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THE ISSUE OF UKRAINE IN THE RUSSIAN NATIONAL DISCOURSE

The article refers to the position of Russian nationalists regarding Ukraine, according to which they refuse the idea of Ukrainian independence. They neither consider the state of Ukraine as an independent state nor the Ukrainian people as a separate nation. For years, Russian nationalists have been preparing an ideological basis for the legitimization of their aggressive and imperial foreign policy, the logical continuation of which was the annexation and occupation of the territory of Ukraine by Russia. The study of Russia's aggressive invasion of Ukraine and the instrumentalization of historical narratives is one of the important topics of the contemporary political agenda, which deserves special attention from scientists and civil society. To scientifically oppose the views of Russian nationalists, the authors of the article analyze the issues of the origin of Russia and "Russians" based on a retrospective analysis of history; the imperial character of the modern geopolitical concept of Slavophile – "Russian World"; The process of Russification in Ukraine – the stages of forbidding the teaching of the Ukrainian language since the seventeenth century and the Russian narratives.

The purpose of our study is to study and fundamentally analyze the Russian imperial nature. Such an integrated approach will help us explain its phenomenon and draw the right conclusions. Ukrainian identity and the idea of Ukrainian statehood are especially unacceptable for the Russian imperialist ideology, they cannot imagine a real, great Russia without Ukrainian lands. It is for this reason that at various times attempts were made to discredit the idea of Ukrainian statehood and called it at the official level various derogatory epithets: Malorossiya, Novorossiya and others.

Keywords: *political discourse; nationalist narrative; Slavophile concept; expansionist politics; Imperialist worldview; Russification process; Primakov doctrine; annexation of history.*

Russian nationalist thinking has historically been nourished by imperialist clichés. This tradition merged during the Soviet period with Russia's role as the leader of the communist world. The spread of communism and the expansion or restoration of Russian rule were almost synonymous; Since the 90s of the 20th century, imperialism as a leading concept in modern international politics has merged with post-modern nationalism. The fusion of Russia's imperial-nationalist tradition with communist principles made Russia's post-communist identity crisis particularly painful. For a long time, it was not possible to create a new national identity and national narrative in the new geographical borders, political reality and international agenda until the Putin government put forward a series of patriotic narratives, in which "Derzhava" is equated with "Russia" and "Homeland" for the majority of Russians, for which glory have these people sacrificed their freedom and economic well-being. The issue of Ukraine occupies a special place in these stories and myths. Russian nationalists generally do not consider Ukraine as an independent state, and the Ukrainian people as a separate nation, and reject the idea of Ukrainian independence.

To clarify the discourse about "Russian" and "Ukrainian", we consider it interesting to first retrospectively review the issues of the origin of Russia and "Russian".

Almost every nook and cranny of Russian history is carefully analyzed by Russian patriotic literature, but it prefers to remain silent about some issues. We have the history of the foundation of the Russian state in mind, at the beginning of which are foreign tribes – the Varyags.

The population of Kievan Rus consisted of three main ethnic groups – Slavs, Finns and Normans, who laid the foundation for a new ethnic unity – the Russians, whose country was later called Russia [1].

Slavic tribes settled between the river Dnieper and lake Ilmen. It was they who formed the main ethnic base of the future Kyiv state.

The southern border of the Finnish settlement and the contact line of the Finns with the Slavic tribes ran along the Moskva River [2, 110].

According to the monk Nestor of the Kyiv-Pechori Monastery (XI-XII centuries), the third Norman group of the population, led by three brothers, came at the invitation of the Slavic ambassadors with the motive that "there is no order in the country". The elder brother Rurik was settled in Novgorod, Sineus – in the vicinity of Beloozero, and Truvor – in the city of Ibborsk of the Krivichs. After the death of Sineus and Truvor, the elder brother extended his power to their domains and started the family of the future rulers of the country. The Varyags played a decisive role in the formation of the Russian state. The name "Russian" is related to the Varyags. "Rus" was the name of the Scandinavian tribe that came to the land of the Slavs and Finns under the leadership of the Ruriks. Monk Nestor, describing Oleg's campaign on Byzantium, distinguishes Slavs from Russians without any hesitation [3]. As it turns out from various sources, in the beginning, not the Slavs were called Russians, but their conquerors, the Varyags. Kluchevsky directly indicates that those who were initially known as Slavs later received the name of Varyags – Russians [4, 109].

Kluchevsky also notes that among the Eastern Slavs, the name Rus does not appear at all in the 8th century, and in the 9th-10th centuries, "Russians" were still not used to refer to the Slavs, and the Rus is distinguished from the Slavs in the same way that the native and dominant tribe is distinguished from the local and subjugated population [4, 143]. "Varyags" and "Russians" are the names of the same Scandinavian tribe. The Slavs refer to them simply by the first term, and those living in the south – Byzantines, Arabs, Khazars – by the second term. For the Byzantines, for example, the Rus is a Scandinavian half-robber and half-merchant, a warrior whose long boats visited the empire's borders from the north even before the arrival of the Ruriks [1].

As for the issue of imperialist Russia, it is a phenomenon of the first decades of the eighteenth century, even though Muscovite Russia waged wars of conquest in previous centuries as well. Its creator is Peter the first. It was during his time that Russia was declared an empire, and since then the expansion of Russia has been going on under the name of the empire. Peter sharply separated the service to the king from the service to the state, the motto was also changed, in which the estate of the former king (отчина) turned into the homeland – "приумножение земель отечественных". Both mottos, in a hidden or open form, imply the territorial growth of the country at the expense of other countries. Peter's opening of a window in Europe, strengthening of influence and positions on the Black Sea, and widening of expansion in the Caspian Sea can be considered the main vector of Russian foreign policy, which is equally suitable for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as for the modern period [5]. Peter laid a solid foundation for Russia's different statehood: a permanent army, a system based on the European order, which gave Russia a great advantage over its neighbours. Since then, Russia's interests have extended to the territories where the "brother" Slavic or Orthodox population lives; Accordingly, a new ideology is beginning to form, which is combined with Russian imperialism.

Among the theories of nationalism, Pan-Slavism should be distinguished, the first signs of which can be seen in the time of Catherine and Paul and become stronger in the nineteenth century. It works with a very similar, but not identical, ideology in the Caucasus, where there is a stronger emphasis on Orthodoxy and the "protection" of a monotheistic nation.

In modern conditions, the Slavophile concept has somewhat changed form, the Catholic roots of the cultures of many peoples of Slavic origin (Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, etc.) and the impossibility of integration into a single state after has been realized. Slavophiles were divided into "patriots", "nationalists", and "Eurasians", and the most genuine ones became "Derzhavniks" or "imperialists" [6, 4]. Despite such a division, all of them have in common the old Slavophile idea about the uniqueness of Russia and its history. In modern conditions, the "Primakov Doctrine", which was created in 1996-97, when Yevgeny Primakov was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, was revived and launched with new intensity. According to the doctrine, Russia is a superpower, it protects its own interests within Eurasia, which implies both territorial control and influence of ethnic-linguistic groups.

"Novorossiia" is a Russian imperialist term. This is the new Russia, which is based on the new Eurasian Union. It is the successor of the Slavophiles, and it is about the special Russian role, the unified Slavic identity of Russia, Ukrainians, and Belarusians – the revival of "Holy Russia", in which all these things converge. In their modern messages, like the propaganda of the Russian Empire of the nineteenth century, there is no Ukrainian nation, there is one great Eastern Slavic unity; There is an older, Russian brother and a younger, Russian brother – this is a nineteenth-century creation, which is clearly visible in the policy of Alexander III. Anti-Ukrainian politics was also pretty strong at that time. The strange thing is that the propaganda messages created 150 years ago are still valid today, with a large number of Russians sincerely believing that Ukrainians are either the same or slightly different Russians. However, if we look at the history of Ukraine, they have

more in common with the Poles than with the Russians. 2/3 of Ukraine was a part of Rukh-Pospolita for a long time. The cultural and linguistic influence of Polish is greater in Ukraine than the one of Russia.

The modern manifestation of Slavophile is the geopolitical concept, "Русский мир", which also reflects the Russian imperial worldview. "Русский мир" is people trapped in national and cultural frameworks, Russian-speaking or Russian-thinking people who may live outside the country; The concept of "Русский мир" has been gathering strength since the end of the 90s. Putin uses this concept for the first time in 2001, and then this term will turn into a weapon, a lever of state policy. It is this concept that Putin's government uses concerning the territories of southern Ukraine.

Although this topic was raised by Putin, its inclusion into the modern historical and territorial framework does not seem to be correct to us. Imperial spirit is characteristic of the entire Russian national thought in general. However, it seems that Russia somehow lost this quality and it was necessary to return it. Putin changed the talking about the socialist future by talking about imperial power. For the rise of Russia, it is important to have an external threat to consolidate the population. In recent years this is the most powerful narrative. During the invasion of Ukraine, they said, "If the Russian army had not entered Ukraine, NATO would have done it the next day and created a threat to us", as if this is an existential threat to Russia, that fighting in Ukraine is necessary to save Russia. On the other hand, the rise of Russia requires a strong national policy. The Russian language plays the biggest role in the policy of focusing on one identity for the population. Russian nationalism is introduced through the Russian language for the ethnic minorities who have actually lost their language. Russian nationalism is introduced through the Russian language.

The russification process in Ukraine, which provided for the prohibition of learning the Ukrainian language, started in the 17th century; In particular:

In 1627 – According to the decree of King Alexei, books published in the Ukrainian language were to be collected and burned;

In 1690 – Ukrainian manuscripts were prohibited by the decree of Patriarch Yokim of Moscow;

In 1709 – By the decree of Peter the First, printing books in the Ukrainian language was forbidden;

In 1748 – The Synod prohibited the teaching of the Ukrainian language in schools, closing 866 schools as a result;

In 1763 – By decree of Catherine the Second, it was forbidden to teach in the Ukrainian language at the Kievo-Maglyan Academy;

In 1863 – According to Valuev's circular, anyone who recognized the existence of the Ukrainian language would be considered an enemy of Russia;

In 1876 – According to the decree of Emsk, theatre performances in the Ukrainian language and the introduction of books in order to destroy the Ukrainian culture and the Ukrainian language were forbidden;

In 1888 – By the decree of Alexander the Third, it was forbidden to use the Ukrainian language in state institutions and to be baptized with Ukrainian names;

In 1914 – The Ukrainian press was prohibited by the decree of Nicholas I;

In 1938 – According to the decree of the State Committee, the study of the Russian language in Ukrainian schools became mandatory;

In 1958 – According to the resolution of the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR, all Ukrainian schools were switched to the Russian language;

In 2022 Putin tried by violent means to force the Ukrainian population to adopt Russian as the state language. At the same time, on April 20, at the meeting of the Supervisory Board of the non-governmental organization "Russia – Country of Opportunities" (АНО «Россия – страна возможностей»), Russian President Vladimir Putin supported the modification of historical education in schools to fight against fake news about the current situation in Ukraine. According to him, schoolchildren in Russia are particularly vulnerable to fake news from the West and Ukraine [7].

In Ukraine, the disinformation campaign based on historical narratives became more active in 2013-2014, in the context of "Euromaidan". Kremlin-affiliated media referred to Euromaidan demonstrators as "Banderovts," a Soviet-Russian term for Ukrainian nationalists who fought alongside the Nazis in World War II. Even in the background of the annexation of Crimea, Soviet and Russian imperialist narratives were actively spread, thus justifying the annexation of the Crimean peninsula to Russia, and the battles in the east of Ukraine appeared not as a battle between Russia and Ukraine, but as a battle against Ukrainian fascists. These narratives were also aired by the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, at the official level: "Everything in Crimea speaks of our common history. This is the ancient, Tavrian Chersonese territory, where the great principal Vladimir was baptized. In the hearts and minds of the people, Crimea has always been and is still an integral part of Russia." In the same speech, Putin referred to Euromaidan as a revolution

organized by Ukrainian neo-Nazis: "Nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes and anti-Semites carried out this coup d'état" [8].

The researchers analyzed 850,000 posts about recent Ukrainian history on the Russian social network Vkontakte and 16,000 posts on Facebook between January 2016 and April 2019, and identified several main narratives, namely:

- Portraying Ukrainians as neo-Nazis and interpreting the hostilities in Donbas as a continuation of World War II – separatists fighting against Ukrainian "fascists".
- Presenting southern and eastern Ukraine as a historical part of Russia.
- Claiming that the Crimean Peninsula is an ancient Russian land and the cradle of Russian Orthodoxy (completely ignoring the heritage of the Crimean Tatars and other ethnic or religious minorities) and preparing the annexation of Crimea by "annexing history".
- Portraying Ukrainian nationalists as war criminals, fascists and ideological heirs of the Nazis.
- Narratives focused on portraying the Soviet Union as a superpower and rising Soviet nostalgia among the Ukrainian population. These narratives are usually accompanied by the assertion that the creation of the Ukrainian state is the merit of the Bolsheviks.

Russian nationalists are so actively manipulating Ukraine's recent history that in September 2019 the European Parliament even issued a resolution condemning Russia's efforts to encourage polarization in neighbouring countries by glorifying the Soviet past through information operations. Based on the study of various manipulative historical narratives, a report published by the London School of Economics, in the Ukrainian context, focuses on Russia's efforts to deepen polarization in society through the instrumentalization of historical narratives [9].

Thus, Russian nationalists have been preparing the ideological basis for the legitimization of their aggressive and imperial foreign policy for years, for which the annexation and occupation of the territory of Ukraine by Russia became a logical continuation. The study of the case of Russia's aggressive invasion of Ukraine and the instrumentalization of historical narratives, in our opinion, is one of the important topics of the contemporary political agenda, which deserves special attention from scientists and civil society.

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Хевцуріані А., Чхіквішвили Г. Проблема України в російському національному дискурсі

Статтю присвячено дослідженню позиції російських націоналістів щодо України, згідно з якою вони відмовляються від ідеї української незалежності. Вони не розглядають ані державу Україну як незалежну державу, ані український народ як окрему націю. Російські націоналісти роками готували ідеологічне підґрунтя для легітимації своєї імперської зовнішньої політики, логічним продовженням якої стала анексія та окупація території України Росією. Дослідження агресивного вторгнення Росії в Україну та інструменталізація історичних наративів є однією з важливих тем сучасного політичного порядку денного, яка заслуговує на особливу увагу науковців та громадянського суспільства. В межах наукового протиставлення поглядам російських націоналістів автори статті на основі ретроспективного аналізу аналізують питання походження Русі та «росіян»; імперський характер сучасної геополітичної концепції слов'янофільства – «русский мир»; процес русифікації в Україні – етапи заборони викладання української мови з XVII століття та інші російські наративи.

Метою дослідження є вивчення та фундаментальний аналіз російської імперської ідеї. Українська ідентичність та ідея української державності особливо неприйнятні для російської імперіалістичної ідеології, носії якої не можуть уявити собі справжню, велику Росію без українських земель. Саме тому в різні часи робилися спроби дискредитувати ідею української державності та називали її на офіційному рівні різними принизливими епітетами: малоросія, новоросія тощо

Ключові слова: політичний дискурс; націоналістичний наратив; слов'янофільська концепція; експансіоністська політика; Імперіалістичний світогляд; процес русифікації; доктрина Примакова; анексія історії.