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The Politics of Memory in Ukraine in 2014: Removal of the Soviet Cultural Legacy and Euromaidan Commemorations

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Abstract

The year 2014 brought great social and cultural disruptions to Ukraine. Euromaidan, the annexation of Crimea, and war in the Donbas led to significant social and political changes, with crucial transformations in Ukrainian historical memory playing an important role in them. Public appeals to history accompanied most political processes in 2014 and were always used for self-legitimization by both sides of the conflict. Changes in attitude towards the Soviet cultural and historical legacy and the formation of a new memory about Euromaidan (“the invention of tradition”) might be considered as a major shift in this field. The aim of this article is to observe and analyze major trends of the politics of memory in Ukraine in 2014 and early 2015.

Key Words: Politics of memory, historical memory, cultural legacy, de-Sovietization, commemorations.



Introduction

On April 9, 2015, the Ukrainian parliament adopted the Law “On Condemnation of the Communist and National-Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes in Ukraine and Prohibition of Their Propaganda and Symbols.” The law prohibited the use of Soviet symbols, monuments and street names, and made denial of the criminal nature of the Soviet and Nazi regimes a crime. The law immediately sparked a heated public debate among Ukrainian and international scholars and public figures.

The Communist Party of Ukraine received 13% of the vote in the parliamentary election of 2012. At that time, passage of anti-Communist laws was not seen as a near-future possibility. To understand the reasons behind such rapid shifts in the politics of memory about the Soviet past, we need to review transformations within Ukrainian society’s historical memory and state practices of the politics of memory in Ukraine after Euromaidan.

Besides, the formation of a new memory about Euromaidan exerted a powerful influence on Ukrainian cultural and political life in 2014 (a case of “the invention of tradition” as defined by Eric Hobsbawm). This article is devoted to outlining the interactions between these two major trends in the politics of memory in 2014.

My major argument is as follows: cultural and political changes brought to Ukrainian society by Euromaidan (including the emergence of Euromaidan commemorations) acted as

decisive factors in changing the attitude towards the Soviet cultural legacy's objects in Ukraine. I use the term "politics of memory" in this article to describe actions of any social actor aimed at the creation or preservation of some model of memory about the past. "The Soviet cultural legacy" is understood in my article as an umbrella term covering both material remains (monuments, street names) and cultural practices of the Soviet regime (celebrations, traditions).

Politics of Memory in Ukraine Before 2014

An understanding of the peculiarities of recent changes in the use of history in the Ukrainian public sphere requires a brief description of the specific features of the politics of memory and historical memory in modern Ukraine.

The depiction of two models (cultures) of historical memory in Ukraine is a starting point for many studies of Ukrainian collective memory. Culturologist Stefan Troebst labeled these models "post-communist" and "national-liberal" ones, historian Ihor Symonenko called them "national-democratic" and "postcolonial-Soviet," historian Georgiy Kasianov identified "national(ist)" and "Soviet-nostalgic" ones (he also added a third model, which he saw as mixed and ambivalent and sharing some features of both primary models).¹ A detailed analysis of the characteristics of each of these memory cultures is not an objective of this paper. I limit myself to emphasizing that the core difference between them is perception of Soviet history and cultural legacy. Thus, the national model is characterized by distancing from the Soviet legacy, negative marking of the Soviet past, and the idea of building a Ukrainian identity as opposite to the Soviet one. The post-Soviet (Soviet-nostalgic) model's defining features include full or partial recognition of the Soviet cultural legacy and less critical perception of the Soviet past.

The heterogeneity of these memory cultures is strengthened by the fact, that since Ukraine gained independence, no consistent strategy of dealing with the Soviet past has been implemented. The defeat of the national-democratic opposition in the first Ukrainian presidential election on December 1, 1991 and the victory of "national-communist" candidate Leonid Kravchuk showed significant difficulties met by the anti-Soviet project in Ukraine and the power elites' resistance to change. This fact reflected the cultural realities of the country.

From then until 2004, the political use of history in Ukraine was limited. Ukrainian historian Andriy Portnov sees situational dependence and omni-directionality as key features of politics of memory in that time.² Yaroslav Hrytsak defines consciously practiced ambivalence as a key feature of Leonid Kuchma's memory policy. He defines ambivalence in this case as

1 Stefan Troebst, "Kakoi takoi kover? Kultura pamiaty v postkommunisticheskikh obschestvakh Vostochnoi Evropy [What a Carpet? The Culture of Memory in Post-Communist Societies of Eastern Europe]," *Ab Imperio* 4 (2004): 41–77; Ihor Symonenko, "Osoblyvosti struktury istorychnoi pamiaty Ukrainskoho narodu ta shliakhy formuvannia natsionalnoho istorychnoho naratyvu [Peculiarities of the Structure of Historical Memory of the Ukrainian People and Ways of Creating a National Historical Narrative]," *Stratehichni priorityty* 1 (2009): 51–62; Georgiy Kasianov, "How a War for the Past Becomes a War in the Present," *Krytyka* 16 (2014): 150–51.

2 Andriy Portnov, "Uprazhneniia s istoriei po-ukrainski (Zametki ob obschestvennykh izmereniakh funktsionirovaniia istorii v postsovetskoii Ukrainie) [Exercises with History in the Ukrainian Style

a combination of the national and Soviet paradigms and avoidance of figures and events that look likely to reignite political antagonisms.³

Viktor Yushchenko's victory in the presidential election of 2005 significantly changed the situation. Memory policy became a cornerstone of his cultural policy. Yushchenko was the only Ukrainian president to have a consistent memory policy of his own that included nationalization of history, creation of a culturally homogeneous nation, and overcoming of the Soviet legacy.⁴ Such policy was interpreted by him in the terms of "restoring historical justice" and "promoting national revival," so it was an end in itself. Yushchenko's administration was a time of the greatest intensification of historical discussions in the political sphere in the entire independence period.

However, many of the president's projects having to do with the politics of memory (in particular, recognition of the man-made famine of 1933 — the Holodomor as a genocide against the Ukrainian people and exoneration of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, UPA) provoked a number of social conflicts and led to societal polarization, transferring many historical subjects to the political realm. The opposition, including Communists and members of the Party of Regions, also started using and abusing history in a political struggle. They referred to the Soviet legacy and glorified some pages of Soviet history (mostly the concept of the Great Victory in World War II).

The victory of Viktor Yanukovich, leader of the Party of Regions, in the presidential race of 2010 led to the end of the intensification of the state-led memory policy and reduced the number of history-related controversies in the public sphere in Ukraine. The politics of memory was low on President Yanukovich's and his party's list of priorities. However, pro-government politicians continued using history for political purposes from time to time. For example, a 2011 vote in the Ukrainian parliament allowed public use of the Red Flag as a symbol of the Great Victory on May 9, which provoked violent clashes between supporters and opponents of this idea.

Politics of Memory in Ukraine After Euromaidan: The Soviet Legacy

Polish sociologist Barbara Szacka identifies legitimization of the current sociopolitical order as one of two key functions of collective memory.⁵ Obviously, social and political shifts in Ukraine after Euromaidan impacted on collective memory.

The massive public protests that occurred in Ukraine between December 2013 and February 2014 and went down in history as Euromaidan and the Revolution of Dignity fundamentally changed the political and cultural landscape of Ukrainian society. One of these changes was a rethinking of the place of the Soviet cultural legacy in Ukraine. It started with wide-spread

(Notes on Public Aspects of History's Functioning in Post-Soviet Ukraine)]," *Ab Imperio* 3 (2007): 93–138.

3 Yaroslav Hrytsak, "Istoriia i pamiat: Amnezia, Ambivalentnist, Aktyvizatsiia [History and Memory. Amnesia, Ambivalence, Activization]," in *Ukraina. Protsesy natsiietvorennia*, ed. A. Kapeller (Kyiv: K.I.S., 2011), 370.

4 Hrytsak, "Istoriia i pamiat," 375.

5 Barbara Szacka, *Mynule, pamiat, mit [Past, Memory, Myth]* (Chernivtsi: Knyhy — XXI, 2011), 49–55.

demolition of Lenin monuments in Ukraine, called “*Leninopad*” (Lenin-fall). The first of them was demolished in Kyiv during a People’s *viche* (a weekly mass protest on Maidan). The event attracted much publicity and was widely covered in Ukrainian and international mass media. Comparisons of the monument’s demolition with the destruction of the Berlin Wall became widespread.

Some of President Yanukovich’s allies (including the Communist Party of Ukraine, which was a member of the pro-government coalition), and to some extent the president himself, were perceived as “pro-Soviet” politicians. On the contrary, the Euromaidan protesters used pro-national and pro-European slogans. This explains why the demolition of the Lenin monument, a symbol of the Soviet past, became part of the mass protests against the Yanukovich regime.

The demolition of the Lenin monument became a significant mobilization resource for the protest movement and quickly spread to other Ukrainian cities. According to information of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance, 504 monuments of Lenin fell during 2014.⁶ For many people, the demolition of the Lenin monument in their city was a sign of solidarity with Euromaidan. Thus, the largest number of demolitions happened on February 21 (26 monuments) and February 22 (49 monuments), following the most violent confrontations of Euromaidan. At the end of 2014, the city of Zaporizhia was the only Ukrainian-controlled regional capital to have a monument to Lenin still standing.

Around 5,500 monuments to Lenin were located in Ukraine at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁷ A monument to Lenin in the central square of the town or village was actually a necessary element of Soviet urban space. In modern Ukraine, they become a striking example of the “invisible monuments” concept, developed by Robert Musil. Having lost their symbolic meaning and the majority of commemorations centered on them, they gradually turned into a routine and invisible part of urban space. Local authorities often did not have enough money or political will to demolish Lenin monuments and reconstruct their central squares. In addition, attention to Soviet monuments became part of the political activities of the Communist Party of Ukraine, which was represented in local governments in many regions of Ukraine. According to Communist MP Yevhen Tsarkov, his party restored and installed 80 monuments to Lenin in Ukraine.⁸

A year before the “Lenin-fall,” the right-wing Svoboda Party, which held a few seats in the Verkhovna Rada at the time, tried to launch a wave of demolition of Lenin monuments in Ukraine. Svoboda MP Ihor Miroshnychenko was personally involved in the demolition of the Lenin monument in Okhtryka (Sumy region) on February 15, 2013, which triggered clashes with local Communists and received considerable media attention. However, their actions received

6 “Za rik v Ukraini znesly pivtysiachi pamiatnykiv Leninu [Five Hundred Lenin Monuments Were Demolished in Ukraine Last Year],” *Official website of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance*, accessed November 8, 2015, <http://www.memory.gov.ua/news/za-rik-v-ukraini-znesli-pivtisyachi-pam-yatnykiv-leninu>.

7 “Za rik v Ukraini.”

8 “V Ukraini vidnovleno 80 pamiatnykiv Leninu — nardep-komunist [80 Lenin Monuments Have Been Restored in Ukraine, a Communist MP Reports],” *Istorychna pravda*, accessed November 3, 2015, <http://www.istpravda.com.ua/short/2011/11/7/61857/>.

limited support among Ukrainian society and faced growing resistance, led by the Communist Party of Ukraine and some pro-government politicians. For example, the eccentric mayor of Kharkiv (where the largest statue of Lenin in Ukraine was located), Hennadii Kernes, threatened Ihor Miroshnychenko during a live broadcast of a TV program: “If you try to damage it (the Lenin monument.— Andriy Liubarets), I will break your hands and legs.”⁹ However, about a year after, on September 28, 2014, the monument to Lenin in Kharkiv was demolished at a pro-Ukrainian rally, and the mayor did nothing to prevent it.

The demolishing of Soviet-era monuments wasn't restricted only to Lenin monuments. During 2014, many Ukrainian cities saw monuments to such historical figures as Karl Marx, Mikhail Frunze, Sergei Kirov, Dmitry Manuilsky and others demolished or damaged. In some cases, demolitions of Soviet-era monuments were not perceived as acts of vandalism by their participants, but rather intended to encourage local authorities to change the urban landscape. On February 9, 2015, the eve of the anniversary of the Battle of Kruty, civic activists demolished two monuments to Soviet leaders in the Alley of Heroes in Chernihiv and transported them to the Chernihiv Historical Museum. Activists explained their actions as a response to the reluctance of the City Council to demolish monuments to figures who they blamed for the “Bolshevik occupation of Ukraine.”¹⁰

The “Lenin-fall” was interpreted mostly as an expression of public demand for memory policy actions aimed at overcoming the Communist past and erasing Soviet cultural legacy objects from the Ukrainian cultural landscape. Thus, it shaped the cultural policy of the new Ukrainian government that came to power after Euromaidan and created a trend for de-Sovietization in Ukrainian politics.

Most power-holders pragmatically supported the demolition of Soviet monuments. Kharkiv authorities tried to get ahead of the curve during the demolition of the Lenin monument there. Half an hour before the scheduled people-led demolition of the monument, head of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration Ihor Baluta issued an order which instructed the city to dismantle the monument. The Minister of the Interior of Ukraine, Arsen Avakov, stated that the police would neither interfere nor launch any criminal proceedings into it.¹¹ The Minister of Culture, Viacheslav Kyrylenko, said that his department would encourage public initiatives aimed at the demolition of Soviet-era monuments. The President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, said after the demolition of the Lenin monument in Kharkiv that it was going to happen sooner or later and linked it with the significant Ukrainian cultural legacy of the city.¹²

9 “Svobodovtsu uhrozhaiut perelomat ruki i nogi [Svoboda Member Threatened With Having His Arms and Legs Broken],” *Youtube*, accessed November 7, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vos6kJACfzE>.

10 “V Chernihovi na Alei Heroiv znesly dva pamiatnyky komunistychnym diiacham (video, foto) [Two Monuments to Communist Figures Have Been Demolished in Chernihiv’s Alley of Heroes (Video, Photos)],” *Hromadske TV*, accessed November 6, 2015, <http://www.hromadske.tv/society/v-chernihovi-na-aleyi-geroyiv-znesli-dva-pamyatnik/>.

11 “Avakov o sobyttiakh v Kharkove: Lenin? Pust padaet [Avakov about Events in Kharkiv: Lenin? Let Him Fall],” *Liha Novosti*, accessed November 2, 2015, http://news.liga.net/news/politics/3479362-avakov_o_sobytyakh_v_kharkove_lenin_pust_padaet.htm.

12 “Poroshenko: Povalennia pamiatnyka Leninu v Kharkovi malo statysia rano chy pizno [Poroshenko: The Demolishing of the Lenin Monument in Kharkiv Was Going to Happen Sooner or Later],”

The war in eastern Ukraine also influenced changes in the politics of memory in Ukraine. Pro-Russian separatists actively relied on the Soviet cultural legacy (especially the memory of World War II) for legitimization of their actions. For example, the separatist tanks' markings "Onward to Kiev!" echoed the Red Army's slogan "Onward to Berlin!" Also, the "parade" of Ukrainian prisoners of war in Donetsk, held by the separatists, imitated the "parade" of German POWs in Moscow in 1944.¹³

An important role in the removal of the Soviet cultural legacy was played by the reformed Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance (UINP). On 25 March 2014 (shortly after Euromaidan) a new director was appointed to lead the institution, historian and civic activist Volodymyr Viatrovykh. The Institute of National Remembrance was established in Ukraine on the model of similar institutions in the countries of East-Central Europe in 2005 by President of Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko, as a central executive body under the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. During Yushchenko's time in power, it played an important role in the implementation of the president's memory policies. Viktor Yanukovich reduced the importance of the Institute in 2010, turning it into a research institution.¹⁴ Soon after Euromaidan, the Institute regained its old status.

In an interview given after his appointment, Viatrovykh declared the need to transform the Institute into a "national instrument for the overcoming of the totalitarian past."¹⁵ He also linked the tragic events of Euromaidan directly to the standstill in state policies aimed at overcoming the totalitarian past:

As soon as the process of restoring the nation's memory stopped, we saw fresh attempts to exonerate the Soviet past, which eventually resulted in direct use of Soviet practices in the final months of Yanukovich's administration: reprisals against dissenters and opposition and even executions of civilians in the center of the capital city.¹⁶

Moreover, Viatrovykh called the "Lenin-fall" an element of "spontaneous de-Sovietisation" and linked it with the reluctance of politicians to "break with the totalitarian past."¹⁷

UNIAN, accessed November 10, 2015, <http://www.unian.ua/politics/995009-poroshenko-povalennya-pamyatnika-leninu-v-harkovi-malo-statisya-rano-chi-pizno.html>.

13 Georgiy Kasianov, "How History Goes Wrong: Historical Politics and its Outcomes," *Fieldsights*, accessed November 15, 2015, <http://www.culanth.org/fieldsights/611-how-history-goes-wrong-historical-politics-and-its-outcomes>.

14 Decree of the President of Ukraine № 1086/2010 "On the Institute of National Remembrance," accessed November 3, 2015, <http://zakon4.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1086/2010>.

15 "Volodymyr Viatrovykh: 'Yakshcho ne zasudyty zlochyyny mynuloho, vony povtoriatsia' [Volodymyr Viatrovykh: 'Should We Fail to Condemn the Crimes of the Past, They Will be Repeated']," *Ukrinform*, accessed November 6, 2015, http://www.ukrinform.ua/ukr/news/yakshcho_ne_zasuditi_zlochyni_minulogo_voni_povtoryatsya__volodimir_vyatrovich_1979794.

16 "Yakshcho ne zasudyty zlochyyny mynuloho."

17 "Pravo na vladu za 2 zhovtnia 2014 roku [Right to Rule, 2 October, 2014]," *Youtube*, accessed November 6, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6SZhavQMqKs>.

Such statements point to the UINP's role as a typical "mnemonic warrior" (according to Kubik and Bernard's methodology¹⁸) that sees the de-legitimization or destruction of alternative visions of the past as their most important memory policy objective. In this case, combating the Soviet legacy was chosen by such memory agents as the main goal of the state-building process. Any problems inside Ukrainian society could be explained then by shortcomings of de-Communization processes.

We should also observe how the politics of removing the Soviet cultural legacy reflected on celebrations and commemorations of anniversaries in 2014. The celebration of May 9 in 2014 was a major challenge for the cultural policy of Ukrainian authorities. The memory of the Great Patriotic War and the Great Victory concept were among the most powerful elements of Soviet cultural legacy in Ukraine and offered many avenues for the instrumentalization of history by "pro-Russian" and "pro-Soviet" political elites. Ukrainian authorities were preparing to celebrate Victory Day while aware of this holiday's potential as a pretext for an escalation of the conflict in Ukraine. Prime Minister of Ukraine Arseniy Yatsenyuk asked citizens to refrain from participation in public events on that day.

Ukrainian authorities and the Institute of National Remembrance have done much work to promote the rethinking of May 9 commemorations. The change of commemoration symbols is the visual evidence of this rethinking. The problem of symbols was particularly acute due to the fact that the Ribbon of Saint George, used as the main Russian commemoration symbol of May 9, had become a symbol of pro-Russian separatists, who aimed to portray their war against the Ukrainian army as another war against fascism. The Remembrance Poppy shaped as a gunsight became the new symbol of May 9 commemorations. It was made by Ukrainian designer Serhii Mishakin and carried the motto "*Nikoly znovu*" (Never again). The symbol shows a will to use Europe-wide forms of commemoration and to replace the triumphal perception of the Great Victory in WWII with victim memory forms, more common in Europe.

Besides, the state started to commemorate the anniversary of World War II, which started in 1939, instead of the Great Patriotic War, which started in 1941, commemorated in the USSR and in some post-Soviet countries. The new symbol mentioned 1939 as the starting year of the war, instead of 1941. The date switch was important due to the historical experience of western Ukraine (where the war began two years earlier with the occupation by the Soviet army).

The recommendations for the commemoration of Victory Day, issued by the Institute of National Remembrance, advised government bodies to refrain from the celebration of Victory Day "in the Soviet format," pointing out the inappropriateness of military parades (indispensable attributes of the Russian and Soviet tradition of celebrating May 9) and noted that

perception of the Second World War as the Great Patriotic War, the revival of the Soviet traditions of celebrating the Victory Day is used to restore and strengthen the ideological influence of Russia in post-Soviet space.

18 Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik, eds., *Twenty Years after Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Also, the Institute proposed to commemorate May 8 in the form of a Memorial Day along with May 9, “because of this country’s European integration ambitions.”¹⁹

Such ideas were not new in the Ukrainian public sphere. Discussions about the term “the Great Patriotic War” and adoption of other elements of a Soviet vision of WWII have a long history among Ukrainian scholars and politicians. Similar ideas were expressed by historians who worked for government research institutions during Yushchenko’s presidency.²⁰ Yushchenko’s ideas about rethinking the memory of WWII (in particular the idea of the reconciliation of UPA veterans with veterans of the Soviet army) met with open resistance and criticism by opposition politicians and public figures.

On the eve of the anniversary of Victory Day, Poroshenko called the anti-terrorist operation “the Great Patriotic War of 2014,” and the soldiers taking part in it “grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren of those who defended the country 70 years ago.”²¹ This statement had high symbolic value, becoming a striking example of the rethinking of Soviet mythology and its replacement by modern Ukrainian mythology.

Another parallel was made by Ukrainian authorities on November 22, 2014, during the annual commemoration of victims of the 1933 Stalinist artificial famine (the Holodomor). The president of Ukraine called eastern Ukrainian separatists “spiritual descendants of Holodomor organizers” and compared the man-made famine with the blocking of humanitarian aid from the unoccupied zone of Ukraine.²² The UINP devoted its anniversary program to resistance to collectivization policy, and the famine in 1932–1933. Viatrovych commented on the decision: “The people who weren’t destroyed by the terrible genocide in 1933 must remain invincible now, in 2014.”²³

Moving the Defender of the Fatherland Day from February 23 (former Soviet Army Day) became another manifestation of the erasing of the Soviet cultural legacy from Ukrainian cultural space. The president addressed the issue for the first time during the celebration of

19 “Yak vysvitliuvaty Den Peremohy. Rekomendatsii Instytutu natsionalnoi pamiati [How to Reflect Victory Day. Recommendations of the Institute of National Remembrance],” *Media Sapiens*, accessed November 9, 2015, http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/ethics/standards/yak_visvitlyuvati_den_peremogi_rekomendatsii_institutu_natsionalnoi_pamyati/.

20 See for example, Ihor Symonenko, “Druha svitova viina v istorychnii pamiati ukrainskoho narodu [The Second World War in the Historical Memory of the Ukrainian People],” *Stratehichni priorityety* 4 (2008): 44–54.

21 “Poroshenko nazvav ATO na Donbasi ‘Vitchyznianoiu viinoiu-2014’ [Poroshenko Called the ATO in the Donbas ‘the Patriotic War of 2014’],” *UNIAN*, accessed November 9, 2015, <http://www.unian.ua/politics/1001825-poroshenko-nazvav-ato-na-donbasi-vitchiznyanoyu-viynoyu-2014.html>.

22 “Nashchadky Stalina stvorili shtuchnyi holod na terytorii Donbasu — Poroshenko [Stalin’s Descendants are Creating an Artificial Famine in the Donbas],” *Ukrainska pravda*, accessed November 8, 2015, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/11/22/7045100/>.

23 “Volodymyr Viatrovych: ‘My zmozhemo podolaty bud-yakoho voroha za umovy, shcho budemo razom’ [Volodymyr Viatrovych: ‘We Can Defeat Any Enemy, if We Stay Together’],” *Ukrainskyi Instytut Natsionalnoi Pamiati*, accessed November 7, 2015, <http://www.memory.gov.ua/news/volodimir-v-iatrovich-mi-zmozhemo-poboroti-bud-yakogo-voroga-za-umovi-shcho-budemo-razom>.

the Independence Day of Ukraine: “Ukraine will never celebrate this holiday using the military-historical calendar of a neighboring country. We will honor the defenders of our homeland, not someone else’s!”²⁴

On the eve of the Christian feast of Pokrova (Intercession of the Theotokos) on October 14, the UINP recommended that the president move the Defender of the Fatherland Day to this date. October 14 has several symbolic meanings. Theotokos of Pokrova was seen as a protector by Ukrainian Cossacks. Therefore, the Day of the Ukrainian Cossacks has been celebrated on this day since 1999.²⁵ In addition, this date is also considered the foundation day of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. On October 14, 2014, the president issued a decree abolishing the celebration of February 23 and declaring October 14 as the Day of the Defender of Ukraine. It should be noted that back in 2009, President Viktor Yushchenko also proposed moving the Defender of the Fatherland Day from February 23, proposing instead to celebrate it on the anniversary of the Battle of Kruty (January 29). However, this idea wasn’t implemented by him.

The renaming of streets honoring Soviet statesmen also intensified in 2014. During December 2014, the Kyiv City Council renamed 11 streets which were named after Soviet historical figures and announced plans to rename about 50 more.²⁶ The UINP also encouraged the renaming of streets. In October 2014, it published a digest for rural and urban councils with a description of the legal procedures for street renaming and a list of people who “fought against Ukrainian statehood.”²⁷

As we can see, the spontaneous demolishing of Lenin monuments as a sign of solidarity with Euromaidan was the starting point of de-Sovietization processes in Ukraine in 2014. Furthermore, removing the Soviet cultural legacy was associated with reducing Ukraine’s cultural dependence on Russia. This process gained extreme urgency in 2014 after the beginning of the Ukrainian-Russian hybrid war. This was made possible by Russia’s firm position as the successor of the Soviet Union in the minds of many Ukrainians.

Not much resistance aimed at combating the politics of denying the Soviet cultural legacy took place. Attempts to protect Lenin monuments were isolated and weak. Soviet holidays didn’t become occasions for protests against government actions. Up to a certain point, this phenomenon could be explained by purely current political factors: decrease of the support for the Communist Party of Ukraine, failure of this party to win any seats in the parliamentary election in 2014 (for the first time in Ukrainian history), and the collapse of the Party of Regions. Besides, the most

24 “Vystup P. Poroshenka na paradi do Dnia Nezalezhnosti [Poroshenko’s Speech at the Independence Day Parade],” *UNN*, accessed November 8, 2015, <http://www.unn.com.ua/uk/news/1378548-vistup-p-poroshenka-na-paradi-do-dnya-nezalezhnosti>.

25 Decree of the President of Ukraine № 966/1999 “On Ukrainian Cossack Day,” accessed November 4, 2015, <http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/966/99>.

26 “Na pereimenovanie ulits Kieva potratyat 4 mln. грн. [4 Million UAH Will be Spent on Renaming Kyiv Streets],” *Nash Kiev*, accessed November 14, 2015, <http://kiyany.obozrevatel.com/life/60193-na-pereimenovanie-ulits-kieva-potratyat-4-mln-grn.htm>.

27 “Pereimenuvaty vulytsi z radianskymy nazvamy ne skladno i ne doroho [It is not Difficult and Not Expensive to Rename Streets with Soviet Names],” *Official website of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance*, accessed November 6, 2015, <http://www.memory.gov.ua/news/pereimenuvati-vulitsyu-z-radianskimi-nazvami-ne-skladno-i-ne-dorogo-institut-natsionalnoi-pam-yati>.

radical part of the “pro-Soviet” politicians withdrew from Ukrainian political life and supported Russia and so called “LNR-DNR” separatist entities in the conflict. Furthermore, the absence of protection of the Soviet cultural legacy casts some doubt on the widespread view which sees Ukrainian society as split by its cultures of memory, and indicates a significant dependence of this split on the political situation and political uses of history. It indicates the need for new explanatory concepts which would help to understand Ukrainian society.

The Politics of Memory in Ukraine After Euromaidan: Commemorations of Euromaidan

The commemoration of Euromaidan has played an important role in collective memory in Ukraine since 2014. *Nebesna Sotnia* (the Heavenly Hundred, the common name for about 100 people who died during the Euromaidan clashes) has become its central motif.

In the first days after the deaths of protesters, spontaneous “memorials” with photos of victims, candles, and flowers appeared on Maidan. Instytutska Street became the central place of commemoration for them, it being the place where many protesters were shot by snipers. A lot of people brought flowers and lit candles there to honor the dead. In November 2014, the street was renamed Alley of the Heroes of the Heavenly Hundred. Also, small memorials were established in the street, dedicated to each of the known dead protesters. Monuments and plaques of varying size and cost were installed in many Ukrainian cities and villages during 2014. The tallest monument to the heroes of the Heavenly Hundred (4 meters high without pedestal) was unveiled in the southern Ukrainian city of Mykolaiv. Spontaneous memorial creation continued into 2015. In the Park of Partisan Glory (Kyiv), unknown people erected two memorials to the Heavenly Hundred, made from painted concrete slabs.²⁸

“Sites of memory” devoted to the Heavenly Hundred often replaced Soviet “sites of memory.” Thus, protesters often set photos of the Heavenly Hundred along with Ukrainian symbols on pedestals of the fallen monuments to Lenin. The most famous among them is the spontaneous memorial to the Heavenly Hundred in the city of Dnipro, created on a bare Lenin pedestal after the statue was demolished in February 2014. Local residents brought flags, lampadas, posters, and photographs of the victims. Later on, they were moved to the memorial park in front of the regional administration, where the Alley of Maidan Heroes was created. The authorities have begun construction of a memorial to the Heavenly Hundred in the form of a pool, which will be erected where a Lenin monument once stood.²⁹ A similar case occurred in Poltava, where

28 “V Kieve poiavilis ‘narodnye pamiatniki’ Nebesnoi Sotne: opublikovany foto [‘People’s Monuments’ to the Heavenly Hundred Have Appeared in Kyiv: Photos Published],” *Obozrevatel*, accessed November 5, 2015, <http://kiyany.obozrevatel.com/life/29537-v-kieve-poyavilis-narodnye-pamyatniki-nebesnoj-sotni-opublikovanyi-foto.htm>.

29 “Zamist Lenina u Dnipropetrovsku bude memorial Nebesnoi Sotni [Instead of Lenin, Dnepropetrovsk Will Erect a Memorial to the Heavenly Hundred],” *Istorychna pravda*, accessed November 6, 2015, <http://www.istpravda.com.ua/short/2014/06/4/143155/>.

a monument to the Heavenly Hundred was created by coloring the pedestal of a dismantled Lenin monument.³⁰

The renaming of streets became an even more telling example of the Soviet cultural legacy's replacement by virtue of the memory of Euromaidan. In 2014 and early 2015, at least 43 streets in 28 towns and villages across Ukraine were renamed in honor of the Heavenly Hundred, Heroes of Maidan, or in honor of individual members of the Heavenly Hundred who were born in these cities. The vast majority of renamed streets had been named after Soviet historical figures or events. Also, most of them are located in the city center.

On December 1, 2014, Head of the Department of Planning and Architecture of the Kyiv City Administration Serhii Tselovalnyk announced the end of registration for a project competition for Kyiv's downtown reconstruction and the building of a monument to the Heavenly Hundred. The reconstruction of Kyiv's downtown will cover the whole central part of the city, where the protests were held (70 hectares in total) and will form a "territory of dignity," consisting of the public space of Maidan, a monument to the Heavenly Hundred, an international cultural center and the Museum of Maidan. On that occasion, Tselovalnyk said that the Column of Independence (built in 2001 and serving as the central element of Kyiv's downtown) could be removed from the area. Reasoning for this decision was very telling: "The column — is a symbol of empire, a symbol of totalitarianism, while we are building a democratic state, aren't we?"³¹ These words show that in Ukraine in 2014, even architectural decisions were influenced by the idea of overcoming the Soviet legacy.

In February 2015, the UINP president suggested the transformation of the October Palace (a performing arts center in Kyiv's downtown) into the Museum of Maidan, and linked it to the fact that the building housed the Soviet secret NKVD police in the 1930s. According to Viatrovych,

it would be very symbolic if the building where NKVD torture chambers were located in the 1930s would become the site for the Museum of Maidan, reflecting the ultimate victory of freedom over tyranny.³²

30 Anna Volkova, "Hranitnyi postament, na ktorom stoial pamiatnik Leninu, molodyie hudozhniki Poltavy prevratili v memorial 'Nebesnoi sotni' [The Granite Pedestal on Which a Lenin Monument Once Stood has Been Turned into a Heavenly Hundred Memorial by Young Artists of Poltava]," *Fakty i komentarii*, accessed November 6, 2015, <http://fakty.ua/179711-granitnyj-postament-na-kotorom-stoyal-pamyatnik-leninu-molodye-hudozhniki-poltavy-prevratili-v-memorial-nebesnoj-sotni-foto>.

31 "Z Maidanu mozhut prybraty kolonu Nezalezhnosti [The Column of Independence Could be Removed From Maidan]," *BBC Ukraine*, accessed November 7, 2015, http://www.bbc.co.uk/ukrainian/entertainment/2014/12/141203_maidan_reconstruction_ko.

32 "Muzei Maidanu maie buty u Zhovtnevomu palatsi — Instytut natsionalnoi pamiaty [The Maidan Museum Should be Housed in the October Palace]," *Official website of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance*, accessed November 8, 2015, <http://www.memory.gov.ua/news/muzei-maidanu-mae-buty-u-zhovtnevomu-palatsi-institut-natsionalnoi-pam-yati>.

Another way of commemorating Euromaidan involved marking the anniversaries of some Euromaidan events. During the anniversary of the violent dispersal of the student Maidan (the starting point of Euromaidan), one of its organizers, singer Ruslana Lyzhychko, urged activists to go to Maidan on the night of November 29 and spend a “Night of Memory” there (mimicking the “night watches” of protesters during Euromaidan).³³ The anniversary of the first clashes on Hrushevskoho Street (January 19) was marked with several protests of Ukrainian right-wing organizations. The parliamentary faction of the “People’s Front” put forward a proposal to make January 16, the day of the adoption of the so-called “dictatorial laws” in 2014, a non-working day for the Ukrainian parliament, calling it a “black day of Ukrainian parliamentarianism.”³⁴

February 20, the Day of the Heroes of the Heavenly Hundred, was made the main commemoration date of Euromaidan and its official anniversary. This date was officially established by a presidential decree.³⁵ The choice of the date was explained by it being the day when sniper fire left scores of protesters dead on Instytutska Street during Euromaidan. From February 18–22, 2015, a wide range of artistic and commemorative events devoted to Euromaidan were held across the country. Central among them were commemorative ceremonies held in Independence Square on February 20, and the March of Dignity which involved leaders of European countries and other foreign politicians on February 21. During the commemorative ceremonies in Kyiv on February 20, the Rays of Dignity light installation was launched. It sent beams of light to the sky from the places of the deaths of activists, symbolizing their souls.

In February 2015, the National Bank of Ukraine issued a series of collectible coins dedicated to Euromaidan, entitled “The Revolution of Dignity,” “The Heavenly Hundred,” and “Euromaidan.”³⁶

Thus, we can see that a full range of commemorations centered on Euromaidan was already formed by the end of 2014, including anniversaries, monuments, street names, new museums, installations, and collectible coins. This suggests that from 2014, Euromaidan has been a distinctive Ukrainian “site of memory” and an important Ukrainian identification mark. Commemorations of Euromaidan usually ousted Soviet sites of memory.

It is worth mentioning that the image of Euromaidan in modern Ukrainian collective memory has mostly traumatic and victim features. To some extent, the popularity of

33 “Na richnytsiu rozhonu studentiv na Maidani vidbudetsia ‘Nich pamiati’ [On the Anniversary of the Students’ Dispersal, a ‘Night of Memory’ Will be Held on Maidan],” *5 kanal*, accessed November 11, 2015, <http://www.5.ua/Hronika-Majdanu/na-richnytsiu-rozhonu-studentiv-na-maidani-vidbudetsia-nich-pam-iati-63345.html>.

34 “‘Narodnyi front’ proponuie zrobyty 16 sichnia nerobochym dnem u Radi [The ‘People’s Front’ Suggests Making January 16 a Non-working Day for the Rada],” *Hromadske TV*, accessed November 10, 2015, <http://www.hromadske.tv/politics/-narodnii-front—proponuye-zrobity-16-sichnya-nero/>.

35 Decree of the President of Ukraine № 69/2015 “On Honoring the Feat of Members of the Revolution of Dignity and Commemorating the Heroes of the Heavenly Hundred,” accessed November 5, 2015, <http://www.president.gov.ua/documents/692015-18468>.

36 “Natsbank vypustyv monety, prysviacheni heroiam Maidanu [The National Bank Issued Coins Dedicated to the Maidan Heroes],” *Ukrainska pravda. Zhyttia*, accessed November 10, 2015, <http://life.pravda.com.ua/society/2015/02/16/189424/>.

commemorations of Euromaidan can be explained by the influence of the emphasis on the victim conception of Ukraine's past, inherent for Ukrainian historical memory. Georgiy Kasianov singled out the focus on the Ukrainian people's role as a victim of fate as one of the most representative features of modern Ukrainian historical memory.³⁷

Conclusions

Many scholars and public figures use the term "de-Sovietization" for cultural and political processes occurring in Ukraine since 2014. It seems that for most of these actions the more appropriate definition would be "visual de-Sovietization," since it was mostly concerned with eliminating marks of the symbolic presence of the Soviet Union on the Ukrainian cultural landscape. Meanwhile, de-Sovietization is a more complex process that involves structural social changes, including reform of the administrative apparatus and the change of political elites.

The spontaneous nature of the Lenin-fall could be explained by the concept of subjectivity proposed by Russian historian Ilya Gerasimov. According to him, Euromaidan was primarily a manifestation of the personal and collective subjectivity of Ukrainian society. Also, Gerasimov noted subjectivity as one of the key identifying features of Ukrainian society in the post-Maidan period.³⁸ Using this approach, the Lenin-fall could be viewed as a declaration of collective subjectivity by Euromaidan protesters in different Ukrainian cities. The demolishing of Lenin monuments was for them the only available form of declaring their support for Kyiv protesters and protesting against the government of the day. Lenin monuments were partly associated with the Yanukovich regime, because of the pro-Soviet memory policies espoused by his party and its allies from 2005–2013.

The Lenin-fall, which was mostly spontaneous in nature and was primarily connected with a declaration of support for Euromaidan protesters, created a political trend for visual de-Sovietization. This trend was supported and cultivated further by a part of pro-government politicians (for instance, those linked with the UINP) and intensified after the start of the Russian-Ukrainian hybrid war.

In 2014, the Ukrainian government wasn't the main initiator and leader of changes in the perceptions of the past inside Ukrainian society. Like Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma, and unlike Victor Yushchenko, new President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko rarely went beyond current political needs in his politics of memory. However, it was with his support or participation that the most decisive events in the politics of memory and the erasing of the Soviet cultural legacy occurred in Ukraine (continuation of the Lenin-fall, cancellation of the celebration of February 23, rethinking of Victory Day).

The emergence of new powerful Ukrainian sites of memory has played an important role in the process of removing the Soviet cultural legacy. The traumatic experiences of Euromaidan

37 Georgiy Kasianov, *Danse macabre. Holod 1932–1933 rokiv u politytsi, masovii svidomosti ta istoriografii* [*The 1932–1933 Famine in Ukrainian Historiography, Politics, and Mass Consciousness*] (Kyiv: Nash chas, 2010), 271.

38 Ilya Gerasimov, "Ukraine 2014: The First Postcolonial Revolution. Introduction to the Forum," *Ab Imperio* 3 (2014): 22–44.

and the Russian-Ukrainian hybrid war have become factors that cancel the “invisibility” of the Soviet cultural legacy’s objects. This phenomenon could be explained by the concept of cultural trauma. According to sociologist Piotr Sztompka, besides its destructive impact on society, cultural trauma could unleash the power of social formation and cultural reconstruction.³⁹ This could be called the reason why the cultural trauma of Euromaidan changed public attitude to the Soviet cultural legacy’s objects.

While Ukrainian national history has not always been able to act as a powerful catalyst for mobilization, capable of giving a sufficient number of generally accepted identity markers that would replace Soviet ones, the latest common traumatic historical experiences have been able to perform this task. Using the metaphor of Charles Maier,⁴⁰ public protests and war in Ukraine released “radiation” that greatly shortened the half-life of the Soviet past.

The Law “On Condemnation of the Communist and National-Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes in Ukraine and Prohibition of Their Propaganda and Symbols” was the next step in the process of visual de-Sovietization. It changed the fate of the Soviet cultural legacy’s objects from removal to legal prohibition. As we can see, the processes that took place in Ukraine in 2014 were interpreted as an expression of public demand urging Ukrainian politicians to enact this controversial decision.

The process of transforming historical memory in modern Ukraine has significant research potential in the period of a “soft landing” of the memory industry, using Michael Rosenfeld’s metaphor.⁴¹ It highlights problems of memory transformations during crisis periods of history and gives an example of the growing influence of the memory industry in the 21st century.

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39 Piotr Sztompka, “Sotsialnoie izmienie kak trauma [Social Change as Trauma],” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 1 (2001): 6–16.

40 Charles Maier, “Hot Memory Cold Memory: On the Political Half-Life of Fascist and Communist Memory,” *Transit: Europäische Revue* 22 (2002): 153–65.

41 Michael Rosenfeld, “A Looming Crash or a Soft Landing? Forecasting the Future of the Memory ‘Industry,’” *The Journal of Modern History* 81 (2009): 122–58.

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