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TENSIONS ON THE TOPIC OF HISTORY IN POLISH-UKRAINIAN RELATIONS AS A RESULT OF INFORMATION WARFARE

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The article deals with today's ethnic-cultural tensions and how they connect with the history of Poland and Ukraine and current diplomatic relations. The article overviews the problematic development of the current nationalist movement in Poland and its relationship with the "Center-Right" government, which was formed after the election of the President of the Republic of Poland Andrzej Duda. On the example of the closure of the Polish consulates in Ukraine after the 2017 incident with a grenade launcher in Lutsk, the author shows how a single hooligan attack in an atmosphere of ethnic tensions can lead to a total knock-out of the diplomatic system of the country. The research reveals the causes, parties and goals of the conflict, as well as subjects interested in ethnic tensions. It is shown how the problems of Polish-Ukrainian relations related to the secret change in the foreign policy course of the Republic of Poland in 2008 created a "synergy" with the growth of nationalist sentiment in Europe and the expansion of Russian influence. The link between the strengthening of nationalist movements and ethno-cultural conflicts in Europe (including the appeal of patriotic youth to their memory of historical conflicts) with the proliferation of pro-Russian and anti-globalist conspiracy propaganda in popular corners of the Internet, including those directed against the processes of European integration and NATO enlargement, have been shown in the research. The research suggests ways to prevent the escalation of conflict using the examples of both the diplomacy of the President of Ukraine and initiatives of representatives of civil society. The topic of Internet propaganda as a factor of ethnic tensions and rising political movements, as well as the distortion of history in such propaganda, is proposed by the author for future research

Key words: *history policy, international relations, Republic of Poland, politics of memory, propaganda.*

Мелекєсцев Кирило. Напруженість щодо історії в польсько-українських відносинах у результаті інформаційного протистояння

У статті досліджуються етнокультурні конфлікти сучасності у зв'язку з історією Польщі, України та нинішніми дипломатичними відносинами. Розглядається проблематика розвитку націоналістичного руху у Польщі та його зв'язку із «правоцентристським» урядом, що сформувався після обрання Президентом Республіки Польща Анджея Дуди. На прикладі закриття консульств Польщі в Україні після інциденту з гранатометом у Луцьку в 2017 р. автор показує, як поодинокі хуліганські атаки в атмосфері національного напруження можуть спричинити тотальний локдаун дипломатичної системи країни. Розкриваються причини, сторони та цілі конфлікту, а також інтереси зацікавлених у конфліктах суб'єктів. Відображається, як проблеми польсько-українських відносин, пов'язані із секретною зміною зовнішньополітичного курсу Республіки Польща у 2008 р., утворили «синергію» зі зростанням націоналістичних настроїв у Європі та розширенням російського впливу на радикальні рухи. Показано зв'язок посилення націоналістичних рухів та етнокультурних конфліктів у Європі (включно з апеляцією патріотично налаштованої молоді до історичних конфліктів) із поширенням проросійської та «антиглобалістської» конспірологічної пропаганди у популярних куточках Інтернету, у тому числі спрямованої проти процесів Європейської інтеграції та розширення НАТО. Розкрито шляхи до попередження ескалації конфлікту на прикладах як дипломатії Президента України, так і ініціатив представників громадянського суспільства. Тема поширення пропаганди у всесвітній мережі як фактора національного напруження та розвитку політичних рухів, а також викривлення історії у такій пропаганді запропоновані автором для майбутнього дослідження.

Ключові слова: *історична політика, міжнародні відносини, Республіка Польща, політика пам'яті, пропаганда.*

Relevance of the article is based on a number of points to be discussed in the study of both history and political science. Historically, ethnic tensions were a source of political power for different groups throughout the history of Polish-Ukrainian relations. For example, the Cossack Hetmanate of old has arisen because of tensions between Ruthenians and Poles in the Dnieper Ukraine, and also relied on the anti-Jewish and anti-Armenian sentiment in the Ukrainian society during its rise to power and the toppling down of previous bureaucracy, which would often exclude the non-polonized natives of Ukraine from joining the domineering class of society, especially in cities. The resulting animosity culminated in a bloody war and a clear division between Pole and Ukrainian. Later on, in the 1920th, the Polish government tried to curb ethnic tensions in



their policy of aggressive assimilation of Ukrainians in the West of Ukraine, only resulting in, once again, seeding a bloody conflict. Politically, such historical events have given a rise to nationalism as both an ideology of political parties, as well as a guiding principle of nation-states: although modern constitutions strive to be unbiased in this regard, countries still base themselves around certain languages, ethnic groups and their histories. Contemporary Ukraine faces troubling times in the matters both political and economical, along with the ongoing Russian aggression, which makes it extremely important to look at the contacts with the neighbor nations and recognize the aforementioned tensions.

In 2017 we have gotten access to previously classified documents, which affected our understanding of Poland's eastern policy as whole. The changes in Polish-Ukrainian relations in 2009 were not just caused by tensions between the two, but rather a case of the Russian Federation expanding its influence on Polish foreign policy via a variant of psychological information warfare, playing on the Poles' idea of "already doing enough for Ukrainians" and "expecting something in return". Prior to 2017 the "Russian" explanation for Polish-Ukrainian tensions would seem outrageous. However, such methods, playing on the opposing side's expectations of reward, were used outright in Moscow's information warfare tactics against Ukraine throughout the relations between two countries [1, p. 610–611]. The Polish Foreign Minister at the time, Witold Waszczykowski, who declassified a document from the year 2008, known officially as "Theses on the Polish policy towards Russia and Ukraine", March 4th, 2008, commented that only four people had access to the document in 2008, among them Radosław Sikorski, who was at that time the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, usually trying to present himself as the most prominent ally of Ukraine in the EU. The document came up after Prime Minister Donald Tusk's two visits to Moscow and Kyiv at the start of 2008, during which he was criticized for "political two-timing". Leonid Kravchuk and Aleksander Kwasniewski condemned Tusk's actions as "unfair" towards Ukraine, which made quite a lot of sense in the perspective, for Tusk allowed Moscow to turn Poland against Ukraine in return for some faint promises of cooperation [2, p. 69].

It can be said that the matter of popular opinion among the Poles and the Ukrainians, also affects official political matters, and it comes closer and closer to a state that can be best described as "tensions". Nowadays even alone man with a camera can affect politics as a whole, bringing ethnic grievances back to the negotiations table. For example, the 2017 attack on the Polish Consulate in Lutsk managed to paralyze the whole system of Polish-Ukrainian interstate relations for a month. Ukrainian officials probed for terrorist threat and "hooligans", while Poland has suspended its consulates "until proper security could be provided" [3; 4].

The goal of the article is, thus, to show how the issues of history and culture, such as the long-gone ethnic conflicts, fuel the tensions in contemporary Polish-Ukrainian relations. Such aspects of the **subject** of Polish-Ukrainian relations as their cultural and societal sides could benefit from further research. For as we, the researchers, dwell on treaties and memorandums that declare support for the strategic partnership, we should not forget the "human side" to history: when the actions of a single rocket launcher-armed hooligan are enough to throw the diplomatic network of two countries into disarray, one can easily see the importance of the "little man".

Results and discussion. The analysis of various materials relevant to the information warfare in its "propaganda" sense, such as literature on history and politics, publications in media outlets, and direct sources such as documents related to international cooperation and reports on the current events, we can determine such results of the study: **firstly**, the events of Ukrainian-Polish history are used as a pretext for fueling ethnic tensions in the societies of both Ukraine and the Republic of Poland. **Secondly**, these ethnic tensions could be characterized as a brewing conflict with fluctuating sides, or a future political crisis. **Thirdly**, solutions to these information warfare issues are being sought out by the members of civic society in the two countries, although the main way of dealing with tensions remains "teeth-gritted teamwork", repressing the problematic issues in official discourse.

The discussion of **the first point** is already underway throughout global media outlets under the name of "angry nationalism", with both political journalists and historians investigating the process and its issues related to how history is viewed in different cultures, and how they apply that view to contemporary politics.

One of such journalists is Peter Dickinson, publisher of *Business Ukraine* magazine and *Lviv Today*, who analyzed youth-driven nationalist protests in Poland, blamed the issue on "...a right-wing government that feeds nationalist sentiment", said nationalism leading to protests against "the loss of sovereignty to EU", "globalization" and issues. The protests were seen happening as soon as the government shows weakness or signs of corruption; and right at the moment the Polish government would immediately try to turn the protests against the EU structure rather than themselves. This officially became a problem when the European Commission issued a warning to Warsaw for their controversial legal reforms. Such a policy also resulted in Poland metaphorically "shooting themselves in the foot" after their continuous rise to prominence in the larger structure of the European Union in 2005–2015, with President Duda now favoring the reinforcement of his government with "anti-globalist" forces at the expense of weakening the EU. While noting the rise of Polish



nationalism, Mr. Dickinson claimed that “the Ukrainians never felt more welcome in Poland”, and wrote that, even with Poland declaring the Volhynian Tragedy an act of genocide in 2016, the Ukrainians “shouldn’t take it as an affront to them directly necessarily”, although it is “...certainly bad timing from a Ukrainian point of view and from a general united Europe against Russian aggression point of view”. Looking at the ethnic-cultural tensions Dickinson reinforced positivism, citing how the Polish and Ukrainian parliaments issued a joint resolution recognizing the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany as the initiators and responsible actors for the start of World War II. The author asked for a hopeful perspective on the Polish-Ukrainian relations, noting President Poroshenko’s initiative: “Poroshenko was in Poland for the Warsaw Summit and he went to memorials to the Volyn Massacres and paid his respects in a very respectful manner. I think this was an important gesture” [5].

In contrast, an article Ian Bateson for *Foreign Policy* called the Polish-Ukrainian ethnic-cultural tensions “a gift for Putin” and describes the core of misunderstanding in the troubles of nation-building in Ukraine. Calling out Ukraine and Poland for starting “history wars” Bateson noted: “Ukraine has been in desperate search of heroes to inspire the country. At least one of those national inspirations is now threatening a critical, but increasingly fragile, international relationship when Ukraine can least afford it. The Ukrainian hero is Stepan Bandera, and the relationship in question is Ukraine’s partnership with Poland” [6]. As we can see, not all perspectives on the brewing conflict are as optimistic.

Bateson’s position is echoed in another *Foreign Policy* published article of Adam Zamoyski is a British historian and author of *Poland: A History*. Commenting on the newly elected Polish government, Mr. Zamoyski stated that it had “given Polish nationalism a bad name. “Nationalistic” has joined the epithets used by Western commentators to describe the Law and Justice party, alongside “xenophobic” and “populist.” It’s easy to understand why the term has been applied. But it’s important to understand that the Polish government, in trying to pose as the defender of Polish sovereignty, has abused and distorted Polish nationalism”.

Like Dickinson, Zamoyski noted the use of Polish “angry nationalism” in government’s interests, turning many young people invested in the past and future of the Polish nation against its own European neighbors, inciting riots and dangerous ethnic tension. Like Mr. Bateson, he called it to be orchestrated by Moscow, further commenting on how the slogans of mission, martyrdom, and sovereignty espoused by Polish nationalists come from Poland’s postwar Communist history, also designed in Moscow. The Communist propaganda managed to fit the Nationalist outlook, targeting the masses of “people who find the idea of the secular, liberal Western world too challenging and seek comfort in a sort of provincialism that wraps itself in religious and patriotic slogans” [7].

An alarming rise of Nazi-apologists espousing slogans of ethnic nationalism in Europe, along with the radical left parties has been attributed to Russian money by think-tanks and independent researchers, but it remains a “hush-hush” topic for officials and diplomats, as exposing such degree of Russian influence across Europe can shatter not just the fast-deteriorating relations with the sanctioned aggressive rogue state that is the Russian Federation, but the Europeans’ own faith in their governments and democratic systems’ ability to protect them. As for the supporters of radical parties, many of them prefer the propagated image of Russia as a new “savior of the white Western world” to the liberal European “globalist” paradigm. This is well exemplified on their usual coordination and discussion forums online, such as *Achan.org’s* and *8chan.org’s /pol/* boards, or *reddit.com’s* now-banned */r/the_donald* and */r/greatawakening*, which allowed European radicals fast and easy communication with like-minded people in the United States. Such forums are often “fed” Russian propaganda with fake quotes from Vladimir Putin celebrating ethnic nationalism and a racist outlook on immigration (something that Putin’s government does not tolerate among their own homegrown nationalists, prosecuting such sentiment under article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code). People visiting these Internet forums come to actually prefer direct Russian influence to the boogeyman of “Jewish globalist state” (associated in their propaganda with NATO and the European Union), a label under which any Russia-opposing entity may end up. This topic deserves a further research, as there is a lot of factual evidence of how Internet soft power can influence masses of people and result in increased support for whole movements and political parties through information warfare.

Prior to the 2017’s revelation of the “Theses on the Polish policy towards Russia and Ukraine” such caution against Russian influence would be seen as “manipulating the facts to favor an anti-Russian narrative”, but nowadays this does not seem so farfetched, as think-tanks like *The Atlantic Council* support such a “narrative”. Although the three aforementioned publicists criticized the new Polish government for encouraging aggressive nationalism, it should be noted that the very same government revealed “The Theses”, allowing the world to see how Russia has been supporting the Polish-Ukrainian tensions as early as in 2008 – the same year when it launched an offensive against Georgia, which was publically opposed by the presidents of Poland, Ukraine and Lithuania [8].



The foreign observers don't just criticize Polish nationalism for "mucking up the waters", but the Ukrainian one as well, particularly that of Stepan Bandera and his rise to the hero status in today's Ukraine. Yaroslav Kaczyński, formerly a long-time ally of the "pro-European forces" in Ukraine's political system declared: "I plainly told President Poroshenko that they won't make it to Europe with Bandera. It's absolutely clear to me. We've already shown great patience, but everything has its limits" [9]. Under "Bandera" both the Polish and the Russians understand the very idea of a Ukraine that aggressively defends its indolence, instead of catering to its neighbors: although Stepan Bandera himself has been dead since 1959, many parties have since claimed association with the national idea that he and the OUN exposed.

Some on the Polish side recognized the lies in anti-Bandera propaganda, but noted how Ukrainian nationalism has no place in a modern European culture. For example, Jacek Kluczkowski, a Polish diplomat and an ambassador to Ukraine in 2010, said this to a UNIAN interviewer regarding Stepan Bandera's "Hero of Ukraine" status: "It is certainly untrue that Bandera was a German collaborator and thus should not be condemned for collaboration. But are Bandera's slogans adequate for a modern democratic state?! Could such a very controversial figure be a modern example for the people that aspire to continue on the path of European integration?! Therefore, we were concerned about this award. <...> You see, we in Europe created the European Union as a community of values. I would not want the people who opposed democracy and civil society to be a part of our heritage" [10]. Of course, this interview was taken five years before Poland itself would be accused of threatening the European values and the foundations of the EU as a community, so in the long run Mr. Kluczkowski's words may be turned against Polish nationalism as much as they were espoused against the Ukrainian one. Like Ukraine, Poland has to subscribe to the narrative of being a "bulwark of Europe" to support its nationalism and disdain for common EU practices (such as supporting immigrants from the Middle East).

On the **second point**, we must not that the word "conflict" in this article does not describe an immediate armed confrontation, a diplomatic crisis or a trade blockade; but instead considers the conflictological point of view. Conflict science would name such confrontations as being the culmination of a conflict, but the main part of a conflicts, its beginnings, are characterized by the state of the sides before the, so to say, "call to arms". The ethnic-cultural tensions in Polish-Ukrainian relations would be characterized as the beginning of a conflict; although conflict science allows for a conflict's culmination to be negated altogether, as conflicts can end before reaching the "active" stage. However, it is important to recognize that the prerequisites for said "active stage" already exist, as the decision-makers have to work to prevent a full-blown conflict from destroying the current strategic partnership perspective. The sides of the conflict fluctuate between governments and societies of both Ukraine and Poland. The distinction between "government" and "society" is quite important here, as the messages of official decision-makers and popular opinion-makers often contrast. It could also be stated that those without a defined position could be considered a separate side. The conflict is multi-layered and connected to the interests of both the main sides and the secondary actors (such as the EU, the USA and the RF), which are mostly interested not in the moral-ethical points of the conflict, but in the changes it may bring to international relations.

Discussing the **third point**, we have to note one of the most important decisions on the matter of ethnic tensions, which was the address of President Petro Poroshenko' regarding the Volhynian Tragedy of 1943. President Poroshenko had addressed the Polish side with speeches in 2014 and 2016, even including a public apology before the Polish people and condolences for every life lost in the historical conflict. The decision cost him support from radicalized politicians in the homeland, such as Oleg Liashko, who called his apology "disgraceful" [11].

Nationalists on both sides have been demanding the opponent to take full responsibility for the Volhynian Tragedy and denounce a part of their own historical heritage associated with it for almost a decade, so one President's work may not be enough. These issues have been observed ever since shift in Polish-Ukrainian relations in 2009, which was not just a matter of the two countries changing their foreign policy interests, but a conscious choice in favor of Russia in Polish foreign policy theses of 2008, which encouraged "friendly-critical" relations with Ukraine, as well as proclaiming that "Even without mentioning huge economic interests of Poland in Russia, which concerns not only the energy sector, that plays an important role in relations of Poland with Russia and Europe, as well as the mutual cultural and intellectual interests, it is necessary to note that an active dialogue with Russia is of great political value for Poland". Commenting on such logic, Witold Waszczykowski said that "The authors had no illusions about [the policy's] success, but decided that 'being pro-Russian' would be a kind of a tool, a trick for the relations with the West. In a way, they wanted to improve their reputation in the West". Eerily similar to Russia's current propaganda, the authors of the document noted that, for the West, Russia could be an important ally in the fight against Islamic terrorism without the old Soviet ideological anti-western agenda, as well as "a large storage of resources that can significantly support the economy of the Western world" [12, pp. 103–104].



Aside from politicians, the members of the civic society also attempted to “repair bridges” on their own. One of the most important events of the cultural aspect of Polish-Ukrainian relations in 2015 was the fact that after a seven-year hiatus (since 2008), the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance and the Polish Institute of National Remembrance restored the historical dialogue to curb ethnic-cultural tensions as a factor of the relations between two countries.

This restoration happened during the Ukrainian-Polish Forum of Historians, the founding meeting of which was held in Kyiv on November 2, 2015. During the meeting several organizational issues were resolved concerning the work of the Forum; the participants outlined a number of topics of the Forum’s work for the next year, along with the dates of the next meetings. The number of permanent members of the Forum (twelve persons) was determined and the co-chairs of the Ukrainian and Polish groups, which were Professor Yuri Shapoval and Professor Waldemar Rezmer, were approved. The main chronological focus of the Forum’s work was the 1939–1947 period, which was associated with the hottest discussions of Polish and Ukrainian historians regarding such events as the Second World War, the Volhynian Tragedy, Operation Vistula (although events as “pacification” in Galicia, or the murder of Tadeusz Hołówko formally remained outside of this framework). Additionally, the discussion also touched on the issues of “correct definitions”: after all, a certain number of Polish researchers consider the interpretation of the Volyn tragedy as a genocide of the Poles to be the only true version; outraged by the use of other terms such as the “Polish-Ukrainian conflict”, “anti-Polish action of OUN-UPA”, and “ethnic cleansing”, since, in their opinion, this shifts the emphasis and reduces the responsibility of the Ukrainian side: specifically, at the first meeting of the forum, it was mentioned in the reports “*A Review of Polish Studies on Polish-Ukrainian Relations 1939–1947*” (by prof. Jan Pisuliński) and “*The inventory of issues in the shared history of the 20th century*” (by prof. Leonid Zashkilnyak) [13].

Such an initiative by Ukrainian and Polish scholars to “fix” the ideological aspect of the Polish-Ukrainian partnership was definitely worthy of praise, especially since it continued with yearly forums beyond the initial meetings, and expanded to include various historians from both countries. However, due to the 2018 changes to the Polish law criminalizing refusal to designate Ukrainian nationalists as guilty of genocide against the Poles, the Ukrainian side withdrew from the dialogue, with the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance demanding amendments [14].

Conclusions. The developing nation-building in Ukraine and a revival of the “culture of remembrance” in Poland have both given the rise to patriotism in the societies of two countries. This, in turn led to an increase in ethnic tensions. Young, politically active people across Ukraine and Poland came up with questions not only towards their own governments, but to those of neighboring countries, fervently believing themselves to be in the right. The tensions culminated with attacks on Polish consulates across Dnieper Ukraine, and with the Polish attacks on Ukrainian historical monuments in the historical Western Volhynia / New Galicia region. A certain number of politicians exploited such feelings for political gain (creating a confrontation between homegrown nationalism and “globalist Europe”), which contributed to an uneasy situation in the Polish-Ukrainian relations, which now show signs of a brewing conflict. This sabotaged the process of relations-building and European Integration for both countries, challenging European unity and Ukrainian independence. A number of think tanks have thus attributed part of this unrest to Russian influence, especially the clandestine efforts to influence nationalist groups across the Internet. This resulted in the Polish and Ukrainian governments both having to walk upon a thin line between nationalism (needed to appease the politically active parts of population and opposition politicians) and pluralism (needed to keep the official relations strong and developed at the face of geopolitical concerns). Because of this, the initiative of UINP and PINP to conduct forums to find compromise between Polish and Ukrainian positions on national memory is of great significance. The civic society could further engage in creating a “reconciliation position” for future generations of Ukrainians and Poles. Such meetings are already happening across Ukraine and Poland, with the Warsaw University establishing a “Students’ Dialogue” conference program, expanding Polish-Ukrainian cultural dialogue beyond Volhynia and Galicia. Initiatives like these can only be further recommended for the effort of lessening ethnic-cultural tensions in the relations.

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