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Abstract

The protection of the Russian language and Russian “compatriots” has been a major issue of Russian political discourse for years. According to Russian official announcements, it was even a major reason for Russian war activities in Ukraine. In 2014, the Russian Federation introduced its language policy in Crimea and began to control the language policy of Donetsk and Luhansk “People’s Republics.” Both Russian and Ukrainian, as well as other languages, have been affected by these measures. Since 24 February 2022, Russian language policy has entered new temporarily occupied territories. Although Ukrainian has occasionally been declared a “state language” in Crimea, in DNR and LNR and then either been deprived of this status (LNR, DNR) or not (Crimea) it has never actually played this role. On the contrary, it has gradually been removed from the public sphere. Announcements regarding the language policy in recently occupied territories have been contradictory for months. Generally, Russian political discourse regarding the Ukrainian language is still based on traditional double-bind strategies. Official “appreciation for the Ukrainian language” is notoriously accompanied with narratives about the “artificiality” of the Ukrainian language, its “uselessness,” and even its virtually inherent “Nazi ideology.” At present, new textbooks of “the classical Ukrainian language” are allegedly being prepared in the Russian Federation. Historians of the Ukrainian language are curious how this unheard-of language might be designed.

Key Words: Russian war in Ukraine, Ukrainian language, Russian language, language policy, Crimea.



1. Vladimir Putin’s “appreciation for the Ukrainian language”

On 5 October 2022, during the ongoing Russian war in Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared at a meeting with Russian teachers:

Ideas of Neonazism exist everywhere, but no country glorifies it except for Ukraine, which elevates it to a national level; Russia, instead, appreciates the Ukrainian people: in Russia there are 3 mln Ukrainians,¹ our attitude toward Russians and Ukrainians is the same. [...] Notwithstanding the tragedy of

¹ Notably, Putin talked about 3 mln Ukrainians on 5 October 2022, although the census of 2010 revealed only 1.35 mln in the Russian Federation (2002: 2.03 mln). I. e., he added the Ukrainians living in the temporarily occupied territories to his count.

our days, we immensely appreciate the Ukrainian people and Ukrainian culture, the Ukrainian language, literature, and so forth.²

Subsequently, Putin reiterated his notorious narratives about alleged Neonazism and the oppression of Russians and the Russian language in Ukraine.³ This happened a few days after the pseudo-referenda in the occupied territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson oblasts (23 to 27 September 2022), and the signature of the treaties that regulated the annexation of these territories into the Russian Federation (30 September 2022).⁴

What Putin did not mention in this statement was the fact that prior to the escalation of the Russian war in Ukraine (24 February 2022), he had repeatedly proclaimed that no separate Ukrainian identity and language exist at all, and that Ukraine is an artificial state invented by Lenin at the expense of Russia.⁵ While insisting that Ukrainian and Russian are basically the same language, and Ukrainians are in fact just Russians, Putin, at the same time, had even back then declared, as a disclaimer: “We appreciate the Ukrainian language and the traditions.”⁶

In none of his speeches, Putin explained why the Ukrainians, as the second largest minority of the Russian Federation, have no Ukrainophone schools, no Ukrainophone media, and basically no language rights at all. He did not say a word about the recent history of the Ukrainian language in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine after 2014 either. In fact, this would have been instructive, as Russian or Russian-led language policy in Crimea and the non-recognized Donetsk and Luhansk “People’s Republics” in these regions became role models for the territories that Russian military forces temporarily annexed after 24 February 2022.⁷

2 “Putin govorit, chto idei neonatsizma est’ vezde, no ni odna strana ne vozvelichivaet ego krome Ukrainy, kotoraiia vozvodit ego na natsional’nyi uroven” [“Putin says that the ideas of neo-Nazism are everywhere, but no country exalts it except Ukraine, which elevates it to the national level”]. RIA novosti. October 05, 2022. https://t.me/rian_ru/180505?fbclid=IwAR2uRTfMRebDl-vTGowu4UkOGvPoLFHYpXZAwU8FACzA1L6iKxA wDJaY.

3 Dar’ia Erozbek, “Putin zaiavil, chto Rossiia s uvazheniem otnositsia k ukrainskomu narodu i kul’ture” [“Putin said that Russia respects the Ukrainian people and culture”]. Kommersant. October 05, 2022. <https://www.kommersant.ru/amp/5595194>.

4 Andrei Kolesnikov, “A Zapad i stonet, i plachet” [“And the West groans and cries”]. Kommersant. September 30, 2022. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5592887>.

5 See, e. g. “Stat’ia Vladimira Putina ‘Ob istoricheskom edinstve russkikh i ukraintsev’” [“Article by Vladimir Putin ‘On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians’”]. TASS. July 12, 2021. https://tass.ru/politika/11884999?utm_source=google.com&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.com&utm_referrer=google.com.

6 Ibid.

7 The Russian invaders were expelled from other territories so quickly that they could not take any organized measures regarding language policy.

This article discusses Russian and Russian-led language policy in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine as well as the Russian discourse that accompanied it in Russian politics and Russian media.

2. Russian language policy in occupied Crimea

In Crimea, the Ukrainian language had played only a very limited role in the public sphere even prior to the Russian annexation of 2014. According to the Ukrainian census of 2001, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol were the only administrative units of Ukraine where Ukrainians did not make up the majority of the population (24.4% Ukrainians, 12.1% Crimean Tatars in the Crimea, 22.1% Ukrainians and 0.5% Crimean Tatars in the City of Sevastopol).⁸ 77.0% of the inhabitants of Crimea regarded Russian as their native language. Crimean Tatar followed second with a percentage of 11.4%, and Ukrainian ranked only third with a percentage of 10.1%. In the city of Sevastopol, as many as 90.6% claimed Russian to be their native language, as opposed to 6.8% who regarded Ukrainian as native.⁹

In 2014, only 7.2% of Crimean children were instructed in Ukrainophone classes of three schools¹⁰ (Crimean Tatar: roughly 3%), although it deserves to be mentioned that 100% of the pupils learned Ukrainian, the state language, as a subject.¹¹ At the same time, no less than 99.2% of the pupils learned Russian as a subject, while 8.6% learned Crimean Tatar.¹² Ukrainophone print media and Ukrainophone electronic media were almost absent from the peninsula, whereas Russophone (mostly anti-Ukrainian) electronic and print media were received on a broad scale.

8 All-Ukrainian population census 2001. State Statistics Committee of Ukraine. Accessed October 22, 2022. <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/>.

9 Michael Moser, *Language Policy and the Discourse on Languages in Ukraine under President Viktor Yanukovich (25 February 2010–28 October 2012)* (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2013), 41.

10 Taras Kremin, "Ohliad shchodo obmezhenia funktsionuvannia ukrainskoi movy na tymchasovo okupovanykh terytoriiakh Ukrainy" ["Review of restrictions on the functioning of the Ukrainian language in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine"]. *Upovnovazhenyi iz zakhystu derzhavnoi movy*. February 19, 2021. <https://mova-ombudsman.gov.ua/oglyad-ukrayinskoyi-movi-na-timchasovo-okupovanih-teritoriyah-ukrayini>; Ihor Tokar, "Ukrainci ye, a movy nemaie. 0,1% krymchan vyvchaiut ukrainsku v Krymu" ["There are Ukrainians, but there is no language. 0.1% of Crimeans study Ukrainian in Crimea"]. *Radio Svoboda*. June 19, 2021. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/crimea-education-ukrainian-language/31274562.html>.

11 Anna Derevianko, "Dyskryminatsiia: movna sytuatsiia v Krymu pislia 7 rokiv okupatsii" ["Discrimination: the situation in Crimea after 7 years of occupation"]. *Hromadskii prostir*. April 05, 2021. <https://www.prostir.ua/?news=dyskryminatsiya-movna-sytuatsiya-v-krymu-pislya-7-rokiv-okupatsiji>.

12 Yevheniia Horiunova, "Ukrainska mova v Krymu: status vyhnantsia" ["The Ukrainian language in Crimea: the status of an exile"]. *Krym.Realii*. September 26, 2017. <https://ua.krymr.com/a/28758505.html>.

In February 2021, one year after the full-scale Russian military attack against Ukraine, Taras Kremin, Ukraine's Commissioner for the Protection of the State Language, published a "Survey of the Restrictions of the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language in the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine".¹³ The report reminded readers of the fact that in 2004, i. e., as a result of the "Orange Revolution," the Higher Council of Crimea had initiated a program for the development of the Ukrainian language in Crimea, but funds had been either shortened or completely cancelled as early as 2010, when Viktor Yanukovich had been elected Ukraine's President.¹⁴

On 7 March 2014, i. e., at a very early stage of the annexation of Crimea, the City of Sevastopol instantly banned the use of the Ukrainian language in official accounting records, and in the "Statues of the City of Sevastopol" of 11 April 2014, Ukrainian was not even mentioned.¹⁵ In that same year, most teachers of Ukrainian were quickly "requalified" as teachers of Russian.¹⁶

Three years after the Russian invasion, on 24 May 2017, the Crimean administration issued a "Law of the State Languages of the Crimean Republic," which declared Russian, Ukrainian, and Crimean Tatar as "state languages".¹⁷ Obviously, this law had no connection with reality, as Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar never played any visible role in the public sphere, including jurisdiction and administration.¹⁸ The official sites of the "State Council of the Republic of Crimea," the "Government of the Republic of Crimea," etc. are available in Russian only, too. All Ukrainophone plates and signs on official buildings were removed shortly after the annexation.¹⁹ Obviously, the announcement of three "state languages" was a reaction to international criticism, as the U.N. had harshly criticized Russian language policy in Crimea in that same year (see below).

Since 2014, various Ukrainophone cultural clubs and musical ensembles, theaters and print media have been russified or closed; Internet publications have been hacked or destroyed, almost all TV and radio stations as well as Internet sources from Ukraine have been banned.²⁰ A Ukrainophone theater circle for children was shut down in the Christmas period of 2015 because the plays were not translated into Russian and the child actors wore embroidered shirts, which the Russian authorities interpreted as "dyed-

13 Kremin, "Ohliad shchodo." The document was based on materials collected by his own team, by the Representative of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the Regional Council of the Ukrainians of Crimea ("Kraiova Rada ukraintsiv Krymu"), and the volunteer movement "Freedom Space" ("Prostir svobody").

14 Kremin, "Ohliad shchodo."

15 Ibid.

16 Lana Dollenberh, "V aneksovanomu Krymu vchyteliv ukrainskoi perekvalifikuiut na vchyteliv rosiiskoi" ["In the annexed Crimea, teachers of the Ukrainian language will be retrained as teachers of the Russian language"]. Krym.Realii. August 06, 2014. <https://ua.krymr.com/a/26516159.html>.

17 Tokar, "Ukrajntsi ye".

18 Ibid.; Derevianko, "Dyskryminatsiia."

19 Kremin, "Ohliad shchodo."

20 Ibid.

in-the wool nationalism”.²¹ Crimean authorities have persecuted numerous Ukrainian cultural activists such as the founders of a “Ukrainian People’s House” or the organizers of celebrations commemorating Taras Shevchenko’s birthday; some of these activists have been tortured, some have disappeared without a trace.²² In April 2015, Ukrainian activists established a “Ukrainian Cultural Center,” but very soon most founding members left Crimea following several waves of oppression.²³ As a response to this civic initiative, the Crimean administration established a “Ukrainian Community of Crimea” (“Ukrainskaia obshchina Kryma”), which represents the interests of the occupying forces. Many of the materials of this organization are apparently based on low-quality electronic translations from Russian if they are not simply kept in Russian.²⁴ Out of 49 religious communities of the Ukrainian Orthodox church, only four survived until June 2021.²⁵ Metropolitan Klyment of the Ukrainian Orthodox church, who had earlier sent a letter of complaint to the General Assembly of the UN, declared in the summer of 2021: “As of today, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is the only place where one can hear the Ukrainian language”.²⁶ In an interview for the platform “Krym.Realii”, he bemoaned that in Crimea, the Ukrainian language was “practically ruined”.²⁷ This was barely an exaggeration, as many eyewitness accounts confirm. Olena Popova, a representative of Simferopol’s “Ukrainian Cultural Center,” reported in a commentary for Krym.Realii that she did not dare to speak Ukrainian in public because she “did not want to be in the situation of slight hostility all the time”.²⁸ In another interview, she explained the failure of her attempt to organize a conversation club in 2016 by the fact that “people are afraid”; ironically, one of the persons who showed up at the opening meeting for the conversation club was Anastasiia Hrydchyna, an activist of Putin’s party “United Russia” and director of the above-mentioned Russian-ruled “Ukrainian Community of Crimea”.²⁹

As Zaur Smirnov, Director of the State Committee of International Affairs and Deported Citizens, put it in a press conference in Simferopol on 19 September 2017, Russian officials usually argue as follows: “All of us fully understand that there is no

21 “V Krymu zakryli ukrainioazychnyi detskii kruzhek” [“Ukrainian-language children’s club closed in Crimea”]. Bukvy. December 30, 2015. <https://bykvu.com/ua/bukvy/18492-v-okkupirovannom-krymu-zakryli-poslednij-detskij-ukrainoyazychnyj-kruzhek/>.

22 Kremin, “Ohliad shchodo.”

23 Tokar, “Ukrainci ye”.

24 Kremin, “Ohliad shchodo”; Tokar, “Ukrainci ye”.

25 Tokar, “Ukrainci ye”.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Olena Removska, “‘Tse imperska polityka prydushennia’: yak Rosiia stavytisia do ukrainskoi movy v Krymu” [“‘This is an imperial policy of suppression’: how Russia treats the Ukrainian language in Crimea”]. Krym.Realii. November 10, 2020. <https://ua.krymr.com/a/yak-rosia-stavytsia-do-ukrainskoi-movy-v-krymu/30940590.html>. See also “V Krymu otkryvaiut kursy ukrainskogo iazyka” [“Ukrainian language courses open in Crimea”]. КримSOS. September 21, 2016. <https://krymsos.com/ru/u-krymu-vidkryvayut-kursy-ukrayinskoyi-movy/>.

pressure on the Ukrainian language. We all know that the interest for it has dropped because formerly it had been imposed”.³⁰ This line of reasoning is quite typical of Russian assessments of the Ukrainian language as such, as will be confirmed by many of the below-cited materials.

As early as 2017, the number of children who were instructed in Ukrainian had dropped 37-fold and the number of Ukrainophone classes almost 30-fold compared to 2014. Only 6.7% of the pupils of Crimea learned Ukrainian as an elective subject,³¹ and no new Ukrainophone classes had been created in Simferopol for the two preceding years.³² When Ukrainian activists demanded the reintroduction of Ukrainophone teaching in Simferopol, Mikhail Rodkov, Director of the Department of Education of the Russian Federation, replied, in May 2017, that Ukrainian could be reintroduced in secondary schools only on an elective basis, as Ukrainian was not a state language and no Russian educational programs in Ukrainian had been developed for secondary schools.³³ Although the above-mentioned Crimean language law that established the three “state languages” was issued several weeks later, this did not change anything.

In the academic year of 2020/21, only 214 pupils (0.1% of the pupils of Crimea) – 162 in school No. 20 of Feodosiia and 52 in the former Ukrainian gymnasium of Sevastopol – were instructed in Ukrainophone classes,³⁴ compared to 15.68% of the population of Crimea who had declared their Ukrainian nationality even in the Russian census of 2014. But even in the “Ukrainophone” classes, more lessons were devoted to Russian grammar and literature than to Ukrainian grammar and literature.³⁵ A somewhat larger percentage of 3% children of Crimea was instructed in Crimean Tatar, compared to 10.57% of the population of the peninsula who had declared their Crimean Tatar nationality in the Russian census of 2014.³⁶ An overwhelming majority of 96.9% of the children were, of course, instructed in Russian.³⁷ Moreover, only 232 children, i. e., 0.2%, learned the Ukrainian language as a subject.³⁸ Obviously, this situation also resulted from the fact that in Crimea each school class has to select one

30 Horiunova, “Ukrainska mova.”

31 Ibid.

32 “Tol’ko 174 uchenika v Simferopole poluchaiut obrazovanie na ukrainskom iazyke” [“Only 174 schoolchildren in Simferopol receive education in Ukrainian”]. КРИМСОС. April 20, 2017. <https://krymsos.com/ru/lyshe-174-uchni-v-simferopoli-otrymuyut-osvitu-ukrayinskoyu-movoyu/>.

33 “Sevastopol’skie aktivisty trebuiut vernut’ v shkoly ukrainskii iazyk” [“Sevastopol activists demand the return of the Ukrainian language to schools”]. КРИМСОС. May 04, 2017. <https://krymsos.com/ru/sevastopolski-aktyvisty-vymagayut-povernuty-v-shkoly-ukrayinsku-movu/>.

34 Kremin, “Ohliad shchodo”; Removska, “Tse imperska polityka prydushennia.”

35 Kremin, “Ohliad shchodo.”

36 Eskender Bariiev, Head of the Crimean Tatar Resource Center, reported that prior to the Russian occupation, in 384 classes (of 15 schools) Crimean Tatar had been the language of instruction, compared to 119 classes in 2021 (Derevianko, “Dyskryminatsiia”).

37 Kremin, “Ohliad shchodo.”

38 Derevianko, “Dyskryminatsiia.”

“native language,” which, of course, usually is Russian as the majority language. Courses of the Ukrainian or Crimean Tatar, which are elective only, take place after class and are reportedly often at an inadequate level. Beginning from the 10th grade, Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar are excluded from the study programs altogether.³⁹

Notably, a certain demand for private higher-level Ukrainian-language instruction had not disappeared in Crimea anyway, because several students (264 in 2016, 397 in 2020) continued to enter universities in Ukraine, where thousands of free university places had been provided for students from Crimea⁴⁰ (2,604 in 2017⁴¹). However, as Valentyna Potapova, director of the Center of Civic Education “Almenda” reported in 2020, “it is practically impossible to find private teachers in Crimea.” Potapova confirmed that most teachers were afraid to offer their services as they feared repression.⁴²

At the Taurian University of Simferopol, the Faculty of Ukrainian Philology was downgraded to a small department (“kafedra”) in September 2014; shortly afterwards, it was integrated into the Faculty of Slavic Philology and Journalism.⁴³

On 19 April 2017, the UN International Court of Justice obliged the Russian Federation to guarantee the Ukrainians of Crimea access to Ukrainophone school education.⁴⁴ The suppression of the Ukrainian and the Crimean Tatar languages in Ukraine are discussed in the General Assembly of the UN on a yearly basis, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europa discussed the issue in 2020.⁴⁵ In 2021, Taras Kremin, Commissioner for the Protection of the State Language, sent a letter of complaint to the OSCE.⁴⁶ Notwithstanding its theoretical status of a “state language,” Ukrainian definitely does not fare well in Crimea.

3. Language policy in Russian-occupied DNR and LNR

After the local uprisings that were staged in eastern and southern parts of Ukraine after the Revolution of Dignity (November 2013 – February 2014), Kyiv lost control of most

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Horiunova, “Ukrainska mova.”

42 Removska, “Tse imperska polityka prydushennia.” See also “Uchyteli ukrainskoi movy u Krymu boiatsia peresliduvan – predstavnytsia upovnovazhenoho” [“Ukrainian language teachers in Crimea are afraid of persecution – representative of the commissioner”].

Ukrinform. December 16, 2021. <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-crimea/3369937-uciteli-ukrainskoi-movi-u-krimu-boatsa-peresliduvan-predstavnica-upovnovazhenogo.html>.

43 Kremin, “Ohliad shchodo.”

44 Removska, “Tse imperska polityka prydushennia”; Yevhen Teize, “Sud OON vyznav utysky krymskykh tatar i ukrainsiv u Krymu” [“The UN Court recognized the oppression of Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians in Crimea”]. DW. April 19, 2017. <https://www.dw.com/uk/міжнародний-суд-оон-визнав-утиски-кримських-татар-і-українців-у-криму/a-38495960>.

45 Removska, “Tse imperska polityka prydushennia.”

46 Tokar, “Ukraintsi ye”.

territories of “DNR” and “LNR” in May–June 2014, followed by more losses in early 2015. On 17 March 2015, the Ukrainian Parliament officially declared DNR and LNR temporarily occupied territories.⁴⁷

Although a majority of the population had declared to be Ukrainians in the census of 2001 in both oblasts (56.9% in Donetsk region; 58% in Luhansk region⁴⁸) the situation of the Ukrainian language in the public sphere had not been much better than in Crimea. In Donetsk region, 24.1% of the population had regarded Ukrainian to be their native language (a decrease of 6.5% as compared to 1989!), 74.9% – Russian (an increase of 7.2% as compared to 1989). In Luhansk region, the figures had been 30.0% Ukrainian vs. 68.9% Russian.⁴⁹ Prior to the annexation, the Ukrainian language had held strong positions primarily in the sphere of education, partially in accounting and in jurisdiction, in both regions. Beyond that, Ukrainian was present in cinema theaters, in Ukrainian electronic media, on billboards, city lights, street signs, etc.⁵⁰ In 2013/4, 50.4% of the pupils in Donetsk oblast had been instructed in Ukrainian; 244 schools had been Ukrainophone and 367 bilingual. In Luhansk oblast, 45.7% had been instructed in Ukrainian; 119 schools had been Ukrainophone and 181 bilingual.

In 2006, the Regional Council of Luhansk had established a “Program for the Development and Functioning of the Ukrainian and Russian Languages in Luhansk Oblast for 2007–2010,” whereas no corresponding language program had been realized for Donetsk oblast. Both Oblast Councils had declared Russian a “regional language” in 2012, except for the rayons Svativ, Bilokurakhyne, Novopetrovsk, and Markivka.⁵¹

Soon after the annexation, both DNR (14 May 2014) and LNR (18 May 2014) issued almost identical “Constitutions” of their “People’s Republics” that, in Article 10, established both Russian and Ukrainian as their “state languages”.⁵² At the same time,

47 Serhii Stukanov, “Ukrainska mova na Donbasi: rik pid okupatsiieiu” [“The Ukrainian language in Donbas: a year under occupation”]. Portal movnoi polityky. July 09, 2015. <https://language-policy.info/2015/07/ukrajinska-mova-na-donbasi-rik-pid-okupatsijeyu/>.

48 All-Ukrainian population census 2001.

49 Moser, *Language Policy*, 42.

50 Stukanov, “Ukrainska mova.”

51 Kremin, “Ohliad shchodo.”

52 Konstitutsiia Donetskoi Narodnoi Respubliki (v red. Zakonov ot 27.02.2015 № 17-IHC, 29.06.2015 № 63-IHC, 11.09.2015 № 92-IHC, 29.12.2017 № 205-IHC, 30.11.2018 № 01-IIHC, ot 06.03.2020 № 106-IIHC, ot 24.06.2022 № 383-IIHC, ot 27.09.2022 № 416-IIHC) [Constitution of the Donetsk People’s Republic (as amended by Laws dated 02/27/2015 No. 17-INS, 06/29/2015 No. 63-INS, 09/11/2015 No. 92-INS, 12/29/2017 No. 205-IHC, 11/30/2018 No. 01-IIHC, dated 03/06/2020 No. 106-IIHC, dated 06/24/2022 No. 383-IIHC, dated 09/27/2022 No. 416-IIHC)]. GIS NPA DNR. <http://gisnpa-dnr.ru/npa/0008-1-20140514/>; Konstitutsiia Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki (s izmeneniami, vnesennymi zakonami Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki ot 24.09.2014 № 22-I, ot 03.12.2014 № 1-II, ot 03.03.2015 № 1-II, ot 25.11.2017 № 195-II, ot 02.02.2018 № 212-II, ot 06.09.2018 № 263-II) [Constitution of the Lugansk People’s Republic (as amended by the laws of the Lugansk People’s Republic dated September 24, 2014 No. 22-I, dated December 3, 2014

Russian was established as the only language of accounting, and all institutions began working in Russian only. Yevhen Klepa, mayor of Horlivka, officially declared at that time that “Ukrainian should be forbidden” in schools.⁵³ Within a year, Ukrainian was practically banned from all spheres where it had been used prior to the occupation, as reported, *inter alia*, by observers from the voluntary movement “Freedom Space”.⁵⁴ Ukrainian media were blocked from the “People’s Republics” instantly, local media continued to communicate in Russian only.⁵⁵

As early as 2017 Oleksandr Zakharchenko, then leader of DNR, proudly announced that 100% of the schools of DNR had switched to Russophone education. He reported that this had been achieved after in 2014 only 50% had been instructed in Russian, followed by 88% in 2015.⁵⁶ As a rule, officials claimed that the transition to Russian and the closure of Ukrainophone classes occurred on parents’ demand.⁵⁷ Not only the Ukrainian language, but also Ukrainian literature and history were minimized to one hour per week or completely banned from the schools of DNR and LNR during the first months of occupation.⁵⁸ Instead of the history of Ukraine, pupils began learning the “History of the Donetsk Land,” subsequently, in higher classes, the “History of the Fatherland,” which, of course, included the history of Russia.⁵⁹ As early as 25 September 2014, the “Ministry of Education and Science” of DNR had decreed that more hours should be devoted to the Russian language at the expense of other subjects. As a result, first and foremost lessons of Ukrainian were transformed into elective subjects in most schools of the People’s Republics.⁶⁰

In March 2020, the Ukrainian language and Ukrainian literature were officially excluded from the school programs of DNR; LNR followed suit in June of that same

No. 1-II, dated March 3, 2015 No. 11-II, dated November 25, 2017 No. 195-II, dated 02/02/2018 No. 212-II, dated 09/06/2018 No. 263-II)]. LNRNEWS.ru. <https://lnrnews.net/pages/konstitucija-luganskoi-narodnoi-respubliki-7.html>; Stukanov, “Ukrainska mova.”

53 Stukanov, “Ukrainska mova.”

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 “Zakharchenko zaiavil o zavershenii perekhoda obrazovatel’nykh uchrezhdenii DNR na russkii iazyk obucheniiia” [“Zakharchenko announced the completion of the transition of educational institutions of the DPR to the Russian language of instruction”]. Donetskoe agentstvo novostei. June 06, 2017. <https://dan-news.ru/politics/zaxarchenko-zayavil-o-zavershenii-perexoda-obrazovatelnyx-uchrezhdenij-dnr-na-russkij-yazyk-obucheniya/>.

57 Stukanov, “Ukrainska mova”; Lina Kushch, “Shkoly ‘DNR’: yak vyvchaiut ukrainsku istoriiu i movu?” [“DNR’ schools: how do they study Ukrainian history and language?”]. BBC News Ukraina. October 27, 2016. https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/society/2016/10/161026_ukrainian_in_donetsk_om.

58 Stukanov, “Ukrainska mova”; Kushch, “Shkoly ‘DNR.’”

59 Kushch, “Shkoly ‘DNR.’”

60 Stukanov, “Ukrainska mova.”

year.⁶¹ Henceforth, Ukrainian courses were optional and, as frequently reported, of very low quality (15–20 minutes at seven in the morning). An increasing number of former teachers of Ukrainian were retrained to teach Russian,⁶² and textbooks were usually imported from Russia.⁶³ Interestingly, however, in early 2020 almost 3,800 children from DNR and LNR received part of their secondary education from the non-occupied territories of Ukraine online; as expected, these students usually kept their initiatives in secret, because, as they put it, “nobody needed problems”.⁶⁴ Higher education in DNR and LNR is provided in Russian only. According to the official website of “Donetsk National University of DNR,” this university still offered a study program devoted to the Ukrainian language in 2020. However, in 2017 the former Department of Ukrainian Philology and Applied Linguistics had been transformed into a Department of Slavic Philology and Applied Linguistics,⁶⁵ and at the time when Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University was renamed Luhansk National Pedagogical University in July 2020, the Department of the Ukrainian language that had existed since 1921 was shut down.⁶⁶ At Luhansk Dal University, the subject “Ukrainian language” was replaced with “Russian language in professional communication” by a decree of 20 January 2020.⁶⁷ “First prorector” Yurii Hutko argued that this step was inevitable due to a “lack of qualified specialists who impeccably know Russian,” as a consequence of the “discriminatory language policy in Ukraine during the preceding decades.” This statement came as a surprise, because prior to 2014 there had been only a few schools with Ukrainian as the language of instruction.⁶⁸

Although some institutions in both “People’s Republics” have retained the component “Ukrainian” in their names (Luhansk Ukrainian Academic Musical and Dramatical Theater; Urban Lesia Ukrainka Center of Ukrainian Culture in Makiivka) almost all events and announcements are exclusively kept in Russian in these centers too.⁶⁹

61 Kremin, “Ohliad shchodo”; Tat’iana Semenova, “Zamknutyi krug. Kak ukrainskii iazyk vnov’ stal nenuzhnyim na okkupirovannoi chasti Luganskoi oblasti” [“Vicious circle. How the Ukrainian language again became unnecessary in the occupied part of the Lugansk region”]. Fokus. June 21, 2020. <https://focus.ua/ukraine/457235-luganskaya-oblast-ukrainskij-jazyk>.

62 Kremin, “Ohliad shchodo”; Kushch, “Shkoly ‘DNR.’”

63 Kushch, “Shkoly ‘DNR.’”

64 Kremin, “Ohliad shchodo”; Kushch, “Shkoly ‘DNR.’”

65 Kremin, “Ohliad shchodo.”

66 Ibid.

67 “V okupovanomu ‘vyshi’ ostatochno skasuvaly ukrainsku” [“Ukrainian was finally canceled in the occupied ‘high school’”]. Portal movnoi polityky. March 17, 2020. <https://language-policy.info/2020/03/v-okupovanomu-vyshi-ostatochno-skasuvaly-ukrajinsku/>.

68 “V okupovanomu ‘vyshi’”.

69 Kremin, “Ohliad shchodo.”

On 5 March 2020, DNR finally deprived Ukrainian of its status as a “state language,” and LNR followed suit on 3 July 2020.⁷⁰

The decision for LNR had been made months earlier too. On 26 March 2022, Leonid Pasichnyk, head of LNR, had announced at that point that “this decision confirms the path toward integration with the Russian Federation that we have opted for in 2014, and it reflects the genuine aspirations of the population of the republic”.⁷¹ At the same time, the authorities argued that “the use of Ukrainian as a state language has not been realized in practice” anyway. They announced that, although education was offered in Russian, other languages could be studied “on parents’ demand”.⁷²

On 8 January 2021, a new “Law of the State Language of LNR” entered into force. The law foresaw that all Ukrainophone documents must be translated into Russian by 1 March 2023.⁷³ Since the beginning of the annexation, numerous Ukrainian activists have been persecuted, tortured, or killed; most Ukrainian institutions such as “Prosvita” have been banned for political “extremism”.⁷⁴

4. “Classical Ukrainian” as a new “state language” in “Russian territories”?

To be sure, representatives of the occupation forces have repeatedly announced that Ukrainian will “not be banned,” especially with reference to Kherson and Zaporizhzhia oblasts.

On 24 May 2022, Kyrylo Stremousov, vice head of the Military-Civilian Administration, promised that “the Russian language will become the state language of Kherson oblast on a par with Ukrainian”.⁷⁵ In particular:

70 Ibid.; “Okupanty v ‘LNR’ pozbavyly ukrainsku movu statusu “derzhavnoi” [“The occupiers in the ‘LPR’ deprived the Ukrainian language of the status of ‘state’”]. Portal movnoi polityky. June 04, 2020. <https://language-policy.info/2020/06/okupanty-v-lnr-pozbavyly-ukrajinsku-movu-statusu-derzhavnoi/>.

71 “Bez movy: V LNR ukrainskii iazyk lishili statusa gosudarstvennogo” [“Without language: In the LPR the Ukrainian language was deprived of the status of the state language”]. Molot. March 26, 2020. <https://don24.ru/rubric/v-strane-i-mire/bez-movy-v-lnr-ukrainskiy-yazyk-lishili-statusa-gosudarstvennogo.html>.

72 Pavlo Kalashnyk, “U tak zvaniy ‘DNR’ ukrainsku movu pozbavyly statusu ‘derzhavnoi’” [“In the so-called ‘DPR’ the Ukrainian language was deprived of the status of ‘state’”]. Hromadske. March 06, 2020. <https://hromadske.ua/posts/u-tak-zvanij-dnr-ukrayinsku-movu-pozbavili-statusu-derzhavnoyi>.

73 Kremin, “Ohliad shchodo.”

74 Ibid.

75 “Stremousov poobeshchal zashchitit’ ukrainskii iazyk v Khersonskoi oblasti” [“Stremousov promised to protect the Ukrainian language in the Kherson region”]. FederalPress. August 02, 2022. <https://fedpress.ru/news/77/policy/3066694>.

The Russian language will become the major language of accounting, communication, and all issues that are of importance for the state. We do not ban the Ukrainian language and will not play around with any linguistic issues.⁷⁶

Stremousov explained that Russian was to become the language of instruction in schools and at universities too, but on parents' demand Ukrainophone classes could be established. He added that "a large community of Crimean Tatars" lived in the region and that there were discussions whether Crimean Tatar should also be provided with the status of a state language, "as it was done in Crimea," and assured his audience that "we will not oppress anybody's rights."⁷⁷ On 2 August, Stremousov reiterated during a meeting with "residents of the region" that "the Ukrainian language will remain" and that it "shall be a state language on the territory of Kherson oblast." He added: "If somebody forces you to speak Russian or even talks about it feel free to contact me. Our task is to preserve Ukrainian culture. This is not a genocide, not annihilation. This is denazification."⁷⁸ In early September, Stremousov already announced that "the schools of Kherson oblast teach the children in the Russian language. They have said that Russian is the major language of communication at home with their parents."⁷⁹ He repeated his promise that nobody would oppress the Ukrainian language as late as 5 October 2022, but he never forgot to contextualize Ukrainian with the notorious narratives about Banderites and Nazis.⁸⁰

On 7 June 2022, the Russian media Platform RIA Novosti cited Tetiana Kuzmych, director of Kherson's Regional Administration of Education, who declared that "the Ukrainian language and literature will be preserved in the study programs in the event of the integration of the region into the Russian Federation."⁸¹ Her statement was a reply to Crimea's Vice Prime Minister Georgii Muradov, who had asked, during the Plenary Session of the XV International Festival "The Great Russian Word" in Simferopol, whether Ukrainian would retain its status of an official language in Kherson oblast. Soon afterwards Putin's press secretary Dmitrii Peskov announced (9 June 2022) that "local residents should decide" whether Ukrainian will be a state

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

79 Elena Gorshkova, "V shkolakh Khersona pereshli na obuchenie na russkom iazyke" ["Schools in Kherson switched to teaching in Russian"]. URA.RU. September 08, 2022. <https://ura.news/news/1052585348>.

80 Ekaterina Volkova, "Stremousov: nakazyvat' golosovavshikh protiv vkhozhdeniia v sostav RF na Khersonshchine ne budut" ["Stremousov: those who voted against joining the Russian Federation in the Kherson region will not be punished"]. Gazeta.ru. October 05, 2022. <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2022/10/05/18720847.shtml>.

81 "Upravlenie obrazovaniia Khersona: ukrainskii iazyk i literaturu sokhraniat v shkolakh" ["Kherson Education Department: Ukrainian language and literature will be preserved in schools"]. RIA novosti. June 7, 2022. <https://ria.ru/20220607/kherson-1793767053.html>.

language “on the liberated territories of Donbas”.⁸² Peskov added that there is only “one state language in our country,” but “as far as particular communities [“rayony”] are concerned they are not parts of our territory at the given moment.” He promised that “everything will depend on the people’s choice.”⁸³

On that same day, Volodymyr Rohov, head of the movement “We are together with Russia,” declared in Crimean Simferopol:

The Russian language is native to Zaporizhzhia oblast. More than 80% of the inhabitants of the region regard Russian as their native language, 100% understand it, speak it, write in it, and usually use it at every occasion. The Russian language can de facto already be regarded as the state language, and de jure it will receive this status in the nearest future.⁸⁴

At the same time, Rohov promised that “if Ukrainian is close and native to a person, he can address the organs of power in Ukrainian and will receive a reply in Ukrainian”.⁸⁵

Three days later, Russian Minister of Education Sergei Kravtsov announced that in Zaporizhzhia oblast, pupils will learn Ukrainian along with Russian, which he considered unproblematic as both languages have “common linguistic roots”.⁸⁶ Kravtsov pointed to the model of “all national republics” of the Russian Federation, where people had “the opportunity to learn the national language.” He assured his audience that “this is a gradual issue, adequate methods exist”.⁸⁷ One month later, on 9 July 2022, Kravtsov confirmed in Melitopol that “nobody bans” Ukrainian “as a native language”.⁸⁸ He promised that for “pupils who wish to learn the Ukrainian language” an “adequate number of hours” would be provided. After repeating the notorious narratives about “brotherly peoples” and “common roots,” Kravtsov finally even declared: “The Ukrainian language is very rich and interesting”.⁸⁹ A few days earlier, he had disseminated a more relevant message: The study programs of the occupied

82 “Peskov: ostanetsia li ukrainskii iazyk gosudarstvennym, dolzhny reshit’ zhiteli Donbassa” [“Peskov: residents of Donbass must decide whether Ukrainian will remain the state language”]. RIA novosti. June 09, 2022. <https://ria.ru/20220609/donbass-1794238801.html>.

83 Ibid.

84 “Russkii iazyk v Zaporozhskoi oblasti stanet gosudarstvennym” [“Russian language in the Zaporozhye region will become the state language”]. RIA novosti. June 09, 2022. <https://ria.ru/20220609/zaporozhe-1794332954.html>.

85 Ibid.

86 “Shkol’niki Zaporozh’ia prodolzhat izuchat’ ukrainskii iazyk nariadu s russkim” [“Zaporozhye schoolchildren will continue to study Ukrainian along with Russian”]. REN TV. June 12, 2022. <https://ren.tv/news/v-mire/986919-shkolniki-zaporozhia-prodolzhat-izuchat-ukrainskii-iazuk-nariadu-s-russkim>.

87 Ibid.

88 “Kravtsov: v shkolakh osvobozhdennykh territorii Ukrainy prodolzhat prepodavat’ ukrainskii iazyk” [“Kravtsov: Ukrainian language will continue to be taught in schools in the liberated territories of Ukraine”]. Izvestiia. July 9, 2022. <https://iz.ru/1362441/2022-07-09/shkolniki-osvobozhdennykh-territorii-ukrainy-prodolzhat-izuchat-ukrainskii>.

89 Ibid.

territories were already being adapted to Russian – and this also meant: Russophone – models.⁹⁰

After several weeks, during the summer holidays, Kravtsov explained that programs were being prepared “especially for those schools where people speak Ukrainian” in accordance with Russia’s Institute of Native Languages and the Ministries of DNR and LNR.⁹¹ A few days later, on 1 August 2022, Russian Deputy Minister of Education Denis Gribov confirmed that the ministry was developing a Ukrainophone study program “for the children of DNR and LNR as well as the territories of Ukraine,” and that this program would be in full accordance with Russian models.⁹²

On 11 August 2022, Kravtsov specified that the schools of the “liberated territories of Ukraine” could choose among three study programs: one of them was “maximally close to the Russian program,” another one “considered” the Ukrainian language, “where it is a native language,” and a third one offered “the Ukrainian language as an elective subject.”⁹³ Kravtsov explained, however, that this was merely a temporary solution, and that the Russian Unified State Exam [“Yedinyi gosudarstvennyi ekzamen (ЕГЭ)”] would become mandatory in all occupied territories after five years at the latest. He emphasized that the transitional period, which was planned for the occupied territories of Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, and Kharkiv oblasts only, would not take a long time, and he announced that the schools of DNR and LNR would already adopt Russian education standards, beginning with 1 September 2022.

The reality is that only Russian textbooks and study plans are to be used in the schools of all occupied territories, thus Ukrainian – and Ukrainophone – textbooks have been systematically removed from the schools.⁹⁴ Numerous reports confirm that

90 “Shkol’niki Zaporozh’ia.”

91 Vladimir Kulagin, “Shkol’nikam DNR i LNR predlozhat programmy po izucheniiu ukrainskogo iazyka” [“Schoolchildren of the DPR and LPR will be offered programs to study the Ukrainian language”]. *Gazeta.ru*. July 28, 2022. <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2022/07/28/18219302.shtml>.

92 “Minprosveshcheniia RF razrabatyvaet programmu dlia obuchenie detei DNR i LNR na ukrainskom iazyke, no po standartam obrazovaniia Rossii” [“The Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation is developing a program for teaching children of the DPR and LPR in Ukrainian, but according to Russian education standards”]. *BelRos*. August 01, 2022. <https://belros.tv/news/obschestvo/minprosveshcheniya-rf-razrabatyvaet-programmu-dlya-obuchenie-detey-dnr-i-lnr-na-ukrainskom-yazyke-no/>.

93 “EGE stanet obiazatel’nym na osvobodhdennykh territoriiakh Ukrainy cherez piat’ let” [“The Unified State Exam will become mandatory in the liberated territories of Ukraine in five years”]. *TASS*. August 12, 2022. https://tass.ru/obschestvo/15459347?utm_source=google.com&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.com&utm_referrer=google.com.

94 Mariia Agranovich, “Sergei Kravtsov: Shkol’niki na osvobodhdennykh territoriiakh Ukrainy smogut izuchat’ ukrainskii iazyk kak rodnoi ili fakul’tativno” [“Sergey Kravtsov: Schoolchildren in the liberated territories of Ukraine will be able to study Ukrainian as a native language or as an elective”]. *Rossiiskaia gazeta*. August 12, 2022. <https://rg.ru/2022/08/12/sergej-kravcov-shkolniki-na-osvobodhdennykh-territoriiah-ukrainy-smogut-izuchat-ukrainskij-iazyk-kak-rodnoj-ili-fakultativno.html>;

the occupation forces and their allies more often than not urge parents to refrain from elective Ukrainian language lessons, as has been the case in the formerly annexed territories. If Ukrainian is taught at all, it is limited to one hour per week, whereas Russian is taught on a daily basis.⁹⁵

On the eve of the new school year, on 31 August 2022, several Russian officials introduced a strange new term: “classical Ukrainian.” First and foremost, Sergei Kravtsov declared during a meeting with Vladimir Putin that “pupils will be provided the opportunity, if parents and pedagogues decide so, to learn Ukrainian as their native language.” He announced that appropriate study plans and methodology materials had been developed and teachers had been trained. He added that Russian authorities were even preparing “a textbook of the classical Ukrainian language”.⁹⁶

On 5 September 2022, the Russian parliamentarian Evgenii Fedorov from Putin’s party “United Russia” suggested to the Russian Minister of Science Valerii Falkov that “an institution that will regulate the rules of the use of the Ukrainian language in Russia” should be established in Russia.⁹⁷ Fedorov added that this institution should be “independent of political decisions and attempts at artificial reforms on Kyiv’s part,”

Iryna Zhukevych, “Okupanty vyluchaly ukrainsku literaturu zi shkil na Kharkivshchyni (dokument)” [“The occupiers seized Ukrainian literature from schools in the Kharkiv region (document)”]. Glavkom. September 11, 2022. <https://glavcom.ua/world/world-politics/okupanti-viluchali-ukrajinsku-literaturu-zi-shkil-na-kherkivshchini-dokument-874553.html>; “Izuchenie ukrainskogo iazyka na osvobozhdennykh territoriakh budet dostupno vsem zhelaiushchim” [“Learning the Ukrainian language in the liberated territories will be available to everyone”]. Ukraina.ru. August 12, 2022. <https://ukraina.ru/20220812/1037628275.html>.

- 95 Alina Miroshnikova, “Shcho vidbuvaetsia zi shkolamy na okupovanykh terytoriiakh?” [“What is happening with schools in the occupied territories?”]. Osvitorii Media. May 24, 2022. <https://osvitoria.media/experience/shho-vidbuvaetsya-zi-shkolamy-na-okupovanyh-terytoriyah/?fbclid=IwAR3sTHzbFhNi182DfFB2ZMho7KsgmFwTdavmoakCVQw-odQyzG2mlwEF8I>; Mariana Myhal, “Miskyi holova Melitopolia rozpoviv, yak pedahohy-zradnyky muchat ditei za movu” [“The Mayor of Melitopol told how traitorous teachers torture children for language”]. Glavkom. October 25, 2022. https://glavcom.ua/country/science/rashisti-vzjalisja-za-deukrajinizatsiju-timchasovo-okupovanikh-teritorij-884627.html?fbclid=IwARoFEVwODv_r3NHIMGKrEu_OQUlo2gKM_8-nV2ZcH5Tro_mWBJPz5ZKFs4.
- 96 “Na okkupirovannykh territoriakh Donbassa detei budut obuchat’ ‘klassicheskomu’ ukrainskomu iazyku” [“In the occupied territories of Donbass, children will be taught the ‘classical’ Ukrainian language”]. Novosti Donbassa. August 31, 2022. <https://novosti.dn.ua/ru/news/330687-na-okkupirovannyh-teritoriyah-donbassa-detej-budut-obuchat-klassicheskomu-ukrainskomu-yazyku>; Evgenii Diumin, “Minprosveshcheniia RF gotovit uchebnik po ukrainskomu iazyku” [“The Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation is preparing a textbook on the Ukrainian language”]. URA.RU. August 31, 2022. <https://ura.news/news/1052583196>.
- 97 “V GD predlozhili sozdat’ normy regulirovaniia ukrainskogo iazyka v RF” [“The State Duma proposed creating norms for regulating the Ukrainian language in the Russian Federation”]. Moskva24. September 05, 2022. <https://www.m24.ru/news/obshchestvo/05092022/497793>.

because “nowadays attempts are being made to change the orthography and phonetics of the Ukrainian language, by integrating new vocabulary,” whereby “all activities are being undertaken in order to distance Ukrainian from the Russian language”.⁹⁸ According to Fedorov, Ukrainian and Russian are “similar because they were formed on the foundations of Old Russian,” “the Ukrainian language is an indispensable part of Russian culture,” and “it is regarded as a state language on a par with Russian and Crimean Tatar in Crimea”.⁹⁹ The author of the related press release added that for the time being, the norms of the Ukrainian language were regulated by the Institute of the Ukrainian language and the Institute of Linguistics at the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine.¹⁰⁰ Three days later, Evgenii Fedorov explained in greater detail what might be the essence of the mysterious “classical Ukrainian” language. In his interview for “Ukraina.ru,” he argued that Ukrainian was the state language on parts of the occupied territories and that there would be even more such parts in the future. He added:

Once there is a Ukrainian state language, or as they sometimes say “Russian-Kievan dialect,” this means that there should be norms, there should be scholars, there should be institutes. Someone has to write textbooks.¹⁰¹

Fedorov argued that if Ukrainophone textbooks were necessary, they had to be conceived “in accordance with Russian traditions.” As for their language, he opined:

It is very simple: this is an historical, beautiful, classical Ukrainian dialect of the Russian language. The one that existed in the Soviet period, and earlier, during the existence of the Russian Empire. Nowadays this language has been adulterated for political purposes, and it is our task to purify it from these adulterations, to reestablish its genuine, original essence. During the existence of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, such schools existed. Therefore, we have the experience, there are achievements, and there are methodical materials.¹⁰²

98 “V GD predlozhili sozdat’ normy.”

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid.

101 Mariia Nesterova, “Evgenii Fedorov: russkaia traditsiia – podderzhka vsekh etnosov i grupp. O vosstanovlenii ukrainskogo iazyka” [“Evgeny Fedorov: Russian tradition – support for all ethnic groups and groups. On the restoration of the Ukrainian language”]. *Ukraina.ru*. September 08, 2022. <https://ukraina.ru/20220908/1038531760.html?fbclid=IwARzSa1VPuaovenAaNbEOTfNaaNmz9GYU7mWTQii9JXbE5VnzNq4HWWho6SSs>.

102 Ibid.

The new textbooks were destined to be used in Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk, and, basically, on all future “liberated” territories.¹⁰³ According to Fedorov, “the Russian tradition of a multinational, multilingual, and united Russian culture” was based “on the support of all ethnoses, groups, and languages”.¹⁰⁴ He continued: “Ukrainians are Russians, but they belong to a separate linguistic group,” and “precisely this is the millennium-long Russian cultural tradition,” as opposed to the traditions of Germans and English, who are “either foes or fools”.¹⁰⁵

On that same day when Fedorov announced his idea, Russian “political scientist” Ivan Meziukho supported him, as reported by RT.¹⁰⁶ In particular, Meziukho declared:

In fact, attempts are being made to change the Ukrainian language in order to distance it from Russian, which is not alien to the Ukrainian people.¹⁰⁷

Meziukho pointed out that “some years ago, the Kyiv regime made phonetic reforms that have changed the classical Ukrainian language beyond recognition.” He deplored that aside from that, feminitives have been officially introduced into Ukrainian, and he welcomed the idea of establishing centers of the regulation of Ukrainian in Russia.¹⁰⁸

It has not become clear yet how precisely “classical Ukrainian” might be designed by the occupying forces. Allegedly, however, the secret will be solved soon. On 7 September 2022, Russian Deputy Minister of Education Aleksandr Bugaiev declared that “the textbook of the classical Ukrainian language can appear in LNR, DNR, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia oblasts by the end of this year”.¹⁰⁹ He elaborated:

But this textbook is very difficult. It should be of very high quality. It is meant to be a textbook of the beautiful Ukrainian language. And precisely such a textbook on classical Soviet foundations is being prepared.¹¹⁰

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid.

106 “Politolog otsenil ideiu sozdaniia v RF instituta regulirovaniia norm ukrainskogo iazyka” [“The political scientist appreciated the idea of creating in the Russian Federation an institute for regulating the norms of the Ukrainian language”]. Moskva24. September 05, 2022. <https://www.m24.ru/news/obshchestvo/05092022/497841>.

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid.

109 “Uchebnik po ukrainskomu iazyku mozhet poiavit’sia do kontsa goda – Minprosveshcheniia RF” [“A textbook on the Ukrainian language may appear before the end of the year – Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation”]. Moskva24. September 07, 2022. <https://www.m24.ru/news/politika/07092022/498596>.

110 “Uchebnik po ukrainskomu iazyku poiavitsia do kontsa goda v Donbasse” [“A textbook in the Ukrainian language will appear before the end of the year in the Donbass”].

Ukrainian intellectuals quickly reacted to the Russian slogans about “classical Ukrainian.” Particularly, the prominent linguist Larysa Masenko reminded readers of the Stalinist terror of 1933, when the Bolsheviks reversed earlier Ukrainian processes of standardization, tried to bring Ukrainian norms as close to Russian as possible and, at the same time, created an atmosphere where using Ukrainian was widely regarded as dangerous.¹¹¹

Political scientist Petro Oleshchuk commented on the textbooks of the “classical Ukrainian language”:

What language this is remains a mystery. I think they may try to “canonize” Surzhyk or practice other linguistic perversions. But the fact itself is telling. They are forced to manipulate and imitate “genuine Ukrainian identity” [“igrat’ v ‘pravil’noe ukrainstvo”].¹¹²

Oleshchuk explained that for the time being, “the original idea [...] of the ‘artificial character’ of Ukrainian statehood and identity” had failed, as had all numerous attempts to convince the population of the occupied territories that they are all just Russians.

5. The Ukrainian language in recent Russian political discourse

The ongoing declarations that Ukrainian would not be banned were accompanied with a number of press reports and interviews that discussed the Ukrainian language, usually reiterating anti-Ukrainian myths that have been characteristic of Russian imperialist discourse for decades, if not centuries.¹¹³

News.ru. September 07, 2022. <https://news.ru/europe/uchebnik-po-ukrainskomu-yazyku-poyavitsya-do-konca-goda-v-donbasse/>.

111 Larysa Masenko, “Linhvotsydna stratehiia Kremliia: u Rosii khochut ‘rehuliuvaty normy ukrainskoi movy’ azh do zlyttia” [“The Kremlin’s lingucidal strategy: in Russia they want to ‘regulate the norms of the Ukrainian language’ until the merger”]. Portal movnoi polityky. September 21, 2022. <https://language-policy.info/2022/09/linhvotsydna-stratehiya-kremliya-u-rosiji-hochut-rehulyuvaty-normy-ukrajinskoji-movy-azh-do-zlyttya/>.

112 Petr Oleshchuk, “Rossiiane pochuvstvovali, chto proigrali, i raspisalis’ v glavnom porazhenii” [“The Russians felt that they had lost and accepted the main defeat”]. 24 kanal. September 02, 2022. https://24tv.ua/ru/vtorzhenie-rossii-ukrainu-pochemu-okkupantam-ne-udastsja-rkusificirovat_n2149407?fbclid=IwARoBOM9qFsMkV4RRkxPIS76VlgSImvCc_07hEZn25Y7HxfR7adue4u5gtc.

113 See, e. g., Michael Moser, *New Contributions to the History of the Ukrainian Language* (Edmonton–Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2016), 1–36, 585–600.

When Putin and his allies signed the treaties regulating the annexion of the occupied territories of Ukraine on 30 September 2022, he once again bemoaned the breakup of the Soviet Union and declared:

There is nothing stronger than the decisiveness of millions of people who, in terms of their culture, belief, traditions, and language regard themselves as a part of Russia, whose forefathers lived in one single state.¹¹⁴

Putin added that in light of “Anglosaxon” “aggression” and “diversions” against Russia, “we are fighting so that nobody would ever even think that one can occupy and erase from history Russia, our people, our language and our culture.”¹¹⁵

One of the persons who took part in the signation ceremony, allegedly “with burning eyes,” was Anatolii Vasserman.¹¹⁶ During the past decades, Vasserman had earned himself the reputation of a fervent fighter against the Ukrainian language, which he has attempted to characterize as a dialect of Russian, based on a number of pseudoscholarly – and false – arguments.¹¹⁷

It was probably no coincidence that a few days prior to the Kremlin ceremony, leading Russian media had launched a video of a meeting of Russian teachers, where Putin’s personal friend, film director Nikita Mikhalkov, declared that the Ukrainian language as such had become “a symbol of Russophobia” and that “the combination of words that we hear in Ukrainian transcription and pronunciation are for us and for the world, in principle, and for themselves too, an articulation of hatred against Russia.”¹¹⁸

On 21 June 2022, the prominent scandalous Russian writer and political activist Zakhar Prilepin claimed that “for eight years” no law of DNR had oppressed the Ukrainian language and continued:

The reality is that the Ukrainian language and culture will be taught in its initial shape and quality. As part of the huge Slavic and all-Russian culture. And not as a Polish Russophobic smear.¹¹⁹

114 Kolesnikov, “A Zapad i stonet, i plachet.”

115 Ibid.

116 Ibid.

117 Moser, *Language Policy*, 174–176.

118 “‘Ukrainska mova stala obrazom rusofobii’: Mikhalkov – proty vykladannia ukrainskoiu movoiu u shkolakh tak zvanykh ‘DNR’ ta ‘LNR’” [“‘The Ukrainian language has become an image of Russophobia’: Mikhalkov is against teaching in the Ukrainian language in schools of the so-called ‘DPR’ and ‘LPR’”]. Bukvy. August 26, 2022. <https://bykvu.com/ua/bukvy/ukrainska-mova-stala-obrazom-rusofobii-mikhalkov-proty-vykladannia-ukrainskoiu-movoiu-u-shkolakh-tak-zvanykh-dnr-ta-lnr/>.

119 “Zakhar Prilepin prokomentiroval propagandistskie slukhi o zaprete na osvobozhdenykh territoriakh ukrainskogo iazyka” [“Zakhar Prilepin commented on propaganda rumors about a ban on the Ukrainian language in the liberated

Prilepin called to return to Ukraine “the genuine senses of Old Russian literature and Ukrainian classics.” For whatever reasons, he named (Oleksandr) Dovzhenko, a Ukrainian film director, and (Mykola) Bazhan, a Ukrainian writer. (Both of them lived and worked in the Soviet area, but none of them had a lot in common with Prilepin’s ideology.)

Many more prominent and less prominent persons were given the opportunity to voice their opinions on the Ukrainian language and its prospects in widespread Russian media, which are either directly or indirectly controlled by the Russian state. Some of the statements were reactions to the above-cited occasional Russian official announcements that Ukrainian might have some kind of official status in the occupied territories.

On 10 August 2022, the journalist Aleksei Makovtsev published an article on the Internet magazine “Regnum” entitled “The Ukrainian language is not necessary anywhere and for nothing on the liberated territories”.¹²⁰ Makovtsev reminded readers of the allegedly “forcible Ukrainization” of Soviet times and elaborated on that topic:

In the southeast of Ukraine, the Ukrainian language did not serve as a medium of mutual communication, but as an instrument of the manifestation of one’s political views. Nationalist ones, needless to say. Well, sometimes the Ukrainian language was necessary for communicating with the bureaucratic apparatus of Ukrainian statehood. [...] And right now, when, as a result of the Special Military Operation [“SVO”], a part of the territory of historical Novorossiiia has been liberated, while we are waiting for the integration of these lands into their native Russian haven, it turns out at a sudden that for whatever reasons, the Ukrainian language will remain in the schools. Moreover, judging by the context of these announcements, there will not be a separate subject labeled “Ukrainian language,” but the format of Ukrainophone languages will be preserved – only the textbooks for them will be printed in Russia.¹²¹

Makovtsev argued that the Ukrainian language as such was entirely artificial in the “liberated” lands. According to him, it is important that “children return to the

territories”]. *Za pravdu*. June 21, 2022. <https://zapravdu.org/2022/06/21/zaxar-prilepin-prokommentiroval-propagandistskie-sluxi-o-zaprete-na-osvobozhdennyx-territoriyax-ukrainskogo-yazyka/>.

120 Aleksei Makovtsev, “Ukrainskii iazyk na osvobozhdennykh territoriakh ne nuzhen nigde i ni dlia chego” [“The Ukrainian language in the liberated territories is not needed anywhere and for anything”]. *REGNUM*. August 10, 2022. <https://regnum.ru/news/3665642.html>.

121 *Ibid.*

instruction in native Russian instead of non-native Ukrainian.” He explained that “in independent Ukraine,” former teachers of Russian had been trained to teach Ukrainian instead, and that it would take just “a month of courses” to create teachers of Russian out of teachers of Ukrainian.¹²² Makovtsev added that anyone who would not master this task was likely to be “a convinced Ukrainian nationalist, and such a person must be kept at maximal distance from the educational system”.¹²³ Moreover:

The Ukrainian language has died out in DNR because of its uselessness even as an elective subject, thereby clearly demonstrating its artificiality on the territories of historical Novorossiiia.¹²⁴

In early September 2022, Serhii Markov, one of Russia’s most prominent “political experts,” declared in a radio interview for Putin’s favorite medium “Komsomolskaia Pravda” that Ukrainian is a “Banderite language” (in Russified Ukrainian: “Banderovskaia mova”). In accordance with countless statements by Russian officials, he announced that those who wished to “study Ukrainian,” e. g., in Kherson region, should “be provided with such an opportunity” because Ukrainian “is the mother tongue of many there.” He did not forget to add that generally, instruction had already totally been switched to Russian and to the Russian system earlier anyway.¹²⁵ At the same time, Markov elaborated on the term “classical Ukrainian language” that had been introduced by Russian Minister of Education Sergei Kravtsov a few days earlier:

There is a classical Ukrainian language – this is more or less Taras Shevchenko’s language, which is very close to Russian and which every Russian person understands because it is, in the end, a variant of the Russian language. And there is the contemporary official Ukrainian language, which is the product of political technologists. It is forcibly de-Russified to a maximum degree. Russian words are replaced with a specifically enormous number of Polish and English words. And this artificial contemporary Ukrainian language, which can also be labeled a totalitarian or terrorist language, is the one that official Ukrainian power institutions want to teach the pupils.¹²⁶

122 Ibid.

123 Ibid.

124 Ibid.

125 Vladimir Gladkov, “Ukrainskii iazyk dolzhen ostat’sia, nado likvidirovat’ banderovskuiu movu’ – politolog Markov” [“The Ukrainian language must remain, Bandera’s language must be eliminated’ – political scientist Markov”]. Politnavigator. September 02, 2022. <https://www.politnavigator.net/ukrainskij-jazyk-dolzhen-ostatsya-nado-likvidirovat-banderovskuyu-movu-politolog-markov.html>.

126 Ibid.

This latter variant of the Ukrainian language, Markov explained, deserved “full liquidation.” On the other hand, he claimed that he warmly welcomed the fact that a textbook “in normal Ukrainian” was being prepared in Russia.¹²⁷

The report about Markov’s radio interview was followed by long quotes from two earlier contributions to the ongoing language campaign. Both of them deserve a closer look.

In the original version of the first cited interview, which appeared on the Russian-sponsored website “Ukraina.ru,” a certain Artem Sharlai was introduced as “the director of religious affairs of the Military-Civilian Administration of Zaporizhzhia oblast,” who was “dealing with spiritual and moral problems and leading his war against extremism.”¹²⁸ Sharlai reported about himself that as early as during the Orange Revolution, he had begun fighting all kinds of “extremism” in a so-called “Slavic guard.”¹²⁹ According to him, “liberty was given to the most dangerous religious organizations” and to “totalitarian sects” in Ukraine, while “nationality policy was totally based on Russophobia.” Sharlai reported on a mysterious pastor with three American passports who “at the very beginning” [of the Russian war in Ukraine, M. M.] worked in the Melitopol area.¹³⁰ All possible “sects” were allegedly imported from America, collaborated with western secret agencies, and spied on the local population. In Sharlai’s view, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was not only a nationalist, but even a “Nazi” organization. Generally, Sharlai opined that “Ukrainian identity as a doctrine [“Ukrainstvo kak ucheniie”] is poison that is put into the Russian man and tries to replace his historic roots with some surrogate that leads to some kind of consciousness of his exclusivity.”¹³¹ This doctrine, as he argued, had been developed “by Austro-Hungary” in order to get along with those “Galicians who wanted to be subjects of the Russian Emperor.” Then Sharlai mentioned Soviet “Ukrainization” and ended up labelling Lenin the “founding father of Ukraine.” He repeatedly referred to Ukraine as “the Ukrainian Reich” [“Ukroreich”].¹³² Ukrainian identity was, as he elaborated, “a sickness, a changed state of mind as among drug addicts, as among occultists with their transmethods.” In full accordance with Russian anti-Ukrainian stereotypes, even Sharlai conceded that “there are songs in the Little Russian dialect, there is a certain village culture” and that “this is understood, beautiful, and there is nothing bad about

127 Ibid.

128 Vasili Tkach, “Artem Sharlai: Ukraina – eto russkie liudi, kotorye popali v sektu” [“Artem Sharlay: Ukraine is Russian people who fell into a sect”]. *Ukraina.ru*. July 26, 2022 (updated: August 29, 2022). <https://ukraina.ru/20221009/1039512504.html>. The site was established on 18 June 2014 and belongs to the propagandistic channel Russia Today. It has often been criticized for fakes, frauds, and hate speech (*Ukraina.ru* 2022). Another ominous Russian website that focuses on events in Ukraine is *strana.ua*, which was established by the journalist Ihor Huzhva on 16 February 2016 (*Strana.ua* 2022).

129 Tkach, “Artem Sharlai.”

130 Ibid.

131 Ibid.

132 Ibid.

it”.¹³³ Sharlai was convinced that Ukrainians could “achieve cosmic greatness in the framework of the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union,” as witnessed by Serhii Koroliov, the Soviet Ukrainian rocket engineer.¹³⁴ He condemned those who had “sold” the Soviet Union “for some miserable silverlings”.¹³⁵ Daria Bolotina, the other person mentioned in the article that dealt with Markov’s views, was introduced in her own interview (for Russia’s “Federal News Agency” [“FAN”]) as a “doctor of cultural studies, historian, and journalist” who had served in “Novorossiiia’s People’s Militia” in July and August 2014. It should be added that Bolotina is from Moscow, and that her major field of interest is the White movement in the Russian Empire.¹³⁶ In her interview she declared:

Initially, Austro-Hungarian powers attempted to transform the dialect that was used among the commoners into a language at the turn of the 20th century on the contemporary territories of Western Ukraine, then another attempt was made in the period of the Civil War in Russia in 1918–1919. But no language was developed then. And in practice, the “Ukrainian national literary language” was a mixture of Polish elements and chancery vocabulary of the Russian bureaucracy.¹³⁷

Bolotina deplored “the artificial process” that had taken place on the territory of the former Ukrainian SSR during the past 30 years,” i. e., the dissemination of the Ukrainian language in Ukraine. Then she mentioned Mykola Hohol [Nikolai Gogol], who had written his works in Russian, and claimed that all elites whom the Ukrainians “regarded as their own” spoke Russian “or, if we speak about the 18th and 19th centuries, even more often European languages, primarily, French and German.” Bolotina, too, notoriously praised the very beautiful Little Russian folk dialect as “a cultural dignity,” but added that it cannot create any culture, as opposed to Russian, which had been the primary language of instruction in Soviet times and even in post-Soviet times “in independent”¹³⁸ Ukraine. Bolotina argued that in large cities, “such as Kyiv and Kharkiv, and even in Western Ukraine,” there were many people for whom Russian is the

133 Ibid.

134 Ibid.

135 Ibid.

136 Bolotina Dar’ia Ivanovna. Personal website: <http://northwestarmy.ru/bolotina-darya-ivanovna/>.

137 Ol’ga Sova, “Bolotina: otkaz ot russkogo iazyka v shkolakh mozhnet privesti k okonchatel’nomu razrusheniuiu Ukrainy” [“Bolotina: refusal of the Russian language in schools could lead to the final destruction of Ukraine”]. *Mirovoe obozrenie*. August 14, 2022. <https://tehnovar.ru/377504-Bolotina-otkaz-ot-russkogo-yazyka-v-shkolah-moghet-privesti-k-okonchatel'nomu-razrusheniyu-Ukrainy.html>.

138 In the original: “в «незалежной»,” in quotation marks, without a noun, as again used later.

language of “cultural communication, which they also speak at home, and also with persons close to them and with their friends.” The loss of Russian in schools would “lead to an escalation of the conflict and, perhaps, to an even greater, strong and obvious divide in Ukraine’s society than we see right now.” It would evoke “a loss of cultural identity and a turn toward a western one, if they, e. g., introduce English even more massively than now.” However, “as the Anglosaxons’ language is absolutely alien to Ukrainian children, this will lead to a very awkward effect.” According to Bolotina, “maybe, this is precisely what Kyiv’s western curators are striving for”: not only Ukraine’s “loss of any possible cultural identity, but also its ultimate destruction.” Interestingly, in the conclusion of this article, Russian was labeled the “great and powerful”¹³⁹ language.¹⁴⁰

During that same period, on 4 September 2022, the journalist Vasiliï Stoiakin published an article on “Ukraina.ru,” entitled “The intention of the Russian Ministry of Education to prepare a textbook of the classical Ukrainian language for the schools of the liberated territories has evoked a fervent discussion”.¹⁴¹ In reality, Stoiakin did not report on any discussions at all. Instead, he just cited Elena Panina, Director of the Institute of International Political and Economic Strategies [“RUSSTRAT”], who opined that such a textbook would be “a serious step on the path of the denazification of Ukraine,” because:

The contemporary Ukrainian language [...] ¹⁴² is maximally overloaded with words and constructions whose major task is to make it not similar to Russian [...] ¹⁴³ After many years of mocking, not the Ukrainian language, but its “Canadian dialect” has been established in Ukraine. It was authored by Banderites in Canada, where the Western Ukrainian dialect was “harmonically” filled up with rotten Anglicisms, Polonisms, Germanisms, and other “isms.” Just not Russian ones.¹⁴⁴

Stoiakin agreed with this opinion, but expressed his doubts whether this would convince “the sect of witnesses of the Austrian general staff [where the Ukrainian language was supposedly invented].” Then he cited “an appreciated Russian publicist,” whose name he did not want to mention “out of appreciation” [Stoiakin might have

139 In the original with quotation marks, without a noun.

140 Sova, “Bolotina.”

141 Vasiliï Stoiakin, “Rossiisko-ukrainskaia kolliziia. Fenomen ideologicheskogo vzaimoobogashcheniia v ramkakh odnogo naroda” [“Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The phenomenon of ideological mutual enrichment within one nation”]. *Ukraina.ru*. September 04, 2022. <https://ukraina.ru/20220903/1038410325.html>.

142 Carets in the original.

143 Carets in the original.

144 Stoiakin, “Rossiisko-ukrainskaia kolliziia.”

had in mind Sergei Mikhalkov, see above]: “in its contemporary variant the Ukrainian language is a political instrument and a form of expression of hatred” toward Russia. The author added a number of stereotypical Russian imperialist arguments regarding Russian-Ukrainian relations.

One more intriguing article that contributed to the propaganda campaign of early September 2022 was an interview with a certain Andrei Konovalov, “a philosopher from Donetsk,” who was given a voice on “Ukraina.ru,” too.¹⁴⁵ Konovalov argued that the Donbas people were “trying to correct the mistakes of the past about which Russian President Vladimir Putin has spoken. The invented state Ukraine was imposed on the people on Russian lands in the space of historical Russia.” Konovalov, too, argued that Ukraine was created “in the Austro-Hungarian Empire” and concluded that “Ukrainian identity is identical with Nazi ideology” [“ukrainstvo – eto i iest’ nazizm”]. According to his outline, the Ukrainian project was “transferred to the Germans,” and, currently, to “the Anglosaxons.” The very essence of this project was, as Konovalov explained, “being anti-Russian.” The “philosopher” declared that “Southwestern Rus’ (Karhkiiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Odesa, Kherson, Donetsk, Luhansk, and other oblasts) had been given away by Lenin due to political considerations into some kind of state called ‘Ukraine,’ which had not existed before.” Konovalov’s strange narrative was in utmost accord with Putin’s statements. But then the “philosopher” added his own thoughts regarding the recent “idea to create a new, ‘correct’ textbook of the Ukrainian language” [see below], which he labeled “awkward,” “given the fact that there had been more than enough [“predostatochno”] such textbooks in Soviet times.” Konovalov argued that in LDNR, “the concept of ‘Russian Donbass’” had been established, and that in the course of the “special operation,” the lands of historical “Novorossia” were being “liberated.” Therefore, “the Russian language, Russian culture, [which is] multinational by its nature,” had to be developed because “people have decided to do so, not the [political] power.” As a disclaimer, Konovalov stated that “those who want to be instructed in Ukrainian are provided with this opportunity” and that “nobody will break those who regard themselves as Ukrainian.” First and foremost, however, he underlined that “in the Republics of Donbass,” Russian was recognized as the state language and that this policy should serve as a model for all other territories that were being “liberated from Ukrainian Nazism.” Konovalov concluded that “from the beginnings,” Russia had been “an Empire,” and that its multinational character was confirmed in the religious and spiritual spheres by none other than Jesus Christ himself.¹⁴⁶ Konovalov’s narrative anticipated a new slogan of Russian war propaganda that became popular in late October 2022. After Putin had already announced on 30 September 2022 that western non-traditional values, in particular western gender

145 “Donetskii filosof nazval ‘stranno’ ideiu obnovit’ uchebnik ukrainskogo iazyka” [“A Donetsk philosopher called the idea of updating the Ukrainian language textbook ‘strange’”]. Ukraina.ru. September 08, 2022. <https://ukraina.ru/20220908/1038553254.html>.

146 “Donetskii filosof.”

policy, equaled to “open satanism”,¹⁴⁷ Aleksei Pavlov, assistant secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, declared on 25 October that Ukraine has “turned into a totalitarian hypersect” and that therefore, “with the continuation of the special military operation, it is becoming increasingly urgent to carry out the desatanization of Ukraine”.¹⁴⁸

5. Russian only anyway?

It is obvious that the occupation forces acted as Russifiers from the beginning. The foundation of this policy was expressed – or rather confirmed – by a draft law issued by Konstantin Zatulin from Putin’s Party “United Russia” on 28 March 2022. The parliamentarian suggested to regard as “compatriots” everyone who knew Russian and “belonged to peoples who historically live on the territory of Russia”.¹⁴⁹ Needless to say, Ukrainians and Belarusians were on that list.

Regarding concrete measures, representatives of the occupying forces repeatedly assured the public that the transition to Russian in all spheres would be smooth.

On 23 March 2022, Olha Bas, head of the administration of the chairman of LNR, announced that the role of schools and their directors had to be discussed and that, for a certain period of time, it had to be taken into consideration that children had been instructed in Ukrainian before.¹⁵⁰ She continued:

And generally, we should preserve this Ukrainian language as something authentic, but this does not entail that we should not adhere to the Constitution of LNR, because the major language and state language is Russian. Nonetheless, we have to transit smoothly. The school principals, the teaching staff,

147 Egor Levin, “Putin nazval otkrovennym satanizmom naviazvanie zapadnykh tsennostei detiam Rossii” [“Putin called the imposition of Western values on Russian children outright Satanism”]. *Zvezda.ru*. September 30, 2022. <https://tvzvezda.ru/news/20229301553-ZBgEP.html>.

148 “V rossiiskom Sovbeze uvideli ‘sotni sekt’ v Ukraine i zakhoteli ‘desatanizatsii’” [“The Russian Council of Ministers saw ‘hundreds of sects’ in Ukraine and wanted ‘de-Satanization’”]. *Ukrainskaia pravda*. October 25, 2022. <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2022/10/25/7373464/>; “Russia’s Security Council claims there are ‘hundreds of sects’ in Ukraine and demands ‘desatanisation’”. *Ukrainskaia pravda*. October 25, 2022.

149 “‘Yedyna Rosiia’ proponuie vyznaty spivvitchyzykamy vsikh, khto hovoryt rosiiskoiu” [“‘United Russia’ proposes to recognize as compatriots all who speak Russian”]. March 28, 2022. *Portal movnoi polityky*. <https://language-policy.info/2022/03/edyna-rosiya-proponuje-vyznaty-spivvitchyzykamy-vsikh-hto-hovoryt-rosijskoyu/>.

150 “LNR prorabotaet plavnyi perekhod shkol v osvobozhdennykh raionakh na russkii iazyk” [“The LPR will work on a smooth transition of schools in the liberated areas to the Russian language”]. *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*. March 23, 2022. <https://lug-info.com/news/lnr-prorabotaet-plavnyj-perehod-shkol-v-osvobozhdennykh-rajonah-na-russkij-yazyk>.

and the parents should strictly understand [“iskliuchitel’no ponimat”] how we are going to continue our work, thus we will not repel people [...].¹⁵¹

Bas emphasized that the transition to Russian education standards would be realized soon anyway.

Measures of Russification in the occupied territories knew barely any limits. As “Le Monde” reported in August 2022,

[...] between February 24 and June 18, as revealed by the Russian Ministry of Defence, more than 1.9 million Ukrainians, including more than 307,000 children [...] were forcibly transferred to the Russian Federation, without any guarantees or external checks on their living conditions and their future. This transfer through one-way evacuation corridors, to “filtration camps” and then to areas as remote as Murmansk, Kamchatka, or the North Korean border, brings back the specter of deportations carried out by Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union. [...] As the investigators appointed by the UN Human Rights Council fear, these minors are all at risk of being adopted by Russian families [...].¹⁵²

In April 2022, the Crimean leader Aksionov announced that in Crimea, “requalification centers” were being prepared for teachers from Kherson, Kharkiv, and Zaporizhzhia oblasts to acquire “Russian standards of education” and participate in Russian language courses. It raised the occupation forces’ dismay that the children from the newly occupied territories did not have a sufficient command of Russian.¹⁵³ Aksionov added that “the Russian language will be one of the major subjects in Ukrainian institutions of education,” after the “purification from the Nazi disease”.¹⁵⁴

151 Ibid.

152 “Deporting Ukrainian children and ‘Russifying’ them is jeopardizing the future of Ukraine”. *Le Monde.fr*. August 05, 2022. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2022/08/05/deporting-ukrainian-children-and-russifying-them-is-jeopardizing-the-future-of-ukraine_5992568_23.html; see also “UN’s Bachelet concerned over Ukraine orphans ‘deported’ to Russia for adoption.” *UN News*. June 15, 2022. https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/06/1120412?fbclid=IwARoYZIJ_M_cblQKeJbMppYfy8EiJ4lkcp9WvAZ_nC1boH6Y-qyp5indoBWU; Miroshnikova, “Shcho vidbuvaietsia.”

153 “Rosiiia zbyraietsia prymusovo rusyfikovuvaty deportovanykh ukrainsiv” [“Russia is going to forcibly Russify deported Ukrainians”]. *Portal movnoi polityky*. April 18, 2022. <https://language-policy.info/2022/04/rosiya-zbyrajetsya-prymusovo-rusyfikovuvaty-deportovanyh-ukrajintsiv/>.

154 “Russkii iazyk budut uchit’ v shkolakh osvobozhdennoi ot natsizma Ukrainy” [“Russian language will be taught in schools of Ukraine liberated from Nazism”]. *Vesti Sevastopol’*. April 19, 2022. <https://vesti92.ru/2022/04/19/russkiy-yazyk-budut-uchity-v-shkolah-osvoboghdenny-ot-nacizma-ukrainy.html>.

The Russian language, which is native to a considerable part of the population of Ukraine, will not disappear. It existed, is existing, and will exist. As opposed to the Ukrainian Reich [“ukroreich”].¹⁵⁵

In late May 2022, LNR’s First Deputy Minister of Education Olha Dovzhenko declared that about 300 former teachers of Ukrainian would soon be retrained at Luhansk State Pedagogical University for several months, between 6 June and 21 November 2022.¹⁵⁶ Dovzhenko added that the Ukrainian language would be taught at schools too, but declared that Ukrainian-language teaching was just “insufficient”.¹⁵⁷

At the same time, Crimean political leader Vladimir Konstantinov announced that in Crimea textbooks were collected for the recently occupied territories, and teachers were prepared to work there in order to “reconstruct what had been destroyed not in the houses and streets, but in the souls of the people”.¹⁵⁸ Retraining of teachers from the occupied territories was organized in Moscow and the Stavropol area, too. Russian Minister of Education Sergei Kravtsov announced in September 2022 that 5,000 teachers had already been requalified.¹⁵⁹ Teachers who refused to collaborate with the occupying forces were oppressed and persecuted. At the same time, Russian officials and their allies organized Russian language training camps for children from the occupied territories.¹⁶⁰

Smoothness of the transition could not always be taken for granted. A few weeks after the Russian army entered Melitopol, the occupation forces ordered the transition from Ukrainian to Russian as the language of instruction beginning with 1 April 2022.¹⁶¹ In mid-June, Russian Minister of Education Sergei Kravtsov announced that, beginning

155 Ibid.

156 “V shkolakh LNR budut izuchat’ ukrainskii iazyk fakul’tativno” [“Ukrainian language will be taught as an elective in LPR schools”]. *Vedomosti*. August 26, 2022. <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/2022/08/26/937796-shkolah-lnr-budut-izuchat-ukrainskii-yazik-fakultativno>.

157 Ibid.

158 Ibid.

159 Viktoriia Prysedska, “My pryishly vas zvilniaty.’ Yak Rosiia ‘denatsyfykuie’ shkoly na okupovanykh terytoriiakh [“We have come to set you free.’ How Russia ‘denazifies’ schools in the occupied territories”]. *BBC News Ukraina*. May 30, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-61619012>.

160 Viktoriia Prysedska, “Prosymo ne rozpovidaty pro ukrainski uroky’. Yak vchatsia na okupovanii terytorii” [“We ask you not to tell anything about Ukrainian lessons.’ About teaching in the occupied territories”]. *BBC News Ukraina*. September 25, 2022. https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-62983478?fbclid=IwARiTeNo8_vcgyaBjgXlb9pyvoFnjowgAhWwgG79mGAl3PnbIorJ6b5Wnk98; Miroshnikova, “Shcho vidbuvaietsia.”

161 “U Melitopoli okupanty khochut pochaty navchalnyi protses rosiiskoiu movoiu” [“In Melitopol, the occupiers want to start the educational process in Russian”]. *Portal movnoi polityky*. March 26, 2022. <https://language-policy.info/2022/03/u-melitopoli-okupanty-hochut-pochaty-navchalnyj-protses-rosijskoyu-movoyu/>.

with the new school year, Melitopol would already entirely work according to Russian study programs.¹⁶² He accompanied his words with the notorious narratives about common roots and alleged Ukrainian “propaganda of Nazi ideology and fascism”.¹⁶³ In early June 2022, Halyna Dalchenko, head of the Military-Civilian Administration of Melitopol, announced that all occupied territories of Zaporizhzhia oblast would switch to Russophone teaching and adopt the Russian grading system with the beginning of the new academic year too.¹⁶⁴

On 6 July 2022, Russian was declared the “official language” of the “liberated territories of Kharkiv Oblast,” while Ukrainian was to be “regarded as a regional language”.¹⁶⁵ On 31 August, RIA Novosti reported, with reference to its own correspondent in the city of Kupiansk, that the majority of pupils in the “liberated cities” of Kharkiv oblast allegedly wanted to be instructed in Russian.¹⁶⁶ The news agency cited Artem Turov, the “curator of the humanitarian mission” on that territory, who claimed that “there is a great demand not only for learning the Russian language as a subject, but generally for the opportunity to read books in Russian, for Russophone literature: be it classical, children’s literature, or fine literature”.¹⁶⁷

During that period, Ukrainian media reported that the occupation forces and their collaborators had prepared to remove from the city of Balakliia Ukrainophone books, including Ukrainian translations of Stephen King’s books, but failed to fulfil that task owing to the successful Ukrainian counterattack in Kharkiv oblast.¹⁶⁸ On the other hand, Russian media reported that in the framework of the initiative “Books for Donbas”, Putin’s party “United Russia” had organized the transfer of about 40,000

162 “S 1 sentiabria shkoly Melitopolia budut rabotat’ po rossiiskim standartam, – Minprosveshcheniia RF” [“From September 1, Melitopol schools will operate according to Russian standards, – Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation”]. Fokus. June 13, 2022. <https://focus.ua/ukraine/518767-s-1-sentyabrya-shkoly-melitopolya-budut-rabotat-po-rossiiskim-standartam-minprosveshcheniya-rf>.

163 Ibid.

164 Ar’e Tsvai, “Zaporozh’e perekhodit na russkii iazyk” [“Zaporozhye switches to Russian language”]. DEITA. June 08, 2022. <https://deita.ru/article/517688>.

165 “Russkii iazyk stal ofitsial’nym dlia dokumentov na osvobozhdennoi territorii Khar’kovskoi oblasti” [“Russian became the official language for documents in the liberated territory of the Kharkov region”]. Izvestiia. July 6, 2022. <https://iz.ru/1360718/2022-07-06/russkii-iazyk-stal-ofitsialnym-dlia-dokumentov-na-osvobozhdennoi-territorii-kharkovskoi-oblasti>.

166 “Bol’shinstvo shkol’nikov v osvobozhdennykh gorodakh Khar’kovskoj oblasti khotiat učit’sia na russkom iazyke” [“Most schoolchildren in the liberated cities of the Kharkov region want to study in Russian”]. LIFE. August 31, 2022. <https://life.ru/p/1520201>.

167 Ibid.

168 “Zakhvatchiki sobiralis’ vyvezti iz Balaklei ukrainskie knigi – Tkachenko” [“The invaders were going to take Ukrainian books out of Balakleya – Tkachenko”]. Ukrinform. September 20, 2022. <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-regions/3575819-zagarniki-zbiralisa-vivezti-z-balaklii-ukrainski-knizki-tkachenko.html>.

Russophone books to the occupied territories.¹⁶⁹ Party member Andrei Turchak explained that this was necessary because in Ukrainian textbooks “during all our common history” had been falsified, including the “history of the Great Fatherland War”.¹⁷⁰ Allegedly, these textbooks had “praised traitors such as Mazepa or the Nazis Bandera and Shukhevych.” Allegedly, “a huge number” of those books had been published in Norway, Sweden, and Canada, while Turchak observed a “very acute shortage even of classical works of Russian authors and children’s literature”.¹⁷¹

Russian Minister of Education Kravtsov joined in and declared that teachers had frequently mentioned their need for Russian books during his meetings in Melitopol, Berdiansk, and Donetsk:

The children want to learn the Russian language. They want to read the works of our great authors and poets. This is very important. [...] We have already retrained several thousands of teachers. In Rostov a special center had been created for the coordination of this work, and another center has appeared in “Artek” [a center for children, M. M.] in Crimea.¹⁷²

Anna Kuznetsova, another member of “United Russia” who was in charge of “humanitarian cooperation,” added that her staff planned to organize trips for children “from DNR, LNR, and the liberated territories” to Russia, “so that they can see with their own eyes the places of historical events and reestablish in their minds that memory that had been taken from them in such a perfidious way.” Mr. Turchak concluded the meeting with the promise that “for those guys [“rebiata”] who want to learn Ukrainian that opportunity will be provided”.¹⁷³ He compared the situation of the occupied territories to that of the national republics in the Russian Federation.¹⁷⁴

In late August 2022, on the eve of the beginning of the new academic year, LNR’s Minister of Education and Science Ivan Kusov declared that “every school [in LNR] can go for a great number of additional hours if there is a need for learning [Ukrainian], if there is a desire among parents and children to learn the Ukrainian language”.¹⁷⁵ He added that the schools in the “liberated territories” would be provided with textbooks

169 “Yedyna Rosiia’ proponuie.”

170 Ibid.

171 Ibid.

172 Ibid.

173 Ibid.

174 Andrei Turchak, “Shkol’nikam na Donbasse i v osvobozhdennykh territoriakh budet predostavlena vozmozhnost’ izuchat’ ukrainskii iazyk” [“Schoolchildren in the Donbass and liberated territories will be given the opportunity to study the Ukrainian language”]. *Edinaia Rossiia*. June 28, 2022. <https://er.ru/activity/news/andrej-turchak-shkolnikam-na-donbasse-i-v-osvobozhdyonnyh-territoriyah-budet-predostavlena-vozmozhnost-izuchat-ukrainskij-yazyk>.

175 “V shkolakh LNR.”

from those territories of the Russian Federation that had taken patronage for the occupied territories and that 106 teachers had come to LNR from Russia.¹⁷⁶

Tetiana Kuzmych, who had promised that Ukrainian would remain in the study programs of Kherson, specified that the language of instruction in Kherson's schools would be Russian and that Ukrainian would remain in the schools as a separate subject, either as a "special course," or as a course of the "native language," apart from the general study program, on parents' demand.¹⁷⁷ Back in 2020, a Ukrainian language teacher from Luhansk oblast had described what the principle of "lessons of the Ukrainian language on parents' demand" (usually just one hour a week) could actually mean: she had witnessed that as many as 100% of the parents had to agree to additional classes, which usually did not happen, as many feared persecution.¹⁷⁸

A few days after the beginning of the new academic year 2022/23, Russian journalists reported with enthusiasm that in Luhansk and Donetsk "People's Republics" and in the "liberated territories," teachers "read the poems of Russian classics with pleasure and without fear again" and "gradually, the schools will entirely switch to Russian study standards".¹⁷⁹ In all schools of the occupied territories, the academic year was opened with the lesson "My history," which was to "explain to the children that their region has always been inseparably connected with Russia".¹⁸⁰

Between 23 and 27 September 2022, the Russian occupation forces finally staged their long-planned pseudo-referenda in the occupied territories.

On the eve of these events, on 9 September 2022, Serhii Moroz, the Executive Director of the Press Service of the Military-Civilian Administration of Kherson oblast, advertised the referenda, emphasizing that "Russia is here forever".¹⁸¹ Moroz declared that "many schools have opened" although "a part of the people has left Kherson and Kherson oblast," including, "of course, children and teachers." When asked whether the Ukrainian language was being taught in Kherson and the oblast, Moroz replied:

176 "V shkolakh LNR."

177 Marta Levi, "Obuchenie v shkolakh osvobodzhennykh territorii Khersonskoi oblasti budet na russkom iazyke" ["Education in schools in the liberated territory of the Kherson region will be in Russian"]. Sotsial'nye novosti. August 23, 2022. <https://www.socialinform.ru/obuchenie-v-shkolah-osvobodzhennykh-territorij-hersonskoj-oblasti-budet-na-russkom-azyke/>.

178 "Kak eto – prepodavat' ukrainskii v okkupatsii? Monolog uchitel'nitsy s Donbassa" ["How is Ukrainian taught in the occupation?" A Monologue by a teacher from Donbass]. CVOI.CITY. September 16, 2020. <https://svoi.city/articles/97801/kak-eto-prepodavat-ukrainskij-v-okkupatsii-na-donbasse>.

179 Pavel Kutarenko and Egor Levin, "Vozvrashchenie russkogo mira: kak nachali novyi uchebnyi god shkoly LDNR i osvobodzhennykh territorii" ["The return of the Russian world: how schools in the LDPR and liberated territories began the new academic year"]. Zvezda.ru. September 05, 2022. <https://tvzvezda.ru/news/2022941717-qns96.html>.

180 Ibid.

181 Tat'iana Chugaenko, "Sergei Moroz o tom, pochemu v Khersone nikogo ne presleduiut za ukrainskii iazyk" ["Sergei Moroz about why no one is persecuted for speaking Ukrainian in Kherson"]. Ukraina.ru. September 09, 2022. <https://ukraina.ru/20220909/1038528368.html>.

Yes, the Ukrainian language has remained in the schools. We partially speak Ukrainian here anyway, and nobody persecutes anyone for the Ukrainian language. Generally, instruction will take place in Russian, all subjects will be taught in Russian, but the Ukrainian language is part of the study program too. Nobody oppresses anyone. We want to act like our neighbors, the Crimeans. They, in general, speak three languages: Russian, Ukrainian, and Tatar. Therefore, the Ukrainian language is not suppressed by us by any means.¹⁸²

For the pseudo-referenda in both Kherson and Zaporizhzhia oblasts, the occupation forces prepared bilingual bulletins, as opposed to the bulletins in DNR and LNR, which were written just in Russian.¹⁸³

On 28 September 2022, one day after the pseudo-referenda, Sergei Eliseiev, “Chair of the Government of Kherson Oblast,” declared that “undoubtedly, the Ukrainian language will be used on a par with Russian in Kherson oblast.”¹⁸⁴

A few days later, on 2 October 2022, after the Russian annexion of the occupied territories, the “Ambassador” of LNR in Russia Rodion Myroshnyk assured those who did not agree with his (staged) proposal that Ukrainian should be a “second state language in LNR” that the inhabitants of LNR would cease to use Ukrainian anyway, as in Crimea.¹⁸⁵ According to him, everything depended “on further decisions. Right now, only Russian is a state language with us.”¹⁸⁶ Two days later Russia’s Deputy Minister of the Interior Evgenii Ivanov confirmed that the status of Russian as a state language is guaranteed based on the treaties between Russia and the occupied territories, but he added that “the new subjects of the Russian Federation can determine themselves which language they would teach.”¹⁸⁷

182 Chugaenko, “Sergei Moroz.”

183 “Biulleten’ na referendum na Khersonshchine sostaviat na dvukh iazykakh” [“The ballot for the referendum in the Kherson region will be in two languages”]. REN TV. September 21, 2022. <https://ren.tv/news/v-mire/1026371-biulleten-na-referendume-v-khersonshchine-sostaviat-na-russkom-i-ukrainskom>. See photographs of the bulletins in *Referendумы 2022*.

184 “Vlasti Khersonskoi oblasti: ukrainskii iazyk budet ispol’zovat’sia naravne s russkim” [“Authorities of the Kherson region: the Ukrainian language will be used on an equal basis with Russian”]. RIA novosti. September 28, 2022. <https://ria.ru/20220928/yazyk-1820197254.html>.

185 “Miroshnik schitaet, chto ukrainskii iazyk ischeznet estestvennym obrazom” [“Miroshnik believes that the Ukrainian language will disappear naturally”]. Smotrim. October 02, 2022. <https://smotrim.ru/article/2969881>.

186 Ibid.

187 “MID: v novykh regionakh Rossii ne zapretiat izuchat’ ukrainskii iazyk” [“Ministry of Foreign Affairs: in new regions of Russia it will not be prohibited to study the Ukrainian language”]. REN TV. October 04, 2022. <https://ren.tv/news/v-rossii/1031366-mid-v-novykh-regionakh-rossii-ne-zapretiat-izuchat-ukrainskii-iazyk>.

As late as 3 October 2022, the Russian press did not cease to continue its notorious double-bind strategy. As usually, one press release was reported on with two headlines: “Russian will become the state language on the territory of Zaporizhzhia oblast”¹⁸⁸ and “In Zaporizhzhia there is a desire to retain the Ukrainian language”.¹⁸⁹ The genuine news was that Volodymyr Rohov, head of the movement “We are together with Russia,” declared in an interview with TASS that Russian will become the state language on the territory of Zaporizhzhia oblast, but added that Ukrainian could remain an official language, “as in Crimea”.¹⁹⁰ Rohov also promised that whoever wanted to be instructed in Ukrainian would have this opportunity, but he added: “All of us perfectly know that precisely Russian unites the people” [“imenno russkii iazyk – obiediniaushchii”].¹⁹¹

Immediately after Rohov’s announcement, Andrei Klishas, the Plenipotentiary of the Federation Council in the Constitutional Court of Russia and the General Prosecutor’s office, raised his voice and clarified that “nobody will ban the Ukrainian language in Zaporizhzhia oblast, but it will not have an official status”.¹⁹² He declared:

The representative of the local administration will soon understand that Ukrainian will not have any official status and that only the republics of the Russian Federation have the right to establish a state language.¹⁹³

6. Language regulations in the annexation treaties of 30 September 2022

On 3 October, the treaties that regulated the Russian annexation of the occupied territories were finally published. RIA Novosti announced that by 1 January 2026, all occupied territories were to be fully integrated into the Russian Federation.¹⁹⁴

188 “Russkii iazyk na territorii Zaporozhskoi oblasti stanet gosudarstvennym” [“The Russian language in the Zaporozhye region will become the state language”]. RIA novosti. October 03 2022. <https://zp-news.ru/society/2022/10/03/42213.html>.

189 “V Zaporozh’e zakhotei ostavit’ ukrainskii iazyk” [“In Zaporozhye they wanted to leave the Ukrainian language”]. Lenta.ru. October 03, 2022. <https://lenta.ru/news/2022/10/03/mova/>.

190 Ibid.

191 Ibid.

192 “V Sovfede zaiavili, chto ukrainskii iazyk na Zaporozh’e ne budet imet’ status gosudarstvennogo” [“The Federation Council stated that the Ukrainian language in Zaporozhye will not have state status”]. TASS. October 03, 2022. https://tass.ru/politika/15937079?utm_source=google.com&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.com&utm_referrer=google.com.

193 “Klishas: ukrainskii iazyk v Zaporozh’e ne budet imet’ status gosudarstvennogo” [“Klishas: Ukrainian language in Zaporozhye will not have state status”]. Vedomosti. October 03, 2022. <https://www.vedomosti.ru/society/news/2022/10/03/943577-klishas-ukrainskii-yazyk-v-zaporozhe-ne-budet>.

194 “Opublikovany dogovory s novymi regionami o priniatii v sostav Rossii” [“Agreements with new regions on admission to Russia have been published”]. RIA novosti. October 03, 2022. <https://ria.ru/20221003/dogovory-1821085738.html>.

All four treaties mentioned the language issue in the preamble and in Article 3. Notably, all relevant wordings were copied from the Constitution of the Russian Federation.

The preambles mentioned the “respect and protection of the dignity, rights, and freedoms of the person, including [...] the right to use one’s native language and to a free choice of the language of communication, upbringing, education and creative work”.¹⁹⁵ This was an adapted quote from Article 26, paragraph 2, of the Russian Constitution, which states: “Everyone shall have the right to use his or her native language, to a free choice of the language of communication, upbringing, education and creative work”.¹⁹⁶

Article 3 of all the four treaties reiterated Article 68 of the Russian Constitution, but the treaties with DNR and LNR, on the one hand, substantially differed from those of the treaties with the territories of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, on the other. For the latter, Article 3 just said:

3. The Russian Federation shall guarantee to all peoples living on the territory of Zaporizhzhia [Kherson, respectively] oblast the right to preserve their native language and to create conditions for its study and development.¹⁹⁷

This was an adapted quote from Article 68, paragraph 3, of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, which states:

195 See, e. g., *Dogovor mezhdru Rossiiskoi Federatsiei i Zaporozhskoi oblast’iu o priniatii v Rossiiskuiu Federatsiiu Zaporozhskoi oblasti i obrazovanii v sostave Rossiiskoi Federatsii novogo sub’ekta* (Moskva, 30 sentiabria 2022 g.) [Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Zaporozhye region on the admission of the Zaporozhye region to the Russian Federation and the formation of a new entity within the Russian Federation (Moscow, September 30, 2022)]. *Garant.ru*. October 03, 2022. <https://www.garant.ru/hotlaw/federal/1569402/>.

196 The Constitution of the Russian Federation. <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-01.htm>.

197 *Dogovor mezhdru Rossiiskoi Federatsiei i Zaporozhskoi oblast’iu*; see also *Dogovor mezhdru Rossiiskoi Federatsiei i Khersonskoi oblast’iu o priniatii v Rossiiskuiu Federatsiiu Khersonskoi oblasti i obrazovanii v sostave Rossiiskoi Federatsii novogo sub’ekta ot 30 sentiabria 2022 goda* (ratifitsirovan Federal’nym zakonom ot 4 oktiabria 2022 goda № 375-FZ, vstupil v silu 5 oktiabria 2022 goda, pis’mo MID Rossii ot 05.10.2022 № 19696/dp) [Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Kherson region on the admission of the Kherson region to the Russian Federation and the formation of a new entity within the Russian Federation dated September 30, 2022 (ratified by Federal Law No. 375-FZ of October 4, 2022, entered into force on October 5, 2022, letter Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia dated October 5, 2022 No. 19696/dp)]. *Pravo.gov.ru*. October 03, 2022. <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202210030003>.

68.3. The Russian Federation shall guarantee to all of its peoples the right to preserve their native language and to create conditions for its study and development.¹⁹⁸

The paragraph was included into the treaties with DNR and LNR as paragraph 2 of Article 3 too, but in those two documents it was preceded by paragraph 1 (of Article 3), which stated:

3.1. The Russian language shall be the state language of Luhansk [Donetsk] People's Republic.

Article 68, paragraph 2, of the Russian Constitution, states:

68.1. The Russian language shall be a state language on the whole territory of the Russian Federation.¹⁹⁹

No state language was thus explicitly established for Kherson and Zaporizhzhia oblasts. As expected, all four treaties were issued in Russian only, as indicated in Article 9 of all documents. It was thus obvious that there would be no room for Ukrainian in the occupied territories anyway.

Finally, it deserves to be mentioned that all preambles of the annexation treaties referred the necessity to “provide the defense of historical truth and honor the heroism of the defenders of the common Fatherland,” which was a direct quote from the recent amendments to the Russian Constitution of 2020 (for a criticism of the amendments see Pistan 2022). In particular, Article 67.1, paragraph 3 of the constitution states that “the Russian Federation honors the memory of the defenders of the Fatherland and ensures the defense of historical truth. Diminishing the significance of the heroism of the people in defending the Fatherland shall not be permitted”.²⁰⁰ Given this context, where would Ukrainian identity or the Ukrainian language find a place?²⁰¹

7. Conclusion and outlook

Russian and Russian-led language policy in the temporarily occupied territories can be characterized as a continuing realization of double-bind communication that

¹⁹⁸ The Constitution of the Russian Federation.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Carna Pistan, “Alarming Alterations: How Memory Politics Turned the Russian Constitution into a War Weapon”. PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 798. September 26, 2022. <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/alarming-alterations-how-memory-politics-turned-the-russian-constitution-into-a-war-weapon/>.

²⁰¹ Interestingly, when Carna Pistan published her paper on the amendments in September 2022 she correctly predicted that “With the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the important role that history and memory play in it, those provisions acquire new significance and require deeper explanation” (Ibid.). At that point, she could not know yet that the provisions would even play a crucial role in the annexion treaties.

accompanies acts of aggression against Ukrainian identity and the Ukrainian language in particular. Alleged “appreciation” for the Ukrainian language, repeated announcements that “nobody bans the Ukrainian language” and even legislative initiatives that temporarily retained the status of Ukrainian as one of the “state languages” in some of the occupied territories have served as a background of continuous rhetorical campaigns against the “artificial Ukrainian language” and “Ukrainian Nazi identity” as well as the immediate ban of the Ukrainian language in the public sphere. Particularly intriguing are recent Russian initiatives aiming at the standardization of something the propaganda labels “classical Ukrainian.”

Since 24 February 2022, Ukrainian activists have been protesting the policy of the occupying forces in various ways. One of their most interesting initiatives was the use of the Ukrainian letter “І” [ii] as a symbol of Ukrainian resistance against the Russian invaders (who, in their turn, used the letters “Z,” “V,” and occasionally “O” as symbols of their occupying forces).²⁰² The activists paint the letter on benches, sidewalks, buildings, and flyers such as those who protested the pseudo-referenda.²⁰³

Some parents in the occupied territories, especially in Kherson and Melitopol, continue to use the opportunities of online teaching as provided by teachers from Ukraine, those who had fled from the occupied territories. This online teaching takes place in secret and against all odds: The Internet is often weak, and Ukrainian providers are blocked.²⁰⁴ Thousands of school buildings have been damaged or ruined in the course of the war, and some have been used by the Russian army. In the zones of active warfare, schools often do not work at all. In some of the occupied territories, the school year 2021/22 was finished several weeks earlier due to warfare activities.²⁰⁵ In September 2022, every seventh pupil of Ukraine (about 640,000 children) was a refugee in western countries, first and foremost in the European Union. Many of them continued to attend their schools online from abroad.²⁰⁶

202 Rostyslav Khotyn, “Yi, Yi, Yi... Ukrainske pidpillia literoiu ‘Yi’ boretsia z Rosiieiu na okupovanykh terytoriiakh” [“Yi, Yi, Yi... The Ukrainian underground fights with Russia on the occupied territories with the letter ‘Yi’”]. Radio Svoboda. October 15, 2022. https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/ukrayina-rosiya-viyna-okupatsiya-mova-litera-yi/32083789.html?fbclid=IwAR2Nhmeq23yTQiOCEXJtVDP68CCS8UeyUYEE-UjSyxfpFXTimB9nyO_IQBc.

203 Ibid.

204 Pryedska, “My pryishly vas zvilniaty”; Miroshnikova, “Shcho vidbuvaetsia”. See also Keilin Devlin and Mariia Koreniuk, “Vony promyvaiut mozok nashym ditiam’. Yak na okupovanykh terytoriiakh vykladatymut ‘russkyi myr’” [“They brainwash our children. How the ‘Russian peace’ will be declared in the occupied territories”]. BBC News Ukraina. August 23, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-62639820>.

205 Miroshnikova, “Shcho vidbuvaetsia.”

206 Sviatoslav Khomenko and Diana Kuryshko, “Boius novu vchytelku bilshe za rakety’. 1 veresnia u chasy viiny [“I’m afraid the new reader is more worried about the rockets. 1st September during the war”]. BBC News Ukraina. September 01, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-62750028>.

Ukrainian civic organizations have continued to collect evidence concerning Russian and Russian-led language policy in the temporarily occupied territories. On 6 July 2022, the Ukrainian World Congress published a survey of those Russian measures that can be labelled “linguicide”.²⁰⁷ The report was based on numerous eyewitness accounts about terror and oppression against speakers of Ukrainian from the occupied territories collected, inter alia, via telephone hotline. It mentioned the destruction of Ukrainian media, the kidnapping and killing of Ukrainian journalists, the pressure on Ukrainian teachers to collaborate with the occupation forces, the destruction of all kinds of Ukrainian books and the total Russification of the public sphere.²⁰⁸ In September 2022, Taras Kremin, Ukraine’s Commissioner for the Protection of the State Language, announced that the collected materials regarding the oppression of the Ukrainian language in the temporarily occupied territories would be added to the files of Ukraine’s case vs. the Russian Federation at the European Court of Human Rights.²⁰⁹ Meanwhile, plenty of evidence suggests that an increasing number of Ukrainians switch to Ukrainian as their language of personal communication in response to the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the Ukrainian language.

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207 “Rosiiska polityka linhvotsydu na okupovanykh terytoriiakh Ukrainy” [“Russian policy of linguistic in the occupied territories of Ukraine”]. Ukrainian World Congress. July 06, 2022. <https://www.ukrainianworldcongress.org/ua/rosijska-politika-lingvociduna-okupovanih-teritoriyah-ukra%0d1%09ni/?fbclid=IwARooPYbiKVsu2P6rtzoyn59hW0e8DVxjHesds94RCJRglRCwvZaVGHkkazo>.

208 Ibid.

209 “Movni zlochyny zaharbnikiv budut dolucheni do spravy Ukrainy proty rosii v YeSPL – Kremin” [“The crimes of the invaders will be added to the case of Ukraine against Russia in the ESPL – Kremin”]. Ukrinform. September 09, 2022. <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3567900-movni-zlocini-zaharbnikiv-budut-dolucheni-do-spravi-ukraini-proti-rosii-v-espl-kremin.html>.

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