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The Image of Russia and Russians in the Western Ukrainian Press of the Early 1990s

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I worked on this article in 1993-1994. Published in* Polis *magazine in 1995, it was the first part of a bigger project. The second article, also published in* Polis *#2, 1996, analyzed the image of Ukraine and Ukrainians in the Russian press after the collapse of the USSR. I thought it would be useful to reread the article written more than a quarter of a century ago, because some of the issues addressed in them resonate with the current situation. In those distant days, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation financed the project, and colleagues from Lvov helped collect the material. The article is reprinted unchanged and unabbreviated, but I have provided it with some comments, which appear in the text as insertions in italics.

What will Russia and Ukraine, the largest new states in Eastern Europe that have never existed like this before, be for each other—friends, enemies or neighbors? There is no need to explain the importance of this issue not only for Russia and Ukraine, but also for the whole world. The experience of Yugoslavia shows that we are not insured against the most horrible scenarios. To a large extent, the development of Russian-Ukrainian relations depends on how the elites of the new states portray each other and what message they send to society. The most convenient source for studying this problem is the press.

The failure of the coup in August 1991 created a completely new situation in the disintegrating Soviet Union. The main change was the disappearance of ulterior Fear that had existed throughout *perestroika*. The fear that the communist regime would suddenly "wake up" from its liberal obsession and remember the taste of blood was reflected in popular half-jokes—that the entire *perestroika* was started by the KGB in order to identify "hidden enemies" and do away with them all at once. In some republics—Kazakhstan, Georgia, and the Baltic states—"a little bit" of blood (from the point of view of political cynicism) had already been shed.

The frightened silence of most republican leaders, including Leonid Kravchuk, on August 19 and 20, 1991, gave way to a sudden political outburst, when it became clear that the "old regime" was powerless. This is when Ukraine's rapid and irreversible drift towards complete independence began. The following eighteen months were unusually packed with political events in Ukraine: an independence referendum, the first presidential election, and the creation of its own state institutions. As Ukrainian television was still quite immature, the press played a very important role during that period not only in a specific political struggle, but also in molding a new image of the world in mass consciousness.

The Western Ukrainian, or Galician, press occupied, and partly still occupies, a special place in the Ukrainian print market. This region was a stronghold of the national democratic movement Rukh during—*perestroika*. The communists suffered a devastating defeat there during the 1990 elections. The region became home for the most radical nationalist political organizations of Ukraine.

This phenomenon is largely rooted in the 19th- and 20th-century history of Galicia, when this region, which had never been part of the Romanov Empire and then the Soviet Union until 1939, was, except for a short period in the 1920s, the leader of the Ukrainian national movement. Over the years of Soviet rule, assimilation processes in the region advanced much less than in other parts of Ukraine. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Galician press in the early 1990s saw its role not as purely regional, but as national, following the traditions of the late 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries, when Galicia sought to influence Eastern Ukraine both through printed materials and by sending national movement activists there. (Similar campaigns of national activists to the "East" were organized in the early 1990s (see, for example, Pravda, 1991)).

In the mid-1990s, the personnel and ideological expansion of Western Ukrainian nationalism into the central regions of the country was already obvious. Naturally, it drew its potential not only from its popularity in Galicia, but also from the most diverse support provided by the Ukrainian diaspora that had formulated many parts of this ideological complex long before it could be publicly declared in Ukraine.

When writing this essay, the author studied articles printed between August 1991 and December 1992 by the main daily newspapers in Western Ukraine (*Vysokiy Zamok, Moloda Galichina, Za Vilnu Ukrainu)*, the *Post-Postup* weekly, as well as *Shlyakh Peremohi*, a newspaper of the Ukrainian diaspora in Germany, which is close to the Galician press in terms of orientation and which became available in Ukraine in 1992. In total, about two hundred publications were identified. They are quite homogeneous in terms of orientation, but can vary greatly in terms of emotional charge. All publications that contradict the main trend are specially marked.[1]

[1] By 1995, the image of Russia and Russians in the Galician press had undergone some changes. However, the overall "paradigm" had not changed. This fact will be analyzed in further publications. At the same time, the main approaches to the interpretation of this image, which appeared back in 1991-1992, "cemented" the basis for advancing negative ideas about Russia.

Let me say that the image of Russia drawn in the Galician press is unfair in its one-sidedness. However, it would be too easy to limit the purpose of this article to just analyzing the mechanisms of negative stereotyping, for which the Galician press provides so much material. It would be instructive to try and analyze the immediate reaction of the imaginary Russian reader of these texts (practically unknown in Russia) and, despite the obvious tendentiousness of most publications, to figure out what is nevertheless fair or not so unfair in them. In other words, it is worth taking a closer look at whether certain statements emotionally rejected by Russian people are always unfair, and if not, why this happens.

The key ideologeme underlying the image of Russia drawn in the Galician press is its imperial complex. It is present in the vast majority of publications and exploited in several ways. This concept prevails in the description of the past of Russia and Russian-Ukrainian relations. The notion of empire is used here outside the historical context, in the purely negative meaning it acquired in the 20th century. Let me give several of the most conspicuous quotes.

"A huge prison, a limitless Gulag, almost three hundred and fifty years (since 1654) of oppression. Uprisings, national liberation movements, but only the prohibition of the Ukrainian language and everything Ukrainian time and again on the part of Russia… A fact carefully hushed up in the USSR—Soviet Russia conquered Ukraine that was independent at that time… the war of 1918-1921 was a Ukrainian-Russian war for Ukraine, not a civil one" (Pokalchuk, 1991).

"Privileged Russians fought against Ukraineness in Ukraine since the days of Buturlin, Menshikov, Potemkin, the Ems decree, and secret circulars until the time of Rakovsky, Postyshev, and Khrushchev. They were opposed by Vygovsky, Mazepa, Shevchenko, Petlyura, and Shukhevych … Suffocating in the 'brotherly embrace,' the Ukrainians only defended themselves—turning blind in the dungeons of Solovki, coughing up blood in the Cheka cells, and claiming the victory of the spirit of struggle when they were blown up by grenades in their shelters. Guys from the Volynian and Galician troops were hard to capture—when surrounded by the NKVD police, they shot themselves,

thus joining their eternal nation. This is how students near Kruty and soldiers near Bazar became Ukrainians" (Zhizhko, 1992).

"… Stepan [Bandera] came and, by mighty will, directed the fire of hatred against the invader into the mouth of the Moscow beast. UPA scorched the guts of the insatiable bear" (Ibid).

"In the absence of private property (it was replaced in Ukraine by the Great Russian origin and a red party ticket in the pocket), the totalitarian system allowed the dispatched planters to exploit Ukrainians. The created system of benefits and privileges was intended to oust Ukrainians from Ukraine… For Ukrainians, Ukraine was turned into hell in 1917-1950, and into a reservation from the 1950s until the 1980s" (Shlyakh Peremogi, 1992b). In his article "Who Can Love Russia?" Pokalchuk recalls Liliana Cavani's film *The Night Porter,* which describes the love between a concentration camp female prisoner and a Gestapo officer, and concludes: "This is what our love with Russia was like" (Pokalchuk, 1991).

In the final count, communism is often seen simply as a cover for Russian imperialism. "The time has come for a trial of the ideology of Russian national chauvinism, which, under the guise of communism, conducted total expansion in all directions," says an article with the remarkable title "And the Last Mohicans Are Worth Something If They Are Ukrainian" (Zalivala, 1992).

So, the history of relations with Russia is described entirely as the history of confrontation and oppression of Ukraine. The interpretation of many events does not stand up to scientific criticism or at least looks lopsided. Obviously, the centuries-old neighborhood simply cannot be made up of negative aspects only. And yet, any features of commonness or positive interaction are overlooked.

The image of Ukrainians as victims of Russian hegemonism over several centuries will certainly be rejected by the vast majority of Russian readers. In fact, Russians have never rejected Ukrainians, and a surname ending with an "o" has never caused its owner any trouble in Russia. It is unlikely that many in Russia know the events, mentioned in one of the cited articles, near Kruty and Bazar, the Ems decree, or many other sad and tragic facts from the history of Russian-Ukrainian

relations. We must understand that the historical truth about Russian-Ukrainian relations lies somewhere in the middle between the purely negative image from the Galician press and the conflict-free, almost idyllic one created by Soviet propaganda and historical education.

This is part of a huge problem rooted in the fact that until recently Russians have never experienced ethnic oppression or discrimination. The emotions of "ethnic victims" are barely understandable for Russians living in Russia. Coupled with ignorance and sometimes unwillingness to know the history of national oppression in the Russian Empire and the USSR, this creates a "space of misunderstanding" in relations with other peoples of the former Soviet Union to no lesser extent than the exaltation of anti-Russian sentiments on the other side does.

The motive of imperial complex clearly dominates the interpretation of modern Russian politics by Galician journalism. Before December 1991, it contrasted two Russias: one imperial, embodied by the Union center and Mikhail Gorbachev, and a "new, democratic" one, personified by Boris Yeltsin and opponents of the State Committee on the State of Emergency, better known as GKChP. The Galician press unequivocally and strongly condemned the GKChP and vowed solidarity with democratic Russia on August 20, 1991, when official Kiev simply called for calm. "The reaction will not pass, democracy will win!" read the slogan on the front page of the newspaper *Za Vilnu Ukraïnu* on August 20. On August 22, the same newspaper appeared with a headline reflecting the local specifics of the view on events: "The Junta Has Failed! The Collapse of the Empire Is Inevitable!"

Galician leaders of that time, especially on the eve of the independence referendum and the presidential election, often emphasized their desire to maintain close ties between the future independent Ukraine and Russia. Most of these statements appeared in the Lvov-based Russian-language newspaper (also published in Ukrainian) *Vysokiy Zamok*. "I have already imagined the following picture: for example, you don't like the repertoire of the Lvov Opera House. So you fly to Moscow to go to the Bolshoi Theater on Saturday and Sunday, and you are back to work on Monday already in your own

country," presidential candidate V. Chornovil said at a meeting with voters (Vysokiy Zamok, 1991a). Competing with him for the Russian voters was then parliament chairman L. Kravchuk, who voiced "a firm belief that no one will be able to drive a wedge between the peoples of Ukraine and Russia" (Kravchuk, 1991). I would like to stress that Chornovil continued to demonstrate a very balanced position, speaking in the spring of 1992 about numerous mistakes on *both* sides that had caused an aggravation of Russian-Ukrainian relations (Chornovil, 1992).

Also on the eve of the referendum, *Vysokiy Zamok* published an interview with B. Goryn, Deputy Chairman of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet and one of the leaders of the Ukrainian Republican Party, who formulated, perhaps, the most constructive approach to the problem of Ukraine-Russia relations: "Unlike some politicians, speaking at conferences, seminars, and rallies, I have avoided the expression 'Russian empire,' and talked about the real Soviet empire, which is undoubtedly in its final days now. There have been many gloomy, and I would say, tragic pages in the history of relations between Ukraine and Russia. But let us leave this to historians. We politicians must proceed from present-day realities, not from the past history, for such an approach can lead us into a dead end… Ukraine and Russia are destined by God to be neighbors, and it is our noble mission to do everything possible so that relations between our sovereign states are civilized, mutually beneficial, and good-neighborly… There may well be relapses of imperial thinking and imperial politics. But I really want to believe that after the dismantling of the Soviet empire Russia will not seek to revive the Russian Empire" (Vysokiy Zamok, 1991b).

Even the newspaper *Za Vilnu Ukrainu*, known for its strongest anti-Russian position, wrote in December 1991: "We definitely need an alliance with Russia, but without intermediaries from the center—an equal and truly fraternal, one that would work for Russia, and for more than eleven million Russians living with us in independent Ukraine, and for Ukraine, which hopes for honest relations" (Vorobel, 1991).

This position was undoubtedly shared by many politically active Russians both in Russia and in the republics at that time, as evidenced

by the behavior of the Russian-speaking electorate both in Ukraine itself and in the Baltic states. However, it soon became clear that not everyone was ready to follow Goryn's appeal not to extend hostility towards communism and the Soviet system to Russia and Russians, which significantly increased among the latter the number of those who advocated a return to the "good old days."

Already in the fall of 1991, one could clearly feel what can be described as readiness to "recognize" a familiar image. It was somewhat reflected in Goryn's aforementioned interview concerning a meeting of the Ukrainian-Russian inter-parliamentary commission. "*To our surprise* [hereinafter italicized by me—A.M.], there were no pronounced Big Brother symptoms or imperial thinking stereotypes on the part of the Russian parliamentarians" (Vesokiy Zamok, 1991b). In November 1991, *Moloda Galichina*'s editorial said that the collapse of the Soviet empire "will inevitably be followed by the collapse of a lower-level empire—the RSFSR" (Moloda Galichina, 1991a). In December, the same newspaper wrote about Russia's "financial stick" that threatened Ukrainian sovereignty (Moloda Galichina, 1991b).

The inevitability and desirability of the disintegration of modern Russia as the only way to overcome its imperial complex is one of the important motives behind the reasoning by both foreign opponents and newly-minted Russian emigres who criticize Russia's current politics. This causes a lot of resentment in Russia. However, the balance between the imperial element in ideology and politics, and the desire of a part of society to become a "normal nation-state" remains at the center of debates about the future of Russia. This dualism is quite obvious both in the rationale behind political decisions and in how these decisions are explained to the public.

Since 1992, with the Union center gone, and Ukraine and Russia left face to face with a lot of problems in bilateral relations, the Galician press showed a clear predisposition to interpret any foreign policy steps taken by Moscow as an "imperial syndrome," even when local and rationalized conflicts of interest between Russia and Ukraine were

behind them. (This does not mean that with time Russia does not provide increasingly more reasons to fear "imperial relapses.") This approach is typical in discussions addressing key problems such as Crimea, the Black Sea Fleet, nuclear weapons, and financial relations.

The first among them—Crimea—invariably evoked and still evokes the strongest emotions, the essence of which is expressed by a headline from *Vysokiy Zamok*: "Crimea Is a Test by Russia as to What Can Be Done with Ukraine" (Vysokiy Zamok, 1992b). The Western Ukrainian press reacts sharply to almost all publications and political statements by any prominent Russian figures that question Ukraine's rights to Crimea. The fact that territorial claims against Ukraine were not officially put forward is interpreted as a purely tactical move. "So far, Yeltsin is not inclined to get involved in an armed conflict in Crimea" (Post-Postup, 1992c, p. 3). "What Yeltsin has on his mind, Rutskoy wears on his sleeve" reads a headline on the front page in *Moloda Galichina*, which explains: "We do not see Zhirinovsky next to Yeltsin. So what? He can appear at any time" (Moloda Galichina, 1992b). In other words, the threat of Zhirinovsky's coming to power is associated not with some kind of political cataclysm, but with the rejection by the Russian ruling elite of the democratic camouflage.

The fate of nuclear weapons stationed in Ukraine was considered in the context of potential Russian aggression against Ukraine (Kuz'yo, 1992). A *Post-Postup* cartoon depicted a bunker in the middle of a nuclear desert, with one of the residents reprimanding another: "We told you, Leonid Makarovich, not to give warheads to the Moskals!" (Post-Postup, 1992a, p. 1). Another cartoon showed Kravchuk against the background of missiles going up into the sky, saying on the phone: "Okay, okay, Mr. Bush, we will deliver missiles to Russia even faster than you think" (Post-Postup, 1992c, p. 1). However, not everyone was inclined to talk about this even with black humor. "Why Moscow so fervently craves Ukraine's disarmament is understandable. The Kremlin has always longed and still longs to talk to us from a position of strength and cherishes the dream of throwing an imperial yoke upon the Ukrainian people again at the first opportunity. The presence of nuclear weapons in Ukraine cools the chauvinistic fervor. It would be

fair to assume that Washington is aware of this dirty Russian game" (Bruch, 1992). (It is difficult not to notice that many publications in the Galician press are strikingly reminiscent of the Soviet-era newspaper *Pravda* in both style and vocabulary. They are also similar in their extreme cognitive scarcity and strict adherence to the propaganda principle: all answers are clear and unambiguous.)

Shlyakh Peremogi insisted that Ukraine's military doctrine should be based on the concept of a potential Russian threat. "Is it not here that the factor of moral demobilization begins, the complex of Little Russianness, when the people responsible for the fate of the state cannot step over the centuries-long complex of belittlement, ask questions like 'Is Russia a friendly power for Ukraine? Is Russia threatening Ukraine's independence?' and answer them? Sooner or later, they will have to be answered, and then life itself will force the creators of the Ukrainian military doctrine to take Mazepa's '… we have the right by the saber' as the basis of the concept. Then we will see if we have the Mazepa, Petlyura, and Shukhevich of today" (Shlyakh Peremogi, 1992a). Let me say that all of these figures were leaders of the armed struggle against the Russian or Soviet authorities. In order to understand how irresponsible the author of this text is, one should only ask what exactly, in his opinion, should "today's Mazepa, Petlyura, and Shukhevich do?"

I wonder what the author of that article would say if he knew that history has made Vladimir Zelensky the continuator of the Mazepa and Shukhevich cause.

I should also say that the Russian political establishment has done quite a lot to ensure that such a point of view gets some justification. This applies not only to the part of it that is increasingly exploiting nostalgic feelings, arguing about the "reunification" and "illegality of the Belovezhskaya Pushcha collusion" or claiming Russia's rights to Crimea. Such statements will inevitably poison Russia's relations with its neighbors for a long time. The post-war history of Europe shows that "restoration" sentiments persist throughout the life of the generation whose fate has been crippled by the change of borders. It is important,

however, that these sentiments do not become crucial for the policy of the state. Meanwhile, more than three years after the collapse of the USSR, there is no political will in Russia to firmly guarantee respect for the sovereignty and integrity of Ukraine at the highest official level—presidential and parliamentary. At the psychological level, Russia has turned out to be too weak to act with proper political tact towards its neighbors.

Unfortunately, this diagnosis was increasingly reaffirmed in subsequent years.

However, this does not negate the fact that such belligerent rhetoric is extremely dangerous down the line. It helps overcome the psychological barrier that makes it completely unimaginable for many today, both in Russia and Ukraine, that Russians and Ukrainians can shoot at each other. However, the emotional preparation of the modern Balkan war began exactly with such publications, which focused attention on the bloody pages of the past and created the image of an aggressive neighbor in the present.

When covering the *economic situation* in late 1991 and early 1992, relatively prosperous Ukraine was opposed to poor Russia. Having announced a contest of cartoons on topical issues, the newspaper *Vysoiky Zamok* published the first one showing a food-laden pack-peddler telling his partner: "I wonder how they all know that we are from Moscow?" (Vysokiy Zamok, 1991c). A drawing in another newspaper depicted a dilapidated hut with portraits of Lenin and Stalin in the holy corner and a balalaika sitting against the wall. Wearing bast shoes and reading a newspaper by the light of a kerosene lamp, an old man says to his wife: "Heh, I wish we would get back Crimea!" (Moloda Galichina, 1992a). At a rally dedicated to the Crimean problem, Lvov Mayor V. Spitzer, said: "I do believe that ordinary Russian people in Crimea will understand that it is better to live in a rich Ukraine than in a starving Russia" (Vysoky Zamok, 1992a).

The newspaper *Post-Postup* gave the entire front page to a cartoon depicting Rodin's The Thinker with pronounced Mongolian facial

features, a fur earflap hat on his head, a balalaika at his feet, and "Ukraine's Independence Act" in his hands. The caption read "How do we organize Russia now?" (Post-Postup, 1992b). If we recall the tone of the latest Russian media reports about economic difficulties in Ukraine, we will have to admit that we are very similar in our ability to gloat over the neighbor's problems.

Nothing has changed in this respect over the past quarter of a century.

As the economic situation deteriorated, these problems were increasingly often covered through the lens of the imperial complex. "The Central Bank of Russia has launched a financial war against Ukraine, deliberately sustaining losses in order to destroy the neighbor" (Frunze, 1992, p. 3). The principle of the "presumption of guilt" applies to Russia: "Russia's policy towards Ukraine can be called a policy of 'active disregard and counteraction.' In practical terms, this strategy is based on the suspension of official propaganda attacks against Ukraine and complaints about its independence, on the maximum restraint of official anti-Ukrainian rhetoric in the press… In general, the Russian policy towards Ukraine is aimed at curbing its economic growth and limiting economic independence where this can be achieved without much damage to itself… So today, due to the calm tone of Ukraine's negotiations with Russia, there is a great risk of being drawn into the Russian political and economic environment, and only an active and purposeful policy of Ukraine can resist this" (Lavrenyuk, 1992). The conclusion is clearly formulated in a title from *Moloda Galichina*, which says "Russia Loves Ukraine but Hungry and Barefoot" (Moloda Galichina, 1992b).

As we can see, the idea that Russia is responsible for economic failures and that a mutually beneficial economic partnership is impossible in principle was formulated as early as 1992.

In the long run, all this creates an almost apocalyptic image of Ukraine as a victim of Russian economic imperialism: "Today,

in most regional cities of Ukraine, there are chauvinistic Russians in the administrations, in the management, and among the senior executives of cooperatives and joint ventures. Caucasus natives control the shadow economy—in an independent Ukrainian state, they are actually the dominant national minority that parasitizes here… A tiny percentage of small Ukrainian owners will moan under the pressure of Russian capital and the financial and administrative elite, which will speak Russian. Tens of thousands of Ukrainians with no property will also understand that they are exploited only because they were born Ukrainians, because they will be jobless" (Shlyakh Peremogi, 1992b). Obviously, nationalism in such statements crosses the line that separates it from xenophobia.

A. Vitvitsky summed up Russian-Ukrainian communication in the first year after the collapse of the USSR as follows: "In relations with Ukraine, democratized Moscow is using a number of tactical steps designed to prevent its full independence. Moscow has undertaken successive attacks against the creation of independent armed forces in Ukraine, and sabotaged the delivery of oil and other raw materials in order to knock down the Ukrainian economy which is already weak due to the inherited Soviet economic structure. Of particular importance are Moscow's various political intrigues aimed at dismembering the Ukrainian territory… This is an imperial syndrome deeply rooted in the psyche of Russian democrats…" (Vitvitsky, 1992).

From the point of view of the Galician press, imperial sentiments are characteristic of the entire Russian political spectrum and ultimately are a more important factor than any ideological differences. "Won't the Russian messianic idea become, if it has not already become, the 'common territory,' the common bridgehead for Russian liberals, Russian imperial patriots, and Russian national communists to win back the 'common territory of many peoples'?" (Kis', 1992). The accusations of "imperial thinking" were hurled at Russian liberals so often that even by the standards of 1995 they do not look quite fair. More importantly, with this approach, there is simply no partner in Russia with whom it could be possible to negotiate the normalization of relations, and all efforts to this end seem to be doomed to failure

in advance. Obviously, this point of view had a noticeable impact on Ukraine's behavior during the negotiations on the CIS as well as on the problems of bilateral relations with Russia during Leonid Kravchuk's presidency.

It is quite natural that the Galician press abundantly quotes statements of "restoration"- minded Russian politicians and publicists as the most convincing argument in favor of such an approach. However, the press—and this is where its bias shows—says practically nothing about the fact that not all in Russia, including prominent politicians, share the "restoration" approach. I could not find any interviews or at least quotes reflecting an alternative point of view. The only exception, which should "testify that not the entire Russian intelligentsia is besotted by chauvinistic poison," is an article by "famous Moscow political activist" Valeriya Novodvorskaya, which came out in Lvov under the eloquent title "On the National Meanness of the Great Russians" (Novodvorskaya, 1992).

The imperial complex appears not only as the dominant factor of Russian politics in the past and present, but also as an integral feature of an individual Russian person. "While the nationalist movement in Russia is still actively forming ideologically and organizationally, crude market-tram-prison chauvinism is flourishing among Russians, as always. Imperial ambitions and messianism are deeply stuck in the head of the elder brother under the fur earflap hat. No matter how a Russian person looks like—wearing bast shoes and a padded jacket, the uniform of a Stalinist Gauleiter or a European tuxedo with a *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* in his hand—he likes to repeat that he spreads global good, suffers for the liberation of peoples from foreign or class oppression, and arbitrarily does everything he wants because Russia is allowed to do anything" (Shlyakh Peremogi, 1992b). I have already quoted articles where Russians were defined as colonizers and planters.

Let me pay attention to the words about the "uniform of a Stalinist Gauleiter." Analogies between Stalinism and fascism are quite frequent in the Ukrainian press, as well as in the press of other countries that were under the Kremlin's control. There is no doubt that this offends many Russian readers and is perceived as a manifestation of

Russophobia. Indeed, sometimes there are quite ignorant attempts to describe fascism as a trait inherent in Russian history, starting with the *oprichnina*, which L. Sotnik, the author of the article "Ordinary Imperial Fascism," compares with Röhm's Storm Troopers (Sotnik, L., 1992). But such nonsense should not hide a real problem. When Sotnik or other authors talk about the Black-Hundred traditions of the Union of the Archangel Michael, Soviet concentration camps and the dangers of fascism in modern Russia, are they not right? It is another thing that the public consciousness of Russia as a whole has turned out to be unable to decisively come to terms with the past, and conversations about the denigration of history have gradually sidelined attempts to make an honest, albeit very painful, assessment of the crimes committed by the Soviet regime.

This diagnosis was articulated back in 1994.

Some gestures are more valuable than decades of diplomatic work to establish relations. German Chancellor Willy Brandt knelt in Warsaw, begging forgiveness for the Nazi atrocities. Russian officials often say that Russia is the successor of the USSR, but not in such a context, which does not go unnoticed by the Galician press. This is partly the reason why many of Russia's neighbors do not feel insured against the revival of imperial trends in its foreign policy. Citing the example of the Polish Sejm that condemned Operation Vistula, during which thousands of Ukrainians were forcibly driven from their native places after World War II, A. Maslyanik published an article under the indicative title "Decent People Have the Habit of Apologizing, or Will Russian Democracy Repent of the Crimes Against the Ukrainian People?" (Maslyanik, 1992).

The topic that could have become the central point of dialogue on the painful pages of history is the famine of 1932–1933. However, neither side appeared to be prepared for such a dialogue. In Ukraine, this topic became the focal point of the most fierce propaganda campaign and legislative regulation, which defended the interpretation of those events as

genocide, overestimated the number of victims and determined the circle of perpetrators, with Russia being at its center. In Russia, efforts were focused on refuting Ukrainian claims. The events, which were a common tragedy for many people of different ethnic backgrounds, had become a tool for building a negative image of the ethnic Other.

Now let us look at the images the Western Ukrainian press is building in connection with Russia, images that are so important for understanding the mechanisms of *stereotyping*. It is most vividly manifested in cartoons. (Unfortunately, the journal's format does not allow them to be reproduced, so the reader will have to take my word for it: stylistically most of them do not differ fundamentally from the average Soviet samples. The exception is the rather original and witty works of artists from *Post-Postup*. The number of such cartoons is quite large, and I have managed to find about thirty.)

The imperial complex remains the central motive here. In July 1991, Russia is portrayed as a gloomy guard at the gates of a concentration camp, with "A New Union Treaty" printed on them. The guard greets folklore characters, who are standing indecisive at the gates and symbolizing the republics, with "Welcome!" (Za Vilnu Ukrainu, 1991). Another drawing shows an arachnid creature sitting in the Kremlin and extending its clawed paws towards Moldova, Georgia, and Crimea (Za Vilnu Ukrinu, 1992b). A third picture depicts a two-headed Russian eagle, predatorily grabbing a Cossack and saying "Where are you Cossack going from me?!" (Za Vilnu Ukrainu, 1992a). Another commonly used symbol of Russia's aggressiveness is the bear. "And this is my assistant on Ukrainian issues," Yeltsin tells Kravchuk, pointing to the huge ferocious beast wearing a *budenovka* and hanging over the characters (Post-Postup, 1992e). "What do we look like against the background of the Russian bear?" asks a *Post-Postup* author in an article on the progress of reforms in Ukraine (Post-Postup, 1992f, p. 3).

Other invariable features of Russia's image are darkness and chaos. Kravchuk is depicted as being attacked by a dark pack of bats with the faces of Russian politicians (Post-Postup, 1992d) or barely holding the fence that separates him from the fighting and shooting crowd of

Russian politicians (Post-Postup, 1992g). “Which way to go?” Kravchuk asks a girl embodying Ukraine at a fork in the road in another drawing. The sign saying “Asian path of development” is turned towards fires and explosions, while the “European” sign points to an idyllic landscape with a rising sun (Vysokiy Zamok, 1992b). (The question, however, is: How do we guess so easily, especially today, that “Asia” means Russia?)

Drawing the border of Europe along the eastern border of Ukraine is quite typical of the Galician press. *Shlyakh Peremogi* comments on the introduction of the coupon (a temporary monetary unit) as follows: “Ukraine has achieved economic independence and taken a huge step from Asia to Europe” (Shlyakh Peremogi, 1992c). In a polemic with the English magazine *The Economist*, which is skeptical about Ukraine’s current possibilities, *Moloda Galichina* gives advice to its editorial board: “May next time your artist draw a shabby, emaciated, but large and strong European coming out of an open iron cage, next to which lies a huge defeated barbarian with Mongolian facial features” (Moloda Galichina, 1992c).

(And The Economist *heard that recommendation.)*

In general, it is quite striking that while discussing the image of Russia and Russians, most Galician publicists lose the sense of self-irony and distance with regard to Ukraine itself, which is typical of any “young” nationalism. The desire to see themselves as an outpost, a bastion of Europe is a distinctive feature of geopolitical concepts that existed and still exist in a number of Eastern European countries that bordered the former Soviet Union. This is an obvious symptom of underdeveloped geopolitical thinking that makes the bearers of these concepts hostages of confrontation between Russia and the West, which is catastrophically dangerous for them themselves in the first place. So the Western Ukrainian press follows quite old stereotypes in this respect—almost the entire range of these ideas can be found in Polish journalism not only during the interwar period, but even in the second half of the 19th century, and, above all, in articles published in Galicia.

But can we say that the presented image is *completely* false? Unlike Russia, Ukraine has managed to avoid using force to resolve political and national conflicts over these years. This is the only CIS state where the *second* legally elected president is in office. D. Furman is right when he writes: "In political terms, in terms of building democracy, the 'younger brother' has turned out to be more 'talented' than the 'elder' one—a fact that apparently has simply not yet been fully comprehended by the 'elder' brother, for it seems to undermine the very idea of 'seniority'" (Furman, 1995).

* * *

Let me summarize. It is quite obvious that the Galician press in the reviewed period drew a purely negative image of Russia. Its publications clearly contain elements of negative stereotyping. Russia is seen as the main threat, and all controversial issues and local conflicts of interest are blamed on a deliberate policy aimed at undermining Ukrainian independence. Political processes in our country are interpreted within the framework of pessimistic scenarios, which inevitably lead to greater aggressiveness on the part of Russia.

At the same time, the "younger brother" complex is clearly present in the Galician press. It manifests itself in the desire to emphasize Ukraine's difference from Russia as a way of justifying Ukrainian individuality. This is especially characteristic of strongly nationalist newspapers such as *Shlyakh Peremogi* or *Za Vilnu Ukrainu*.

According to the Galician press, in basic oppositions such as "Europe-Asia," "the best future-a grave past," "peace-war," and "order-chaos," Russia invariably belongs to the part that is different from the one where Ukraine is.

What makes this image of Russia and Russians dangerous is that it is a constitutive element of the worldview held by certain political forces. The high priority of the topic is indirectly confirmed by the fact that the vast majority of the cited publications appeared on the front pages. This means that propaganda efforts to build a negative image of Russia are an established practice regardless of the current political situation, and will remain such in the foreseeable future. The

press will look for, and sometimes even create, pretexts to maintain the atmosphere of confrontation. Given the fact that there are enough forces in Russia that are interested in escalating tensions, it is safe to predict that the anti-Russian approach will remain one of the leading motives for a significant part of the Western Ukrainian press.

By the beginning of the 21st century, this was already true of Ukraine's central press as well.

The Galician press today does not enjoy any wide popularity outside of Western Ukraine. One of the reasons for this is the one-dimensional anti-Russian orientation, which clearly did not match the change in the electoral mood in favor of normalizing relations with Russia, so evident during the parliamentary elections in 1993 and the presidential election in 1994. However, any aggravation of Russian-Ukrainian relations, growing nationalist tendencies in Russia's political life, and Russian politicians' calls for restoring "the country we have lost" serve as an additional means of making anti-Russian propaganda in Ukraine attractive. Phobias, expressed in Western Ukrainian press publications about Russia, are a part of public consciousness of a significant part of the Ukrainian population. And they are not always groundless. At the level of everyday life, this can upset and even annoy us, but at the political level, we must be able to deal with this if Russia wants to make serious progress in the challenging process of normalizing relations with its largest neighbor.

Well, all the worst fears articulated in this article of nearly thirty years ago have come true.

"We must understand that the historical truth about Russian-Ukrainian relations lies somewhere in the middle between the purely negative image from the Galician press and the conflict-free, almost idyllic one created by Soviet propaganda and historical education," I wrote in 1994, hoping that over time this lopsided Ukrainian and Russian narrative would gradually become a thing of the past. Russia made attempts at the official level to build a dialogue on history issues with

both Ukraine and Poland. To this end, relevant organizational bodies were created and books published owing to the joint efforts of historians of the two countries. At some periods, great political importance was attached to those efforts. I myself actively participated in that work, albeit more in my personal capacity, because the official formats did not arouse much enthusiasm as they clearly lacked genuine mutual trust. But there were people in Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania, who were personally open to such cooperation.

Western Europe sometimes participated in these dialogues, and sometimes it was there invisibly and symbolically as an observer to whom both sides tried to demonstrate their commitment to the cosmopolitan approach to memory politics that prevailed in Europe at that time. In this version of memory politics, the victims of the Holocaust were the main victim, and exposing one's own nation as the main sufferer was considered indecent and so were ethnically closed historical narratives.

However, as it has now become quite obvious, narratives that increased alienation and nurtured hostility, with both sides excluding topics that did not allow them to build "unambiguous" "victim-executioner" oppositions, became increasingly dominant. The "historical policy," that is, an antagonistic approach to the political use of the past, clearly began to prevail already at the end of the first and the beginning of the second decades of the 21st century, slowly destroying the already vulnerable space for dialogue. Gradually, Western Europe also shifted the focus of its memory politics from the Holocaust and responsibility for it to the "legend of two totalitarianisms."

For thirty years, staunch supporters of the confrontational approach worked to strengthen the image of the Other as an enemy to be faced sooner or later on the battlefield. Now the advocates of this point of view are triumphant as they see the current events as proof that they were right from the very beginning. But it would be appropriate to ask if the mechanism of self-fulfilling prophecy is not embedded in such a confrontational approach? If from the very first days of independence you prepare societies for an inevitable, in your opinion, and even desirable, armed confrontation that frees your societies from erroneous uncertainty

in relations with the former parent state, do you not increase the chances that such confrontation will actually occur?

I am writing these final comments under the fresh impressions of the exhibition "Ukraine. Times of Cataclysms" opened at the Moscow Manege on November 4, 2022. I regret to say that the most tendentious and one-sided narratives, which would have looked anachronistic in the mid-1990s, have prevailed in Russia, too. So, there is no reason for optimism in the foreseeable future—the past, as well as cultural and symbolic politics in the broadest sense have become another field of combat confrontation.

The threats that have materialized so tragically today were foreseen and articulated a quarter of a century ago. We have failed to avert them.

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