE WEST ON THE TERRITORY OF UKRAINE

The narrative about the “confrontation between Russia and the West on the territory of Ukraine” appeared in response to the strengthening of democratic processes in Ukraine. It is a variation of the narrative about “Ukraine’s crossroads between the West and the East.” This narrative really took hold after the Orange Revolution of 2004 and became one of the leading explanations for the events in the country after the 2014 Revolution of Dignity. Western journalists often call the Maidan events the “Ukrainian crisis”, which means not only an internal political battle, but also a geopolitical struggle between Russia and the West. In the foreign media, there is a narrative that the Ukrainian revolutions, such as the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity, are only platforms for confrontation between Russia and the Western world, which seems to be splitting Ukraine. By the way, the same narrative is actively exploited by the Russian Federation to justify its full-scale invasion in 2022.<sup>128</sup>

It is interesting that the narrative has a different connotation, depending on whether one takes a pro-Russian or a pro-Western position, both of which have been broadcast by Western publications. In the pro-Russian interpretation, the narrative refers to the efforts of Western countries, primarily the United States, to strengthen their influence in the region, which is portrayed as harmful for Ukraine and threatening the security of Russia. In particular, with the support of the West, nationalist sentiments seem to be intensifying in Ukraine. Concepts seem to have become rather confused here because the pro-Ukrainian part of society deemed “nationalist” is also characterized as “Nazi”. It should be understood, on the contrary, that the pro-Ukrainian position actually consists of a desire to free the nation from the harmful influence of the Russian Federation, which throughout the period of independence has tried to undermine democratic institutions, and make Ukraine economically, politically and culturally weak and dependent. It has been the Western partners, however, who have supported the development of

125 “Plan ‘F’”, DW, April 15, 2014. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/putins-plan-f-for-ukraine/a-17571704>

126 Watkins, T. (2014): “9 questions about Ukraine”, CNN, April 16, 2014. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/04/16/world/europe/ukraine-questions/index.html>

127 “Russia to formally annex four more areas of Ukraine”, BBC, September 29, 2022. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63072113>

128 Bilefsky, D., Pérez-Peña, R. and Nagourney, E. (2022): “The Roots of the Ukraine War: How the Crisis Developed”, The New York Times. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/article/russia-ukraine-nato-europe.html>

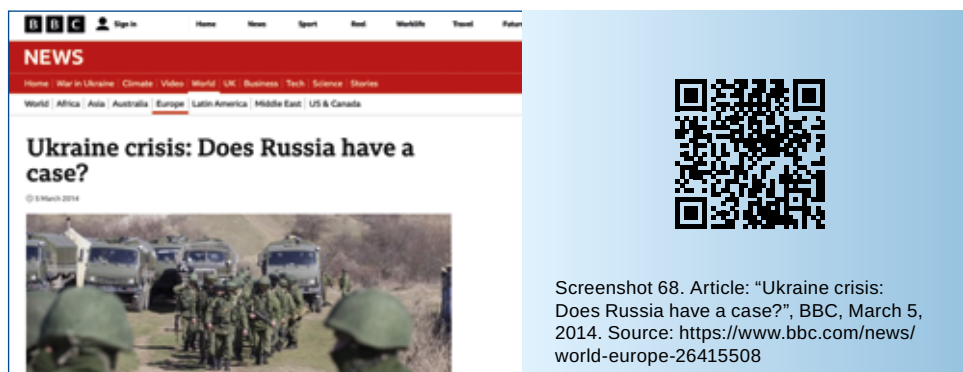
democracy in Ukraine, where society has chosen the dream of life not in a totalitarian, corrupt state like the Russian Federation, but in a country in which human rights are respected, economic and political freedom is guaranteed, there is the rule of law, and conditions are created for the realization of human potential. In the pro-Western interpretation, the West has helped with the democratic development of this post-Soviet country, but the emphasis is often on risks related to disrupting relations with the Russian Federation because of the Ukrainian issue.

Messages of Russian propaganda are present in the Western media, such as the claim that the Ukrainian government is under the direct control of the USA: "The only real source of power in Ukraine is not the electorate, i.e. the people, but the US embassy."<sup>129</sup> "Five years have passed since the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, which began with the Maidan, led to the Kyiv coup and pushed the Donetsk territories to break away from their homeland in order to preserve the Russian identity, which was threatened by the new course of the 'puppet' government of Kyiv, remotely controlled by Washington."<sup>130</sup>

The author also emphasizes that the West's increasing influence in Ukraine is something that Western leaders may not want to acknowledge, fearing a revival of Cold War-era tensions and fueling Russia's long-standing paranoia that the West seems to be surrounding and threatening it.

In the first case, with the help of peaceful protests, Ukrainians have managed to achieve fair elections instead of falsified ones, and in the second case, to launch systemic reforms to establish Ukraine as a democratic European state.<sup>131</sup>

A significant part of the world's leading media saw the annexation of Crimea as a conflict between Russia and the West.



The BBC noted that this is the biggest crisis between Russia and Western countries since the Cold War.<sup>132</sup> The media correctly interpreted the events taking place, indicating that thousands of Russian troops controlled Crimea. Moscow denied that these "polite green men" were Russian soldiers, calling them Crimean "self-defense" forces, although correspondents said they were too well trained and equipped to be irregular militia. However, Russia later admitted that it had sent troops into Ukraine supposedly to protect the Russian-speaking population, and this was also reflected in the world media.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>129</sup> "Völkisches' Gesetz in der Ukraine? Selenskij will Sonderrechte für 'einheimische Völker'", RT.de, 2021. Available at: <https://bit.ly/476v87A>.

<sup>130</sup> "Donbass Trincea D'Europa. 5 Anni dalla Proclamazione della Repubblica di Donetsk", Contro, 2019. Available at: <https://archive.today/2022.04.14-223859/https://www.controinformazione.info/donbass-trincea-deuropa-5-anni-dalla-proclamazione-della-repubblica-di-donetsk-2/>.

<sup>131</sup> "Review of pro-Russian narratives in the media of Germany and Italy about the control and use of Ukraine by the West in its own interests", Vox Ukraine, 2022. Available at: <https://voxukraine.org/oglyad-prorosijkskyh-naratyviv-u-zmi-nimechchyny-ta-italiyi-pro-kontrol-ta-vykorystannya-ukrayiny-zahodom-u-vlasnyh-interesah/>.

<sup>132</sup> "Ukraine crisis: Does Russia have a case?", BBC, 2014. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26415508>.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.



According to the BBC, Russia initially denied the violation of the Budapest Memorandum. But later, Moscow declared that the situation in Ukraine continues to deteriorate after the seizure of power by “radical extremists”, threatening the lives and safety of the residents of Crimea and the southeastern regions. The media also noted that Russia considers the current government to be “unconstitutional and unrepresentative” of the “indigenous” Russian-speaking population, and demands the dissolution of “extremist groups.”

#### NOTE:

It should be noted that the events of 2014 to 2022 were almost never called a war. Such expressions as «Ukrainian crisis» or «Ukrainian conflict» diverted the focus of attention from the aggressor. Ukraine was forced to call the events in the east an «anti-terrorist operation».

Russia still calls its invasion a «special military operation» and indeed on March 4, 2022, criminalized the use of the word «war». Responsibility for spreading «knowingly false information about the activities of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation» and «discrediting Russian troops» is subject to penalties ranging from fines to imprisonment for up to 15 years. During the first three days of this law coming into force in Russia, 60 people were detained on these charges.

These examples show that the use of euphemisms only complicates the analysis of the real situation and harms decision-making processes.

The narrative of “geopolitical confrontation” gained new momentum in 2022. For example, some in the (largely state controlled) Hungarian media have written that the USA is using Ukraine to drag the Kremlin into a long war and continue “American global hegemony”<sup>134</sup> (ed. Hungary’s energy dependence on the Russian Federation and the close relations between these two countries indicate why its media actively uses pro-Russian narratives). In such a scenario, Russia plays the role of a state that seems to be striving to create a multipolar, more just world. Hungarian media has also spread textbook fakes for Russian propaganda purposes. For example, one article mentioned the fiction that the USA was behind the organization of the Euromaidan protests in 2014.<sup>135</sup>

According to the results of VoxCheck monitoring, 373 cases of disinformation about Ukraine were found in the media of Italy, Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary during October 2022 alone.<sup>136</sup> In particular, numerous German media reports refer to the war in Ukraine as a “proxy war” of the West, the USA or NATO against Russia,<sup>137-138</sup> and assert that the war in Ukraine was provoked by NATO<sup>140</sup> and is continued and fueled by the collective West,<sup>141</sup> supplying Ukraine with weapons. Other

134 Hidegkuti, K. (2022): “Bevetné az atomfegyvert Zelenszkij” [Zelensky would deploy nuclear weapons], mostkvater. Available at: <https://moszkvater.com/bevetne-az-atomfegyvert-zelenszkij/>.

135 “Hamis Zászlók Alatt” [Under false flags], Demokrata. Available at: <https://demokrata.hu/velemenye/hamis-zaszlok-alatt-597820/>.

136 Markova, M. and Perevoshchikov, K. (2022): “Propaganda diary: review of Russian disinformation in European media in October 2022”, Vox Ukraine. Available at: <https://voxukraine.org/propaganda-diary-oglyad-rosijskoyi-dezinformatsiyi-v-yevropejskyh-media-u-zhovtni-2022-roku/>.

137 Johnstone, C. (2022): “Die mächtigste Waffe, die der Westen der Ukraine gegeben hat: Notizen vom Rand der narrativen Matrix”, Uncut-news. Available at: <https://uncutnews.ch/die-maechtigste-waffe-die-der-westen-der-ukraine-gegeben-hat-notizen-vom-rand-der-narrativen-matrix/>.

138 “Elon Musks übergroße Rolle im Ukraine-Konflikt bietet einzigartige Chancen”, Uncut-news, 2022. Available at: <https://uncutnews.ch/elon-musks-uebergrosse-rolle-im-ukraine-konflikt-bietet-einzigartige-chancen/>.

139 Stern, J. and Lantier, A. (2022): “EU-Außenminister beschließen, 15.000 ukrainische Soldaten für Krieg gegen Russland auszubilden”, Wswn. Available at: <https://www.wswn.org/de/articles/2022/10/18/npmb-o18.html>.

140 “Äthiopien entlarvt die westliche Heuchelei über die Ukraine”, Uncut-news, 2022. Available at: <https://uncutnews.ch/aethiopien-entlarvt-die-westliche-heuchelei-ueber-die-ukraine/>.

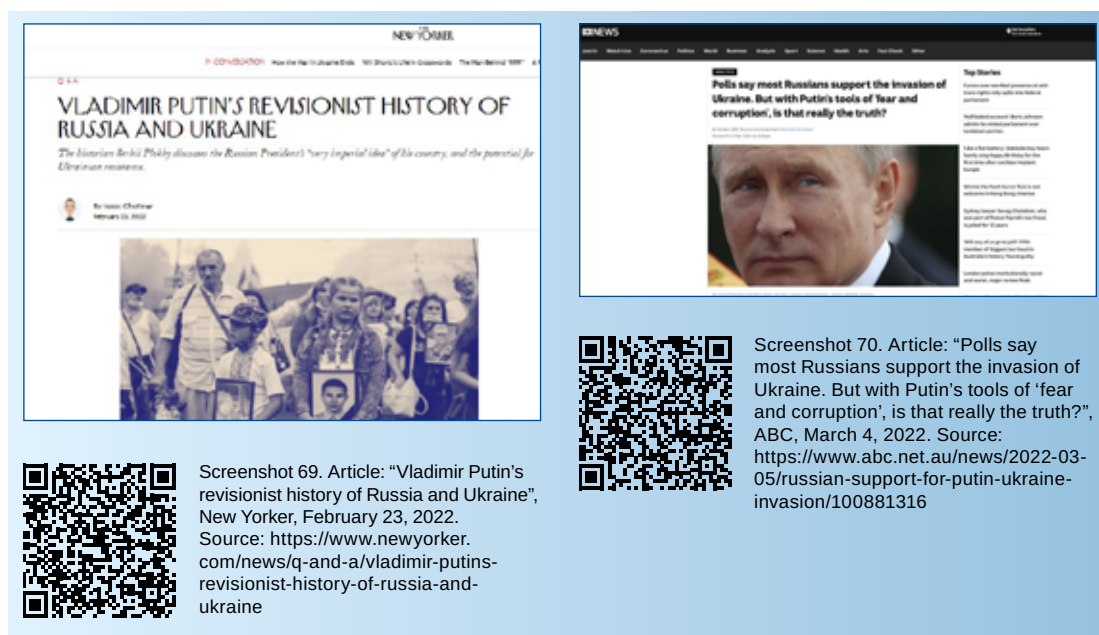
141 “Der Westen verstößt gegen den Vertrag zur Nichtverbreitung von Atomwaffen”, Anti-Spiegel. Available at: [https://www.anti-spiegel.ru/2022/der-westen-verstoest-gegen-die-vertrag-zur-nichtverbreitung-von-atomwaffen/?-doing\\_wp\\_cron=1666479098.5357229709625244140625](https://www.anti-spiegel.ru/2022/der-westen-verstoest-gegen-die-vertrag-zur-nichtverbreitung-von-atomwaffen/?-doing_wp_cron=1666479098.5357229709625244140625)

reports claim that the EU is directly involved in the “conflict with Russia.”<sup>142</sup> In the German pro-Russian media there is a significant number of reports that the USA and NATO are actual participants in the war with Russia in Ukraine.<sup>143</sup>

The Fix investigated Reuters’ coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war.<sup>144</sup> The author, Sofia Padalka, tells the story of cooperation between news agencies, citing examples that indicate that Reuters has used material that plays into the hands of the Russian Federation, in particular, in a full-scale war. The Fix draws attention to the vocabulary of the Reuters material, which distorts the reality of the war. When it comes to Ukrainian territories, often instead of “occupied by Russia” they say “territories supported by Russia” or “supported by Moscow.” This creates the illusion that a civil war is taking place in Ukraine, not full-scale aggression inflicted by one country against another.

In addition to Reuters, of course, other influential media outlets have depicted the situation in Ukraine in a distorted mirror. Some stories about the Russian-Ukrainian war in the international media often lack context because the journalists do not know the history and specifics of relations between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, do not perceive Russia as a terrorist country with imperial ambitions, and do not consider Russians responsible for supporting the actions of their country’s leadership.

When the world’s leading media broadcast pro-Russian narratives to explain the political situation, but do not balance them with pro-Ukrainian ones, it makes it difficult for uninformed readers to form an objective and complete picture of the events.



At the outset of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the world community hoped that the war would end quickly at the negotiating table, so the leading Western media narrative was about “Putin’s war”: they said that Putin had personally given the order for the invasion and that he alone should be responsible for it. Probably in an attempt to motivate Russian people to stand against the war the US President Joe Biden publicly announced: “... You, the Russian people, are not our enemy.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., n. 139.

<sup>143</sup> Margolis, E. (2022): “Den Dritten Weltkrieg stoppen – jetzt”, Antikrieg. Available at: [https://www.antikrieg.com/aktuell/2022\\_10\\_28\\_dendritten.htm](https://www.antikrieg.com/aktuell/2022_10_28_dendritten.htm).

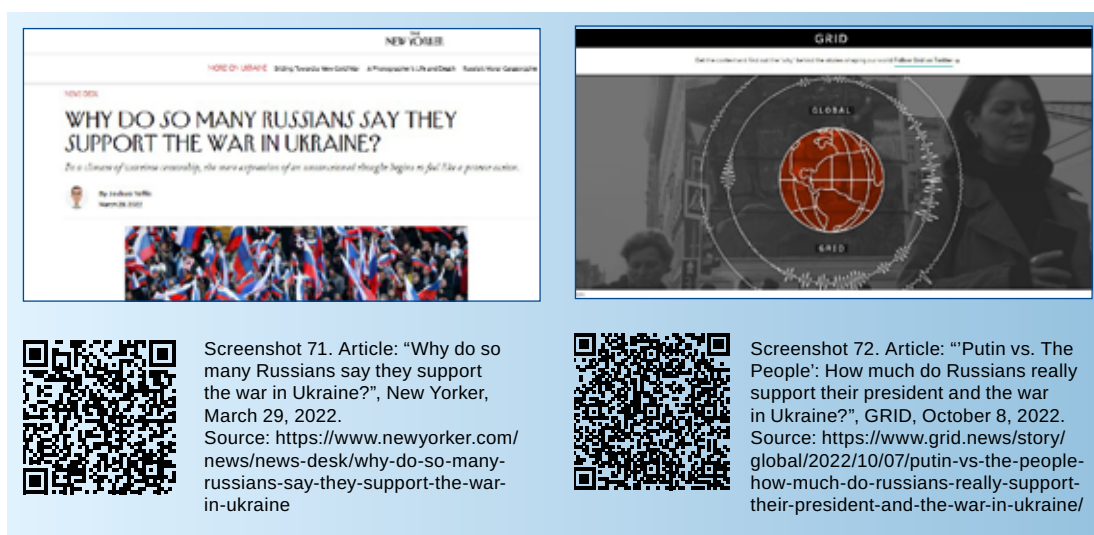
<sup>144</sup> Padalko, S. (2022): “What’s wrong with Reuters coverage of the war in Ukraine”, The Fix. Available at: <https://thefix.media/2022/6/16/whats-wrong-with-reuters-coverage-of-the-war-in-ukraine>.



I refuse to believe that you welcome the killing of innocent children and grandparents or that you accept hospitals, schools, maternity wards that, for God's sake, are being pummeled with Russian missiles and bombs; or cities being surrounded so that civilians cannot flee; supplies cut off and attempting to starve Ukrainians into submission.”<sup>145</sup>

However, the real mood of the Russian people is reflected in a survey by the Russian Levada-Center, conducted jointly with the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. This poll showed that 81 percent of Russians fully or partially support the actions of the Kremlin and Russia's war against Ukraine.<sup>146</sup>

Although Western media often do not deny that Russians support the war against Ukraine, some media still call them victims of propaganda and appeal to people not to resort to Russophobia in culture or education.<sup>147</sup> It is worth noting that weakening Russia's “soft power” is important, because it will help reduce Russia's influence on public opinion in Western countries and protect their population from propaganda. Secondly, despite censorship, in the Russian Federation it is still possible to obtain information from primary sources via the internet, in particular via VPN. In addition, many Russians have the opportunity to receive information about events in Ukraine first-hand – from relatives or friends who live there – but in many cases decided to ignore the uncomfortable truth.<sup>148</sup> This phenomenon needs further careful research.



## A BRAVE COUNTRY DEFENDING THE WHOLE DEMOCRATIC WORLD

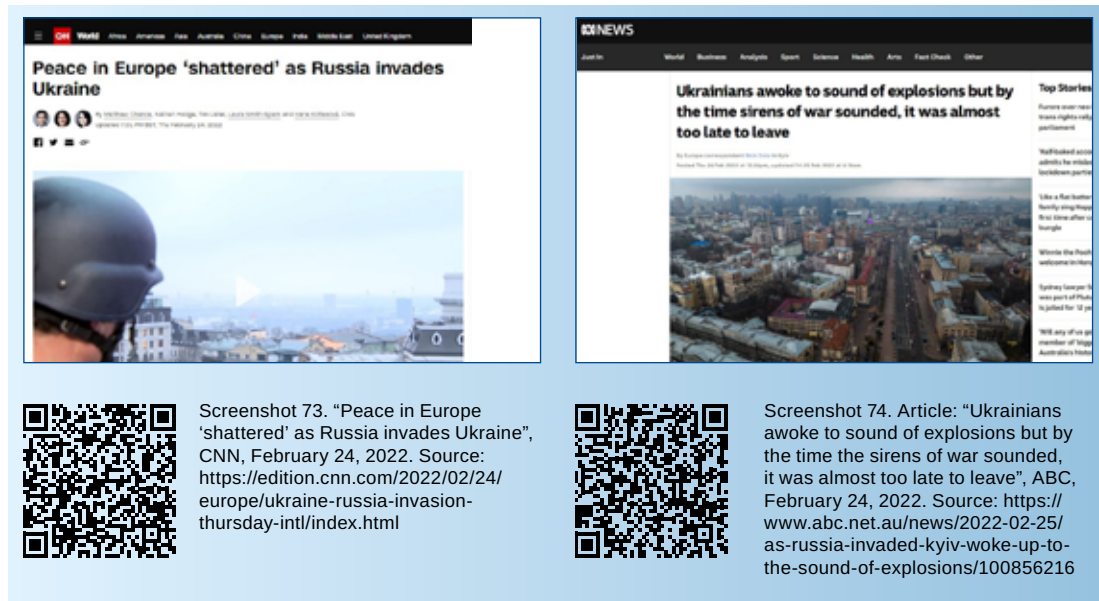
Since the invasion, the attention of the entire world's media has been focused on the events in Ukraine. Ukrainian men and women have been rewriting narratives about their country with their own blood. This will determine their fates and the fates of several generations to come. After initial assessments feared that Kyiv would fall in a few days Ukraine is today perceived by many as a stronghold defending the entire democratic world.

145 “President Biden's speech on unifying the efforts of the free world aimed at supporting the people of Ukraine”, US Embassy in Ukraine, 2022. Available at: <https://bit.ly/44qP8Q5>.

146 Smeltz, D. and Wojtowicz, L. (2022): “Russians think they're engaged in a heroic struggle with the West”, Washington Post. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/04/14/russia-public-opinion-putin-ukraine/>.

147 Butsko, D. (2022): “What does the Western media not understand about the Russian-Ukrainian war?”, Media Detector. Available at: <https://detector.media/infospace/article/198697/2022-04-28-chogo-zakhidni-media-ne-rozumiyut-pro-rosiysko-ukrainsku-viynu/>.

148 Davlikanova, Olena (2023): Russian Victim-Blaming Unmasked, Center for European Policy Analysis, June 20, 2023. Available at: <https://cepa.org/article/russian-victim-blaming-unmasked/>



Experts' opinions were changing every day as the Ukrainian nation managed to withstand this unprovoked, senseless and brutal Russian aggression. On the first day of the invasion one often expressed view – stated, for example, by Pavel Felgenhauer, a Moscow-based defense analyst, and presented on Deutsche Welle – was that "Pentagon generals believed that in 72 hours, the Ukrainian organized resistance would collapse and then it would maybe become guerrilla warfare".<sup>149</sup> Later the discussion gradually developed around the evident fact that Russia was finding it difficult to achieve its officially undeclared goals. "But in these first few days of the war, a rapid Ukrainian collapse is starting to look like an increasingly remote possibility – and if Russia does attain victory, it will do so at a significantly higher cost than President Vladimir Putin seems to have expected".<sup>150</sup> "Putin failed to achieve his goal of quickly crushing Ukraine's outgunned and outnumbered army. The Russians were ill-prepared for Ukrainian resistance, proved incapable of adjusting to setbacks, failed to effectively combine air and land operations, misjudged Ukraine's ability to defend its skies, and bungled basic military functions like planning and executing the movement of supplies."<sup>151</sup>

Successes on the battlefield provided a basis for discussing the question of what exactly would constitute victory for Ukraine and defeat for Russia. "Kyiv was a Russian defeat for the ages. The fight started poorly for the invaders and went downhill from there".<sup>152</sup> Various options were put forward, from repelling the attack on Kyiv and maintaining independence in part of its territories, to Ukraine recovering the territories it controlled until February 24, 2022, and even 2014. The most widespread opinion of that period concerned a "small victory" on the part of Ukraine, namely the gradual restoration of control over the territories lost after February 24, 2022. Restoration of control over Crimea and Donbas was deemed unlikely because of the great symbolic importance of Crimea for Russia and the Ukrainian Army's insufficient (for that task) offensive capabilities and skills.<sup>153</sup>

149 "What next as Russia's military offensive stalls", DW, February 27, 2022. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/putin-eyes-next-phase-as-military-advance-held-up-by-ukrainian-resistance/a-60937071>

150 "Why the first few days of war in Ukraine went badly for Russia", Vox, February 28, 2022. Available at: <https://www.vox.com/22954833/russia-ukraine-invasion-strategy-putin-kyiv>

151 "Russia's failure to take down Kyiv was a defeat for the ages", AP, April 7, 2022. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-battle-for-kyiv-dc559574ce9f6683668fa221af2d5340>

152 Ibid.

153 "What if Ukraine Wins? Victory in the War Would Not End the Conflict with Russia", Foreign Affairs, 2022. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-06-06/what-if-ukraine-wins>

**How a Russian invasion of Ukraine, the 'breadbasket of Europe,' could hit supply chains**

Published: Feb. 23, 2022 10:16 AM EST | Updated: Feb. 23, 2022 3:20 PM EST

**KEY POINTS**

- Russia is also the world's top wheat exporter. Together with Ukraine, both account for roughly 25% of the global wheat export market.
- China is also a big recipient of Ukrainian corn — in fact, Ukraine replaced the U.S. as China's top corn supplier in 2021, said Owen Turek, president of Sourcing Industry Group.
- Russia and Ukraine are also big suppliers of metals and other commodities, analysts said.
- While the European Union would be affected by the escalating crisis, Germany would be especially hit.

Water grows for some grains from rainfall since the Russian climate isn't arid, with soil moisture contributing a significant amount to the growth of crops.

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**Ukraine fighting to stop 'a new iron curtain' after Russian invasion**

President calls on Ukrainians to defend country as Russia claims to have 'neutralised' air defences

Russia Ukraine invasion latest news follow live updates

Luke Harding and Emma Garbano-Swarrows in Kyiv, Andrew Roth and Piotr Sauer in Ukraine, Julian Burger in Washington and Sam Jones

Thu 24 Feb 2022 18:09 GMT

Russia has invaded Ukraine: what we know so far - video report

Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, has said his compatriots are fighting to stop "a new iron curtain" falling across the country after Russian forces launched a huge and long-declared invasion that has sparked fears of the biggest war Europe has seen since 1945.

Screenshot 75. Article: "How a Russia invasion of Ukraine, the 'breadbasket of Europe', could hit supply chains", CNBC, February 23, 2022. Source: <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/02/23/impact-of-russia-ukraine-on-supply-chains-food-metals-commodities.html>

Screenshot 76. Article: "Ukraine fighting to stop 'a new iron curtain' after Russian invasion", The Guardian, February 24, 2022. Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/24/russia-attacks-ukraine-news-vladimir-putin-zelenskiy-russian-invasion>

**Ucraina e Russia in guerra, i bimbi di Kiev a scuola con il gruppo sanguigno sulla manica. I genitori: abbiamo paura**

A Kiev le famiglie si rifugiano nei semi-interrati e nelle sinagoghe. Qualcuno prova a scappare. I bambini stringono forte le mani dei genitori e scoprono la guerra sulla pelle

1,2 mila storie

Ucraina sotto assedio. Minuti di tregua a Kiev

Ucraina, Катерина Романова: di bambini non meritiamo la guerra

Ucraina, cosa sono difetto è a Berlino di stato Nato i generali possono farlo.

Ucraina, i bambini di guerra: i genitori sono angosciati

**Why the first few days of war in Ukraine went badly for Russia**

Russia banked on Kyiv falling quickly. Here's why it hasn't.

By Jack Rosenthal (@jackrosenthal) | @vox.com | Feb 28, 2022, 4:04pm EST

Stop: requiring college degrees for jobs that don't need them

Your brain may not be quite as sharp as you think

What YouTube's latest games are really selling you

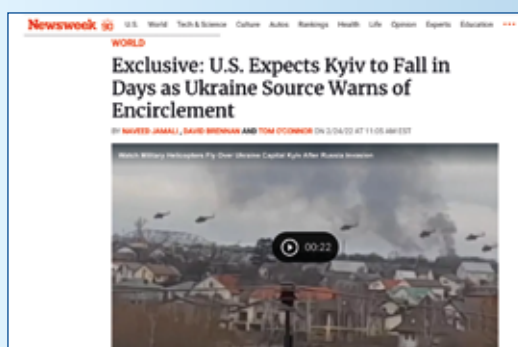
The case for slowing down AI

Joe Biden's first vote taken on 'Republican' seat as 'senior representative'

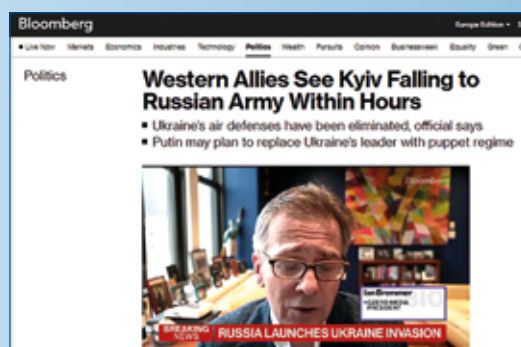
Screenshot 77. Article: "Ukraine and Russia are at war, Kyiv children at school with blood type mark on their sleeves. Parents: We are afraid", LEGGO, February 24, 2022. Source: [https://www.leggo.it/mondo/guerra\\_ucraina\\_bambini\\_scuola\\_cosa\\_sta\\_succedendo\\_news\\_ultime\\_notizie-6525243.html?refresh\\_ce](https://www.leggo.it/mondo/guerra_ucraina_bambini_scuola_cosa_sta_succedendo_news_ultime_notizie-6525243.html?refresh_ce)

Screenshot 78. Article: "Why the first few days of war in Ukraine went badly for Russia", VOX, February 28, 2022. Source: <https://www.vox.com/22954833/russia-ukraine-invasion-strategy-putin-kyiv>

The topic of conducting military operations on the territory of the Russian Federation remains taboo. Direct confrontation of NATO and the Russian Federation is something to be avoided, although ideas about the need to demilitarize the Russian Federation and hopes for the continuation of the division of the Russian neo-empire into independent states are beginning to be heard. Opinions are being voiced about the future "controlled defeat" of Russia instead of Ukraine's ultimate victory.



Screenshot 79. Video: "Exclusive: U.S. Expects Kyiv to Fall in Days as Ukraine Source Warns of Encirclement", Newsweek, February 24, 2022. Source: <https://www.newsweek.com/us-expects-kyiv-fall-days-ukraine-source-warns-encirclement-1682326>



Screenshot 80. Article: "Western Allies See Kyiv Falling to Russian Army Within Hours", Bloomberg, February 24, 2022. Source: <https://bit.ly/3D6x1DF>



Screenshot 81. Article: "German mass media agree: the attack on Ukraine is only the beginning. 'The darkness over Europe will last for years'", Wyborcza, February 25, 2022. Source: <https://bit.ly/3JQqG2U>



Screenshot 82. Article: "The war in Ukraine: the food industry is experiencing a major upheaval", Le Figaro, February 28, 2022. Source: <https://www.lefigaro.fr/societes/guerre-en-ukraine-la-filiere-alimentaire-face-a-un-choc-majeur-20220228>

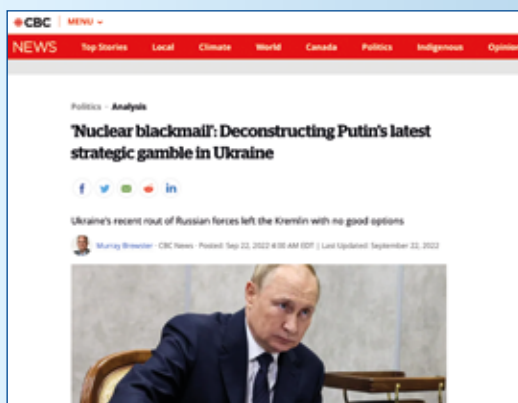


Screenshot 83. Article: "Ukraine Is Already Paying Us Back", Politico, April 1, 2022. Source: <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2023/01/04/ukraine-democracy-investment-00076180>



Screenshot 84. Article: "The war in Ukraine is on track to be among modern history's bloodiest", The Washington Post, June 23, 2022. Source: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2022/06/23/ukraine-war-deaths-soldiers-history/>

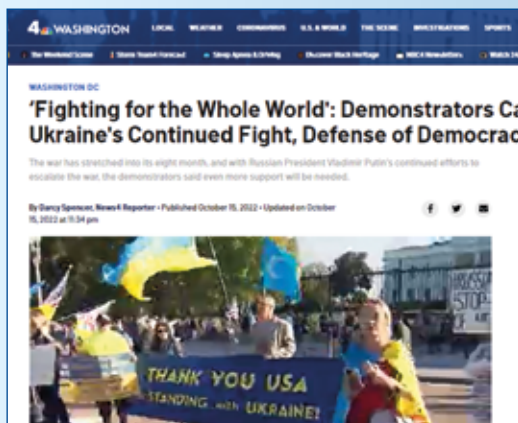




Screenshot 85. Article: "Nuclear blackmail: Deconstructing Putin's latest strategic gamble in Ukraine", CBC, September 22, 2022. Source: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/ukraine-russia-nuclear-crimea-1.6590669>



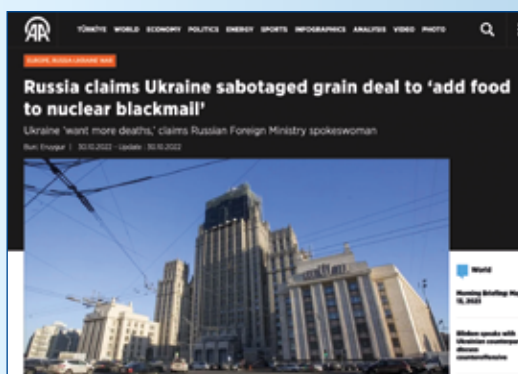
Screenshot 86. Article: "Ukraine Accuses Russia of 'Nuclear Blackmail' over Zaporizhzhia Plant", US News, October 6, 2022. Source: <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2022-10-06/ukraine-accuses-russia-of-nuclear-blackmail-over-zaporizhzhia-plant>



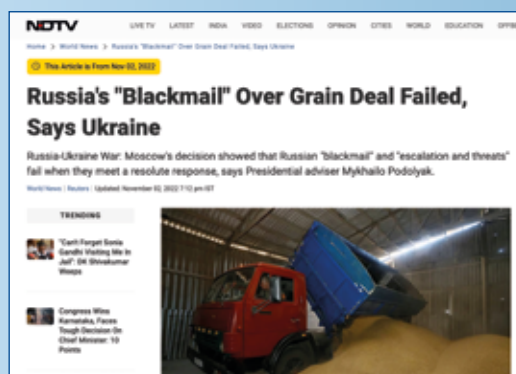
Screenshot 87. Article: "Fighting for the Whole World: Demonstrators Call Attention to Ukraine's Continued Fight, Defense of Democracy", NBC Washington, October 15, 2022. Source: <https://bit.ly/3NJfoYQ>



Screenshot 88. Article: "Kidnapped children: how Russia appropriates the children of Ukraine", Nicola Porro, October 18, 2022. Source: <https://bit.ly/3O6kZQT>



Screenshot 89. Article: "Russia claims Ukraine sabotaged grain deal to 'add to nuclear blackmail'", AA, October 30, 2022. Source: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/russia-claims-ukraine-sabotaged-grain-deal-to-add-food-to-nuclear-blackmail-12724916#>



Screenshot 90. Article: "Russia's 'Blackmail' over Grain Deal Failed, Says Ukraine", NDTV, November 2, 2022. Source: <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/russia-ukraine-war-russian-blackmail-over-grain-deal-failed-says-ukraine-3484069>

However, the threat of a Third World War – although this might be said to have begun in 2014 – the use of nuclear weapons, famine in African countries, inflation and other challenges facing humanity due to the aggression of the Russian Federation have been raised as arguments by part of the expert community in relation to the need to resolve the issue at the negotiating table before the de-occupation of the territories captured by the Russian Federation, the termination of the supply of weapons to Ukraine and the prevention of the defeat of the Russian Federation and Putin's personal humiliation. If the international community succumbed to such persuasion, it would repeat the historical mistake of failing to respond to Russian aggression in 2014 – the side that wins this war will determine the new world order.

Using Western spokespersons and media, Kremlin propaganda has tried to promote a narrative about the need for peace talks with Russia on its, the aggressor's, terms. In *The American Conservative*, retired US Army Colonel Douglas McGregor stated that the only solution to the "Ukrainian conflict" is "peace negotiations and recognition of Russia's legitimate security interests in the region."<sup>154</sup> This editorial and other articles transmit narratives about the inexpediency of providing weapons to Ukraine<sup>155</sup> and a "new escalation due to support for Ukraine."<sup>156</sup>

In the first phase of the full-scale war, in certain quarters among Western scholars and experts there were frequent calls to hand over Crimea to Russia and fulfill its demands for "autonomy" in Donbas, fearing the start of the Third World War<sup>157</sup> and blaming the USA for "blocking negotiations",<sup>158</sup> which would be a "fatal mistake" for the entire democratic world.

It was because of such narratives that Ukraine was pushed to make peace, but on terms favorable to the Russian Federation, including Ukraine's renunciation of Crimea and the previously occupied territories in the east, so as not to create a "humiliating defeat"<sup>159</sup> for Russia, as this could undermine European stability. The clash between supporters of the view that Russian humiliation should be avoided and proponents of the idea that the West should stop fearing it<sup>160</sup> has intensified in the meantime.

The narrative about the dilemma between the need to help "brave Ukrainians" and the "threat of a limited conflict turning into the Third World War" was spread by German philosopher Jürgen Habermas. He put forward the thesis that a war against a nuclear state cannot be won with military force alone, and therefore, in his opinion, a direct confrontation between the West and the Russian Federation should be avoided at all costs and each additional degree of military support should be carefully weighed.<sup>161</sup> Henry Kissinger also called on Western countries to persuade Ukraine to negotiate with Russia and return to the status quo as it stood at the time of the full-scale Russian invasion.<sup>162</sup>

154 Macgregor, D. (2022): "Washington Is Prolonging Ukraine's Suffering", *The American Conservative*, December 20, 2022. Available at: <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/washington-is-prolonging-ukraines-suffering/>

155 Dreher, R. (2023): "Ukraine: Whose War Is This Anyway?", *The American Conservative*, January 11, 2023. Available at: <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/ukraine-whose-war-is-this-anyway/>

156 Ahmari, S. (2023): "Laurels for Sanity on Ukraine", *The American Conservative*, January 24, 2023. Available at: <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/laurels-for-sanity-on-ukraine/>

157 "Noam Chomsky on How To Prevent World War III", *Current Affairs*, April 13, 2022. Available at: <https://www.currentaffairs.org/2022/04/noam-chomsky-on-how-to-prevent-world-war-iii>

158 "War and Indignation. The West's Red Line Dilemma", *Reset*, June 6, 2022. Available at: <https://www.resetdoc.org/story/jurgen-habermas-war-indignation-west-red-line-dilemma/>

159 "Russia's defeats in Ukraine have strategists worried about Moscow's next move", *CNBC*, September 13, 2022. Available at: <https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/13/how-russia-could-react-after-its-humiliating-defeats-in-ukraine.html>

160 Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/06/03/west-shouldnt-fear-humiliating-russia-vladimir-putin-has-done/>

161 "War and Indignation. The West's Red Line Dilemma", *Reset*, May 6, 2022. Available at: <https://www.resetdoc.org/story/jurgen-habermas-war-indignation-west-red-line-dilemma/>

162 "Kissinger says Ukraine should cede territory to Russia to end war", *The Washington Post*, May 24, 2022. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/24/henry-kissinger-ukraine-russia-territory-davos/>





Screenshot 91. Article: "Ukraine can win, says US, as fightback frustrates Putin's plan for swift victory", The Guardian, March 5, 2022. Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/05/ukraine-claims-battlefield-successes-as-mariupol-evacuation-falls-apart-russia>



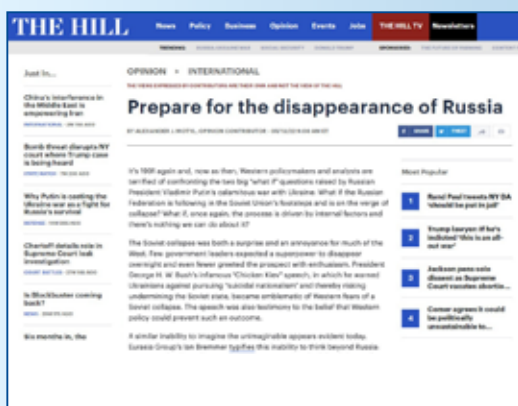
Screenshot 92. Article: "Bill Ackman says Russia's attack on Ukraine means World War III has likely already started", CNBC, March 7, 2022. Source: <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/03/07/russia-ukraine-bill-ackman-says-world-war-iii-likely-already-started.html>



Screenshot 93. Article: "Noam Chomsky on How To Prevent World War III", Current Affairs, April 13, 2022. Source: <https://www.currentaffairs.org/2022/04/noam-chomsky-on-how-to-prevent-world-war-iii>



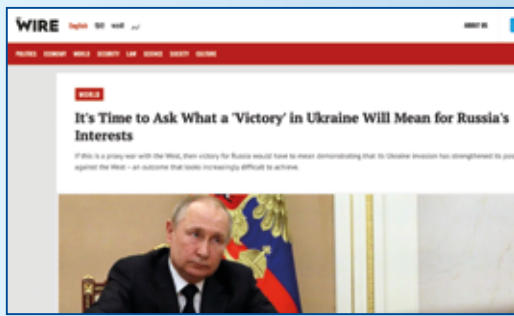
Screenshot 94. Article: "What would victory actually mean now for Ukraine - and for Europe?", The Guardian, May 2, 2022. Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/may/02/russia-defeat-ukraine-vital-peace-security-europe>



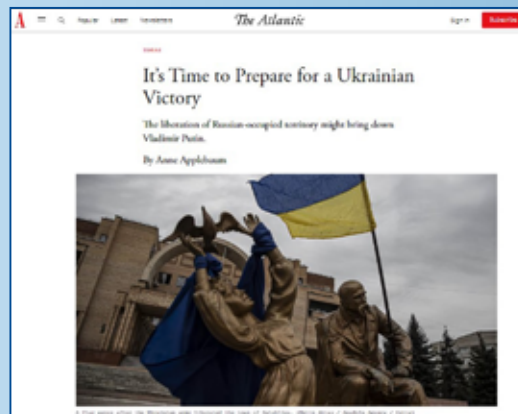
Screenshot 95. Article: "Prepare for the disappearance of Russia", The Hill, May 13, 2022. Source: <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/3483799-prepare-for-the-disappearance-of-russia/>



Screenshot 96. Article: "Ukraine is furious when Macron says 'Don't humiliate Putin'", BBC, June 4, 2022. Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61691816>



Screenshot 97. Article: "It's Time to Ask What a 'Victory' in Ukraine Will Mean for Russia's Interests", Wire, August 1, 2022. Source: <https://thewire.in/world/its-time-moscow-debated-what-a-victory-in-ukraine-will-mean-for-russias-interests>



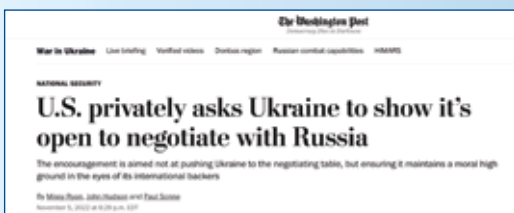
Screenshot 98. Article: "It's Time to Prepare for a Ukrainian Victory", The Atlantic, September 11, 2022. Source: <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/09/ukraine-victory-russia-putin/671405/>



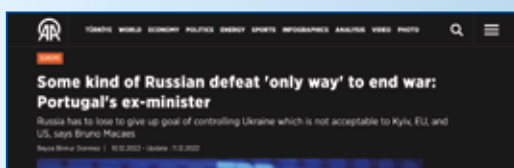
Screenshot 99. Article: "How Does Ukraine Define Victory?" Forbes, September 13, 2022. Source: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/katyasoldak/2022/09/13/how-does-ukraine-define-victory/>



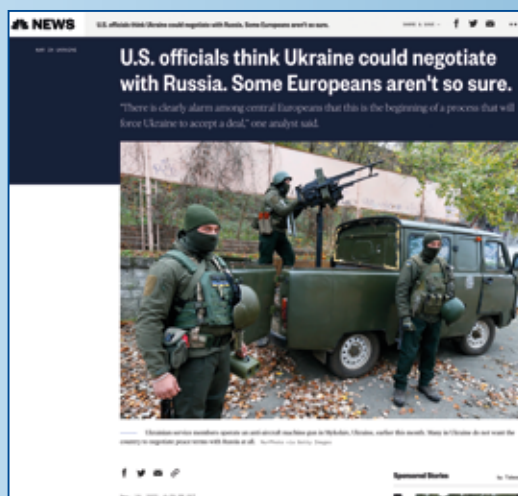
Screenshot 100. Article: "Putin warns a NATO-Russia clash would bring 'global catastrophe' as mobilisation set to end in two weeks", LBC, October 14, 2022. Source: <https://www.lbc.co.uk/news/putin-warns-nato-russia-clash-would-bring-global-catastrophe/>



Screenshot 101. Article: "U.S. privately asks Ukraine to show it's open to negotiate with Russia", The Washington Post, November 5, 2022. Source: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/11/05/ukraine-russia-peace-negotiations/>



Screenshot 102. Article: "Some kind of Russian defeat 'only way' to end war: Portugal's ex-minister", AA, December 10, 2022. Source: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/some-kind-of-russian-defeat-only-way-to-end-war-portugals-ex-minister/2760470>



Screenshot 103. Article: "U.S. officials think Ukraine could negotiate with Russia. Some Europeans aren't so sure", NBC, November 18, 2022. Source: <https://bit.ly/3JVhmLd>

**Ukraine war: The West is united for now - but what if it splits?**  
 27 April 2022  
 Russia-Ukraine war

Screenshot 104. Article: "Ukraine war: The West is united for now – but what if it splits?", BBC, April 27, 2022. Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-61237762>

**Ukraine Is in Worse Shape than You Think**  
 VOICE OF SIMON SHUSTER  
 TIME Correspondent

Screenshot 105. Video: "Ukraine Is in Worse Shape than You Think", Time, May 14, 2022. Source: <https://time.com/6176748/ukraine-war-economy/>

**Why the West is still not yet helping Ukraine as much as possible**  
 Many Western European public debates about help for Ukraine juxtapose feelings of solidarity for Ukrainians with concerns about the security of the West. This headline ignores the core national interests of EU and NATO member countries regarding a Russian defeat and the development of a safe, stable and resilient Ukraine.  
 October 10, 2022 Andreas Umland Articles and Commentary

Screenshot 106. Article: "Why the West is still not yet helping Ukraine as much as possible", New Eastern Europe, October 10, 2022. Source: <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2022/10/10/why-the-west-is-still-not-yet-helping-ukraine-as-much-as-possible/>

**Inside the monumental, stop-start effort to arm Ukraine**  
 The U.S. supply of weapons has never been enough for Kyiv. But for Washington and the Pentagon, there are broader concerns.  
 By Russi McFadden, Dan Lutas and Paul H. Brinkmann  
 December 23, 2022 at 10:00 a.m. EST

Screenshot 107. Article: "Inside the monumental, stop-start effort to arm Ukraine", The Washington Post, December 23, 2022. Source: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/12/23/ukraine-weapons-biden/>

Although it is claimed that Ukraine has united the West,<sup>163</sup> this unity is constantly being put to the test, especially when it comes to the provision of weapons to Ukraine. "This war may go on for some time... There are some tough choices ahead that may make it hard for Western powers to stay on the same diplomatic page".<sup>164</sup> Even though various countries have gradually started to supply the heavy weaponry that earlier on was claimed to be too dangerous or even impossible for all sorts of reasons

163 "The West shouldn't fear 'humiliating' Russia. Vladimir Putin has done that all on his own", The Telegraph, June 3, 2022.

Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/06/03/west-shouldnt-fear-humiliating-russia-vladimir-putin-has-done/>

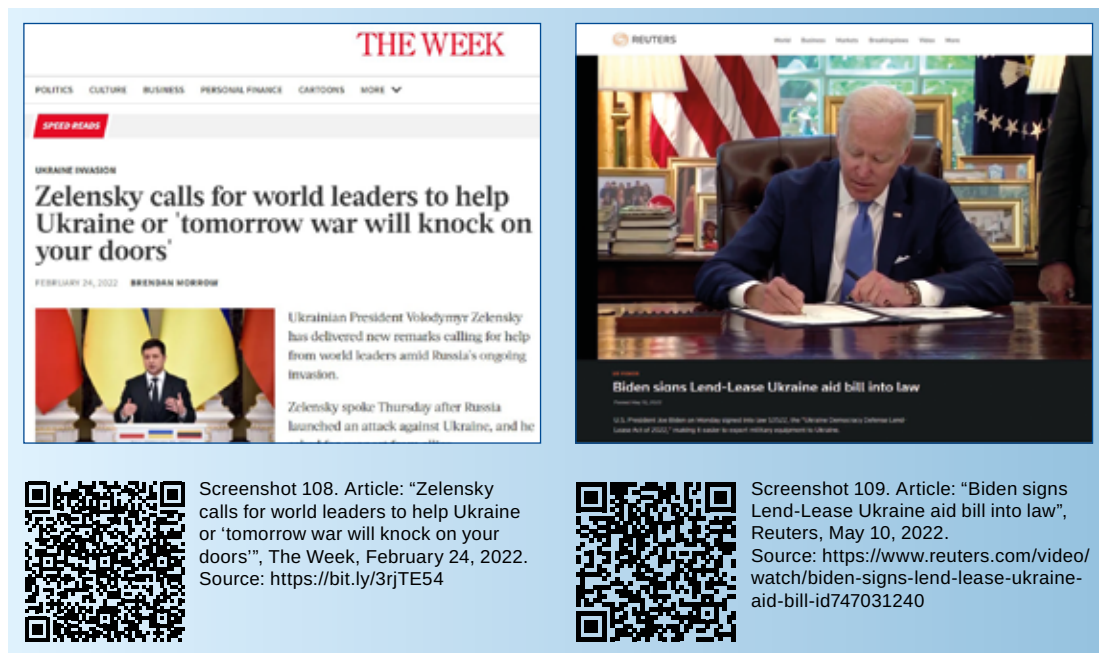
164 "Ukraine war: The West is united for now – but what if it splits?", BBC, April 27, 2022. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-61237762>



(the case of Germany's painful path<sup>165</sup> from providing only 5,000 helmets to Leopard tanks today is a great illustration of this), it is not enough to ensure its ultimate victory and prevent more deaths of Ukrainians and further destruction of the country. But as President Zelensky rightly said on the first day of the invasion: "If you, dear European leaders, do not help us today, war will come knocking at your door tomorrow."<sup>166</sup>

Those who hesitate are lost. "The difference between expectations and the surprising resilience of Ukraine's military makes it easy to misinterpret the current situation in Ukraine's favor. But not winning is still not winning. Ukraine is in far worse shape than commonly believed and needs, and will continue to need, a staggering amount of aid and support to actually win."<sup>167</sup>

Despite all the parallel narratives, the dominant one concentrates on Ukraine's courage and sacrifice. The end of the first year of the full-scale war has not even been commemorated yet, while Ukraine has already etched in world history the image of a strong, freedom-loving, and brave country that has united pro-democratic forces and is boldly defending the values of the entire Western world. US President Biden has called the resistance of Ukrainians "the flame of liberty."<sup>168</sup>



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has repeatedly said that he admires the heroism and courage of the Ukrainian people.<sup>169</sup> EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has stated: "We will never be able to match the sacrifice that the Ukrainians are making ... but what we can tell you is that you'll have

165 "Germany struggles to adjust to a new era", Politico, October 12, 2022. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-struggle-adjust-new-era/>

166 "Zelensky calls for world leaders to help Ukraine or 'tomorrow war will knock on your doors'", The Week, February 24, 2022. Available at: <https://theweek.com/russo-ukrainian-war/1010583/zelensky-calls-for-world-leaders-to-help-ukraine-or-tomorrow-war-will>

167 "Ukraine Is in Worse Shape than You Think", Time, May 14, 2022. Available at: <https://time.com/6176748/ukraine-war-economy/>

168 Remarks of President Joe Biden – State of the Union Address, The White House. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/03/01/remarks-of-president-joe-biden-state-of-the-union-address-as-delivered/>.

169 "UK PM Boris Johnson salutes Ukrainian courage in surprise visit to Kyiv", The Economic Times, April 10, 2022. Available at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/uk-pm-boris-johnson-salutes-ukrainian-courage-in-surprise-visit-to-kyiv/video/90756800.cms?from=mdr>

your European friends by your side as long as it takes.”<sup>170</sup> European Council President Charles Michel, praising the courage of the Ukrainian people, noted: “You are not alone...We are with you and will do everything possible to support you and to make sure that Ukraine will win the war.”<sup>171</sup>

“Ukraine now has strong governing institutions — so strong that they have continued to function under the onslaught of Russia’s attack in the biggest war in Europe since the 1940s. The Ukrainian people have created an independent democratic alternative to the vassal state Putin seeks — one that is worth fighting for... Ukrainians are fighting an American great-power adversary to defend the free world from the kind of wanton aggression that would destroy the U.S.-led order NATO exists to defend.”<sup>172</sup>

## INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

The image of Ukraine in the Western media has constantly changed in response to the turning points in its turbulent thirty-year path to becoming an independent democratic country. Sometimes this image has reflected the real state of affairs in the country, and sometimes it has been formed under the influence of Russian propaganda.

After Ukraine gained independence, the world looked carefully at the new state, wondering, what will this country be like, what values will it have, how will it determine its future? The world was not sure about the choices of Ukrainians, and was also under the influence of the Russian narrative about “Ukrainian nationalism”, so Ukraine was forced to give up its nuclear weapons in exchange for the development of international relations and economic assistance. As history has shown, however, the security guarantees of the nuclear states have not worked. The possibility that one of the guarantors of Ukraine’s security would violate the agreement by invading was not seriously considered.

The topic of nationalism tends to arise time and again when it comes to Ukraine. Only after the start of a full-scale invasion did the narrative that Ukrainian nationalism is in itself exclusively liberatory (rather than extremist or isolationist) finally start to receive sufficient coverage.

The entire history of independent Ukraine has unfolded at the crossroads between the West and Russia. Although Ukrainians never abandoned the dream of being a sovereign democratic state, it has not been easy to realize it. After the collapse of the USSR, the Russian Federation quickly adopted a neo-imperial stance, constantly interfering in Ukraine’s internal affairs. Moreover, from the beginning, Russia has made claims on various territories of Ukraine, eventually resorting to, first, a local, and then a full-scale war to try to achieve its goal, the restoration of the Soviet Empire.

Ukraine has often been viewed through the lens of Russia’s interests, from the perspective of political, economic, cultural and other ties. The influence of the Russian Federation has been one of the determining factors in the formation of the image of Ukraine as a corrupt, weak state, unable to determine its present and future. This impression was strengthened by the slow pace of democratic transformation and entry into the European family, which was beset by obstacles. Although the Orange Revolution was assessed as a failure during Yushchenko’s presidency, at that historical moment favorable conditions were created for the still weak democracy to consolidate sufficiently to avoid following the path of Russia and Belarus. So even with the arrival of the pro-Russian and authoritarian President Viktor Yanukovich, Ukraine did not allow a complete usurpation of power.

The events of the Revolution of Dignity once again changed opinions about Ukraine, which clearly defined its priority as being to protect democratic values. However, the attack by the Russian Federation

170 “Europe will ‘stand by your side’ says von der Leyen on visit to Ukraine”, RFI, September 15, 2022.  
Available at: <https://www.rfi.fr/en/europe/20220915-europe-will-stand-by-your-side-says-von-der-leyen-on-visit-to-ukraine>

171 “EU’s Michel tells Ukrainians during Kyiv visit: ‘History will not forget’”, Reuters, April 20, 2022.  
Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-councils-michel-makes-surprise-visit-kyiv-2022-04-20/>

172 “Ukraine Is Already Paying Us Back”, Politico, April 1, 2022.  
Available at: <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2023/01/04/ukraine-democracy-investment-00076180>

in 2014, the loss of Crimea and parts of the territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, as well as the reluctance of Western partners to go into a confrontation with Russia, once again created conditions for manipulation. This includes talk about an ideological split in society along linguistic, religious and territorial lines. In general, the idea that the population of Ukraine can be divided into pro-Westerners and pro-Russians on linguistic or territorial grounds is false. After centuries of Russification, a large part of Ukrainians came to consider the Russian language their native language, but this did not mean that they belong automatically to the camp of adherents of the "Russian world".

This is a misconception that ignores the complex characteristics and ideas that make up Ukraine's new self-awareness. Language is not its cornerstone, but the will to freedom, the desire to seize another historical opportunity to finally get rid of stifling totalitarianism, the desire to change the post-Soviet social contract and organize life in accordance with democratic values, putting human beings, rights and freedoms at its core. This is what distinguishes the Ukrainian and Russian mentalities.

Since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion on February 24, 2022, Ukraine has amazed the world, which feared that it would soon be enslaved by Russia. With exceptional effort, Ukraine has managed to win a number of victories at the front and in the diplomatic arena. Ukraine has united the West, while establishing itself as a sovereign in the international arena.

Some influential world media outlets have even created separate tabs and sections on their portals dedicated to the course of the war in Ukraine. Foreign media are less and less often labeling Ukraine as a "post-Soviet country" or one that is struggling with internal societal division or remains undecided on the vector of its foreign policy. Now Ukraine is a united country and a member of the European family and the civilized world. It is a symbol of the fight for freedom and democracy.



## CHAPTER 3. RUSSIAN MEDIA ON UKRAINE: THE WAR FOR MINDS

Russian media has fundamentally changed its news paradigm to reinforce pro-Kremlin narratives. The news often covers real events, but they are deliberately misinterpreted for the purpose of elaborate manipulation. Thus Russian and international audiences (that is, those who watch Russian TV) do not receive facts, so much as their distorted interpretation. As if that were not enough, Russian propaganda even creates completely fictional stories that are so implausible that one might expect them to be dismissed as pure nonsense, but surprisingly a significant part of the Russian population swallows them as true (for example, a story of a boy “crucified” by Ukrainian “nationalists” or “the new Ukrainian junta that promised to grant two Russian-speaking slaves to every Ukrainian nationalist”).

News about Ukraine takes up the lion’s share of airtime in Russia. The aim is to shape a negative opinion about Ukrainians and Ukraine and to divert the attention of Russians from internal problems, consolidating the population around the need to confront “external enemies”.

The government-controlled Russian media is an important part of the political propaganda machine, which oppresses freedom of speech and deploys “state of the art” technologies for influencing mass consciousness. Therefore, after the collapse of the USSR, the nature of the interaction between the media and the state, such as state control of the media and the promotion of favorable government narratives, essentially barely changed in the Russian Federation. In modern Russia, as in the Soviet Union, the media influences the domestic audience ideologically and politically, and seeks to promote grand narratives among the external audience.

Over the past 30 years, the Russian state has been massively spreading (false) narratives to the effect that Ukraine belongs to Russia historically, repeating the totalitarian-style propaganda of the 1920s and 1930s, portraying Ukrainians as less valuable “little Russians”, not to mention “traitors” or worse. Russian narratives are also dripping with nostalgia for the USSR, a “holy war” with Western culture, and a common unifying religion, Orthodoxy. The Russian media, as cogs in the propaganda machine, play an important role in this.

The establishment of total control over the Russian media and its transformation into a propaganda machine did not happen overnight. In the early 1990s, the first commercial companies and media holdings (including NTV and ORT) appeared, independent journalism developed, and the principle of freedom of speech was gradually put into practice after the harsh censorship of Soviet times. However, already in the mid-1990s, the curtailment of freedoms and the strengthening of state control over the Russian media began (to mention only one event, Vlad Listyev, general director of the ORT TV channel, was murdered), although most remained in private ownership. State control over commercial media works through the Russian oligarchs’ dependence on state power. Although Russian private capital largely controls the information space, its narratives and content are determined by the Russian regime.

The growth of the media market and power, as well as the strengthening of control over all sources of information (especially the internet), began when Vladimir Putin came to power. In 2012 the state conferred on itself the right to block particular websites.<sup>173</sup> As a result, a significant number of sites and web pages were blocked,<sup>174</sup> and from year to year the number of banned sites entered in a special

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173 Law of the Russian Federation «On Information, Information Technologies and Information Protection», 2021. Available at: <https://base.garant.ru/12148555/>.

174 Russia’s FSB will be able to block sites faster. Detector Media, August 6, 2019. Available at: <https://ms.detector.media/media-i-vlada/post/23296/2019-08-06-fsb-rosii-zmozhe-shvydshe-blokuvaty-sayty/>

register grew: in 2020, 4,931 sites were blocked, in 2021, 7,018.<sup>175</sup> However, some opposition media still manage to continue working, although their journalists and owners are systematically persecuted. From the beginning of 2022, the authorities of the Russian Federation intended to close or block the so-called "liberal media" in Russia, namely "Ekho Moskvyy", "Novaya Gazeta", "Dozhd", "Meduza", "Nastoyashchee vremya", DOXA, "Voice of America", as well as representative offices of international and foreign agencies, such as the BBC, Deutsche Welle, and "Krym.Realii". Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are also blocked.

#### NOTE:

Currently, all media that belong to foreign holdings or receive funding from foreign organizations, even when it comes to monetization on YouTube channels, must indicate in their material that they are "foreign agents". According to the law, legal entities registered abroad or foreign media without registration that distribute printed, audiovisual and other materials and are financed from foreign sources are considered as such.

Russia's Foreign Agent Media Act was passed in 2017, shortly after the US Department of Justice required RT America (an affiliate of a Russian propaganda broadcaster) to register as a foreign agent in the United States. According to the press secretary of the President of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Peskov, the adoption of the law was a "mirror reaction" to the actions of the Americans.<sup>176</sup>

It should be noted that the so-called liberal Russian media sometimes find themselves in situations that call their impartiality and support for democratic values into question. For example, in December 2022, a journalist on the Dozhd channel, Alexei Korostelyov, talking about military mobilization in the Russian Federation, emphasized the assistance provided to many Russian military personnel (ed. – "our guys") with equipment and "elementary amenities at the front."<sup>177</sup> The journalist was fired. In support, several journalists at the channel resigned. The general director of the channel recorded a video in which she asked the journalists to return and called the dismissal of the journalist a "mistake" and "insidious".<sup>178</sup>

This case was not the first: earlier the channel had shown a map on which Crimea was marked as Russian. Representatives of the channel came to a meeting with the National Council of Electronic Media of Latvia (NEPLP) without an interpreter and demanded to speak in Russian, although it is not the official language of Latvia and is not used for documents and official meetings. The channel's license was revoked. At the beginning of 2023, the channel received a broadcasting license in the Netherlands, however.

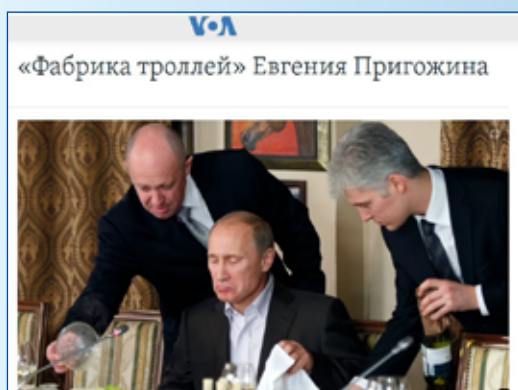
Russian trolls and bots operate all over the internet, actively promoting the fictional "history" of Russia and Ukraine in comments on news on social networks, trying to manipulate the minds of internet users.

175 Dynamics of website blocking by Roskomnadzor: judicial practice and key aspects. Available at: <https://rtmtech.ru/research/website-blocking-research/>

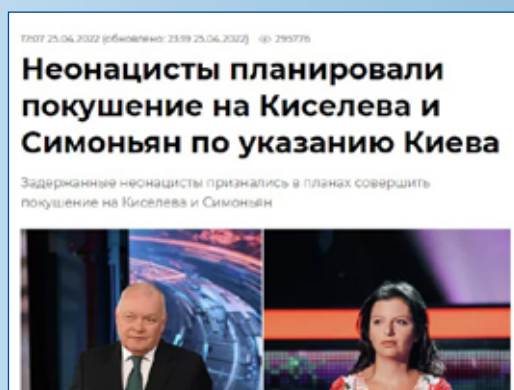
176 Foreign media agents. Recognition procedure and status, TASS, 2021. Available at: <https://tass.ru/info/11230889>

177 «Dozhd» fired the host for his words about helping the Russian military with «equipment at the front», BBC News Russian service, 2022. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-63836217>

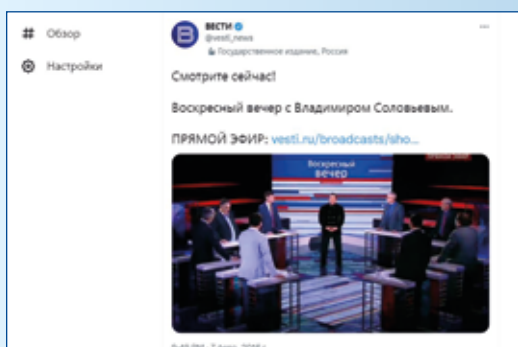
178 «It was a mistake, no malicious intent.» General director of «Dozhdya» Natalya Sindeeva asked the dismissed presenter Alexey Korostelev to return to the TV channel, Meduza, 2022. Available at: <https://meduza.io/news/2022/12/06/eto-by-la-oshibka-nika-kogo-zlogo-umysla-gendirektor-dozhdya-natalya-sindeeva-poprosila-vernutsya-na-telekanal-uvolennogo-veduschego-alek-seya-korosteleva>



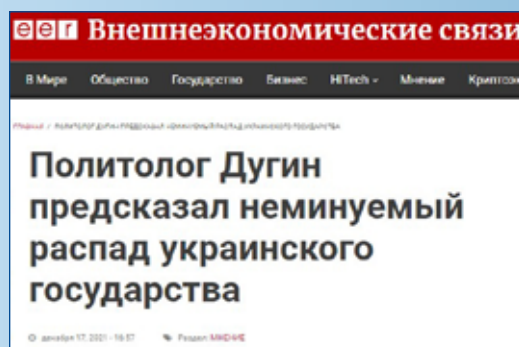
Screenshot 110. Article: "Russian experts in the field of media analyze the mechanism of action of the 'Troll Factory' and its attempts to manipulate the public", VoA, February 21, 2018. Source: <https://www.golosameriki.com/a/ai-prigozhin/4263958.html>



Screenshot 111. Article: "Director General of the International News Agency 'Russia Today' Dmytro Kiselev and Editor-in-Chief of RT TV channel and MIA 'Russia Today' Margarita Simonyan: 'Neo-Nazis planned an attempt on Kiselev and Simonyan ordered by Kyiv'", RIA News, April 25, 2022. Source: <https://bit.ly/3JRLc34>



Screenshot 112. "Sunday Evening with Vladimir Solovyov", a Russian propaganda program, Twitter, February 7, 2016. Source: [https://twitter.com/vesti\\_news](https://twitter.com/vesti_news)



Russian propagandist Alexander Dugin  
Screenshot 113. Article: "Political scientist Dugin predicted the inevitable collapse of the Ukrainian state", Foreign Economic Relations, December 17, 2021. Source: <https://bit.ly/3O6J2iB>

#### NOTE:

"Troll Factory" is the conventional name of a Russian agency headquartered in St. Petersburg, which is engaged in disinformation in social networks with the aim of shaping public opinion in favor of the Russian government, discrediting the Russian opposition, and so on. Employees of the agency, so-called "trolls" or "Kremlbots", use fake accounts in social networks and online publications, on forums and video hosting to promote the interests of the customer, namely the ruling elite of the Russian Federation, spreading a pro-Kremlin political view, mostly in comments. The organization is sponsored by companies owned by Russian businessman Evgeny Prigozhin, the founder of the Wagner Group, a private military company (officially forbidden in Russia).

But the main source of the spread of Russian propaganda is the state TV channels of the Russian Federation, their news programs and talk shows. The latter played a major role in preparing citizens of the Russian Federation for the invasion of Ukraine, building support for the destruction of civilian infrastructure and justifying the genocide of the Ukrainian people. Russian propagandists, such as Kiselyov, Solovyov, Skabeeva, and Simonyan, should be brought to justice within the framework of an international tribunal for inciting war crimes and genocide and be punished accordingly.

Russian propagandists chose the talk show format precisely because it allows the same messages to be broadcast by different people loyal to the regime, who are invited on as “experts”. Fueling hatred against Ukrainians, such propaganda shows operate using methods similar to those of Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (“Free Radio and Television of a Thousand Hills” – ed.) or “genocide radio”, which incited the population of Rwanda to exterminate Tutsis and moderate Hutus, as a result of which more than 800,000 people were killed in 1994. On October 11, 2022, the trial of Felicien Kabuga, owner of the aforementioned radio and television station, who is accused of inciting genocide, began in The Hague.<sup>179</sup>

The volunteer “information hygiene” initiative “How not to become a vegetable” forms a database of Russian propagandists and public figures who supported a full-scale war against Ukraine and have been involved in spreading anti-Ukrainian narratives over the past eight years. Currently, the database includes 1,800 people and is updated quarterly.<sup>180</sup> The following groups of Russian propagandists who broadcast anti-humane messages in the media can be distinguished:

**Politicians:** representatives of the Russian political elite, together with the media, form grand narratives, legitimize them and promote them in the media.

**Mass media, journalists:** define narratives and distribute them to a wide target audience, primarily middle-aged and older people.

**Bloggers:** such bloggers as Anatoly Shariy, Artemiy Lebedev and others are leaders of propaganda narratives in the Russian Federation and abroad on their own information platforms on Instagram, YouTube, Telegram, TikTok, and Facebook. Their target audience is young people and narrow target groups that are not covered by television.

**“Experts”:** speakers invited to participate in various talk shows, radio broadcasts, television broadcasts, and so on. They are called in to provide “professional”, “expert” assessment or comments with a clearly pronounced pro-Kremlin bias. The pool of such “experts” consists of “specialists” from various fields of knowledge, including philosophy, political science, economics and sociology. Their task is to spread, repeat and consolidate central Kremlin narratives.

**Collaborators** (Y. Murayev, I. Kiva and others): citizens of Ukraine or persons who have been deprived of Ukrainian citizenship (for treason or collaboration – ed.), who play the role of “insiders”, because they often in the past worked for the state or in elected positions, and are now called on to demonstrate support for the “Russian world” in Ukraine. It is worth emphasizing that the majority of such persons left Ukraine not long before or right after the start of the full-scale invasion. They used to receive Russian support for promoting Russian interests in Ukraine.

**The military** (for example, I. Konashenkov): their task is to maintain support in the Russian armed forces, to present a highly sanitized version of the progress of the so-called “special military operation” with the aim of military mobilization of the population.

**Actors, musicians, athletes** (I. Okhlobystin, V. Mashkov, N. Mikhalkov, D. Pevtsov): they are charged with consolidating messages and translating them into myths, promoting propaganda narratives through Russian culture, in an effort to suppress critical thinking.

179 Genocide Radio: Why is a multi-millionaire from Rwanda on trial in The Hague?, Forbes, 2022.

Available at: <https://www.forbes.ru/forbeslife/480057-radio-genocida-za-cto-v-gaage-sudat-mul-timillionera-iz-ruandy>

180 Database of Russian propagandists, YouControl, 2022. Available at: <https://youcontrol.com.ua/articles/baza-propahandystiv/>.

**Academics and philosophers** (A. Dugin): they are called on to substantiate propagandist narratives “scientifically”, such as the historical greatness of the Russian Federation, ideas on the “Russian world”, and so on. Their methods often include rewriting history or subjective reinterpretation of facts.

**Church** (Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Cyril [ed. – a former KGB agent] and priests): it seeks to sanctify narratives, bringing them into the realm of faith and holiness.

#### NOTE:

Yevgeniy Murayev is a pro-Russian Ukrainian politician, owner of the pro-Russian TV channel “NASH”, deputy of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in 2014–2016.

Ilya Kiva is a former pro-Russian politician from Ukraine, collaborator with Russia, separatist, Ukrainophobe. He was a People’s Deputy of Ukraine in the pro-Russian political party Opposition Platform “For Life”.

I. Konashenkov is a Russian military man, lieutenant general, official representative of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation. He became famous in 2015 during coverage of Russia’s military operation in Syria and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

I. Okhlobystin is a Russian actor, director, screenwriter and journalist. An active supporter of the “Russian world” and Putin’s policies. He spreads Russian propaganda and justifies the armed aggression of the Russian Federation.

A. Dugin is a Russian philosopher, politician, political scientist, and publicist with fascist leanings, an ideologist of neo-Eurasianism and racism, founder and leader of the “International Eurasian Movement.”

Thus, under conditions of authoritarianism, lack of freedom of speech, and persecution of dissents, those listed above perform specific missions in creating, promoting and consolidating Kremlin narratives.

Since the 1990s, a single system of propaganda – a factory of narratives – has gradually been created in the Russian Federation. At the initial stages of the formation of independent Russia, this “factory” performed domestic political tasks, but with the strengthening of authoritarianism, it has gradually switched to handling Russia’s strategic geopolitical tasks. It should be noted that outside of Russia propaganda is being spread most efficiently by “independent analytical centers”, “experts” and “researchers” who, although not Russian citizens, depend on Russian funding. The Russian Orthodox Church also belongs to this circle of propagandists. All of them spread propaganda through their information channels and platforms.

Separately, it is worth emphasizing the “civilizational” features of the formation of Russian narratives.<sup>181</sup> The “official historical narrative of Russia” plays a big part in shaping the perception of Russia domestically and overseas and reflects the state’s vision.<sup>182</sup> In other words, this is the official – censored – version of the history of the Russian Federation, which is designed to justify its imperialist ambitions, as Yale Professor Timothy Snyder describes in detail in the book *The Road to Unfreedom*.<sup>183</sup>

Summarizing, we can say that today the official Russian media do not adhere to the principle of freedom of speech and journalistic standards in their work. Instead, they create an alternative reality to justify the crimes of the totalitarian regime of the Russian Federation and undermine democratic values in Russia, Ukraine and all over the globe.

181 Dugin, A.H. (2019): *Noomakhia – The Russian Logos II – The Russian Historial: The People and State in Search of the Subject*. Moscow: Academic Project.

182 Malynova, O. Yu. (2019): Who and how forms the official historical narrative? Analysis of Russian practices. *Politia*, 3 (94): 103–126.

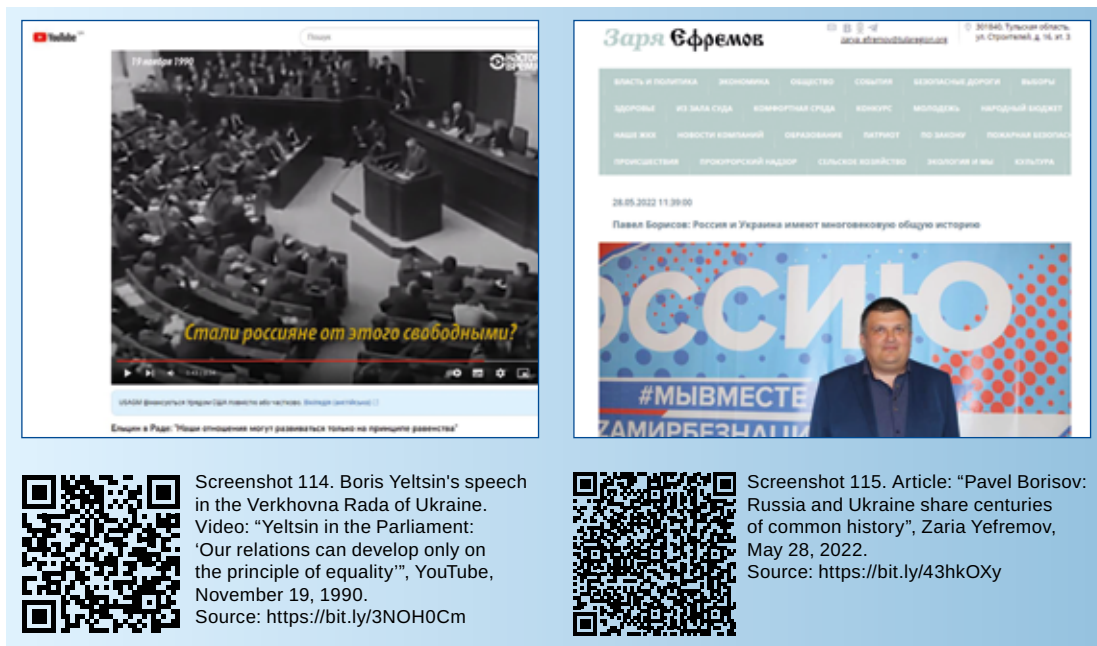
183 Snyder, Timothy (2018): *The Road to Unfreedom*. For details see: <https://www.timothysnyder.org/books/the-road-to-unfreedom-tr/the-road-to-unfreedom-hc>



## UKRAINE AND RUSSIA ARE BOUND BY A COMMON HISTORY, BUT WILL BUILD EQUAL RELATIONS

As the USSR collapsed, the narrative of friendship between Russia and Ukraine as allied republics dominated. Moscow positioned itself as a joint decision-making center, and Mikhail Gorbachev's policy and confederal perspectives made it possible to talk about relative parity in Russian–Ukrainian relations.

Boris Yeltsin, speaking before the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in 1990, noted that “relations between Russia and Ukraine can only develop on the principles of equality. Today, Russia does not claim any special role. Russia does not seek to become the center of some new empire”.<sup>184</sup>

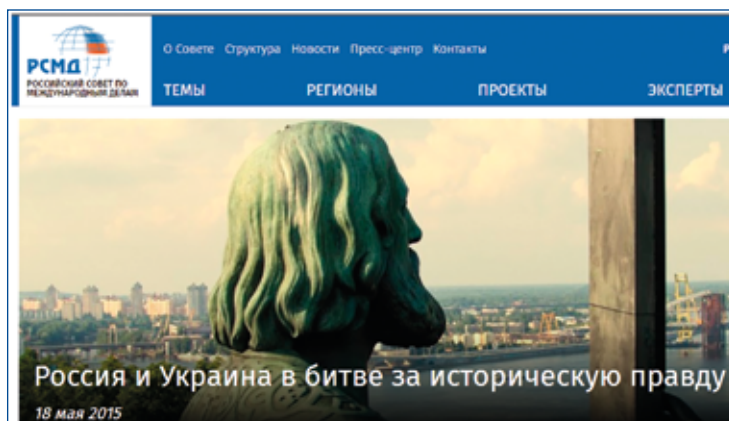


However, already in 1992 at a press conference in Moscow, recalling the events of Ukraine's declaration of independence and the putsch in Russia, Yeltsin emphasized that he believed in the future of the CIS, because the former Soviet republics were connected by a common economy and history.<sup>185</sup> In general, the topic of territorial claims, threats to resolve them by military means and economic blackmail from Russia started to become a framework for the development of relations between the two countries right after the collapse of the USSR. The more pro-Western the sentiments of the Ukrainian people and the politics of Ukraine became, the more the relations between the two states became strained.

In Russia's geopolitical vision of itself, there is no concept of its borders. It is dominated by such notions as "sphere of exclusive interests", "zones of influence", or "area of resettlement of the Russian-speaking population". This forms the basis for aggressive Russian nationalism and imperialism and a framework for policies towards neighboring countries, which are considered primarily as republics of the former Soviet Union, and not as states independent of Moscow. Although Yeltsin's first presidential term was dominated by anti-communist rhetoric and a rethinking of Soviet history, including repression and other crimes of the Soviet leadership, the ideas of democracy, freedom and reconciliation with the West were advanced, but soon rejected.

<sup>184</sup> B. Yeltsin's address to the members of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, YouTube, 1991. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0GwknzCCyys>.

<sup>185</sup> Yeltsin's press conference, YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMZmh5pvmzY&t=148s>.



Screenshot 116. Article: "Russia and Ukraine in the battle for historical truth. Russian Council on International Affairs", May 18, 2015. Source: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/rossiya-i-ukraina-v-bitve-za-istoricheskuyu-pravdu/>

The content of Russia's unofficial (but actual) strategy towards Ukraine is largely explained by the concept of "leadership instead of direct control", set out in the "Strategic Course of Russia with the CIS Member States".<sup>186</sup> This is not a direct renewal of the political situation that existed before the collapse of the USSR, but favors Russia's modernization of such relations in order to preserve the numerous advantages of its former geostrategic position and, at the same time, create more favorable conditions for Russia in the Commonwealth of States.

Such a strategy worked quite effectively for Moscow in the 1990s. Despite formal international recognition, Ukraine remained largely isolated in the Eurasian space dominated by Russia.

## A WEAK STATE POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY

From the first years of Ukrainian independence, Russian media spread narratives about Ukraine's economic failure and its total dependence on Russia. Attention was also focused on Ukraine's alleged inability to maintain the fleet and meet debt obligations to foreign investors.<sup>187</sup>



Screenshot 117. Resolution of the Parliament of the Russian Federation "On the status of the city of Sevastopol".


<sup>186</sup> Decree of the President of the Russian Federation «On the Approval of the Strategic Course of the Russian Federation with States – Members of the Commonwealth of Independent States». Available at: <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/8307/print>.

<sup>187</sup> News, ORT, 10.05.1996. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOoHTtypSU&t=270s>.

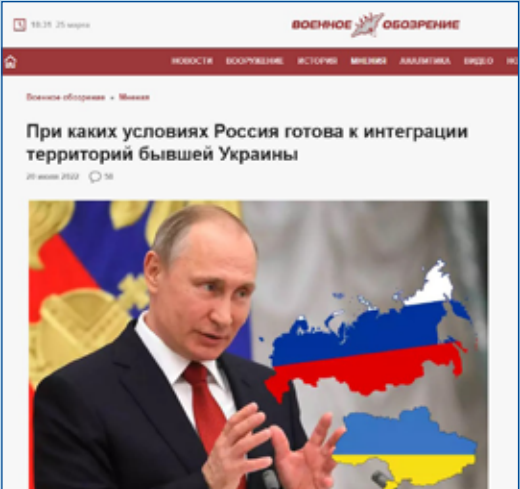
<sup>188</sup> Правовой статус Крыма и Севастополя с 18-го века до наших дней. [Электронный ресурс] // <https://statehistory.ru/4536/Pravovoy-status-Kryma-i-Sevastopolya-s-18-go-veka-do-nashikh-dney/>

By the mid-1990s, the idea that Ukraine did not need its own navy and that it would benefit from military-strategic cooperation with the Russian Federation was being actively promoted.

After the division of the Black Sea Fleet, the Russian media spread narratives that this was not a division, but rather a loss of the fleet for Russia, furthermore that Ukraine would not be able to maintain it and that it did not need a fleet at all. "There are no naval forces in Ukraine, and there will be none. Ukraine needs a minimal Navy. Ukraine has no interests in the Mediterranean Sea. There are only interests in the nearby area. Ukraine is not economically capable of creating a navy. This is a utopia. Ukraine will not create anything without Russia. Each nation has its own characteristics. The peculiarity of the Ukrainian nation is "if I can't eat it all, I will at least bite here and there".<sup>189</sup> Thus, Moscow began to create an image of Ukraine as an economically and politically unsuccessful, weak territorial formation and openly to demand recognition of the special status of the Russian Federation and the priority of its interests.<sup>190</sup>



**Скриншот 118.** Article: "Mr. Yes: why did they hate and despise the former head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia", Express Newspaper, November 14, 2017. Source: <https://www.eg.ru/politics/414982/>



**Скриншот 119.** Article: "Under what conditions is Russia ready to integrate the territory of the former Ukraine", Military Education, July 20, 2022. Source: <https://topwar.ru/199209-pri-kakih-uslovijah-rossija-gotova-k-integracii-territorij-byvshej-ukrainy.html>

#### NOTE:

In 1992, President of Ukraine Leonid Kravchuk issued a decree on the affiliation of the Black Sea Fleet to Ukraine. The next day, Russian President Boris Yeltsin declared the fleet the property of Russia. The State Duma of the Russian Federation declared that Ukraine's possession of Crimea was illegal, and in 1993 passed a decision regarding the "Russian status" of the city of Sevastopol.<sup>191</sup> To avoid an open confrontation, both presidents withdrew their decrees. After that, the countries began dividing the fleet at the negotiating table, signing an agreement on the withdrawal of the Black Sea Fleet from the strategic forces of the CIS and its subordination to the presidents of Russia and Ukraine. In 1993, the fleet was divided equally.

<sup>189</sup> What was the Russian Black Sea Fleet like during the reign of Boris Yeltsin, YouTube, 1996. – Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHcLWJcGxE>.

<sup>190</sup> Haran, O./Koval, Ya./Shevchuk, A. (1994): Ukraine and Crimea in Russian geopolitical concepts, Political Thought, 93–97.

<sup>191</sup> Resolution of the Supreme Council of the Russian Federation «On the status of the city of Sevastopol». Available at: <http://sevkrimrus.narod.ru/ZAKON/sevastop.htm>

The issue of agreeing state borders was also acute. Russian politicians stated that Russia could not accept the loss of its geopolitical position and guarantee the territorial integrity of Ukraine, emphasizing that Ukraine's borders can be changed peacefully. In addition, Russia's military doctrine stated that the non-formalization of a number of sections of the state border of the Russian Federation and the incompleteness of the regulation on the legal status of troops of the Russian Federation outside its borders increases the degree of threat to the military security of the Russian Federation.<sup>192</sup> As A. Kozyrev admitted in an interview, "since April 1992, the Verkhovna Rada has already started talking about the need for force [ed. – military resolution of the dispute], and not only in Tajikistan (remember, Ruskoy and company). We were on the brink, we really were on the brink of the Yugoslav scenario throughout 1992, that is, the use of force against the republics, and essentially war in the former Soviet Union. I flew to different points in order to say: 'Yes, I am against the start of a war according to Milosevic's scenario.' That is, against Russia trying to establish control by military means, I don't know, over Crimea, for example."<sup>193</sup>

#### NOTE:

Yuri Meshkov is a Crimean politician and lawyer, the first and only president of the Republic of Crimea. Known for his Ukrainophobic views, he gained support in part due to his connections with chauvinistic Russian politicians. His political platform favored maximum rapprochement with Russia, up to the inclusion of Crimea. Meshkov planned the introduction of the ruble on the peninsula, the conclusion of a military-political agreement with Russia, and the granting of Russian citizenship to the residents of Crimea, among other things.

The interview given by President of Ukraine Kravchuk<sup>194</sup> to Russian journalists was spread in the Russian media at the same time. Kravchuk noted that the problem of Crimea is acute. Pro-Russian political forces in Crimea, led by Yury Meshkov, pushed for dual [Ukrainian-Russian] administration of the peninsula, and also did not reject the idea of absorption of the peninsula by the Russian Federation. Ukraine could not accept that. He once again noted that the peninsula directly depends on Ukraine (economically, infrastructurally, historically, socio-culturally) and is an integral part of it, regardless of Russian manipulations and speculations.

There was a widespread opinion that Ukraine took advantage of the historical efforts of the Russian Empire, the foreign policy successes of the USSR and, as it were, received "too much" in the process of gaining independence.

Alexander Dugin formulated and tried to substantiate the metanarrative of Eurasianism, which became decisive for the formation of other narratives of modern Russia. Among other things, in his program work *Fundamentals of Geopolitics* in 1997 (please note the time of publication), Dugin also spoke about Ukraine. In particular, he wrote: "The sovereignty of Ukraine is such a negative phenomenon for Russian geopolitics that, in principle, it can provoke an armed conflict... Ukraine as an independent state with some territorial ambitions represents a huge danger for all of Eurasia, and without a solution to the Ukrainian problems, talking about continental geopolitics is generally meaningless... Strategically, Ukraine should only be a projection of Moscow."<sup>195</sup>

192 Military doctrine of the Russian Federation, 1993. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/4747>; Military doctrine of the Russian Federation – 2010. – Available at: <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/461>; Law of the Russian Federation «On Defense», 1996. Available at: <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&prevDoc=102018636&backlink=1&nd=10204158>

193 Kozyrev, Andrey (2011): A real kamikaze, *Forbes Russia*. Available at: <https://www.forbes.ru/ekonomika/lyudi/74501-andrei-kozyrev-nastoyashchii-kamikadze>.

194 Leonid Kravchuk. Live dialogue. 1st channel «Ostankino». 1994. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FREFqRxpXM&t=1254s>.

195 Dugin, Alexander (1997): *Fundamentals of Geopolitics*. Moscow: Arctogeia. Available at: <https://vector-eurasia.ru/books/Dugin.Geopolitika.pdf>



Similar to the argument about Ukraine's inability to maintain a navy, Russia has argued that Ukraine is unable to adequately maintain its nuclear stockpile. This narrative was used to justify the need for Ukraine's nuclear disarmament. Russia, demanding the immediate handover of nuclear weapons stocks that remained on the territory of Ukraine after the collapse of the USSR, accused Ukraine of delaying the process. The disarmament of Ukraine allowed the Russian Federation to export nuclear components worth several billion dollars to its territory, to destroy the nuclear potential of the neighboring state and to weaken Ukraine's defense capacity.

The Russian Federation's territorial claims and ambitions went even further under the influence of the declaration of the "State of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" program for the development of "Greater Russia",<sup>196</sup> which gave expression to revanchist motives.

#### NOTE:

The program "State of the XXI century" is a historical project aimed at establishing a new system of social relations in Russia: national consolidation and integration of society. The state-patriotic idea of the "greatness and power" of the Russian state was asserted in the program. These and other ideas form the basis of the concept of the "Russian world". As stated on the information portal of the "Russian world" foundation, the concept of the "Russian world" encompasses not only the Russians in Russia, but Russian emigrants living near and far abroad, as well as their descendants. These are also foreign citizens who speak Russian, study or teach it, and all those who are sincerely interested in Russia and who care about its future. All layers of the "Russian world" – polyethnic, multi-confessional, socially and ideologically heterogeneous, multicultural, geographically segmented – are united by being somehow part of Russia. The "Russian world" is a global project that is supposed to allow Russia to acquire a new identity, new opportunities for cooperation with the rest of the world and additional impulses for its own development.<sup>197</sup>

The Russian political community has sought to depict Ukraine as an artificial formation, a weak and amorphous entity, doomed to permanent crisis and fruitless destructive internal struggles. According to the Russian authorities, Ukraine has no prospects as an independent state, and sooner or later it will either disintegrate or be forced to abandon its independent strategy and embark on the path of economic and military-political reintegration with Russia.<sup>198</sup> Therefore, it makes no sense to do anything else than to wait and to refrain from creating unnecessary legal obstacles to the implementation of such a scenario.

## BLOOD-RELATED NATIONS DIVIDED

In the early 2000s, with the coming to power of Vladimir Putin, the Russian Federation experienced a significant rollback of democratization and started distancing itself from the West as a partner. Russia's rhetoric regarding Ukraine also started to change. Russian analyst Dmitriy Trenin notes: "Changes caused by the Ukrainian crisis [protest actions of the opposition in Ukraine in 2000–2001, known as 'Ukraine without Kuchma' – ed.] are not territorial, but rather strategic and mental. Russia has finally given up trying to integrate with the West and become part of the Euro-Atlantic community. She returned to her home port in Eurasia and prioritized ties with non-Western countries".<sup>199</sup>

Along with this, through the Russian media, Vladimir Putin started to push a message about divided blood nations. "It is absolutely unacceptable when two ethnically, culturally, historically close peoples

<sup>196</sup> The national program «State of the XXI century» – the revival of Great Russia. Available at: <http://derzhava21.ru/program>.

<sup>197</sup> Russian World Foundation. Ideology. Available at: <https://russkiymir.ru/fund/>

<sup>198</sup> The Russian core of the State. Article-manifesto of the Chairman of the Central Committee of the CPRF G.A. Zyuganova, 2020. Available at: <https://kprf.ru/party-live/cknews/194458.html>.

<sup>199</sup> Kuzio, T. (2018): Putin's war against Ukraine. Revolution, nationalism and criminality. Kyiv: Spirit and Letter, p. 53 (trans. from English by Andrii Pavlyshyn).



– blood relatives – become separated. And this crack is widening due to the ‘incomprehensibility’ (orange) [Putin called the Orange Revolution of Yushchenko’s supporters and government an insignificant, incomprehensible phenomenon – ed.]. At the same time, together with Viktor Yushchenko, we will work on simplifying the crossing of the [Ukrainian-Russian] border. We will continue to jointly solve these problems”.<sup>200</sup>

Almost from the very beginning of his reign, Putin has implemented policies based on the historical narrative of great power. Putin blames his predecessor for the “collapse” of the USSR, considering this event the most tragic mistake of the twentieth century. During his first two terms in office, Putin began a piecemeal reconstruction of Soviet symbols and values, and during the next two he tried to systematically revive them [make them more significant for Russians – ed.]. In Russia of the 1990s, there was a crisis of values: there was a struggle between political elites, criminal groups and newly minted oligarchs for resources during privatization and the formation of a so-called “free market” against the background of the economic decline, weakness and corruption of state institutions, courts and human rights bodies. Therefore, a pattern was laid in the basic principles of the social contract: “whoever is stronger, they are right”, and the demand for “a strong hand that will bring order” was formed in society. The idea of a “strong hand” eventually led to the return of the cult of Joseph Stalin as the most effective ruler of the country who triumphed in World War II. In addition, the difficult living conditions and the lack of opportunities for the majority of Russians to improve their socio-economic situation created favorable conditions for pro-government manipulation of popular sentiments. This is how the narrative emerged about the need to restore dignity. And since the Russian Federation did not embark on a path of reforms, the development of civil society, and the fight against corruption, the popular masses were offered the whimsical idea of the “eternal greatness and spirituality” of the Russian people, the uniqueness of its historical significance and the image of Russia surrounded on all sides by enemies that must be repelled.<sup>201</sup>



The idea of restoring a semi-Soviet Union became the state doctrine of Russia. At the highest political level, such statements were made in Russia for the first time on April 25, 2005, in Putin’s message to the Federal Assembly: “The collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century; for the Russian people, it became a real drama.” Putin especially focused on the fact that [with the collapse of the USSR – ed.] “25 million ethnic Russians found themselves abroad against their will, and... immediately... the Russian people turned out to be the largest divided people in the

200 Direct line: Vladimir Putin, YouTube, 2005. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0dvgBtlw>.

201 Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of May 12, 2009 No. 537 «On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020». Available at: <https://76.mchs.gov.ru/deyatelnost/napravleniya-deyatelnosti/grazhdanskaya-zashchita/organizaciya-meropriyatiy-grazhdanskoy-oborony/normativno-pravovye-akty/federalnye-zakony/ukaz-prezidenta-rf-ot-12-maya-2009-g-n-537-o-strategii-nacionalnoy-bezopasnosti-rossiyskoy-federacii-do-2020-goda>

world. And this is definitely a tragedy.”<sup>202</sup> The “historical” fact on which Putin builds his political plans is grounded on the claim that the states that gained independence after the collapse of the USSR do not have sovereignty, and Russia must be reborn as something like the Soviet Union or even the Russian Empire.

In the international arena, however, the Russian Federation still tried to maintain its influence over Ukraine not through military, but through political, economic, cultural, and linguistic interference in the country's internal affairs. In the 2004 presidential elections, Vladimir Putin supported Viktor Yanukovich's candidacy and congratulated him on his victory even before the final results were announced.<sup>203</sup> In Russia's official rhetoric, Yanukovich's “election” as president was highlighted as a choice in favor of Ukraine's stability, strengthening statehood and further democratic and economic development. Putin emphasized his approval of Yanukovich's policy of good-neighborly relations with Russia and the CIS states. In this way, the Russian president unequivocally emphasized the undesirability for the Kremlin of the pro-Western and pro-Ukrainian candidate Viktor Yushchenko coming to power.

A statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation in 2009 noted that public rhetoric on the topic of the Ukrainian language as the state language of Ukraine and the Ukrainian view of history is aimed at confrontation, the dismantling of Russian–Ukrainian good neighborliness, the cultural and linguistic assimilation of the Russian-speaking regions of the country in the interests of the “Western Ukrainian minority”, and promoted to oppose Ukraine's and Russia's good relations in the interests of the Euro-Atlanticists.<sup>204</sup>

#### NOTE:

It is interesting that in his speeches about Ukraine, Putin often uses phrases that draw vulgar parallels between forcing Ukraine to get closer to the Russian Federation and rape: “a girl must be disillusioned – suitors have a choice”<sup>205</sup> or “like it or not, suck it up, my sweetheart”.<sup>206</sup>

Putin used the last phrase during a joint press conference with French President Emmanuel Macron on February 8, 2022, commenting on the statement of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky about the injustice of the Minsk agreements, which Ukraine was forced to sign after Russia attacked Crimea and Donbas.

Later, in response to this statement, Zelensky asserted that Ukraine is truly beautiful and shows patience, which is a sign of wisdom. As for the word “my”, it is “a slight exaggeration”, continued Zelensky. He expressed the opinion that Ukraine behaves with dignity because it does not respond to “provocations” and defends its own territory.

In fact, such statements by Putin clearly demonstrate Russia's disdain for Ukraine and its lack of respect for it as an independent country, emphasizing Russia's readiness to force Ukraine to submit to Moscow's will.

Also in 2009, Putin claimed that many Ukrainians hoped for a better life after the “Orange Revolution”, but they had been cruelly disappointed.<sup>207</sup> In addition, the Russian president continued to interpret

202 Message to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation on April 25, 2005.  
Available at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/>

203 Putin congratulated Yanukovich on his victory in the presidential elections of Ukraine, RIA, 2010.  
Available at: <https://ria.ru/20100215/209337092.html>.

204 Kyiv called statements about the violation of the rights of Russian speakers destructive, RIA, 2009.  
Available at: <https://ria.ru/20090709/176823393.html>.

205 Putin: «The Ukrainian ‘girl’ illusions should be destroyed – the leaders of the Orange Revolution did not live up to their hopes and are parasitizing», Censor NET. Available at: [https://censor.net/ru/news/81712/putin\\_quotdevushku\\_ukrainu\\_nado\\_lishit\\_lilyuzi-yi\\_lidery\\_oranjevoyi\\_revolyutsii\\_ne\\_opravdali\\_nadejd](https://censor.net/ru/news/81712/putin_quotdevushku_ukrainu_nado_lishit_lilyuzi-yi_lidery_oranjevoyi_revolyutsii_ne_opravdali_nadejd).

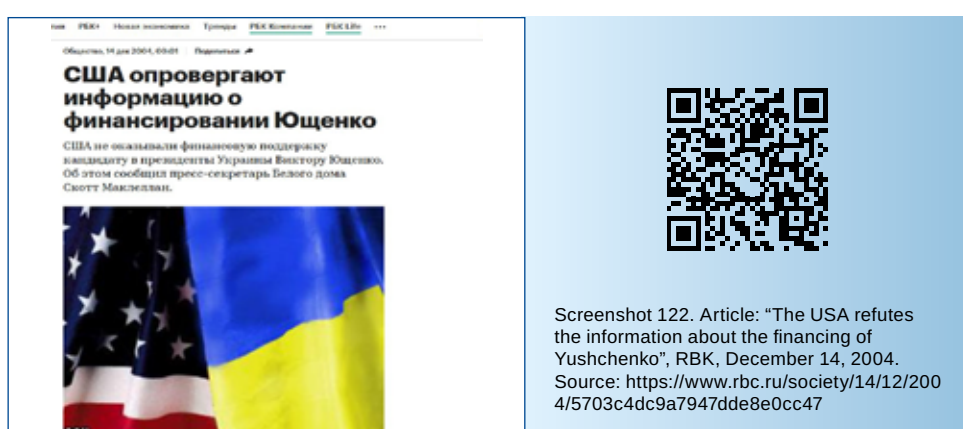
206 Putin explained the words «suck it up, my beauty» // Vedomosti. – 2022.  
Available at: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/2022/02/10/908783-putin-obyasnil-slova>

207 See n. 203.

Ukrainians' protests against the falsification of the results of the presidential elections not as a desire for democratization, but as a struggle between clans for access to the financial resources of the state.<sup>208</sup>

In Russia, a propaganda campaign was launched aimed at discrediting the democratic achievements of the Orange Revolution. In particular, deputy of the State Duma Vyacheslav Nikonov noted that the authorities at the time were interested in preventing Yanukovich from governing the state and claimed that there was powerful foreign influence in the elections [from Western countries, especially the USA – ed.]. Nikonov also emphasized the seemingly significant support for Yushchenko among Russian liberals (including financial support).<sup>209</sup> The message was that Ukraine has no experience of statehood and is not capable of deciding its own destiny.<sup>210</sup>

Claims about the financing of Yushchenko's election campaign by Russian émigré oligarch Boris Berezovsky and by the USA through non-governmental organizations and ex-Prime Minister of Georgia Ivanishvili appeared quite often in the Russian mass media.<sup>211</sup>



## THE “RUSSIAN WORLD” AND THE THREAT FROM THE WEST

The term “Russian World” is an ideological concept of Russian culture and its mission in the world. The foremost authors of its modern (1990s) interpretation are Petr Shchedrovitsky, Efim Ostrovsky, Valery Tishkov, Vitaly Skrinnik, Tatiana Poloskova and Natalia Narochnickaja. Once Putin rose to power, the concept was henceforth promoted officially as part of Russian state policy and propaganda. The main determinant of one's belonging to the “Russian World” is belonging to a cultural-linguistic group, which allows Russian authorities to target their policy of “protecting interests” of Russian-speaking population at a broad group of foreign countries, flexibly adapting it to changing circumstances. Under the Russian Empire and the USSR, a comprehensive policy of Russification was pursued in historically Ukrainian territories. All former Soviet republics and countries that were in the sphere of influence of the USSR fell under the same policy. Currently, the Russian Federation uses the Russian language as a weapon and an element of justification for military aggression, so the language issue is also a security issue for Ukraine.

208 Sologubenko, A. (2010): Ukraine: cloned democracy, BBC Russian service. Available at: [https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2010/01/100104\\_ukraine\\_cloned\\_democracy](https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2010/01/100104_ukraine_cloned_democracy).

209 The dividing line appeared 15 years ago when the «Orange Revolution» began. It became the first step towards the war in Donbas, Lenta.RU, 2019. Available at: [https://lenta.ru/articles/2019/11/22/maydan\\_kak\\_sudba/](https://lenta.ru/articles/2019/11/22/maydan_kak_sudba/).

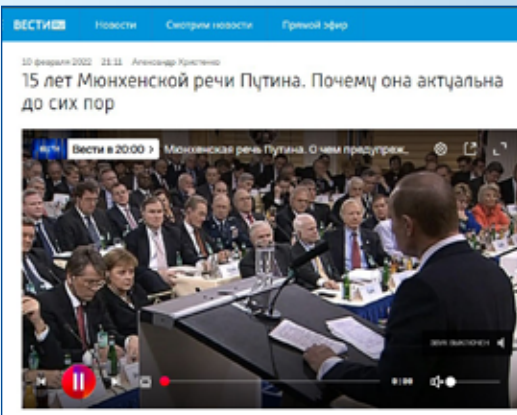
210 Nikonov, Vyacheslav (2015): Ukraine has come under external management, Vesti.ru. Available at: <https://www.vesti.ru/article/1752830>.

211 See n. 37.

"The Russian World" expresses the desire of the Russian state to stretch its power beyond its borders. People supporting the concept believe that there is a mythical "Russian world" out there, which must be (re)conquered and annexed to Russia. This is a narrative aimed at restoring the imperial dominance of the Russian Federation, a concept born of a state in decline, delusional about its former greatness. Archaicism is the biggest problem facing supporters of the "Russian world".

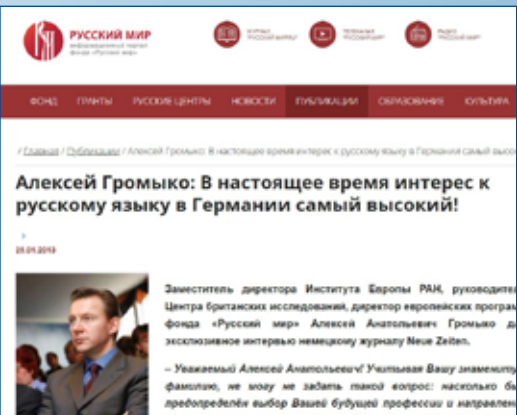
"The Russian world" is a commodity for export, a concept seeking to justify external expansion. There are 25-30 million ethnic Russians and even more native Russian speakers outside of Russia. The fact that the number of such people is decreasing over the years is perceived by the Russian Federation as a threat.

Different approaches are taken to promote the "Russian world". Some narratives are used for states with Russian ethnic or Russian-speaking minorities. First of all, we are talking about the countries that the Russians call the "core" of this world – in addition to Russia, these are Ukraine (termed "Little Russia" by Russian chauvinists) and Belarus ("White Russia"). Here, the greatest focus is on linguistic and cultural affinity. Completely different narratives are used for countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, which have nothing to do with Russian culture: the "Russian world" is promoted through nostalgic discourses referring to Soviet times, when the USSR supported these countries with weapons and money in the "struggle against world capitalism". Some countries in these regions still perceive Russian politics and culture as anti-American, anti-Western, and anti-colonial. In countries not familiar with Russian culture, this is actually the only discourse they have available. If you look at the supporters of the "Russian world", it becomes obvious that they gravitate towards Soviet nomenclature, which in fact has not disappeared. Alexei Gromyko, director of the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences, has written an article in which he describes the "Russian world" in structural terms.<sup>212</sup> Other values include "multiculturalism with Russian dominance" and "multi-confessionalism with Orthodox dominance."



**10 февраля 2022 21:11 Александр Кристиан**  
**15 лет Мюнхенской речи Путина. Почему она актуальна до сих пор**

Вести в 2000 > Мюнхенская речь Путина. О чем предупреждал...



**РУССКИЙ МИР**  
Информационный портал  
Всего объединяет мир

ГОЛОС ГРАЖДАН РУССКОЕ ЦЕНТРИ НОВОСТИ ПУБЛИКАЦИИ ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ КУЛЬТУРА


Главная / Публикации / Алексей Громыко: В настоящее время интерес к русскому языку в Германии самый высокий

**Алексей Громыко: В настоящее время интерес к русскому языку в Германии самый высокий!**

25.01.2013


Заместитель директора Института Европы РАН, руководитель Центра британских исследований, директор европейских программ фонда «Русский мир» Алексей Анатольевич Громыко дал эксклюзивное интервью немецкому журналу Neue Zeiten.

— Уважаемый Алексей Анатольевич! Учитывая Вашу известную фамилию, не могу не задать такой вопрос: насколько бы предпочли выбор Вашей будущей профессии и направлен...



Screenshot 123. Speech by Vladimir Putin (President of Russia) at the Munich Conference, 2007.

Video: "Like Hitler, Putin told the West in advance what he was going to do, and the West ignored him", Vesti RU, February 10, 2022. Source: <https://www.vesti.ru/article/2675429>



Screenshot 124. Article: "Alexey Gromyko: At present, interest in the Russian language in Germany is very high", Russki Mir, January 25, 2013. Source: <https://russkiymir.ru/publications/88117/>

The Russian state supports the promotion of the Russian language through cultural expansion, issuing grants and organizing events. For example, an Anthology of Short Prose of the Silver Age of Russian Literature has been published in Chinese; a "Tchaikovsky – Soul of Russia" festival was held in Mexico;

<sup>212</sup> Gromyko, A. (2013): Russian world: concept, principles, values, structure, Russian world. Information portal of the Russian World Foundation. Available at: <https://russkiymir.ru/publications/190922/>

a “Russian Revival” film festival took place in Australia. In this way, messages of Russian imperial propaganda and chauvinism about “unity” and “friendship” are spread by means of “soft power”. These projects are designed to consolidate Russia’s dominance in the regions it considers part of the “Russian world” and spheres of its geopolitical influence.

#### NOTE:

In order to centralize power, the Russian Empire, starting from the time of Catherine II, systematically tried to Russify the peoples who lived on its territory in order to strengthen their feeling of belonging to Russia.<sup>213</sup> Censorship was one tool used to achieve this goal. Several decrees were issued in Russia prohibiting the printing and distribution of books in the Ukrainian language, for example, in 1863 and 1876. Although the Soviet Union formally recognized the existence of the Ukrainian language, and the Great Soviet Encyclopedia indicated that “the Ukrainian language was subject to restrictions and an official ban under tsarism”,<sup>214</sup> the Soviet government still believed that the Ukrainian language in ethnic Ukrainian territories should be of secondary importance. The Ukrainian language was called the language of the peasants and the countryside, while the Russian language was supposedly the language of the cities and industrial centers, although during the reign of Peter I, Ukrainian prevailed in all large Ukrainian cities. Therefore, the image of the Ukrainian language was artificially created as a language of folk crafts, and not suitable for science or culture. Instead, Russian was considered the language of a large and powerful multinational union. The policy of Russification was accompanied by the persecution, imprisonment and execution of representatives of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, the implanting of Russian and Soviet cultures, and the assimilation of the Ukrainian population. All these actions to destroy the Ukrainian language and cultural identity of Ukrainians can be regarded as cultural genocide or ethnocide.

Even after Ukraine gained independence, Russification continued for a long time, because Russian-language television channels continued to operate in Ukraine, and the amount of Russian music content, movies, printed publications, books, etc. was disproportionately high compared with Ukrainian-language content. This policy of cultural influence was deliberately carried out by the Russian Federation. After the Russian invasion of Donbas and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, which Russia justified as “protection of the Russian-speaking population”, Ukraine began to implement measures to protect the Ukrainian language, for example, through quotas and Ukrainian music on radio stations or the requirement to translate Russian-language films to show on television or to add Ukrainian subtitles to them. The Russian media called such actions “aggressive Ukrainian nationalism” and “oppression of the rights of the Russian-speaking population.”

The Kremlin uses an alternative history to justify its aggression, to explain its reasoning. Therefore, for each act of aggression, the Russian Federation created one historical narrative or another that was supposed to prove its right to this aggression and justify it. For example, the illegal annexation of Crimea is justified by the fact that Crimea has supposedly “always been Russian”; the Russian aggression in the Donbas by the claim that the Donbas allegedly ended up within the borders of Ukraine “accidentally”, and that exclusively Russian-speaking citizens live there. Such statements are fiction and a falsification of historical facts. The population censuses of 1896, 1900, and 1926 testify that the majority of Donbas residents identified themselves as Ukrainians.<sup>215</sup> Attempts to bring “the Russian world” to Odesa or Kharkiv were based on the claim that the mythical “Novorossiya” has existed since the eighteenth century, and that these territories would not be Ukrainian if it were not for the Russian tsars.

213 Hoskings, Geoffrey (1997): *Russia: People and Empire 1552–1917*. London: HarperCollins.

214 Great Soviet Encyclopedia, Vol. 26, article «Ukrainian language».  
Available at: <http://niv.ru/doc/encyclopedia/bse/articles/11162/ukrainskij-yazyk.htm>

215 Dudnyk, I. (2011): *Population censuses in Ukraine: maps, figures, myths and their refutation, Historical Truth*.  
Available at: <https://www.istpravda.com.ua/articles/4edca73ec8b44/>.



**NOTE:**

"Novorossiia" is an artificial Russian imperial name used to designate the eastern-southern territories of modern Ukraine: Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Mykolaiv, Kherson, Kirovohrad, Odesa, and Donetsk regions. Part of these territories was annexed to the Russian Empire as a result of the Russian-Turkish wars (1735–1739, 1768–1774). The name "Novorossiia" is collective, and also applied to the southern lands of the Russian Federation (Kuban). "Novorossiia", or "New Russia" is a tribute to the colonial tendency of the time in naming captured lands. Other European countries also named their colonial possessions according to this principle. For example, this is how New England, New Caledonia, New Zealand, the cities of New Amsterdam and New Orleans, not to mention New York got their names. In order to master the territories newly annexed to Russia, as well as with the aim of assimilating Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars, the "colonization of Novorossiia" began, as a result of which many Russians were settled in these territories. But Germans, Serbs, Greeks, Jews and representatives of other nationalities also arrived there, who often received privileges for settling these lands.

Since 2007, the Russian Federation has entered an active phase of promoting its own geopolitical strategy. At the Munich Security Conference, Putin criticized the unipolarity of the world, the policy of the USA and NATO towards Russia. "I believe that for the modern world a unipolar model is not only unacceptable, but also impossible at all... Russia is a country with more than a thousand years of history, and it has almost always enjoyed the privilege of conducting an independent foreign policy... I think it is obvious: the process of NATO expansion has nothing to do with modernization of the Alliance itself or ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it is a serious provoking factor that lowers the level of mutual trust."<sup>216</sup> The Russian Federation also took a negative view of Ukraine's potential membership of NATO.

Also, Russia emphasized that all "color revolutions" were staged by the West, and that such protests are not held for the purpose of democratizing society, but for the sake of the struggle for power.<sup>217</sup>

The West's weak reaction to Putin's Munich speech and Russia's invasion of Georgia on August 8, 2008, as well as the decision to deny Georgia and Ukraine an Action Plan for NATO membership today look like tragic historical mistakes that led to the annexation of Crimea and a full-scale war on the European continent.

**NOTE:**

In the military-political sphere, the beginning of 2010 was marked by the signing of an important document, the "New Military Doctrine".<sup>218</sup> This doctrine declares that there is a military threat to Russia and describes the possibility of launching military and armed conflicts, local, regional and large-scale wars against it. According to this doctrine, nuclear missiles are the guarantor of Russian state security.

Russia's new military doctrine marks the end of the post-Soviet era, when Russia sought to cooperate with NATO rather than oppose it. The 2010 doctrine defined NATO expansion as a threat to Russia's national security and confirmed its right to use nuclear weapons for defense, but it did not declare NATO to be Moscow's main enemy and did not foresee a pre-emptive nuclear strike, as was the case during the Cold War.

The "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation" was also intended to strengthen Russia's role in the world.

<sup>216</sup> Putin, Vladimir (2008): Munich conference speech, YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tjGcYRmyDo>.

<sup>217</sup> Colored Revolutions. Available at: [https://ruxpert.ru/Цветные\\_революции](https://ruxpert.ru/Цветные_революции)

<sup>218</sup> The New Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 2010. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/461>

**NOTE:**

The main principles, mechanisms and directions of the Russian Federation's modern foreign policy were determined by the decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated November 30, 2016, which put into effect the "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation". This concept defines the Russian Federation as "one of the influential centers of the modern world", and its priority is "strengthening Russia's role in the world humanitarian space, spreading and strengthening the position of the Russian language in the world, popularizing the achievements of national culture, national historical heritage..., Russian education and science, consolidation of the Russian diaspora".<sup>219</sup>

An integral component of the new concept is the use of "soft power" tools, primarily information and communication, humanitarian and other technologies. This, in particular, is expressed in the foreign activities of Russian centers of influence, for example, the "Russian World" foundation and others with the aim of "promoting the study and spread of the Russian language as an integral part of world culture and a tool of international and transnational communication, support and development of the system of Russian educational organizations abroad, providing support to branches and representative offices of Russian educational organizations located on the territories of foreign countries."

The Concept promoted narratives about Russia's role in maintaining security in the world, "opposing attempts by individual states or groups of states to revise universally recognized principles of international law; attempts to arbitrarily interpret the most important international legal norms and principles to suit the political situation and the interests of individual states; attempts to pass violations of international law for its creative application". An important element in achieving the above tasks is "strengthening the position of Russian mass media and mass communications in the global information space, and bringing the Russian point of view on international processes to the broad circles of the world public."<sup>220</sup>

Such statements sound rather cynical, especially in the context of the wars unleashed by the Russian Federation against Georgia and Ukraine, the support of proxies to destabilize the situation in other regions, and the conduct of a destructive foreign policy in general. The position of Russia, which "considers the fight against international terrorism as the most important state task and key priority," is also cynical given the unconventional (essentially terrorist) ways in which Russia is pursuing its war against Ukraine, with shelling of civilians and critical infrastructure.

Russia is trying to create a new geopolitical pole, and the image is being created in Russian society that Russia is a unique state with its own civilization, which has an important goal, to restrain the West. If Russia claims the status of a pole therefore it needs satellite states. That is why the Russian-Ukrainian war and the "conquest" of Ukraine became Russia's state strategic goal.

## **GAYS, RADICALS, NATIONALISTS / NAZIS, FASCISTS TOOK POWER IN UKRAINE**

The events of the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine were portrayed by Russian propaganda as involving mainly "gays", "fascists", antisocial elements and marginalized elements. At that time, sexual minorities were one of the main topics in the Russian mass media.

An "unequivocal" association was made between the May 2014 presidential elections in Ukraine and the "gay parade" [Kyiv Pride is considered a march for the rights and freedoms of all the people, not only minorities – ed.] planned for the same day, which the Russian media called "the first success of

219 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation as of 2016. Available at: <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/41451>

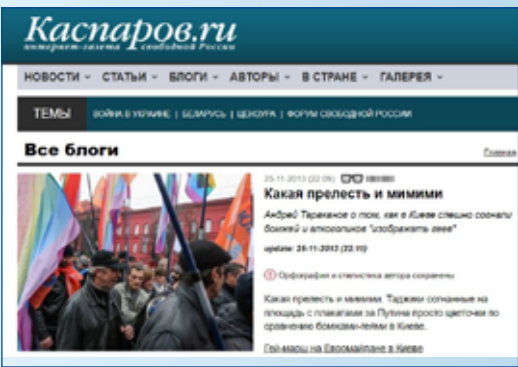
220 Ibid.


Euromaidan”.<sup>221</sup> Ukraine’s political leadership was portrayed in the same way: Russian propagandists called Oleksandr Turchynov the constant driver of and participant in Ukrainian gay parades.

#### NOTE:

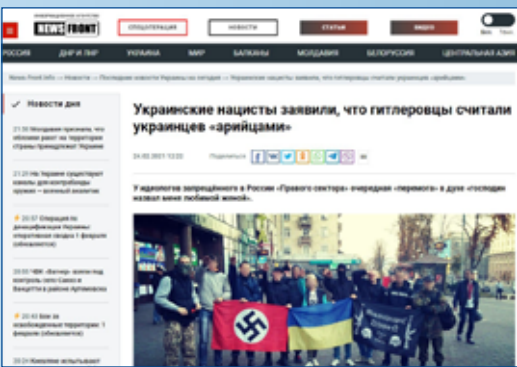
Oleksandr Turchynov acted as the President of Ukraine after President Yanukovych fled. Presidential term: February 23, 2014–June 7, 2014. He is a preacher of the Evangelical Baptist Church.


Homophobia, as well as the rejection of everything related to human rights, has long become a key element of Russian state policy and the ideology of the Russian world.



QR code for Screenshot 125: 

Screenshot 125. Article: “Tajiks, forced to gather in the square with posters for Putin, are nothing in comparison to homeless gays in Kyiv”. Kasparov RU, November 25, 2013. Source: <http://www2.kasparov.ru/material.php?id=529390342AEE2>



QR code for Screenshot 126: 

Screenshot 126. Article: “Ukrainian Nazis said that the Nazis considered Ukrainians to be ‘Aryans’”, News-Front.info, February 24, 2021. Source: <https://news-front.info/2021/02/24/ukrainskie-nacisty-zayavili-chto-gitlerovcy-schitali-ukrainczev-arijczami/>

#### NOTE:

Since 2013, Russia has had a law prohibiting so-called “propaganda of homosexuality.” This ban is supposedly aimed at “protecting children from information that harms their health and development.”<sup>222</sup> In fact, the law prevents the visible representation of LGBT people in the media, as well as peaceful gatherings and public campaigns aimed at protecting the rights of LGBT people. Homophobia is also used to discredit opposition movements. For example, in 2020 Russia voted to amend the Constitution, which enshrined the protection of “traditional” family values at the state level. Advertisements supporting the change to this law contained a clear homophobic message, portraying LGBT people as a threat to Russia’s future.

In the context of the theme of ensuring equality and protection of “traditional (patriarchal) values”, it is interesting to note the decriminalization of domestic violence in the Russian Federation: domestic violence was reclassified from a criminal offense to an administrative offense by federal law.<sup>223</sup>

<sup>221</sup> The more or less annual «March of Equality» is a traditional human rights march in support of equal rights for LGBT+ people.

<sup>222</sup> Promotion of non-traditional sexual relations is prohibited. THE STATE DUMA OF THE FEDERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION. Available at: <http://duma.gov.ru/news/55838/>

<sup>223</sup> Putin signed a law on the decriminalization of domestic violence, Interfax, 2017. Available at: <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/548888>

LGBT rights in Russia are identified with the “harmful influence of the decaying West.” LGBT people are described as a “threat to traditional values and children”, which is also associated with Europe’s loss of “spirituality”, and therefore the “correct” path of development. This contrasts with the “purity and holiness” of Russia as an ancient spiritual center, while the West is demonized. Thus, Russia is portrayed as the defender of Good and the last stronghold in the fight against Evil.

Russia’s strategy of intimidation of gays, lesbians and other members of the LGBT community was tied to the narrative of a Ukrainian society split between those oriented towards the “East” and the “West”, with pro-Ukrainization, European integration and NATO membership opposed to the idea of a Eurasian Customs Union and fraternal relations with Russia and Belarus. It is worth noting that not only the European aspirations of Ukrainians, but also European values themselves were negatively presented in the Russian information space, for example, inclusive and equal treatment of different population groups, respect for the dignity of each person, and tolerance in this context were described as “perversions”. Russian propaganda’s portrayal of the Ukrainian LGBT community and right-wing radical groups as allies is interesting [the opposition of these two groups in Ukraine is well known – ed.]. However, although the Russian mass media accused Ukrainians of supporting the “decaying West”, the participants in the Revolution of Dignity were simultaneously described as driven solely by selfish interest, because the so-called “protest” was completely “paid for”.

#### NOTE:

The Revolution of Dignity is an important event in the history of Ukraine, which became a successful attempt to intensify the democratic and European integration processes and free the country from Russia’s destructive influence. The revolution demonstrated the country’s civilizational choice.

Millions of people took to the streets of Ukrainian cities, and many came to Kyiv at their own expense. The capital became the center of political events. The majority of citizens viewed the protests as a conscious struggle for their civil rights. Students, public activists, human rights defenders, doctors, teachers, priests of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, football fans, actors, musicians, business representatives – almost all social, age and professional strata of the population were represented among the participants of the Revolution.

The Revolution of Dignity opened a window of opportunity for the most important changes in Ukraine: the process of decommunization and the development of civil society, which powerfully declared itself on the Maidan in the form of numerous public initiatives and a volunteer movement to build up the army and protect the state, and further processes of transformation of a post-totalitarian society into a democratic one.<sup>224</sup>

Russian propagandists have actively spread a narrative about the need to “kill the Kyiv junta” since the Revolution of Dignity in 2013–2014. It is part of the Russian narrative that the revolution in Ukraine was a “fascist coup” after which a “junta” came to power.

224 National Memorial Complex of Heroes of the Heavenly Hundred – Museum of the Revolution of Dignity. Available at: <https://www.maidanmuseum.org/uk/storinka/revolyuciya-gidnosti>

**NOTE:**

The word “junta” means a military government. This is a type of political regime that comes to power as a result of a military coup, illegally seizing power, and resorting to terror against the population to maintain power. Russian propagandists applied this term to the Ukrainian government. Allegedly, after Viktor Yanukovich fled from Ukraine as a result of the events on the Maidan (Revolution of Dignity), the country was led by forces that “illegally deprived the legitimate president [Yanukovich] of power” and began to oppress people who share the ideas of the “Russian world”. Therefore, Russia, as the “embodiment of sacred values” is morally compelled to defend the “righteous” or “their own”.

The use of the term “junta” in this case is incorrect, because the army never became a party to the confrontation. Russia, however, used the term to spin the lie that reactionary terrorist groups had supposedly seized power in Ukraine and were repressing the population. In fact, the Revolution was a manifestation of the will of the Ukrainian people, and in 2014, internationally recognized democratic presidential elections were held. As a result Petro Poroshenko became the President of Ukraine after the first round of voting.

In the context of the presentation of Ukrainian revolutionaries as aggressive nationalists, Nazis, and fascists, the term “Banderivtsi” [Banderites, the followers of Stepan Bandera – ed.] is also popularized. The destruction of Banderites, or the “denazification of Ukraine”, was later identified as one of the official goals of the start of the “special military operation” in 2022.

**NOTE:**

The Banderites and their leader Stepan Bandera are an underground military organization that fought for the liberation of Ukraine from two totalitarian regimes - Nazi and Communist. They operated as late as the middle of the twentieth century.

Stepan Bandera is an ideologue of the Ukrainian national liberation movement. His views on the fight against the occupiers were radical for his time: focusing on his own forces, creating armed underground troops and gaining Ukraine's independence.

Stepan Bandera and another leader of the national liberation struggle Roman Shukhevych saw the achievement of this goal primarily in the consolidation of all Ukrainian political forces. The names of these Ukrainian figures, as well as other leaders of the Ukrainian liberation movement, have always been smeared by the Russian authorities.

It is worth noting that the Nuremberg Tribunal, which tried the main Nazi criminals in the war of 1939–1945, rejected the attempts by representatives of the Soviet Union to condemn the activities of the Ukrainian armed forces under the leadership of Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych. The International Court of Justice qualified this activity as a movement of Ukrainian resistance against the armed aggression of foreign troops on their ethnic territory during the Second World War.

It is true to say that some acts of Ukrainian nationalists are a matter of harsh historical debates. But in today's context those leaders of the past are a symbol of national liberation and defense of Ukraine with no connotation other than protection of the country from another genocide orchestrated by Russia.

The Russian authorities have used a political technique that has been tested many times in the past: a sharp reorientation of Russians' value priorities, away from domestic troubles to external triggers in the form of an enemy common to the entire nation and the euphoria of victory over it. Ukraine was declared such a threat, and the image of Nazi Germany was applied to it – the former “brotherly people” unexpectedly transformed in the media into “Banderites”, “Nazis” and “Ukrainian fascists”.

However, the accusations of alleged adherence to fascist ideas in Ukraine mostly apply to the Russians themselves, as Timothy Snyder, well-known intellectual, Yale University professor and specialist in the history of Eastern Europe, in particular, Ukraine, Poland and Russia, proved thoroughly in his article: “We Should Say It. Russia Is Fascist”.<sup>225</sup>

225 Snyder, Timothy (2022): We Should Say It. Russia Is Fascist. Available at: <https://nyti.ms/3EjTNbH>



Table: Signs of fascism in Russia

| Fascist ideas   | Russia  | Ukraine   |
|---|---|---|
| A cult of irrationality and violence                                      | Yes   | No  |
| The cult of a single leader   | Yes: Putin and Putinism   | No  |
| Cult of the dead  | Yes: the cult of the dead was created around the events of World War II   | No  |
| The myth of a past golden age of imperial greatness                       | Yes: The "golden age" must be restored with the help of a war of healing violence – a war against Georgia, Ukraine  | No  |
| Xenophobia  | Yes   | Not as widespread as in Russia  |
| The myth of innocence and lost greatness                                  | Yes: Russia deserves a monopoly on sacrifice and victory in WWII because it "stood alone" against Nazi Germany  | No  |
| Domestic policy based on protection from alleged external enemies/threats | Yes: the collective West  | No. Perception of Russia as an enemy and a threat is a sound reaction to imperialistic aggression |
| A cult of the will  | Yes   | No  |
| The language of enmity and hatred   | Yes: propaganda calls for genocide against Ukrainians, promotes an idea of Russian greatness and complementarity of other nations and cultures, depicts the West as hostile and destructive the Russian righteous civilizational path | Mainly in response to Russia's aggression   |

Although Russia calls Ukrainians and Europeans, and basically all those who disagree with its aggressive policies and acts, fascists, it is the Russian Federation that is a fascist state, as many experts have claimed. When Russian propaganda equates Ukrainians and Nazis, it aims to dehumanize the people being killed as a result of Russian aggression. Speeches full of hatred against Ukrainians justify murder, including mass graves found in Bucha, Mariupol and every part of Ukraine that had been under Russian occupation. Mass killings are not isolated cases, but the expected consequences of the fascist war of extermination. Fascists who call other people "fascists" represent fascism taken to its absolute illogical extreme, a cult of nonsense in which hate speech replaces reality with fiction. This is the height of fascism, or "schizofascism"<sup>226</sup> and "rascism",<sup>227</sup> to cite new terms referring to the phenomenon.

With the beginning of the propaganda campaign launched in 2014 in the Russian and pro-Russian mass media, the bizarre topic of "Ukrainian fascism" invented by Russia came to the fore. The Revolution of Dignity was depicted as a "fascist coup", and the notion of a "struggle against fascism"<sup>228</sup> was used to justify the occupation of Crimea and armed Russian aggression in the east of Ukraine. It was intended to justify use of the discourse of the victory over fascism in the Great Patriotic War to "explain" the

226 Snyder, Timothy (2019): *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*, Random House.

227 Snyder, Timothy (2022): *The War in Ukraine Has Unleashed a New Word*. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/22/magazine/ruscism-ukraine-russia-war.html>

228 Rozumny, O.M. (2017): Russian policy of memory as a component of hybrid aggression against Ukraine: technology, effectiveness, countermeasures, *Strategic Priorities*, 3: 67–77.

fight against Ukrainians. This rhetoric (including such words as “punishers” [karateli – those applying repressive methods against a peaceful population – ed.], “Nazis”, “militias”) is used to describe the events in Ukraine.

At that point, Russia was sending out two messages through its propaganda machine: “power in Ukraine has been seized by radical nationalists (fascists)” and “if Crimea and Donbas had not escaped Kyiv’s control, their population would have become victims of nationalist (fascist) terror”.<sup>229</sup> The purpose of such stories is to drum up support for aggressive Russian policy. By equating Ukrainians with fascists, the Russian authorities spread the idea that Ukrainians can and should be killed. The propagandists have tried to shape the image of the “Right Sector” in particular as sadists and rapists.<sup>230</sup>

Subsequently, Russian propaganda invented myths about the “criminal activities” of the “Right Sector”, for example, about “mass murders” of the Russian-speaking population. At that time, Russian propaganda did not yet call all Ukrainians “Nazis” without exception, pointing out the existence of some “nationalist gangs” that threaten the life and peace of ordinary Ukrainians. Another propaganda narrative soon emerged from this, namely that Russia must “save” Russian-speaking Ukrainians from their own government, even if this requires military intervention.

#### NOTE:

The “Right Sector” is a socio-political movement that advocates national Ukrainian revival, building its activities on the principles of national unity, patriotism, and so on. The leader of the movement, Dmytro Yarosh, rejects all accusations that the Right Sector adheres to Nazi ideology, explaining that the movement includes people of all nationalities and it does not matter what ethnic origin a person has, what language they speak, and what religion they practice.<sup>231</sup> The Supreme Court of Russia condemned “Right Sector” as an extremist organization and banned its activities in Russia, although there was never a single representative office of “Right Sector” on its territory.

The year 2014 became a turning point for Russian propaganda. That was when the Russian mass media actively switched from manipulation and half-truths to the use of complete lies and the creation of fake news, most of which was simply absurd. Unfortunately, even hypertrophied and primitive fictions about Ukraine, which seemed funny to Ukrainians because of their obvious absurdity, found a response in Russian society, confirming that we live in a post-truth world. A classic meme of Russian propaganda of that time was a fictional story about a “crucified boy from Sloviansk”, which was supposed to become the personification of the “bloody, violent nature of the Ukrainian national guardsmen”. This fiction was initially promulgated on July 11, 2014 on Russian television. The plot was as follows: Russian journalists allegedly met a woman in a refugee camp in the Rostov region. This woman said that she had seen with her own eyes how Ukrainian soldiers killed a child and then the mother in the central square of the city of Sloviansk. The next day, another interview with this woman, Halyna Pishnyak, appeared on the same Channel 1. No evidence was presented.<sup>232</sup>

229 Yermolenko, V./Iliuk, O. (2019): Introduction. Re-Vision of History. Russian Historical Propaganda and Ukraine, KIS. C. 4–6.

230 Gatehouse, Gabriel (2015): The Right Sector: the revolution in Ukraine is not over? BBC Russian Service. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BzbkArHFMNY>.

231 Stogrin, I. (2014): The right sector: who they are and what they want, Radio Freedom. Available at: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/25297508.html>.

232 Dudar, O. (2021): The story of one lie: what happened to the woman from Transcarpathia who told a fake story about the «crucified boy», Watch Info. Available at: <https://dyvys.info/2021/04/12/istoriya-odniyeyi-brehni-shho-stalosya-iz-zakarpatskoyu-ya-ka-rozpovila-fejk-pro-rozip-yatogo-hlopchyka/>.

Another narrative in Russian propaganda's anti-Ukrainian rhetoric was the narrative of the "mass flight" of residents in the east of Ukraine, who allegedly were horrified by the "atrocities of the Nazis" and found refuge in the Russian Federation. According to Russian mass media, the number of refugees from Ukraine to Russia has reached such a scale that they had to introduce a state of emergency in the Rostov region of the Russian Federation.

One of the most absurd fakes of Russian propaganda was the fake about "Russian-speaking slaves". For fighting against "free Donetsk and Luhansk", Ukrainian National Guardsmen were allegedly promised a plot of land and "two slaves" from among the Russian-speaking residents of Donbas.

Propagandists emphasized that not only people, but also animals and birds suffer from Ukrainian "atrocities" and "nationalistic hysteria". In particular, the Russian mass media claimed that the Ukrainians exterminate grebes because they have red (and therefore pro-Russian) plumage, and that this is what their Ukrainian teachers supposedly teach children in Ukrainian schools.

These absurd propaganda statements are just a few examples of the extremely primitive fakes actively spread in the Russian mass media at the time.

A popular propaganda theme developed by the Russian media even before the full-scale invasion was the fiction of secret biolaboratories that supposedly operate in Ukraine and are directly funded by Western countries, primarily the United States. Propagandists told the public an absurd story about birds from Ukrainian biolaboratories, which, migrating through Russia, allegedly spread a virus that affects only ethnic Russians, based on their DNA. Here, the Russian narrative about weapons of mass destruction and Ukraine's apparent desire to restore its nuclear potential in response to the ineffectiveness of the Budapest Memorandum are being followed in parallel.

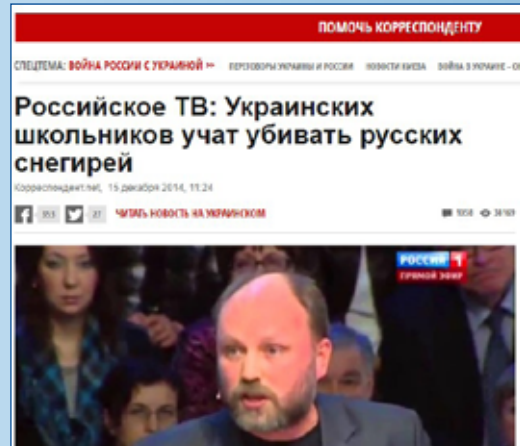
During that period of information warfare, Russian media began simply to make up stories, presenting them as facts. The source of that insanity was obviously in the Kremlin. Putin quoted Hitler's propagandist Goebbels at a meeting with an international delegation of rabbis: "The more incredible a lie is, the faster it will be believed."<sup>233</sup> The fact that Putin quotes the Nazi propagandist Goebbels, who is guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity, is also quite revealing.

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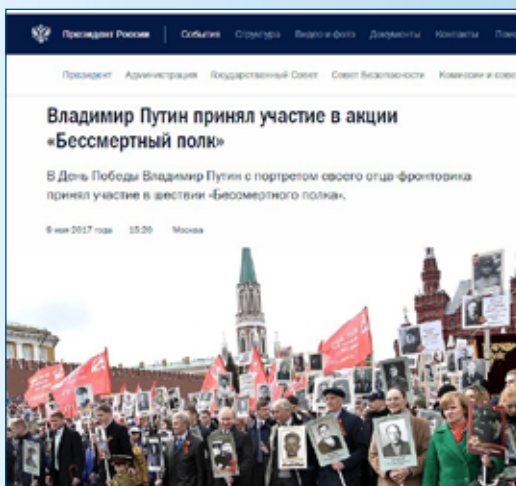
233 Meeting with representatives of international public and religious organizations, Spbytiya, 2014. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46180>



Screenshot 127. Article: "The Rostov region accommodated almost 14,000 Ukrainian refugees. Checkpoint and camp for refugees from Ukraine in the Rostov region", RIA News, June 22, 2014. Source: <https://ria.ru/20140622/1013077110.html>



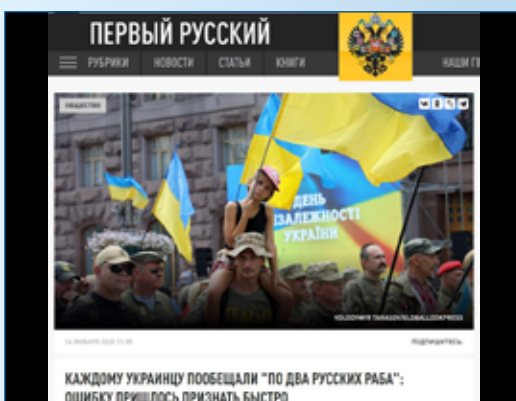
Screenshot 128. Article: "On air on TV channel Russia-1, it was said that in Ukrainian schools they teach feeding yellow and blue tits and hunting pro-Russian snowbirds", Korrespondent, December 15, 2014. Source: <https://bit.ly/3pAN6hY>



Screenshot 129. Article: "The President took part in the action 'Immortal Regiment'", official website of the President of Russia, May 9, 2019. Source: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60495>



Screenshot 130. Article: "American biolaboratories in Ukraine: why Russia and China are worried", Newspaper.Ru, April 9, 2021. Source: [https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2021/04/09\\_a\\_13552772.shtml](https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2021/04/09_a_13552772.shtml)

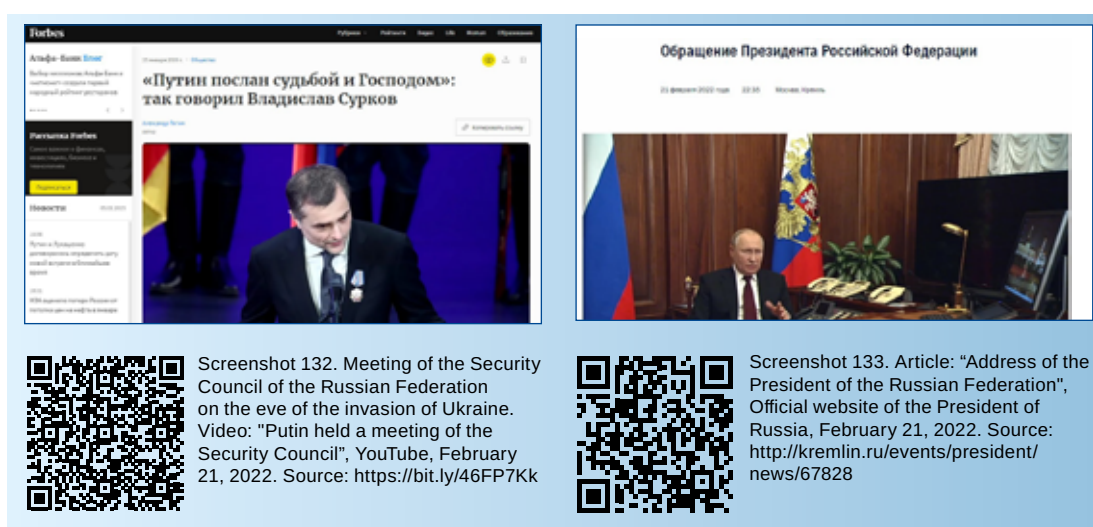


Screenshot 131. Article: "Each Ukrainian was promised 'two Russian slaves'", Tsargrad, January 14, 2022. Source: <https://bit.ly/44iHFDm>

## UKRAINE AS A NON-EXISTENT STATE

On December 21, 2021, in a conversation with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who, in order to relieve international tension, had assured the Russian president that Ukraine would not become a member of NATO in the next 30 years, Putin said: "Ukraine and Belarus should not exist as independent states."<sup>234</sup> As soon became clear, this address was a kind of manifesto of Putin regarding his justification for a full-scale war against Ukraine.

On July 12, 2021, during a Russian national holiday, which is tentatively called Russian Independence Day, Putin published the article "On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians", in which he presented a distorted, propagandistic and colonial vision of the history of Ukraine and concluded that "modern Ukraine is wholly and completely a brainchild of the Soviet era. We know and remember that it was largely created at the expense of historical Russia. It is enough to compare which lands were reunited with the Russian state in the 17th century and with which territories the Ukrainian SSR left the Soviet Union. ... Russia was actually robbed."<sup>235</sup>



In this way, Putin tried to justify to Russian citizens his decision to "immediately recognize the independence and sovereignty of the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic." Putin called the current Ukrainian government "a product of the 2014 coup d'état" and specified that he "does not and will not recognize any other solution to the Donbass issue, except a military one", demanding that Ukrainians "immediately stop hostilities".<sup>236</sup>

A widely publicized article on the Russian-Ukrainian war thus boosted several propaganda narratives:<sup>237</sup>

**Fake 1.** Ukrainians, Belarusians and Russians are one people. This narrative contradicts the previous (Soviet) narrative about "three fraternal but separate nations".

234 Scholz talked about a conversation with Putin before the full-scale war. He said that Ukraine and Belarus should not be independent, Die Welt, August 21, 2022. Available at: <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article240586497/Ukraine-Krieg-Scholz-Biden-Macron-und-Johnson-fordern-Inspektion-des-AKW-Saporischschja.html>.

235 Putin, Vladimir (2021): On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians. Official website of the President of Russia. Available at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/66181>.

236 Putin, Vladimir (2022): Putin's address to the citizens of Russia, Official website. February 21, 2022. Available at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>.

237 See n. 63.



**NOTE:**

Ukraine is a sovereign country with a thousand-year history and its own statehood. Ukrainians are a separate people with their own language, culture, traditions, folklore, mentality, and so on. On December 1, 1991, 90.32 percent of citizens who participated in the referendum voted in favor of the Act on the Proclamation of Independence of Ukraine. Ukrainians unanimously wanted sovereignty and separation from both the Soviet Union and Russia. Therefore, the myth of the "one nation" is a propaganda fiction that denies obvious historical, cultural, and other scientific facts.

**Fake 2.** The Soviet government created Ukraine: "It was the Soviet national policy – instead of the great Russian nation, a triune nation consisting of Great Russians, Little Russians [ed. – Ukrainians], and Belarusians – that established at state level the position of three separate Slavic peoples: Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian. The final design of the "three-united Russian people" could not go the "American way", eventually becoming a state-building "supra-ethnic" nation".<sup>238</sup>

**NOTE:**

In fact, Lenin did not create Ukraine. In 1918, he launched a war against the Ukrainian People's Republic (UPR), an independent Ukrainian state created by Ukrainians after the fall of the Russian Empire. After the defeat of the Ukrainian People's Republic, Lenin integrated it in the USSR as the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

In November 1917, the Ukrainian national movement proclaimed the independent Ukrainian People's Republic, but the UPR was subjected to Bolshevik aggression, and after several years of unequal struggle, it was again occupied by Russia.

It is also untrue that some lands were "gifted" to Ukrainians by the Bolsheviks. "Ukraine before the occupation by the Bolsheviks in 1919–1920 was 200,000 square kilometers larger than the size in which it left the Soviet Union".<sup>239</sup>

**Fake 3.** This concerns the exit of Ukraine and Russia from the USSR and the fact that Russia did not seem to leave the USSR. The truth is that the Law on the Procedure for Consideration of Issues Related to the Withdrawal of Union Republics from the USSR<sup>240</sup> was adopted on April 3, 1990, when the USSR was still in place. Ukraine was the only one of the former Soviet republics that acted in accordance with this law at the time of withdrawal from the Soviet Union.

"A mixture of ignorance and aggression", that is how historians have characterized Putin's ideas, debunking all his false "conclusions". Scholars draw attention to the fact that during the Lenin-Stalin era, Ukraine grew territorially not because of mythical "Kremlin gifts", but with the restoration of its own ethnic lands, which had been temporarily located within the borders of other countries as a result of wars and other historical events that took place on the European continent.<sup>241</sup>

238 Bovt, G. (2021): Ukraine – the birth of Stalinism? About the triune Russian people, Gazeta.ru, July 5, 2021. Available at: <https://www.gazeta.ru/comments/column/bovt/13699742.shtml>

239 Chervonenko, V. (2022): Lenin created modern Russia, not Ukraine. Historians about Putin's scandalous speech, BBC News. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-60480944>

240 Law on the procedure for resolving issues related to the withdrawal of the Union Republic from the USSR, 1990. Available at: <https://base.garant.ru/6335629/>.

241 Vodotyka, Tetyana/Golovko, Volodymyr/Kulchytskyi, Stanislav/Yakubova, Larisa (2022): Ukrainian century (1921–2021): origins, lessons, perspective of state formation. Essays. Second edition. Kyiv: Klio Publishing House LLC.

In this regard Timothy Snyder's concepts of the "politics of inevitability" and the "politics of eternity" are very useful for in-depth understanding of the civilizational path such narratives are shaping for the nations.

#### NOTE:

"...the politics of inevitability – a sense that the future is just more of the present, that the laws of progress are known, that there are no alternatives, and therefore nothing really to be done. <...>

The politics of inevitability is the idea that there are no ideas. Those in its thrall deny that ideas matter, proving only that they are in the grip of a powerful one. The cliché of the politics of inevitability is that "there are no alternatives." To accept this is to deny individual responsibility for seeing history and making change. Life becomes a sleepwalk to a premarked grave in a prepurchased plot. <...>

Whereas inevitability promises a better future for everyone, eternity places one nation at the centre of a cyclical story of victimhood. Time is no longer a line into the future, but a circle that endlessly returns the same threats from the past. Within inevitability, no one is responsible because we all know that the details will sort themselves out for the better; within eternity, no one is responsible because we all know that the enemy is coming no matter what we do. <...>

In power, eternity politicians manufacture crisis and manipulate the resultant emotion. To distract from their inability or unwillingness to reform, they instruct their citizens to experience elation and outrage at short intervals, drowning the future in the present. In foreign policy, eternity politicians belittle and undo the achievements of countries that might seem like models to their own citizens. Using technology to transmit political fiction at home and abroad, eternity politicians deny truth and seek to reduce life to spectacle and feeling.

Inevitability and eternity translate facts into narratives. Those swayed by inevitability see every fact as a blip that does not alter the overall story of progress; those who shift to eternity classify every new event as just one more instance of a timeless threat. Each masquerades as history; each does away with history. Inevitability politicians teach that the specifics of the past are irrelevant, since anything that happens is just grist for the mill of progress. Eternity politicians leap from one moment to another, over decades or centuries, to build a myth of innocence and danger. They imagine cycles of threat in the past, creating an imagined pattern that they realise in the present by producing artificial crises and daily drama.

Inevitability and eternity have specific propaganda styles. Inevitability politicians spin facts into a web of wellbeing. Eternity politicians suppress facts in order to dismiss the reality that people are freer and richer in other countries, and the idea that reforms could be formulated on the basis of knowledge".<sup>242</sup>

This is exactly the path that Putin's Russia has chosen. The "politics of eternity", as Timothy Snyder emphasizes, gives rise to "big" ideas (grand narratives), such as the narrative of a "great people", the "great victory" and so on.

Snyder singles out the following features of the "politics of eternity" that can be identified in modern Russia:

- a powerful man erases the future, and the present has become eternal;
- the "politics of eternity" requires the creation of problems that cannot be solved, problems that are imaginary;
- the "politics of eternity" destroys history.<sup>243</sup>

242 Timothy Snyder (2018): "Vladimir Putin's politics of eternity", The Guardian. Available at: <https://bit.ly/47X87EE>

243 Ibid.

Vladislav Surkov has summarized the agenda of the Russian state and propaganda,<sup>244</sup> distinguishing four models of the Russian state: the state of Ivan III (fifteenth–seventeenth centuries), the state of Peter I (Russian Empire, eighteenth–nineteenth centuries), the state of Vladimir Lenin (USSR, twentieth century), and the state of Vladimir Putin (RF, twenty-first century). According to Surkov, Putin has achieved the following<sup>245</sup>:

- “During the time of Putin’s rule, new opportunities for state building have opened up, which is defined not by imported chimeras, but by the logic of historical processes.”
- “The biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century”, that is, the collapse of the USSR, and therefore “the impossible, unnatural and counter-historical collapse of Russia was halted, albeit late.”
- Putin’s regime is precisely the regime that has created “an organically formed model of the political system [that] will be an effective means of survival and elevation of the Russian nation for the coming not only years, but also decades, and most likely for the entire future century.”
- Putinism will remain the ideology of the future.
- “Foreign politicians claim Russia’s interference in elections and referendums all over the planet. In fact, the matter is even more serious – Russia interferes with their brains, and they do not know what to do with their own altered consciousness”. This phrase sounds like an open admission of manipulative and propaganda practices.
- “It was from Russia that a sobering question was sounded to deceived humanity: and who are we in the world web – spiders or flies...?”
- “When no one denied the hegemony of the ‘hegemon’ and the great American dream of world domination had almost come true and many imagined the end of history with the final remark ‘the nations are silent’, the Munich speech suddenly sounded out confidently.”
- “It is enough to change the angle of vision a little... and a resident of the West begins to turn his head in search of other models and ways of existence. And sees Russia.”
- “There is no deep state in Russia, but there is a deep people... The ability to hear and understand the people, to see them through and through, to their full depth, and to act accordingly is the unique and main advantage of Putin’s state. It is in harmony with the people, compatible with it, and therefore... it is effective and long-lasting...”
- “Our new state will have a long and glorious history in the new century. It [the state] will not break. It will go its own way, win and keep prizes in the top league of geopolitical struggle. Sooner or later, all those who demand that Russia ‘change its behavior’ will have to come to terms with this. After all, it only seems that they have a choice.”

#### NOTE:

Vladislav Surkov is a Russian politician. Assistant to the President of the Russian Federation (2004–2008); Assistant to the President of the Russian Federation on socio-economic cooperation with the CIS states, Abkhazia and South Ossetia (2013–2020). Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation. Ideologist of the “Novorossiya” project.

<sup>244</sup> Surkov, V. (2019): Putin’s Lasting State, Politykus.

Available at: <https://politikus.info/v-rossii/116858-vladislav-surkov-dolgoe-gosudarstvo-putina.html>.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

## DENAZIFICATION AND DEMILITARIZATION OF UKRAINE

Immediately before the start of full-scale war against Ukraine, Putin held a meeting of the Security Council of the Russian Federation (February 21, 2022)<sup>246</sup> and addressed the Russian people (February 21, 2022<sup>247</sup> and February 24, 2022).<sup>248</sup> In these addresses, Putin justified the start of a “special military operation” in Ukraine, talking about the need to “liberate the peoples of Donbas” and “denazify and demilitarize” Ukraine.

At the first stage of the full-scale invasion, Russian propaganda continued to promote the narratives of a “united nation”, the “liberation” of Ukrainians from “neo-Nazis” and the “protection” of the residents of Donbas. Therefore, Russian propaganda described the military goals as “humanistic”. But soon the narrative of “brotherhood of nations” gives way to the narrative of “war with the West.” When the Russian troops were forced to retreat from Kyiv region, Chernihiv region and Sumy region, it appeared to the Russian population as a voluntary withdrawal from military positions in order to transfer the army to Donbas, supposedly with the aim of stopping the “war crimes” of the Ukrainian military and protecting Russian-speaking residents.

With increasing losses in the war, there is a need to justify them in the eyes of the average Russian. For this purpose, the narrative of “sacred duty” and the sacredness of Russian victims in the Russian-Ukrainian war, which propaganda continues to call a “special military operation”, is promoted. In this context, parallels are drawn between the “feats of Russian soldiers” in the war against Ukraine and in the Great Patriotic War, with the heroization of the participants of these wars.

From the point of view of Russian propagandists, “victory through fear” in the war against Ukraine has its advantages, and in order to normalize the phenomenon of war and add connotations of a “caring state” to it, the propaganda machine constantly repeats information about benefits and significant payments for the participants of the “special military operation” and the dead soldiers’ families.

In order to impose its vision of the world and events on the masses, propaganda must control the information space. That is why the narrative about the harmfulness and unreliability of social networks is being actively promoted so that the population perceives any alternative, unofficial information as fake, and therefore trusts only the official pro-Kremlin media. Meanwhile, people spreading such “fakes” are being prosecuted.

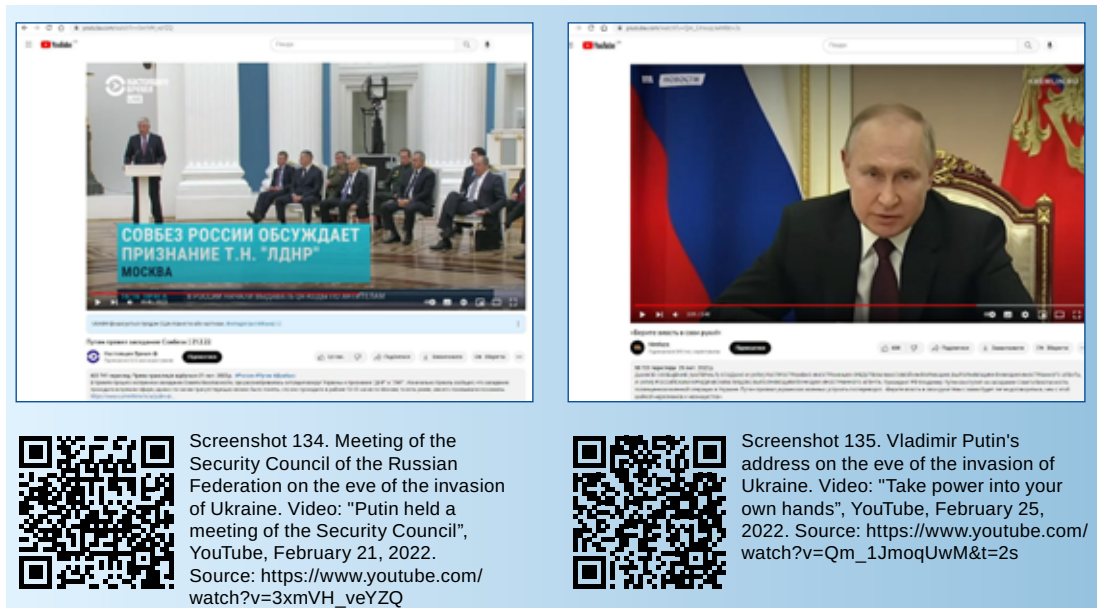
Also, Russia continues to promote the “failed state” narrative regarding Ukraine, constantly highlighting in the mass media internal problems that are not related to war: corruption, issues of European integration, the ethnic origin of Ukraine’s political leadership. Ukraine is portrayed as a puppet of the West, which seems to have been harboring the idea of the “destruction of Russia” for a long time. The idea that “the war with the West will continue until the last Ukrainian” are indicative, if the collective West ignores “Russia’s peaceful aspirations” and nullifies all its efforts to resolve the conflict. The Russian population is told that the West deliberately armed and continues to arm the “Ukrainian regime” in order to use it to commit violence in the Donbass and Crimea in order to weaken Russia.<sup>249</sup> Thus, the special military operation is presented to the population as Russia’s logical response to threats from the West and as a preventive step to avoid a global war.

246 Putin held a meeting of the Security Council, 2022. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xmVH\\_veYZQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xmVH_veYZQ).

247 Putin’s address to Russians, 2022. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQDrFG5Ynf0>.

248 Address of the President of the Russian Federation, 2022. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=taYTXHsUU5w>.

249 Danilyn, P. (2022): The war to the last Ukrainian is a view imposed by the West. Available at: <https://vz.ru/opinions/2022/3/30/1151266.html>



A possible expansion of the area of Russian hostilities, which may spill over into NATO territory (Poland, the Baltic states), has been actively discussed in Russian media. The occupation of the western regions of Ukraine by Poland has become a new narrative. According to Putin, there is no one to negotiate with in Ukraine, because he does not recognize the Ukrainian leadership and army, repeating that Ukraine is ruled by "neo-Nazis" and "gangs of criminals".<sup>250</sup>

Overall, the main narratives of the period are as follows:

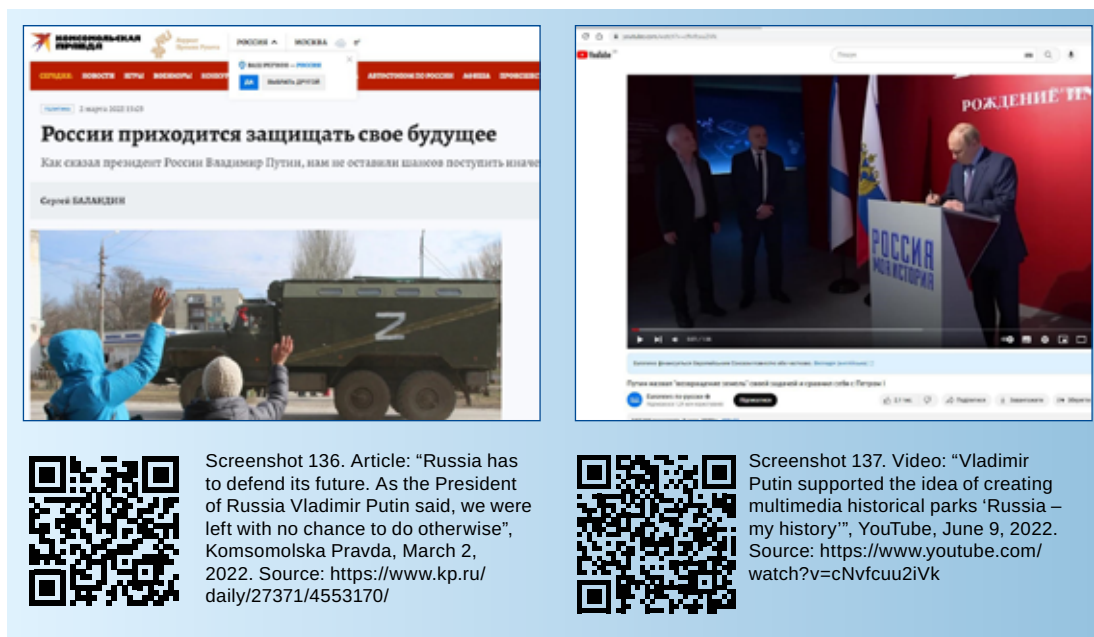
- justification and popularization of the war (special military operation);
- the "sacred" role of the political leadership of the Russian Federation (Putin) and the Russians in conducting the special military operation;
- reorientation of public consciousness: from internal difficulties in the economy to external ones, the "threat of the West";
- heroization of the special military operation;
- demonization of Ukraine and the West;
- hyperbole about the suffering of Donbas residents as a result of "Nazi war crimes";
- stigmatization of non-Russian media as sources of disinformation and fakes.

The apotheosis of Putin's chauvinistic narratives is his comparison of himself with emperor of Russia Peter I as "the collector of Russian lands".<sup>251</sup>

<sup>250</sup> Kadyrov, R. (2022): There is no one to negotiate with in Ukraine, IA Krasnaya Vesna. Available at: <https://rossaprimavera.ru/news/c25fb109>.

<sup>251</sup> Putin called the «return of lands» his task and compared himself to Peter I, Euronews in Russian, 2022. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNvfccu2iVvK>.





In such a war, publicized as a war "for a righteous cause", the Russian Federation needed a quick victory. The leadership of the Russian Federation assured its soldiers that the special military operation would be short and that the Ukrainian state would be "undermined from within": the government would lose the trust of the population, the leadership of the country and the armed forces would be disoriented, because any government decisions would be sabotaged by the population, and the Russian army would be met as liberators. Even if the Ukrainian army retains moral and psychological stability and combat power, the lack of public support means that it will be able to put up only partial resistance, organized by individual commanders at their own peril.<sup>252</sup> But such stories have turned out to be far from the truth.

## "RETREATING OFFENSIVE", "GESTURES OF GOOD WILL" AND OTHER CREATIVE ACHIEVEMENTS OF RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA

Through the failure of the Blitzkrieg, Ukrainians' stiff resistance, and then the successes of the Ukrainian army on the front, Russian propaganda has been forced to invent explanations of the army's inability to fulfill the initial invasion plan. Those efforts have spawned truly extraordinary euphemisms, such as "retreating offensive" (withdrawal of the Russian armed forces from previously occupied territories) and the "gesture of good will" (another synonym for retreat).<sup>253</sup>

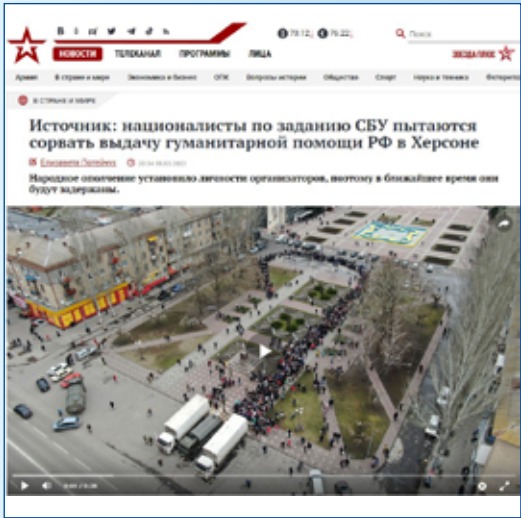
With the beginning of hostilities on the territory of Ukraine, both the subject matter and the rhetoric of Russian propaganda have been constantly changing. The Russian media wrote about the war in Ukraine mainly during the first month after the start of the full-scale invasion. Starting from April–May 2022, the emphasis has been on "humanitarian aid to refugees from Ukraine" and residents of "liberated" (in fact, temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation) Ukrainian territories. This narrative is quite actively used by Russian propaganda to demonstrate the "humanity" of the occupying power. However, this is done with the aim of creating a false impression of reality, primarily for Russian citizens. In fact, Ukrainians in the temporarily occupied territories often refuse any help offered by the occupiers.<sup>254</sup>

252 Radikov, I. (2015): The new essence of war in the 21st century and its reflection in the military doctrine of the Russian Federation, *Vestnik Sankt-Peterburgskogo Universiteta. Politologiya. Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya* [Bulletin of St. Petersburg University. Political Science. International Relationships], No. 2, pp. 39–51.

253 Retreating offensive on Kherson: how the Kremlin explained another defeat to the Russians, *Money*, 2022. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K66k3xb6-Ws>

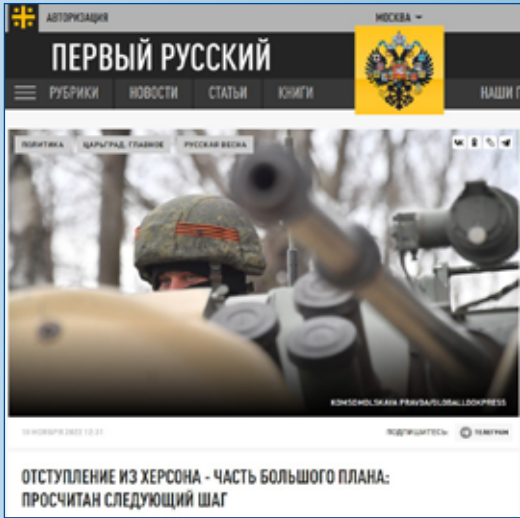
254 In the occupied areas of Kharkiv Oblast, Ukrainians refuse to "help" the enemy. Available at: <https://novynarnia.com/2022/04/24/v-okupovanyh-rajonah-harkivshhyny-ukrayinczi-vidmovlyayutsya-vid-vorozhoyi-dopomogy/>

In order to create the image needed by the propagandists, Russian “journalists” have resorted to staging videos in which they use imported Russian “activists” rather than the local population.<sup>255</sup>



**Источники: националисты по заданию СБУ пытаются сорвать выдачу гуманитарной помощи РФ в Херсоне**  
Националисты пытаются сорвать выдачу гуманитарной помощи РФ в Херсоне. В ближайшее время они будут задержаны.

Source: <https://tvzvezda.ru/news/2022352034-4ytFO.html>



**ОТСТУПЛЕНИЕ ИЗ ХЕРСОНА - ЧАСТЬ БОЛЬШОГО ПЛАНА: ПРОСЧИТАН СЛЕДУЮЩИЙ ШАГ**

Source: [https://tsargrad.tv/news/otstuplenie-iz-hersona-chast-bolshogo-plana-proschitan-sledujushhij-shag\\_661861](https://tsargrad.tv/news/otstuplenie-iz-hersona-chast-bolshogo-plana-proschitan-sledujushhij-shag_661861)

It is also worth raising the topic of forced migrants. After the start of the full-scale invasion, the Russian authorities began deporting Ukrainians to the territory of the Russian Federation and the so-called Russian-controlled DPR-LPR, calling this forced deportation a “population evacuation.” This situation looks especially cynical in relation to Ukrainian children who were forcibly removed from the occupied territory of Ukraine and given for adoption to Russian families, while often they have blood relatives in Ukraine who cannot get access to these kidnapped children. According to the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948, such actions by the Russian authorities to forcibly remove children from the territory of Ukraine constitute genocide.<sup>256</sup> In particular, Article 2 of this Convention emphasizes that genocidal acts, among others, include “forcible transfer of children of [one national, ethnic] group to another.”<sup>257</sup>

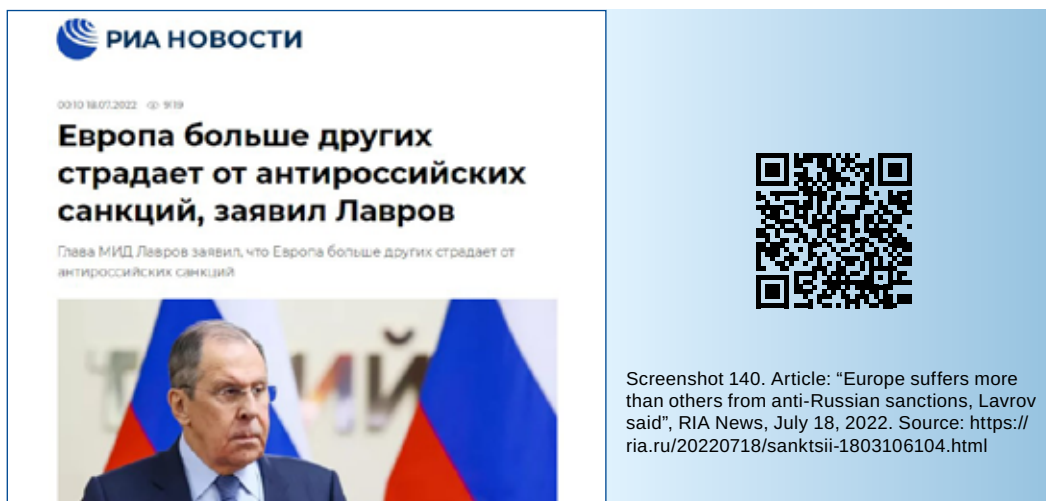
After the start of Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine, some countries imposed economic sanctions. The response in the Russian media has been as follows: Europe will suffer more from sanctions than the Russian Federation. Interesting in this context is a series of cringe-worthy Russian videos about Europe, which seems to be frozen in winter.<sup>258</sup>

<sup>255</sup> The Russian Federation failed to distribute “gum aid” in Kherson. Available at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2022/03/4/7328208/>

<sup>256</sup> Snyder, T. (2022): Six steps to prove Russian genocide in Ukraine. Putin and Hitler act similarly. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5wUWN2am8QI>

<sup>257</sup> Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948. Available at: [https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.1\\_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf)

<sup>258</sup> The Christmas hamster vividly showed Europeans their gloomy future, Life, 2022. Available at: <https://life.ru/p/1547758>



This narrative is promoted along with reports about the “real state of the Russian economy.” The population of the Russian Federation is told that the Russian economy has a fairly solid foundation, such as accumulated gold and currency reserves, amount of public debt and so on, and is thus able to resist “the West’s efforts to bring Russia to its knees.” Russian propaganda tries to convince people that Western sanctions will bring short-term losses but will not have a significant negative effect. Therefore, for the sake of victory, it is worth enduring temporary difficulties. The import substitution narrative explains that sanctions will create new opportunities for domestic Russian manufacturers.

#### NOTE:

Since the beginning of the war, Ukraine’s international partners have approved several sanction packages that have limited Russia’s access to international trade, blocked its reserves, and forced international companies to withdraw from the Russian market completely or partially. At the same time, the forecasts of some economists regarding the Russian economy were not too pessimistic. Probably, this was because the sanctions were introduced gradually and not quickly enough. Although the G7 countries have imposed sanctions on certain sectors of the Russian economy, for example, oil and coal, analysts at the Kyiv School of Economics are convinced that without additional sanctions, the consequences of the approved measures will be visible no earlier than the end of 2023.<sup>259</sup>

## INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

The depiction of Ukraine in Russian media has undergone metamorphoses not many could have predicted. The inherited from the USSR narrative of brotherhood between Russia and Ukraine was the main framework for all further developments for more than two decades to come. Ultimately it turned into a narrative about Ukrainians as a non-existent nation and justification of genocide as the only means of saving Russian-speaking population from Ukrainian junta and Nazis.

In early 1990s Moscow even referred to the principle of equality as a cornerstone of relation development between the states. Very soon that idyllic image of potential constructive cooperation of the two independent states was poisoned by territorial claims to Ukraine, Russian threats to resolve them militarily, attempts to denuclearize and demilitarize Ukraine, strengthen Russian political influence on Ukraine’s domestic affairs and economic blackmail.

<sup>259</sup> Impact of sanctions on the russian economy. Available at: [https://kse.ua/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/RFEconomy\\_-review-3.pdf](https://kse.ua/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/RFEconomy_-review-3.pdf)

The brotherly nation narrative was strengthened by the one about Ukraine's economic failure and its total dependence on Russia. Moscow started to portray Ukraine as a failing, politically unsound, and weak territorial formation, and it openly demanded that the Russian Federation's unique status and the primacy of its interests be acknowledged. Thus, Russia as an elder caring brother was depicted as the one saving Ukraine from itself. A military-strategic cooperation with the Russian Federation was being actively promoted. The division of the Black Sea Fleet was presented by the Russian media as a loss of the half of the fleet for Russia and Ukraine's inability to maintain its part was stressed.

With the coming to power of Vladimir Putin in the early 2000s, experiencing a significant rollback of democratization the Russian Federation launched a more aggressive policy of interference into Ukraine's internal and external affairs, including by meddling with presidential and parliamentary elections. With the growing ties with the West and the shaping of Euro-integration moods in Ukraine Russia exploited the narrative about blood-related nations divided. It was fueled by other narratives—about the “Russian World” and the growing threat from the West, which put Ukraine in the very center of Russia's imperialistic ambitions.

The Revolution of Dignity led to a more aggressive tone when it comes to interpreting events in Ukraine—the need to save Russian-speaking population from gays, radicals, nationalists, nazis and fascists who took power in Ukraine. And while the Russian invasion in Donbass was presented as a civil war and the annexation of Crimea as returning of historical Russian lands, the weak reaction of the world community to Russian aggression created favorable grounds for radical ideas. In 2020s Putin made it clear that Ukraine should not exist as an independent state and that Ukrainian nation does not exist as such, which paved the path to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the bloodiest war in Europe since WWII.

Overall, Russian media has once again demonstrated the world how powerful propaganda may be. Completely distorted interpretation of the past and present is the cornerstone of efforts put into justification of imperialism and genocide. For this purpose, Russian propaganda even creates completely fictional stories that should have been dismissed as pure nonsense, but surprisingly served its purpose to seed hatred to Ukrainians among Russian population or at least dehumanize them.

Currently unable to offer anything to the modern world but energy resources, Russia appeals to the past as a model for the future. However, this model should be based on values and principles insisted on by Russia. An integral component of Russian propaganda narratives is the notion of Russia's “special path of development”, its uniqueness as a civilizational phenomenon, the rejection of Europe and the presentation of everything “Western” as soulless and sinful, and the idea of the superiority of its civilization compared to all other world cultures.

The Russian Federation forms narratives based on the principles of succession and continuity of its own state formation, therefore such narratives include ideologemes and mythologemes of all previous regimes: Golden Horde, Imperial and Soviet. By manipulating freedom of speech, the right to access information, the right to peaceful assembly, RF eliminated democracy on its territory and invests a lot of effort to make democracy vulnerable worldwide.

## CHAPTER 4. UKRAINIAN MEDIA OPTICS: FROM THE REPRODUCTION OF RUSSIAN NARRATIVES TO SHAPING THE NATION'S SELF-AWARENESS

In the first 20 years after the collapse of the USSR, television was the most popular source of information trusted by the population of Ukraine. As of 1991 Ukraine had only one state television channel. Gradually new private media have been created and licensed. Viktor Pinchuk's media holding has been growing since 1991, and now unites such TV channels as Novy Kanal, ICTV, STB and M1. Founded in 1995 the "1+1" TV channel has positioned itself as Ukrainian. Established in 1996 the "Inter" TV channel initially focused more on the Russian-speaking population. Rinat Akhmetov's SCM media holding entered the national market in 2004. Overall, every Ukrainian oligarch with significant influence on national political life has attempted to establish or buy a media outlet. However, Russian TV dominated the information space for a long time.

### NOTE:

Viktor Pinchuk is a Ukrainian entrepreneur, politician, billionaire and oligarch, son-in-law of the second president of Ukraine, Leonid Kuchma. Founder of EastOne and the Pinchuk Foundation. Owner of StarLightMedia media group. He was the fourth richest Ukrainian in 2022.<sup>260</sup>

Rinat Akhmetov is a Ukrainian businessman, entrepreneur, banker, economist and politician of Tatar origin, a People's Deputy of Ukraine from the pro-Russian Party of Regions (2006–2007, 2007–2012), richest person in Ukraine, ranked first among the 20 richest Ukrainians in 2022.<sup>261</sup>

Only since 2005 the internet and social networks have become an alternative to traditional media. Since 2014, a public broadcaster independent of political and oligarchic influence has been actively developing.

Many of the founders of print and electronic mass media in Ukraine have foreign origins, including Russian. In 2019, businessman and politician Taras Kozak, in cooperation with Viktor Medvedchuk, created the pro-Russian media holding Novyny, which included the news channels NewsOne, Channel 112, ZIK and, later, First Independent. In early February 2021, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky issued a decree implementing the decision of the National Security Service of Ukraine "On the application of personal special economic and other restrictive measures (sanctions)".<sup>262</sup> Thus, three pro-Russian propaganda information channels in Ukraine, which belong to Viktor Medvedchuk's associate Taras Kozak, ceased operations. On February 4, 2021, providers turned off these channels in all regions of Ukraine. They were henceforth accessible only on YouTube. Sanctions against these TV channels are a matter of national security, not freedom of speech, as the channels engaged in pro-Russian propaganda and undermined Ukraine's information and national security.

260 Information about Viktor Pinchuk. 20 richest Ukrainians 2022. Forbes.ua. 27.12.2022. Available at: <https://forbes.ua/profile/viktor-pinchuk-5>

261 Information about Rinat Akhmetov. 20 richest Ukrainians 2022. Forbes.ua. 27.12.2022. Available at: <https://forbes.ua/profile/rinat-akhmetov-1>

262 Decree of the President of Ukraine "On the decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine dated February 26, 2021 on the application of personal special economic and other restrictive measures (sanctions)", Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2021. Available at: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/81/2021#Text>.



**NOTE:**

Viktor Medvedchuk is a former Ukrainian (pro-Russian) politician, statesman and public figure, and businessman. One of the leaders of the banned party Opposition Platform "For Life".

Before the full-scale invasion, he was under house arrest on suspicion of treason, and after the invasion, he escaped arrest. The Ukrainian security service detained Medvedchuk and, after five months of imprisonment, exchanged him for 200 captured defenders of Azovstal.

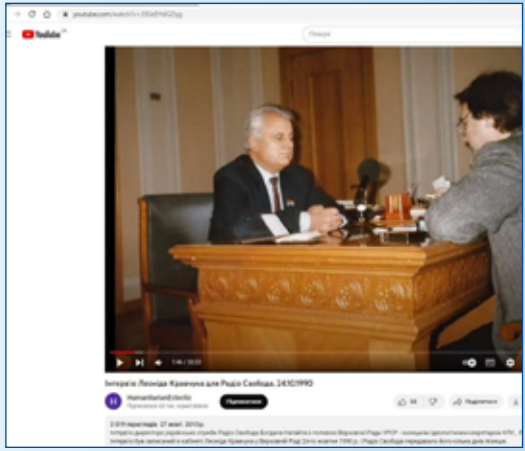
According to the Decree of the President of Ukraine, in January 2023, Medvedchuk was deprived of Ukrainian citizenship.

In order to develop freedom of speech and a free media capable of providing objective information and comprehensive analysis, while adhering to journalistic standards, many large international donor organizations – USAID, the European Union and the Council of Europe – are working in Ukraine to support the media sphere. Assistance is also being provided by the Media Development Fund of the US Embassy in Ukraine, the International Renaissance Fund, the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany and other embassies and funds.


It is worth noting that, despite certain defects of the Ukrainian media – pre-paid news or materials reflecting the interests and narratives of certain groups – generally speaking, even during periods of increased authoritarianism under Yanukovich, the principle of freedom of speech and pluralism of opinion was always ensured.

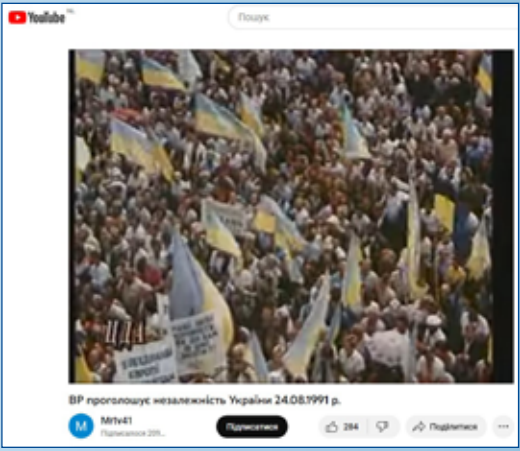
## A PEACEFUL WAY TO INDEPENDENCE

In the early 1990s, Ukraine's independence was hotly discussed in the domestic media. The struggle for independence is a historical struggle of the Ukrainian people, who finally got a chance to establish their own state without war or a revolution, but through the development of parliamentarism. In other words, to become sovereign and democratic in an evolutionary, not a revolutionary way.




**Screenshot 141.** Video: "Interview with the President of Ukraine Leonid Kravchuk for 'Radio Freedom'", YouTube, October 24, 1990 (published on October 27, 2013). Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39SeEHdGDyg>





**Screenshot 142.** Video: "The Verkhovna Rada declares the independence of Ukraine on 24.08.1991", YouTube, August 24, 1991 (published on August 19, 2010). Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UePyV4s67iE>



In October 1990, Leonid Kravchuk (at that time chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian SSR and later the first President of the independent Ukraine) stated in an interview with Radio Svoboda that the Verkhovna Rada would be remembered for paving the way to Ukraine's independence. Kravchuk saw his mission as avoiding a civil war. Pro-Ukrainian forces were radically opposed to communists and Moscow. He emphasized that Ukraine is a multinational state with 11 million ethnic Russians and a variety of political views. It is therefore important to move along an evolutionary path step by step, taking into account realities all over the country. It is important to prevent a war that might be initiated by political rivals [pro-Ukrainian and pro-Soviet forces – ed.]. Kravchuk believed that Ukraine should become a European state, a peaceful and civilized one.<sup>263</sup>

#### NOTE:

Leonid Kravchuk's policy in the 1990s was aimed at finding compromises and agreements with representatives of various political and ideological camps. Therefore, he managed to get the support of both representatives of the Communist Party and part of the National Democrats, positioning himself as a supporter of independence and a moderate communist.

The collapse of the USSR was presented as an accomplished fact, which happened because of the lack of strong vertical power, the collapse of the economy and the danger of civil war. The signing of the "Białowieża Agreement" was portrayed as an attempt to prevent the Yugoslav outcome.

Kravchuk's messages were aimed at both domestic and Western audiences. For Ukrainians, the idea of a peaceful settlement of the issue of national statehood was important, while Ukraine was represented to Western partners as a democratic, legal and civilized state based on state institutions, civil rights and freedoms.

"One more chance given by history was finally taken [after the last Ukrainian state Kyivan Rus was defeated by the Mongols in 1240 – ed.]. The national idea saved Ukrainians from the danger of dissolving into its constituent Tatars, Lithuanians, Poles, Muscovites and Russians".<sup>264</sup>

Along with this, Kravchuk mentioned the signing of the CIS agreement, which was ratified by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on December 12, 1991, warning, however, about possible attempts to transform the commonwealth into a single state.<sup>265</sup>

263 Kravchuk, L. (1990): Interview of Leonid Kravchuk for Radio Liberty, Radio Liberty. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39SeEHdGDyg>.

264 The Verkhovna Rada proclaims the independence of Ukraine on August 24, 1991, YouTube, August 24, 1991 (published on August 19, 2010). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UePyV4s67iE>

265 Leonid Kravchuk's press conference, TV-Inform, 1991. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ja0KzAxFILI>.



Screenshot 143. Article: "Live forever, independent Ukraine!", The Voice of Ukraine, August 27, 1991. Source: [http://www.golos.com.ua/edition\\_archive/1991-08](http://www.golos.com.ua/edition_archive/1991-08)



Screenshot 144. Article: "Russia: the people and the state", The Voice of Ukraine, March 26, 1992. Source: [http://www.golos.com.ua/edition\\_archive/1992-04](http://www.golos.com.ua/edition_archive/1992-04)

#### NOTE:

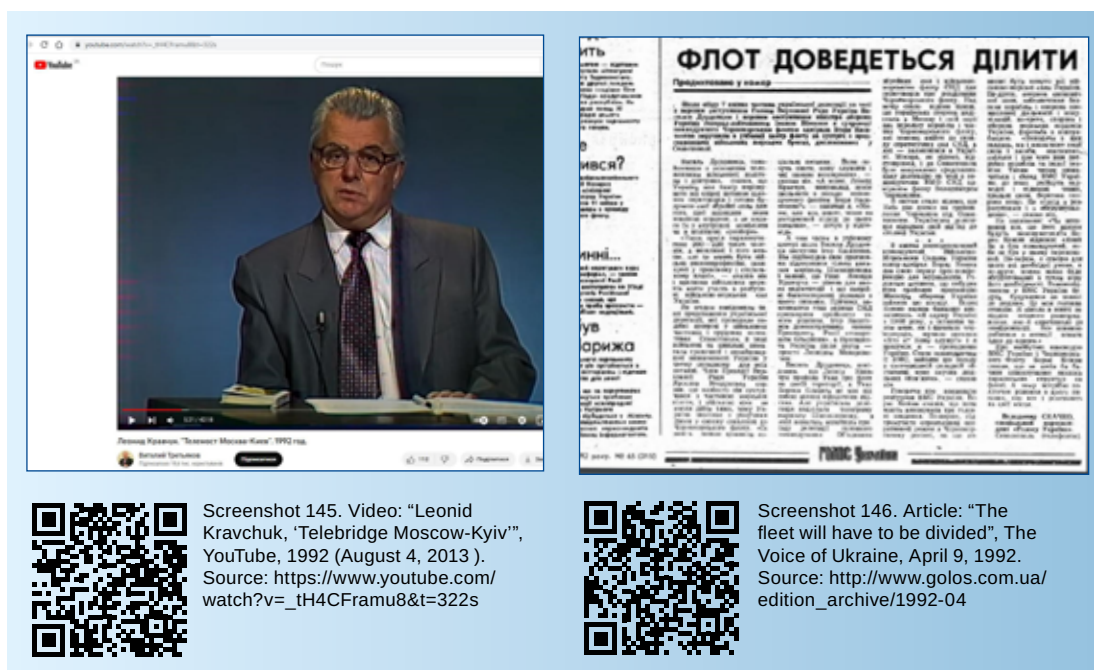
"The Statute of the CIS" was adopted in Minsk on January 22, 1993. But it was not ratified in Kyiv. In particular, Kyiv deemed unacceptable Article 30 of the agreement "On the Supreme Command of the United Armed Forces" of the countries whose leaders formed the CIS. And also Article 31, stating that "the board of commanders of the Border Troops is a body of the Council of Heads of State dealing with issues of protecting the external borders of the member states and ensuring a stable situation in them".

On December 20, 1991, the "Statement of the Verkhovna Rada on Ukraine's Conclusion of the Agreement on the Commonwealth of Independent States" warned of the danger of a possible transformation of the CIS into a state entity with its own authorities and management and with the status of a subject of international law. The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine insisted on the inviolability of Ukraine's borders.<sup>266</sup>

The dangers of rapprochement with Russia and its Soviet imperialism were underlined in the largest Ukrainian newspaper of that time, Voice of Ukraine.<sup>267</sup>

<sup>266</sup> Statement of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine regarding Ukraine's conclusion of the Agreement on the Commonwealth of Independent States, Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1992. Available at: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2003-12#Text>.

<sup>267</sup> Russia: the people and the state, Voice of Ukraine, March 26, 1992. Available at: [http://www.golos.com.ua/edition\\_archive/1992-04](http://www.golos.com.ua/edition_archive/1992-04)



The issue of giving up nuclear weapons was also discussed. Leonid Kravchuk asserted his readiness to eliminate all types of nuclear weapons and complete nuclear disarmament, which he called a common goal. He also declared his readiness to create mechanisms to guarantee the non-use of nuclear forces.

According to the CIS agreements, Ukraine had to hand over part of the fleet to the Russian Federation.

In fact, the new sovereign Ukraine saw its own security policy in the context of maintaining strategic military cooperation with the Russian Federation. At the same time, the idea of Ukraine's complete nuclear disarmament was promoted, because the young Ukrainian state, with its transition economy, sought to become a partner in the eyes of Western countries, which were demanding disarmament.

## INTEGRITY OF THE UKRAINIAN BORDERS

The Russian political elite has never ceased its territorial and economic terrorization of Ukraine since the first years of independence. Russia claims that it has the right to raise the issue of border revision. In 1992, Russia helped support separatist sentiment in Crimea, and the local administration declared its own independence and called a referendum on the issue, and later elected a president of Crimea. In fact, with the assistance of Russia, the ground was being prepared for the withdrawal of Crimea from Ukraine and its accession to the Russian Federation. Rallies in Sevastopol were held under slogans: "We will not give Crimea to the Tatars and Ukrainians!", "Crimea has always been Russian", "Rukh [The People's Movement of Ukraine is a Ukrainian political party and first opposition party in Soviet Ukraine – ed.] activists are fascists and nationalists."<sup>268</sup>

### NOTE:

In 1992, the Parliament of Russia declared that the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of 1954, by which Crimea was included in the Ukrainian SSR, had no legal force. On July 9, 1993 the Russian Duma granted the capital city of Crimea, Sevastopol, Russian federal status with the resolution "On the Status of the City of Sevastopol."

268 Bujurova, L. (1991): And I want to go to Russia, home, Avdet. October 4, № 22(33).

In the 1990s, Russian propaganda repeatedly falsified historical facts regarding Crimea and attempted to revise historical events. The set of political myths remains stable: the “illegality” of the transfer of Crimea to the Ukrainian SSR, the capriciousness of Khrushchev, who supposedly “gave Ukraine a gift without any justification.”

#### NOTE:

The Institute of CIS Countries under the leadership of Konstantin Zatulin dealt with ethnic diasporas in relation to their involvement in anti-state activities in the countries of the post-Soviet space. Zatulin and his team carried out extensive pro-Russian work in Ukraine: with their support a number of pro-Russian organizations were established, including the Union of Orthodox Citizens of Ukraine, the Russian Party of Crimea, the Russian Community of Crimea, and the Congress of Russian Communities of Crimea. Other organisations include the Congress of the Russian People, the “Soyuz” party, the Union of Crimean Youth, the Slavic Party, and the Russian Movement of Sevastopol.<sup>269</sup>

Former mayor of Moscow Yuriy Luzhkov facilitated efforts directed towards Sevastopol, making it the center for consolidating the “fifth column” in Ukraine. Stoking pro-Russian sentiments enjoyed success among certain strata of the local population thanks to the funding of projects for developing the city’s infrastructure. This development was accompanied by slogans such as: “Russia remembers you! Russia will not forget you!”<sup>270</sup>



Screenshot 147. Video: “Vyacheslav Chornovil on separatism in Crimea”, YouTube, May 13, 1992 (March 28, 2014). Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWs9rNr6arl>

Kyiv did not interfere in these ethno-political processes, trying to preserve peace in the region and Crimea’s administrative-territorial autonomy. It was in such an atmosphere at the beginning of 1993 that the head of the People’s Movement of Ukraine, Viacheslav Chornovil, delivered his famous Crimean speech in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine against Russia’s attempts to separate Crimea from Ukraine, calling Moscow’s attempt to hold a referendum in Crimea a ruse. Chornovil’s speech was addressed to Crimeans, so it was made in Russian. Chornovil argued that the secession of Crimea would turn it into a kind of Cuba, a communist region cut off from civilization. It was also noted that an independent Crimea is not economically viable, and that Russia is unable to help this region, as it is experiencing economic troubles itself.<sup>271</sup>

269 Turanskyi, Mykola (2014): Russia’s propaganda campaign in preparation for the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, Military Historical Scientific Journal «Meridian». Available at: [https://vim.gov.ua/pages/\\_journal\\_files/04.10.2017/pdf/VIM\\_17\\_2017-67-80.pdf](https://vim.gov.ua/pages/_journal_files/04.10.2017/pdf/VIM_17_2017-67-80.pdf).

270 Rushchenko, I.P. (2015): Russian-Ukrainian hybrid war: a sociologist’s view, monograph. FOP Pavlenko O.G.

271 Vyacheslav Chornovil on separatism in Crimea, 1992. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWs9rNr6arl>.



**NOTE:**

Viacheslav Chornovil (1937 – 1999) was a Ukrainian politician and Soviet dissident who helped modern-day Ukraine reclaim its independence. He was frequently detained for his political beliefs in the 1960s-1980s. Chornovil was one of the founders of Rukh, the People's Movement of Ukraine. On March 25, 1999, a truck collided head-on with the vehicle Chornovil was in, which to many looked like a politically-motivated assassination. Thousands of Ukrainians turned out for his funeral.

to guarantee the non-use of nuclear forces. The denuclearization is a narrative in itself that we will dive into further on.

## UKRAINE AS A NEUTRAL, NON-ALIGNED AND NON-NUCLEAR STATE

The issue of nuclear weapons arose immediately after Ukraine declared independence, but the process of disarmament itself lasted for about six years. President Kravchuk, and later President Kuchma, said that one of the key aspects of the formation of Ukraine's foreign policy under conditions of independence and sovereignty in international relations is a movement towards nuclear-free status.

It is obvious that the Ukrainian government's decision to give up on its nuclear weapons took place under strong pressure from the USA and Russia. In addition, it was difficult for Ukraine to maintain its entire nuclear arsenal due to the high cost.

Screenshot 148. Article: "With the consent of the leaders of the CIS, at the meeting in Minsk, they began to export nuclear weapons from the territory of Ukraine", The Voice of Ukraine, January 18, 1992. Source: [http://www.golos.com.ua/edition\\_archive/1992-01](http://www.golos.com.ua/edition_archive/1992-01)

Screenshot 149. Article: "The withdrawal of tactical nuclear weapons from the territory of Ukraine has been completed", The Voice of Ukraine, May 7, 1992. Source: [http://www.golos.com.ua/edition\\_archive/1992-05](http://www.golos.com.ua/edition_archive/1992-05)

The Declaration on the State Sovereignty of Ukraine<sup>272</sup> was concluded in 1990. The Ukrainian SSR declared its intention to become a neutral state and not to accept, produce or acquire nuclear weapons. The Declaration on Non-Nuclear Status<sup>273</sup> stated Ukraine's intention to completely destroy its nuclear

272 Declaration on the State Sovereignty of Ukraine, Bulletin of the Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian SSR, 1990. Available at: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/55-12#Text>.

273 Statement on the nuclear-free status of Ukraine, Bulletin of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1991. Available at: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1697-12#Text>.

weapons and their components on the territory of the Ukrainian state as soon as possible. In the Agreement of the Commonwealth of Independent States on Strategic Forces<sup>274</sup> nuclear disarmament was set to be completed by the end of 1994.

#### NOTE:

In 1994, the presidents of the USA, Ukraine, and Russia signed the so-called Tripartite Statement,<sup>275</sup> which referred to the removal of nuclear warheads and the provision of compensation to Ukraine in the form of fuel for nuclear power plants. On November 16, 1994, Ukraine joined the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons<sup>276</sup> and on December 5, 1994, the new President Leonid Kuchma signed the Budapest Memorandum.<sup>277</sup> This declared Ukraine's non-nuclear status in exchange for security guarantees from its partners. Ukraine completely lost its nuclear status on June 2, 1996, when the last nuclear warheads were removed from its territory, mine launchers for ballistic missiles and strategic bombers were destroyed, and some weapon components were transferred to museums.

Ukraine was under informal international pressure with the threat of its economic and political isolation. The maintenance period for nuclear warheads expired in 1996–1997, and Ukraine, according to President Kravchuk, needed 10 annual state budgets to create and install its own warheads on existing carriers. The United States, which did not know what to expect from the young Ukrainian state, exerted great influence on Ukraine's nuclear disarmament.

The domestic mass media connected the declaration of Ukraine's intention to become a neutral, non-aligned and non-nuclear state in the future with the framework for leaving the USSR. However, Yuriy Kostenko questions the justification of this argument, noting that there were only four republics in the USSR in which nuclear weapons were stationed [Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan – ed.]. But none of the other republics ever used their “nuclearfree” status as a pre-condition for leaving the Union.<sup>278</sup>

Given Russia's pressure on Ukraine with regard to Crimea, guarantees of the inviolability of Ukrainian borders were essential for the then Ukrainian leadership. Therefore, the signing of the Budapest Memorandum<sup>279</sup> was considered a victory for Ukrainian diplomacy. “In 1994, when I signed the Budapest Agreement, we were guaranteed security by the USA, Great Britain, Russia, and then also China. It seemed to me that we would soon be living as in God's bosom. We don't need an army either,”<sup>280</sup> claimed Leonid Kuchma.

274 Agreement between member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States on Strategic Forces, 1991. Available at: [https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/997\\_082#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/997_082#Text).

275 Tripartite statement of the Presidents of Ukraine, the USA and Russia, 1994. Available at: [https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/998\\_300#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/998_300#Text).

276 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Available at: [https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Договір\\_про\\_нерозповсюдження\\_ядерної\\_зброї](https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Договір_про_нерозповсюдження_ядерної_зброї).

277 Budapest Memorandum. Available at: [https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Будапештський\\_меморандум](https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Будапештський_меморандум).

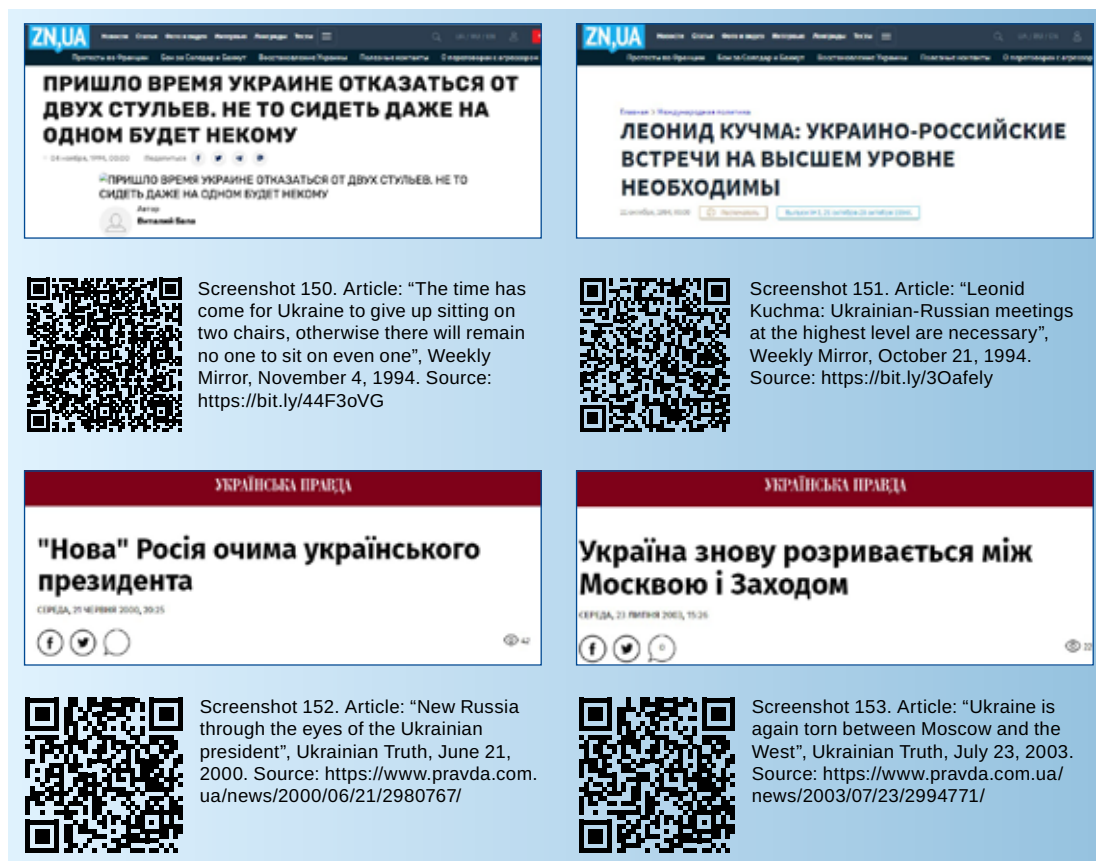
278 Kostenko, Yu. (2015): History of nuclear disarmament of Ukraine. Yaroslaviv Val.

279 Memorandum on security guarantees in connection with the accession of Ukraine to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, 1994. Available at: [https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/998\\_158#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/998_158#Text).

280 Kuchma, L. (2014): The President of France warned that the Budapest Memorandum is a deception. Available at: [https://zn.ua/ukr/POLITICS/kuchma-prezident-franciyyi-poperedzhav-scho-budapeshtskiy-memorandum-ob-man-150913\\_.html](https://zn.ua/ukr/POLITICS/kuchma-prezident-franciyyi-poperedzhav-scho-budapeshtskiy-memorandum-ob-man-150913_.html).

## UKRAINE BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE EU / NATO COUNTRIES

The second President of Ukraine, Leonid Kuchma, pursued a multi-vector policy, arguing that a state with a developed network of economic relations with neighboring countries, particularly Russia, is a more attractive partner for the West.



At the same time, Kuchma considered the western vector of foreign policy to be a higher priority. In the book *Ukraine Is Not Russia*,<sup>281</sup> Leonid Kuchma laid out theses about the differences between the Ukrainian and Russian national characters and views on historical events.

Despite the declaration of multi-vectorism, the Ukrainian media spread a narrative about a confrontation between Western countries and Russia, and pushed Ukraine to choose a vector of cooperation in terms of economic advantages. Even diametrically opposed theses and opinions regarding the benefits of such cooperation were often reflected in the mass media.

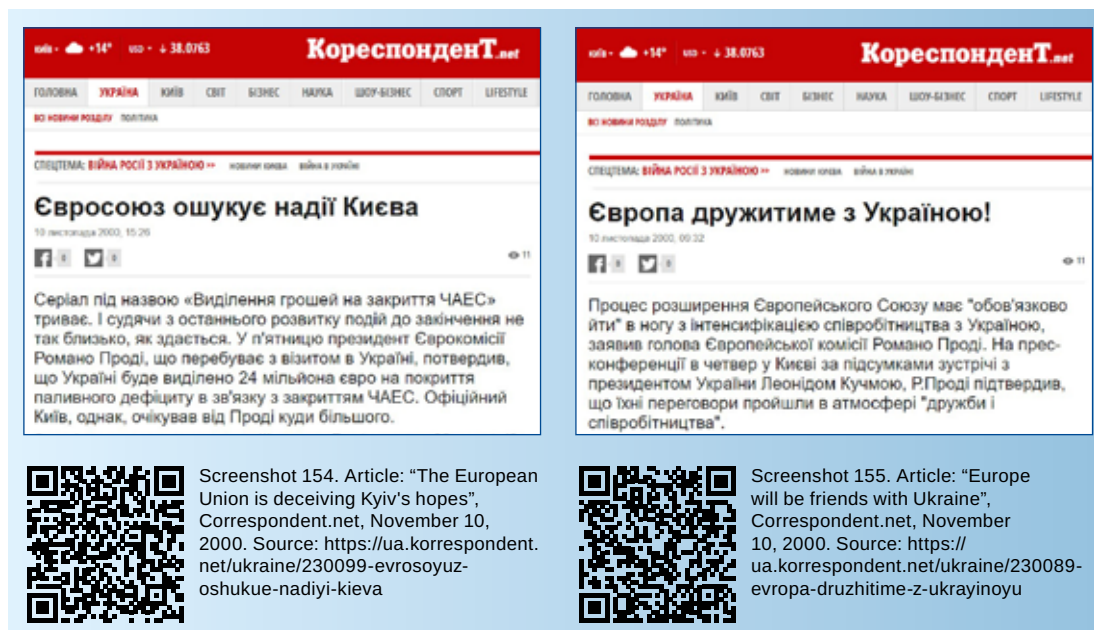
In particular, Ukraine's cooperation with the EU was portrayed as controversial, and Europe's cooperation with Ukraine was depicted as symbolic, noting that Ukraine had signed a standard agreement on partnership and cooperation with the EU in 1994.<sup>282</sup> All subsequent cooperation was often reduced to "political transactions" and the struggle for financial support, which was portrayed very ambiguously in the media.

Domestic pro-Russian media underlined the message that "no one is waiting for us in the West", and that economic assistance will depend on Ukraine's renunciation of national security interests. Russia was portrayed as a country that is ready to guarantee Ukrainian security within the framework of the

<sup>281</sup> Kuchma, L. (2003): *Ukraine is not Russia*. Available at: <https://booksonline.com.ua/view.php?book=172389>.

<sup>282</sup> Agreement on partnership and cooperation between Ukraine and the European Communities and their member states, 1994. Available at: [https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/998\\_012#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/998_012#Text).

CIS. Therefore, the only correct idea was to abandon “sitting on two chairs” and move towards rapprochement with Russia.



In the late 1990s, tensions grew between Ukraine and its Western partners. This was caused by Western countries' concern about the state of Ukrainian democracy in connection with the disappearance and death of a number of political figures and journalists: Vadym Hetman (1998), Vyacheslav Chornovil (1999), and Heorhiy Gongadze (2000), and also in connection with the emergence of a public protest movement.<sup>283</sup> In response to this, the narratives of Kuchma's government changed. On the eve of the presidential elections, in an interview with Russian journalist S. Dorenko, Kuchma used such ideas as “we are a brotherly people”, “I love Russia”, “we are all from the same font”, “we need each other”, “we will never be enemies.”<sup>284</sup>

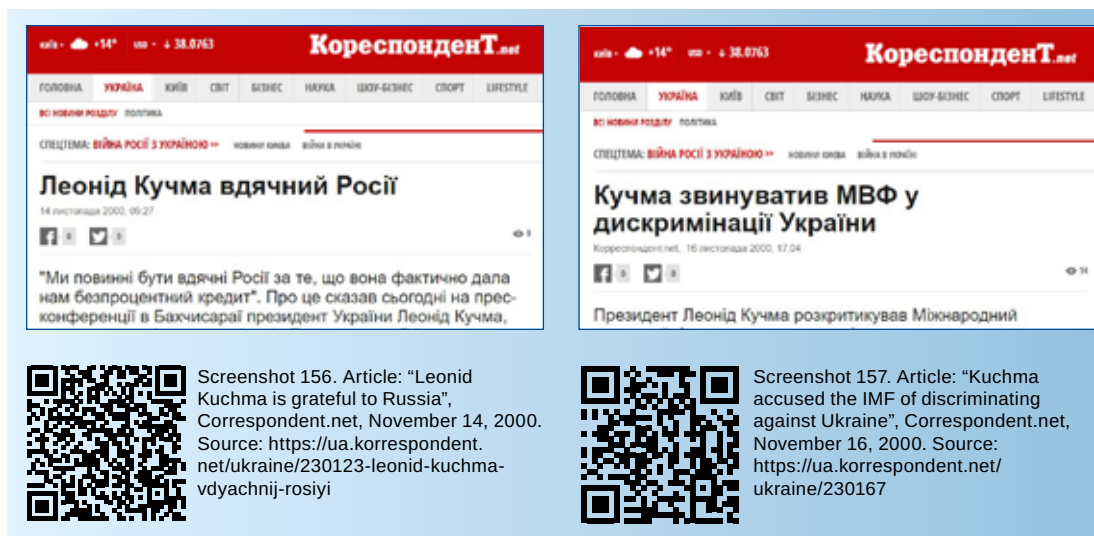
The benefits of cooperation with Russia were also being actively promoted in the mass media. In particular, cooperation with the International Monetary Fund was portrayed in a critical perspective (it was mooted that the IMF was pursuing a dishonest policy towards Ukraine, which entails consolidating Ukraine's role as a peripheral country with a hopeless economy), instead, economic cooperation with Russia was highlighted as profitable and useful. Ukraine's “gratitude” to Russia for the restructuring of Ukraine's gas debt was emphasized — “we should be grateful to Russia for actually giving us an interest-free loan.”

The beginning of the 2000s was marked by the strengthening of the public movement “Ukraine without Kuchma”. The idea of “the birth of civil society, which is associated with the birth of a Ukrainian state, a European state” was spreading (“Where the government was deaf, the street always made the decisions”).<sup>285</sup>

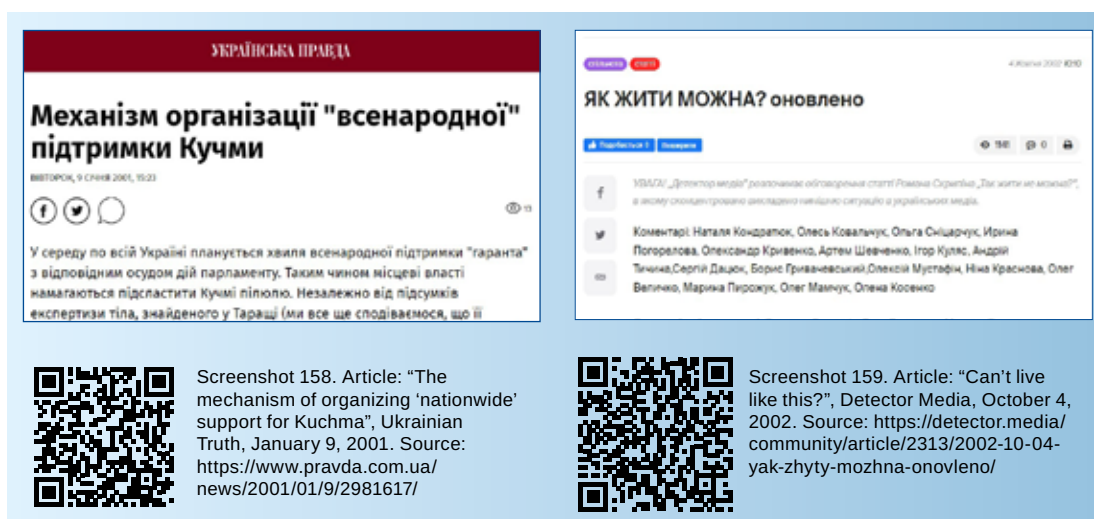
283 Kuchma regarding Russian lies, 2014. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=keawcRX4RZc>.

284 Kuchma, L. (1999): On the relationship between Ukraine and Russia. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_bpAVde7ksY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_bpAVde7ksY).

285 The face of the protest – documentary about the rally “Ukraine without Kuchma”, 2003. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCwPF6UPGBk>.



At the same time, there were rallies in support of President Kuchma, which were depicted in some mass media outlets as "organized by the authorities."



After the appointment in 2001 of Viktor Medvedchuk, a pro-Russian politician [later Putin became godfather to his child – ed.], as the head of the Presidential Administration, a relentless flow of instructions on how to frame current political events were issued to all the leading TV channels, and not only those controlled by the Medvedchuk-associated SDPU(u) party. This caused outrage and criticism among journalists regarding the manipulative and precensored news that began to be broadcast by TV channels. One of the most notable articles produced at that time was by TV presenter Roman Skrypin and entitled «Can't live like this?»,<sup>286</sup> in which he invited his colleagues to unite in order to resist the pressure from the authorities and the "corporate interests" of mass media owners. The rally "Ukraine without Kuchma" was a forerunner of the Orange Revolution (2004), at which the following contradictory narratives were already being clearly articulated: "split Ukraine", "Ukraine is a European state", "organized Maidan", "criminal Ukrainian government", "nationalist rebellion", etc. In other words, these were narratives aimed at dividing society. The media, working for different political camps, exacerbated the contradictions.

286 Can't live like this?, Media Detector, 2002.

Available at: <https://detector.media/community/article/2313/2002-10-04-yak-zhyty-mozhna-onovleno/>.



## ARTIFICIAL DIVISION OF UKRAINE

During the presidential election campaign in Ukraine in 2004, an attempt to artificially divide the country was undertaken. Russia's political-technological intervention was aimed at the ideological polarization of Ukrainian society. Narratives about the "split of Ukraine", "fear of nationalists", the division of Ukrainians into "us" and "them" increased the prominence of the language issue [the status of the Russian language – ed.], contradictory interpretations of history and geopolitical perspectives.

Manipulation of topics related to religion, language, history, unity, and geopolitics shaped narratives about "two Ukraines" or a "split Ukraine", which were actively used by the two election campaign headquarters of the presidential candidates Viktor Yushchenko and Kremlin puppet Viktor Yanukovich. The image of "representative of the national-democratic camp" was developed for Yushchenko and that of "defender" of Russian-speaking Ukraine was promoted for Yanukovich. In order to inflame interregional conflicts, Yanukovich was deliberately positioned as a candidate from the east and south of Ukraine, and Yushchenko as one from the west.<sup>287</sup> Difficult events in the history of the state, such as the Holodomor, the Second World War (the so-called Great Patriotic War), and the struggle of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army began to be actively exploited in the media to deepen the ideological split among voters.

### NOTE:

The 2004 elections are the only instance in Ukraine's electoral history when the Ukrainian presidential elections were held in three rounds. In the second round, the National Exit Poll indicated victory for Yushchenko by a margin of 11 percent (54 percent of the votes against Yanukovich's 43 percent). The Central Election Commission declared Yanukovich the winner (49.42 percent of the votes against 46.69 percent). The Orange Revolution broke out in protest against the results of the elections, which were characterized by large-scale violations and fraud. During mass demonstrations on the Maidan, Kyiv's central square, the Supreme Court of Ukraine invalidated the results of the second round of elections and ordered a third round, in which Yushchenko won with 52 percent of the vote.

The idea of "protecting the Russian language and Russian culture" was also widely promoted by the pro-Russian mass media. In general, the problem of bilingualism was raised regularly in the Ukrainian media at that time and was the subject of constant political speculation and provocations. During the parliamentary elections of 2006, Yanukovich stated: "We are in favor of giving the Russian language official status. Our slogan: two languages, one people".<sup>288</sup> He emphasized that after the parliamentary elections, his party would raise the issue of granting the Russian language the status of a second state language, and also raised the possibility of holding a referendum and subsequent amendments to the Constitution [the Constitution of Ukraine enshrines the Ukrainian language as the sole official language, ed.]. Yanukovich assured people that the problem of "bilingualism" in Ukraine could be solved by giving Russian the status of a second official language. In fact, at that time the Russian language was not suppressed by the Ukrainian state. Over a thousand state Russian-language schools were in use in Ukraine, most books and periodicals were printed in Russian, and numerous TV channels and radio stations spoke Russian.

<sup>287</sup> Debates between Yushchenko and Yanukovich, 2004. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tsN3JyyIsf8>.

<sup>288</sup> Viktor Yanukovich promises to submit the issue of the status of the Russian language to a national referendum, Radio Svoboda, 2004. Available at: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/922426.html>.



Yanukovych's statements, as a politician supported by the Kremlin, reflect Russia's desire to create a narrative about a supposed acute language problem and the alleged suppression of the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine, although such a problem did not exist. Yanukovych's proposal to amend the Constitution and establish the official status of the Russian language is a clear continuation of the long-standing Russian imperialist policy of Russification of Ukraine with the aim of undermining its statehood and creating favorable conditions for ethnocide and the absorption of Ukraine by Russia.

#### NOTE:

According to the Apostrophe website<sup>289</sup> (2020), 1,093,280 students in Ukraine studied in Russian in 2006–2007, and the number of Russian-language schools was 1,480.

A significant decrease in the number of Russian-language educational institutions occurred only after the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine in 2014.

#### NOTE:

According to the last all-Ukrainian census of 2001, the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Mykolaiv, Luhansk, Odesa, Kharkiv, and Kherson regions [south-east of Ukraine – ed.] were home to 22,664,000 people, including 14,135,000 Ukrainians (67 percent), 6,194,000 Russians (29.9 percent), along with other ethnic groups. 9.6 million of those Ukrainians, the majority, called Ukrainian their native language, while the other 4,532,000 Ukrainians cited Russian – that is, they were Russified. Only in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, out of 350 thousand of ethnic Ukrainians, only 40.4 percent (a minority) considered Ukrainian their native language, while the rest of the Ukrainians were Russified.<sup>290</sup>

This census shows that although ethnic Ukrainians dominated the region numerically, a certain percentage of them considered Russian their native language. The policy of the Soviet Union, aimed at Russification, led to such a decline and destruction of the Ukrainian language in the southeastern regions of Ukraine. As a result, in most cities of Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Kharkiv, Kherson regions and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea there were few schools teaching in the Ukrainian language. For example, in 1990, in Zaporizhzhia, a city of nearly a million people, where more than 70 percent of the population were ethnic Ukrainians, there was only one Ukrainian school and two more in the vicinity of villages attached to the regional center. In the city of Berdyansk, with a population of 130,000, there were no Ukrainian-language schools at all.

<sup>289</sup> How the study of Ukrainian and Russian languages in schools has changed since 2014: interesting data, Apostrophe, 2020. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3EkUr0>

<sup>290</sup> Federalization and bilingualism = destabilization and collapse of Ukraine?, Universe, 2014. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3EiNLbm>.

In fact, since 2004, political speculation around historical, linguistic, and cultural issues has cemented the narrative of Ukraine's division along regional lines. The incitement of enmity was fostered by the deliberate dissemination of Russian propaganda that the rights of the residents of Donbas were allegedly being violated through the tax system, that such a system was unfair, that people in the region lived in poverty because Kyiv takes money from them and gives preference to Western regions when allocating funds. Furthermore their inhabitants do not work, and are mostly lazy, unlike the workers of Luhansk and Donetsk regions. The narrative spread that "Donbas feeds Ukraine".

#### NOTE:

Donbas [Donetsk coal basin – ed.] is the unofficial name of parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions with significant reserves of minerals (primarily coal) and powerful production potential. The region also has the highest rates of urbanization in Ukraine.

In 2004, the myth was popularized that Donbas supposedly feeds all of Ukraine, although statistics show that Donetsk and Luhansk regions were subsidized from the budget of Ukraine.<sup>291</sup>

The Orange Revolution was depicted by the headquarters of the pro-Russian "Party of the Regions" as a "sabbath" and "putsch" directed by the West.<sup>292</sup>

A Russian propaganda line about "three types of Ukrainians" also appeared.<sup>293</sup> With its colors and slogans, the visualization of the "three sorts of Ukrainians" visually mimicked the advertising style of Yushchenko's "Our Ukraine" party.<sup>294</sup> In Donetsk, posters with an image of Yushchenko in SS uniform were distributed, along with leaflets with the word "Nashism" (a combination of Yushchenko's party name "Our Ukraine" and fascism ["nashi" means "our" – ed.]).

It was during this period that Russia tested the scenario of separatism in Ukraine.

#### NOTE:

In 2004, Russia played the "Eastern Ukrainian" separatism card for the first time. On November 28, 2004, in the city of Severodonetsk, Luhansk region, at a congress of deputies from 17 mainly eastern and southern regions of Ukraine, the creation of a South-Eastern federal state with the capital in Kharkiv was discussed. A delegation from Russia led by mayor of Moscow Yuriy Luzhkov was present at this congress.

It is from this time that Russian political technologists began to create pseudo-values, presented as supposedly "traditional" and positing irreconcilable differences between the Ukrainian population of different regions.

Manipulation, lack of a properly articulated opposing viewpoint, bogus experts and false headlines created a virtual reality for supporters of both political camps. As a response, the events of the Orange Revolution stimulated the development of new mass media and freedom of speech. In particular,

291 Taruta debunked the myth that Donbas feeds Ukraine, Ukrainian Truth, 27.03.2014. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3qR7X0S>

292 Lyudmila Yanukovych, drugged oranges and American boots, 2004. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3Ekjld0>.

293 Marcynovsky, A. (2011): Ukrainians were divided into three sorts, Gazeta UA. Available at: [https://gazeta.ua/ru/articles/marcynovskij-anatolij/\\_ukrayinciv-podilili-na-tri-sorti/372555](https://gazeta.ua/ru/articles/marcynovskij-anatolij/_ukrayinciv-podilili-na-tri-sorti/372555)

294 Political advertising in Ukraine: presidential elections 2004 – three sorts of Ukrainians, division and "Nashism", Channel 24, 2018. Available at: [https://24tv.ua/politichna\\_reklama\\_v\\_ukrayini\\_prezidentski\\_vibori\\_2004\\_\\_tri\\_sorti\\_ukrayintsiv\\_rozkol\\_ta\\_nashizm\\_n1029351](https://24tv.ua/politichna_reklama_v_ukrayini_prezidentski_vibori_2004__tri_sorti_ukrayintsiv_rozkol_ta_nashizm_n1029351).

the commercial channels 1+1,<sup>295</sup> ICTV, "Inter", "Noviy Kanal", "Tonis", and NTN signed a document on the protection of journalistic standards. "Ukrainian journalists are protesting against censorship and blackmail. Reporters of the leading TV channels made a statement against the way the mass media covered the election campaign. Journalists declare that from now on in their work they will adhere to globally accepted standards [of journalistic ethics – note. ed.]".<sup>296</sup>

The narrative about the division of Ukraine's population was also exploited in 2014 during the Revolution of Dignity. Pro-Russian media propagated the idea that "Ukrainians are an amorphous mass that is unable to negotiate. The state has collapsed on the Maidan, and then collapsed in the east. State institutions cannot be restored." On the TV channel "Nash" it was said that Ukraine had lost its independence because of the Euromaidan.<sup>297</sup> Vsevolod Stepaniuk, who was described as a political and economic expert, said that Ukraine has been going downhill for 30 years and that this is the result of "external (Western – ed.) management".<sup>298</sup>

The main narratives on Ukrainian TV channels, such as NewsOne, Channel 112, ZIK, and "First Independent", owned by pro-Russian oligarchs, were as follows: "Ukraine is under the foreign rule of the United States", "Ukraine is a ruined country, a sub-state", "Nazism is spreading in Ukraine", "a civil war is going on in Ukraine", "Ukraine must reconcile with Russia", "Maidan was a mistake and a defeat for Ukrainian citizens". The narratives were spread by a series of guests, pro-Russian fugitive politicians from Yanukovich's team and Russian political commentators.

The main internal sources of fake news about Ukraine were Ukrainian news channels sponsored by Russia, such as "Novostnoe agentstvo Kharkiv", "Obozrevatel", and RIA Novosti Ukraina.<sup>299</sup>



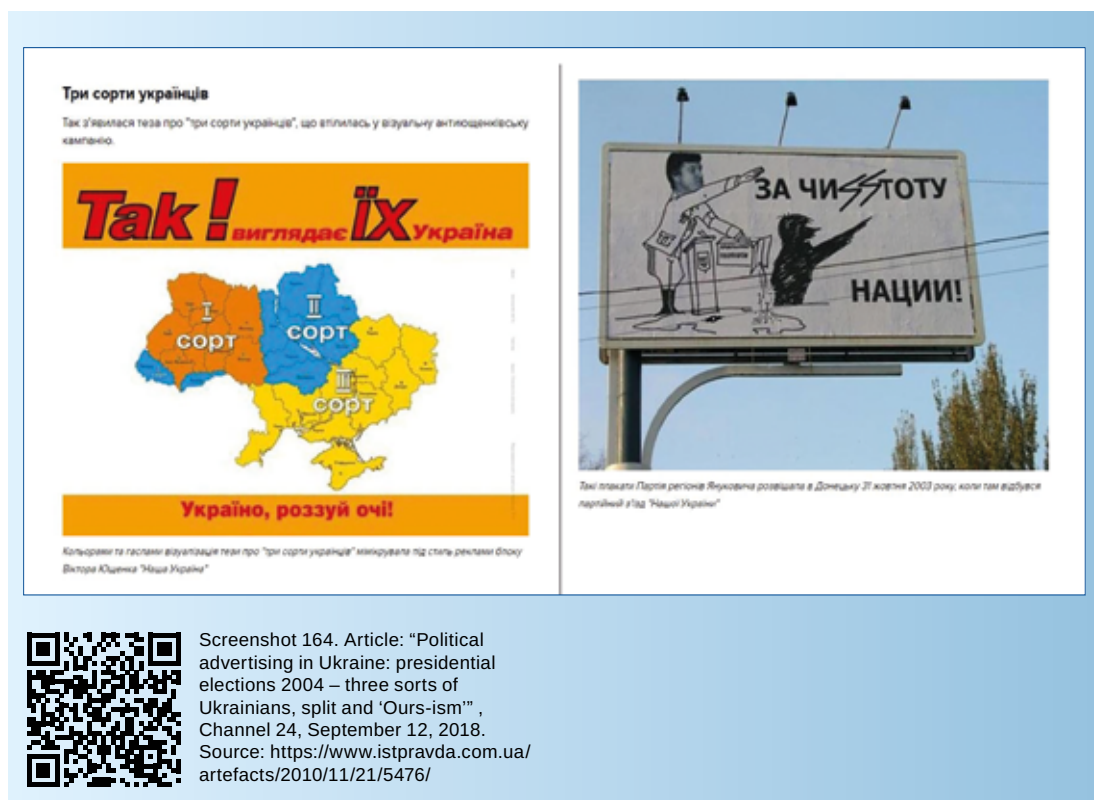
295 The 1+1 team apologizes for participating in the information war against the people of Ukraine! Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfUr\\_S6m1Lk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfUr_S6m1Lk).

296 Protests of Ukrainian journalists, 2004. Available at: <https://ukrainian.voanews.com/a/a-49-a-2004-10-29-1-1-86865572/221443.html>.

297 Montyan, Tatiana (2014): People. Hard Talk. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bUqVPzM2Ng>.

298 30 years of degradation of Ukraine, why everything went wrong. The results. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99tYqphsXOU>.

299 A third of the news on Russian television is devoted to Ukraine, study by UKMC, 2018. Original article available on the website of the Ukrainian Crisis Media Center: <https://uacrisis.org/uk/66976-grupa-z-analizu-gibridnih-zagroz-ucmc>.



During all its years of independence, Ukraine has been the focus of attention of Russian security services, which have supported pro-Russian political parties and various kinds of organization (religious, non-governmental, cultural, professional, and others), relentlessly trying to convince people through the mass media that Ukrainians would enjoy a better life not in a unified, but in a federal country, with not one state language, but two. It was systematic and deliberate, and at that time the Ukrainian security services and political elites did not oppose it as they should have done. Considering the scale and financing of such propaganda and information interventions, the fierce resistance of all Ukrainians to Russian aggression, including residents of regions in which the Russian-speaking population dominated, according to the abovementioned census, becomes all the more surprising. This demonstrates the true unity of the Ukrainian nation, which has fought the enemy-occupier and has not fallen prey to either historical, linguistic, or cultural differences that might prevent its cohesion. On the contrary, today the Ukrainian nation is based on common values and goals. It thus seems clear where the value split actually is, namely along the border of Ukraine and Russia.



**NOTE:**

The 1926 census of the USSR recorded that ethnic Ukrainians made up the majority of the population on the territory of Donbass.

We use the 1926 census for the following reasons:

1. This census took place before the Holodomor of 1932–1933. It is not surprising that the next census, which took place in 1939, after the Holodomor and ten years after the previous census, showed no increase in the population of Ukraine.

2. Industrialization in Ukraine was only gaining momentum at that time, and therefore mass resettlement of Russians to the industrial Donbas began in the 1930s, when the Soviet government began to settle Russians in the wasteland of Ukrainian territories during the Holodomor. This caused a significant increase in the Russian-speaking population in the east and south of Ukraine.

These data demonstrate an increase in the share of Russians compared to Ukrainians both throughout Ukraine (from 9.2 percent of the entire population of Ukraine in 1926 to 13.5 percent in 1939 and 22.1 percent in 1989), and in the east of Ukraine. Thus, it is clear that this was a deliberate policy of the Soviet leadership to reduce the gene pool of Ukrainians.

The need to federalize Ukraine was actively promoted by Russian propaganda, which claimed that the interests of the regions are not taken into account by the center in a unified state. In fact, the Kremlin planned the regionalization of Ukraine as a prerequisite for its future disintegration. In order to promote this narrative, Russian security services organized separatist action-resolutions and self-proclamation of “people’s republics”. In the pro-Russian domestic mass media, theses were spread about protection of the “Russian world” in the so-called LPR/DNR. Russian aggression in Donbas was justified by the fact that Donbas had supposedly ended up within the borders of Ukraine “accidentally” and that only “Russian speakers” live there.

## **ECONOMICALLY PROFITABLE AND VITALLY NECESSARY FRIENDSHIP**

In 2004, the TV channels “Inter”, 1+1 and “First National” broadcast a conversation between President of the Russian Federation Putin and Ukrainian TV viewers. Putin praised Yanukovich’s government and announced his support for him in the elections. Putin voiced such ideas as “preserving stability” and the benefits of cooperation between Russia and Ukraine: “It would seem that moving away from Moscow will guarantee Ukraine Western investments, but this is not the case. On the contrary, only cooperation [with Russia –ed.] will ensure the national interests of each country.”<sup>300</sup> Putin’s main argument was the reduction of gas tariffs for Ukraine.

Some Ukrainian politicians at the time also spread the narrative about “economically beneficial and vitally necessary” cooperation with Russia, especially in the energy sector. For years, pro-Russian politicians from the “Party of the Regions” had been trying to convince voters that their coming to power would mean the immediate return of “Ukrainian-Russian friendship”, and that this friendship, in turn, would quickly turn into material benefits for ordinary citizens. Yanukovich characterized the so-called “Kharkiv Agreements” as a profitable agreement with the Russians.<sup>301</sup> He stated that the signing of these agreements would avert an increase in gas prices for the people, housing and communal services, and the “temporary” stationing of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine “is not a challenge to national security”.<sup>302</sup>

300 Direct line with Vladimir Putin in Ukraine, YouTube, 2004. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOTdAlb2TT8>

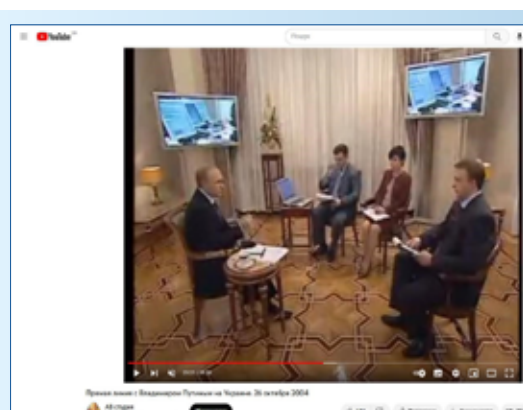
301 Protests against the Yanukovich-Medvedev agreements, Channel 5, 2010. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3L015Fe>.

302 Press conference with Viktor Yanukovich, 2010. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3KXqIME>.

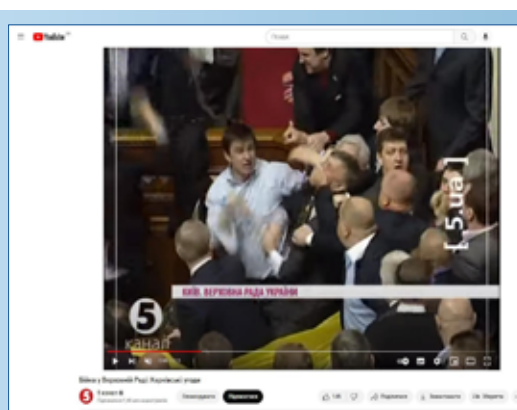
**NOTE:**

President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich and President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev signed the so-called "Kharkiv Agreements", which extended the stationing of Russia's Black Sea Fleet on Ukrainian territory for 25 years and at the same time provided Ukraine with a 30 percent discount on the price of Russian gas.

The preparation and signing of these agreements was one of the first steps in weakening Ukrainian sovereignty and created the conditions under which Russia decided to take military action against Ukraine. The terms of this contract were unfavorable for Ukraine, even considering the gas discount. In fact, by signing this agreement, Yanukovich made Ukrainian sovereignty vulnerable.



Screenshot 165. Video: "Direct line with Vladimir Putin in Ukraine", YouTube, October 26, 2004 (published on December 8, 2017 ). Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOTdAlb2TT8>



Screenshot 166. Video: "Fight in the Verkhovna Rada: Kharkiv agreements", YouTube, April 28, 2010. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCP24ZwXX-0>

The "Kharkiv Agreements" caused violent indignation in Ukrainian society. A rally gathered under the walls of the Verkhovna Rada demanding that the government not ratify this document. Opponents of ratification talked about the potential weakening of state sovereignty and the lack of significant benefits for Ukraine. The opposition accused Yanukovich of betraying national interests.

It is obvious that the "Kharkiv Agreements" rooted the presence of the Russian Federation in Crimea. Stationing the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol contributed to the annexation of the peninsula in 2014. Commitments to Ukraine that Russia undertook in 2010 were not fulfilled, and Moscow unilaterally terminated the agreement in March 2014.

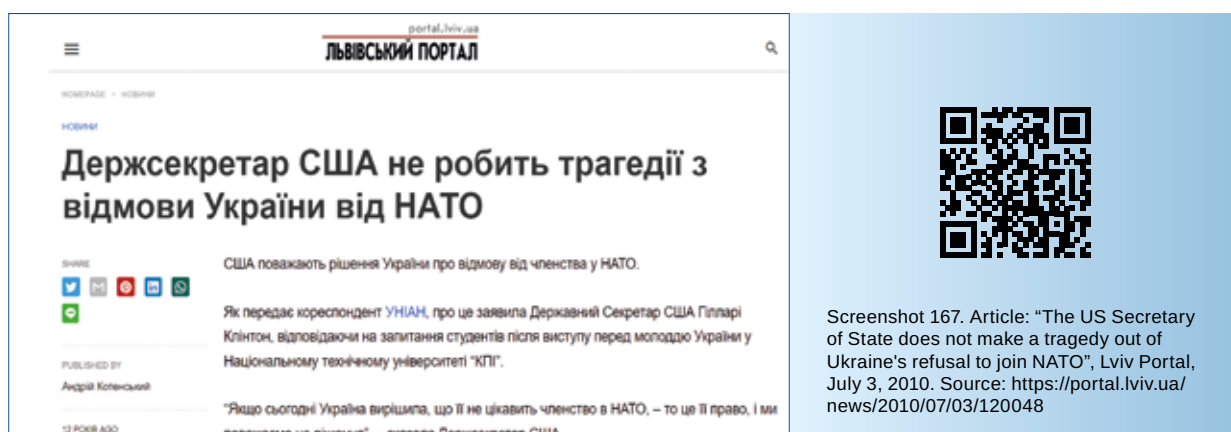
## MULTI-VECTOR POLICY AND NON-BLOCK STATUS

Viktor Yanukovich also actively exploited the idea of Ukraine's non-aligned status, demonstrating that he did not support the country's accession to NATO.

### NOTE:

President Yanukovich signed the Law on the Basics of Internal and Foreign Policy,<sup>303</sup> which provides for Ukraine's non-aligned status and prevents Ukraine from joining NATO. Among the main principles in the document are Ukraine's full participation in pan-European and regional systems of collective security and membership in the European Union while maintaining good-neighborly relations and strategic partnership with the Russian Federation, other CIS countries, as well as with countries worldwide.

Yanukovich stated that popular support for NATO membership was the main condition of such a decision.



Back in 2008, on Savik Shuster's top political talk-show "Freedom of Speech", the Russian politician Vladimir Zhirynovsky said that Ukraine should remain a neutral state and move closer to Russia. He emphasized that if the Russians in Crimea ask for help from Russia, if they "are eliminated", if the Russian language is restricted, then the Russian Federation will have to intervene.<sup>304</sup> At the same time, Putin spread the narrative that Ukrainians are against joining NATO, but that the Ukrainian government is ignoring their wishes and therefore the Russian Federation will be forced to defend its national interests.<sup>305</sup>

In part, this non-alignment at this stage allowed both the United States and the European Union not to aggravate relations with the Russian Federation due to the issue of Ukraine's membership of NATO: "If today Ukraine decided that it is not interested in NATO membership, that is its right, and we respect its decision ... [after all] ... this issue should be decided by the Ukrainians themselves".<sup>306</sup>

Thus, at that historical moment, Ukraine remained a buffer zone between the European Union and Russia, without making a final civilizational choice regarding its development path.

<sup>303</sup> The Law of Ukraine On the Basics of Internal and Foreign Policy, 2010. Available at: <https://bit.ly/47WT8KT>.


<sup>304</sup> Zhirynovsky on a Ukrainian talk show in 2008. Forecasts of the future path of Ukraine and the outcome, 2008. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVM651yTtog>.

<sup>305</sup> Putin threatens Ukraine with missiles. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBHmhrPu2h4>.



<sup>306</sup> The US Secretary of State does not make a tragedy out of Ukraine's withdrawal from NATO, Lviv portal, 2010. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3Ejs4li>.

## ASSOCIATION WITH THE EU = UKRAINE'S ECONOMIC COLLAPSE

Along with the narrative about “beneficial cooperation with Russia”, the message was also spread about unfavorable conditions under the Agreement on the Association of Ukraine with the EU. A week before the planned signing of this agreement, Viktor Yanukovich began publicly to question it, explaining that he was waiting for European politicians to provide Ukraine with compensation for the losses that Ukraine could suffer after this document's entry into force. Talking about his refusal to sign it, President Yanukovich stated that the Agreement was apparently disadvantageous for Ukraine: “This decision was caused by the awareness of huge economic losses that Ukraine could suffer.”<sup>307</sup> He stated that an agreement with the EU could be reached only at the cost of the bankruptcy of half of Ukrainian industry and an inevitable significant fall in standards of living: “I did not need power at such a price...”<sup>308</sup>




Screenshot 168. Article: “Refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the EU: an economically expedient decision or treason?”, VoA, November 21, 2013. Source: <https://ukrainian.voanews.com/a/ukraine-comments/1795052.html>

Screenshot 169. Video: “Viktor Yanukovich: Genocide is taking place in Donbas”, YouTube, June 23, 2015. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jfty4bJxxKY>

Former member of the “Party of Regions” and Minister of Justice Olena Lukash emphasized on her Facebook page that since 2013 “the country has been destroyed by the economic interests of foreign cynics and Ukrainian marauders” and that the Association Agreement was unprofitable.<sup>309</sup>

A similar message was voiced by political commentator Mykhailo Chaplyga on the NewsOne TV channel. In his opinion, the political part of the agreement was useful for Ukraine; at the same time, the economic one was not profitable at all. “Poland, Hungary and Slovakia created the Visegrad Group to lobby for their own interests. And what did Ukraine do? Was it about to sign [the Association Agreement] in three minutes and give everything away?”<sup>310</sup>

Those statements repeated major narratives of Russian propaganda, which depicted the Association Agreement as a “contract with the Devil.”

307 Yanukovich explained the situation with European integration, TSN, 2013. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3st4pCp>.

308 Yanukovich named the reason for refusing to sign the association agreement with the EU. Available at: <https://bit.ly/45sPg2B>.

309 Post by Elena Lukash, Facebook, 2014. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/Lukash.ua/posts/1143438479355766>.

310 “A foreign administration controls Ukrainian banks”, “association with the EU is not beneficial for Ukraine”: the key anti-Western narratives of the past week. Available at: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/30620819.html>

**NOTE:**

Yanukovych managed to hold off signing the Association Agreement for a long time. Negotiations began during Yushchenko's presidency. The agreement was to be signed in the fall of 2013. At that time, Russia, led by President Putin, was actively promoting its own economic and political project, the Customs Union. Russia managed to dissuade Yanukovych from signing an agreement with the EU, threatening a trade war and offering a favorable loan if he fell in line. But the main factor in Yanukovych's decision was that Russia did not demand democratic reforms or any action against corruption in Ukraine. In fact, the Russian Federation used its influence over its protégé Yanukovych and "bribed" him and his party to strengthen and expand its influence in Ukraine.

Yanukovych went to Vilnius for the Eastern Partnership Summit held on November 28–29, 2013, but at the last moment refused to sign the Agreement. This decision caused a wide spectrum of emotions among the population: from great surprise to outright indignation. Some Ukrainians, hoping for the preservation of the European foreign policy vector, started a protest action on Maidan Nezalezhnosti, the central square of Kyiv, on the evening of November 21, 2013. Viktor Yanukovych tried to suppress this protest. On the night of November 30, law enforcement personnel brutally dispersed the demonstrators, most of whom were students. This resulted in the expansion of the protests from the small student Euromaidan into a mass protest movement that came to be known as the Revolution of Dignity.

Protests in Kyiv continued during December 2013 and January 2014, and also spread to other cities in the country. On January 16, 2014, the parliament adopted the so-called "dictatorial laws", which only exacerbated the confrontation between the authorities and the protesters. The climax came with the events of February 18–20, 2014, when law enforcement officers opened fire on the protesters. On February 20, the Verkhovna Rada condemned the violence by the presidential authorities. President Yanukovych, after the parliament opposed him, fled the country on the night of February 21. Verkhovna Rada speaker Oleksandr Turchynov becomes acting president.

After fleeing the country, Yanukovych spread fake stories to the effect that Ukraine is allegedly "conducting a policy of genocide against the residents of Donbas", and that Maidan frightened Crimea and Donbas with its right-wing radicalism, which is why the population began to implement self-defense measures. In fact, Kremlin puppet Yanukovych tried to justify the open Russian military aggression to the world by means of such lies.

**NOTE:**

In 2014, during a rally for secession from Ukraine (planned and supported by Russia), militants raised the Russian flag in Donetsk, and Russian citizens took leadership positions. In 2014, the so-called "prime minister" of the DPR, the Russian Oleksandr Borodai, stated that if it weren't for Putin and his policies, decisions and actions, there would be no "Russian Donbas", no DPR and no LPR.

Since 2014, about 600 observers of the OSCE special monitoring mission from more than 40 countries, including Russia, have been working in Donetsk and Luhansk regions. During eight years of work, these international representatives have not found any evidence of systematic killing of civilians by the Ukrainian army in the Donbass as reported by Russian propaganda. In addition, the inhabitants of Donbas are not representatives of any separate independent nation or ethnic group. In reality, no such ethnic or national group as "the people of Donbas" exists. Both Ukraine and the temporarily occupied territories in Donbas have suffered casualties and destruction as a result of the hostilities that the Russian Federation has been conducting since 2014 on the territory of independent Ukraine. Instead, Ukraine is fighting for its own territorial integrity.

Social networks were becoming the main platform for waging Russia's information war in Ukraine. To spread disinformation, a wide network of bots were deployed, which left numerous propaganda comments on popular social networks, sowing doubt and fear. The level of trust in comments is usually higher than in content itself – a large number of comments with the same types of idea creates the illusion that the information is true. However, these attempts to influence Ukrainian society did not have

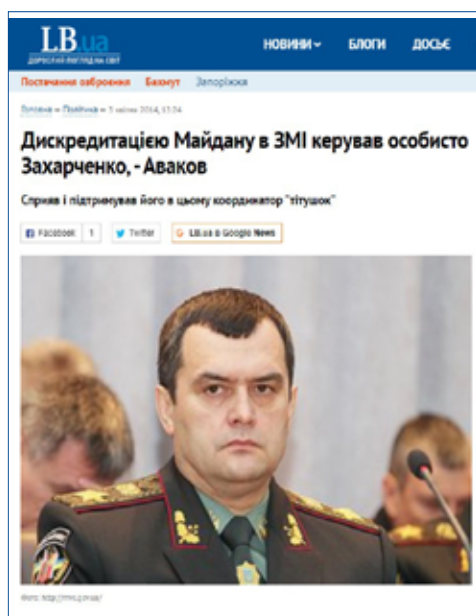


the results the Kremlin expected. The Revolution of Dignity won, but at the cost of more than a hundred dead – the “Heavenly Hundred.”

## THE REVOLUTION OF DIGNITY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

The refusal to sign the Association Agreement caused public outrage, which resulted in a protest movement called Euromaidan. Later, after student protesters were beaten by security forces on the orders of Kremlin protegee President Yanukovych, the peaceful protest turned into the Revolution of Dignity, when people took to the streets to speak out against the government's arbitrariness and for a democratic country in which human rights should be respected.

The pro-Ukrainian mass media portrayed the events on Maidan as a public movement of disobedience, provoked by illegal actions taken by the authorities and the refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union, as well as corruption, and violations of human rights and freedoms. In the journalistic materials of that period, it was noted that Ukraine had paid too high a price for freedom from dictatorship and its democratic choice, seeking to be part of Europe. The heroes of the “Heavenly Hundred” are Ukrainians and foreigners who gave their lives during the Revolution of Dignity, defending the ideals of democracy, defending human rights and freedoms and Ukraine's European future. Euromaidan was depicted as a continuation of the Orange Revolution of 2004 and the process of forming the Ukrainian nation.



Screenshot 170. Article: “Zakharchenko personally directed the discrediting of the Maidan and the mass media”, LB.ua, April 3, 2014. Source: [https://lb.ua/news/2014/04/03/261815\\_diskreditatsiyu\\_maydana\\_smi.html](https://lb.ua/news/2014/04/03/261815_diskreditatsiyu_maydana_smi.html)

**NOTE:**

During the new Maidan, narratives that were already being used by propagandists in 2004 revived, namely those about the “split of Ukraine” and the “coup d'état”, reappeared in the Russian mass media. However, in reality, the Revolution of Dignity exhibited no signs of a coup d'état. The goal of a coup d'état is the seizure of power by the plotters in their own interests, while the Revolution of Dignity began with public action in support of signing the Association Agreement with the EU. After the authorities used violence, the protest turned into a mass protest aimed at protecting democratic values, human and citizens' rights and freedoms. When the events in Kyiv took a tragic turn, and President Yanukovich and his government removed themselves from leadership, the Verkhovna Rada assumed responsibility for governing the state and began to make decisions in a democratic and legal manner.

On February 20, 2014, at 4:00 p.m., Deputy Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada Ruslan Koshulynskyi opened the assembly of MPs. At night, the Council voted to withdraw security forces from the center of Kyiv, and also supported the resolution “Condemning the use of violence against citizens of Ukraine” at the first reading.

On February 21, during the parliamentary vote, a decision was made by 386 votes to return to the 2004 Constitution, turning Ukraine back into a Parliamentary-Presidential Republic. Deputies from the “Party of Regions” faction, who did not flee the country after the escape of Viktor Yanukovich and his entourage, also voted for those decisions. After President Yanukovich's escape from Kyiv, the Verkhovna Rada remained the only legitimate authority in the country and made all decisions within its competence and in accordance with current legislation.

Attempts to present the Maidan and the vote to remove Yanukovich from power as a coup d'état have no basis, because the decisions were made by the valid, legal parliament, in accordance with the relevant laws.

Afterwards, documentaries and news stories depicted the “simple heroes of the Maidan”,<sup>311</sup> musicians glorified struggle and victory,<sup>312</sup> and books commemorating the “Heavenly Hundred”<sup>313</sup> were published.

After the tragic events, including the shooting of protesters, there was huge public demand for justice and punishment of the perpetrators. Therefore, the new government informed the citizens through the media about the relevant investigations and court hearings.<sup>314</sup>

“I am a drop in the ocean” became a common slogan, which meant that every citizen can do something for the sake of the state and promote changes. For example, a large number of small and medium-sized businesses provided assistance to the protesters; car owners and taxi drivers gave people free rides; other volunteers created groups for medical, legal and humanitarian aid, as well as cultural and informational support. Even spiritual support was provided by priests of various denominations.<sup>315</sup> Narratives emerged that helped to rally society to fight together and instill faith in victory. Also, memes were used as an informational weapon. A football chant “Putin-h\*ylo” [Putin is a morally bankrupt man – ed.] packs a whole narrative into two words.<sup>316</sup>

311 Documentary “Five portraits of the Maidan”. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISNyAZnnz4o>.

312 Yarmak featuring Tof – 22. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8SqTaE4-5a4>.

313 The Book of Memory “Heavenly Hundred” was published, 2014. Available at: [https://kurs.if.ua/news/vyyshla\\_drukum\\_knyga\\_pamyati\\_nebesna\\_sotnya\\_4819.html/](https://kurs.if.ua/news/vyyshla_drukum_knyga_pamyati_nebesna_sotnya_4819.html/).

314 The discrediting of the Maidan in the mass media was personally managed by Zakharchenko. Avakov, Left Bank, 2014. Available at: [https://lb.ua/news/2014/04/03/261815\\_diskreditatsiyu\\_maydana\\_smi.html](https://lb.ua/news/2014/04/03/261815_diskreditatsiyu_maydana_smi.html).

315 Akopov, S., Bidenko, Yu. and Albers, G. (2020): Common and different: the study of narratives in the public consciousness of Germany, Russia and Ukraine, Kyiv–Berlin.

316 ‘Khulo’: The offensive term that has attached itself to Putin, The Washington Post, 2014. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/06/16/khulo-the-offensive-term-that-has-attached-itself-to-putin/>.

After the Revolution of Dignity in 2013–2014 and with the beginning of Russia's war against Ukraine in 2014, narratives about Ukraine's war of independence spread in the media.<sup>317</sup> In his inaugural speech, President Petro Poroshenko noted that "Heroes of the Maidan died for independence", claiming that he came to power to "preserve the unity of Ukraine, ensure peace and guarantee security" and proposed a peace plan. The war that began in 2014 was positioned in the Ukrainian media as an anti-terrorist operation (ATO), and the main focus was on the restoration of peace, Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity.<sup>318</sup>

#### NOTE:

Russia decided to take advantage of internal instability in Ukraine and launched a military aggression against it. At the end of February 2014, "little green men" appeared near the parliament and government of Crimea – soldiers in uniform without identification marks. They blocked Ukrainian military units and began preparations for the occupation of the peninsula. On March 16, 2014, the occupation authorities organized a so-called "referendum" on Crimea's accession to Russia. The referendum was held without complying with the basic requirements for organizing a democratic expression of will and was not internationally recognized. According to the faked results announced by the organizers, 97 percent of Crimeans were in favor of annexing the peninsula to the Russian Federation. On March 18, at the request of the President of the Russian Federation, Russian legislative bodies approved the annexation of Crimea. Ukraine and most other states did not recognize Crimea as Russian.

At the same time, in the spring of 2014, Russia began destabilizing the political situation in Ukraine and encouraged the development of separatist movements in Donetsk region and Luhansk region, as well as in Kharkiv, Odesa and other regional centers of the country. In May, separatist organizations formed by Russian security services announced the creation of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DPR and LPR) and organized a pseudo-referendum in their support. In response, Ukraine launched an anti-terrorist operation (ATO).

Such phenomena of information space as, say, the legend of "cyborgs", appeared in the information field as a folk legend. The state (including the Ministry of Digital Policy) participated in the creation of the film "Cyborgs", which glorifies and heroizes the soldiers who defended Ukraine in the ATO zone.<sup>319</sup>

#### NOTE:

"Cyborgs" are Ukrainian military personnel who participated in the defense of Serhiy Prokofiev Donetsk Airport during the hostilities in the east of Ukraine (May 26, 2014–January 22, 2015) and courageously opposed the Russian military and separatist groups. The airport was of particular importance for Ukrainian military logistics.

The Revolution of Dignity gave a strong impetus to ambitious structural reforms. Reforms of the police, education system, health care, gas and banking, pensions, taxation and other things were carried out with varying degrees of success. Decentralization reform gave local authorities more financial autonomy and more responsibility for planning the development of their local communities. Among the successes, it is worth highlighting the formation of a strong civil society, which has been a source of positive changes in recent years. It influences the agenda of the state, monitors the activities of the authorities, and also formulates its own proposals for reform.

On the way to European integration, Ukraine is not losing its national identity, but on the contrary, it is strengthening it. The Orthodox Church of Ukraine officially ended its subordination to the Moscow Patriarchate after more than 300 years. The Ukrainian Church signed the "tomos" (decree) on

317 Vorobyov, Y. (2014): The greatest heroic victories and tragic defeats. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3EjDtru>.

318 Petro Poroshenko's press conference, 2014. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9XfcP-rBm0g>.

319 "Cyborgs" is a feature film directed by Akhtem Seitablayev. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmZRNkbhgQU>.

autocephaly, thereby taking its place in the diptych, the official list of Orthodox autocephalous and autonomous churches.

The conclusion of the Ukraine–EU Association Agreement emphasized the Ukrainian people's "civilizational choice" and opened up one of the largest markets in the world for Ukrainian goods. Having renounced its non-aligned status, Ukraine set a course for joining the EU and NATO in its Constitution. For the country as a whole, the transition from the Russian sphere of influence to the European one is now complete and irreversible.<sup>320</sup> At least, it seemed so.

The war in Donbas and the occupation of Crimea had been going on for eight years when Russia launched a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. On February 21, 2022, Russian President Putin had unilaterally "recognized" the independence of the self-proclaimed DPR and LPR, stating that these entities include all territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, even those that remain under the control of Ukraine. On February 24, 2022, the head of the Russian state announced the start of a so-called "special military operation" against Ukraine, the main goal of which he called the "demilitarization" of the country. Russian armed forces began to carry out missile and air strikes on the cities of Ukraine.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in an address to the people on February 24, 2022 that "the Ukrainian people are free and want to determine and build their own history peacefully. The people and the government of Ukraine want peace. But if they want to take away our state and freedom, we will defend ourselves."<sup>321</sup> This is an existential war, a war against tyranny, "a war between good and evil".<sup>322</sup>

320 Dubrovskiy, V., Mizhei, K., Ivashchenko-Stadnik, K. and Vynnytskyi, M. (2020): «Six years after the Revolution of Dignity: What has changed?» Report prepared by CASE Ukraine with the financial support of the International Renaissance Foundation. Available at: [https://case-ukraine.com.ua/content/uploads/2020/06/6-years-of-the-Revolution-of-Dignity\\_UA.pdf](https://case-ukraine.com.ua/content/uploads/2020/06/6-years-of-the-Revolution-of-Dignity_UA.pdf).

321 President Zelensky's address to the people of Ukraine and Russia, TSN, 2022. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsPP-q-ZhnQ>.

322 Volodymyr Zelensky's speech at the time of receiving the Winston Churchill Leadership Award, 2022. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vvj5Gdyu97Y>.

The full-scale war has inspired Ukrainian artists to counteract propaganda and promote the truth about events in Ukraine through their creative work on online platforms.<sup>323-328</sup> The main message in the mass media is that Russia's war against Ukraine is unjust and a violation, and that the goal of Russian military aggression is to destroy the Ukrainian people and deprive them of their right to self-determination and independent development, even their identity. The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine has called on the whole world to recognize the actions of the Russian Federation as genocide of the Ukrainian people.<sup>326</sup>

#### NOTE:

The 1948 UN Convention "On the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide" defines genocide as "acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, any national, ethnic, racial or religious group through:

- a) killing members of such a group;
- b) causing serious bodily harm or mental disorder to members of such a group;
- c) deliberate creation for any group of living conditions designed for its complete or partial physical destruction;
- d) measures designed to prevent childbirth in the environment of such a group;
- e) forcible transfer of children from one ethnic or national group to another."<sup>327</sup>

Thus, the criminal actions of the Russians in Ukraine fall not only under the classification of war crimes, but also qualify as genocide because of the purposeful destruction of Ukrainians as a national group.

Systematic and large-scale collection of evidence of the crimes of the Russian army is currently one of the main tasks of the Ukrainian authorities.

We can see that the narrative of the "struggle for freedom", which became popular in 2014 during the Maidan, has since grown into a "war for freedom".

## UKRAINE AGAINST RUSCISM

When Ukraine gained independence, Russia, first cautiously, and then actively manipulating the facts, sought to manufacture a connection between Ukrainian patriots (pro-Ukraine-minded citizens) and nationalists. The concept of patriotism was mixed with the concept of "Nazis" and "fascists". Since 2014, this manipulation has spread in Ukrainian mass media outlets owned by the pro-Russian oligarchy. They have circulated stories that purport to show that supporters of Euromaidan profess "fascist ideology" and "fascist methods", and that since the Maidan Ukraine has been dominated by nationalist sentiments and where, according to Russian propagandists, fascism is reviving.

Similar labels were attached to many Ukrainian politicians: "Parubiy loves Hitler" or "Suprun is a fascist".

323 Boombox. Oh, there is a red viburnum in the meadow, 2022. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBcJcdNqhhw>.

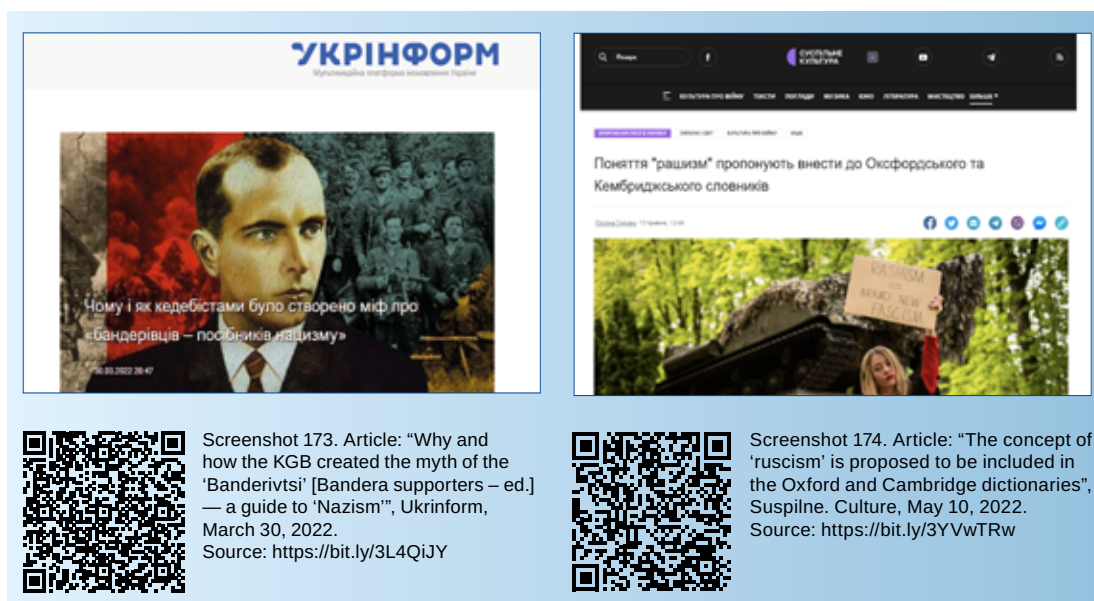
324 Without restrictions – a free people, 2022. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nl8wThsEbKE>.

325 Barskikh, Max (2022): "Spring will come". Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RM00xQdnfBI>.

326 The Parliament of Ukraine. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/verkhovna.rada.ukraine>.

327 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Available at: [https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.1\\_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf).



**NOTE:**

Andriy Parubiy is a Ukrainian politician. Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine from April 14, 2016 to August 28, 2019.

Ulyana-Nadia Suprun is a Ukrainian politician and doctor, and Minister of Health of Ukraine from August 2016 to August 2019.

The alleged "fighting spirit" of the Donetsk and Luhansk "militias" was supposed to be fueled by the idea that Ukraine had forgotten about the victory over Nazism in the Second World War and became "fascist" itself, therefore deserving to be hated just like the "German-fascist invaders" almost 80 years ago.

**NOTE:**

In fact, in Ukraine, as well as in Russia, and in many developed countries, there are indeed representatives of extreme right-wing forces. However, these organizations are few in number and do not have as much support in Ukrainian society or governing institutions as the pro-Kremlin media try to portray.

During the Euromaidan, the absolute majority of protesters were peaceful citizens, and the participants from right-wing groups, such as "Right Sector", numbered no more than a thousand people out of the eight million who came to the protests. In the 2014 presidential elections, the candidate from the Right Sector party received only 0.7 percent of the vote.

Instead, Russia itself has many features of a fascist state, as stated by Timothy Snyder,<sup>328</sup> Sviatoslav Lypovetsky,<sup>329</sup> and Anastasia Melnychenko.<sup>330</sup>

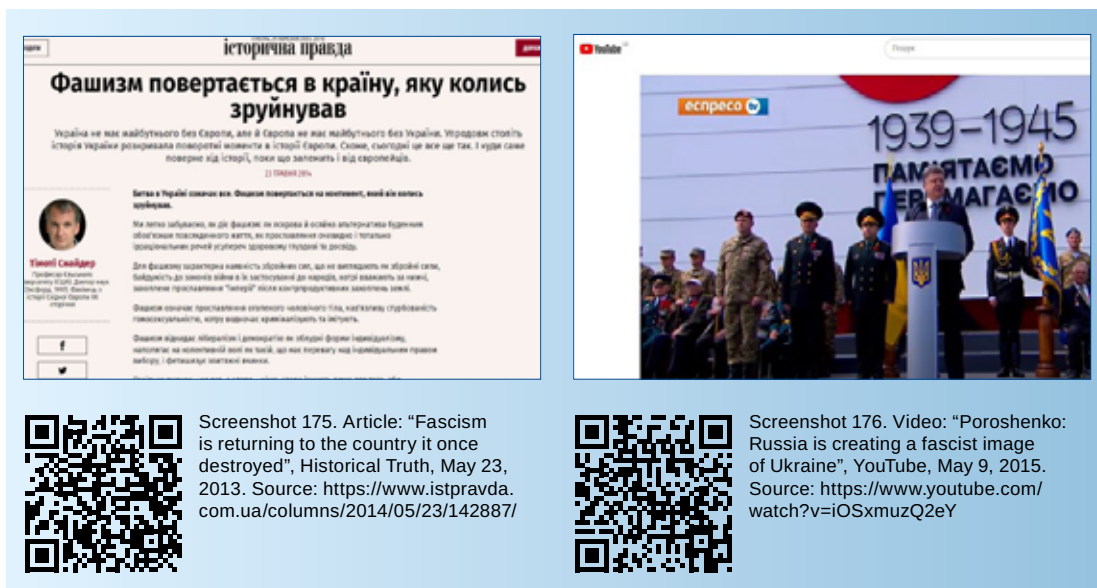
328 Timothy Snyder on the Russian manual on genocide, Texty.org, 2022. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3PPZiWE>.

329 Lypovetskyi, S. (2022): Ruscism as one of the faces of fascism. 14 signs of fascism from Umberto Eco that can be applied to modern Russia, Texty.org, 2022. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3QWhMW5>.

330 Melnychenko, A. (2022): 14 signs of a fascist regime in Russia according to Lawrence Britt. Check for yourself, Zmina, 2022. Available at: <https://zmina.info/columns/14-oznak-fashystskogo-rezhymu-v-rosiyi-za-lourensom-brittom-perevirte-sami/>.

Yale historian Timothy Snyder has reflected on a new term introduced by Ukrainians, “Ruscism” [Russian fascism – ed.]. In his column “The War in Ukraine Has Unleashed a New Word” for The New York Times, Snyder writes that Ukrainians have taken careful note of Russia’s lurch towards fascism over the past decade. The Russian regime has the following fascist hallmarks: a cult of the leader and the dead, a corporate state, a mythical past, censorship, conspiracy theories, centralized propaganda, and a war of aggression: “Even when we fairly discuss the extent to which this term can be applied to Western figures and parties, we tend to overlook the central example of the revival of fascism, which is the Putin regime in the Russian Federation”.<sup>331</sup>

Russian propaganda was fueled by the fact that there was a discussion in Ukrainian society about replacing the Victory Day holiday in World War II, which was celebrated on May 9, with Reconciliation and Remembrance Day, which would be celebrated on May 8, as is done in other countries of the world. Such symbolic dates have not only a deep historical meaning, but also a socio-political one. Commemoration of Remembrance Day, together with other European countries, emphasized mourning for the greatest tragedy of the twentieth century and historical memory in order to prevent such a tragedy in the future. Instead, the May 9 Victory Day parade in the Russian Federation has long since turned into a show of force and a tool of military intimidation. The slogan “we can do it again” is often used by the Russians to intimidate Germany, which today is also depicted as Nazi in the rhetoric of Russian propagandists. In the Ukrainian information space, the term “pobedobesije” [a sort of diabolic frenzy - ed.] even appeared, which conveys the unhealthy and very aggressive atmosphere of Victory Day in the Russian Federation. Ukrainian President Poroshenko noted that trying to foster the image of Ukraine as a fascist state is simply Russia’s attempt to justify its own aggression.



After Russia’s occupation of Crimea, the Ukrainian mass media was flooded with stories that fascist ideas are spreading in Russia and that its political rhetoric is becoming dangerous for the whole world.

Timothy Snyder in his column “Historical Truth” also points out that fascist ideas are taking over Russia. The author emphasizes that “Putin today presents himself as the leader of extreme right-wing forces in Europe, and the leaders of European right-wing parties swear allegiance to him. There is an obvious contradiction here: Russian propaganda directed at the West insists that the problem with Ukraine is that its government is too far to the right of the political spectrum – and, at the same time, Russia is building a coalition with the European far-right”.<sup>332</sup>

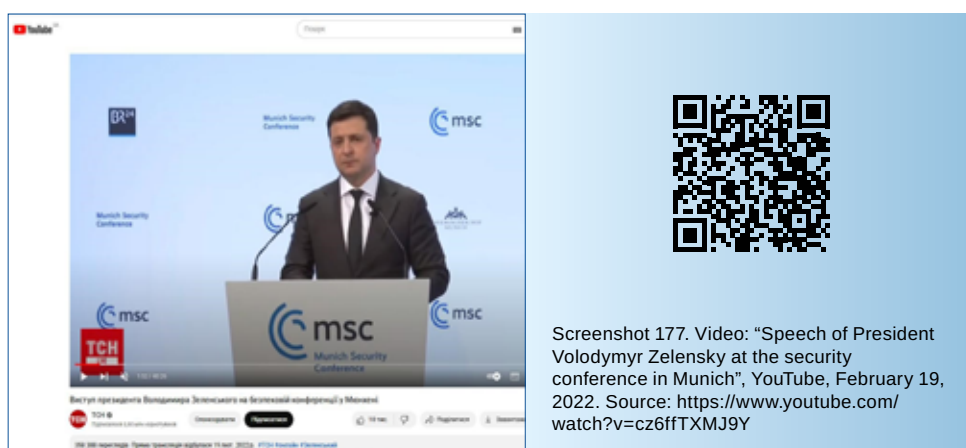
331 Snyder on the new term “Ruscism”: Ukrainian identity is connected with the ability to live between two languages, 2022. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3qSge4S>.

332 Snyder, T. (2014): Fascism returns to the country it once destroyed, Historical Truth, 2014. Available at: <https://bit.ly/45Mx2Ji>.

At the summit in Munich, on the eve of Russia's full-scale invasion, President Zelensky called on the world to abandon the policy of "appeasement", drawing parallels between the European position of "appeasement" in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and its policy in the run-up to the Second World War: "We know what the policy of appeasement leads to". Zelensky also recalled the events of 2008, when Ukraine was denied NATO membership, which was explained by some European politicians in terms of their fear of Russia: "They thought that by denying Ukraine, they could appease Russia."<sup>333</sup>

Numerous stories by Ukrainian journalists that appeared after the full-scale Russian invasion showed that Putin's modern regime exhibits many features of totalitarian regimes and Hitler's Germany. In particular, it is said that:

- propaganda and the rewriting of history are the main pillars of the Putin regime in achieving political goals, such as the restoration of lost greatness, the return of colonial territories;<sup>334</sup>
- Putin's cult of personality began to take shape from the first years of his rule;
- nationalism manifests itself in discrimination against other nationalities in the Russian Federation by the forcible implantation of Russian culture;<sup>335</sup>
- the state favors the military, spending about 40–60 billion dollars on it every year. In Russia, there are 195 people per police officer, compared with 479 in the USA and 280 in Ukraine.<sup>336</sup>



Among many other signs of the Russian regime's affiliation with fascism, numerous war crimes have been committed by the Russian military in the Kyiv region and other temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.<sup>337</sup>

"Concentrated evil visited our land. Killers. Executioners. Rapists. Marauders. Who call themselves an army. ... For these murders, for these tortures, for the hands torn off by explosions, which are lying on the streets. For shooting people in the back of the head with their hands tied. This is how the Russian state will now be perceived. This is your image".<sup>338</sup>

333 Speech of President Volodymyr Zelensky at the security conference in Munich. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cz6fftXMJ9Y>.

334 Ruscism, or why Russians are the new Nazis, YouTube-VoxUkraine, 2022. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XStjncR4jBo>.

335 Melnychenko, A. (2022): 14 signs of a fascist regime in Russia according to Lawrence Britt. Check for yourself, Zmina, 2022. Available at: <https://zmina.info/columns/14-oznak-fashystskogo-rezhymu-v-rosiyi-za-lourensom-brittom-perevirte-sami/>.

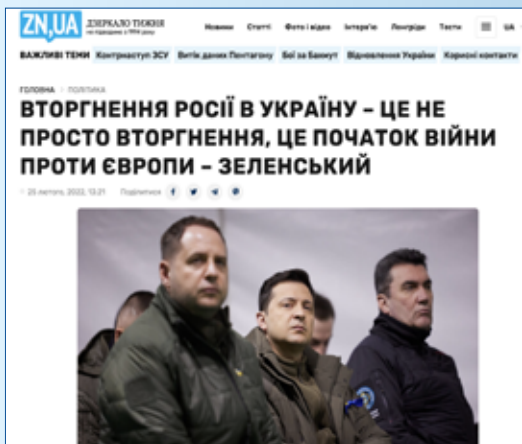
336 How many law enforcement officers are there per capita in the countries of the world, Word and Deed, 2020. Available at: <https://www.slovovidlo.ua/2020/02/14/infografika/suspilstvo/skilky-pravooxoronziv-prypadaye-dushu-naselennya-krayinax-svitu>


337 What are the differences between ruscism and fascism?, 2022. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Et\\_QvaKon4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Et_QvaKon4).

338 Zelensky: Concentrated evil has visited our land, Ukrinform, 2022. Available at: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/3447798-zelenskij-na-nasij-zemli-pobuvalo-koncentrovane-zlo.html>.


## GUARDING THE WHOLE DEMOCRATIC WORLD


The war in Ukraine has united Europe. For many years, the states of the democratic world tried in vain to reach a common stance on cooperation with the Russian Federation and on curbing Putin's aggression. There were disagreements between one group of European states (for example, Germany and France), who believed that economic cooperation with the Russian Federation could "pacify" the authoritarian regime, and others (for example, the United Kingdom and Poland), who argued that only determined resistance could stop the Russian Federation from pursuing expansionist plans. The differences were overcome only after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Putin's bet that, by limiting the supply of energy to Europe, he could weaken the aid of European countries to Ukraine and prevent the introduction of sanctions against Russia, did not come true. Russia's attack on Ukraine, including an attempt to seize Kyiv, numerous reports of war crimes and regular missile attacks on Ukrainian cities prompted almost all European countries to impose sanctions against Russia.



QR code for Screenshot 178: 

Screenshot 178. Article: "Russia's invasion of Ukraine is not just an invasion, it is the beginning of a war against Europe – Zelenskyi", Weekly Mirror, February 25, 2022. Source: <https://zn.ua/ukr/POLITICS/vtorhnennja-rosiji-v-ukrajinu-tse-ne-prosto-vtorhnennja-tse-pochatok-vijni-proti-jevropi-zelenskij-.html>



QR code for Screenshot 179: 

Screenshot 179. Article: "This is the last war. This is the battle of Mankind with brutality", Weekly Mirror, February 27, 2022. Source: <https://zn.ua/ukr/internal/se-zh-ostannja-vijna-se-do-boju-cholovitstvo-zi-zvirstvom-staje.html>

Ukraine itself has played a significant role in the unification of Europe. Today, the narrator of Ukrainian history is primarily the official government of Ukraine, in particular, President Volodymyr Zelensky. Speaking to an international audience Zelensky explains Ukraine's perspective on current events, forming narratives.

From the first minutes of the full-scale invasion of Russia, the Ukrainian authorities began to call on European states and the whole world to act as a united front against the Russian aggressor. In a video address to the European Council, Volodymyr Zelensky said: "Ukraine united for the sake of peace – and for the sake of peace, our country unites the world... I want to thank you – you are united, united around us."<sup>339</sup> In the message "On the foundations of domestic and foreign policy", the Ukrainian president said: "For ten months of this year, we have helped the West to find itself again, to return to the global arena and to feel how much the West prevails. No one in the West is afraid of Russia anymore and never will be. We have helped the European Union to acquire real subjectivity".<sup>340</sup>

<sup>339</sup> Zelensky addressed Europe, Ukrinform, 2022. Available at: <https://bit.ly/45LbwEG>

<sup>340</sup> Ukraine has united the European Union – Zelensky's message to the Council, Interfax-Ukraine, 2022. Available at: <https://interfax.com.ua/news/general/881130.html>

Thus, the President's speeches have influenced political decision-making. For example, shortly after his speech at the meeting of the European Parliament on March 1, 2022, Ukraine received the status of candidate for membership of the European Union, and after the presentation of the Ukrainian peace formula at the UN General Assembly, a resolution was passed on the payment of reparations by Russia to Ukraine. The unity of civilized states and strong support for Ukraine by partner countries are also the result of public speeches.



Screenshot 180. Article: "Volodymyr Zelensky signed the application for Ukraine's membership in the European Union", the official online page of the President of Ukraine, February 28, 2022. Source: <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/volodymyr-zelenskij-pidpisav-zayavku-na-chlenstvo-ukrayini-u-73249>

Ukrainian authorities, politicians and public figures emphasize that Russian aggression will have global consequences for Europe and have put forward arguments about why it is beneficial for Europe to support Ukraine, both on the battlefield and on its path to European integration. They explain that Ukraine's membership of the EU and NATO would be, first of all, "new opportunities to strengthen the potential of the European and Euro-Atlantic community", which will make it possible to strengthen the security of Europe.<sup>341</sup> Given different views on the pressing issue of security, the European Union can no longer be divided. The threat from Russia, which has always existed, has become unavoidable, and this threat itself will not disappear.

European integration has also become the center of attention in the Ukrainian media. For many years, the European Union has tried to satisfy the aspirations of Ukrainians for integration with projects that have not really held out much prospect of joining. The Neighborhood Policy, Privileged Partnership, and the Eastern Partnership did not offer the likelihood of joining the EU. In the 2014 Ukraine–EU Association Agreement, although Ukrainian aspirations for a European future were mentioned, the prospect of joining the EU remained very abstract. Shortly after the start of the full-scale Russian invasion, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky signed an application to join the European Union.

Ukrainians are convinced that a full-scale war should not be an obstacle to European integration, because the Ukrainian authorities are capable of pursuing the necessary reforms.

In addition, Ukrainian media outlets are calling for Ukraine's European partners to jointly implement sanctions against Russia, for example, to stop buying energy from the Russian Federation.<sup>342</sup> This

341 Why Ukraine is needed by the European Union and NATO: a new configuration of forces and the path to peace, Radio Freedom, 2022. Available at: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/ukrayina-vstup-yes-prypynennya-viyny/31901643.html>

342 Ukraine will help Europe to close the Russian gas valve, The Last Bastion, 2022. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3OVTEAo>



should be a convincing proof of the unity of Europe and a guarantee of peace on the European continent.

Military support for Ukraine from various European states has been widely covered in the media, especially noting those who treat Ukraine favorably and those who are in no hurry to help.<sup>343</sup> British Prime Minister Boris Johnson became a favorite among Ukrainians,<sup>344</sup> as did President of Poland Andrzej Duda<sup>345</sup> because of their dedicated support for Ukraine. On the other hand, the policy of Viktor Orbán and the Hungarian government infuriates Ukrainians.<sup>346</sup>

Experts are paying more and more attention to the transformation of the EU itself and the impact of the war on the balance of power among European countries. Journalists have noted that it has been Poland and the Baltic states that most decisively promoted assistance to Ukraine in the first months of the war, when France and Germany seemed paralyzed. This increased their influence in the global political arena.<sup>347</sup>

The crimes committed by the Russian Federation in Ukraine, such as genocide, the large-scale destruction of cities, towns, residential areas, homes for the elderly, hospitals, energy and other critical infrastructure facilities, have opened Europe's eyes to the real, neo-fascist Russia. The Ukrainians' brave struggle has united Europeans, giving them a sense of unity and a common vision for helping Ukraine.

## UNBREAKABLE PEOPLE OF AN UNBREAKABLE COUNTRY

Tens of thousands of dead and wounded civilians and soldiers, destroyed cities and villages, an unprecedented migration crisis, economic losses running to hundreds of billions of dollars – these are the consequences of 11 months of full-scale Russian invasion.

### NOTE:

As of February 4, 2023, the full-scale armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine had resulted in the killing of 460 Ukrainian children, while 919 have been injured with varying degrees of severity; 349 children have disappeared, and 16,222 children have been deported to the Russian Federation.<sup>348</sup> Due to Russian bombing and shelling, 3,126 educational institutions have been damaged, 337 of them completely destroyed.<sup>349</sup>

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has calculated that currently there are 18,096 victims among the civilian population of Ukraine who have suffered from Russian aggression. As of January 9, 2023, the occupiers had killed 6,952 Ukrainians and injured 11,144. Most victims are in Donetsk and Luhansk regions. "Most of the recorded casualties among the civilian population are due to long-range explosive weapons".<sup>350</sup>

The real number of victims is much higher, and by the end of the day may account hundreds of thousands of dead among both civilians and military.

343 Support for Ukraine in the world: which countries approve the provision of weapons and sanctions against the Russian Federation, European Truth, 2022. Available at: <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2022/06/20/7141506/>

344 What awaits Ukrainians' favorite Boris Johnson in the future – he promised to return, ICTV Facts, 2022. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRaM6imgN1Y>

345 Ukrainians cheered Duda on the streets of Lviv, Ukrainian Pravda, 2022. Available at: <https://bit.ly/30Zaheb>

346 The policy of Viktor Orbán and his government makes the entire European Union indignant, European Truth, 2022. Available at: <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2022/12/5/7151898/>

347 The war in Ukraine increased the influence of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Information portal "The Page", 2022. Available at: <https://thepage.ua/ua/politics/yak-vijna-v-ukrayini-zminila-sferi-vplivu-u-yevropi>

348 Children of war, Office of the Prosecutor General, 2023. Available at: [https://t.me/pgo\\_gov\\_ua/9316](https://t.me/pgo_gov_ua/9316)

349 Victims of war: data on children have been updated in Ukraine, Office of the Prosecutor General, 2023. Available at: <https://podrobnosti.ua/2466472-zhertvi-vjni-v-ukran-onovili-dan-pro-dtej.html>

350 The UN has recorded more than 18,000 victims of Russian aggression among the civilian population, LB.ua, 2023. Available at: [https://lb.ua/society/2023/01/10/542119\\_oon\\_zafiksuvala\\_ponad\\_18\\_tisyach\\_zhertv.html](https://lb.ua/society/2023/01/10/542119_oon_zafiksuvala_ponad_18_tisyach_zhertv.html)

There are many initiatives aimed at gathering stories of Ukrainians,<sup>351</sup> including an online archive of war crimes committed by Russia – the “Memorial” platform.<sup>352</sup> Documented war crimes are divided into 7 categories: killing; attacks on the civilian population or civilian objects; destruction of settlements; taking hostages and torture; illegal deportation; attack on religion and culture; and rape

. Thousands of tragic stories have been told by the Ukrainian media, including the fate of the Prymenki family from the city of Sumy – a husband, wife and three of their sons who died in an instant in their own home as a result of a Russian airstrike; a 13-year-old boy from Kharkiv, who died as a result of “Grad” shelling at a public transport stop; the loss of children as a result of the shelling of residential buildings in Odesa, Kyiv, Dnipro and other cities of Ukraine.

Every crime committed by the Russian Federation unites Ukrainians even more and strengthens their confidence in the need to continue their struggle. “If at least a part of the territory of Ukraine remains occupied, it will be a permanent place of provocation,” explains Mykhailo Podolyak, adviser to the Office of the Ukrainian President. “It cannot be that we sign some, conventionally speaking, ‘Minsk-3’, because then we will have to admit that in a year we will have war again”.<sup>353</sup>

Putin’s invasion plans were defeated by the resistance of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the will and spirit of Ukrainians, and the support of partners from around the world, thanks to which Russia failed to occupy Ukraine quickly, as the Kremlin planned.

#### NOTE:

During the 10-month war, the Ukrainians have managed to destroy more than 100,000 invaders, thousands of units of military equipment and missiles, ships and planes, numerous Russian bases, their airfields and warehouses with ammunition.

The Armed Forces of Ukraine have already liberated more than half of the territories that Russia captured after February 24, 2022. As of November 2022, Ukrainian forces had liberated almost 78,000 km<sup>2</sup> of their territory.

The key stages of the liberation of the territory of Ukraine so far include: the expulsion of the Russians from Mykolaiv; the withdrawal of the Russian Armed Forces under threat of defeat and encirclement from Kyiv, as well as from the entire territory of Zhytomyr, Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy regions; victory in the battle for Kharkiv; the expulsion of the Russians from Zmiiny Island; the Balaklia-Kupian offensive; the liberation of Sviatohirsk and Lyman and the transition to the offensive on Svatove-Kreminna; the liberation of Kherson and the heroic defense of Bakhmut.

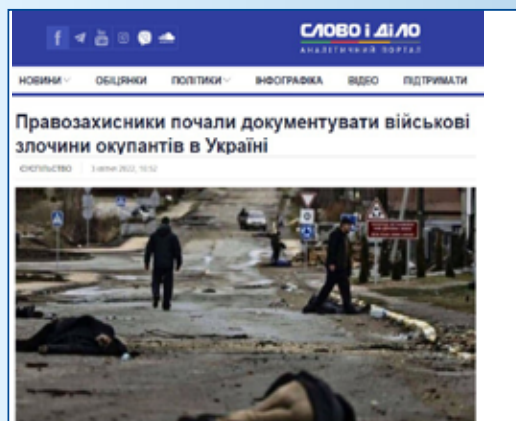
The Ukrainian Armed Forces have shown themselves to be the most creative modern army in the world. Some actions of our soldiers have set a unique example in military affairs. For example, the specialists of the Armed Forces have managed to adapt American high-speed anti-radar missiles with a range of more than 100 km AGM-88 HARM to domestic fighters. In addition, in the hands of the Ukrainian army, civilian helicopters and drones have become a powerful element in asymmetric war with the enemy, allowing attacks far beyond the capabilities of existing weapons, in particular, on the territory of occupied Crimea. The Armed Forces of Ukraine have conducted the world’s first large-scale operation in the form of an attack by a swarm of naval drones on powerful (and expensive) enemy warships.<sup>354</sup>

351 Davlikanova O. et al. (2022). 100 Stories of Women and Girls from Russia’s War against Ukraine (Volume I). Available at: <https://bit.ly/3ECIP1r>

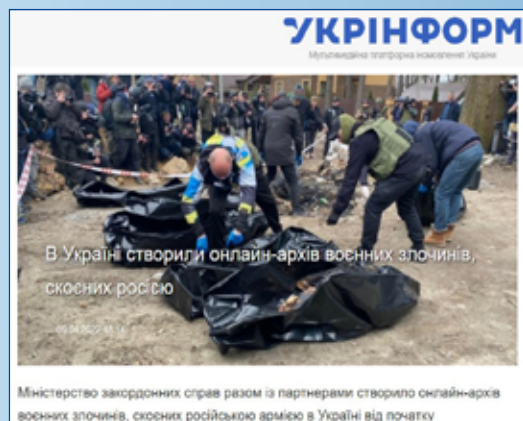
352 The “Memorial” platform, Memorial, 2023. Available at: <https://www.victims.memorial/>

353 Podolyak, Mykhailo (2022): “We will fight to the last Russian on the territory of Ukraine”, BBC. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-62468750>

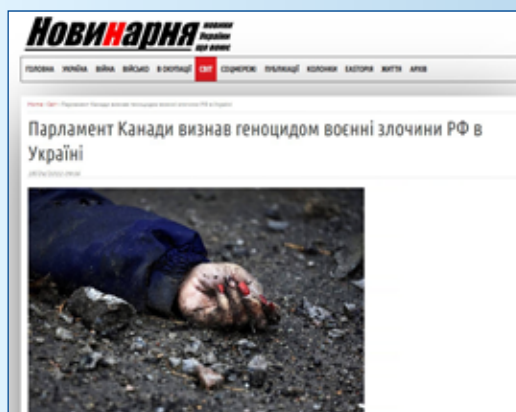
354 2023 will be the year of the liberation of the entire territory of Ukraine from the Russian invaders, Army FM, 2022. Available at: <https://www.armyfm.com.ua/ua/2023-%E2%80%94-stane-rokom-zvilnennya-vsiyei-teritorii-ukraini-vid-rosijskih-zagarnikov/>



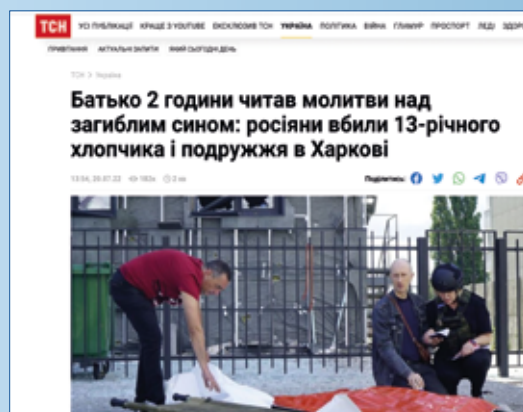
Screenshot 181. Article: "Human rights activists began to document the war crimes of the occupiers in Ukraine", Slovo i Dilo, April 3, 2022. Source: <https://bit.ly/44jvtWX>



Screenshot 182. Article: "Ukraine has created an online archive of war crimes committed by Russia", Ukrinform, April 9, 2022. Source: <https://bit.ly/43iXbh6>



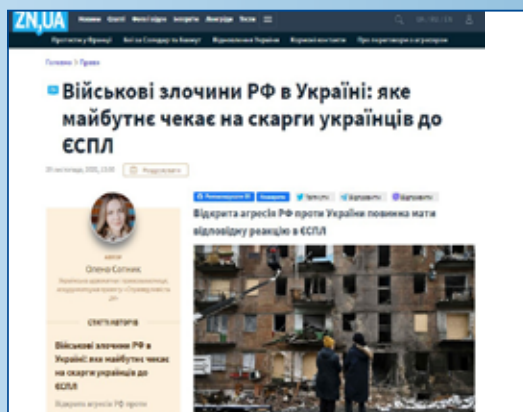
Screenshot 183. Article: "The Parliament of Canada recognized the war crimes committed by the Russian Federation in Ukraine as genocide", Novynarnia, April 28, 2022. Source: <https://novynarnia.com/2022/04/28/parlament-kanady-vyznav/>



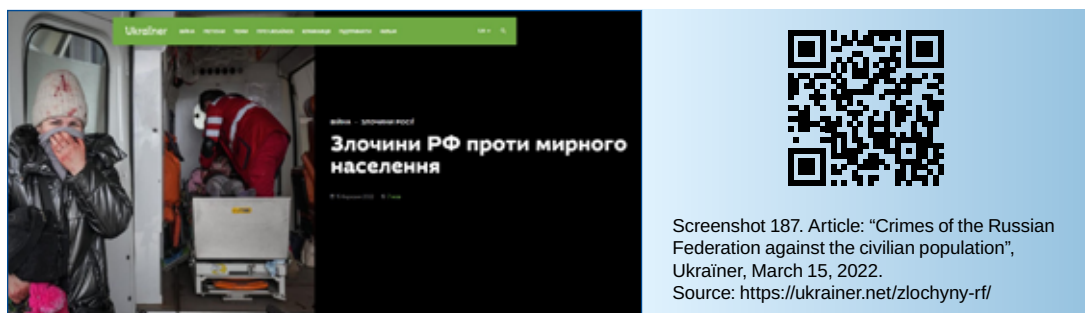
Screenshot 184. Article: "A father prayed for 2 hours over his dead son: the Russians killed a 13-year-old boy and a couple in Kharkiv", TSN, July 20, 2022. Source: <https://bit.ly/3O51kRw>



Screenshot 185. Article: "Stories of five Ukrainian children killed by Russia", Radio Freedom, October 8, 2022. Source: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/istoriyi-pyaty-ukrayinskykh-ditey-yakym-ubyla-rosiya/32068586.html>

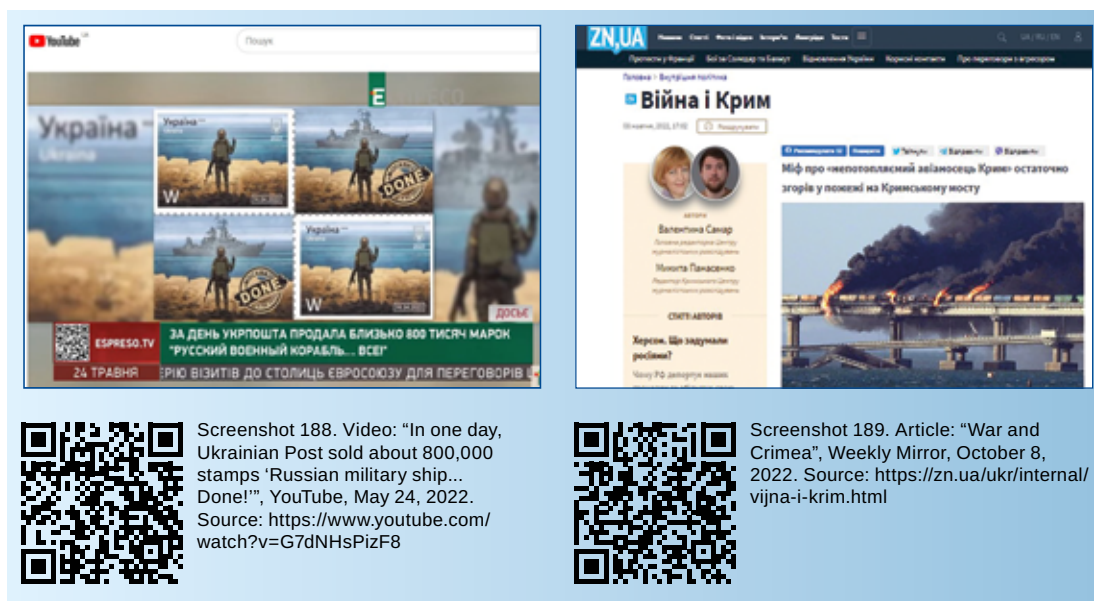


Screenshot 186. Article: "War crimes of the Russian Federation in Ukraine: what future awaits the complaints of Ukrainians to the ECtHR", Weekly Mirror, November 29, 2022. Source: <https://bit.ly/46TxQxs>



The people's elevated fighting spirit and the strengthening of the population's trust in the Armed Forces of Ukraine are also reflected in the Ukrainian media in the form of positive narratives: "Ukraine is an invincible country", "indomitable people", "a united nation", "we believe in the Armed Forces of Ukraine", "we believe in Zaluzhny [commander of Ukraine's armed forces – ed.]".

During World War II, Ukraine became a symbol of the struggle for freedom and created symbols of indomitability. One such symbol is the response of the defenders of Zmiiny Island – "Russian warship, go to hell" – to a demand to surrender. This defiance has attained great resonance. "Ukrposhta" even issued a stamp to commemorate this episode.<sup>355</sup> After the defeat of the flagship of the Russian naval fleet "Moskva", a postage stamp "Russian warship ... FINISHED!" was also issued and was much sought after.



<sup>355</sup> Ukrposhta issued the final postage stamps of the "RUSSIAN WARSHIP ..." series, Ukrposhta, 2022.

Available at: <https://www.ukrposhta.ua/ua/news/57660-ukrposhta-vipustila-finalni-poshtovi-marki-serii-russkij-vonnij-korabl->



**NOTE:**

Russia's attacks on the Ukrainian island of Zmiiny began on February 24, 2022, with the cruiser "Moskva"'s missile attack on the Ukrainian border garrison on the island, followed by its capture.

On June 30, 2022, the Russian garrison was hastily evacuated from Snake Island, and on July 4, the Ukrainian military raised a Ukrainian flag there.

Already on April 13, 2022, the same Russian missile cruiser "Moskva" was sunk by the Ukrainian military.

The Azovstal metallurgical plant became a real citadel of resistance to the Russian invaders during the blockade of Mariupol, as well as a symbol of Ukrainian resilience.<sup>356</sup> The words "Strong as Azovstal" acquired a sacred meaning for every Ukrainian, and the defenders of "Azovstal" became the pride of the Ukrainian army.

**NOTE:**

Defense of "Azovstal" – combat operations that lasted from March 18 to May 20, 2022 on the territory of the Mariupol metallurgical plant "Azovstal" and on the territory adjacent to it, as part of the battle for Mariupol during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Thousands of people found themselves in the lower floors of the industrial giant, including civilians, medics and nearly 3,000 Ukrainian soldiers from various units, including National Guardsmen, border guards, paratroopers, SBU employees and Azov soldiers.

The battles were fought by the Armed Forces of Ukraine on one side and the occupying armed forces of the Russian Federation on the other. The Russians attacked day and night from the sky, sea and land, including with incendiary shells and phosphorus bombs, trying to weaken the defending Ukrainian fighters.

Another symbol of unity was the word "palianytsia".<sup>357</sup> It became a kind of "password" by which Ukrainians distinguish what is "theirs" from what pertains to "foreigners" – it is difficult for Russians to pronounce this word correctly, so it was used to identify Russian saboteurs and Russian soldiers (a shibboleth, in other words).

**NOTE:**

Palianytsia is a traditional kind of Ukrainian bread, mainly made of wheat flour. In Ukraine, no holiday or rite is complete without a palianytsia, a symbol of hospitality, affection, ritual and talisman. It is a part of greeting ritual for high level politicians visiting Ukraine. At the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the Russian leadership assured its soldiers that the Ukrainians "liberated" from the "Ukrainian fascists" would gladly welcome them with bread and salt. Instead, the Ukrainians repelled the invaders, and the term instead of a symbol of hospitality became a kind of code for identifying enemy saboteurs.

<sup>356</sup> Azovstal is a new measure of Ukrainian resilience, YouTube, 2022.  
Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tF8oAY3hdTM>

<sup>357</sup> "Say 'palianytsia': the Ukrainian fearlessly attacked the armed invaders, YouTube, 2022.  
Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RqjeD9sl4ss>



A ceramic rooster from the Vasylykiv majolica factory, which survived on top of a kitchen cupboard on the remaining wall of an otherwise completely destroyed apartment in Borodyanka after an airstrike, became another symbol of Ukrainian resilience against the mass crimes of the Russian occupiers.<sup>358</sup>

Myths about the invincibility of the Russian army were debunked by a series of successful Ukrainian counterattacks, including the strike on the Crimean bridge.

Volodymyr Zelensky's daily appeals also help to keep up Ukrainian spirits. They are a source of news for Ukrainians and confirmation that the government is still "in place". The Ukrainian president's speeches are simple and at the same time metaphorical. The metaphor of light and darkness, which he repeats frequently, acquires a new meaning every time. For example, during the Christmas speech, Zelensky noted that Ukrainians may celebrate the holiday by candlelight, not because it is romantic, but because, most likely, there will be no light, adding: "However, the light of our faith will not be darkened".<sup>359</sup>

Each daily address of the President of Ukraine to the people begins with the words "Unbreakable people of an unbreakable country",<sup>360</sup> "Glory to all our heroes! Glory to our indomitable people!",<sup>361</sup> "To make it through this winter is to make it to the end".<sup>362</sup> The "unbreakable country" narrative was picked up by Ukrainian journalists. In particular, TV Channel 5 launched a special project "Unbreakable Country",<sup>363</sup> which features interviews with military personnel and volunteers. Most news channels and news agencies broadcast stories about life<sup>364</sup> and struggle under the occupation,<sup>365</sup> providing help and support,<sup>366</sup> with social messages designed to unite the people.<sup>367</sup> The media also publishes the results of studies,<sup>368</sup> analyses<sup>369</sup> and historical overviews<sup>370</sup> of the Ukrainian nation and the roots of its resilience.

358 The history of the popularity of the ceramic rooster from Borodyanka, YouTube, 2022.  
Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JazJ-ru5tUQ>

359 Zelensky addressed Ukrainians on Christmas Eve, YouTube, 2023.  
Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QofXC2X0UQo>

360 Zelensky's address to the unbreakable people of Ukraine, YouTube, 3.03.2022.  
Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmam-tp17Tg>

361 Glory to all our heroes! Glory to our indomitable people! Address of the President, YouTube, 24.09.2022.  
Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkBDDyr9kKE>

362 To make it through this winter is to make it to the end. Address of Volodymyr Zelensky, YouTube, 04.12.2022.  
Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFoVrmlkRz0&t=3s>

363 Special project "Unbreakable country", YouTube, 2023.  
Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL5eQ15vxDEVxIKHIL279bUM5Gey1ILNzO>

364 She gave birth to a daughter in the basement of her house under enemy fire: how people lived in the occupied Kherson region, Facts, 30.10.2022. Available at: <https://health.fakty.com.ua/ua/novyny/narodyla-donku-u-pidvali-svogo-budynku-pid-obstrilamy-voroga-yak-zhyly-lyudy-na-okupovanih-hersonshhyni/>

365 Kherson: mass actions against the invasion by Russian troops, Radio Liberty, 2022.  
Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnJEASTYzza>

366 Prytula, Serhiy (2022): We will continue to fight, and the Russians will continue to die on our land, Ukrainian Pravda, 12.05.2022.  
Available at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2022/05/12/7345753/>

367 The great Ukrainian people are indomitable and invincible! Our weapons are kindness, honesty, justice and a thirst for freedom and independence, Head Office of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine in the Dnipropetrovsk region, 24.03.2022.  
Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=842174693847439>

368 Resilience of territorial communities in the conditions of martial law: capacity for recovery and development: analytical report, Center for Social Research of Sumy State University, 2022.  
Available at: [https://essuir.sumdu.edu.ua/bitstream-download/123456789/90540/1/Kostenko\\_2022\\_2.pdf](https://essuir.sumdu.edu.ua/bitstream-download/123456789/90540/1/Kostenko_2022_2.pdf)

369 The formula of Ukrainian resilience, Mirror of the Week, 17.12.2022.  
Available at: <https://zn.ua/ukr/SOCIUM/formula-ukrajinskoji-stijkosti.html>

370 What is the secret of the invincibility and indomitability of the Ukrainian Cossack spirit?, Ukrinform, 30.01.2023.  
Available at: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/2544632-v-comu-polagae-taemnica-neperemoznosti-j-nezlamnosti-ukrainskogo-kozackogo-duhu.html>

The whole of Ukraine and the rest of the world watched the heroic protest actions of Kherson residents during the occupation of the city by Russian troops.<sup>371</sup> From the first days of Russia's full-scale invasion, Kherson Region was under occupation. Despite the danger, local residents went to rallies with Ukrainian flags, hung yellow and blue ribbons around the city and region, opposed the pseudo-referendum on integration with Russia. The rallies took place every day, and thousands of Kherson citizens came out. The occupiers used weapons, gas and stun grenades against them, tracked activists and arrested them.

The liberation of the territories captured by Russian troops dominated the news feeds of all domestic media.

Within the framework of the United Telethon, informational videos about heroic cities were broadcast.<sup>372</sup> These stories demonstrate the indomitability and endurance of the cities and their inhabitants, who did not give up and did not lose faith in victory.

The narrative "Glory to the Armed Forces!", "Glory to the heroes!" is popularized in all media and social networks. For example, on the portal Army Inform,<sup>373</sup> information is presented about the defenders of Ukraine, their life stories and the victories of the army. The narrative is aimed at strengthening the public's trust in the Armed Forces and its leadership. In particular, a flash mob of gratitude to the commander of the Armed Forces Valerii Zaluzhny was circulated on social networks.<sup>374</sup> Well-known media personalities express their gratitude and support for the Armed Forces, noting that the future of Ukraine depends on Ukrainian soldiers, that Ukrainian soldiers are a "real force, a wall", and the Ukrainian people trust their professionalism, endurance and calmness, that "the country prays, works and supports the Armed Forces".<sup>375</sup>

#### NOTE:

In July 2021, Volodymyr Zelensky appointed Valery Zaluzhny commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Zaluzhny has passed through all levels of military service, from platoon commander (31 people) to battalion commander (up to 1,000 people). Zaluzhny has served in the leadership of all four Operational Commands of the Ground Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine: Deputy Commander of the Forces for Combat Training of OC "East", Deputy Commander of the Forces of OC "South", Chief of Staff – First Deputy Commander of the Forces of OC "West". Zaluzhny was commander of the troops of OC "North" before becoming commander-in-chief. From 2014, he fought in Donbas, and later took charge of the headquarters of the Joint Forces Operation.

Valery Zaluzhny, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, enjoys the respect of both military and civilian Ukrainians, and across the world for his openness, combat experience and respect for ordinary soldiers.

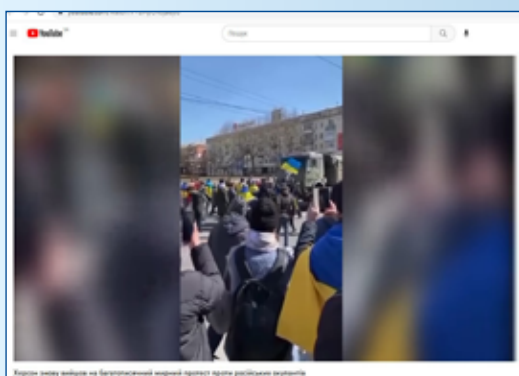
371 "Kherson is Ukraine": with such slogans, local residents opposed the Russian military from the first days of the occupation, Ukrinform, 30.01.2023. Available at: <https://suspilne.media/274538-herson-ce-ukraina-z-takimi-gaslami-miscevi-ziteli-protistoali-vijskovim-rf-z-persih-dniv-v-okupacii/>

372 Hero cities of Ukraine, YouTube, 2022. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9J0EJsQJTJ4>

373 Who is the author of the slogan "Glory to Ukraine"?, YouTube, 2022. Available at: <https://armyinform.com.ua/tag/geroyam-slava/>

374 Nina Matvienko wanted to marry Zaluzhny: the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces responded unexpectedly, 24 Showbiz, 8/01/2023. Available at: [https://showbiz.24tv.ua/nina-matviyenko-hoche-zamizh-za-zaluzhnogo-yak-vin-vidreaguvav\\_n2232749](https://showbiz.24tv.ua/nina-matviyenko-hoche-zamizh-za-zaluzhnogo-yak-vin-vidreaguvav_n2232749)

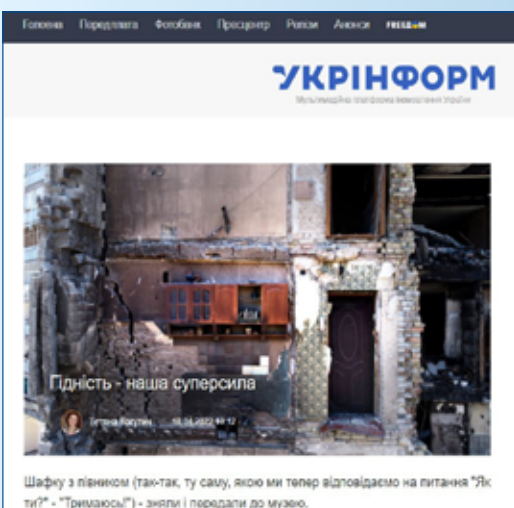
375 Ukrainian celebrities expressed their gratitude to the Armed Forces of Ukraine, YouTube, 2022. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkLU4\\_-2iLw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkLU4_-2iLw)



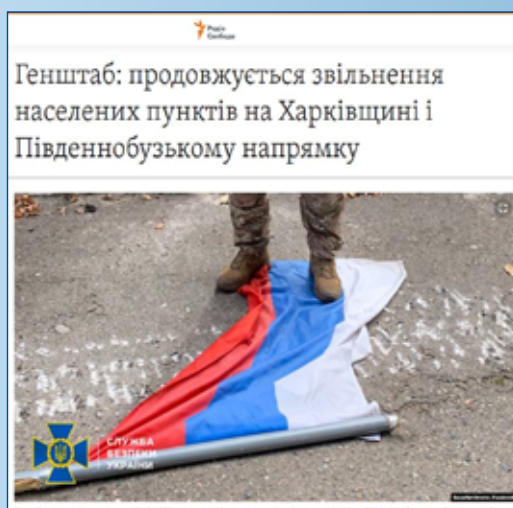
Screenshot 190. Video: "Kherson once again went out for a peaceful protest against the Russian occupiers", OBOZREVATEL TV, March 20, 2022. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DAyCN9jadyo>



Screenshot 191. Article: "All of us are a little bit like this kitchen shelf: a symbol of resilience on the wall of a house in Borodyanka", Suspilne, April 8, 2022. Source: <https://suspilne.media/226370-vsi-mi-troski-ca-safka-simvol-stijkosti-na-stini-budinku-u-borodanci/>



Screenshot 192. Article: "Dignity is our superpower", Ukrinform, April 18, 2022. Source: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/3460354-gidnist-nasa-supersila.html>



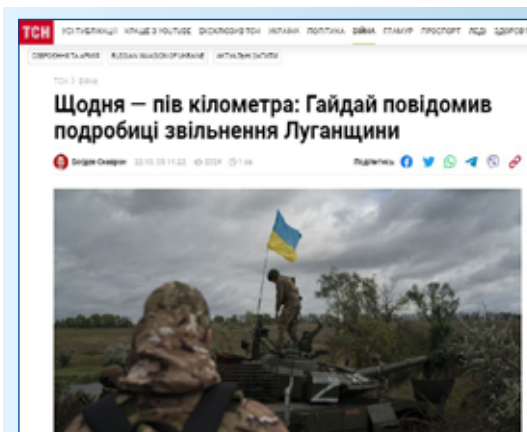
Screenshot 193. Article: "General Staff: the liberation of settlements in the Kharkiv region and the Southern Buz region continues", Radio Freedom, September 10, 2022. Source: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-henshtab-zvilnennia-naselenykh-punktiv/32027802.html>

In his few interviews, even before the start of the large-scale Russian invasion, the Commander-in-Chief noted that the Armed Forces had changed. Soviet approaches had been left behind, as had the common history with the aggressor, and young officers entering the service will change the army over the next few years.

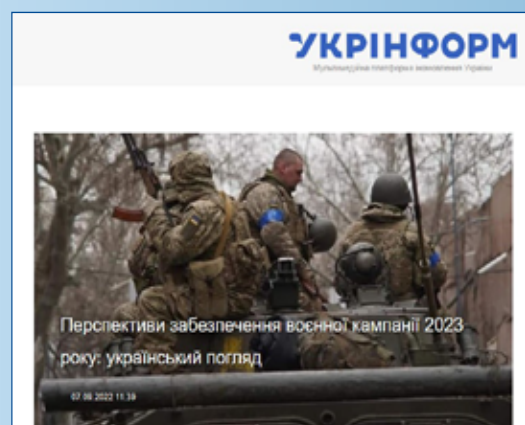
One of the main articles published by the Commander-in-Chief is his joint article with the First Deputy Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on National Security, Defense and Intelligence, Mykhailo Zabrotsky on how events may develop in the future in the context of a large-scale Russian invasion.<sup>376</sup> The article states that “the weapons of the Armed Forces of Ukraine have a range almost 20 times shorter than the enemy’s weapons.” Only Ukraine’s partners can solve this problem by providing it with “weapons systems or certain types of ammunition with the appropriate range.” Otherwise, “this war can last for years.”

This text was published on the eve of the meeting of the contact group on the defense of Ukraine in the Rammstein format, so experts believe that the purpose of the article was to convince allies of Ukraine’s effectiveness on the battlefield, as well as to encourage them to supply more powerful weapons.<sup>377</sup>

The full fledged war in Ukraine has been going on for over a year. The Russians have captured part of Ukrainian lands and are trying to keep them. They are erasing populated areas from the face of the earth, destroying energy facilities and are not giving up their attempts to demoralize the population. Despite all this, Ukraine has persevered.



Screenshot 194. Article: “Every day – half a kilometer: Gaidai reported the details of the liberation of Luhansk region”, TSN, November 5, 2022. Source: <https://tsn.ua/ato/schodnya-piv-kilometra-gayday-povidomiv-podrobitci-zvilnennya-luganschini-2195596.html>



Screenshot 195. Article: “Prospects for ensuring the 2023 military campaign: the Ukrainian view”, Ukrinform, September 7, 2022. Source: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/3566162-ak-zabezpeciti-voennu-kampaniu-u-2023-roci-ukrainskij-poglad.html>

376 Prospects for securing the military campaign of 2023: the Ukrainian view, Ukrinform, 2022.

Available at: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/3566162-ak-zabezpeciti-voennu-kampaniu-u-2023-roci-ukrainskij-poglad.html>

377 Will the war spill over to the territory of Russia? Experts explain the article by Zaluzhnyi and Zabrotsky, Radio Liberty, 2022.

Available at: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/stattia-zaluzhnyi-zabrotsky-viyna/32024032.html>

## INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

Thus, the narratives that have been spread in the domestic media in recent years are changing direction towards Ukraine's agency. That is, while until 2014 narratives about Ukraine were mostly formed under the influence of external factors, with the beginning of Russia's war against Ukraine, Ukrainian narratives began to emerge from their own, internal context. Today, Ukraine is increasingly able – at least partially – to seize the initiative in forming its own image both in internal and external media space. Moreover, an active information campaign, a clear international position and internal state cohesion make it possible to influence the shaping of Russia's image in the international arena.



## EPILOGUE

Narrative can be a tool for interpreting or constructing an image of the past, present and future, with the aim of forming the desired model of behavior and thought patterns of individuals and social groups. The narratives about Ukraine that we have reviewed, spread by Western, Russian, and domestic media, form the image of our country among ordinary citizens of different countries and decision-makers.

Initially, after gaining independence, Ukraine was widely perceived by Western countries through narratives and meanings constructed and broadcast by Russia, because Russia was considered the "main player" in the geopolitical space of the former USSR. At the same time, in the first years of our country's independence the United States also shaped the image of Ukraine. They were most concerned about Ukraine's nuclear potential, and this issue was used by the Americans in their policy towards Ukraine and the Russian Federation. Dominant in the 1990s was an image of Ukraine as a state characterized by "nuclear nationalism". Ukraine continued to be perceived as a former part of the USSR and a kind of outpost, a gate between Europe and Russia.

The situation changed in 2004 after the Orange Revolution, when the world community saw Ukraine in a different role – as a state that is ready to fight for its democracy. However, ineffective political decisions, scandals and disputes within the country partially changed the attitude towards Ukraine, especially after the Kremlin protege V. Yanukovich came to power. Ukraine's image as a corrupt state, where politicians abuse their power and are heavily influenced by Russia dominates.

The beginning of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine in 2014, the annexation of Crimea and the seizure of part of the Ukrainian Donbas, the full-scale war that began on February 24, 2022, and the consolidation of Ukrainian society around these difficult historical challenges form a new image of Ukrainians as a strong, freedom-loving nation in the world media. Thus, we note a certain evolution of the Western vision of the image of Ukraine, from Russia's "younger brother" to a free, autonomous state that is fighting for its independence, defending its European aspirations and democratic values.

Russian narratives about Ukraine have also undergone significant changes, from brotherly nation to Ukrainian fascists who must be killed. In this matter, we can single out several significant events that have influenced their formation. In particular, they include the signing of the "Budapest Memorandum" (1994), the Orange Revolution (2004), the "Kharkiv Agreements" (2010), the Revolution of Dignity (2013–2014), and the Russian-Ukrainian war.

The formation of Russian narratives about Ukraine was also influenced by events inside the Russian Federation, and most importantly, Putin's construction of vertical power during his many years in office. World events have also had an impact on the crystallization of Russian propaganda, especially problems in the EU, Brexit, the expansion of NATO to the east, and the strengthening of China. It should be noted that Russia has had a hand in some of those problems.

All this has influenced the rhetoric of Russian propaganda regarding Ukraine: from narratives about the "common history and brotherhood of the Slavic peoples" to openly xenophobic messages about the "state that did not happen", "Ukrainian fascists", a nation that "never existed and does not exist" and "the Western-led Kyiv regime".

Ukrainians' heroic fight against Russian aggression has finally brought the Ukrainian perspective to the forefront among Western elites. Today Ukraine influences narratives not only about itself, but also about Russia and the future of the democratic world.

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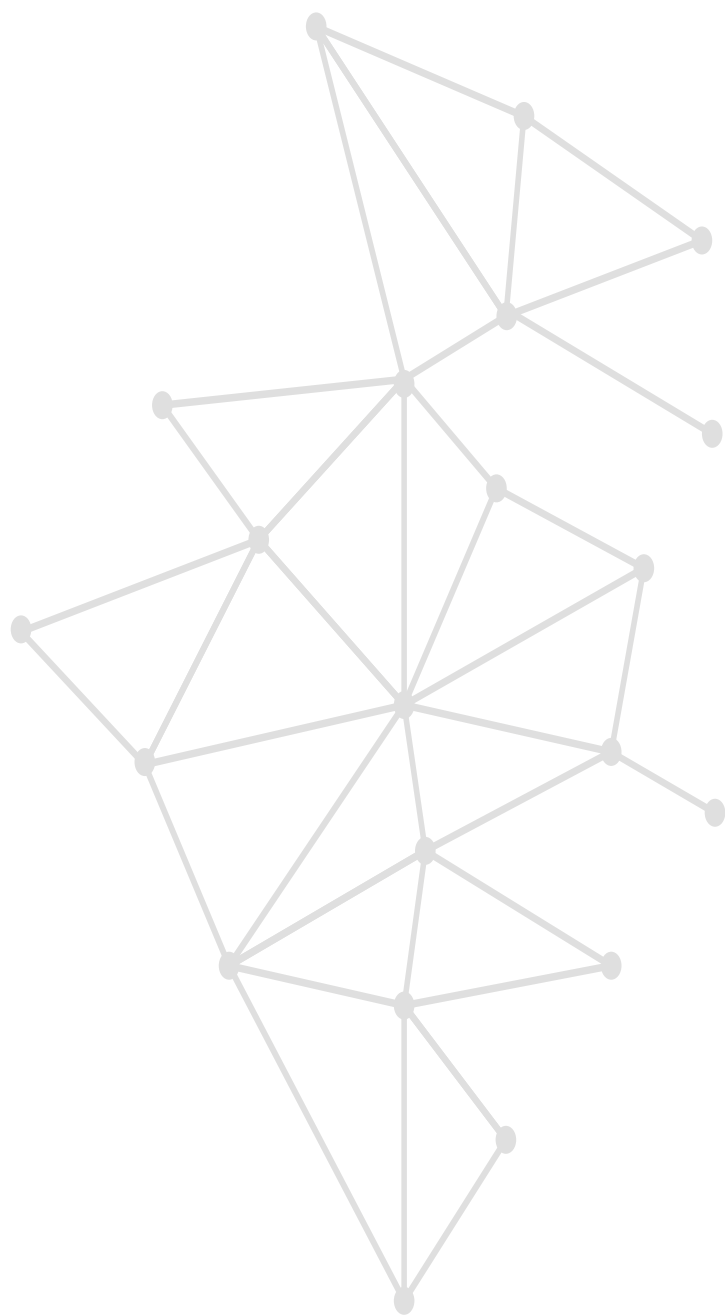
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