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Articles

Decommunization, Memory Laws, and "Builders of Ukraine in the 20th Century"*

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Introduction

This paper provides a critical overview of the Decommunization campaign in Ukraine up to the spring of 2017, which marked two years since the beginning of the program introduced by the four Memory Laws ratified by Ukraine's president Petro Poroshenko in May 2015. In reality, the process of removing Soviet statues and memorabilia began well before Euromaidan, especially in Western Ukraine where Lenin monuments and others of the Soviet period were swiftly removed from the late 1980s into the early years of independence.[1] But I address the formal campaign headed by the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance (hereafter referred to as INR), which began in the spring of 2015. I provide an analysis of the program and its results, the results of opinion polls, some critiques and also the reasons why it remains controversial, particularly outside Ukraine.

The particular focus is 20th century "builders of Ukrainian independence" as defined by these laws because this question has solicited the most attention, along with the physical changes that have resulted to the map of Ukraine, monuments, and memorials. Decommunization has a wider context than the Memory Laws, including a program of administrative decentralization and a new Education Law, introduced in draft form on September 5 and approved by the president on September 25, 2017, which will gradually render the Ukrainian language as the only language of instruction in schools and higher educational institutions.[2] Clearly the decentralization program cannot be fulfilled while a conflict situation remains in the eastern parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. My focus here is narrower since the paper concentrates on the impact of two of the laws in particular: on "builders of Ukrainian independence" and condemnation of Soviet and Nazi regimes.

The program continues to divide Ukrainian society, in part because it is based on hero figures that have negative reputations in the east and south of

* The author is grateful to his PhD students Ernest Gyidel and Shona Allison for research assistance on this paper.

1 The main Lenin monument in Kyiv was also dismantled in the fall of 1991, but was technically a monument to the October Revolution of 1917 rather than an individual Lenin statue.

2 See, for example, https://www.unian.info/society/2159231-new-education-law-becomes-effective-in-ukraine.html (accessed January 25, 2018).

the country. The reform has also brought Ukraine into potential conflict with several other states, principally Poland, which resents in particular the elevation to the status of "builders" of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) responsible for the summer 1943 Volhynia "massacre" of Poles.[3] On the other hand, as attitudes to Russia in Ukraine become more negative because of the latter's role in the conflict in the east and the 2014 annexation of Crimea, some form of severance with the past seems inescapable. The Soviet period tied Ukraine to Russia through education, industry, the Communist hierarchy, and (in much of Ukraine) language. Lastly, attitudes toward Decommunization vary according to age and level of education, and most important, regional location. Though it is too early to come to definitive conclusions, the results to date are mixed.

THE MEMORY LAWS OF 2015

Though the dismantling of monuments began on a regional basis as early as the late Soviet period, particularly in Western Ukraine, the current program was introduced by the controversial Memory Laws of the Spring of 2015,[4] devised inter alia by INR director Volodymyr Viatrovych and Yurii Shukhevych, the son of the leader of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) leader Roman Shukhevych. The four laws were entitled: "About condemnation of Communist and National-Socialist (Nazi) totalitarian regimes in Ukraine and a ban on propaganda of their symbols"; "About access to archives of repressive agencies of the Communist totalitarian regime 1917–1991"; "About perpetuation of victory over the Nazism in World War II 1939–1945"; and "About legal status and honoring the memory of fighters for independence of Ukraine in the 20th century."

The laws resulted in a ban on the Communist Party of Ukraine by the Ministry of Justice, issued on July 24, 2015 and coming into effect four months later, prohibiting the activities of all three Communist parties in the country, led by the CPU, which had been a permanent fixture in the Ukrainian Parliament until 2014, albeit with dwindling numbers. The ban was based on the law of Spring 2015 prohibiting all symbols and propaganda of Nazism and Communism in Ukraine.[5] Petro Symonenko, who was the leader of the party throughout the independence period, declared that he would appeal to the Eu-

3 See, for example, Jared McBride, "Peasants into Perpetrators: The OUN-UPA and the Ethnic Cleansing of Volhynia, 1943–1944," *Slavic Review* 75:3 (2016), pp. 630–654.

4 See http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_1?pf3511=54749; http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_1?pf3511=54689; http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_2?id=&pf3516=2539&skl=9; and http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_2?id=&pf3516=2540&skl=9 (all accessed January 25, 2018).

5 https://tsn.ua/politika/v-ukrayini-oficiyno-zaboronili-kpu-462089.html (accessed January 25, 2018).

ropean Court of Human Rights to reverse the decision, but was unable to get an appeal ratified by the Ukrainian court system.[6]

The most disputed of the four laws was the law on the "fighters for independence," since its choices were selective, applying only to non-Soviet entities and individuals. The laws were modelled on previous anti-Communist decrees in East European countries and accepted with limited debate, overshadowing a lengthy discussion of some of the more contentious issues of Ukraine in the 20th century that had become a feature of the early 21st century among Ukrainian historians.[7] Included among the fighters were controversial groups such as the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). The leaders of those organizations, Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych, had long been hero figures in some Ukrainian communities of North America, Europe and Australia, but until recently their popularity in Ukraine was limited to the western regions in which they or their supporters had operated. In late 2017, about 41% of respondents to an opinion poll conducted throughout Ukraine supported the notion of OUN and UPA as participants in the struggle for the independence of Ukraine, with 27% opposed, so the picture is changing (though support was much higher among men than women and prevalent in the Western regions more than in others).[8]

Bandera in particular was branded a "fascist" by Timothy Snyder, an historian generally sympathetic to Ukraine, in an editorial article written during the Euromaidan protests and portrayed at more length as such in a voluminous biography by the German-Polish scholar Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe, based on his PhD thesis at the University of Hamburg, Germany.[9] During Euromaidan, Bandera received a resurrection of sorts, particularly on January 1, 2014, because the protests coincided with the annual candlelight procession bearing his portrait on the occasion of his birth date in central Kyiv. Conversely, anyone associated with the Communist Party was omitted from the list of "builders of independence," even though some of these figures contributed significantly to the development of national consciousness and nation building in Ukraine: Oleksandr

6 https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news/27433929.html (accessed January 25, 2018).

7 I have discussed these debates at length. See David R. Marples, *Heroes and Villains: Creating National History in Contemporary Ukraine* (Budapest, Hungary: Central European University Press, 2007).

8 The opinion poll was conducted from September 16 to October 1, 2017 by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology.

9 See http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2010/02/24/a-fascist-hero-in-democratic-kiev/ (accessed January 25, 2018) and Grzegorz Rossolinski, *Stepan Bandera: The Life and Afterlife of a Ukrainian Nationalist: Fascism, Genocide, and Cult* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2014). Snyder commented as follows: "Bandera aimed to make of Ukraine a one-party fascist dictatorship without national minorities. During World War II, his followers killed many Poles and Jews." See also Eleonora Narvselius, "The 'Bandera Debate': The Contentious Legacy of World War II and Liberalization of Collective Memory in Western Ukraine," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 54: 3–4 (December 2012), pp. 61–83.

Shums'kyi, Petro Shelest, and Leonid Kravchuk are prominent examples.[10] Thus the law was highly selective, meeting the criteria selected by the INR.

Crucially, President Petro Poroshenko supported the new laws. Historian Kyrylo Halushko cites a meeting of Poroshenko with history professors and students at which he advised them to educate the public about controversial events to eliminate the legacy of Soviet and Russian propaganda.[11] More communication was needed with the public, Poroshenko stressed, and only historians were in a position to make convincing arguments. Those who are qualified should publish not only academic volumes but also popular books. The inference is that such works can create unity within the country through a common historical narrative, particularly of the recent past. The naivety of this perspective has quickly become apparent over the thirty months during which the Memory Laws have been enforced. Not surprisingly historians rarely agree in their interpretations of various events since, in contrast to the Soviet period, there can be no common view that is accepted by all in a democratic scholarly environment. The INR nonetheless was given a green light by parliament and the president to begin the program of Decommunization with Viatrovych, the co-initiator of the laws, at the helm.

The president has been very supportive of Decommunization and the Memory Laws from their inception. In May 2016, he commented during a visit to the Bykivnia Memorial site that national security interests demanded the completion of Decommunization. At that time, he remarked that some communities, thanks to the manipulations of politicians, were not taking the changes of names seriously. Not only must the changes take place, Poroshenko stated, but local communities should not resort to using names linked with the former imperial Russian state and "Novorossiya."[12] More recently, on the 75th anniversary of the officially designated establishment of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), Poroshenko commented that the army included "the best sons and daughters of the Ukrainian people" and "courageously resisted two powerful totalitarian regimes."[13] Clearly his comments may have been influenced by Russian acts of aggression on Ukrainian territory, but there seems no question that the president is fully behind the changes being introduced. The same applies to the ruling coalition in Parliament, which consists currently of two parties: the Petro Poroshenko Bloc and the People's Front led by Chairman of the Rada, Andrii Parubii.

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10 David R. Marples, *Ukraine in Conflict: An Analytical Chronicle* (Bristol, UK: E-International Relations Publishing, 2017), pp. 157–159.

11 https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/28048337.html (accessed January 25, 2018).

12 https://hromadske.ua/posts/poroshenko-dekomunizatsiia-v-ukraini-maie-buty-zavershena (accessed January 25, 2018).

13 http://nv.ua/ukr/ukraine/events/75-ja-richnitsja-stvorennja-upa-poroshenko-porivnjav-povstantsiv-z-ninishnimi-zahisnikami-ukrajini-2025022.html (accessed January 25, 2018).

PRIORITIES OF THE INR

The annual report of the INR was released on its website in mid-February 2017. It laid out six main priorities:[14]

1 Decommunization
2 Popularizing Ukrainian history
3 Commemoration of the fighters for Ukrainian independence and victims of totalitarian regimes (by which is meant Stalin's USSR and Nazi Germany)
4 Preserving the memory of Euromaidan and the creation of a Museum of the Revolution of National Dignity
5 Creating an INR archive, which is linked to the general opening of archives as well as the transfer of the SBU archive to the INR offices
6 Improving the teaching of history in schools.

According to Viatrovych, by the end of 2016, 987 settlements and 25 districts had been renamed, within settlements, 500 place names had been altered, and 2,389 monuments and symbols linked to "totalitarian propaganda" had been removed. The program was 80% complete in the provinces, 95% in the city of Kyiv.[15] The most successful region of Ukraine in terms of "decommunizing" is Vynnytsia, which incidentally was also one of the areas affected by the Holodomor.[16] The last Lenin monument in this region was demolished in March 2017 in the village Tereshkyi, Bar district. Evidently the village head, a former Communist had put up resistance to its removal. Only one monument remained to be eliminated at the time of writing, to Mykola Shchors, which was located in the village Pishchanka.[17]

Not included in the list of priorities but mentioned several times by Viatrovych is the creation in the city of Kyiv of a Museum of Totalitarianism, which could house those monuments of artistic or aesthetic value, such as the Shchors statue in Kyiv.[18] Viatrovych's wish was for the museum to be opened by November 7, 2017, the centenary of the Bolshevik Revolution in Petrograd

14 http://www.memory.gov.ua/news/oprilyudneno-zvit-pro-robotu-institutu-u-2016-rotsi (accessed January 25, 2018).

15 A link to the PDF with the full interview can be found at: http://resource.history.org.ua/cgi-bin/eiu/history.exe?&I21DBN=EJRN&P21DBN=EJRN&S21STN=1&S21REF=10&S21FMT=ASP_meta&C21COM=S&S21CNR=20&S21P01=0&S21P02=0&S21COLORTERMS=0&S21P03=IDP=&S21STR=misto_2017_2_10 (accessed January 25, 2018).

16 See, for example, *Holodomor (microform): Famine in Ukraine, 1932–1933* from the Central State Archive of Public Organizations, Kiev (Woodbridge, CT: Primary Source Microform, 2004), f1, op20, d.5255 (April 4–5, 1932).

17 http://vlasno.info/politika/vlada/mistseva/item/16866 (accessed January 25, 2018).

18 Ibid.

(St. Petersburg), but this target was not met.[19] The goal of the museum will be to show the establishment of the Soviet regime and how it affected the mentality of the population. A related problem is that there are no laws to protect art of value, and Soviet mosaics are often destroyed or simply painted over. Concerning their importance, photographer Evhenii Nikiforov, interviewed by Hromadske Radio in March 2017, commented that: "it is undoubtedly art. I cannot imagine anyone who would look at the best examples of Soviet Ukrainian mosaics and say 'no, this is not art'."[20] Some of the artists painting in the Soviet era were dissidents at some point in their careers, thus a wholesale denigration of art in the Soviet period is unwarranted, in the view of Nikiforov.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE INSTITUTE OF NATIONAL REMEMBRANCE

The financing of INR, according to the same annual report came through two decrees in the state budget, one on "national memory" (HR8.5 million or USD318,700) and one for the Museum of the Revolution of National Dignity (HR5 million; USD187,450). The largest single outlay was for commemorations of the Holodomor (HR427,777; USD 16,000). Director Viatrovych's salary, like that of state employees generally, increased in October 2016 from HR5–6,000 to 10–12,000,[21] thus reaching at the peak USD448 per month, which is higher than the Ukrainian average, indicating that the government places high value on his position and activities. The INR has 35 full-time staff members, all located at the office in Kyiv. It has no regional representation. Taken overall, the government of Ukraine has not imbued the Institute with substantial financial backing or regional presence, but it has supported INR in its decisions.

Activities of INR are coordinated with the Ministry of Culture. Viatrovych maintains that Decommunization is regarded favorably by most Ukrainians (see below), but insists that regions should not be allowed to conduct referenda on name changes. Nor should they be allowed to play games, such as the attempt in Dnipropetrovsk—now Dnipro—to retain the original name and attribute it to St. Peter rather than Hryhorii Petrovskyi. When local authorities have resisted name changes, they are taken to court, and to date, INR has won all its cases, though many more awaiting were trial at the time of writing.

There are also some exceptions to the wholesale removal of monuments to Soviet leaders. The city of Dniprodzerzhinsk, for example, has been renamed Kamiansk but retains a monument to Leonid Brezhnev, who was born

19 On November 3, Viatrovych announced the postponement of the museum, now named the Museum of Monumental Propaganda of the USSR. See http://www.unn.com.ua/uk/news/1696682-vidkrittya-muzeyu-monumentalnoyi-propagandi-srsr-u-kiyevi-vidklali-na-neviznacheniy-chas (accessed January 25, 2018).

20 https://hromadskeradio.org/en/programs/kyiv-donbas/v-ukrayne-shedevralnye-obrazcy-monumentalnogo-yskusstva-no-my-yh-ne-cenym-fotograf (accessed January 25, 2018).

21 http://news.liga.net/interview/politics/14695255-vyatrovich_dekommunizatsiya_dayet_immunitet_k_massovym_ubiystvam.htm (accessed January 25, 2018).

in the city in 1906. In fact, in early 2017, Brezhnev's statue was being repaired by funds from the city's budget. Viatrovych demanded that the monument be removed and responded to the city's statement that it was a part of the local museum of "Myths and Realities of the Soviet Epoch" as "99% fake."[22] Ironically, polls cited by Oleksandr Zinchenko, a historian and Assistant Director of INR, to downplay the importance of Stepan Bandera in Decommunization, reveal that the popularity of Bandera in Ukraine today is less than that of Brezhnev. The comment is based on a poll conducted by the Institute of Sociology, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in the summer of 2015. At this time, Brezhnev's popularity stood at 13.2% and Bandera's 12.9%.[23]

THE VIEWS OF VIATROVYCH AND INR

Volodymr Viatrovych, the Director of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance, is ostensibly the leader of Decommunization with the backing of the Ukrainian government and president. Thus, it is useful to provide a brief survey of his outlook and opinions as reflective of those of the INR. His views are not easy to summarize, not least because of the frequency of his commentaries and pronouncements, mostly on social media sites. In August 2016, however, he presented a lecture in the series "Lektorii," which ran from July 30 to August 23 of that year in preparation of the celebration of 25 years of Ukrainian independence. Viatrovych's talk was entitled "Decommunization as Rethinking the Past" and provided a concise account of how he perceives Decommunization.[24]

First of all, he noted, many problems of contemporary Ukraine can be attributed to misconceptions about the "happy life" in Soviet Ukraine. Hence Decommunization is the process of rethinking the past and "a chance for the future." Without it, Ukraine cannot become a developed country along the lines of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and the Baltic States. Rather it would follow the pattern of Russia, Belarus, and the Central Asian republics, which did not experience Decommunization. He sees Ukraine's present position as being between these two groups.

Decommunization logically should have started in 1991 when the country became independent, but in fact the old Communist nomenklatura managed to cling on to power. The first real attempt, in Viatrovych's opinion, occurred after the 2004 Orange Revolution that resulted in the inauguration of Viktor Yushchenko as president. It was at this time that the Ukrainian Institute of Na-

22 http://novynarnia.com/2017/02/22/nedekomunizovaniy-pam-yatnik-brezhnyevu-v-kam-yanskomu-shhe-y-poremontuyut-byudzhetnim-koshtom/ (accessed January 25, 2018).

23 http://texty.org.ua/pg/article/textynewseditor/read/74638/Liknep_dla_Kachynskogo_kult_Bandery_u_cyfrah (accessed January 25, 2018).

24 http://www.memory.gov.ua/news/lektorii-500-khvilin-pro-ukrainu-volodimir-vyatrovich (accessed January 25, 2018).

tional Remembrance was created and focus turned to the Holodomor (Famine of 1933) as a crime of the "Communist totalitarian regime." Ukraine also began to open up its archival records at the same time as Russia began to close some of its own and rehabilitate the Communist past, making it a state ideology.[25]

In 2010, Viatrovych continues, Yanukovych became president of Ukraine and ended all initiatives aimed at Decommunization. He also began to target opponents using means similar to those deployed by the Soviet leadership in the 1930s. His progress ended with the protests of Euromaidan in late 2013, which was "an anti-Soviet and anti-Communist rebellion." The movement was popular and largely spontaneous, resulting, inter alia, in the dismantling of Lenin statues—the so-called *Leninopad*, he added. Hence, the laws of 2015 did not initiate Decommunization, they simply provided it with a new framework. The first law, on the victory over Nazism, introduced the European practice of commemorating the Second World War without Soviet militarist pathos. The Ukrainian law, in his view, propagates values of humanism and reconciliation.

Regarding the other laws, Viatrovych comments that the archival law allows access to the archives of repressive Communist organs, with the ultimate goal of transferring all collections to a new Archive of National Memory. The law on Nazi and Communist symbols tried to deal with the problem of the mass "Leninization" of Ukraine, as Ukraine in 1991 had 5,000 Lenins, proportionally more per square meter than Russia, which had 6,000 but is twenty-eight times larger in territory. In his view, the process recognizes the artistic value of some monuments, which will be preserved in museums—it was unclear how and when this would take place. The law does not dictate name changes, it merely stipulates which names are permissible, and Viatrovych feels confident that in the majority of cases the local community can make their own choices. The basic premise behind this thinking—mentioned by Viatrovych in an interview on August 24 (Independence Day) 2016—is that the entire Soviet period was a time of occupation of Ukraine by a foreign power (see below).[26]

In a further comment in early January 2017, Viatrovych addressed perhaps the most controversial street name change to date, namely the renaming of Moscow Avenue in Kyiv as Bandera Avenue. He claims that the change went through several phases of public discussion and that Kyiv City Council supported the idea. The public voted on the question on a special website, with more than 5,000 participants in the voting. Only one member of Council was

25 The statement is incorrect. Russia has not returned to Soviet ideology and in fact Vladimir Putin is known for his critical comments about Lenin. It has, on the other hand, returned to the use of the German-Soviet war as justification for its current political actions, a practice that began in the Brezhnev period (1964–82), but which was abandoned under Mikhail Gorbachev's leadership (1985–91) and that of the first independent Russian president, Boris Yeltsin (1991–99).

26 http://www.5.ua/polityka/viatrovych-period-radianskoi-vlady-v-ukraini-mozhna-vvazhaty-okupatsiieiu-123855.html (accessed January 25, 2018).

opposed to the idea. He attributes the opposition to the use of Bandera's name to Russian propaganda and "manipulations by certain politicians," especially of the older generation, made up mainly of pensioners who make up a significant part of the electorate. Viatrovych lashes out at those who have maintained that Stepan Bandera has become the official replacement for the removed Lenin statues in Ukraine. On its Facebook page, the INM observes that only four monuments of Bandera have been erected since Euromaidan and only 34 out of 51,500 streets have received his name.[27]

Moving to the external sphere, the INR leader attributes most of Ukraine's historical memory problems today to outsiders, most prominently Russia and Poland. Polish-Ukrainian relations in early 2017, he acknowledges, were in their worst shape since 1991. In particular, the Polish side was incensed by the veneration of heroes of UPA, which was responsible for the mass slaughter of Polish civilian populations in Volhynia in the spring and summer of 1943. Yet he has never conceded that these events were anything other than manifestations of a conflict in which both sides committed misdeeds. Moreover, he assigns full culpability to the Poles for the deterioration of relations between the two states. They exploit the past, thus "politicizing history and historicizing politics." Viatrovych is optimistic that this situation will change and the Poles will see the folly of their current perspective.[28]

An essential tenet of the INR perspective is that it is Russia, and Russia alone that is exploiting the "Great Patriotic War" for political purposes. The war myth is a "state religion" in contemporary Russia. The Soviet authorities used the same myth to create the "Soviet people" as a single national entity. May 9 was the day when all-post-Soviet leaders except those of the Baltic States traveled to Moscow to take part in a Soviet-style parade. But after Euromaidan, Ukraine began to leave this "mythological space" and to narrate its own, Ukrainian experience, of the war. Still many Soviet propaganda terms remain and it is common today to hear talk of "fascists" or "executioners." The goal of the INR is to counter this phenomenon by opening archives, a campaign that started in Ukraine in the early 1990s and it has created a digital archive (still in its infancy) entitled "Archive of the Liberation Movement."[29] In this way, anti-Communist and anti-Soviet signify anti-Russia, and the mission is to distance Ukraine, finally and irrevocably, from Russia and the so-called Russian World.

Gradually a campaign against Communism is developing signs of a campaign against all things Russian. Viatrovych explains this phenomenon by stating that within a Soviet layer of Communism "we often stumble upon a

27 https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2017/01/16/7132563/ (accessed January 25, 2018).

28 https://day.kyiv.ua/en/article/close/volodymyr-viatrovych-national-memory (accessed January 25, 2018).

29 See http://avr.org.ua/index.php/ROZDILY (Accessed January 25, 2018).

Russian-imperial layer, which also had an impact on Russian place names." He maintains that "Ukrainians must have exclusively Ukrainian names for our sites" and that there are no outlets for Russian names. He then partially contradicts himself by adding that although some cities exhibit figures linked to Russian culture, they should not dominate the landscape. If someone is fond of Russian history and culture then the right place for them is the Russian Federation. Consequently, there is no longer any possibility for Russian to become the second state language in Ukraine.[30] His attitude is hardly conducive to any reconciliation with the disaffected parts of the Ukrainian east.

Within Ukraine, he has singled out "the Donbas"[31] as an area with "Sovok" or Soviet mentality, a result of both Soviet and post-independence policies of the local leadership. He maintains that the Donbas was the area in which the Soviet Union constructed the "model Soviet man" and in which the ideal Soviet citizen was easiest to create. The authorities dispatched here workers from different parts of the Soviet Union to work in heavy physical labor jobs where they were bombarded with propaganda. Such was the success of the Soviet model that even twenty-five years after the end of the Soviet regime, the area remains part of the Soviet Union in the minds of its residents.[32] It symbolizes another of Viatrovych's basic tenets, which is that the entire Soviet period should be recognized as "the Soviet occupation of Ukraine," something installed from the outside.[33]

In this respect, there is little difference between the INR's interpretation of the 20th century and that of the governments of the Baltic States, and to a lesser extent the formerly Communist states of Eastern Europe. The key question regarding the INR leader is the lack of distinction between scholar and propagandist for the government. He is author of several books, some of which are based on archival research in Ukraine using sources that only recently have been made available to visitors. Yet his public pronouncements are often political in tone, especially his denunciations of critics, among which the government of Poland features prominently. Some Western academics and Western media have found his articles and statements to be distortions of historical events and even "whitewashing" of crimes committed by Ukrainian activists against

30 Volodymyr Viatrovych, "Derusifikatsiia v Ukraine: vedet li eto k grazhdanskoi voine [Derussification in Ukraine: will it lead to civil war?]," *Apostrof* (October 12, 2016). The online link was unavailable at the time of writing.

31 It should be noted that the description of the areas of conflict as "the Donbas" is inaccurate as the name refers to the basin of the Don River or coalfield, which also includes some territory in the Russian Federation. Hereafter the term is used to denote only those areas within the pre-2014 Ukrainian borders.

32 https://www.5.ua/suspilstvo/viatrovych-rozpoviv-pro-prychyny-formuvannia-terorystychnykh-dnr-ta-lnr-na-donbasi-123843.html (accessed January 25, 2018).

33 https://www.5.ua/polityka/viatrovych-period-radianskoi-vlady-v-ukraini-mozhna-vvazhaty-okupatsiieiu-123855.html (accessed January 25, 2018).

Jews and Poles during the Second World War.[34] On the other hand, there is little doubt that a decisive attitude toward Soviet memorabilia, city and street names, monuments, and interpretations of the past was essential if Ukraine was to distance itself from Russia. The political situation and conflict largely dictated that outcome. The key question is the reception of Decommunization in Ukraine, which is explored in the ensuing section of this paper.

OPINION POLLS: HOW UKRAINIANS VIEW THE DECOMMUNIZATION REFORM

Attitudes to Decommunization appear to be moving gradually in a more positive direction, though survey results are often confusing in their disparate conclusions. In November 4–11, 2016, the sociological Rating Group conducted a poll of over 2,000 people through personal interviews on Communist ideology and the dismantling of Lenin monuments. About 48% of respondents supported the ban on Communist ideology (78% in the West and 33% in the East), with the better-educated and younger people most in favor. The same poll, however, revealed that 48% of respondents opposed the replacement of Lenin monuments and 41% were opposed. A larger majority opposed the renaming of cities and streets that carried Soviet names—57% with 35% supporting such changes. On the other hand, if statues to be removed were commemorating people who committed known crimes against the Ukrainian people, the situation is reversed: 49% versus 44%. The apparent nostalgia for Lenin monuments is, however, retrospective since virtually all of them had been taken down by the time the poll was carried out.[35]

A survey by three scientists from the Polish Academy of Sciences took place in 2016 and examined attitudes of Ukrainians, with the participation of the Rating Group. The poll surveyed 4,000 people in four regions of Ukraine: West, Center, South and East. It looked broadly at the attitudes of respondents to Ukrainian history, sources of information, and Decommunization, as well as relations between Ukrainians and Poles. The importance of Ukrainian history was denoted by 83% of respondents, that of the Soviet Union only 51%, with the main sources of historical knowledge being one's own family in conversations (40%), schools (38%), books (36%), movies (25%) and the Internet (24%). The most popular historical figures were Taras Shevchenko, Bohdan Khmelnytsky, Yaroslav the Wise, Volodymyr the Great, Mykhailo Hrushevsky and Viacheslav Chornovil; and the least popular were I. V. Stalin, V. I. Lenin, M. S.

34 See, for example, Jared McBride in https://www.thenation.com/article/how-ukraines-new-memory-commissar-is-controlling-the-nations-past/; Tarik Cyril Amar on http://www.wnyc.org/story/radical-historian-rewriting-ukraines-past/ and Josh Cohen at http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/27/dear-ukraine-please-dont-shoot-yourself-in-the-foot-nationalists-russia-bandera-rada/ (accessed January 25, 2018).

35 http://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/otnoshenie_k_otdelnym_istoricheskim_lichnostyam_i_processu_dekommunizacii_v_ukraine.html (accessed January 25, 2018).

Gorbachev, Catherine II, N. S. Khrushchev, and Stepan Bandera. Yet a plurality of respondents had a favorable attitude to both OUN and UPA, and 58% considered Decommunization to be necessary in Ukraine, with 34% opposed.[36] A few comments on these polls are necessary. They indicate general support for Decommunization, but not necessarily the elevation of Bandera in particular as a national hero. The Polish poll also demonstrated that the Holodomor is widely recognized as an example of a Soviet atrocity against Ukrainians (63% considered it an act of Genocide). Thus, the conception of national heroes in the form of "fighters for Ukraine in the 20th century," embraced in the Memory Laws, seems to be less influential than the memory of the Holodomor, which of course was initiated earlier and already has a significant memorial site. What is worthy of note is that all the figures venerated in Ukraine are Ukrainians, and of those regarded negatively only one (Bandera) was an ethnic Ukrainian (though not a resident of a Ukrainian state or Soviet republic). Ukrainians are also satisfied with their statehood, increasingly hostile toward Russia and much more favorable to joining the European Union than was the case a few years ago.[37]

The UINR survey of the spring of 2017 shows notable differences in attitude to Decommunization according to region. It divides Ukraine into five regions: West, Center, North, South, and East. In the latter, the results are ambiguous, since the two largest cities, Donetsk and Luhansk, are currently controlled by rebels and thus excluded, as is the occupied Crimean peninsula, where the attitudes would likely be negative overall. Table 1 illustrates public responses to the question: "Do you support the policies of decommunization the government is conducting?"

The most ardent supporters of Decommunization are young, well-educated Western Ukrainians and those most opposed are older (especially those over 60) less well-educated residents of the eastern regions. The latter area is the heartland of the former Regions Party, which brought to power the presidency of Viktor Yanukovych (2005–10) and his Donetsk-dominated Cabinet. Overall the population does support the reforms, which are widely based and go beyond the more controversial issues highlighted in this paper. Still, the support, especially given state propaganda and funding, is not overwhelming.

36 http://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/ukraincy_ob_istorii_kulture_i_polsko-ukrainskih_otnosheniyah.html (accessed January 25, 2018). The three main authors were Tomasz Stryjek, Joanna Konieczna-Salamatin, and Kamila Zacharuk and the results published on June 1, 2017.

37 See http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=722 (accessed January 25, 2018) based on a poll conducted from May to September 2017 and the report of sociologist Volodymyr Paniotto; and on earlier lack of interest in the EU in Ukraine (as well as Belarus and Russia), see Stephen White, Ian McAllister, and Valentina Feklyunina, "Belarus, Ukraine and Russia: East or West?" *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 12 (2010), pp. 344–367.

Table 1: Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance Survey, Spring 2017 (10,017 respondents, in percentages)

	Support	Oppose
West:	69.0	27.2
Center:	45.1	50.6
North:	58.1	37.2
South:	47.4	39.4
East:	39.8	51.0
Overall:	54.3	39.5

Source: https://tsn.ua/ukrayina/v-instituti-nacpam-yati-vidzvituvali-pro-pidsumki-dekomunizaciyi-infografika-900878.html, March 22, 2017 (accessed January 25, 2018).

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In general, the main critics of Decommunization, excluding the Russian government and its various agencies, tend to be historians, Eastern Ukrainians, those living in the south of the country (see above), and neighboring states, particularly Poland. However, the Memory Laws generated a strongly negative response from scholars in the West who considered them too restrictive regarding the rights of historians to independent research.[38] The imposition, in theory, of laws controlling historical debates and penalties for disparaging "builders of Ukrainian independence in the 20th century" implied that the state would impose fines or more serious punishments upon those who might question the actions, for example, of OUN and UPA during the Second World War. In fact, Viatrovych is preoccupied heavily with the claim from prominent Poles that the campaign is glorifying OUN and UPA, which will likely never be accepted in their country and may prevent Ukraine's future entry into the European Union. Lastly there is widespread opposition to changing national holidays such as Victory Day (from May 9 to May 8) and abolishing the holiday for International Women's Day (March 8). I will deal with some of these arguments briefly.

Among historians, an articulate critique has come from Serhy Yekelchyk of the University of Victoria, Canada, and published in the Ukrainian journal *Korydor* in October 2016. Yekelchyk, who is a native of Kyiv, believes that victimization has become "part of our national narrative and identity" focused mainly on the famine of 1932–33 and crimes of the Soviet regime, a point made

38 https://krytyka.com/en/articles/open-letter-scholars-and-experts-ukraine-re-so-called-anti-communist-law (accessed January 25, 2018). Though I am listed on the website of *Krytyka* as the sole author of this letter, it was in fact co-authored by James Sherr of Chatham House.

earlier, inter alia, by Georgiy (Georgii) Kasianov in particular.[39] Ukrainians, claims Yekelchyk, are ignorant of their culture, allegedly destroyed by the Soviet regime. If one became educated, however, it would become clear that Ukrainian culture is ambivalent and rooted in the Soviet past. He notes, providing a specific example, that: "our [Ukrainian] culture is rather ambivalent and rooted in the Soviet past.... One cannot imagine Dovzhenko without socialism." "It would be a very Soviet approach" to try to edit his movies to remove the socialist elements. He dwells on the problem of responsibility for the past using the example of the debate around the renaming of Kirovohrad. The local community wanted to change the name back to the one in the era of the Russian Empire, i.e. Yelisavethrad. But parliament rejected the suggestion and Yekelchyk concludes that the purpose therefore (as noted with Viatrovych's comment above) was to eliminate the Russian imperial or "colonial" past.[40]

Yekelchyk continues further. Taking the "colonial" route signifies that Russia or other countries are then responsible for all the misdeeds of the imperial and Soviet periods in Ukraine, hence removing any local responsibility, and ignoring complex or ambivalent questions. Yet the state continues "to assume an ethnographic role in Ukrainian culture, which is a Stalinist invention." The dominant role of the state in culture derives from the time of Stalin, and thus Decommunization is in reality de-Russification, as is evident from the refusal of the Ukrainian Parliament to permit the city of Kirovohrad to revert to the name of the city in tsarist times Yelisavethrad. But then, he writes, "we must acknowledge that the Russian Empire was created by Ukrainian hands." Not only were Ukrainians oppressed, they took part in the oppression, in the Holocaust, Holodomor or other events.

Essentially the approach of the authorities, including the INR, is ethnocentric, according to Yekelchyk. But such an approach cannot be successful. The only chances of success (which would signify a secure and stable Ukrainian state) lie in creating a politically inclusive identity and authentic reforms that would address the plight of the average resident, as well as restricting the power and authority of oligarchs. When one mobilizes a population "around disputes about language, flags, national memory," this is an example of populism of the most primitive kind. As for memorials, rather than removing the Nikolay Shchors statue and replacing him immediately with Konovalets,[41] it would be better to put up small but thoughtful memorials of the victims of pogroms in Ukraine in 1919, when tens of thousands of Jews and Mennonites suffered. Perhaps the most important comments lie in Yekelchyk's final remarks:

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39 See, for example, Georgii Kasianov, "The Open Grave: The 1932–33 Famine in Ukrainian Historiography, Politics, and Mass Consciousness," *Ab Imperio* 3 (2004), pp. 237–269.

40 http://www.korydor.in.ua/stories/sergij-yekelchyk-pamjat-reprezentacija-kultura.html and ff. (accessed January 25, 2018).

41 Nikolay Shchors was a prominent Red Army commander in the Russian Civil War of 1918–22; Ievhen Konovalets was the leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists in the interwar period until his assassination by a Soviet agent in Rotterdam in 1938.

> We should not think that mutual repentance and reconciliation is some sort of European formality performed by Germans and Poles, but never by us. It is time to remember the victims and the experience of the "little man" and to stop putting new mythologized heroes on pedestals.

In the spring of 2017, Andreas Umland, a political scientist at the Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation in Kyiv, published a critical article about the INR.[42] Umland notes that the INR consisted of "relatively young activists with unknown scholarly credentials." They were "nationalistic publicists" with no prior links to Ukrainian academic institutions and their main goal was to offer a sympathetic narrative of the Bandera faction of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and its wartime leaders, such as Bandera, Roman Shukhevych, and Yaroslav Stetsko. Ironically, their appointment in 2014 coincided with a spate of new scholarly studies of the period in Ukraine, Europe, and North America—he cites the appearance in Germany alone of three new publications authored by Frank Golczewski, Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe, and Kai Struve.[43] Thus these German scholars undermine the pro-OUN publicity, producing very different analyses based on close archival work.

According to Umland, the laudations of OUN represent a "mounting challenge to the EU's core principles" based on the importance of the Holocaust. It ignores anti-Semitic prejudices and actions of the OUN and UPA, though as yet the debates in Ukraine have not been picked up in the West where few people understand the Ukrainian language. Umland comments, however, that it is not enough to blame the Nazis for the anti-Semitic actions of the OUN and others in Ukraine because another major factor was the local anti-Jewish sentiment and the association of Jews with the Communist regime of Stalin. Once the broad Western public becomes aware of the anti-Semitism in interwar Ukraine, then "Ukraine's image in the West will be lastingly damaged."

Umland observes that those propagating Ukrainian memory policies are non-academics, who do not submit their work for peer review. The INR leaders are linked with a Galician NGO named "Center for Research into the Liberation Movement" (TsDVR), which publishes en masse sympathetic materials about the OUN-B and its leaders. The TsDVR played a major role in pushing through the Memory Laws in Spring 2015. The INR leader Viatrovych authored a book in 2011, which, claims Umland, was "an apologia" about the slaughter of Polish civilians in Volhynia in 1943–44, with the help of the then president of the Kyiv Mohyla Academy and Minister of Education, Serhii Kvit. Ukraine's interpretation of the Second World War, as represented by Viatro-

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42 Published on March 17, 2017. See http://neweasterneurope.eu/2017/03/07/the-ukrainian-government-s-memory-institute-against-the-west/ (accessed January 25, 2018).

43 Frank Golczewski, *Deutsche und Ukrainer, 1914–1939* (Paderborn, Germany: Ferdinand Schoeningh, 2010); Rossolinski-Liebe, *Stepan Bandera*; and Kai Struve, *Deutsche Herrschaft, ukrainischer Nationalismus, antijüdische Gewalt. Der Sommer 1941 in der Westukraine* (München: Oldenbourg, 2015).

vych and others, brings the state into a direct conflict situation with Poland, Germany, and Israel. Umland concludes that:

> Much of the Ukrainian public remembrance of the Second World War since 1991 has been conducted as if either these and other crimes by the OUN never happened, or as if they were unrelated to the OUN's ideology, justified by the war context, or merely a result of German instigation....

In an article questioning the renaming of streets on Kyiv, Kost Bondarenko, a well-known political analyst, remarks that Viatrovych and his associates are attempting to impose their vision of history on the country using the same methods used formerly by the Bolsheviks. He believes that the campaign is doomed to failure because it is simply placing one version of the past over another. He also raised the question of Ukraine's relations with Poland, commenting that when throwing stones at Russia, Ukraine does not anticipate that these same stones can ricochet into Poland.[44]

One of Ukraine's leading historians, Yaroslav Hrytsak, approaches the question from a different angle, maintaining that the PR campaign for Decommunization is a frustrating diversion from more important matters. It is "an illusion," in his view, that Communism can be eliminated by focusing on historical memory. The current approach of removing monuments and symbols, in his view, is simplistic and could be interpreted as a sign of defeat rather than triumph. The first task should be to overcome the poverty of the population, and political and economic transformation must occur alongside the renaming of streets and towns. Historical memory is a consequence of the past, but not its cause, though the impact of Communism must be understood.[45] In other words, while Hrytsak is not opposed to the Laws per se, he believes that the direction taken by the government is misguided.

Perhaps the chief critic among historians of the changes brought by the Memory Laws has been the above-mentioned Kasianov, Head of the Department of Contemporary History and Politics at the Institute of History of Ukraine (Kyiv) and professor at the National University "Kyiv Mohyla Academy." Kasianov comments that the glorification of OUN and UPA—he cites the renaming of Moskva Avenue in Kyiv after Bandera as an example—is part of a new national mythology, something unavoidable when constructing a political identity. He maintains that to date, the heroic myth has been unable to find a better agent than UPA, which is always equated with OUN. Part of the Ukrainian Diaspora, he writes, subscribed to the same myth and transplanted it into Ukraine, whereupon it was incorporated into history textbooks without critical evaluation. Though UPA fought against the Soviets, its main enemy was the Poles, though it also eliminated many Ukrainians that behaved "incorrectly."[46]

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44 https://rian.com.ua/analytics/20160303/1006132653.html (accessed January 25, 2018).

45 http://reshetnyakva.blogspot.ca/2017/02/pro-et-contra.html (accessed January 25, 2018).

46 https://focus.ua/society/366016/ and ff. (accessed January 25, 2018).

Kasianov maintains that there are far less contentious figures upon which to build national history than Bandera or Shukhevych, namely the dissidents of the 1960s, such as Vasyl Stus, a talented poet and heroic figure who refused to modify his views even when he realized they would lead to his death. Nationalism in Kasianov's view can be liberal and liberating, but also radical and xenophobic. Fighting for national liberation is positive, but if it develops into hatred toward other nations it is negative. As an example of the latter he perceives the struggle against the Russian language, which takes the form of professional activity.

Kasianov addresses three myths that are pervasive in contemporary Ukraine. The first is that Ukraine was a colony of Russia and therefore the current Ukraine is a post-colonial state. Instead, he asserts, Ukraine is an example of a postcolonial condition without prior colonialism. As Ukraine was under the rule of three empires, he asks, was it a colony of all three? Regarding the Russian Empire, there was significant Ukrainian input into its formation. Local elites were anxious to integrate and merge with the imperial elite. Like the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union was another example of Ukrainians penetrating the Soviet elite. But such a phenomenon, in which the colony's elite plays a prominent part in the affairs of the mother country, does not constitute colonialism. The Ukrainian intelligentsia operating in St. Petersburg nurtured the idea of Ukraine as a separate territory by working through imperial structures. The main Ukrainization movement took place in the 1920s and early 1930s in Soviet Ukraine when the Ukrainian language completed its transition into a language of high literature.

Myth number two is actually two opposing myths: Russians and Ukrainians are brothers; and Russians and Ukrainians are enemies. He comments that without doubt they are closely related peoples, but culturally a Russian-speaking Ukrainian differs from a Russian from Russia. And even Russians living in Ukraine are different from Russians living in their native country. Those who speak about "eternal enemies" are moral idiots and ethnicities and cultures cannot be put into inimical positions. The concept of "fraternal peoples," on the other hand, is no more than a metaphor. It does not denote that the peoples in question are identical and must reside together. Each one can decide their fate independently.

The third myth is that the Russian language is an instrument of Russian aggression, which is less a myth than a slogan that some politicians have deployed. Kasianov perceives such a notion as the height of ignorance. A language "cannot be good or bad." Even if one considers Russian the "language of the enemy" one still needs to study it in order to learn how to fight that enemy. A much larger problem in his view is the need for improvement in the way Ukrainian is taught in schools, which is "archaic." The switch to a single national language was done in a bureaucratic fashion without the concomitant measures such as writing textbooks for those who knew no Ukrainian. This situation was in place particularly in Crimea where prior to annexation there

were only six Ukrainian schools housed in the buildings of former kindergartens. He believes that the lamentable state of affairs in Crimea was borne out by the 2001 census, in which only 25% of Crimeans identified themselves as Ukrainians. Language also pertains to history, and the history of Ukraine is treated as one of wars, oppression, and massacres. In his view, it needs to be properly packaged so that Ukraine can emerge from its "colossal depression."

The above criticisms are quite severe and without doubt these historians are judging Ukraine by higher standards than those used for neighbors Russia and Belaus, where the perversions of historical analysis are far more marked and at times deliberately duplicitous. This perspective is perhaps a result of the progress Ukraine has made in democratic reforms, relative freedom of elections, regular changes of president, and aspirations to become a member of the European Union, having acquired Associate Membership. It is also a reflection of the perception of Ukraine as a civic nation rather than one based on ethnic origin, which is reasonable given the support for Euromaidan—and earlier, the Orange Revolution—by broad sections of the public, including Russian speakers, ethnic Russians, and other non-Ukrainians. What has been surprising given earlier divisions of society illustrated by the results of the elections—simply put a more democratic pro-European West and a more pro-Soviet, Russian-speaking east—has been the general support for continuing statehood free from Russian influence, even in Donetsk and Luhansk.

Plans for New School Program

Together with the Ministry of Education and Science, headed by Liliya Hrynevych, the INR presented a draft of a new school program for history taught to pupils in Grades 10 and 11 in February. Two courses on "History of Ukraine" and "World History" would be cancelled. They would be replaced by a single course called "History: Ukraine and the World," which covers 20th century, with material on Ukraine comprising at least 70% of the course material. The concept of the course is national orientation of historical education and its importance for nation building.[47] Though not yet confirmed by law, it is worthy of attention because of the directions it proposes for the education of Ukrainian youth about the recent past.

The proposed course content is like a manual on the evils of Russia. It features wars with Russia in 1918 and 1919–20, occupation of Ukraine by Communist Russia, assimilation by the USSR, the Holodomor, Ukrainian resistance against Soviets and Nazis, the Ukrainian liberation movement of the 1950s and 1960s, Ukrainian Human Rights Activism, crisis in the Communist bloc, the fall of the USSR, formation of the contemporary Ukrainian nation, the Orange Revolution, the Revolution of Human Dignity (Euromaidan), and the current

47 http://www.memory.gov.ua/news/volodimir-vyatrovich-predstaviv-kontseptsiyu-vikladannya-istorii-dlya-10-11-klasiv (accessed January 25, 2018).

war with Russia. There is nothing herein related to the period of indigenization of the 1920s, National Communism in Ukraine, Ukrainians' role in the Soviet victory during World War II, and the role of pivotal Communist figures such as Petro Shelest in the development of national consciousness in Ukraine.

Lastly, calendar reform is next on the agenda of the INR and Viatrovych maintains that Ukraine still has a number of Communist holidays that have no meaning in contemporary Ukraine.[48] He proposed to cancel days off for International Women's Day (though people could still celebrate it), as well as May 1–2 and May 9, which will be a state holiday without a day off. They will be replaced by March 9 (Day of Shevchenko), May 8 (Day of Victory over Nazism, which coincides with the European commemorations rather than those in Russia and Belarus), and the second Friday in September (Family Day). The number of statutory holidays will thereby be reduced from 11 to 9, and if holidays fall on the weekend, Monday will remain a working day.

Opening of Archives

Decommunization, based on the Memory Laws, has a number of other aspects, one of which is the opening of former Soviet archives in Ukraine, including the Archives of State Security (SBU, the former KGB Archives), the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and Foreign Intelligence, all of which have opened their collections for the years 1917–1991. Access was made straightforward and visitors simply had to fill out a form once the law took effect. In 2015, the same year that the law was approved, 3,500 researchers visited these archives, including both scholars and those seeking information about relatives repressed during the 1930s.[49] In addition the perpetrators of the repressions of these years are now fully exposed for the first time and they are no longer protected from exposure of their personal data if they worked for the NKVD. Andrii Kohut, director of the FSB Archives has commented that it is necessary to explore in detail the motives of these people and whether they had been subject to psychological and other pressures.[50] The opening of archives must be regarded as a positive phenomenon resulting from the Memory Laws.

Conclusion

The INR is not operating in a vacuum. On the contrary and paradoxically, its measures replicate those carried out in Poland (its chief critic), and also to those in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and the Baltic States. Riga, for ex-

48 http://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/viatrovych/588cdc2fbccfe/ (accessed January 25, 2018).

49 See the comments by Liliya Hryshko: http://bit.ly/1VekHHd (accessed January 25, 2018).

50 http://euromaidanpress.com/2017/05/31/declassified-dossiers-of-kgb-informants-to-expose-to-lustrate-or-not-to-disturb/ (accessed January 25, 2018).

ample, has a prominent Museum of Soviet Occupation, 1940–1990,[51] which is arguably more anti-Soviet or anti-Russian than anything in the campaign carried out in Ukraine. But none of these states has such divided opinions today on the events and aftermath of the Second World War. Either they have in essence accepted versions of the former Soviet interpretation (Russia, Belarus) or else focused on the Soviet occupation of their homelands, deportations, and guerrilla warfare (Central Europe and the Baltic States). In turn, the campaign is taking place during a period that the president of Ukraine considers open warfare with Russia. Moreover, the hybrid war that has accompanied the violence in Donetsk and Luhansk regions has resulted in an overwhelming volume of propaganda from Russia about Ukraine's recent past. Thus, Decommunization is a form of patriotic activity and becomes inevitably politicized.

Simply put, the campaign of the INR may be justifiable to a point, namely if it is regarded solely as a move to counter Russian propaganda, which would mean that it was essentially a measure adopted in a period of extreme tension and conflict. But every indication is that it is much more than that, and intended as something permanent and definitive, and the INR appears to have almost unlimited powers of enforcement, having been given a blank check by the government to carry out its mandate. Its perception of the recent past, as critics have pointed out, is based on a sense of victimization and a perspective of history that absolves Ukraine of any responsibility for the actions of those who are perceived to have assisted Ukrainian independence. In turn, as Yekelchyk and others have noted, it ignores the role of Ukrainians in the creation and operation of the Soviet state, effectively separating them from any activity in the Soviet period as prominent personalities working for the Soviet Union.

There are also two sides to Decommunization. The first is simply one of removing symbols of Soviet rule and Communism, and appears quite logical. There was no reason for Ukraine to have more than 5,000 statues of Lenin on its territory or to have a city named after the first leader of the Soviet secret police Feliks Dzerzhinsky. But there has been no debate on the form of replacements, if needed, outside the confines of the INR, which has a largely political agenda. Though some Lenins have been replaced by statues of non-Communist figures—Darth Vader and John Lennon are two of the more idiosyncratic examples—for the most part the tendency, the second side of the process, has been to elevate those considered to be "fighters for independence" of the 20th century, including controversial figures not widely accepted outside some parts of Western Ukraine.

Here there is an emerging conflict with Western scholarship, which has begun to take advantage of the accessibility of Ukrainian archives and produce works critical of nationalist wartime leaders, directly associating them with the destruction of Poles and Jews, even though they were not the initiators

51 Its website is http://okupacijasmuzejs.lv/en/ (accessed January 25, 2018).

or leaders of the campaign against the latter group. The practice has been for both politicians and historians associated with the INR to accuse such Western scholars of swallowing Soviet propaganda or being "agents of the Kremlin." But though some publicists have indeed adopted views of the conflict that are sympathetic to Russia,[52] such accusations are misguided and inaccurate in the majority of cases of new scholarship, as noted above.

The proposed format of the new school history curricula is also disturbing in that it replaces the former distortions of the Ukrainian past with an equally simplistic formula: what was black is now white and vice-versa. If it were put in place in its current form a nationalist perspective would succeed a Communist one, with neither paying much attention to historical accuracy or impartiality. In general, the Memory Laws of 2015 have been successful in terms of removing Communist era memorabilia, many of which frankly needed removing, though even here there are constant debates over what is of lasting artistic value and how it can be preserved. It has been less successful in replacements, mainly because the choices adopted are somewhat partisan in nature, and the INR operates by decree, with the support of the government, rather than by discussions and widespread consent of the regions.

Lastly, the question has been asked: does it really matter? Is the Ukrainian public really concerned about the names of cities in which they live or which statue is erected in the central square? The answer may lie in the Soviet experience, during which one interpretation dominated state and public life for more than seven decades, severely limiting the ability to understand the society in which one lived. By nature, an ideological stance negates a clear understanding of historical events and politicizes history as a discipline. There is also the quest for historical accuracy in a world dominated by accounts of "fake news," myths, and hybrid warfare. Viatrovych is correct in stating that Russia has adopted a new mythical interpretation of the war. Likewise, Belarus has also used the same war on which to base its national identity, arguing that the Belarusians suffered proportionally the highest losses and played a prominent role in the final victory. Both interpretations are replete with historical flaws, so much so that it may be impossible for decades to comprehend various aspects of the German-Soviet war.

Ukraine, however, despite the problems of irredentism and oligarchic control of key sectors of the administration, is in a much better position than its East Slavic neighbors to start anew. From 2005–10, it constructed an identity based on the Famine of 1932–33, now known as the Holodomor, with Russia identified as the main perpetrator. Since 2015, it has added national heroes of the Second World War to the historical narrative with scant regard for the dark side of their activities. The INR position undermines the central role of the

52 See for example Taras Kuzio at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hncqk_HwcyA (accessed January 25, 2018) who criticizes what he terms "Putinophiles" who have never visited Ukraine and only use Russian sources.

Holocaust in the formation of modern Europe[53] and threatens Ukraine's future place in the European Union, which has been a goal for both the Yushchenko and Poroshenko presidencies, by alienating Poland, which will only be satisfied by a frank admission of guilt for crimes committed.

The question is whether Ukraine can remain united by using the repressions of the Stalin period as its *raison d'etre* and as the foundation stone for its existence, one mainly based on a cult of "suffering"? At the least it would seem wise to combine them with other events from Ukraine's lengthy history that will never acquire such divisiveness and contentiousness. If Ukraine is to move definitively away from the Russian orbit it needs also to reach some form of rapprochement with its EU neighbors, starting with the Poles. That goal should not be impossible but it would require a rethinking of the criteria and events on which Ukrainian memory is being based. In turn, Poland would need to play its own part by moderating its position and being more open to discussion of controversial issues, not least its authoritarian rule over ethnic Ukrainian territories during the late 1920s and 1930s in its eastern territories.

53 This statement is based on several grounds. First, the raising of Soviet crimes to the same level as Nazi crimes, implicit in the Memory Laws, means that the Holocaust is not the central event in the depiction of the war. Second, the OUN-B avowal to eliminate all foreigners from Ukrainian soil pertained also to Jews, rendering them, in this regard and at the start of the war, as collaborators of the Nazis. Third, the Memory Laws ignore the destruction of the large Jewish community on Ukrainian territory. Even at specifically Jewish Memorial sites in Ukraine, such as Babyn Yar, monuments to nationalist martyrs there have been erected frequently in recent years. Ukraine, however, still pays far more attention to Jewish losses in the war than does Russia or Belarus, where the Jewish question plays little role in official narratives.