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SOME THEORETICAL ISSUES ON INTERPRETATION OF UKRAINIAN-POLISH RELATIONS IN THE YEARS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Abstract

Exposure and evaluation of Ukrainian-Polish relations during World War II is a controversial topic, both in a semi-scientific debate and in the public sphere not only in Ukraine and Poland, but also throughout Central and Eastern Europe. While studying the past, the key problem is not transforming historical sources into a narrative, but their interpretation. While doing this, historians must bear in mind the methodological aspects of their work, in particular the following truths: (1) history is always an interpretation of history; (2) 'history of historians' means generalization of various actors of the process, which requires seeing also the 'Other'; (3) history and common memory always contain various stereotypes and myths, memories and experiences, forcing them to overcome and delineate shaky boundaries between good and evil for themselves and for the 'Other'; (4) a historian must be aware of the purpose of his writing, which is not a search for 'historical truth', but an explanation of the causes and consequences of a historical situation, starting from contemporary circumstances and the state of the latest scientific knowledge; (5) a historical interpretation is not an 'absolute truth', but only one of the possible explanations of the events.

In order to explain the reasons for the development of the conflicting nature of Ukrainian-Polish relations during World War II, it is necessary to place a whole series of related facts into a temporal and spatial chain, which demonstrates a steady increase in the 20th century in the struggle of two national movements – Polish and Ukrainian – to create independent countries on the territory of the common historical residence of the two nations. These struggles often had a military character (1918–1923, 1939–1947) and led to a large number of victims among the civilians. During World War II, the Ukrainian people's liberation movement came up with a radical program of a national uprising and the formation of an independent Ukrainian state in the western lands, where this movement had the greatest influence and tradition. During the fightings, the Ukrainian participants met with strong opposition from the Polish Underground State, which sought to restore the *status quo ante bellum* of the Polish State. At the Polish-Ukrainian borderland, an armed conflict for the territories of future states broke out, in which many Poles and Ukrainians, including civilians, were killed. Taken together, these struggles can be qualified as a large-scale conflict and mutual extermination. There was also a small number of mutual war transgressions, which can be covered by the terms 'war crimes', 'ethnic cleansing', or 'crime against humanity'. There is no legal basis to unilaterally qualify as 'genocide' only the crimes committed by 'Ukrainian nationalists'. The 'painful past' of the Ukrainian-Polish relations in the twentieth century does not justify undermining the Ukrainian people's liberation movement and depriving it of the right to recognize their subjectivity in the historical process. The joint development of the two neighbouring countries and nations, as well as their present and future relations should not be held hostages to the past.

Key words

Methodology of research regarding historical conflicts, Polish-Ukrainian relations, World War II, Polish-Ukrainian border territories.

The coverage and assessment of the Ukrainian-Polish relations during World War II includes controversial topics, addressed both in the semi-scientific discussions and in the public sphere not only in Ukraine and Poland, but also in the whole region of East Central Europe. These topics have an impact on the general atmosphere of mutual relations between the countries and peoples. It is about the events that took place more than 80 years ago (the beginning of World War II) and which happened in various conditions and surroundings, despite the rhetoric to the contrary. It is not a coincidence that politicians and large part of both Ukrainian and Polish societies emphasize that studying and explaining those events should be a domain reserved for professional historians. In this text, we are talking about scientists-historians. In a professional environment, there is no need to cite the bibliography regarding this topic – it is well known.[1]

In a professional community, it is not customary to speak of methodological matters. But I have to do it, showing my dissatisfaction with today's situation regarding the presentation of the chosen topic. First, some preliminary theoretical remarks.

First note. The 'real' story is not what we know about the event, but what we learn from it by examining the past from its sources. History is always an interpretation of events by a historian-

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1. At this point I will present only the publications inviting to the fullest knowledge of polemics and literature: О. Каліщук, *Українсько-польське протистояння на Волині та в Галичині у роки Другої світової війни: науковий і суспільній дискурси* [Ukrainian-Polish confrontation in Volyn and Galicia during World War II: scientific and social discourses] (Львів, 2013); G. Motyka, *Wołyń'43* [Volyn'43] (Kraków, 2016); В. В'ятрович, *За лаштунками "Волині-43". Невідома польсько-українська війна* [Behind the scenes of 'Volyn-43'. Unknown Polish-Ukrainian war] (Київ, 2016); Л. Хахула, "Різуни" чи побратими? Сучасні польські *дискурси про Україну* ["Rizuni" or brothers? Contemporary Polish discourses about Ukraine] (Львів, 2016). Cf.: *Українсько-польське протистояння на західноукраїнських землях у роки Другої світової війни:* матеріали до бібліографічного покажчика, Укладач О. Каліщук, Львів (Луцьк, 2007).

researcher. Historians have never been neutral, even if they appear as such. No historian is free from their social environment, upbringing, culture and the current needs of the time, let alone language, cultural or mental conditions, and other individual personality traits. This is an axiom with which historians often disagree. In line with their rhetoric, a historian is always an 'utterer' of the subjectivity of his social environment. This is a known and unfortunately 'pessimistic' rule.

But there is also an 'optimistic' aspect – the professionalism of a historian, or what Marc Bloch designated as a researcher's 'craft'. And here it is appropriate to make a second methodological remark. While it is tempting to make generalizations and pass judgements about various actors of the historical process, one must always take into account the views from a different side or, in other words, from 'the other'. Especially when it comes to such topics as Ukrainian and Polish communities realizing certain socio-political interests in a certain city and at a certain time. Another conclusion drawn from this axiom is that we must take into account the existence of the perspective of the 'Other', which must be included in the research, thus contributing to a complete recognition of the subject.

Third. In view of the above, the social role of a historian grows significantly in the complex process of maneuvering between 'knowledge, imagination, and speech'. Historians produce texts. They, just like doctors, must be well aware of the consequences of their statements affecting the interests of many people and communities, many 'others'. In this case the medical principle *non nocere* – 'do no harm' – applies. History and social memory always contain various stereotypes and myths, memories and experiences, defining the stark boundaries between what is good and what is bad for oneself and for the 'Other'.

In such cases, it is always difficult to talk about recent history or about the past while there are still emotionally involved witnesses of the past events. Therefore, it will be purposeful to recall the remarks of Maurice Halbwachs who notes that collective memory

perceives the group 'from the inside' and it aims to present it with such an image of the past in which it could always recognize itself and which excludes any major changes; history leaves out any periods without changes as 'empty' interludes, and the only worthwhile historical facts are those that reveal a process or event, or contain an element of transformation.[2]

In other words, the latest developments, before they are 'transformed' into 'history', must pass through a period of 'cooling' emotions and expanding the view to include the account of the 'Other'.

Fourth. In historical research, it is important to raise awareness of this manner of perception – what is the purpose of the scientific and historical reflection on the Ukrainian-Polish relations, which in the 20th century were often conflicting? From my point of view, this goal is to identify and explain the causes and consequences of conflicting situations, not for the mere purpose of presenting their course or their political or legal assessment, but also the impact they have on the present and the future. Therefore, none of the conflicts between Ukrainians and Poles in the 20th century can be considered and assessed in isolation from one another. After all, the chain of these conflicts in the modern era began before World War I, and had its continuation and effects. Hence, it is very important to see the whole chain of events. Remembering this, we must ask ourselves the following question: By focusing our attention on conflict situations, are we not distorting the history by presenting only its negative aspect?

The fifth and final note. Today, a large volume of sources and historiographies from the history of Ukrainian-Polish relations in the 20th century have been accumulated, allowing for the reconstruction of events in almost every town and leading centre of political life of Ukrainians and Poles. These studies are worth continuing

2. J. Assmann, *Pamięć kulturowa. Pismo, zapamiętywanie i polityczna tożsamość w cywilizacjach starożytnych* [Cultural Memory and Early Civilization Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination] (Warszawa: WUW, 2008), 58.

for various reasons. But two points must be added: the first – historical facts are so varied and complex that their interpretations may be divergent; second – on the basis of known facts, various interpretations can be made, sometimes even mutually exclusive. And it is so in every story. In this context, it is important not to forget my third comment above.

Now let's move on to the terminological interpretation in the hope that there is no need to speak on a factual level among professionals. I want to emphasize that in matters of interpretation it is important not to repeat the terminology of historical sources, as they always use metaphorical terms corresponding to their time, which carries emotional burden and is narrowed down to a specific place. A simple example: in the works of many historians and journalists, the phrase 'Volyn slaughter' often appears, linking the zoological term 'slaughter' to Volyn and Polish-Ukrainian relations in 1942–1944. However, this is not a scientific term that describes the entire course of events in Volyn in the period in question. The term comes from the emotional accounts of Poles-refugees from Volyn, who, by using this term, wanted to emphasize the catastrophic nature of the suffering of war. Do we have to use this term in the scientific debate today? From my point of view, the events in Ukrainian-Polish relations in Volyn in the years 1942–1944 should be described using adequate scientific term, namely 'attack', 'national conflict', 'social conflict', 'murder', 'plunder', etc. A historian's job is to help understand what happened and why. And in order to explain the events, we need to put individual facts into the general context of the developments in the region and Europe, and build a consistent chain of events that would allow us to obtain their scientific explanation and evaluation.

What is this chain of events? I will only present my point of view.

Historians-researchers understand that in the 20th century in Central and Eastern Europe a situation arose when many na-

tions waged a national-liberation fight for independent statehood. Among them were Ukrainian and Poles. The Ukrainian and Polish nations entered the 20th century as enslaved and separated by the then empires. As early as in the nineteenth century, the representatives of their intellectual elites shaped the programs of national liberation and the creation of independent nation states. The problem was that Polish politicians relied on an enduring tradition of 'historical law' and saw a future independent Poland almost exclusively within the borders of the Commonwealth of 1772, including Lithuanian, Belarusian and Ukrainian lands. They put faithfulness to tradition above political realities. A vast corpus of literature has been written on this subject. In these visions of the future Polish state, the Ukrainian national liberation movement, which was already formed organizationally and politically at the beginning of the 20th century, was often ignored. The movement was particularly active in Galicia under the rule of Austria-Hungary.[3]

However, the formation and maturation of the Ukrainian national movement and its 'grievances' against part of the state-political heritage of the Republic of Poland, as well as its plans to oust the Poles not only from Right-bank Ukraine but also from the Polish 'Piedmont' in Galicia met with opposition and powerful resistance from the Polish population, especially in cities, and then also

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3. Народна програма, "Діло", Lviv, December 24, 1895. The idea of dividing Galicia into two ethnic parts arose back in 1848 in the milieu of the activists of the Supreme Ruthenian Council, which acted as a representative of the interests of the Ukrainian (Ruthenian) population during the revolutionary events in Lviv. Later, the Ukrainian leaders removed this requirement from the political program, expecting an agreement and cooperation with Poles in extending the self-governing rights of the entire province. The disappointment in carrying out another attempt at agreement – the "new era" (1890–1894) – motivated the Ukrainians at the beginning of the 20th century to sharply expose the idea of dividing Galicia into the Ukrainian and Polish parts. Cf.: М. Кугутяк, *Галичина: сторінки історії. Нарис суспільно-політичного руху (XIX ст. – 1939 р.)* [Galicia: pages of history. Essay on the socio-political movement (XIX century – 1939)] (Івано-Франківськ 1993), 32–39.

from the Polish political circles. The accumulated Ukrainian-Polish clashes at the end of World War I grew into a Polish-Ukrainian war over Galicia and Lviv. The particularity of this conflict consisted in the fact that shortly after Ukraine lost the war, Poles and Ukrainians were already acting as allies in the joint struggle of the Ukrainian People's Republic (UPR) and the Republic of Poland against the Bolshevik onslaught. Both wars, according to the figurative statement of the Polish historian Maciej Kozłowski, became a 'Pyrrhic victory' for Poland, because it resulted in a great rift between Ukrainians and Poles, "natural neighbours and allies",[4] and, what needs to be added separately, they aggravated disagreements and conflicts within the Ukrainian national camp, resulting from the signing of the 1920 treaty by the head of the UPR Symon Petliura, and the transfer of lands dominated by the Ukrainian population to Poland (Galicia, Western Volyn, Kholmshchyna, Podlasie, Lemkivshchyna, etc.). The Ukrainian population and politicians of Western Ukrainian lands, which were incorporated into the Polish State, did not accept the decision of the Petliura government, felt deceived, and saw the Polish State as an 'aggressor' and 'invader' that destroyed an important entity created by the Ukrainian nation – the West Ukrainian People's Republic.[5]

Further events showed that the peaceful coexistence of Poles and Ukrainians in one country is under question. The general mood of the Polish and Ukrainian population in the interwar period demonstrated the persistence of prejudices and emotional tensions from both sides, despite various attempts to reach some

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4. M. Kozłowski, *Między Sanem a Zbruczem. Walki o Lwów i Galicję Wschodnią 1918—1919* [Between San and Zbruch. Fighting for Lviv and Eastern Galicia 1918–1919] (Kraków: Znak 1990), 105–106.

5. Б. Гудь, В. Голубко, *Нелегка дорога до порозуміння. До питання ґенези українсько-польського військово-політичного співробітництва 1917–1921 рр.* [The road to understanding is not easy. On the question of the genesis of Ukrainian-Polish military-political cooperation in 1917–1921] (Львів, 1997), 54–59.

compromise. The Ukrainian society did not receive territorial autonomy, as was provided for in international agreements of the years 1919–1920.[6]

On the other hand, the defeats of the Ukrainian national movement in wars, the tenacity of Polish governments on the Ukrainian issue contributed to the radicalization of moods – initially among the youth – and the emergence of a radical wing of the Ukrainian national liberation movement – the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) – which was not the only radical organization in exile, in Poland, or in the Soviet Union. Like all radicals, they developed a 'revolutionary scenario' of achieving independence of their national state under changed international conditions. These conditions dictated the choice of those allies who would seek a revision of the Treaty of Versailles and of the European regime. Germany and its allies challenged this regime and thus drew the attention of the Ukrainian radical movement, which hoped that the emergence of an independent Ukrainian state would be possible in the turmoil of a European war. Just like the Polish politicians had hoped earlier that the European wars of the 19th and early 20th centuries would help them regain independence.

Even today some members of the Polish society and some historians do not understand the reasons of the radicalization of the Ukrainian independence movement in the conditions of the spread

6. In accordance with the resolution of the Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference of June 25, 1919, and subsequent resolutions, as well as the decision of the Council of Ambassadors of March 14, 1923, Poland undertook to grant autonomy to Galicia. Cf.: O. Красівський, *Східна Галичина і Польща в 1918–1923 рр. Проблеми взаємовідносин* [Eastern Galicia and Poland in 1918–1923. Problems of relations] (Київ, 1998), 129–130 and 253–254; Z. Zaks, "Galicja Wschodnia w polskiej polityce zagranicznej (1921–1923)" [Eastern Galicia in Polish foreign policy (1921–1923)], [in:] *Z Dziejów Stosunków Polsko-Radzieckich* [From the history of Polish-Soviet relations], vol. VIII, (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1971), 29–32; J. Pisuliński, *Nie tylko Petlura. Kwestia ukraińska w polskiej polityce zagranicznej w latach 1918–1923* [Not only Petliura. The Ukrainian question in Polish foreign policy in 1918–1923] (Wrocław: WUW, 2004), 392–397; etc.

of totalitarian ideologies and totalitarian ways of solving social problems. However, how could the representatives of nationally conscious Ukrainian circles react to the destruction of Ukrainian statehood? The logical answer is: in a way similar to the reaction of Poles after the invasion by Nazi Germany.

The beginning of World War II saw radicalisation of all sides of the world conflict, since war – as we know – is a radical, anti-humanist way of conducting politics. The Ukrainian national liberation movement during the war was in fact represented by the only political force – organized nationalists from the OUN. The question arises – what did the Ukrainian nationalists fight for? And the answer is unequivocal: to create an independent and united Ukrainian State. United, since at that time the lands inhabited by a majority of Ukrainians were controlled by the USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania – all Ukraine's neighbours (!). The revolutionary scenario of Ukrainian nationalists envisaged an armed uprising and the conquest of the areas inhabited mostly by the Ukrainian population. The rest of the strategy concerned tactical means and instruments of combat, including the choice of allies. Undoubtedly, the leaders of both factions of the OUN (A. Melnyk and S. Bandera after the split in 1940) made mistakes with regard to the use of combat instruments and the choice of temporary allies at various stages of the ongoing war. But they never betrayed the main goal – to achieve an independent national state. Therefore, to separate the Ukrainian radical camp from the Ukrainian national movement in its entirety – as communist Russian propagandists have always tried to do – and to denounce it as something inappropriate in the fight for independence is methodological nonsense. This must be emphasized with all force. The outbreak of World War II was a signal for Ukrainian radicals to carry out their program by means of a revolutionary path – insurrection. Just like in 1918, when the Ukrainian and Polish national movements tried to take advantage of the inter imperial conflict for the purpose of their liberation, they

counted on various allies and changed tactics during the war, the result of which I described earlier.

After the beginning of democratic changes in Poland and Ukraine, the 'white' and 'black' spots of national history began to be filled, especially in the most recent period. In Ukraine, this process was and remains difficult due to the need to overcome the terrible legacy of centuries-long Russian colonialism, the legacy of which is depreciation and disregard for everything that is Ukrainian, including the denial of the mere existence of Ukrainian nation, not to mention the terms 'Ukrainian fascists', 'collaborators', etc. In Poland in the 2000s, a powerful moment of revision of history emerged, with attempts to put at the centre of contemporary Polish-Ukrainian relations the problem of the so-called 'unsolved' historical heritage, namely the murders and deportations of Poles in the years 1943–1946 in the Ukrainian-Polish borderlands (Galicia, Volyn, Nadsiania etc.). And the most important: putting on the Ukrainian national movement all the blame for the crimes committed during the German and Soviet occupation, and blaming the most important force of the Ukrainian liberation movement – the OUN and the UPA – for the victims of the 'defenceless' Polish civilian population.[7]

Such one-sided treatment of Ukrainian-Polish relations in the borderland during the world war affects not the past, but the future, restores reality of the past in its negative manifestations and, as a result, discredits the Ukrainian national movement and Ukrainians as a nation 'equal among equals'. Hence the decisions of the Polish parliament and senate from the years 2009–2016 on "genocide committed by Ukrainian nationalists".[8]

7. О. Каліщук, *Українсько-польське протистояння на Волині та в Галичині у роки Другої світової війни: науковий і суспільній дискурси* [Ukrainian-Polish confrontation in Volyn and Galicia during World War II: scientific and social discourses] (Львів, 2013), 296–308; etc.

8. The Senate and the Sejm of the Republic of Poland adopted resolutions in which they described, in a unilateral statement, the actions of the Ukrainian

Such a politicized approach to the past has two consequences: it ignores the views of the Ukrainian population on past events and Ukrainian historiography, and secondly, it undermines the objectivity of Ukraine and its national interests in the modern world. In fact, the efforts of the thirteen "Poland–Ukraine: Difficult Questions" seminars (1997–2008) are 'gone with the wind'.[9] If the known factual material today quite sufficiently defines the conditions, nature, essence and consequences of the Ukrainian-Polish conflict in Volyn and Galicia, their interpretation differs significantly in the Polish and Ukrainian variants. I admit that in science such

underground ("Ukrainian nationalists") during the Ukrainian-Polish conflict of 1943–1944 as 'genocide' of the Polish nation. Cf.: *Uchwała Senatu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 20 czerwca 2013 r. 70. rocznicę Zbrodni Wołyńskiej* [Resolution of the Senate of the Republic of Poland of June 20, 2013 on the 70th anniversary of the Volyn Crime], Warsaw: Monitor Polski (Official Journal of the Republic of Poland), July 12, 2013, item 582, http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WMP20130000582/O/M20130582.pdf; *Uchwała Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 22 lipca 2016 r. w sprawie oddania hołdu ofiarom ludobójstwa dokonanego przez nacjonalistów ukraińskich na obywatelach II Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1943–1945* [Resolution of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland of July 22, 2016 on paying tribute to the victims of genocide committed by Ukrainian nationalists on the citizens of the Second Republic of Poland in 1943–1945], Warsaw: Monitor Polski (Official Journal of the Republic of Poland), July 29, 2016, item 726, http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/opinie8.nsf/nazwa/625_u/$file/625_u.pdf.

9. For the course and results of regular seminars of Ukrainian and Polish historians, held in 1997–2008, see: *Polska–Ukraina: trudne pytania* [Poland–Ukraine: difficult questions], vol. 1–11 (Warszawa, 1997–2009) [Ukrainian version of the materials: *Україна–Польща: важкі питання,* тт. 1–10 (Варшава–Луцьк, 1998–2006)]. A summary of the work can be found in a separate volume: *Polska–Ukraina: trudna odpowiedź. Dokumentacja spotkań historyków (1994–2001). Kronika wydarzeń na Wołyniu i w Galicji Wschodniej (1939–1945)* [Poland–Ukraine: Difficult Answer. Documentation of historians' meetings (1994–2001). Chronicle of events in Volyn and Eastern Galicia (1939–1945)] (Warszawa: Naczelna Dyrekcja Archiwów Państwowych, Ośrodek KARTA, 2003); A. Żupański, *Droga do prawdy o wydarzeniach na Wołyniu* [The road to the truth about the events in Volyn] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2006), and other publications.

differences are a normal practice. But from the entire spectrum of conflicts that began in 1939, and not in 1943 (!), and in which both many Poles and many Ukrainians were killed, the Polish side chooses only the so-called 'anti-Polish action' carried out by the Ukrainian underground, and gives it a key significance in the whole chain of events. It is an ahistorical approach. After all, it is about a mutual fight against underground movements in a desire to secure the emergence of independent national states after war.

Even during the seminars, historians talked about 'armed conflict' or even 'Polish-Ukrainian war' with the addition of 'interethnic', 'civil', and other qualifiers. In this case, we can speak of a clash of two equal parties – the Polish Underground State and the Ukrainian national movement. Such approach is in line with scientific terminology, and makes it possible to apply the Christian principle "we forgive and ask for forgiveness" on the social level.

However, an interpretation that offends the national feelings of Ukrainians and puts one-sided blame on them for 'slaughtering' the defenceless Poles under what is referred to as 'genocidal nationalism' is quite unacceptable. Firstly, the Poles in the borderland were not defenceless – they had not less, and perhaps more underground forces in Western Ukrainian lands (I wrote about it), especially in Galicia and Volyn, and they prepared to take over these lands by armed forces – these are well-known scientific facts documented in literature. Secondly, Ukrainian nationalism is treated interestingly to this day – if you consider yourself Ukrainian, speak Ukrainian and you support the Ukrainian independent state, then you are a true nationalist (!). But if you support also Poland or Russia, then you are a patriot. Is this approach normal? I doubt it. But it must be emphasized that such a degrading attitude towards Ukrainian nation has a long lasting tradition in both Polish and Russian narratives.

I must point out that the terminology and evaluation of the Ukrainian-Polish relations during the years of World War II differ somewhat strangely. When it comes to the conflict in Volyn, in

the Polish historiography and journalism the terms 'slaughter' and 'genocide' are used, and when it comes to the destruction of the Ukrainian population, including entire settlements, it is referred to as 'preventive or retaliatory actions', 'pacification', 'punishment' etc., and only in some cases individual historians dare to write about 'conflict' or 'war'.[10]

10. At this point, I will mention only two examples from more recent works by Polish historians, which present good factual arguments, but raise questions about interpretation and terminology. Tomasz Bereza, in his valuable monograph, saturated with source material, on the development of Polish-Ukrainian relations during World War II in the Jarosław district of the Lublin region, emphasized that the conflict between the Ukrainian and Polish underground movements is very difficult to define unambiguously, but in its developments, one can find armed attacks and elements of 'ethnic cleansing' on both sides (admittedly the author ironically calls the Ukrainian state-building plans a 'quasi-state', although at that moment (spring 1945) the goals of the Ukrainian underground were already quite understandable and known to all participants of the world war – which is attested by the documents). The researcher himself assesses the situation quite correctly, writing that the authorities of the Ukrainian underground state (the author uses the terms 'authorities' and 'the state' in quotation marks, which is to belittle their status!) "felt obliged to represent the nation they were defending, but also they fought for a living space for them"; on the other hand, "the aspirations of Ukrainian nationalists clashed with the readiness of Poles to defend their state of ownership, reduced by the decisions of the Big Three in Tehran and Yalta". It is in fact the question of an 'armed conflict' ('war'!?) between two national movements, but the author avoids the term that most fully describes the nature of the events. See: T. Bereza, *Wokół Piskorowic. Przyczynek do dziejów konfliktu polsko-ukraińskiego na Zasaniu w latach 1939–1945* [Around Pyskorovychi. Preliminary remarks on the Polish-Ukrainian conflict in Zasania in the years 1939–1945] (Rzeszów: IPN, 2013), 281–282. Another Polish researcher – Mariusz Zajączkowski – in his monograph, scrupulously documented by little known or unknown sources, agrees to admit the fact of a 'guerrilla war' between the two underground movements, but insists that the Polish underground only carried out 'retaliatory' actions against Ukrainians. You have to ask then – if it was a 'conflict' for the territory of the future states, what are the 'retaliatory actions' of the Polish underground for!? It is about ordinary military operations in the field, where the enemy (the Ukrainians) had an advantage in the population. See: M. Zajączkowski, *Ukraińskie podziemie na Lubelszczyźnie w okresie okupacji*

Then a question arises – how to qualify the destruction of entire villages by the Polish underground (Pawłokoma, Sahryń, Piskorowice, etc.)? By analogy, is it necessary to speak of an 'anti-Ukrainian action' or 'genocide' of Ukrainian civilians, 'done by the Polish underground'? Wouldn't it be purposeful to refer to armed attacks on both sides (I emphasize that they began in 1939 and not in 1943) using the term 'armed conflict' or 'war'? Of course it's not about justifying either side! Crimes are crimes in every situation.

Such a proposal is debatable, but it is difficult to find other terms that would encompass the complexity of Ukrainian-Polish relations during World War II without taking into account the entire chain of their development. One can understand the leaders of the Polish underground of that time who wished to maintain the territorial *status quo ante bellum*. However, at the same time, we must also take into account the decisiveness of the leaders of the Ukrainian national liberation movement (and of a large part of the borderland population), who hoped to take advantage of the war situation and make a 'second attempt' to create a Ukrainian national state. I leave aside such facts as the need of the Ukrainians to fight on three fronts – anti-Nazi, anti-Soviet, and anti-Polish.

I will not mention here the matter of counting the victims of the Polish-Ukrainian conflict. I will only notice that the numbers of victims in today's literature and journalism do not withstand criticism and need corrections – with regard to the casualties on both the Polish and Ukrainian side. Recent calculations based on the examination of Ukrainian, Polish, German and Soviet source materials show a large overestimation of Polish losses and underestimation of Ukrainian victims.[11] This question requires new research in

niemieckiej 1939–1944 [The Ukrainian underground in the Lublin region during the German occupation 1939–1944] (Lublin–Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej Oddział w Lublinie, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2015), 427–428. Similar terminology resembles scholasticism or casuistry more than science.

11. Cf.: *Українські жертви Волині 1938–1944 рр. у картах і таблицях. Володимир-Волинський район. Польсько-українське протистояння*

order to meet the requirement of historical scrupulousness. And it seems that this process has already started.

The issue, however, is not the number of victims of the Polish-Ukrainian conflict – given that even one human life is of particular value – but about what happened during World War II in the Polish-Ukrainian borderland. This gives us the key to understanding, explaining and evaluating the events. The analysis of the documents of the Polish Underground State and the Polish government-in-exile during the war shows that their leaders understood well what was going on in the Polish-Ukrainian relations of that time and used in their writings the terms 'war' against the Ukrainians, the 'civil war', or the 'international war'. From 1941, they also made serious preparations for the military conflict, which was often emphasized in their documents.[12] Moreover, the Polish underground formations were the first to start active combat operations against the Ukrainian underground in 1943. As we already know, from March to July 1, 1943, 107 attacks on Ukrainian villages took place in the Volyn province and 722 Ukrainian people (or 1091, according to other data) were killed.[13] This gives grounds to think, taking into account

[Ukrainian victims of Volyn in 1938–1944 in maps and tables. Volodymyr-Volynskyi district. Polish-Ukrainian confrontation], Упорядники О. Голько, О. Тучак, Н. Халак (Львів, 2014), 77; А. Боляновський, "Проблема кількості польських жертв Волинської трагедії 1943 р." [The problem of the number of Polish victims of the Volyn tragedy of 1943], [in:] *Україна–Польща: історична спадщина і суспільна свідомість,* вип. 6 (Львів, 2013), 129–143.

12. See for example: Л. Зашкільняк, "Українсько-польські відносини в роки Другої світової війни: дослідження та інтерпретації" [Ukrainian-Polish relations during World War II: research and interpretations], [in:] *Historia est testis temporum. Księga Pamiątkowa z okazji Jubileuszu 90-lecia Profesorów Richarda Pipesa, Piotra Wandycza, Zbigniewa Wójcika,* Biblioteka Europae Orientalis, studia 5 (Warszawa: Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2017), 435–469.

13. Я. В. Борщик, "До проблеми польських 'відплатних акцій' на (березень – початок липня 1943 р.)" [To the problem of Polish 'retaliation' on (March – early July 1943)], *Український історичний журнал,* no. 1 (2016), 113–132.

the murders of Ukrainians in the Chełm region in 1942, that before the 'anti-Polish action' there was an 'anti-Ukrainian action' carried out by the Polish underground. Historians are not supposed to remove these facts from the interpretation of the events. As for Volyn, the Ukrainian population had a huge advantage over the Polish one in this region, while laying firm claims to Polish property in these lands. The social 'explosives' collected there served as a 'detonator' that triggered the participation of the civilian Ukrainian population, sometimes in anti-humanist revenge campaigns against the Polish population. These criminal acts cannot be justified, but it is always worth explaining them from a socio historical point of view.

Unfortunately, today's Europe has a long history of interstate and international conflicts among its neighbours, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries. As the authors of the international project "Europe and its painful pasts" ("L'Europe et ses passés douloureux") claim, experience shows that revival of old conflicts is always possible despite various endeavours to solve them in the past. The famous French sociologist Georges Mink writes that "history moves into the present and mobilizes various actors, disadvantaged groups of the population or other frustrated groups that have been forgotten in post-conflict agreements or put into silence. Based on these realities, various interested groups, political parties or states create their memory resources and attract to their repertoire of historicizing strategies to 'return to use' the images of the 'painful' past in their political games".[14] That is why it is so important to critically treat the metaphorical 'images' and 'images' borrowed from a dictionary of past events, because they are always filled with an emotional and biased reaction of participants.

In my view, today is the time to seriously re-examine the events and general evaluation of the Ukrainian-Polish relations during

14. Ж. Мінк, Вступ. Європа та її «болісні» минувшини: стратегії історизування та їх використання в Європі, [in:] Європа та її болісні минувшини, Автори упорядники Жорж Мінк і Лора Неймайєр у співпраці з Паскалем Боннаром, Київ 2009, 37.

World War II, and to remove one-sided explanations that prevail in the information space. This space is particularly saturated today with anti Ukrainian rhetoric coming from Ukraine's eastern neighbour. Such rhetoric resuscitates old imperial myths and stereotypes about 'non-existent' Ukrainians or 'fascist' Ukrainian nationalists, endeavours to undermine and distort the image of the Ukrainian national movement, and to wipe the Ukrainian state off the map of Europe. All invectives towards the centuries-long struggle of Ukrainians for their independent state are offensive to the modern people of Ukraine, they violate the principles of peaceful scientific work, and they affect not the past, but the future.

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