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Triadic Nexus Conflict? Ukraine's Nationalizing Policies, Russia's Homeland Nationalism, and the Dynamics of Escalation in 2014–2019

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Abstract: This chapter examines the ongoing Russian–Ukrainian conflict from the perspective of Rogers Brubaker's triadic nexus theory, as developed in his seminal 1996 comparative investigation *Nationalism Reframed*. We juxtapose post-Euromaidan Ukraine's new memory, education and language policies to official Russian criticisms that feature sweeping references to Nazism and 'ethnocide', inter-regional tensions within Ukraine, as well as the common 'heroic' past of Russians and Ukrainians. At first glance, the rhetorical and political escalation between Ukraine and Russia in 2014–2019 appears to constitute a typical trilateral conflict involving a post-colonial nationalizing state, an ethnic minority, and the external homeland – as conceptualized by Brubaker. From closer examination of the historic context, we conclude, however, that classic triadic nexus theory can only partly explain the causal mechanisms underlying the escalation of the Russian–Ukrainian conflict. The sequence of events leading to the explosion of tensions between these two post-Soviet countries since 2014 contradicts the logic of triadic nexus theory. Paradoxically, violent conflict preceded, and was not triggered by, Ukraine's official nationalizing legislation and policies of 2017–2019. Military escalation came before, not after, Ukrainization, which appears as a reaction to rather than cause of Russian armed intervention on behalf of Ukraine's Russian-speakers. We conclude with some deliberations on the implications and determinants of the observed reversed mechanism of nationalist conflict escalation in the Russian–Ukrainian case.

Keywords: Ukraine, Russia, triadic nexus, national state, irredentism, cultural policies

Introduction

This chapter explores the interplay between changes in Ukraine's cultural policies since 2014, and the ensuing sharp reactions of Russian officials and commentators. We relate these confrontations to the 'triadic nexus' of differing nationalisms observed by Rogers Brubaker in his seminal monograph, a nexus peculiar to post-imperial/-colonial situations.¹ Conflicts within such triads typically involve nationalizing states, national minorities within them, and the external homelands of these minorities.

The study adds to earlier discussions of Brubaker's theory in relation to Ukraine,² offering an additional case study of what may appear to be a triadic conflict involving minority, nationalizing and homeland nationalisms, here focusing on the latter two confrontations. First we describe new Ukrainian legislation intended to enhance Ukrainian national unity and state patriotism. We then document selected reactions of Russian officials and pro-Kremlin commentators to Ukraine's post-Euromaidan memory, education and language policies, during the presidencies of Oleksandr Turchynov (acting, February–June 2014) and Petro Poroshenko (2014–2019): from late February 2014 to late May 2019. Here we focus on Russian reactions to six Ukrainian post-Euromaidan laws on de-communization (2015), education (2017) and language (2019).

By examining various types of political, historical and cultural confrontations between post-Euromaidan Ukraine and Russia, we aim to contribute to a better understanding of the generic features of conflicts between the nationalizing and homeland nationalisms of successor states. After outlining developments in Ukrainian memory and history affairs, during and after Euromaidan,³ we explore Moscow's reactions. In the second part, we briefly summarize Ukraine's post-revolutionary education and language policies, and then document some official Russian criticisms of them. In a third interpretative part, we contextualize these verbal battles. The conclusions offer reflections on the implications of our findings for Brubaker's theory.

Several important topics have been omitted here for reasons of space. In terms of Brubaker's triadic nexus theory, the most consequential omission concerns the many activities of Russian organizations in Ukraine, or the organizations favouring a more pro-Russian foreign policy – above all the successor organizations to the Party of Regions. We further omit the understudied

¹ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

² E.g. Volodymyr Kulyk, The politics of ethnicity in post-Soviet Ukraine: Beyond Brubaker, *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 26:1–2 (2001), 197–221; Stephen Shulman, The contours of civic and ethnic national identification in Ukraine, *Europe-Asia Studies* 56:1 (2004), 35–56.

³ Wilfried Jilge, Geschichtspolitik auf dem Maidan: Politische Emanzipation und Nationale Selbstvergewisserung, *Osteuropa* 64: 5–6 (2014): 239–258; Oxana Shevel, The battle for historical memory in postrevolutionary Ukraine, *Current History* 115: 783 (2016): 258–263; Yuliya Yurchuk, Reclaiming the past, confronting the past: OUN-UPA memory politics and nation-building in Ukraine (1991–2016), in: Julie Fedor, Markku Kangaspuro, Jussi Lassila and Tatiana Zhurzhenko (eds), *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 107–137.

topic of Ukrainians living in Russia – a subject where deeper consideration might reveal a ‘quadratic’, not merely triadic, interplay.⁴

Further, we do not deal here with a range of additional contentious issues that complicate Russian and Ukrainian nation-building and relations. These include the two countries’ conflicting geopolitical engagements, Orthodoxy, and history textbooks – topics also closely related to their nationalizing, homeland and minority nationalisms. Even an elementary outline of these and other important aspects of the triadic (or quadratic) conflict of Russian and Ukrainian nationalisms would require book-length exploration.

Memory Politics and ‘De-Communization’

As regards memory affairs, one of the earliest symbolic events of the Euromaidan uprising was the toppling of Kyiv’s central monument to Vladimir Lenin in Besarabs’ka Square on 8 December 2013, two weeks after the start of the uprising. The parliamentary ultra-nationalist and radically anti-Russian All-Ukrainian Union ‘Freedom’ (*Svoboda*), one of the parties most active during the Euromaidan protests, claimed responsibility for this act.⁵ While it was not supported by all other protesting politicians and groups,⁶ the spontaneous grassroots-initiated toppling of Communist-era memorials gained traction all over Ukraine. It sparked the gradual destruction of monuments to Lenin as well as other Soviet leaders across the entire country –‘the fall of the Lenins’ (*Leninopad*).⁷

In 2013, Ukraine still had as many as 2,250 memorials to Lenin,⁸ in addition to numerous landmarks related to other Bolshevik leaders and ideologues. This even included some mythologized literary figures, such as Pavel Korchagin, the main protagonist of Nikolai Ostrovskiy’s ‘socialist-realist’ novel *How the Steel was Tempered* (1934).⁹ As of late 2015, over

⁴ The term ‘quadratic’ has been used by David J. Smith, in connection with the role of international organizations. See David J. Smith, Framing the national question in Central and Eastern Europe: A quadratic nexus? *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 2:1 (2002): 3–16. However, international organizations are conceptually alien to Brubaker’s theory, which seeks to explain conflicts between different nationalisms, and does not consider the myriad of (largely mitigating) non-nationalist factors in these confrontations.

⁵ Kostiantyn Fedorenko, The two movements: Liberals and nationalists during Euromaidan, *Ideology and Politics* 3:1(5) (2015): 4–35.

⁶ iPress.ua, ‘Svobodivtsi’ vzaly na sebe vidpovidal’nist’ za povalennia Lenina, 8 December 2013. https://ipress.ua/news/svobodivtsi_vzaly_na_sebe_vidpovidalnist_za_povalenogo_lenina_35123.html.

⁷ Ukrainskyi instytut natsionalnoi pamiaty. Leninopad, iak proshchannia z radians’kym mynulym. <http://www.memory.gov.ua/news/leninopad-yak-proshchannya-z-radianskim-minulim>. Accessed 22 August 2019.

⁸ Pavlo Podobied, Vid leninizmu do leninopadu, *Radio Svoboda*, 30 December 2014. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/26770232.html>.

⁹ Nataliia Mamchur, Pid Kyevom demontuvaly pamiatnyk literaturnomu heroiu, *S’ohodni*, 20 March 2018. <https://ukr.segodayna.ua/kyev/kaccidents/pod-kyevom-demontirovali9pamyatnik-literaturnomu-geroyu-1124053.html>.

ten thousand toponyms in Ukraine were related to communist ideology, with 878 streets, squares, etc. named after Lenin.¹⁰

According to a 2013 study by the think-tank *Teksty* published one day after the toppling of the Lenin monument in Kyiv, the overwhelming majority of central streets in Ukrainian cities, towns, and villages where the local legislative bodies (*rady* – councils) were located still had names related to Communist ideology. Most often these were ‘Lenin street’, ‘Soviet street’, and ‘October street’.¹¹ Dnipropetrovs’k, named after Hrihoriy Petrovs’kiy (1878–1958) and Kirovohrad, named after Sergei Kirov (1886–1934) – two *oblast* administrative centres – and many smaller towns as well as villages had been named after pre-revolutionary communist or Soviet-era historical figures. Until 2013, only a few central streets had names related to Ukrainian independence or the revised national historical narrative. Most of these newly named avenues, squares, boulevards, lanes etc. were located in Western Ukraine, a region with stronger historical ties to the West.

Galicia (Ukr.: *Halychyna*) – annexed by Moscow only in 1939 from interwar Poland, previously a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire – has a tradition of firmly supporting independence for Ukraine. During the Second World War, the West Ukrainian regions of Galicia and Volhynia had been the base of operations for the Ukrainian nationalist, anti-Soviet, violent uprising of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, the UPA (*Ukrains’ka povstans’ka armiiia*), whose mixed historical record and memory have become topics of contention in Ukrainian domestic as well as foreign affairs.¹² This large irregular armed movement is often associated with the name of Stepan Bandera, leader of the revolutionary faction of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) which directed the UPA in its anti-Soviet struggle as well as its crimes against various civilians, above all Poles and Jews, during the war.¹³ In the late 1980s, Galicia gave birth to the *Rukh*

¹⁰ Sergei Kulesh, *Iz 90 tysiach vulyts’ i ploshch Ukraïny zakon pro dekomunizatsiiu poshyriuiet’sia na 10 tysiach ob’ektiv [infohrafika]*, *ITC.ua*, 11 November 2015. <https://itc.ua/news/iz-90-tisyach-vulits-i-ploshh-ukrayini-zakon-pro-dekomunizatsiyu-poshyryuyetsya-na-10-tisyach-ob-yektiv-infografika/>.

¹¹ *Texty.org.ua*, *My zhyvemo na vulytsi Lenina. Vulyts’ z radians’kymy nazvamy u 20 raziv bil’she nizh z ukrains’kymy*. 9 December 2013. http://texty.org.ua/pg/article/editorial/read/50261/My_zhyvemo_na_vulyci_Lenina_Vulyc_z.

¹² Recent notable publications include Per Anders Rudling, *The cult of Roman Shukhevych in Ukraine: Myth making with complications*, *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 5:1 (2016), 26–65; Oleksandr Hrytsenko, *Prezydenty i pam’iat’: Polityka pam’iati prezidentiv Ukrainy (1994–2014) – pidgruntia, poslannia, realizatsiia, rezul’taty* (Kyiv: K.I.S., 2017); Vakhtang Kipiani (ed.), *Viyina dvokh pravd: Poliaky ta ukraïntsi u kryvavomu XX stolitti* (Kharkiv: Vivat, 2017); Andreas Umland and Yuliya Yurchuk, (eds), *Issues in the history and memory of the OUN I–III*, *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 3:2 (2017), 115–290, 4:2 (2018), 29–132; 6:1 (2020), 185–311; Ivan-Pavlo Khymka, *Ukrainsko-evreis’ki vzaemny: Vid istorii do pam’iati* (Kyiv: Dukh i Litera, 2019); Per Anders Rudling, *Terror remembered, terror forgotten: Stalinist, Nazi, and Nationalist atrocities in Ukrainian ‘national memory’*, in: Jarosław Suchoples, Stephanie James, and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa (eds), *World War II Re-explored: Some New Millennium Studies in the History of the Global Conflict* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2019), 401–428; and Per Anders Rudling, *Tarnished Heroes: The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists in the Memory Politics of Post-Soviet Ukraine* (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2021).

¹³ David R. Marples, *Stepan Bandera: The resurrection of a Ukrainian national hero*, *Europe-Asia Studies* 58: 4 (2006), 555–66; Tarik C. Amar *et al.* (eds), *Strasti za Banderouiu* (Kyiv: Grani-T, 2007); Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, *Bandera und Nikifor – Zwei Modernen in einer Stadt: Die ‘Nationalbürgerliche’ und die ‘Weltbürgerliche’ Moderne in*

(‘movement’), a moderate national-democratic and explicitly anti-Soviet organization similar to the liberationist movements in the Baltic republics during the same period. When Ukraine gained independence in 1991, its Western regions quickly rid themselves of symbols of the communist past – including monuments and toponyms. They thereby provided an early example of decommunization for Ukraine as a whole.¹⁴

In other regions of the country, however, Soviet symbols largely continued to co-exist with new symbols of independent Ukraine until the Euromaidan Revolution. For instance, whereas the 1917 October Revolution memorial on Kyiv’s Independence Square was dismantled already in 1991, in a short walk from there, the Lenin monument on Besarabs'ka Square remained until late 2013.¹⁵ Across Ukraine, Soviet toponyms co-existed with non- or even anti-Soviet names given after 1991. Between late 2013 and 2019, however, most toponyms related to the communist regime gradually disappeared all over the country except for the Russian-occupied parts of Southern and Eastern Ukraine.

In April 2015, more than one year after the Euromaidan Revolution’s victory, the newly elected post-revolutionary Ukrainian parliament *Verkhovna Rada* (Supreme Council) passed several inter-related bills that became known as the ‘decommunization laws’ or ‘package’, although only one of the four laws deals explicitly with decommunization (as well as with denazification).¹⁶ It provides for, among others, an official recognition, heroization and protection of the Ukrainian anti-Soviet nationalist OUN and UPA insurgents of the Second World War.¹⁷ The laws also regulated various other issues, such as a further opening of archives of Soviet law-enforcement bodies.

This meant a radical shift in governmental memory policies – especially regarding the Second World War. The latter included dropping of the term ‘Great Patriotic War’, and the introduction

Lemberg, in: Lutz Henke, Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe and Philipp Ther (eds), *Eine neue Gesellschaft in einer alten Stadt: Erinnerung und Geschichtspolitik in Lemberg anhand der Oral History* (Wrocław: ATUT, 2007), 109–140; Eleonora Narvselius, The ‘Bandera Debate’: The contentious legacy of World War II and liberalization of collective memory in Western Ukraine, *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 54:3–4 (2012): 469–490; Andre Liebich and Oksana Myshlovska, Bandera: Memorialization and commemoration, *Nationalities Papers* 42: 5 (2014), 750–770; Oleksandr Zaitsev, De-mythologizing Bandera: Towards a scholarly history of the Ukrainian Nationalist Movement; André Härtel, Bandera’s tempting shadow: The problematic history of Ukrainian radical nationalism in the wake of the Maidan; Yuri Radchenko, From Stryi Uhryniv to Munich: The first scholarly biography of Stepan Bandera, *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 1:2 (2015), 411–458.

¹⁴ Pavlo Podobied, Vid leninizmu do leninopadu, *Radio Svoboda*, 30 December 2014. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/26770232.html>.

¹⁵ Serhii Pyvovarov, 27 rokiv tomu na Maidani v Kyievi znesly statuiiu Lenina, *The Babel*, 16 September 2018. <https://thebabel.com.ua/texts/19375-27-rokiv-tomu-na-maydani-v-kyievi-znesli-statuyu-lenina-os-yak-zminyuvavsya-viglyad-ploshchi-za-150-rokiv>.

¹⁶ Vitalii Chervonenko, Rada ukhvalyla ‘dekomunizatsiinyi’ paket, *BBC Ukraine*, 9 April 2015. https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2015/04/150409_communizm_upa_vc.

¹⁷ Open letter from scholars and experts on Ukraine re. the so-called ‘Anti-Communist Law’, *Krytyka*, April 2015, krytyka.com/en/articles/open-letter-scholars-and-experts-ukraine-re-so-called-anti-communist-law; David R. Marples, Decommunization, memory laws, and ‘builders of Ukraine in the 20th century’, *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 39 (2018), 1–22.

of a new holiday – 8 May – as Ukraine’s official ‘Day of Memory and Reconciliation’.¹⁸ The new memorial date would appear to conflict with the celebration of 9 May as Victory Day which, despite being a Soviet holiday, has remained in place so far.¹⁹

The most contentious of the four laws ‘On the Condemnation of the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes in Ukraine and Prohibition of their Symbols’ follows the example of official memory policies in several other post-socialist countries by equating the two major totalitarian regimes of the 20th century.²⁰ The law prohibits denial of the ‘criminal character’ of these regimes and spreading information that justifies them. Public use of symbols related to the two regimes is banned; remaining communist memorials must be dismantled.

Toponyms that contain references to names of the communist leaders or to the functioning of the Communist Party have been changed by local authorities. After April 2015, it has become necessary to use Soviet-era symbols in ways that do not formally contradict the decommunization bill. Therefore the neutral post-war slogan ‘No one is forgotten, nothing is forgotten’, or red flags and armbands without additional signs, have become used after 2015.²¹

In 2014–2019, a main institutional initiator and driving force of the decommunization policies was the governmental Ukrainian Institute for National Remembrance (Ukr.: *Ukrains’kyy institut natsional’noi pamiati* – UINP) under its controversial first post-Euromaidan director Volodymyr Viatrovych.²² While the quality of the UINP’s work and 2015 decommunization laws has been disputed, the quantitative achievements of the UINP-directed post-Euromaidan nationalizing campaign were impressive. After four years of implementing the decommunization laws, by April 2019, post-Euromaidan Ukrainian central, regional and local de-sovietization policies had resulted in the re-naming of 987 villages, towns and cities. The latter included the regional capitals Dnipropetrovsk that became Dnipro (after the name of Ukraine’s largest river), and

¹⁸ Yuliy Yurchuk, Global symbols and local meanings: The ‘Day of Victory’ after Euromaidan, in: Timm Beichelt and Susann Worschech (eds.), *Transnational Ukraine? Networks and Ties that Influence(d) Contemporary Ukraine* (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2017), 89–111.

¹⁹ 5 Kanal. Den’ pamiati ta prymyrennia: chomu varto zhanuvaty polehlykh 8 travnia, a ne sviatkuvaty peremohu 9 travnia. 8 May 2019. <https://www.5.ua/suspilstvo/den-pamiati-ta-prymyrennia-chomu-varto-zhaduvaty-polehlykh-8-travnia-a-ne-sviatkuvaty-peremohu-9-travnia-191807.html>.

²⁰ Verkhovna Rada Ukraïny. Pro zasudzhennia komunistychnoho ta natsional-sotsialistychnoho (natsysts’koho) totalitarnykh rezhymiv v Ukraïni ta ikhnoiï symvoliky. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/317-19>; Volodymyr Yavorsky, Analysis of the Law on Prohibiting Communist Symbols, *Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group*, 3 May 2015. <http://khp.org/en/1430564974>.

²¹ Zhenshchiny. Pamiat’. Voina. <http://wmw.gender-ehu.org/proect.htm> accessed 23 August 2019. Bessmertnyi polk’ zavershyv prorois’s’kyï marsh u Kyievi: ztrymani ta slovesni perepalky. *24tv.ua*, 9 May 2019. <https://24tv.ua/bezsmertnyy-polk-2019-kiyiv-video-foto-marshu-9-travnia-2019-n1150718>.

²² Georgii Kas’ianov, K desiatiletiiu Ukrainskogo instituta natsional’noi pamiati (2006–2016), *Historians.in.ua*, 14 January 2016, <http://www.historians.in.ua/index.php/en/dyskusiya/1755-georgij-kas-yanov-k-desyatiletiiu-ukrainskogo-instituta-natsional-noj-pamyati-2006-2016>; Christian Hörbelt, Eine erinnerungskulturelle Zerreißprobe: Wie das Ukrainische Institut für Nationale Erinnerung ein neues nationalukrainisches Narrativ konstruiert, *Ukraine-Analysen* 193 (2017), 11–15; Mikhail Minakov, Die Umgestaltung des kollektiven Gedächtnisses: Die ideologische Funktion des Ukrainischen Instituts für Nationales Gedächtnis in 2014–2017, *Porównania* 24:1 (2019), 31–43.

Kirovohrad that became Kropyvnyts'kyi, to commemorate the city's writer Marko Kropyvnyts'kyi (1840–1910). Almost 52 thousand further toponyms were changed; by 2019, some 2.5 thousand memorials and commemorative signs that referred to the Soviet regime had been dismantled.²³

Operation of political parties and NGOs justifying either of the regimes was also banned. This affected, above all, the long-standing Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU). However, when the law was passed in April 2015, the party was already politically marginalized, having failed to pass the 5% electoral threshold in the October 2014 parliamentary elections. Thus, by the time the law was adopted, it no longer held any seats in the 8th Verkhovna Rada of 2014–2019. According to a poll conducted soon before the 'decommunization package' was passed in 2015, the CPU would have garnered only 2.3 per cent support in a nationwide vote.²⁴

Russian Reactions

While ethnic Russians have suffered no less under communist rule than other nations of the Soviet Union, Russian officials reacted sharply to the adoption of Ukraine's four 'decommunization laws' in early April 2015. Konstantin Dolgov, the representative of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on human rights, democracy, and rule of law, made one of the first Russian statements: '[with these laws], Kyiv wilfully continues to violate international obligations, depriving numerous Ukrainian citizens of their lawful rights. The EU and US must not ignore this anymore'.²⁵ The subsequent official Russian MFA statement argued that Ukraine 'fights its own heroic past' and that the fourth law on decommunization (and denazification), together with the other three bills adopted in parallel, 'limits rights to the freedom of thought, conscience and beliefs'.²⁶

Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergei Lavrov, stated on 20 April 2015:

[...A]n atmosphere of rejection of the very culture, the very way of life of people in the East of Ukraine, is being created [in Ukraine]. [Just look at] the package of laws on decommunization and heroization of fascist henchmen. After this, how could one even claim Ukraine will only be a unitary state, how will people in the East of Ukraine glorify Banderites? [a label derived from the name Stepan Bandera] This will never happen.²⁷

²³ V Ukraïni v ramkakh dekomunizatsii pereimenovano ponad 980 naselenykh punktiv i demontovano 2.5 tys. pamiatnykiv, *Interfax Ukraine*. 9 April 2019. <https://ua.interfax.com.ua/news/general/579399.html>

²⁴ Ukraïns'kyi instytut sotsialnykh doslidzhen'. Monitorynh hromads'koi dumky naselennia Ukraïny: berezen'-kviten' 2015 r. http://www.uisr.org.ua/img/upload/files/2015%2004%2009%20PR_SMC&UISR.pdf.

²⁵ Vladimir Dergachev, Ukraina zapreshchait kommunizm, *Gazeta.ru*, 5 April 2015. https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2015/04/05_a_6626833.shtml?updated.

²⁶ MID RF prokommentiroval zakon o dekomunizatsii Ukraïny, *Fokus*, 11 April 2015. <https://fokus.ua/news/328079>.

²⁷ Lavrov: na Ukraine sozdana atmosfera ottorzheniia obraza zhizni Donbasa, *RIA Novosti*, 20 April 2015. <https://ria.ru/20150420/1059719111.html>.

In 2017, the Russian MFA's official speaker Mariia Zakharova added that 'it is funny' that Ukraine dismantles Lenin memorials, in view of the fact that Vladimir Lenin, in the early 1920s, 'initiated Ukrainization, and therefore Ukraine should leave at least one memorial to him'.²⁸

Also Russia's 'systemic opposition', i.e. the alternative political forces that the Kremlin allows to participate in federal-level politics and have factions in the State Duma, reacted to Ukraine's history laws. Valerii Rashkin, deputy head of the Russian Parliamentary Committee on Ethnic Matters and representative of the Communist Party of Russian Federation (CPRF), called for an anti-fascist rally in Kyiv, in response to the decommunization package.²⁹ In August 2015, the CPRF organized such a gathering near the Ukrainian Consulate General in St. Petersburg. The rally used slogans such as 'No place for Banderism in our home', made references to the Soviet struggle against Nazism, referred to Russians and Ukrainians as 'brotherly nations', and warned against American control over post-Euromaidan Ukraine.³⁰

Already before, as well as independently of, the adoption of the 'decommunization laws', a main theme of Russian attacks on post-Euromaidan Ukraine had been wartime Ukrainian radical nationalism. On various occasions, Vladimir Putin pejoratively referred to all the Ukrainians who do not seek close ties to Russia as 'Banderites' (*bandervotsy*). The unwillingness of Crimeans 'to live under control of neo-Nazis, radical nationalists, Banderites' was, according to Putin's argument in the Russian state TV documentary *President* released in 2015, one of Russia's main motivations 'not to leave Crimeans alone', but to annex the peninsula due to humanitarian considerations.³¹ When delivering his speech to the Federal Assembly on the occasion of Russia's annexation of Crimea on 18 March 2014, Putin exclaimed: 'Crimea will never be Banderite.'³²

In August 2014, shortly before Russian regular troops intervened massively in Russia's 'delegated inter-state war' against Ukraine,³³ Putin compared the actions of the Ukrainian Army in the Donets' Basin to those of the 'German fascist' armies in the Second World War.³⁴ In 2016, Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, claimed that 'Ukrainians are being convinced that Russians are their sworn enemies. In Ukraine, as once in fascist

²⁸ V rossiiskom MID prizvali ostavit' v Ukraine 'khot' kakoi-to' pamiatnik Leninu, *UNIAN*, 5 April 2017. <https://www.unian.net/politics/1861574-v-rossiyskom-mid-prizvali-ostavit-v-ukraine-hot-kakoy-to-pamyatnik-leninu.html>.

²⁹ Dergachev, Ukraina zapreshchait kommunizm (n. 25 *supra*)

³⁰ Roman Kononenko, Antifashystskii komitet Sankt-Peterburga provel piket u zdaniia general'nogo konsul'stva Ukrainy protiv rusofobskoj 'dekommunizatorskoj' politiki Kieva, *Obshchestvo i ekologiya*, 20 August 2015 <http://www.ecogazeta.ru/archives/8789>.

³¹ Putin: Rossiia ne imela prava brosit' liudei v Krymu, *TASS*, 26 April 2014. <https://tass.ru/politika/1931686>.

³² Putin: Krym nikogda ne budet banderovskim, *RT*, filmed March 2014 at seating of the Federal Council of the Russian Federation (video, 02:39). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Im357oBaf7g>.

³³ Jakob Hauter, Delegated interstate war: Introducing an addition to armed conflict typologies, *Journal of Strategic Security* 12:4 (2019), 90–103.

³⁴ Putin sravnil deistviia ukrainskoj armii s fashystskoi, *BBC Russia*, 29 August 2014. https://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2014/08/140829_putin_seliger_ukraine_russia.

Germany, far-right nationalist ideology is being cemented.' Patrushev further claimed that Ukraine was under 'external governance' by the West.³⁵

Although the 2016 renaming of northern Kyiv's Moscow Avenue (*Moskovs'kyi prospekt*) as Stepan Bandera Avenue (*prospekt Stepana Bandery*) was a local matter, determined by the municipal authorities of Kyiv city, it triggered reactions from prominent Russian politicians. Among them was Leonid Slutskii, head of the State Duma Committee on the Commonwealth of Independent States, Eurasian Integration and Relations with Compatriots and a representative of the far-right (and misnamed) Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia that also belongs to Russia's 'systemic opposition'. Slutskii complained of Ukraine's 'heroization of Nazis and fascists', that 'Banderites exceeded Hitlerites in their brutality', and that 'such decisions fall under [the definition of] propagating Nazism and fascism and deserve condemnation from the global community'. According to Slutskii, the West, in its 'anti-Russian agony', is 'keeping its eyes shut' regarding post-Euromaidan Ukraine.³⁶

In turn, Konstantin Dolgov claimed that such renaming 'offends the memory of victims of the Nazis' and is 'a direct mockery of the memory of those who fell while fighting Nazism and fascism, and their local accomplices'.³⁷ The salutation, 'Glory to Ukraine – To the Heroes Glory!' used by the Ukrainian insurgents in the Second World War, revitalized in modern Ukraine and adopted as an official salutation in the Ukrainian Army, has also been condemned by Russian officials. Spokesperson for Russia's Foreign Ministry Mariia Zakharova called the official use of the salutation 'disgusting', arguing that it was originally accompanied by the Nazi salute and 'fully copied the Nazi analogue'.³⁸

In 2016, TASS, the official Russian state news agency, stated that the costly change of toponyms in Ukraine 'not only rejects everything "Soviet", but everything reminiscent of the recent ties to Russia'.³⁹ Pro-Kremlin Russian media and spokespersons argued that, if Ukraine considered the Soviet regime as criminal, that would cast doubts on the status of territories that became part of Soviet Ukraine between 1922 and 1954 – including Galicia, Transcarpathia, Bessarabia, and

³⁵ U Putina sravnili Ukrainu s fashystskoi Germaniei, no ukraintsy i russkie odin narod, *Glavred*, 1 February 2016. <https://glavred.info/politics/354944-u-putina-sravnili-ukrainu-s-fashistskoy-germaniei-no-ukraincy-i-russkie-odin-narod.html>.

³⁶ V RF nazvali poiavleniie prospekta Bandery v Kieve 'propagandoi natsyzma i fashyzma', *Censor.net.ua*, 7 July 2016. https://censor.net.ua/news/396518/v_rf_nazvali_poyavlenie_prospekta_bandery_v_kieve_propagandoyi_natsizm_a_i_fashizma.

³⁷ Moskva otvetila na prospekt Bandery v Kieve, *Korrespondent.net*, 7 July 2016. <https://korrespondent.net/world/russia/3710960-moskva-otvetyla-na-prospekt-bandery-v-kyeve>.

³⁸ Zakharova nazvala natsystskim i omerzitel'nym voinskoie privetstviie 'Slava Ukraine', *InfoResist*, 24 August 2018. <https://inforesist.org/zaharova-nazvala-natsystskim-i-omerzitelnyim-voinskoe-privetstvie-slava-ukraine/>.

³⁹ Moskovskii prospekt v Kieve pereimenovali v prospekt Stepana Bandery, *TASS*, 7 July 2016. <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/3436486>.

Crimea.⁴⁰ Such an argument has been also used by Petro Symonenko, leader of the banned and explicitly pro-Russian Communist Party of Ukraine.⁴¹

A recurring criticism made by government-directed Russian mass media has been that, although the decommunization law also prescribes denazification, Ukraine has not taken sufficient measures. In 2019, the Kremlin's leading propaganda outlet 'Russia Today' (RT) held that the Ukrainian authorities had not reacted to the fact that the National Guard's Azov Regiment had, after the adoption of the decommunization law in 2015, 'preserved [its] emblem and the chevrons with [allegedly] the double lightning-bolt that Nazi Germany units used' (probably, a reference to the wolf's hook), and that, in Western Ukraine, annual rallies that commemorate the Ukrainian Waffen-SS 'Galicia' division have been continued.⁴²

RT referred to Kirill Koktysh, lecturer at Moscow State Institute for International Relations, who stated that the Ukrainian authorities' timid behaviour was due to their fear of a revolt by radicals who 'received combat experience in the Donbas and returned from the [anti-terrorist operation] zone with weapons'. Koktysh also declared that these radicals, 'intoxicated by the right-wing idea', are 'quite a significant force'; further: 'decommunization was advantageous to the USA, as it performs anti-Russian tasks. Its chief meaning lies in cutting the historical and spiritual ties with Russia'. The RT article concluded by referring to pro-Russian Ukrainian commentator Rostyslav Ishchenko, that the decommunization law will not be revoked by the new president Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who will act along the same ideological lines.⁴³ As of the time of writing this chapter, the law had indeed not been revoked.

Education and Language

Background

Even after the loss of control over Crimea and parts of the Donbas in 2014, the government-controlled Ukrainian territories still have a large proportion of native Russian speakers. According to the Ukrainian population census of 2001, 29.6 per cent of all Ukrainian citizens declared

⁴⁰ Platit' i kaiat'sia. Ukraina otdast milliardy za prestupleniia kommunizma, *Argumenty i Fakty*, 23 October 2015. https://aif.ru/society/history/platit_i_kayatsya_ukraina_otdast_milliardy_za_prestupleniya_kommunizma.

⁴¹ Andrei Rezchikov, Ukraina za den' perepisala svoiu rol' v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine, *Vzgliad*, 9 April 2015. <https://vz.ru/world/2015/4/9/602575.html>.

⁴² Ielizaveta Komarova and Ievgenii Zakvasin, 'Otvechaet antirossiiskim zadacham': k kakim rezul'tatam privela dekomunizatsiia na Ukraine, *RT*, 20 May 2019. <https://russian.rt.com/ussr/article/632910-dekommunizaciya-poroshenko-okonchanie>. See also: Per Anders Rudling, 'They Defended Ukraine': The 14. Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (Galizische Nr. 1) Revisited, *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 25: 3 (2012), 329–368; Olesya Khromeychuk, 'Undetermined' Ukrainians: Post-War Narratives of the Waffen SS 'Galicia' Division (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013); Myroslav Shkandrij, The Ukrainian 'Galicia' division: From familiar to unexplored avenues of research, *Kyiv-Mohyla Humanities Journal* 6 (2019): 1–23.

⁴³ Komarova and Zakvasin. 'Otvechaet antirossiiskim zadacham' (n. 42 *supra*).

Russian as their mother tongue.⁴⁴ In 2019, a poll by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology on government-controlled territories found that 28.1 per cent of Ukrainians living there communicate with close relatives mostly or exclusively in Russian, whereas 24.9 per cent speak with them in Ukrainian and Russian in equal measure, with the rest mostly using predominantly Ukrainian.⁴⁵

Immediately after the Euromaidan revolution, the Verkhovna Rada made an abortive attempt to revoke the so-called Kolesnichenko–Kivalov law ‘On the Principles of the State Language Policy.’ This controversial piece of legislation had been adopted during the Yanukovich presidency in 2012, and was informally named after its main promoters, the two pro-Russian politicians Serhiy Kivalov from Odesa and Vadym Kolesnichenko from Crimea.⁴⁶ It allowed the official use of a second language in regions with a minority share of more than 10 per cent of the local population. Importantly, it permitted the use of Russian in state institutions, and was applied in the cities of Kyiv and Sevastopol, in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, as well as in the Donetsk, Luhans’k, Dnipropetrovs’k, Zaporizhzhia, Odesa, Kherson, Mykolayiv, Kharkiv, Sumy and Chernihiv Oblasts.⁴⁷

Even before the law had been adopted, well-informed Western commentators questioned its usefulness. In its ‘Opinion’ on the draft text for the law, the Council of Europe’s Venice Commission wondered whether ‘there are sufficient guarantees, in the current Draft Law, for the consolidation of the Ukrainian language as the sole State language, and of the role it has to play in the Ukrainian multilingual society’.⁴⁸ Against the background of such criticisms and the victory of the Euromaidan revolution, the Verkhovna Rada voted on 23 February 2014 to abolish the law. However, the newly appointed Ukrainian interim President Oleksandr Turchinov did not sign the parliamentary resolution into law.

Neither did Petro Poroshenko, after being elected President on 25 May 2014: the Kivalov–Kolesnichenko law remained in force until 2018. Although Poroshenko presented himself throughout his presidency as a nation-builder, he demonstrated permissiveness on the use of Russian during his first three years in office. In summer 2014, immediately after being elected, he defended the regional status of the Russian language according to the Kivalov–Kolesnichenko

⁴⁴ Vseukraïns’kyi perepys naselennia 2001 | Rezul’taty | Osnovni pidsumky | Movnyi sklad naselennia. <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/results/general/language/>.

⁴⁵ Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, Dumky I pohliady naselennia shchodo vykladannia rosiïis’koï movy v ukraïns’komovnykh shkolakh I nadannia nepidkontrol’nym terytoriiam Donbasu avtonomii v skladi Ukraïny: berezen’ 2019 roku. <http://kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=832&page=1>.

⁴⁶ Michael Moser, *Language Policy and the Discourse on Languages in Ukraine under President Viktor Yanukovich (25 February 2010–28 October 2012)* (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2013).

⁴⁷ Tetyana Ogarkova, ‘The truth behind Ukraine’s language policy’, *Ukraine Alert*, 12 March 2018. www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/the-truth-behind-ukraine-s-language-policy/.

⁴⁸ *Opinion on the Draft Law on Principles of the State Language Policy of Ukraine*. Adopted by the Venice Commission at its 89th Plenary Session (Venice, 16–17 December 2011). [www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2011\)047-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2011)047-e).

law, and expressed hopes that 'the issues of language and culture would never threaten the national unity [of Ukraine] again.'⁴⁹ When, on 28 February 2018, the Kivalov–Kolesnichenko law was revoked, this was not done by either the President or the Parliament. It was Ukraine's Constitutional Court that ruled that the bill was unconstitutional.⁵⁰

Towards the end of his presidency, Poroshenko – partly reminiscent of Viktor Yushchenko's re-positioning during the last months of his 2005–2010 presidency – changed his public rhetoric, becoming more conservative, traditionalistic and nationalistic. This concerned above all the issue of promoting the Ukrainian language, as well as other aspects of governmental cultural policy. His main 2019 presidential campaign slogan became '*Armiia – Mova – Vira!*' (Army – Language – Faith!), implying support for Ukrainian as the sole permitted state language (with no regional exceptions), and for the new autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine.⁵¹

A draft bill 'On Maintaining the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as a State Language' was submitted to the Verkhovna Rada in 2017. After various amendments and rescheduling, it was adopted in April 2019 and signed into law by Poroshenko in May 2019, shortly before he left office.⁵² Less than two months later, in July 2019, a draft bill on cancelling this new language law was already registered by MPs from the pro-Russian Opposition Bloc, a successor organization to Yankovych's Party of Regions.⁵³ However, as of mid-2020, this attempt to reverse Ukraine's new language policies had not succeeded.

The 2019 language law introduced several changes that cement the dominance of Ukrainian language in public life. State employees, including those in the public health and education systems, are obliged to use Ukrainian in their work. The language of education, except during primary school for ethnic minorities, is to be solely Ukrainian. Theatres must provide subtitles or other means of translation for plays that are not performed in Ukrainian. No more than one-tenth of the screenings of a given film in a cinema can be undubbed, with subtitles only.

Printed media in other languages are required to publish a Ukrainian version with identical content; newsstands and bookshops are to have at least fifty per cent of Ukrainian-language items. Exempt from these rules are only the media in Crimean Tatar language, languages of other indigenous people of Ukraine, and official languages of the EU. Customers are to be served in Ukrainian language by default: a different language may only be used if so demanded by the

⁴⁹ Rishennia Verkhovnoi Rady pro pozbavleniia rosiys'koï movy statusu rehional'noi bulo pomylkoiu – Poroshenko, *Korrespondent.net*, 28 June 2014. <https://ua.korrespondent.net/ukraine/politics/3385352-rishennia-verkhovnoi-rady-pro-pozbavleniia-rosiiskoi-movy-statusu-rehionalnoi-bulo-pomylkoiu-poroshenko>.

⁵⁰ Konstytutsiynny sud Ukraïny. 'Sprava #1-1/2018.' http://www.ccu.gov.ua/sites/default/files/docs/2-p_2018.pdf.

⁵¹ Anastasiia Krymova and Liudmyla Kushnir, *Armiia, Mova ta Vira: Chomu lozunh Poroshenka zihrae z nym pohanyy zhart*, *24tv.ua*, 28 February 2019. https://24tv.ua/armiya_mova_ta_vira_chomu_lozung_poroshenka_zigraye_z_nim_poganiy_zhart_n1119316.

⁵² Verkhovna Rada Ukraïny. Proekt Zakonu pro zabezpechennia funktsionuvannia ukraïns'koï movy iak derzhavnoi, http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_1?pf3511=61994.

⁵³ Radi proponuiut' skasuvaty zakon pro movu, *Radio Svoboda*, 16 July 2019. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-radi-proponuyut-skasuvatyzakon-pro-movu/30058251.html>.

customer. At least 75 per cent of the content of a TV station's programmes and at least 35 per cent of the songs played by a radio station must be in the Ukrainian language.⁵⁴

An earlier piece of post-Euromaidan Ukrainian legislation dealing with language issues was the law 'On Education'. Initially passed in September 2017, it was amended in 2019.⁵⁵ An amendment became necessary as not only Russia, but also Hungary, Romania, Poland, Bulgaria and Greece opposed the initial version of the law, which abolished preferential treatment of their kin-minorities in Ukraine. School-aged pupils of these native ethnic minorities of Ukraine had previously had the possibility to obtain their entire Ukrainian state-school education in their native languages. The new law, in contrast, only allowed *primary* public education in languages other than Ukrainian. In 2017, altogether 735 schools across Ukraine had provided education in other languages than Ukrainian. Notably, 356 thousand school students had Russian as their primary language of instruction.⁵⁶

The 2019 amendments to the 2017 law allow minority students who started their schooling before September 2018 to continue to receive education in their minority's native language until September 2023, 'with a gradual increase in the number of subjects in Ukrainian language'. However, this modification applies only to those minority languages that are also official languages of the European Union. For other school children from Ukraine's minorities, including Russophones, secondary education in their native tongue ended in September 2020. After that, on Ukraine's government-controlled territory, only *primary* education is available in non-EU minority languages, including Russian, at state-run schools.

Russian Reactions

The Ukrainian Parliament's abortive attempt to repeal the 2012 Kivalov–Kolesnichenko law, on 23 February 2014, two days after the Revolution of Dignity had triumphed, immediately became a major topic of official Russian and Ukraine's pro-Russian media and spokespersons. On the same day, above-mentioned Leonid Slutskii commented that the 'cancellation of the regional status for the Russian language is a negative signal that may cause a narrowing of the Russian-language space, including educational space, in Ukraine'.⁵⁷ Therefore, according to Slutskii, Russia should 'enter into cooperation, in the most practical way, with every family in Ukraine that does not want to separate from the Russian language and the Russian world, so that children in these families may be educated in and speak Russian'.⁵⁸

However, as mentioned, Oleksandr Turchynov, Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada and Acting President of Ukraine (after Viktor Yanukovich had fled), declined to sign the parliamentary

⁵⁴ Verkhovna Rada Ukraïny, Pro telebachennia i radiomovlennia. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3759-12>.

⁵⁵ Verkhovna Rada Ukraïny, Pro osvitu. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2145-19>.

⁵⁶ Tetiana Oharkova, 'Movnyi zakon': chomu obureni Budapesht, Bukharest ta Varshava? *Hromads'ke.ua*, 27 September 2017. <https://hromadske.ua/posts/movnyi-zakon-naskilky-obureni-budapesht-bukharest-ta-varshava>.

⁵⁷ Quoted in *ibid*.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

resolution on discontinuing the 2012 language law. Turchinov requested a new bill that, while preserving Ukrainian as the sole state language, would guarantee protection for all languages.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, various official representatives of Russia took this development as an occasion to link Moscow's claim for responsibility for Russophones abroad to Russian intervention in Ukraine.

In early March 2014, Putin warned that, 'in case violence spreads to the eastern regions and Crimea, Russia reserves the right to protect its interests and the Russian-speaking population residing there'.⁶⁰ In June 2014, Putin repeated that Moscow would protect 'ethnic Russians in Ukraine and the part of its population that feels its unbreakable – not only ethnic – cultural, linguistic connection with Russia, feels [they are] a part of the broader Russian world. We, of course, will not only observe attentively, but will also act in an according manner. It is to be hoped that the armed forces will not be required'.⁶¹

In 2018 and 2019, official spokesperson for Russia's Foreign Ministry, Mariia Zakharova, repeatedly commented on the draft and later the adopted new language law of Ukraine. She held that it was in contravention of the Ukrainian Constitution, which guarantees the development of other languages; further, the new law leads to 'forceful [*prinuditel'naia*] Ukrainization', and creates 'significant limitations, and, in many cases, direct prohibitions on the use of Russian language'.⁶² The language law would 'limit the rights and interests of millions of [Ukrainian] citizens' and 'escalate tensions' in Ukrainian society.⁶³ Zakharova also claimed that the new law would 'make the prospects of a peaceful settlement of the Donbas conflict more remote', and might 'complicate the situation in the region'.⁶⁴

An RT article, published in February 2019, criticized the new language law, then about to be adopted, as being poorly prepared and risky. The pro-Kremlin Ukrainian political commentator Rostyslav Ishchenko commented that the Ukrainian population is 'unhappy about total Ukrainization', and that Ukraine has eliminated 'Russian education and Russian language since 1992'.⁶⁵ In May 2019, Viktor Volodatskii, Deputy Head of the State Duma's Committee on the

⁵⁹ Turchynov vidmovyvsia pidpysaty rishennia Rady pro skasuvannia zakonu pro movu, *Korrespondent.net*, 3 March 2014. <https://ua.korrespondent.net/ukraine/politics/3314338-turchynov-vidmovyvsia-pidpysaty-rishennia-rady-pro-skasuvannia-zakonu-pro-movu>.

⁶⁰ Putin: Rossiia ostavliaiet za soboi pravo zashchity russkoiazynchnogo naseleniia v sluchaie eskalatsii nasiliia na vostoce Ukrainy, *Zvezda*, 2 March 2014. https://tvzvezda.ru/news/vstrane_i_mire/content/201403020137-nlkn.htm

⁶¹ Putin obeshchaet 'zashchishchat' russkikh' na Ukraine vseгда, *BBC Russia*, 24 June 2014. https://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2014/06/140624_putin_deauthorisation_ukraine_reax.

⁶² Zakharova shchitaiet, chto zakon o iazyke protivorechit konstitutsii Ukrainy, *TASS*, 25 April 2019. <https://tass.ru/politika/6377156>.

⁶³ Zakharova: provodimaia Kievom total'naia ukrainizatsiia obshchestva protivorechit pravovym normam, *TASS*, 10 October 2018. <https://tass.ru/politika/5659206>.

⁶⁴ MID RF: zakon o iazyke na Ukraine usugubit situatsiiu na Donbasse, *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 17 July 2019. <https://www.kp.ru/online/news/3542643/>.

⁶⁵ Alena Medvedeva, Alevtina Pisarenko and Fedor Frolov, Poluchit' golosa natsionalistov: k chemu mozhet privesti priniatiie zakona o iazyke na Ukraine, *RT*, 28 February 2019. <https://russian.rt.com/ussr/article/606618-ukraina-zakon-o-yazyke>.

Community of Independent States, Eurasian Integration and Relations with Compatriots, stated that Ukraine's newly adopted language law was of 'discriminatory nature' and 'infringed the rights of other citizens'.⁶⁶

Ukraine's post-Euromaidan education law had triggered similar reactions in Russia earlier as well. On 27 September 2017, the Russian Parliament (State Duma) issued a resolution 'On the Unacceptability of Violating the Fundamental Rights of Indigenous People and Ethnic Minorities of Ukraine to be Educated in their Native Languages'. Ukraine's new education bill was criticized as contravening both international law and the Ukrainian Constitution, as to the principle that the volume of a citizen's rights cannot be reduced. Further, the State Duma declared that 'hostile intolerance regarding representatives of ethnic groups in Ukraine is, unfortunately, a distinguishing feature of the modern Ukrainian government'. The resolution referred to the new education law as 'an act of ethnocide against the Russian people in Ukraine'. Russian MPs called upon the world to condemn the 'nationalist policy of intolerance' in Ukraine.⁶⁷

After the adoption of the education law, a Ukrainian research group monitored the Russian state media during the period 27 September–20 October 2017. Kremlin-controlled outlets painted a picture of a repressive regime in Ukraine that conducted 'ethnocide' and 'linguistic cleansing'. Ukraine may, Russian state media warned, end up in serious conflict with EU member states that could lead to revocation of the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement. However, some Russian commentators also saw the law as the result of Western influence on Ukrainian cultural policies, the aim being to separate Ukraine from Russia.⁶⁸

After Poroshenko had signed the new language law in May 2019, TASS published an article 'How the use of Russian language was limited in Ukraine', criticizing the new Ukrainian language and education laws as well as another Ukrainian law that introduced language quotas in media broadcasts.⁶⁹ The article outlined the new legal norms, and linked the 'overthrow' in 2014 to the allegedly attempted 'ethnocide' of Russians. In August 2019, the pro-governmental Russian website Lenta.ru published an article claiming that Russian speakers were being discriminated against, that the Ukrainian Southeast expected a review of the language policy, and that 'after the terminal split of society in 2014, eradication of the Russian language from all areas of public life became the symbol of developing the new statehood'. However, this article also expressed

⁶⁶ V Gosdume prokommentirovali podpisannyi Poroshenko iazykovoï zakon, *Glavred.info*, 15 May 2019. <https://glavred.info/world/10070312-v-gosdume-prokommentirovali-podpisanny-poroshenko-yazykovoy-zakon.html>.

⁶⁷ Gosudarstvennaia дума Federal'nogo sobraniia Rossiïskoï Federatsii, O nedopustimosti narusheniia fundamental'nogo prava korennykh narodov I natsional'nykh men'shynstv Ukrainy obuchat'sia na rodnnykh iazykakh. <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/456095518>.

⁶⁸ Elena Sheremeta, 'Iazykovaia zachistka' i 'nasil'stvennaia assimiliatsiia' russkogovoriashchikh: tak rossiïskie SMI vidiat posledstviia priniatiia zakona 'Ob obrazovanii', *Detector Media*, 26 October 2017. <https://detector.media/rosiiski-zmi/article/165368/2017-10-26-yazykovaya-zachistka-i-nasilstvennaya-assimilyatsiya-russkogovoryashchikh-tak-rossiïskie-smi-vidyat-posledstviya-prinyatiya-zakona-ob-obrazovanii/>.

⁶⁹ Kak na Ukraine ogranichivali ispol'zovaniie russkogo iazyka, *TASS*, 15 May 2019. <https://tass.ru/info/6433391>

some optimism as to the possibility that the new government under President Volodymyr Zelens'kyi might be more sensitive to the rights of Russophones.⁷⁰

In 2019, Russia also attempted twice to get a UN Security Council meeting convened regarding the Ukrainian language law. The first attempt in May 2019 was unsuccessful.⁷¹ The second attempt in July 2019 led to a special session of the UNSC on the issue. However, it ended up with Russia being criticized by the Council's members for attempting to pressure Ukraine on what was a domestic political matter.⁷²

Interpreting the Russian–Ukrainian Conflict in Historical Context

In view of Brubaker's theory, the vitriolic language in the official Russian statements quoted above would seem unsurprising. From 2014 to 2019, as post-Euromaidan Ukraine altered its cultural policies ever more deeply, Russia could not help – so it might appear – but react in kind to what was seen as Kyiv's increasingly radical anti-Russian shift. However, closer examination of the timeline of the seminal events in post-Euromaidan Ukraine complicates a straightforward application of Brubaker's explanatory framework to the Russia–Ukraine conflict since early 2014.

Immediately after the Euromaidan, Ukraine's new governments and Presidents Oleksandr Turchynov and Petro Poroshenko behaved with demonstrative moderation concerning minority issues, e.g. with regard to Russian language. It was only a considerable time-period *after* the Russian invasion of Ukraine that national legislation and cultural policies started to fundamentally change, in comparison to the pre-Euromaidan period. With Moscow's continuing annexation of Crimea, war in the Donbas, and more general attack on the new Ukrainian state, the attitude of Ukraine's post-Euromaidan governments and parliament became less and less accepting towards various aspects of Soviet and Tsarist imperial, but partially also general Russian culture.

Triadic nexus theory might well have been applied to the Ukrainian case, in general, and to Crimea's annexation and war in the Donbas, in particular – *if* the sequence of events had been reversed. According to Brubaker's theory, Kyiv's increasingly nationalizing legislation and Ukrainization policies should have come first, escalating existing tensions within the triad. In this scenario, the 2015 memory, 2017 education and 2019 language laws could have eventually led to violence in both domestic inter-ethnic and foreign inter-state relations. However, in post-Euromaidan Ukraine, the succession of escalation was quite the opposite: massive use of force

⁷⁰ Aleksandr Nepogodin, *Mova protiv russkogo*, *Lenta.ru*, 19 August 2019. https://lenta.ru/articles/2019/08/19/rus_ukr/.

⁷¹ Rossiia snova sozyvaet Sovbez OON iz-za iazykovoho zakona Ukrainy. *NV.ua*, 2 July 2019. <https://nv.ua/world/geopolitics/rossiya-snova-sozyvaet-sovbez-oon-iz-za-yazykovogo-zakona-ukrainy-50029802.html>.

⁷² Na Sovbeze OON Rossiia khotela posramit' iazykovoï zakon Ukrainy, zato eï napomnili pro Krym, podderzhku separatistov i sbityi MH17, *TSN.ua*, 17 July 2019. <https://ru.tsn.ua/politika/na-sovbeze-oon-rossiya-hotela-posramit-yazykovoy-zakon-ukrainy-zato-ey-napomnili-pro-krym-podderzhku-separatistov-i-sbityi-mn17-1379232.html>.

by Russia and its collaborators in Ukraine started long before the crucial legislative acts of 2015, 2017 and 2019 as well as the creation of an autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine in 2018-2019.

Some damage, it is true, had been done by actors in Kyiv during and after the Euromaidan when, for example, on 23 February 2014, the Ukrainian Parliament voted to revoke the Kivalov–Kolesnichenko law.⁷³ Some researchers of the fateful events of spring 2014, such as Serhiy Kudelia, have therefore claimed that domestic developments such as these, and the attempt to diminish the official status of the Russian language, albeit abortive, were sufficiently important to turn the resentment felt in Eastern Ukraine into a violent uprising. Here, according to Serhii Kudelia, were the prime sources of the 'Donbas insurgency'.⁷⁴ The Russian factor appears as secondary, in this interpretation.

However, as indicated, the Kivalov–Kolesnichenko law remained in place until 2018 when it was revoked not by the Ukrainian legislature or executive, but by the Constitutional Court. Moreover, the controversial language bill had been in force only since 2012. Its revocation in 2018 simply reinstated Ukraine's situation during the first two decades of new states' existence. Even if interim President Turchynov had, in late February 2014, signed the Parliamentary Resolution revoking the Kivalov–Kolesnichenko law, Ukraine would have merely returned to a status quo under which it had independently, calmly and unitedly developed for 20 years, between 1992 and 2012.

The initial main modifications of Ukraine's cultural affairs were actually not directed against today's narrowly understood national interests of the post-Soviet Russian Federation, but were related to history. The *Leninopad* and renaming of toponyms starting in late 2013, as well as the 2015 de-communization laws were anti-Soviet and anti-communist rather than anti-Russian or anti-Tsarist. They Kyiv city centre has, for instance, until today a Moscow Street as well as a Tolstoi Square and Pushkin Street as well as other toponyms named after Russians.

The first major change in Ukrainian minority policies occurred only three years after the Euromaidan victory, in 2017, when Ukraine adopted a new education law that prohibited teaching in languages other than Ukrainian and English, beyond primary school level. In 2019, a new language law replaced the 2012–2018 Kivalov–Kolesnichenko law and provided for significant positive discrimination for the Ukrainian language. The latter two developments triggered – as triadic nexus theory would predict – highly negative responses from various

⁷³ Verkhovna Rada otmenila zakon o statuse russkoho iazyka, *RIA Novosti*, 23 February 2014. <https://ria.ru/20140223/996527008.html>.

⁷⁴ Serhiy Kudelia, Domestic sources of the Donbas insurgency, *PONARS Eurasia*, 29 September 2014. <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/domestic-sources-donbas-insurgency>; Andreas Umland, In defense of conspirology: A rejoinder to Serhiy Kudelia's anti-political analysis of the hybrid war in Eastern Ukraine, *PONARS Eurasia*, 30 September 2014. www.ponarseurasia.org/in-defense-of-conspirology-a-rejoinder-to-serhiy-kudelia-s-anti-political-analysis-of-the-hybrid-war-in-eastern-ukraine/; Serhiy Kudelia, Reply to Andreas Umland: The Donbas insurgency began at home, *PONARS Eurasia*, 8 October 2014. www.ponarseurasia.org/reply-to-andreas-umland-the-donbas-insurgency-began-at-home/.

'homelands' of Ukraine's ethnic minorities, above all from Russia. Not always without justification, Ukraine's new cultural policies were rabidly criticized by Moscow, as contravening international law, infringing minority rights, violating the Ukrainian Constitution, and leading to conflicts with neighbouring states as well as within Ukraine. Among the non-Russian critics, Hungary claimed that the law was oppressive towards minorities, specifically the native ethnic Hungarians of Transcarpathia.⁷⁵

However, all that happened long *after* Russia's annexation of Crimea, and Moscow's covert invasion of Eastern Ukraine had started. The expected result of the 'triadic nexus conflict' was already evident – a bloody war with thousands of dead, tens of thousands of traumatized, and hundreds of thousands of displaced persons. By the time of the adoption of nationalizing legislation, Moscow had already framed the Russian war against Ukraine as an uprising by and for ethnic Russians and Russophones in Southern and Eastern Ukraine. It had also actively weaponized, from early 2014 on, if not before, the Russian language, culture and church, for a concerted multi-faceted attack on the young Ukrainian state.

It is true that Kyiv's partially anti-Russian education and language laws that concerned interests of ethnic Russians in Ukraine were preceded by other, less nationalizing, albeit for Moscow equally irritating domestic changes in Ukraine. Although far less obviously anti-Russian, these political changes seem to have been as significant, if not more important, for Moscow's public criticism of post-Euromaidan developments than the later-adopted language and education laws. This concerned, above all, the 2014–2015 shift in Kyiv's memory policies, from an approach partly still deferential to Soviet and post-Soviet Russian historical narratives to one that openly challenged them.

With the April 2015 decommunization laws, the Soviet regime was explicitly condemned as totalitarian on a par with the Nazi regime. Justifying communist rule in Ukraine was now prohibited. Affirmatively demonstrating Soviet symbols in public was criminalized. Thousands of toponyms referring to the communist movement and the Soviet regime were renamed, and hundreds of Soviet-era monuments toppled. Participants in the Ukrainian nationalist insurgency during and after the Second World War – 'Banderites' – became officially glorified heroes of Ukraine. In fact, they were merely one of several Ukrainian historical groups explicitly protected from public derogation by the new laws.

Despite these memory policies' anti-Soviet or anti-communist – rather than anti-Russian or anti-Muscovite – inclination, reactions from official Russian politicians and commentators regarding these changes before the start of culturally nationalizing policies in 2017 were, as we illustrated, already emotional, often outright fear-mongering. Russian officials and pro-governmental spokespersons frequently compared Ukraine's new leadership and policies to those of Nazi Germany. Russian historical narratives of the Soviet Union's victorious struggle against the Third

⁷⁵ Vasyly' Ploskina, V Uhorschchyni nehatyvno vidreahuvaly na zakon pro ukrains'ku movu, *Radio Svoboda*, 25 April 2019. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29903937.html>.

Reich were extended to a post-Soviet Russia seeking to protect its kin-people from a Ukrainian 'fascist' threat.

This narrative was a continuation of earlier Kremlin propaganda strategies employed towards pre-Euromaidan, revolutionary and early post-revolutionary Ukraine, among others. Already in 2013–2014 – before the start of active state-led ethno-cultural nationalization – Russian government representatives, pro-governmental politicians and Kremlin-directed journalists referred to the Revolution of Dignity and post-Euromaidan Ukrainian politics in terms like 'fascism', 'genocide' or 'neo-Nazism'. At the same time, vis-à-vis Ukrainian citizens, Russian mass media and officials invoked the common past of Russia and Ukraine, in particular regarding the joint 'Great Patriotic War' against Hitler's invading forces.

The use of bombastic 'anti-fascist' rhetoric by post-Soviet Russian official figures has not been exclusively reserved for Ukraine. For example, with regard to the three Baltic republics, references to the Third Reich are an almost as common feature in post-Soviet Russian public discourse as with regard to Ukraine. Already before Putin's rise to power, such terminology had been employed by Russian officials to explain Moscow's military interventions. For instance, in September 1992, Aleksandr Lebed', then commander of the 14th Russian Army stationed in Moldova, justified Russia's intervention in the ongoing intra-Moldovan conflict. Speaking at a press conference in Tiraspol, Lebed' invoked the Nazis, claiming that the new Moldovan national government in Chisinau behaved in Transnistria in a way that made 'the SS men of 50 years ago appear as mere novices'.⁷⁶

New since 2014 with regard to Ukraine was that the 'fascist' designation became a common place in Russian official discourse on post-Euromaidan Ukrainian domestic affairs. Claims by Russian officials and media of government-promoted 'fascism' in post-Euromaidan Ukraine have been so frequent that *StopFake*, a Ukrainian media project dedicated to exposing disinformation regarding Ukraine in the media, created a special tag 'Fascism', on its website.⁷⁷

At first glance, Brubaker's triadic nexus theory would appear to cover post-Euromaidan political, diplomatic and verbal confrontations between Ukraine's increasingly assertive nationalizing policies and Russia's homeland nationalism. As seen not only in the education and language laws of 2017 and 2019, but also, *inter alia*, in Ukraine's establishing an officially recognized autocephalous Orthodox Church in 2018, Kyiv has, under President Poroshenko, gradually embraced the importance of creating a culturally unified and institutionally separate political Ukrainian nation. The new 'state people' of Ukraine are not only encouraged, but actually forced to embrace key ethno-cultural features – above all, the language – of the country's core nation. Such action are justified by, among others, a need to compensate ethnic Ukrainians for previous oppression by foreign powers, above all by Moscow – a typical trait of nationalizing nationalism

⁷⁶ Press-konferentsia generala Lebedia 1992, *Youtube*, 10 September 1992, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOyjEzMd15s>. See also: Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1999), p. 200.

⁷⁷ StopFake.org, 'Fascism'. Accessed 23 August 2019. <https://www.stopfake.org/ru/tag/fashizm/>.

in a post-colonial successor state.⁷⁸ While this is not always officially stated, it is obvious to ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Russians alike (as well as to bicultural Ukrainian citizens) that such policies on the part of Kyiv's new ruling elite necessarily lead to deliberate containment and partial reduction of the role of Russian language and culture within Ukrainian society.

Russia's aggressive reactions to such policies seem to follow the generic logic of triadic nexus conflicts between nationalizing successor states, their new ethnic minorities, and these minorities' external homelands. The verbal, political and military confrontations between Ukraine's nationalizing and Russia's homeland nationalisms would thus seem to fall squarely within the range of typical conflicts arising within the explosive triad of nationalizing, minority and homeland nationalisms, as described by Brubaker in his seminal work.⁷⁹ However, the Russian–Ukrainian stand-off involves several specific aspects that limit the overall explanatory power of Brubaker's classical theory for Ukraine's Euromaidan and post-Euromaidan periods, if not before. These concern the contents, sequence, and salience of some key determinants and issues in Moscow's attacks on Kyiv.

Further Deliberations on the Russian–Ukrainian Conflict

The contents of the Russian reactions to Ukraine's nationalizing policies have been specific in at least three ways. First, apart from its homeland nationalist impulses, Moscow's scathing criticisms of revolutionary and post-Euromaidan Kyiv had a distinctly geopolitical dimension that is not fully captured by Brubaker's original theory. The non-military escalation of Russian–Ukrainian tensions throughout 2013 and early 2014 was initially due to Ukraine's imminent partial integration with the European Union through a particularly far-ranging Association Agreement. This external factor is not easily accounted for within a narrow understanding of triadic nexus theory focused primarily on nationalizing and nationalist issues.

Second, the Russian–Ukrainian confrontation has been informed to an unusually high degree by historical debate, drawing on the two nations' common Soviet past and the Second World War in particular. The resolutely anti-Soviet direction of moderate Ukrainian nationalism that played a key role during and after the Euromaidan was understood and presented, by Moscow, as similar to extremist Ukrainian nationalism: as being russophobic as well as pro-fascist. Perhaps triadic nexus theory can still capture the ideological and historical, rather than national and cultural, Russian–Ukrainian confrontation on decommunization. However, including this political (rather than ethnic) conflict would require additional theoretical development – not least in view of the considerable suffering of the Russian political and ethnic nation under communism and Soviet rule.

⁷⁸ Rogers Brubaker, Nationalizing states revisited: Projects and processes of nationalization in post-Soviet States, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 34:11 (2011), 1785–1814, at p. 1786.

⁷⁹ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed* (n 1 *supra*).

Third, the escalating tension and ultimately armed confrontation within the triadic nexus involving Ukrainian nationalizing policies, Russian minority interests in Ukraine, and Moscow's homeland nationalism vis-à-vis Kyiv did not grow solely from the increasingly diverging preferences of the Russian and Ukrainian nations. Rather, the high explosiveness of their confrontation was related to continuing official Russian claims about brotherly relations, similar cultures, or even the fundamental identity of Russians and Ukrainians – irrespective of their ethnic heritage and use of language. The Kremlin's excuses for intervening in Ukrainian affairs were not based solely on claims of special responsibility for Russian ethnic kin in Ukraine. They were also justified by the Eastern Slavic and Orthodox cultural closeness between Russians and Ukrainians in general, and references to the alleged intrusion of outside forces (the West) into a supposedly harmonious Russian–Ukrainian symbiosis. This is a line of thought and apology that would seem to go beyond the logic of classic triadic nexus conflict theory, not to mention the famous 'clash of civilizations theory' of Samuel P. Huntington.⁸⁰

Already during the uprising of 2013–2014, Russian homeland nationalist discourses about Ukraine became closely intertwined with the Kremlin's rejection of the Euromaidan protests as a form of legitimate political activity – and with its aversion to regime change in Kyiv and Ukraine's geopolitical reorientation in terms of rapprochement with the European Union and NATO. Such region-specific circumstances counter any straightforward application of the triadic nexus paradigm to Ukraine's 2014–2019 confrontation with Russia. The sequence of events on the ground and salience of various other, not narrowly ethnic issues between the two successor states indicate mechanisms of escalation that compete with, and partly fall outside of, the kinds of tensions explained by classical triadic nexus theory and conflicts between competing nationalisms.

To be sure, Ukraine's nationalizing cultural policies of 2017–2019 were indeed intrusive and in obvious contradiction to the interests of many ethnic Russians in Ukraine. Yet, they could not have triggered a military conflict that had started years before and been determined by other, prior, dynamics that set in motion a process of escalation. With hindsight, Kyiv's resolute nationalizing policies of 2017–2019 can be recognized as reactions to, rather than determinants of, hostility vis-à-vis Russia. Already before and during the Euromaidan events, Moscow had accused the EU, the West in general, and the USA in particular, of deliberately separating Ukrainians from Russians in order to weaken the 'Russian World'. This allegation became a major – though not the only – line of apology for Russia's annexation of Crimea and intervention in the Donbas.

Thus, several major factors that can account for the gradual escalation of the Russian–Ukrainian confrontation about Kyiv's political orientation are entirely or partly outside the framework of the triadic nexus. They had more to do with the general rise of Russian anti-Americanism since the mid-1990s, and the Kremlin's domestic considerations in the wake of the 2011–2012 Moscow protests, than with developments in Ukrainian cultural affairs which did not start to become

⁸⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

restrictive until 2017.⁸¹ The Kremlin's history-related attacks were also informed by the Red Army's military triumph in the Second World War as a central reference in the recent re-invention of Russia, under Vladimir Putin, as an internationally engaged military power.⁸²

In conclusion, Brubaker's triadic nexus theory remains a useful heuristic tool for better understanding the post-Euromaidan Russian–Ukrainian conflict. Yet, it cannot – at least, if exclusively concerned with ethno-cultural issues and narrowly focused on competing nationalisms – fully account for Russia's annexation of Crimea and the sudden outbreak of the Russian–Ukrainian war in the Donbas in 2014. The triad of nationalizing, minority and homeland nationalisms and their explosive interactions today do play an important role in Russian–Ukrainian relations. However, they should be recognized as only secondary or even tertiary factors in the fateful escalation of 2013–2014, which was determined primarily by geopolitical, historical, economic and other issues at most only partially related to Kyiv's not-yet-formulated new cultural policies.

This Ukrainian–Russian specificity can, perhaps, be partly accounted for by a tentative modification of Brubaker's general theory with regard to culturally related peoples. The mutual aggressiveness of nationalizing successor states may be especially high when the post-colonial or post-imperial nations are – as in the case of Ukraine and Russia – relatively close in terms of language and culture, belonging to the same religious and linguistic families. The official state-building narratives of a new nation may – vis-à-vis a culturally close minority within the state – be perceived as insufficiently inclusive or appreciative with regard not only to the national culture of this minority and the external homeland, but also with regard to certain *common* cultural features between the two intertwined successor nations.

This may concern specific holidays, heroes or ideas; crucial historical events, like wars, treaties or uprisings; or certain political ideas about the two nations' identities, futures and geopolitics, shared by large parts of both nations – or, at least, seen as being common to both, by the majority of, at least, one of the two nations. In such cases, even relatively minor political and cultural reorientations can lead to harsh backlash from a 'betrayed brother nation' that perceives such aberrations as scandalous disloyalty on the part of a close relative, as well as an existential threat to its own order, future and identity. Such a modification of Brubaker's hypothesis may help to explain the viciousness and relative swiftness of Moscow's reaction to the events in Kyiv as early as in 2013–2014, when the outlines of the deep cultural re-orientation that was to come in 2017–2019 were not yet fully discernible.

⁸¹ Vladimir Shlapentokh, Russian attitudes toward America: A split between the ruling class and the masses, *World Affairs* 164:1 (2001), 17–23; Lev Gudkov, 'Ich hasse, also bin ich': Zur Funktion der Amerika-Bilder und des Antiamerikanismus in Rußland, *Osteuropa* 52:8 (2002), 997–1004.

⁸² Ivan Kurilla, 'Bessmertnyi polk': 'Prazdnik so slezami na glazakh', parad mertvetsov ili massovy protest? Spory o smysle i perspektivakh novogo prazdnichnogo rituala, *PONARS Eurasia*, 20 June 2018. http://www.ponarseurasia.org/ru/article_20180620_Kurilla.