

UKRAINE – POLAND: QUEST FOR THE PAST¹

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<https://doi.org/10.36169/2227-6068.2020.01.00017>

Abstract. *This article presents an overview of the Polish–Ukrainian debate from 1990s to 2010s over interpretation, representation and commemoration of the “controversial issues” of the past. It focuses on two themes: history of restoration of the “Cemetery of Eaglets” in the city of L’viv, and the story of political use and misuse of the memory of the Polish–Ukrainian conflict during the Second World War, which amounted in mass killings of civil Polish population by the armed units of the Ukrainian nationalist underground in Volhynia in 1943, and the likewise actions of the Polish underground and mutual bloodshed in 1943–1944. The essay analyses the roles and activities of social and political groups, state bodies and non-governmental institutions involved into debates, societal responses to the political controversies over the past. The whole story represents a clash between two similar ethnically centered memory narratives followed by the political actions and counteractions, public controversies, diplomatic polemics and even memory wars. It is the case study of use and misuse of the image of historical Other in the politics of history.*

Key words: *politics of history, memory wars, Ukraine, Poland, use and misuse of the past, reconciliation, genocide, massacre*

The context

Poland and Ukraine have a centuries-old tradition where their relationship has been to mutually stereotype their neighbor. This tradition was and still is a part of any debate over the common past, particularly if that past contains controversial issues, such as memory over conflicts as well as mutually exclusive interpretations.

The most illuminating example is that of school textbooks. In a broader sense, textbooks are a natural venue for cultivation of the positive stereotypes of the ethnic and national Self and controversial and pejorative (to put it mildly) stereotypes about the Other. Ethnocultural stereotypes were entrenched in school courses on history in 1990s, when both countries restored and developed their own national narratives, in both cases restoring the ethnic-centered version of national histories. A content analysis of four Polish and five Ukrainian secondary school history textbooks in use in the early 2000s

¹ This article is an excerpt, revised and adopted for the journal format from the monograph *Memory Crash: The Politics of History In and Around Ukraine (1980s–2010s)* which is forthcoming from CEU press in 2021.

found that Ukrainians were mentioned 56 times in Polish textbooks, 38 times as an “adversary” and 12 times as a “national minority.” Conversely, Poles in Ukrainian textbooks scored 268 neutral mentions, 49 mentions as an adversary and 15 times as a national minority. There were 34 positive mentions of Poles and 79 negative ones (Sereda 2000: 393)

A study of 14 Ukrainian textbooks of 1997–1998 dedicated to negative ethnonationalistic stereotypes, undertaken by Ukrainian historian Natalia Yakovenko, also showed an alarming result where “Poland and Ukraine are ultimately separate political, social, and cultural organisms, connected to each other exclusively by antagonism” (Yakovenko 2002: 375). School textbooks proved to be the major venue where the most confrontational topics of the shared Ukrainian and Polish history were articulated. According to the members of the intergovernmental Ukrainian-Polish commission on school textbooks, created in 1993, the most difficult topic to attain mutually acceptable formulas for were the activities of the OUN and UPA in the 1930s and 1940s (Kulchytsky 2005; Polyansky 1999, 2005).

Since the early 2000s, there has been an upward trend in the mutual perception of Ukrainians and Poles, which has been made more apparent after the Orange Revolution and the accession of Poland to the European Union. In the sphere of collective/historical memory and related stereotypes it was probably at least partly caused by the activity of the Ukrainian-Polish commission on textbooks. Włodzimierz Mędrzecki has acknowledged improvements in the new generation of Polish history textbooks published in the early 2000s where the exposition of topics involving Ukraine became more politically correct (Mędrzecki 2005). Ukrainian textbooks also showed a tendency to have the story cleared of negative cultural connotations (Pidruchnyky... 2012).

Sociologists have also observed the improvement in mutual perception since 1990s when the perception of the Poles deteriorated in Ukraine. Between 1992 and 2002, an index showing national distancing of Ukrainians from Poles (in the Bogardus social distance scale) increased from the relatively balanced score of 3.77 to the much higher 5.01 out of 7 (Panina 2003). Certainly, this trend was a result of a larger number of different factors that did not directly involve the issues of the past. In Poland, the score reached 4.64, notably in the regions bordering Ukraine (Konieczna 2019).

Ten years later, in 2013, according to the Polish Institute of Public Affairs (Instytut Spraw Publicznych), the score of social distance according to the Bogardus scale reached its lowest score of 1.11 in Poland and 0.94 in Ukraine (Polshcha – Ukraina 2013). However, the same study observed that the issues of the past still remained among the most problematic topics. Two-thirds of Polish respondents believed that there are events in the past for which Ukrainians should feel guilty towards Poles. Only two-fifths of Ukrainians agreed. At the same time, half of respondents in both countries agreed that Poles should make amend to Ukrainians for their past sins (Polshcha – Ukraina 2013)

At the same time, Poland supported Ukraine’s efforts aimed in international recognition of the Great Famine of 1932–33 (Holodomor) as a genocide of Ukrainians. Poland remains the most devoted ally and supporter of Ukraine in its defense against Russia’s hybrid war. Paradoxically, this common enemy did not pacify mutual

antagonisms in the realm of the politics of history: the period of 2015–2019 marked by the most bitter confrontation between two countries exactly on the matters of the past.

The matters of discord

Two examples serve as a vivid illustration of difficulties that loom over the Ukrainian-Polish dialogue about the common past. The first is the story of restoration of the memorial complex dedicated to Polish soldiers killed in the Ukrainian-Polish War of 1918–1919 in the Lychakiv Cemetery in Lviv. In this case the local discussions reached the level of bilateral international discussion involving top officials. The second is the memory, history and interpretations of the 'Volhynian massacre' (the most neutral designation of this event in Polish cultural memory) or the 'Volhynian tragedy' (a politically correct and neutral description of the event in Ukrainian)

Fights at the Cemetery

The “Cemetery of Eaglets” is a memorial site created in 1939 as a place of memory of Polish soldiers fallen between 1918 and 1919. This site fell into disrepair in Soviet times. In the middle of the 1990s, under an accord with the Ukrainian government and with the approval of the Lviv city council, Poland began restoring the complex. In 2000, Lviv city council adopted a special resolution on the end of reconstruction, with the Polish side insisting that the monument be rebuilt following the 1939 design. The unveiling of the restored memorial was scheduled for May 21, 2002; two presidents, Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Leonid Kuchma, were expected to conduct the event.

The ceremony did not take place as planned: the president of Poland cancelled his visit because the Ukrainian side (the Lviv city council) refused to approve the version of the commemorative inscription at the entrance of the memorial that suited the historical memory of the Polish side. The bone of contention was one word: while the Polish side insisted that the death of its soldiers had been a “heroic” one, Ukrainians insistently denied this appellation. There was no mention of “heroic” death in the similar inscription on the neighboring memorial to the soldiers of the Ukrainian Galician Army (who fought Poles in 1918–1919) so the deputies of Lviv city council demanded equality. The controversial word had been present in the 1939 inscription (Radio Svoboda 2002)

Moreover, the Polish side insisted that the memorial should include monuments to French and American soldiers, also fallen for Poland, and pushed for the addition of specific sculptural symbols (the *szczербiec* sword, lions on pylons), which also was unacceptable for Lviv city council deputies preoccupied with ideological purity. The latter were also infuriated by the fact that the agreements with the Polish side had been reached at the presidents' level, without participation of local authorities

While the Poles were quite unanimous in their position, the opinions of Ukrainians (those who were at least aware about the conflict) on this matter were divided. Kyiv, as represented by Leonid Kuchma and parliamentarians who supported him, advocated accepting the Polish conditions. Lviv liberal intellectuals shared this position, though

their motives were different: they considered it nonsensical that the past continued to cast a pall over the present and the future of Ukrainian-Polish relations.

The conflict froze in a latent phase without provoking much outcry either in Poland or in Ukraine. More important things came to the fore as Poland prepared for the European Union membership referendum, while Ukraine witnessed a mass protest action, “Rise up, Ukraine!” in the autumn of 2002, organized by the united anti-Kuchma opposition.

However, by 2005, both sides reached specific mutual concessions. Poles unanimously supported the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, as well as Euro-integrationist aspiration proclaimed by Victor Yushchenko, new Ukrainian president. The Polish side agreed to remove the controversial word from the inscription over the main tombstone. Both sides invoked common memory, and this common memory was embodied by the following memorial plaque: “Here lie Ukrainian and Polish soldiers, dead in the war of 1918–1919,” with an arrow near the word “Ukrainian” pointing to the tombs of the Ukrainian Galician Army, and another arrow near the word “Polish,” pointing at the Polish tombs located at the opposite side of the cemetery.

In June 2005, the presidents Viktor Yushchenko and Aleksander Kwaśniewski, unveiled the memorial as the unity of the two memories; participants of the ceremony placed wreaths first on the tombs of Ukrainian soldiers, and then on the Polish side.

This, however, did not signify the end of the discussion. Certain groups in Western Ukraine were still disappointed with the peaceful outcomes of the discussion. Leader of Svoboda party Oleh Tiahnybok called the joint opening of the memorial a “national shame” (Tiahnybok, 2005 2005). In the same year, a commission appointed by the Lviv city council declared that one of the central elements of the memorial carried not a cross but a stylized depiction of a *szczerbiec* sword.¹

The inscriptions remained a sensitive issue. Ten years later, in 2015 with the commencement of new memory wars between Ukraine and Poland, some upright citizens of Lviv looked on with apprehension as two lions with shields were installed at the entrance to the memorial, suspecting a hidden agenda (VGolos.com 2015). Two copies of the original lion statues from the 1930s were erected at the entrance to the cemetery by unidentified persons in 2015 (Ivanochko 2015; Petrenko 2015) according to the decision of Lviv authorities. In October 2018, the Lviv Oblast Council, under pressure from Svoboda, issued a decision to remove the statues. This decision inevitably provoked a negative reaction on the Polish side (Lvivska obrada 2018).

In 2017, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs shared its plans to print a new international passport. The new design envisaged illustrations on the pages devoted to the most important historical events in Polish history. One of the pages presented an image of the chapel from the Eaglets. This immediately provoked a nervous reaction from

¹ The *Szczerbiec* Sword aka the Notched Sword was said to have been chipped by a Polish king who used it to hit the Golden Gate of Kyiv.

the Ukrainian state. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a protest note (ZIK 2017). The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs changed the design as a result.

Predictably, the story was not over. Political groups in whose interest it was to use the issue for their own ideological needs remained. Their presence becomes even more obvious in the light of the story of commemorations of other tragic episodes of shared pasts between nations.

The Volhynian tragedy versus Volhynian massacre

A new topic for debate emerged in 2003, which resonated to a greater extent than the debate over the “Cemetery of Eaglets.” This was the 60th anniversary of the Volhynian tragedy.

Poland was well prepared for this anniversary. A number of studies of the Polish-Ukrainian conflict in Volhynia and Galicia during the Second World War were carried out at the initiative of the Institute of National Memory, the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites, and the National Security Bureau under the president of Poland.

The controversy started with publication of the book of Władysław and Ewa Siemaszko “Genocide of the Polish People of Volhynia Committed by the Ukrainian Nationalists, 1939–1945” (Siemaszko & Siemaszko 2000). A voluminous report of some 1,500 pages primarily based on oral testimonies (recommended for study in schools), this work immediately provoked extreme discomfort among Ukrainian minority politicians, researchers, and public figures. Polish Ukrainians believed that the facts and interpretations narrated in the book were lopsided and cherry-picked. They also remarked that the events represented in the book resulted from the national policy of the Second Polish Republic.

The book was also criticized by Polish historians who worked within the framework of analytical history. They raised a wide range of objections, including biased selection of facts chosen to suit the interpretation of the tragedy as an act of genocide, absence of critical source analysis (among which the memories of eyewitnesses played the main role), dubious calculations, a narrow documentary base, absence of any evidence of similar actions of the Polish side, among other criticisms.

However, this did not stop the book from becoming the touchstone of debate over “genocidal” version of the events in Volhynia and the debate between representatives of Poland and Ukraine in 2000s. The debate was predictably started by veteran organizations of the Armia Krajowa (Home Army), associations of natives of “eastern Polish lands” (“Kresy”), and right-wing organizations such as the Association for Perpetuation of Memory of Victims of Ukrainian Nationalists. These groups were also responsible for the confrontational stance that was then transmitted to their colleagues and adversaries from far-right Ukrainian organizations and even by some Polish and Ukrainian historians.

In broad strokes, those who wanted to “revive the memory of Volhynia” in the Polish mass conscience expounded their argument as follows: a mass orchestrated

extermination of Polish civilians started in Volhynia in the spring through the fall of 1943 and continued on a lesser scale until 1945. According to this version, the massacre was started by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) with the help of the units of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), with the goal of physically removing the Polish population from the region. Ukrainian peasants of Volhynia also participated in these mass murders. The total number of victims was estimated to be between 38,000 and 60,000 (in some cases, the figures of 100,000–150,000 are advanced mostly by politicians). The scale of the massacre of Polish civilians cannot be compared either to the retaliatory strikes of the Home Army and other Polish paramilitary units or to Operation Vistula (the deportation of Ukrainians from the eastern borderlands of Poland to its western part in 1947). Accordingly, the Ukrainian state must officially recognize the fact of genocide of the Poles and apologize. The Polish state must honor the memory of the victims and recognize the events of 1943–1945 as an act of genocide because this is the only adequate way to show respect to the victims.

The position of the Polish liberal intelligentsia, church, and government was more moderate. They advocated for mutual reconciliation, avoiding such terms as “genocide” or “cleansing,” preferring to use the term “conflict.” The first public statements on the official assessment of events in Volhynia were heard in Warsaw on March 10–11, 2003, at the meeting of Ukrainian and Polish MPs dedicated to issues of cooperation between the legislative bodies of two countries. Poles told their Ukrainian colleagues about the discussions in their country and proposed a joint statement that would include a “balanced” assessment of the events from 60 years ago (For-Ua.com 2003)

At the same time, negotiations started for the visit of Polish President Aleksandr Kwaśniewski to one of the Ukrainian burial sites for victims of the events in Volhynia. On March 19, the foreign ministers of Poland (Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz) and Ukraine (Anatolii Zlenko) exchanged statements that the 60th anniversary of events in Volhynia should serve for the historic reconciliation of two peoples. The Polish minister called the anniversary “the trial of the truth” for the peoples of Poland and Ukraine (Obozrevatel 2003)

Between April and May 2003, the presidential administrations of Poland and Ukraine discussed a mutual commemorative action in one of the villages of West Ukraine, scheduled for July 11. July 11th was the commemorative date of the victims of the action undertaken by UPA and OUN in Volhynia in 1943 (so called “bloody Sunday”). According to the Polish ‘genocidal’ narrative, 99 Polish villages in Volhynia were simultaneously attacked by UPA and OUN units that day, and the attack was followed by mass massacres of civilians. The negotiations were not easy for President Kwaśniewski: he came under strong pressure from right-wing organizations at home that demanded an uncompromising position on “genocide of Poles in Volhynia.” Commenting on his own stance, he declared that “we should be resolute as much as possible and as delicate as possible” (Bachynsky 2003). In early April 2003, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine sent its version of the joint declaration to the Polish Sejm “for approval” according to Volodymyr Lytvyn, the speaker of the Verkhovna Rada (Lishchenko 2003) The contents of the document became the object of heated debates in both parliaments.

The pro-Kuchma majority of the Verkhovna Rada, while not much interested in the topic, was ready to accept a “reconciliatory” formula, while national-democrats and nationalists played the role of “hawks”. They insisted that the Polish position was lopsided and based upon anti-Ukrainian prejudice. To substantiate these allegations they referred to the radical declarations of their Polish colleagues from the right-conservative circles rather than to the official statements of the Polish government. A part of the opposition group “Our Ukraine,” headed by Viktor Yushchenko, assumed a posture of reconciliation. Thirty-three MPs of the Verkhovna Rada (from the factions supporting Leonid Kuchma) published an address “to the Poles and Ukrainians” (Holos Ukrayiny 2003) coupling the reconciliation rhetoric with an appeal for the “necessity to contain and neutralize political extremism and xenophobia in the domestic policy processes in Ukraine” (an obvious hint reference to the right-wingers in the Yushchenko circles) (Ibid.).

The authors condemned the actions that led to mass deaths of Polish civilians in Volhynia and called on the Polish government to “unambiguously condemn the actions that caused mass deaths of Ukrainian civilians.” (Lishchenko 2003) Predictably, the Communists, also present in the parliament, as expected ritualistically condemned “the crimes of the OUN–UPA.” After mutual maneuvers and walk-out protests, the text of the joint declaration was formally accommodated in June 2003, all unacceptable formulas having been removed. However, the public reading scheduled for July 10 was jeopardized once again due to the intransigent position of the far-right members of the Sejm. Nevertheless, at the level presidents everything went smoothly. Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Leonid Kuchma prepared a personal meeting in the village of Pavlivka in Volhynia (where a major part of the Polish population was exterminated between July 11–12, 1943 by the UPA). Thus, members of parliament had to be quick. The text of the joint declaration of the Polish Sejm and Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada was approved one day before the meeting of the two presidents. However, some right-wing radicals and right conservatives in Polish Sejm, populists, right-conservatives and Communists (for different reasons) in Verkhovna Rada did not vote. The Communists declared that “neither Ukrainian nor Polish people are not responsible for the tragedy” (Lvivska hazeta 2003) And the right-wing parliamentarian Stepan Khmara, called the text of the declaration “humiliating for Ukrainians,” “distorted in favor of the Poles,” and “not corresponding to the historical truth” (Shylko 2003). During the commemorative ceremony that took place on July 11, in the village of Pavlivka, the presidents of Ukraine and Poland made a joint declaration “On Reconciliation on the Anniversary of the Tragic Events in Volhynia,” both reading aloud the text in the official languages of their countries (Zamyatin 2003).

The declaration condemned the murders of Poles and Ukrainians, contained a plea for the public moral condemnation of the “perpetrators of crimes committed against the Ukrainian and the Polish people,” and expressed the hope that future generations of Ukrainians and Poles youth will fully reconcile with each other “completely disengaging themselves from the warped judgments of the tragic past” (Postup 2003).

Thus, the heads of the two states delineated the boundaries of the official discourse: the refusal of mutual accusations; the joint condemnation of criminal actions but not organizations, countries, or peoples; as well as a fixation on the future and not

on the past when building relationships between peoples and countries. However, the official discourse only partly coincided with one of those adopted by the society.

Taras Voznyak, a Lviv intellectual and the editor of *Ī* (Yi) journal, commented on the act of reconciliation in Pavlivka as follows:

“It does not solve the problem; it does not prescribe a line of action to everyone. It only signals that the events are spoken about and assessed on the political level, on the level of Ukrainian and Polish governments, on the international level” (Vozniak 2003).

Intellectuals and professional historians received and supported this signal, both in Ukraine and Poland. This was the case with mostly liberal intelligentsia and those historians who wished to transcend the boundaries of the historical national narrative based on the principles of ethnic exclusiveness. This part of the society, however, would have supported the reconciliation even without any signals from above.

Kuroń remarked in his February 2003 letter to Miroslav Marinović, a participant of the Ukrainian dissident movement of the 1980s and a well-known public intellectual, that the “rhythm of anniversaries” takes the events out of their historical context and substantially distorts the picture of Polish-Ukrainian relations. He emphasized that the Poles have for centuries been a stronger, dominating side that “Polonized” the Ukrainian elite and at least twice in the 20th century obstructed Ukrainian independence. He wrote to Marinović:

“The thought that Gospel truths do not concern the relations between the peoples who are not Christian and contradicts the spirit of the Gospel. This is why I speak to you not only on my behalf—and I say: forgive us” (Yi 2003a).

This plea for reconciliation seems to have been the most radical one: the majority of those who supported the idea of mutual reconciliation insisted on joint penance.

An open letter of thirty-nine Ukrainian intellectuals rejected the principle of collective responsibility in an open letter:

“We are convinced that the principle of collective responsibility of the whole society for the actions of its members does not have any underlying legitimation, whether evangelical or universal” (Yi 2003b).

That being said, Ukrainian society was far from unanimous: Myroslav Popovych, a philosopher and a public figure, claimed that responsibility can only be personal (Popovych 2003). And Lviv historian Yaroslav Hrytsak believed that while individual responsibility makes good sense in the criminal sphere, the situation is different when it comes to morals. He wrote:

“The choice to belong to a group is related to the emotions that this group evokes in us. And if emotionally I feel pride for the best and most deserving actions of this group, why should I avoid moral responsibility for its sins and crimes?” (Hrytsak 2003).

However, these statements were not the prevailing moods either in Poland or in Ukraine (especially considering the western regions, for which the topic was important). Even

some intellectuals, who by no means inclined to their “own truth” over Volhynia, vigorously defended their position. Jarosław Isajewicz (1936–2010), a reputable scholar despite being a liberal-minded person, condemned the one-sided coverage of Volhynian events in Poland, indicating that mass murders of Ukrainians also took place in Volhynia. He believed that the Polish side was too obnoxious in pressuring Ukrainians for penance (Isayevych 2003)

Yaroslav Dashkevych (1926–2010), another Lviv historian from the older generation, who in 1994 suggested the unconditional condemnation of Ukrainian terror against Polish civilians in 1943–1944, changed his mind. He declared in May 2003 that Poland was turning from a strategic partner into an enemy (Svidnyk 2003). One generalizable point of view was formulated in an address of the Lviv Regional Organization of the Union of Officers of Ukraine to their Polish colleagues. They suggested following the advice of Pope John Paul II to “forget mutual grievances and stereotypes” and take all measures to ensure that nothing of the kind happens again. It was to be left to professional historians to assess the black and white of history's letters (Lvivska hazeta 2003).

Then again, historians had their own problems, admittedly because both countries were dominated by the demand for an ethnocentric national narrative which could perform culturally legitimating functions to overcome a crisis of identity. In Poland this crisis was mostly related to the process of entry to the EU and search for the bases of Polish “Europeanness.” Ukraine struggled with another kind of difficulty. Here, the cultural and historical legitimation of a variant of political polyethnic nationalism stayed problematic, not least because of a prolonged process of historical, cultural, and political legitimation of the “titular” ethnic group.

In both countries, exclusivist national/nationalist memory narratives paid special attention to the victimhood and heroism aspects of national history, which were practically woven together. In Ukraine, the scheme of passage from one stage of the national liberation struggle into its logical consequence presupposed a sanitized image of victimhood and heroism of the OUN and UPA (organizations responsible for mass murders and the rounding up of Polish civilians in Volhynia). An unconditional recognition of the responsibility of these organizations for these actions meant contradicting the dominant narrative. Thus, it was beyond the power of the majority of historians somehow drawn into the debate, especially as the majority of this majority who contributed to the creation of this very narrative. Neither should it be forgotten that within the Soviet mythology, the OUN and the UPA were represented purely as Nazi collaborators, which influenced both sides of the debate. While apologists suffered from a rehabilitation syndrome, their radical opponents, influenced by the Soviet tradition, saw the OUN and the UPA exclusively as collaborationists and “enemies of the people.”

When open public discussions of the “Volhynian tragedy” began and the topic came to the national political arena, Ukrainian and Polish historians already had their own history of investigation of “thorny issues.” This was the name of a series of conferences and published materials that started in 1997 at the initiative of the World Association of Home Army Soldiers, the Polish *Karta* magazine, and the Union of

Ukrainians of Poland. The methodology of these conferences and reports was quite simple: participants defined the range of the most controversial questions (which had arisen of their own accord), then participants expressed their points of view during a workshop, then a working group compiled a list of formulas giving rise to contradictions, and then a joint statement was prepared and materials were published, including the verbatim record of the debate, the final protocol, and the statement.

The debates were focused on the period of 1939–1947 and the preceding period of the Second Polish Republic. It soon became obvious that the facts were not the source of division. Controversial issues primarily included interpretations, causes of conflict, and terminology. While the Polish side mostly referred to “extermination,” “ethnic cleansing,” and even “genocide” when speaking about the events in Volhynia, the majority of Ukrainian historians preferred more neutral terms such as “Ukrainian-Polish conflict,” “Volhynian tragedy” or, to quote the most radical term that they used, “Volhynian massacre.”

A consensus on the causes of the events in Volhynia proved hard to reach. While moderate Polish historians did not see the ideology of the OUN as the principal cause of the tragedy and recognized the responsibility of the Polish government for anti-Ukrainian repression in the 1930s, they still insisted that it did not justify the murder of civilians.

Ukrainian historians maintained that the actions of the OUN and UPA should not be judged without taking into account the Ukrainian policy of the Polish government during the interwar period and the actions of the Home Army and the Polish police towards Ukrainians during the Nazi occupation. These statements were perceived as a tendency to justify the actions of Ukrainian nationalists. In 2003, the Union of Ukrainians of Poland stopped financing the working group because of serious disagreement over the assessment of one more “thorny issue,” the Vistula Operation of 1947.

The 13th workshop, held in Lviv in June 2008, proved to be the last one. Ten volumes of published materials perfectly illustrate how one stops looking for truth because of looking for “one’s own truth.” These “thorny issues” proved to be impossible to solve in a collective manner. Speaking of individual works, the ones authored by Grzegorz Motyka from the Polish side and Ihor Ilyushyn from the Ukrainian side seem to be the most balanced and free of exonerative-accusative rhetoric (Ilyushyn 2003; Motyka 2006, 2011).

In 2003, the preliminary results of the debate on Volhynia were presented. The top political leadership, liberal intelligentsia, and some historians of both countries managed to come to agreement that the commemoration was a road towards reconciliation and mutual forgiveness. Representatives of the political elite, historians, public figures, and journalists who defended one-sided national interest positions and the ethnocentric version of the past kept the formula “vengeance is mine, I shall repay,” opening the door to endless actions and counteractions in the style of use and abuse of history. The debate of 2003, nonetheless, to some extent contributed to reconciliation, at least for those who wished to reconcile. On the one hand, it made known the position of the part of society that was ready to discuss thorny issues of the past to find mutual understanding. On the

other hand, the tone of the debates became much more moderate, and the hysterical sound of emotion did not drown out the voice of reason any longer.

One of the preliminary results of the discussion was arguably also to formalize and standardize the rhetoric of the topic. This remains unaltered to the present day. The radicalization of the debate reoccurs each time the status of the far right and populist politicians grows in Poland and Ukraine. In both countries, there are groups looking for compromise, dialogue, and engage in reconciliation; in both countries, the majority is indifferent to this topic. Thus, the phraseology and the topics of the debate hardly change at all.

The following data shows that society was little aware of the debate over Volhynia. In 2003, according to research conducted by the Razumkov Center, 48.9% of Ukrainian respondents knew nothing about the tragedy of Volhynia, and 28.4% “had heard something” about it (Antonyuk 2013). In Poland, 44% of respondents said that they either knew nothing about Volhynia–43, or that it was “hard to answer” (CBOS 2003: 2). Among those, who knew about event, 41% believed that Poles were victims and 4% that victims were both sides.

According to data from the Polish Center for Research of Public Opinion collected in 2008 (five years after the fractious debates we described), 39% of respondents “had heard something” about the events of 1943 in Volhynia, 20% had “heard a lot about them” and 41% did not know anything about them (CBOS 2008). In 2013, when Ukrainian-Polish relations were once again blighted by an anniversary of “Volhynia–43,” the same center said that 41% of Polish respondents had “heard something” about the events, while 31% did not know anything about the tragedy, and 28% had “heard a lot” about it (CBOS 2013).

In the meantime, despite the government declarations and the mutual apologies of intellectuals in 2003, the “problem of Volhynia–43” stayed topical at least for two reasons. On the one hand, groups for which “Volhynia–43” was a part of communicative memory felt unsatisfied, and on the other hand, the topic did not lose its attractiveness for the mnemonic warriors interested in its mobilizing capacity. In 2008, some Polish politicians made another attempt to pass a resolution on the genocide in Volhynia through the Sejm and instill the remembrance events with accusatory rhetoric. A committee was created in Poland on the occasion of the 65th anniversary of genocide perpetrated by the OUN–UPA against the Polish population of the eastern lands, headed by Jarosław Kalinowski, leader of the Polish People’s Party. The committee demanded the official condemnation of the OUN and UPA as criminal organizations, the introduction of a special course in schools dedicated to the crimes of the OUN and UPA, and the closure of the Ukrainian newspaper in Poland *Nashe slovo*.

The reaction of Polish society was relatively weak (speaking about the majority of citizens) or quite negative (in the case of the minority represented by the liberals). There was no Ukrainian – Polish discussion in the style of 2003, the commemoration being rather an internal Polish event, with provocateur activities of right-wing activists counteracted by the liberal intelligentsia (Polyanska 2008). Ukraine was commemorating the 75th anniversary of the famine of 1932–33, and all ideological resources were directed towards this campaign.

By this time, Ukraine had already formalized the famine (Holodomor) as genocide at the legislative level. Poland supported the efforts of Ukraine to recognize the Holodomor as a genocide of Ukrainians at the international level through a resolution of Sejm in 2006 (a similar resolution was passed by the Senate much later, in 2018). “Volhynia–43” was not the only topic where the idea of “historic reconciliation” was discussed.

In 2006, Viktor Yushchenko and his Polish colleague Lech Kaczyński unveiled a memorial in the village of Pavlokoma (eastern Poland) where, in the spring of 1945, a unit of the Home Army killed over 300 Ukrainian residents of the village (according to historians, it was a retaliatory action for the murder of 11 Poles). The unveiling of the monument was accompanied by the now-commonplace appeals for reconciliation. At the same time, the inscription on the monument did not mention the nationality of the victims and the perpetrators, but a remembrance cross to Polish victims was situated nearby, specifying that the dead were Polish and the perpetrators of their deaths were Ukrainian nationalists (Pavlokoma 2006). The participants did not hear the expected formula “We forgive and ask for forgiveness,” Lech Kaczyński replacing it with a line from Pater Noster (Ukrinform 15.05.2006). However, the aspiration for mutual understanding and reconciliation became obvious at the top state level. The mood of a part of Ukrainian society was summed up very well by the title of an article in the newspaper Young Ukraine: “To forgive, but not to forget” (Ukrayina moloda 2006).

There was an expectation of the continuation of efforts to erect memorial sites in honor of the victims of a fratricidal war in Poland and Ukraine. In February 2009, the two presidents opened a monument to the Polish citizens of Huta Pieniacka (Lviv region) killed by the Ukrainian nationalists. The presidents exchanged standard phrases on the utility of historical truth and the necessity of reconciliation. Viktor Yushchenko said that Ukrainians and Poles were provoked to kill each other by the Nazi and Stalinist regimes (Gazeta.Ua 2009). A similar remembrance ceremony was planned in 2011 for Polish and Ukrainian victims in the villages of Sahryń (Poland) and Ostrovky (Volhynia). The action did not take place: Viktor Yushchenko failed at the presidential elections of 2010, Lech Kaczyński died in the air crash near Smolensk in April 2010. In 2013, President Bronisław Komorowski honored the memory of the victims of the Volhynian tragedy in Lutsk (officially, the president came for a public prayer). President Viktor Yanukovich did not join his counterpart.

At least informally, these symbolic acts defined the official line in the sphere of historical politics. However, in internal policy both sides took actions that made an equal dialogue somewhat more complicated. For instance, in 2007, Viktor Yushchenko conferred the status of Hero of Ukraine on Roman Shukhevych, the leader of the UPA and, according to common opinion on the Polish side (as well as shared by some Ukrainian historians) the person responsible for the actions of the UPA in Volhynia in 1943. In 2009, the Polish Sejm adopted a resolution, “On the Tragic Fate of Poles in the Eastern Territories,” that mentioned “ethnic cleansing with signs of genocide.” In the winter of 2010, just before his retirement from the office of the president, Yushchenko conferred the title of Hero of Ukraine on Stepan Bandera, the leader of the OUN-B. At the same

time, he published a decree glorifying the participants of the “national liberation struggle,” including the OUN and UPA.

Polish historian Tomasz Stryjek believes that Yushchenko’s actions broke an unofficial rule when presidents functioned as arbiters of conflicts of memory. Moreover, in making the decision to glorify the aforementioned historical characters, the Ukrainian president antagonized his best ally in issues of European integration (Stryjek 2014: 181).

True, Yushchenko significantly weakened the positions of the Polish “advocates of Ukraine in the West,” but it should nevertheless be said that some of these advocates, such as Polish right-wingers, never cared about the reactions of the Ukrainian side when carrying out their ideas. The only difference was the position of the two presidents: while Lech Kaczyński made a tactical choice to regulate the pressure of conflict-minded Poles wishing for more active statements and actions, Yushchenko pandered to his right-wingers, intensely implementing the nationalist narrative in his historical politics.

In Ukraine itself the issue of the “crimes of the OUN-UPA” (both against Poles and Jews and against Ukrainians) became the trump card of Yushchenko’s opponents used in order to represent him as a promoter of ferocious nationalism and the heroes he lionized as Nazi abettors and exterminators of civilians. These formulas were especially successful in the eastern regions of the country, where local authorities intentionally cultivated a model of Soviet nostalgia.

In April 2010, after Yanukovich’s accession to power, a moving exhibition, “Volhynia Massacre: Polish and Jewish victims of the OUN–UPA,” was organized by “Russian-Language Ukraine,” nonprofit organization headed by Vadym Kolesnichenko, a “talking head” of the Party of Regions on issues of ideology, and the Polish Society for the Perpetuation of the Memory of Victims of the Crimes of Ukrainian Nationalists. The exhibition (photos and copies of documents) traveled between the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine for several months.

Curiously, the topic of Volhynia strengthened the incredible political alliance of the Communists and the Party of Regions. They also became the somewhat intrusive allies of Polish right-wingers and populists in their fight against “Ukrainian nationalism.” It was especially noticeable in 2013, when a “round” anniversary of the Volhynian tragedy provoked a new outburst of passion. The sequence of events—discussions, statements of politicians, utterances of public opinion leaders, parliamentary initiatives—gave a feeling of *déjà vu*. The debate repeated itself again and again. The Polish side, represented by the same political forces as before, became proactive once more. This time, a parliamentary group was created under the Sejm, dedicated to the “affairs of the Kresy, of the natives of the Kresy and the heritage of the eastern lands” (Sejm 2013). Discussions concentrated once again on qualifying the 1943 tragedy as an act of genocide. Once again, liberals in both countries opposed the escalation of the debate.

Unexpectedly for Polish right-conservatives they found new allies represented by the Ukrainian Communists and Party of Regions who intensively exploited the theme of the “crimes of Ukrainian nationalists” for their own political purposes. Paradoxically,

these unwelcomed allies simultaneously promoted the Soviet nostalgic memory narrative in the whole territory of Ukraine, triggering a radicalization of the national/nationalist memory narrative. As Adam Michnik wrote:

“The situation in Ukraine is really gloomy. Ukrainian democracy is dying out by the minute. Opposition politicians are in prison, independent media are being destroyed. President Yanukovich recasts Ukrainians as heirs of the post-Communist authoritarianism, carrying out the symbolic rehabilitation of the post-Soviet nostalgia.

In western Ukraine, there is a strengthening of chauvanism, related to the Svoboda Party that rehabilitates the most deplorable traditions of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. The choice between chauvinist nostalgia and Soviet nostalgia reminds one of a choice between plague and cholera” (Yi 2013).

In late June 2013, the Polish Senate adopted an address that described the events in Volhynia in 1943 as “ethnic cleansing with signs of genocide.” This was an apparent compromise with the right-wing opposition, which insisted on the direct use of the word “genocide.” But, the Senate also rejected the suggestion of the right-wingers to establish an official date, the Day of Martyrdom of the Poles – July 11 (Rzeczpospolita 2013).

In Ukraine, almost 150 members of the Ukrainian parliament (mainly representing the Party of Regions and the Communist Party) expressed their anxiety about the debate in Poland and their desire to ascertain historical truth. To effect the latter, they addressed to the speaker of the Polish Sejm an open letter urging that the events in Volhynia be described as genocide. The necessity of such a decision was explained, among other things, by the growth of xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and neo-Nazi arrogance (Zerkalo Nedeli 2013) However, this somewhat unusual move elicited no response.

The Polish Sejm adopted a resolution that repeated the Senate formula. Ukraine came close to signing the EU Association Agreement, and this circumstance was taken into account by the Polish leadership, both the president and the parties at the national helm. However, in comparison with 2003, there was evidence of cooling on the reconciliation issue: the idea of a common address of leading Catholic and Greek Catholic clerics was not put into practice.

The Memory War of 2015–2020

The next stage of events around the topic of “Volhynia–43” and related issues resulted from the interaction of interior and exterior policy factors. The Revolution of Dignity, followed by the Russian annexation of Crimea and the war in the east of Ukraine, greatly strengthened the positions of the right and far-right forces in the Ukraine. These elements are the ones that took the most active part both in forceful protests and in military action. Despite their failure in both presidential (May 2014) and parliamentary (October 2014) elections, they played a prominent role in “field politics”: organizing voluntary battalions, taking part in “Leninfall” (mass destruction of Lenin monuments in the spring of 2014) and in the active promotion of an idealized image of the OUN and UPA in the public discourse. These “new” powerbrokers intensified historical politics, using its mobilization

potential both to consolidate those active in the hybrid war imposed by Russia, as well as to distract the public from its failures in reforming the economy and in solving social issues.

The main government institution responsible for the development and implementation of historical politics was headed in 2014–2019 by Volodymyr Viatrovykh, who proposed considering the Volhynian tragedy merely as a part of the Polish–Ukrainian war. This had the effect of effectively relativizing the problem of OUN and UPA responsibility for the extermination of Polish civilians (Viatrovykh 2011). Viatrovykh was also known as an author of panegyric works on the history of the UPA that were never accepted by the scholarly community as an academic work.

The state politics aimed to more intensively promote the nationalist memory narrative could not help but foster the efforts at dialogue and at reconciliation promoted by some intellectuals and politicians in previous years. Nevertheless, the procedure of voting for the memory laws appeared as overtly offensive to the Poles. In the morning of April 9, 2015, Polish president Bronisław Komorowski delivered an emotional speech in the Verkhovna Rada expressing his hope that Ukrainians and Poles would not clash in their discussions about conflicts over the past and their consequences and that they should rather unite in common for a better common European future (Evropeiska Pravda 2015). Ukrainian MPs met his speech with an enthusiastic ovation. In the afternoon, the same audience passed a law that obliged Ukrainian and foreign citizens to praise fighters for liberation of Ukraine, among them—OUN and UPA—organizations broadly perceived as criminal in Poland.

The politics of decommunization, which received the full-throttled understanding and support of the Polish side, were followed by the deepening of the nationalist narrative of memory.¹ Bandera streets, usual in western Ukraine, emerged in Sumy, Khmelnytskyi, Poltava, Zhytomyr, Berdychiv, Brovary, Kremenchuk, and other cities. The renaming of Moscow Avenue (Moskovski Prospekt) in the capital of Ukraine to Bandera Avenue was the most scandalous of these decisions, provoking much outcry (Ukrainska Pravda 2016). This decision of the Kyiv municipal authorities, adopted on July 7, 2016 at the instigation of right-wing deputies, was especially impressive because it was taken on the eve of the visit of Petro Poroshenko to Warsaw and during a new round of debates about the Volhynian tragedy in the Polish Sejm. A year later, the same people in Kyiv managed to push through the renaming of General Vatutin Avenue to Roman Shukhevych Avenue, which was unlikely to make Warsaw happy.

All these events and actions were combined with reconciliatory rhetoric and symbolic moves. In December 2014, President Petro Poroshenko, speaking to the Polish Sejm, described the complicated past of Polish-Ukrainian relations and once again repeated the prescribed formula “We forgive and ask for forgiveness.” In June 2016, Ukrainian public figures, former presidents, and leading clerics wrote an open letter to

¹ By “nationalist narrative”, I mean the picture of the past represented in terms of exclusivist ethnic nationalism whose representatives called themselves nationalists. In the politics of history, it is embodied by the history and memory of radical nationalist organizations: Ukrainian Military Organization, Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, Ukrainian Insurgent Army etc.

the Poles where this same formula appeared once more: “We ask for forgiveness and forgive” (Istorychna Pravda 2016b). They published this letter after the debates on Volhynia in Poland. Pressure from the right-wing government broke the tradition of “round anniversaries”, resulting in the materialization of the possibility of branding the Volhynian events a “genocide.”

Over the last decade, Polish society has moved to the right, both because of a number of internal factors (including historical politics) as well as external ones. This includes the degradation of the political situation in the region because of events in Ukraine, the migration crisis enhanced by the Syrian war, and the aggravation of relations between Russia and the “West.” After the triumph of the Law and Justice Party in the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2015, Poland decisively turned towards affirmative historical politics aimed at “strengthening patriotism” (Shtol, Shtakh & Sariush-Volskaya 2016). In the existing context it has meant the reinforcement of ethnic nationalism, ethnocentrism, and the growth of xenophobia.

Having concluded an alliance with radical nationalists and populists (Kukiz 2015), the Law and Justice Party once again suggested making July 11 the Remembrance Day of Victims of the Genocide of Poles (certainly, the keyword here was “genocide”). According to the members of the party, the Polish victims of these events were not honored enough; in particular, their extermination did not receive the right name—genocide (wPolityce.PL 2016). Michał Dworczyk, an MP representing the Law and Justice Party, read a letter from 200 Polish parliamentarians in a live broadcast of the Ukrainian television channel Espresso TV. The letter contained reproaches to the Ukrainian leadership for the glorification of organizations and persons with a “specific reputation” (meaning OUN-B and UPA). Polish parliamentarians said that the resolution on the day of remembrance of the victims of genocide being prepared in the Polish Sejm was not directed against Ukraine and Ukrainians (Den 2016). On July 7, 2016 the Polish Senate voted 60-23 to recommend that the Sejm adopt a resolution containing the term “genocide” (Rzeczpospolita 2016).

One more important event which happened on the previous day has not yet been publicly discussed: on July 6, a group of Polish MPs submitted to the Sejm a draft law on amendments to the law concerning the Polish Institute of National Memory. The authors of the draft law proposed a special commission of the institute to investigate crimes perpetrated by Ukrainian Nationalists and other Ukrainian organizations collaborating with the Third Reich. Before that, the list included “crimes of Nazism and Communism.” The legislators also proposed expanding the ban on propaganda of Communism and Fascism and other forms of totalitarianism (a criminal offense) by mentioning the crimes of Ukrainian nationalists (Sejm 2016)

The draft law provides a list of grievances against the Ukrainian side, designed to demonstrate a need for the approval of the new law. These grievances included the glorification of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN and UPA) even at the legislative level, the adoption of the date of creation of the UPA (October 14) as the “Day of Defender of the Fatherland”, the inclusion of the leaders of the OUN and UPA in the official national pantheon and perpetuation of their memory in street-naming, the use of the ethos of

Banderite wartime structures for the organization of voluntary battalions and for the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and the neglect for the burial places of the victims of the Volhynian tragedy (Sejm 2016).

Meanwhile, a letter was written on the Polish side by those who had already stopped making decisions. Retired presidents and statesmen including Lech Wałęsa, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, and Bronisław Komorowski also asked forgiveness for the harm done by Poles to the Ukrainians in the past (Istorychna Pravda 2016a).

On July 22, 2016 the Polish parliament adopted a resolution that proclaimed July 11 the Remembrance Day of the Victims of Genocide Perpetrated by Ukrainian Nationalists Against Polish Citizens in the Eastern Lands of the Second Polish Republic in 1943–1945" (442 MPs voted in favor, 10 MPs abstained, none against). The OUN, the UPA, the 14th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS (1st Galician), and other groups that collaborated with the Nazis were named responsible for the murders of 100,000 Poles (and citizens of other nationalities as well). The resolution paid homage to those Ukrainians who saved Poles. The resolution of the Sejm emphasized that only complete historical truth would lead to mutual forgiveness and reconciliation. The "complete historical truth", apparently, meant qualifying the mass murders of Poles in Volhynia as genocide (Sejm 2016b).

The reaction of the Ukrainian side was easy to predict. President Petro Poroshenko expressed his regret and preferred not to go into further detail.(Zakhid.Net 2016). The International Relations Committee of the Verkhovna Rada condemned the "one-sided action" of the Polish legislators as "anti-Ukrainian," "politically unbalanced and juridically incorrect" (Rada 2016). Borys Tarasyuk, head of the parliamentary group on interparliamentary relations of Ukraine and Poland, stepped down from office, proclaiming that the decision of the Sejm was anti-Ukrainian (Radio Svoboda 2016). Volodymyr Viatrovych, the head of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, called the decision of the Sejm a natural result of anti-Ukrainian hysteria in Poland (Viatrovych 2016). Piotr Tyma, the head of the Union of Ukrainians of Poland, indicated that the supporters of reconciliation only addressed the topic of Volhynia by following the calendar (on "round dates"), while the supporters of the confrontational genocidal version never stopped promoting it. He also pointed to an obvious (to his opinion) imbalance in the actions of the Polish side: the absence of any real attempts to discuss mass murders of Ukrainians by the units of the Home Army and other Polish military formations (Tyma 2016).

A similar discussion flared up in the Ukrainian mass media. Nationalists and national democrats cried for a symmetric response. Liberals suggested deploring the actions of the Polish parliamentarians but urged avoiding confrontation. Everyone agreed that the conflict would be expedient for Russia, where the Communist Party registered a statement expressing solidarity with the Polish Sejm (Dzerkalo Tyzhnia 2016).

In response, the Verkhovna Rada registered a project of resolution honoring the memory of the victims. Its wording was almost a mirror-like reproduction of the rhetoric of the Sejm, exemplified by the phrase that the truth "should form the basis of harmony and forgiveness between the Polish and Ukrainian peoples." A commemorative date was

proposed to be marked as a Remembrance Day of Genocide Perpetrated by the Polish State against Ukrainians in 1919–1951 genocide (Verkhovna Rada 2016a). Stanisław Karczewski, speaker of the Polish Senate, told the Polish mass media that the adoption of such a resolution may complicate the dialogue between Poland and Ukraine (Deutsche Welle 2016).

On August 30, 2016, an address of “well-known Ukrainians” to the Ukrainian parliament was published in the press. The authors accused Polish MPs of a “breach of agreements” (proving it with reconciliatory declarations from past years), of the deliberate distortion of “historical truth,” and of using politically irresponsible and juridically incorrect formulas. “Well-known Ukrainians” suggested that the Verkhovna Rada adopt countermeasures, officially establishing three commemorative dates: September 23, the Day of Polish Repression of the Autochthonous Population of Galicia (the day when the Pacification of Ukrainians began in 1930); December 25, the Remembrance Day of Genocidal Extermination by the Polish Underground of the Autochthonous Ukrainian Population in the Centuries-Old Ukrainian Land (“It was on this day in 1942 that the Polish chauvinists began the mass murder of the Ukrainian population, as they sang carols on the corpses of the martyrs”); and, finally, April 28, the Remembrance Day of Ukrainian Victims of Deportation by the Polish State (Evropeiska Pravda 2016).

The debate was additionally fueled by the film *Volhynia*, a historical thriller made by the popular Polish director Wojciech Smarzowski. The film, detailing the atrocities of the UPA and reproducing the old stereotype of the “Ukrainian throat-cutter” curiously coincided with the climax of discussions about the past. The film has never been screened in Ukraine.

The influence of the past on the present seemed to peak and finally, both sides of the process came to their senses, especially as they recognized that their conflict about the past could benefit a third party, namely Russia. On 20 October 2016, the Verkhovna Rada and the Polish Sejm adopted a mutual declaration of memory and solidarity, which was also supported by the Sejm of Lithuania. The declaration stated for the need for “impartial historical research” and for the “containment of the forces that lead to argument in our states.” The declaration pointed at the common enemy, Russia, and at the necessity of reaching consensus when facing the latter (Ukrainska Pravda 2016).

This declaration notwithstanding, aggressive sentiments soon started to be heard again on both sides. In December 2016, Witold Waszczykowski, the Polish minister of foreign affairs, urged the Ukrainian side to mutual constructive actions in the sphere of remembrance of the past, citing the example of Yad Vashem and of Polish-German reconciliation. In particular, he hinted that the national glorification of the UPA (its anniversary was approaching) might hamper the route towards mutual understanding (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych 2016). In January 2017, western regions of Ukraine started to prepare the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. In February, the UINP declared the start of the “national information campaign for the commemoration of the UPA.” (UINP 2017). This news provoked a nervous reaction on the Polish side. Jarosław Kaczyński, speaking to *Gazeta Polska* about his meeting with Petro Poroshenko, said he told Ukrainian president directly:

there is no chance to get to Europe with Bandera. A choice should be made: either integration with the West and break with the tradition of the UPA, or an integration with East and everything such a choice entails (Wiadomosci 2017).

In another interview, Kaczyński told the readers of the weekly *Do Rzeczy* that Ukraine was creating a people's cult who perpetrated genocide against Poles, surpassing Germans in their cruelty. Unsurprisingly, these loud statements provoked a reaction in Ukraine, though not as high in profile. Volodymyr Viatrovykh used his Facebook page to describe the declarations of the Polish politician as "imperialism with complications;" a *Svoboda* activist, for unknown reasons, reminded the "old Polak Kaczyński" of the partitions of Poland; and Bohdan Chervak, leader of the OUN in Ukraine, declared that Kaczyński's position did not differ from that of the Kremlin (Politeka.Net 2017). However, none of these declarations left the domain of social media. And the most important politicians kept silent.

Between 2017–2018, the conflict reached a new dimension. The war of memory was enhanced by the war of the cemeteries. Polish authorities started to remove the memorial plates and monuments dedicated to UPA soldiers that were erected without formal permission. According to official statements, about forty places of memory lacked legal status. The Ukrainian side responded with their own figures: according to data from the UINP, no less than 100 Polish sites of memory had not received official permission to be arranged. After deconstruction of the memorial to UPA soldiers in Hrushovychy in April 2017, the UINP suspended issuing permissions for Polish exhumation works in Ukraine. As a result, the Polish-Ukrainian forum of historians, reestablished in 2015, was stalled.

By the end of 2017, Ukraine Minister of Foreign Affairs Petro Klimkin regretted the excessive politicization of Ukrainian-Polish relations and lamented the Polish position: according to him, Ukrainians had apologized for acts of vandalism while Poles did not (Evropeiska Pravda 2017b). Polish President Andrzej Duda, in turn, exclaimed that he did not object to the installation of Ukrainian tombs in Poland, but he claimed that this should be done only after exhumation and clear identification of the remains (Evropeiska Pravda 2017a). Polish authorities claimed that UPA soldiers had never been buried in the tomb at Hrushovychy, for instance. Presidents of both countries subsequently exchanged standard formulas about the necessity of mutual understanding of the problems of the past at a meeting in Kharkiv on December 13, 2017 and promised to revive the work of the intergovernmental commission created for this purpose (Novynarnia 2017).

Nevertheless, in the winter of 2018 the struggle for the "true past" restarted in both countries. The Sejm approved changes to the Law on the Institute of National Memory proposed two years earlier. Apart from other dubious norms that provoked international scandal (which were in fact aimed at Holocaust revisionism), the law contained mention of the "Ukrainian nationalists" whose crimes against Polish people were lined up with the crimes of Nazis and Communists. Article 55 prohibited public denial of these crimes and introduced criminal prosecution for it, a fine or imprisonment for up to three years (Sejm 2018). In Poland, the amendments were predictably protested by the liberals and the opposition. In Ukraine, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed concern.

The same feeling was publicly shared by President Poroshenko. The Ukrainian parliament asked the Polish president to veto the law. A kind of bitter irony attached itself to this situation: the Polish law declared “Ukrainian nationalists” (i.e., the OUN and UPA) criminals and prohibited any public expressions of an alternative point of view, while Ukrainian law in April 2015 had declared them national heroes; had obliged everyone, regardless of nationality, to respect them; and prohibited any forms of public disrespect to them.

In July 2018, the Ukrainian and Polish presidents broke the tradition of common statements devoted to Volhynia—43. Duda visited the Ukrainian village Olyk to praise the memory of Poles killed in 1943. Poroshenko stopped at the memorial of Sahryń, where Ukrainian villagers were eliminated by Polish partisan forces in 1944. The Polish president called events of 1943 “ethnic cleansing” and routinely appealed to the “historical truth.” The Ukrainian president called for the same truth and mentioned that the conflict “between Ukrainian and Polish peoples is of benefit to a third party—“Muscovy”—with whom these people fought together in the past” (Ukrainska Pravda 2018). Poroshenko expressed hope that the amendments to the Polish law would be dropped.

In January 2019, the Polish Constitutional Tribunal stipulated that formulations like “Ukrainian nationalists” or “Eastern Little Poland” (Malopolska Wschodnia) could not be used as legal terms and therefore did not comply with the constitution. The Tribunal compelled lawmakers to introduce correct formulations (Wiadomosci 2019).

Some signs of normalization became visible after the presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine in 2019. During his visit to Warsaw on 31 August–1 September 2019 the newly elected president Volodymyr Zelensky promised to lift the ban on works exhuming the graves of the Polish victims of the violence of the 1940s. The Polish and Ukrainian presidents once again agreed to create a bilateral commission on historical issues. At the end of September 2019, Ukraine cancelled the ban (Polskieradio.pl 2020) and the Polish side started exhumation works in Lviv oblast. In January 2020, the new director of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory Anton Drobovych at the meeting with the Polish ambassador in Ukraine Bartosz Cichocki expressed hope that the Polish side will undertake concrete steps in restoration of the Ukrainian sites of memory destroyed in previous years (Istorychna Pravda 2020). Simultaneously, the Kyiv City Administration unfurled a huge banner with the portrait of Bandera exactly on the front of it building, thereby marking the anniversary of the birthday of the head of OUN

Conclusions

The “history story” in the relations of Ukraine and Poland is especially instructive, especially from the vantage point of the conflict potential of historical politics. Regardless of the political orientation of the forces at the helm, the ruling classes of both countries consider friendly and partner relations with their neighbor a top priority. Poland and Ukraine managed to find solutions acceptable for both countries in practically every

sphere of relations, whether economic, political, or cultural. There is only one exception to this rule: the sphere of historical memory. Years and decades of reconciliatory efforts by political top managers, public intellectuals, and civic leaders lack efficiency and seem condemned to a kind of “endless cycle.”

The fundamental reason most likely lies with the rivalry of two similar exclusivist ethnocentric versions of the national/nationalist memory narrative, and, to make matters worse, of their radical variants. Additionally, the Ukrainian side often mimics the practices and the discourse forms of the Poles, from the creation of an institute of national memory, to the replication of such patterns as equating Communism and Nazism. The dueling, memetic narratives, each promoted by a mirrored reserve of memory warriors (right conservatives, right-wing nationalists and populists) produce similar modes of conduct and interpretations of the image of the Other. Both sides deployed the language of negation in their assessment of the claims of their rivals. Accordingly, this “much ado about nothing” reaches the level of supreme importance, problems of the past being used to construct a gloomy present.

The Other is the mirroring projection of the Self, of one’s own phobias, concerns and anxieties. This explains the out-sized role of non-state memory agents: Kresy and veteran organizations in Poland, and right-wing political parties and movements without real representation in top political bodies in Ukraine. The aggravation of the conflict coincided with the accession to power of these agents of historical politics.

In Poland, those who supported the revival of ethnocentric Polish identity based on an exclusivist national narrative obtained their influence both in the parliament and in the presidency, while their ideological twins in Ukraine controlled the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory and some other agencies (for instance, State Committee on Television and Radio Broadcasting). The Svoboda Party, which lost its place on party lists in the parliament of 2014, gained more importance at the local level. For instance, Svoboda was behind decisions of local councils to rename streets after Bandera in central Ukraine and to display the OUN flag together with the national flag at public places on certain commemorative dates (see: Kasianov 2018) an action which definitely did not aide in the normalization of Polish-Ukrainian relations.

This type of ethnocentric reading of the past dictates the presentation of the debates as an ethnic conflict between Ukrainians and Poles or even as an international conflict, between Ukraine and Poland as states. Both parties are interested in speaking on behalf of the whole nation. In Poland, these claims might be better grounded; however, the opposition to this kind of politics is still strong. In Ukraine, the right-wing and right-conservative political and ideological segment which claims national representation is even narrower. In this case, the extent of public interest in the debate is deliberately exaggerated and sensationalized. In reality, those who politically benefit from the conflict represent a relatively small portion of political spectrum of Ukraine who have situationally reached power and influence by appropriating some state institutions.

By all means then the Ukrainian – Polish conflict over the past should be considered an extension of the massive revitalization and rise of ethnocentrism in the world. This is the result of a number of factors, beginning with the conflict between

cultural globalism and nationalism and ending with reemergence of tribalism in its most primitive forms.

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