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## **Memory and democratic participation after the Euromaidan: new ways of participation, contestation and protest shaping memoryscapes in Ukraine**

Several mass protests in the history of independent Ukraine can be seen as a response to the government failure to meet citizens’ demands and expectations and the absence or weakness of other channels of democratic participation to influence and shape public policy. In the last few years, new instruments encouraging public participation such as public hearings and electronic petitions have been introduced in Ukraine. The study explores how the existing and more recent forms of democratic participation have shaped memory politics in the wake of the Euromaidan. The article surveys the ways in which citizens have engaged to influence and contest the field of memory politics involving formal procedures such as participation in public hearings, submission of official petitions, the organization of public gatherings and initiation of lawsuits and informal ways such as desecration of monuments, discussions on news portals and social media. It aims to understand the field of memory not only as the area of contestation of different mnemonic entrepreneurs but also as a field of policymaking in which citizens have a say. The article is based on the data collected using participant observation and unstructured interviews methods during two field trips to Zhytomyr, Vinnytsya, Khmelnytskyi and Cherkasy regions in 2016 and 2017.

### **Introduction**

At the beginning of 2017, the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (UINM) draw conclusions of the decommunization process. By the end of 2016, 51,493 streets, 987 cities and villages and 25 rayons had been renamed, and 1,320 Lenin monuments and 1,069 monuments to other communist figures had been dismantled (UINM 2017). The change of toponyms following the adoption of the decommunization laws in April 2015 has been divisive and contested at the local level. Opponents have held that it was untimely to change the toponyms during the time of conflict in eastern Ukraine and of an economic crisis as the changes would involve economic costs. Furthermore, many have argued that the toponyms reflect own history, and history cannot be changed. Yet another argument of opponents has been that the street names and other toponyms are an invisible part of local habitudes and of an unconscious symbolic landscape. Proponents have argued that the changes were necessary as Ukraine was in search of an own historical identification, and the removal of symbols of the totalitarian communist regime was necessary to build a democratic and prosperous future and to counter the enemy, Russia. Overall, proponents saw decommunization as the restoration of justice and considered if the return of the “true Ukrainian history” and the shedding of the externally imposed, communist, one had happened earlier, the conflict could have been averted.

The most contested in the process of the change of toponyms has been the renaming after the historical figures whose legacies have been deeply divisive and disputed, in particular Yevhen Konovalets, the founding leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), Stepan Bandera, the leader of a revolutionary faction of the OUN, and Roman Shukhevych, the commander of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). In 2014, there were 46 monuments, 14 plaques and 5 museums dedicated to Stepan Bandera, all in Western Ukraine (Liebich and Myshlovska 2014). By 2016, there were 50 monuments and 15 plaques to Bandera, most of the new ones erected outside eastern Galicia (Liebich and Myshlovska 2017). In the process of decommunization, by 2017, according to UINM, 34 streets were renamed after Bandera, including 20 outside Western Ukraine in Poltavaska, Sumska, Kyivska, Mykolaivska, Khmelnytska and Cherkaska oblasts (UINM 2017).

In 2017, the head of the UINM, Volodymyr Vyatrovych, published a facebook post in which he claimed that decommunization should not be presented as “banderization” as out of more than 50,000 renamed in the process of decommunization streets, lanes and other objects, only 34 were renamed after Stepan Bandera. Furthermore, while 1320 monuments to the “leader of the proletariat” were dismantled, only four monuments to the leader of the OUN were erected, according to Vyatrovych, all in Western Ukraine and without any participation of public authorities. Vyatrovych also claimed that it would be harmful to create the “cult of Bandera” following the canons of the “cult of Lenin” (UINM 2017). In making this comment, Vyatrovych ignored the fact that in 2016 the first monuments to Stepan Bandera were erected outside Western Ukraine, in Khmelnytskyi and Cherkasy. Furthermore, there were other ways in which the narrative of historical national liberation struggle, including the OUN and UPA struggle, was making inroads outside Western Ukraine.

In what follows, I will examine mnemonic actors that have promoted the renaming of streets and the erection of monuments to the nationalist underground figures in three locations in central Ukraine - Khmelnytskyi, Novohrad-Volynskyi in Zhytomyrska oblast and Cherkasy. Then, I will consider how the process of renaming, which includes the work of the toponymic commission, public consultations and hearings and decisions by local councils, has been leveraged by both proponents and opponents of changes. Next, I will study how the mechanism of e-petitions has been used to contest or support the decisions of local authorities in Cherkasy. Finally, I will examine the statements of position and debates in the local fora and media by the proponents and opponents of the divisive renaming. I will conclude by considering the perception of the effectiveness of means of local democratic contestation by citizens at the local level.

### **Mnemonic actors and history and memory politics at the local level**

Following the adoption of the decommunization laws, the streets and the first monuments to the leaders of the nationalist underground appeared outside Western Ukraine. In 2016, two monuments, one dedicated to Bandera and one to Bandera and Shukhevych, were erected in Khmelnytskyi and Cherkasy. Another commemorative stone to Bandera was erected in 2016 in Rivne. Commemorative plaques to other leaders of the nationalist movement were also erected

in Novohrad-Volynskiy of Zhytomyrska oblast and Kyiv. For example, a commemorative plaque for Yevhen Konovalets in Kyiv on the street that was renamed after Konovalets in 2016 was initiated by the UINM.

The paper focuses on the role of veteran organizations (for example, the Brotherhood of the OUN and UPA), political parties (most importantly, the VO Svoboda), “activists” and some more recent vigilante groups (for example, Tsyvilnyi Korpus Azov) in influencing history and memory politics at the local level during the post-Euromaidan period in central Ukraine. Such organizations have usually played the role of mnemonic warriors (Bernhard and Kubik 2014) introducing their radical, divisive and contested initiatives in local politics. The role of the far-right and vigilante groups during the Euromaidan protests and in the post-Euromaidan period has become a topic of scholarly debate (Ryabchuk 2014; Shekhovtsov and Umland 2014; Puglisi 2015; Klein 2015; Ishchenko 2016; Malyarenko and Galbreath 2016; Karagiannis 2016; Zabyelina 2019), however, the role of such organizations in the decommunization process has not been addressed in detail in this literature. Vigilante groups have played justice and policing functions justifying them by failures and corruption of official justice institutions (Zabyelina 2019). In the field of history and memory, the difference is that vigilante groups have influenced the formal decision-making processes at the local level and their first unsanctioned initiatives have become often supported by local authorities and religious organizations, and thus become “normalized” and institutionalized.

History and memory spheres play an important role in shaping the contours of politics and terms of inclusion and exclusion of different groups. The 2015 decommunization laws, above all the laws “On the condemnation of the Communist and National-Socialist (Nazi) totalitarian regimes in Ukraine and the ban on propaganda of their symbols” (Law 2558) and “On the legal status and commemoration of the fighters for the independence of Ukraine in the twentieth century” (Law 2538-1), accelerated the processes of redefining the nature of the Ukrainian polity and the groups that belong or not belong to it. The laws also included a profound social engineering element, aiming to transform not only the toponyms, but also “totalitarian values” in the words of Vyatrovych (2015). The law “On the legal status and commemoration of the fighters for the independence of Ukraine in the twentieth century” proposes a reading of Ukrainian history as a national-liberation fight for independence. This legislated narrative connects the post-Soviet Ukrainian state to the efforts of “freedom fighters” in different military and non-military groups, including the controversial OUN and UPA, throughout history. Most importantly, it excluded the Soviet and Soviet Ukrainian nation and state-building. Such reading of history depicts the ongoing conflict as the continuation of the national-liberation fight of the Ukrainian people against Russia in its various historical incarnations.

In Khmelnytskyi, the erection of the monument to Bandera was linked to the election of a member of the VO Svoboda as mayor. During the local elections on 25 October 2015, Oleksandr Symchyshyn from the VO Svoboda was elected mayor. Previously, he was a member of the far-right organizations “Tryzub” named after Stepan Bandera and of the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists.

Figure 1. The monument to Stepan Bandera in Khmelnytskyi



Source: photographed by the author, April 2017

In other locations, the erection of monumental installations to leaders of the nationalist underground were initiated by the VO Svoboda or some vigilante groups. In August 2016, the activists of the VO Svoboda in Cherkasy turned a stone into a monument to Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych in protest to the refusal of the city council to name streets after Bandera and Shukhevych. The installation was done without an official permission of local authorities. Another similar case of unauthorized erection of a memorial stone to Stepan Bandera by activists and fighters of Aidar, Azov and Horyn battalions took place in Rivne in January 2016. The head of Rivne oblast Association of Participants in Military Action [boyovykh dii] and ATO participants “UVO”, Serhii Pandrak, who initiated the erection of the stone to the “legendary leader [providnyk] of the OUN and real Hero of Ukraine”, argued that the decision was taken by the community, soldiers from different brigades and battalions, patriots, to avoid that the “corrupt authorities” occupy the space by other projects (Radiotrek 2016; Rivnepost 2016). Few days later, after the stone to Bandera was damaged, Pandrak held that it was desecrated by “separatists” and “non-exterminated communists” [nedobytі komunisty] (Rivnepost 2016). Two months later, the activists and ATO participants placed a 2.7 ton stone with the same inscription on the same place where the previous installation was destroyed. The head of the oblast council, the mayor of Rivne and other state officials and religious organizations participated in the opening of the new stone. One of participants in the opening ceremony noted that only a “national dictatorship” would save Ukraine (Hryshchuk 2016).

Figure 2. The monument to Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych in Cherkasy



Source: photographed by the author, April 2017

The activists of VO Svoboda in Cherkasy also depicted another stone on the same square where the stone to Bandera and Shukhevych is located with an image of Styatoslav Khorobryi and the logo of the party without any permission of the local authorities.

Figure 3. A stone depicted by VO Svoboda in Cherkasy



Source: photographed by the author, April 2017

In Cherkasy, a monument to the fighters for Ukrainian independence proposed by the “activists” was erected in 2016 comprising a column with a statue of St Michael Angel surrounded by seven plaques representing seven stages of Ukrainian state-building. One of the stages was the fight in the “OUN-UPA”. This monumental representation sets in stone the reading of Ukrainian history as the “fight for independence” by defined entities mentioned in the law “On the legal status and commemoration of fighters for independence of Ukraine in twentieth century”.

Figure 4. A monument to the fighters for Ukrainian independence in Cherkasy



Source: photographed by the author, April 2017

Another example of how political parties and other groups encroach on the public space is the museums. For example, the museum in Chyhyryn in Cherkaska oblast hosted an exhibition of the fighters of Kholodnyi Yar in 2017 and incorporated into the exhibition the posters of events organized by the VO Svoboda, Azov and other battalions.

Figures 5 and 6. An exhibition “Kholodnyi Yar” in Chyhyryn



Source: photographed by the author, April 2017

### Public consultations in the process of decommunization as ways of contestation

In “questions and answers” about the decommunization process, Vyatrovych (2016) held that the local community had an absolute right and freedom to select any new toponym or return a historical one. The process of renaming of toponyms includes mandatory consultations with the local community that was established by Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 989 of 24 October 2012. Furthermore, citizens can use other means of interaction with local authorities. In July 2015, the Verkhovna Rada adopted amendments to Article 5 of the Law of Ukraine “On Citizens’ Appeals”, which established that a special form of collective appeal by citizens to the President, the Verkhovna Rada, the Cabinet of Ministers and local self-government bodies is an electronic petition, and supplemented Section II of the Law of Article 23.1, which regulates the

procedure for filing and reviewing electronic petitions. The paper considers how public hearings, electronic petitions and other forms of citizen participation and mobilization have been used in the decommunization process.

In October 2015, the City Council of Novohrad-Volynskiy, a city of about 50,000 residents in Zhytomyrska oblast of central Ukraine, held a plenary session to discuss the renaming of streets in the city following the adoption of the decommunization laws. Prior to the session, as required by the law, the city held public consultations from 16 July till 16 September 2015 to receive commentaries from residents concerning the street changes proposed by the city toponymical commission. In the framework of consultations, 12 phone calls and 24 written commentaries had been received from local residents (Novohrad 2015a). Before the public hearings, the city council informed residents that the final renaming of streets would be guided by the role of historical personalities after whom the streets will be renamed in the process of Ukrainian state-building and the attitude to them of the local community (Zvyagel 2015). The department of culture of the City Council also prepared biographies for most debated personalities after whom it was proposed to name streets: Petro Konashevych-Sahaidachnyi, Stepan Bandera, Roman Shukhevych and Yevhen Konovalets without mentioning any controversial facts of their biographies (Zvyagel 2015).

The public hearings, in which about 70 residents participated, took place on 30 September 2015. A report of the City Council on the hearings noted that the debates about the renaming of streets were emotional and tumultuous, and that the older residents protested the renaming overall arguing that it would constitute substantial costs to the city and residents. The most debated and contested was the renaming of three streets after Konovalets, Bandera and Shukhevych. The renaming of a street after Bandera received the biggest number of comments and proposals. The residents of the street held a meeting prior to the hearings, and many of them were against the renaming (Novohrad 2015a).

Serhiy Kolotov, deputy city mayor, noted that the process of street renaming was taking place across Ukraine and there was an ongoing rethinking of history. He mentioned that there were streets renamed after Konovalets, Bandera and Shukhevych in Zhytomyr, Kyiv and other cities of Ukraine. The report of the public hearings noted that the young people and the city branch of the OUN and UPA Brotherhood supported the renaming while the representatives of the city organization of veterans were unanimously against. Larysa Zayets, head of the department of culture of the City Council, read a letter from the organization of veterans that protested the renaming of streets after Konovalets, Bandera and Shukhevych. The reading was interrupted many times by shouts from the audience as a result of which the representatives of the organization of veterans left the meeting hall.

The head of the local organization of Batkivshchyna party, Viktor Honcharuk, mentioned that "... it is necessary to rely on facts. The communist ideology is already condemned. And the biggest "scary story" [strashylka] in Ukraine – "banderivtsi" – is in the past. The older generation is soaked by Soviet ideology, and it is difficult to convince them about other ways. We are doing everything in accordance with the procedure established by the legislation...". The public hearings ended by

a statement by the head of the city branch of the OUN and UPA Brotherhood, Viktor Buslenko: “Bandera is the symbol of the Ukrainian nation, we have to renew the Ukrainian nation, that’s why there will be a street to Stepan Bandera” (Novohrad 2015a).

By the decision of 20 October 2015, the city council renamed 56 streets except for the ones to be named after Konovalets, Bandera and Shukhevych, which had received most comments from local residents (Zhiromir-online 2015). While the renaming after the three leaders of the nationalist movement was relegated to another discussion, among 56 renamed streets there was a street renamed after Mykola Arsenych, the head of the security service of the nationalist movement. The website of the city council of Novohrad-Volynskyi posted a biography of Mykola Arsenych in the framework of public debates on the renaming of toponyms. The biography mentions that in 1939 he followed special courses of military intelligence near Cracow together with the German Abwehr and later taught at the courses in Cracow. The description accredited Arsenych with the creation of a security service that could fight two most important security services at that time – Gestapo and NKVD. At the same time, it mentions that in 1944 Arsenych together with other OUN-B leaders led negotiations with a Reich representative about a common fight against the USSR. The biography ends by describing the brutal character of Arsenych: “According to the characteristics of his colleagues, [Arsenych] was “the most brutal Banderivets, who did not consider any circumstances and did not know of other measures except for physical destruction”. It was Arsenych who signed a directive on 27.10.1943 that required punishment for unauthorized demonstrations against the Germans, up to shooting” (Novohrad 2015). This biographical note clearly stands out from other biographies of dividing historical figures prepared by the city council in the framework of decommunization by direct reference to collaboration with the Third Reich and violence. It has to be noted that violence and violation of human rights committed by the Soviet and Nazi regimes were the main justifications behind the decommunization laws.

The toponymical commission of the city council prepared another list of proposed street changes in April 2016, which again included Konovalets, Bandera and Shukhevych, and public consultations on the proposed changes started on 14 April 2016. The final decision about the renaming, which confirmed the renaming of two streets (however, different from the ones proposed in 2015) after Bandera and Shukhevych, was taken by a decision of the oblast state administration of Zhytomyrska oblast of 20 May 2016 before the deadline of 24 May 2016. At the initiative of the local Brotherhood of OUN and UPA, on 14 October 2016, a memorial plaque to Konovalets was inaugurated on the building of the city library. The plaque (as well as the commemorative space dedicated to the Heavenly Hundred) was desecrated several months later in January 2017. Dmitry Timofeenko (2017) from Nationalnyi Korpus noted on his social media on 22 January 2017 page that those were the disseminators of separatism [rozplidnyky separatyzmu] including local “sofa” separatists, supporters of communist and other left ideas (representative of the former communist party, some members of the organization of veterans, local anarchists, etc) and supporters of the church of the Moscow Patriarchate. According to Timofeenko, the first group is accustomed to comment on the internet and bring conflict among like-minded individuals [odnodumtsi]. The second group is those who “openly and sincerely support separatism and pro-Russian views” and are the main opponents of the idea of Ukrainian

independence. In particular, Timofeenko mentioned the role of “harmless” veterans during public hearings concerning the renaming of streets who besmirched the leaders of the nationalist movement and provided fake information about mythical collaboration by Ukrainians, the participation of the OUN in Jewish pogroms, etc.

The toponymic commission of Khmelnytskyi consisting of representatives of local authorities, academia and civil society organizations held several sessions to discuss new street names for the ones which the commission considered that fall under the decommunization laws. The VO Svoboda publicized on its website that on 23 February 2016 Symchyshyn signed a decision about the renaming of 48 streets in Khmelnytskyi, including one of the “central and largest” streets named after Stepan Bandera. It also noted that the new street names were discussed with the wide involvement of citizens, and that the opinion of residents of streets in most cases was taken into consideration (Svoboda 2016).

The residents of Khmelnytskyi had a month from 12 January to 12 February 2016 to comment on the proposed by the commission street names and to provide suggestions. The city council received 96 proposals (half submitted via email, 29 by phone and about 20 in writing). The secretary of the city council, Mykhailo Kryvak, reported at the session of the toponymic commission that 6 proposals were against any renaming, and 30 expressed fear about the scale of renaming (Bevz 2016). The biggest number of comments and proposals during the public consultations period (four by telephone and four by email against the renaming and four alternative suggestions) concerned the renaming of Marshala Rybalka street into Stepana Bandery street (Khmelnytskyi 2016). After the public consultations, the city mayor signed the decision about the renaming of 48 streets on 19 February 2016.

In the city of Cherkasy, the local oblast branch of the VO Svoboda was registered in 2006. The VO Svoboda members (three representatives in the city council until 2015 and six between 2015 and 2018) were the most active supporters of decommunization policies and practices. The renaming of streets in Cherkasy following the Euromaidan protests started before the adoption of the decommunization laws in April 2015. The members of the VO Svoboda in the city council initiated the return of “historical names” as the restoration of historical justice (Makarenko 2015).

According to a local journalist, the actions of the VO Svoboda in Cherkasy has been in line with the ideology of the party focused on the fight against communism, support to the military and the counteraction to “rude foreigners” [nakhabni inozemtsi] (Makarenko 2015). During public hearings about the renaming of streets on 19 March 2015, the activists of VO Svoboda did not allow some participants to speak by shouting loudly “Hanba” [Shame] (V4asno 2015). Initially, the toponymic commission of Cherkasy did not accept the proposals of the VO Svoboda to rename streets after the leaders of the nationalist movement. A deputy of the Cherkasy City Council from the VO Svoboda, Yuriy Botnar, complained in February 2016 that the city mayor Anatoliy Bondarenko (from Batkivshchyna party) “did everything possible not decommunize the city in reality” and ignored the VO Svoboda proposals to “commemorate renowned nationalists-state-builders [natsionalisty derzhavnyky] such as Stepan Bandera and Olena Teliha (Botnar 2016). Yaroslav Nyshchuk, the head of the VO Svoboda faction in the city council of Cherkasy in

2015, held that decommunization was an “investment in the education of future generations” as “what surrounds people, forms their world outlook” (Makarenko 2015). In 2019, the VO Svoboda initiated a decision at the city council to prohibit the public use of the “language of the aggressor” that was supported by a majority of city council deputies. In some other local councils, the representatives of the VO Svoboda initiated the public waving of the black and red flag on designated dates. Mykhailo Kupchyn posted on 27 February 2019 on the facebook page of the VO Svoboda that in the Chornobai village council of Cherkaska oblast, the deputies adopted such a decision after a second “attempt” following the visit of soldiers of ZSU and DUK who asked to talk to the deputies and “convinced” them (facebook.com/Cherkasy.svoboda, 27 February 2019).

During the public hearings on 30 July 2015, the deputy mayor of Cherkasy and the head of the toponymic commission, Oleksandr Ilchenko, asked a rhetoric question in his opening remarks: “Do we want to leave things as they are and continue to live on the streets with the names that someone brought to us some time ago and imposed on us?” Another member of the toponymic commission, Volodymyr Polishchuk replied to a number of concerns raised that some streets named after figures who made a contribution to science and history of the former USSR also fell the decommunization laws by saying that Ukraine should orient itself only at its “own history and culture”. According to him, the decisions to name streets after Soviet cosmonauts and Russian writers and scientists throughout the Soviet Union were taken by the communist organs. It is a legalized “ruskii mir”: first comes Russian culture, then the Russian language and then the Russian tanks attack (Cherkasy City Council 2015).

A member of the Cherkasy toponymical commission Vitaliy Masnenko held that the main principles in the selection of new toponyms were to replace the approach taken during the Soviet period of changing local toponyms with the all-union ones thus ruining local identity with the current approach that promotes historical, all-Ukrainian and local renowned figures (In.ck.ua 2016). Masnenko also commented on the proposals of some communities to select neutral street names such as Malyovnycha [Picturesque] or Horikhova [Walnut] in Dakhnyvka that because of such names the local identity is being lost. “Every street can be named in an original way, as own history is everywhere” (In.ck.ua 2016). On another occasion, Masnenko doubted how such “horikhvyi patriotyzm” [walnut patriotism] would work for the formation of national identity of Cherkasy residents and suggested that decommunization could be broadened to “deimperialization” as there are street names introduced during the Soviet period with the aim of the “formation of Ukrainians” (Stepanov 2016)

After the first wave of renaming in 2015 and 2016, the toponymic commission developed proposals concerning other street name changes (including Mozhaiskoho either after Bandera or Aviatoriv Kasianenkiv) in February 2017. During the two months of public consultations, the toponymical commission received 17 paper commentaries and 18 electronic letters. Furthermore, four commentaries requested not to make any changes at all, and there were a number of proposals not linked to any concrete streets to give streets neutral names (Cherkasy City Council 2017a). The proposed renaming of Mozhaiskoho street received the biggest number of comments: four petitions pleaded not to change the street name (one included 43 signatures),

two supported the renaming of the street into Bandery street, one was against the renaming into Bandery street, and three proposed other name streets (Cherkasy City Council 2017).

During the public hearing on 20 July 2018 on the proposed changes only several dozens of residents of Cherkasy participated. The public hearings started with the streets that did not receive any comments, most concerned the names of individuals who died in the ATO. The proposed renaming of Mozhaiskoho street was among the ones that steered most resentment during the hearings. Veteran organizations spoke against the renaming of Mozhaiskoho street and some other streets arguing that the personalities after whom the streets were named were still valid. A report of the public hearings prepared by the City Council noted that the majority of the participants of the public hearings who supported the renaming held that it was necessary to create a new history and honour the contemporary heroes who gave their lives for independent Ukraine (Cherkasy City Council 2017a). The executive committee of the City Council agreed on a draft decision about renaming of 8 streets, including Mozhaiskoho into Bandera street, on 17 April 2018, and then a draft decision of the city council was dated 3 May 2018 (<http://rada.ck.ua/golos/proekty/inf/1421>), however, the decision has not been adopted yet.

### **E-Petitions concerning the renaming of a street after Bandera in Cherkasy**

The renaming of Mozhaiskoho street into Bandera street became the most contested in Cherkasy. Oponents and proponents of renaming used the tool of e-petitions. Between February and August 2018, nine electronic petitions were submitted on the website of the city council concerning the renaming of Mozhaiskoho street. Out of nine petitions, seven protested against the renaming and two supported it.

Only one petition that protested the renaming received the necessary number of votes (250) to be considered by the city council. The petition was submitted by Max Popov on 17 April 2018 and argued that “Stepan Bandera is a controversial character in Ukrainian history. He has no direct relation to the city of Cherkasy. Please do not rename the street with such a provocative name. Choose a loyal [sic] name that would not resent society”. The petition was considered in a session of the city council and was not supported. The initiator of the petition was informed about the city council decision on 18 June 2018 without any further explanation (<http://rada.ck.ua/petitions/web/439>).

In response to the petitions demanding the annulation of renaming after Bandera, two were submitted in support of renaming. One, submitted on 21 April 2018 by Lyubomyr Lynovytskyi, a son of a renown local poet and journalist Petro Lynovytskyi married to the widow of Vasyl Symonenko, gathered 189 (out of 250) votes. The petition justified the renaming by the fact that in 2010 President of Ukraine awarded Bandera the title of Hero of Ukraine, and according to numerous surveys, Bandera was in the top ten of the most prominent Ukrainians. Furthermore, the author of the petition justified the remaining in the following way: “In order to develop national identity of the present and future generations, despite the propaganda of the aggressor country, we support the right of the patriot to commemoration. We consider Bandera a hero,

and the term "banderivets" to be synonymous with the word patriot of Ukraine. There will be a street named after Stepan Bandera in Cherkasy!"

The VO Svoboda in Cherkasy called upon its followers on its facebook page on 24 April 2018 to support the e-petition concerning the renaming of Mozhaiskoho to Bandera Street. It held that "We must prove that Cherkasy is a Ukrainian city! Nationalism is in our blood. Shevchenko was a nationalist. One of the founders of the OUN - Makar Kushnir, was a native of Cherkasy. This is our ideology, which calls to love our nation, our state and strive for its prosperity. Do not be fooled by the Kremlin's propaganda that 'nationalism is fascism'. Support the petition!" (facebook.com/Cherkasy.svoboda, 24 April 2018). However, the petition did not gain the necessary number of votes to be considered by the city council.

Another round of e-petitions was submitted several months later after the exchange between the opponents and proponents in April 2018. Another petition supporting the "decision" of the toponymical commission to rename Mozhaiskoho after Bandera was submitted several months later on 11 June 2018 by Yuriy Chepurnyi. It received only 9 votes. This petition misunderstood the role of the commission in the renaming process as the letter plays a purely consultative role.

Three petitions were trying to suggest creative alternative names to Mozhaiskoho Street. One submitted on 31 August 2018, which received 73 votes, proposed to rename the street after Ivan Piddubnyi, a world champion of fight born in Cherkaska oblast. Another one of 21 July 2018 proposed jokingly in order "to achieve reconciliation and understanding" to rename Mozhaiskoho street after the street of the "21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of victory of Korban Dallas over mangalores". It received 56 votes. Another humorous petition of 24 April 2018, which received 22 votes, suggested to rename the street after Ostap Bender (an imaginary character in a famous novel and Ilf and Petrov) as "it seems that we have too much politics and sadness. Let's have a bit of humor which always suits everyone – the right, the left, centrists and others ... Therefore, neither Mozhaiskyi, nor Bandera. Let there be an Ostap Bender Street, as the beginning of the end of contested streets".

Finally, there were two petitions submitted by Aleksandr Mykhailyk on 16 February 2018 and 17 April 2018 proposed to review the remaining of streets after the individuals who died in the ATO and contested figures like Bandera and demanded the local authorities to respect law and take decisions taking into consideration the results of public consultations and the collection of signatures by residents of the renamed streets.

### **Statements of position and debates at the local level**

Beyond the official channels of decision-making at the local level with the involvement of local residents, the article considers the publications by local residents on the matters of renaming and debates in the local online fora and media. In contrast to the social media which are private group debates, statement of positions and debates on local media are part of the public sphere. Debates on the official websites of the local councils, local media and fora are an important source for studying opinions of local residents and the core issues of debate. The most important issues raised in the discussion have been the understanding that the renaming was done in a

“Bolshevik” ideological manner, defined by political conjuncture and interests of political parties. Another set of questions and debate concerned the failure of local authorities to listen to the opinion of local residents, consider the results of public consultations and hearings and about the ineffectiveness of the e-petition and other democratic participation mechanisms. Finally, the debates about toponyms became debates about the meaning of “being Ukrainian” and about what counts as “Ukrainian”.

In Cherkasy, the city council published a report of the public hearings of 30 July 2015 entitled “The Public [hromadkist] expressed itself on the renaming of streets” (Cherkasy City Council 2015). The post was followed by a lively online discussion. There were a number of comments questioning the legitimacy of public hearings in which only about 300 residents of Cherkasy participated. Another common opinion in the discussion was that the money to be spent on renaming would have been better spent on repairing roads. Some felt that the decommunization laws were carried out in an undemocratic manner, in the USSR spirit, but using a new “patriotic” language (comments section following Cherkasy City Council 2015).

Following the comments by the member of the toponymical commission in Cherkasy, Vitaliy Masnenko, one commentator was indignant about his comment that the residents who proposed to rename streets with neutral names such as Zhyvopysna [Picturesque] were “deprived of fantasy” (In.ck.ua 2016). Other commenters doubted that life in the city would improve after the renaming. One participant in the discussion supporting the renaming saw the comments of “Russian-speaking commenters” as “hate to everything Ukrainian” and suggested to them that the renaming was done for “Ukrainians who will in fact live better after the return of historical names”. Another participant in the discussion considered such as comment as discrimination of Cherkasy residents by language and nationality and doubted his patriotism as the “Most Ukrainian Ukrainian” [Naiukrainkyi Ukrainets] who in fact is “sovok” who self-establishes himself at the expense of others. The latter also advised to watch a speech by Slavko Vakarchuk in Mariupol on youtube, which provides the best definition what it means to be Ukrainian (In.ck.ua 2016).

After the announcement of public consultations concerning new proposals of the toponymic commission in May 2017, which included the proposal to rename some streets after Bandera and Konovalts, the nature of the debate on the website of the city council changed. Several comments of supporters in a similar style claimed that it would be the right decision to honor the heroes of Ukraine. One person enumerated the crimes committed during 73 years of rule of “zhydo-rosiyskykh okupantiv” and argued that that country is dead and now Ukraine has its own heroes who have to be honored. Several of such supporting comments added “away with vata in our minds”, “away with russkii mir, from our given by God land”, “fake heroes of another country is complete vata ... in minds”. Some also delegitimized other participants in the discussion by naming them “vata” and “sovok” and calling to do away with those who say “there is no difference” suggesting to apply to them the formula “Chemodan, vokzal, Rasseya”. Opponents argued that the streets named after Bandera and Konovalts in Cherkasy would be a return to the Soviet Union: “How would we be different from the communists by creating a new Lenin-Bandera ...?”. Several suggested to avoid naming streets after political figures who are always

controversial and dividing. Some protested against the renaming of streets named after Russian or Soviet writers and other public figures who did not fall under the law on decommunization (comments section following Cherkasy City Council 2017 b).

Following the decision of the city council to support the recommendation of the toponymical commission to rename Mozhaiskoho into Bandery ignoring the e-petition against the renaming, there were a number of indignant comments about the failure of local authorities to listen to the opinion of local residents and about the effectiveness of the e-petition mechanism. Some explained the decision by the presence of a VO Svoboda representative on the toponymical commission and the fear of members of the commission to be pressured by “activists” for “voting against Bandera”. One person considered the methods of renaming Bolshevik and that residents themselves had to select names for streets and settlements, “otherwise – we will change names during every change of power” (comments section following Procherk 2018).

Similarly, the installation to Bandera and Shukhevych in Cherkasy was also linked to the VO Svoboda and the lack of consultations with the public. A woman of about 50 years old, a resident of Cherkasy, noted that “It is the Svoboda party which has put up the monument, no one has asked us. before, there was a stone on the square where they wanted to put up a monument to Vasyl Symonenko. These [Bandera and Shukhevych] are the heroes of Western Ukraine, not our heroes, we have nothing in common with them. The Svoboda party came and painted the stone, several times it was desecrated” (collected by the author, April 2017, Cherkasy).

In Cherkasy, a local forum discussion on “Cherkaskyi Forum” entitled “The change of names of streets. Is it necessary?” was initiated after the call for the first public hearing on the street changes in March 2015. By November 2018, there were 519 pages in the discussion (<http://forumua.org/forum/общество-культура-события/черкассы-и-область/68463-переименование-улиц-а-надо-ли>). The forum served as the space for expression of alternative views. One point of view has been that the change of power following the Euromaidan represented just one of many regime and government changes in the last decades, and “heroes and villains” change with each change. “lawless\_Модератор” commented on 24 February 2018 “...The attitude to the events in Kyiv, the Crimea and Donbass in society is extremely contradictory, “heroes and villains” will change not once. Therefore, to call the street names of participants of these events, at least, short-sighted and premature” (Cherkaskyi Forum). Similar comments were made in Khmelnytskyi where residents of Rybalko street renamed after Bandera considered the name change as another regime change comparing it to a popular movie “the wedding in Malynivka” in which the new authorities come and change everything. “Our street used to be Tsentralna, then Marshal Rybalko and now Bandera street” commented Halyna Datskova (Barutcka and Faryna 2016).

In the city of Novohrad-Volynskyi, the local historian [krayeznavets] Oleksandr Provotorov published several articles in the local news portal to comments on the process of decommunization. He critiqued the irregularities and deficiencies in the process of renaming of toponyms. He considered that the local council had fully ignored the results of the public discussion. Also, he held that the “dominant” ideology and power are changing things and

questioned if the city needed ideological renaming using the methods of the Bolsheviks (Provotorov 2015). In another publication, Provotorov (2015a) asked about the interests behind pushing through the council the renaming of streets after six nationalists in the city where neither “banderivtsi” nor “upivtsi” were not successful in establishing the underground. He noted that the advisor to the city mayor who promoted the commemoration of nationalists justified it by the fact that it was “embarrassing” before party organizations [partaigenosse] in other cities that Novohrad-Volynskiyi does not have streets named after nationalists. Finally, he considered that the local community was clear in saying that it did not want any “ideological renaming”.

After the publication of the information about the launch of public discussion on renaming in Novohrad-Volynskiyi in July 2015, one local resident questioned the relevance of naming streets after Petlyura, Konovalts, Shukhevych and Bandera which would mean that the streets named after some criminals, now would be called after other criminals whose actions could not be justified by the liberation struggle. The resident also argued that residents of the city should be asked on which street they would like to live and to take decision about the renaming otherwise the methods of renaming would be no different from the communist ones (Zvyagel 2015 a).

The local historian Provotorov (2019) also critiqued the erection of “tomb plaques” such as the one to Konovalts without official permission on “the monument of Soviet architecture” using as legitimization the facts from Wikipedia and ignoring the “real’ history of the stay of Konovalts and later OUN “expeditionary groups” [pokhidni hrupy] that had little success in the city. He argued that plaques should be erected on buildings directly linked historical events with inscriptions of purely informative nature.

## **Conclusions**

In the three cases examined in the present article, Khmelnytskyi, Novohrad-Volynskiyi in Zhytomyrska oblast and Cherkasy, residents were unsuccessful in changing the initial proposals by the toponymical commissions then confirmed by the city council or oblast council decisions to rename streets after controversial and divisive historical figures. The renaming of streets after Stepan Bandera outside Western Ukraine in the process of decommunization has generated the biggest protest. The renaming has generated the largest number of commentaries and proposals during public consultations, most intense debates during public hearings, the most important issue for e-petitions among petitions concerning toponyms change in Cherkasy and debates on media portals, fora and social media.

The renaming after controversial historical figures in Khmelnytskyi, Novohrad-Volynskiyi and Cherkasy was driven by the representatives of VO Svoboda, the OUN and UPA Brotherhood and Tsvilnyi Korpus, who played the leading role in putting the renaming on the agenda of toponymical commissions, silencing and delegitimizing the opponents of renaming during public hearings and debates in the local media and pushing the renaming through the local councils. They accused the opponents of renaming being unpatriotic, “non-Ukrainian” and supporting separatism. In contrast to other examples when vigilante groups intruded into the work of local self-governance bodies and courts in recent years, in the field of history and memory, their first unsanctioned initiatives have become often supported by local authorities and religious organizations, and thus become “normalized” and institutionalized.

In the process of contestation many local residents expressed the thought that the break with the previous “Bolshevik” methods and democratization would mean the ability of local authorities to take public opinion and needs into consideration in the local decision-making processes. In the cases analyzed in the present article the mechanisms of democratic contestation used by local residents such as public hearings, electronic petitions, collection of signatures and statement of positions and debates in local media to contest the decommunization and the promotion of the fight of national liberation with the focus on the OUN and UPA at the local level have not been successful. At present, only in Cherkasy, the draft decision about the renaming of streets has not been adopted yet.

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