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VOLHYNIA IN POLISH INFORMATION WARFARE ACTIVITIES

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The article deals with the issue of how the memory of Polish civilians killed by Ukrainian nationalist guerilla in Volhynia during World War Two is used by the Polish governments for the state's political agenda in "history policy" and "historical diplomacy". Thus, the goal of the article is to discern whether the Volhynian tragedy revisionist agenda actually exists in the Polish government, what are its aims, whom is it masterminded by, and what are the currently known results of the Polish "historical diplomacy" and "history policy" on Volhynia. The study is based on research of media materials, particularly concentrating on messaging from the Polish government actors, affiliated agents, and on reaction to the messaging inside the country and abroad, while also using the materials from previous literature on Polish-Ukrainian relations, such as results of surveys, analytical reports for the Ukrainian government, interviews of Polish and Ukrainian political science and history researchers. The results of the study allow us to note that, firstly, there exists the specific issue of the Polish government agents seeing Volhynian tragedy as a relevant topic for disseminating information about, making a revision of European historical memory into a victory of the Polish government; secondly, the Volhynian topics have been pursued by various Polish governments in the 21st century, not just the right-wing parties (the study challenges the misaimed blame for the current Polish government as the one that started politicizing the Volhynian tragedy, as the previous government already started the trend of lionizing Polish nationalists' actions in the "Eastern Borderlands" at the Ukrainians' expense, with the only differences being the terms of ethnic cleansing vs. genocide and the caveat for sadness over peaceful Ukrainians' losses in the Polish-Ukrainian conflict during World War II); thirdly, the effectiveness of said Polish historical policy on Volhynia is dubious (in terms of influencing both the internal audience, per 2013 survey, and the foreign response to Polish historical diplomacy). Despite deliberate actions from Polish governments to engage in information warfare on the topic, the Volhynian issue's influence on the actual partnership, on matters of war or peace, is limited.

Key words: foreign influence, history of Ukraine, history policy, information warfare, Republic of Poland, politics of memory, politics of history.

Мелекєсцев Кирило. Волинь як сюжет у польських діях щодо інформаційного протистояння

Стаття присвячена питанню використання польськими урядами в державному політичному порядку денному (в «історичній політиці» та «історичній дипломатії») пам'яті про польських мирних жителів, убитих українським націоналістичним підпіллям на Волині за Другої світової війни. Таким чином, мета статті – з'ясувати, чи насправді існує в польському уряді ревізійністська програма Волинської трагедії, які її цілі, ким вона керується та які наразі відомі результати польської «історичної дипломатії» та «політика історії» на Волині. Дослідження ґрунтується на дослідженні медіа-матеріалів, зосереджуючись на повідомленнях від польських урядовців, афілійованих агентів, а також на реакції на повідомлення всередині країни та за кордоном, а також використовує матеріали, викладені в літературі про польсько-українські відносини, такі як результати опитувань, аналітичні звіти для українського уряду, інтерв'ю польських та українських політологів та істориків. Результати дослідження дозволяють констатувати, що, по-перше, існує специфічне питання сприйняття польською владою Волинської трагедії як актуальної теми для поширення інформації про не, щоб перегляд європейської історичної пам'яті перетворити на перемогу польської влади; по-друге, волинськими темами займалися різні уряди Польщі в XXI столітті, а не лише праві партії (дослідження ставить під сумнів звинувачення нинішнього польського уряду як такого, що почав політизувати волинську трагедію, оскільки попередня влада вже започаткувала тенденцію героїзації дій польських націоналістів на «східних окраїнах» коштом українців, з єдиною різницею в термінах етнічної чистки проти геноциду та застереженням про сум через втрати мирних українців у польсько-українській конфлікт під час Другої світової війни); по-третє, сумнівним є ефективність зазначеної польської історичної політики щодо Волині (щодо впливу як на внутрішню аудиторію, згідно з опитуванням 2013 р., так і на зовнішню реакцію на польську історичну дипломатію). Попри свідомі дії польських урядів щодо інформаційного протистояння, вплив волинського питання на реальне партнерство (у питаннях війни чи миру) є обмеженим.

Ключові слова: зовнішні впливи, історія України, історична політика, інформаційне протистояння, Республіка Польща, політика пам'яті, політика історичної пам'яті.



Relevance of the article is centered on the fact that it covers the policies of the Republic of Poland, Ukraine's neighbor and close partner for both the Euro-Atlantic integration process and military supply for defense against Moscow's aggression. As such, Polish government's narratives on historical events in Ukraine are relevant.

The goal of the article is, thus, to discern whether the Volhynian tragedy revisionist agenda actually exists in the Polish government, what are its aims, whom is it masterminded by, and what are the (currently known) results of the Polish "historical diplomacy" and "history policy" on Volhynia. **The subject** of Polish "history policy" in its relation to Ukraine has been discussed by V. Yablonsky, V. Lozovyy, O. Valevsky, S. Zdioruk, S. Zubchenko, and other researchers; this study's goal is to discern and clarify when and by whom did this policy start, which sides it affected and how, and whether it relates to Moscow's information warfare tactics against Ukraine throughout the relations between countries [1, pp. 610–611].

Results and discussion. After the analysis of literature and media sources we can determine such results of the study: **Firstly**, there exists the specific issue of the Polish government agents seeing Volhynian tragedy as a relevant topic for disseminating information about, making a revision of European historical memory into a victory of the Polish government. **Secondly**, the Volhynian topics have been pursued by various Polish governments in the 21st century, not just the right-wing parties. **Thirdly**, the effectiveness of the historical policy on Volhynia is dubious.

The discussion of **the first point**, is underway in Poland and Ukraine, noting how history both "unites and divides", the latter bit specifically when used for political reasons. Discussing politics, we have to differentiate at least two political interests in play: the Polish and Ukrainian state-aligned ones (we're discounting various non-state actors for now, which would require a more complex research, and focusing on messaging from state-affiliated political agents). Polish state-aligned interests are to ramp-up the Volhynian tragedy of 1943 as one of Poland's greatest historical tragedies at the hands of Ukrainians, and to "fish out" apologies from the Ukrainian side, using those as a sign of foreign policy victory for the internal Polish audience. Ukrainian state-aligned interests would prefer to disregard those historical experiences entirely, leaving "history to the historians" as far as foreign relations with Poland, which Ukraine needs as a friendly partner, go (of course, Ukraine does not follow the same approach towards its own internal audiences, operating a government institution based on the Polish original example: the Institute of National Memory). While noting this bit of hypocrisy on the Ukrainian governments' side, nevertheless, their position is that there should be less conflict on the issues of history, including the Volhynian tragedy, not more, while the Polish position requires active measures to prove something and get others (specifically, the Ukrainians) to agree to the Polish vision of historical justice. Polish Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski specifically defined that that Poland should take the model of Israel as a model of successful diplomacy and historical policy, as the Israeli managed to document and introduce the concept of the Jewish Holocaust into the global political context. "We are not as successful," noted the minister, defining the goal of Poland in regards to its treatment of the Volhynian tragedy [2, p. 150].

The very real issue for ordinary citizens in this Polish-Ukrainian conflict on history is potential suspension of free speech as a result of a number of laws and related parliamentary resolutions (2015 in Ukraine, and 2013, 2016, 2018 in Poland). While the Ukrainian law was vague in what constitutes "disrespect" and what exact punishment will those "disrespecting" the legacy of Ukrainian independence fighters face, it opened way to place the so-called "memory wars" from the field of government messaging into a legal field. The Polish parliament followed suit with the introduction of actually defined criminal responsibility (up to three years of imprisonment) for the denial of Ukrainians' crimes against the Poles in the Volhynian tragedy. While disagreeing with the "both sides" approach (after all, the Ukrainian side is not trying to characterize attacks from Polish nationalist groups of the same period as acts of genocide, or prosecute people for arguing in favor of those groups, long since considered heroic by the Polish government, per Polish Sejm resolution "On the matter of tragic fate of the Poles in the Eastern Borderlands" of July 2009), it is hard not to agree with Dr. Alina Cherviatsova that criminal law "is an ill-suited moderator for public discussion on history but a powerful and dangerous weapon in memory wars which pose a threat of fueling real conflicts in the future" [3].

The Volhynian tragedy memory issue was "supposed to be" resolved under President Kuchma of Ukraine and President Kwasniewski of Poland (with support from the long-standing influencer of Polish political thought and promoter of Polish-Ukrainian partnership, chief editor of "Kultura" Jerzy Giedroyc). In May 1997, Ukraine and Poland signed the Joint Statement "On Concorde and Reconciliation", and in July 2003, the Joint Statement "On Reconciliation on the 60th Anniversary of the Volyn Tragedy" [4]. In 2013 the issue was highlighted by the aforementioned presidents, calling on the politicians not to use the tragedy to mar current relations between Poland and Ukraine [5].



Poland's goals with the information warfare strategy on Volhynia are twofold: the internal audience is supposed to see the government protecting the past for the sake of the future, and the external audience has to agree to a revised scheme of memory politics. As Ukrainian analysts V. Lozovyy and V. Yablonsky suggest, "it seems to the Polish side that the Ukrainians have not apologized enough. The Polish authorities want to destroy the structure of European historical memory, which was built on the mentioned formula of reconciliation" [6]. While one won't find the exact same words in the Polish law, nevertheless, this vision of the deliberate policies to promote Volhynia to the external audiences as "the Polish Holocaust" with the Ukrainians as the sole perpetrators and the Poles as victims of an unprovoked attack can be seen in how Poland "protected" that law before foreign audiences. Particularly, since the relevant 2018 law also included provisions against blaming the Poles for anti-Jewish actions during World War II, it met opposition in Israel, causing a diplomatic scandal to unfold between the Prime Ministers of Poland and Israel [7].

This underlines the Polish governmental agenda in history-related information warfare: it is important for them to put a particular historical narrative on Volhynia in the written law (with criminal responsibility for those disagreeing with it), and, while unable to affect the international law in Europe or beyond (which does not include any ban of the use criminal sanctions as a means of politics of memory), it makes it part of the Polish official policy to make other countries, like Ukraine and Israel, toe the line with a specific narrative on historic past.

On the second point, we must note that there is a conscious narrative to align the use of the Volhynian tragedy for political information warfare with the rise of right-wing parties in Poland, and that narrative comes from both the center-left groups in Poland and the Ukrainian researchers. The latter (including the aforementioned V. Yablonsky and V. Lozovyy), for example, blame the right-wing PiS government of Poland for the "Volhynian" agenda in the 2019 analytics report for the National Institute of Strategic Research of Ukraine. They connect the Volhynian issue with the PiS political agenda entirely, noting that Polish conservative politicians need victories on the foreign policy historical front in order to spread their influence on the patriotic electorate, win the support of nationalist organizations, and raise conservative-nationalist and Catholic-traditionalist sentiments. "For such purposes, it was decided to use the Volyn tragedy of World War II," Ukrainian analysts suggest [8, pp. 83–85]. In a similar case, Peter Dickinson, publisher of *Business Ukraine* magazine and *Lviv Today*, also connected the historical policy on Volhynia to "...a right-wing government that feeds nationalist sentiment", said nationalism leading to protests against "the loss of sovereignty to EU", "globalization", government showing weakness or signs of corruption; which the Polish government would immediately try to turn the protests against the wider EU rather than against themselves [9].

As noted, the point is echoed by voices from Poland: political scientist and Eastern Studies researcher Dr. Mariusz Marszewski noted that the PiS party leader Yaroslav Kaczyński "perfectly hears all the voices of the grassroots of Polish politics. And this is the situation in Polish politics – the right wing of the political spectrum wants Ukraine to apologize for the activities of the Ukrainian insurgent army during the Second World War ... Because now there is a new political wave in Poland. And the political spectrum shifted very strongly to the right. To a certain extent, the political scene is now held by neo-right tendencies that directly go back to the 30s of the 20th century, to the Second Rzeczpospolita. Now the situation is such that the right is putting a lot of pressure, especially after the adaptation of the film 'Volyn', which brought this historical skeleton out of the closet" [10]. Petro Tyma, Polish historian and political scientist, since 2006 the leader of the Union of Ukrainians in Poland also highlighted the right-wing marginal groups, and how their actions may have influenced the more mainstream parties such as PiS, however, noting that there is a of left parties similarly seeking out anti-Ukrainian narratives on Volhynia [11].

In fact, the Volhynian discourse in political information warfare did not start with the PiS domination over both the presidency and the government. The year 2009, back under the Tusk government, there was a "political review" of Polish-Ukrainian relations on the basis of historical memory, which may have been related to the statements in the classified (pre-2017) Polish government's "Theses on Polish policy towards Russia and Ukraine", which included a proposition to reboot relations with Moscow via a "friendly-critical" approach towards Ukraine on the issues relevant to Poland's interests, including historical narratives [12; 13, pp. 87, 93–94]. Back in 2009, long before the now-blamed rise of the right-wing elements to popularity and power, the Polish Sejm adopted a resolution with such claims: "The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army's anti-Polish action at the Borderlands of the Second Polish Republics – mass murders that have the character of ethnic cleansing... The Sejm of the Republic of Poland pays tribute to the murdered compatriots... and the members of the Home Army, Borderland Self-Defense and Peasants' Battalions, who took a dramatic participation in the defense of the Polish civilian population, and remembers peaceful Ukrainian victims" [14]. The rise of the right-wing a in the next decade would do



away with neutral statements like “peaceful Ukrainian victims”, and went from “ethnic cleansing” towards “genocide”, but the issue of politicizing the Volhynian tragedy, as we can see, pre-dated the PiS’s dominance of Polish politics: it’s one thing that the resolution recognized Ukrainian nationalists as responsible for Polish deaths, but in the same text they praised Polish nationalist organizations (the implication about “peaceful Ukrainian victims” notwithstanding). Both Ukrainian and Polish nationalist movements of the Anti-Nazi resistance were lionized in their respective national historical narratives (and, as discussed in a previous point, Ukraine also saw laws that were supposed to protect their legacy from “desecration” come to light), but unlike the Polish politicians, no Ukrainian government tried to officially denounce the Home Army of Poland as perpetrators of “ethnic cleansing” or “genocide”, disregarding any nationalist history attitudes in the populace.

The aforementioned Sejm decision was met with protest by Volhynian civic organizations, regional council, and administration. Mykola Onufriychuk, a veteran org. leader, declared indignation about the resolution, specifically the parts celebrating Polish nationalists: “We cannot remain silent, since many of our villages were destroyed by the Home Army, the Peasants' Battalions, and other underground Polish formations in 1943–44. They are silent about it. They only remember about Volhynia, the events in Volhynia. And they only see that Ukrainians are to blame for that tragedy, for that confrontation” [15]. Nevertheless, a regional protest in Volyn Oblast did not cause any noticeable gap in top-level Polish-Ukrainian relations at the time, since Ukrainian leadership did its best to ignore Polish messaging negative to Ukraine, with President Yushchenko calling the relations “exemplary” [13, p. 87].

On the third point, with the knowledge that the Polish government’s actions to influence information exchange on the topic of the Volhynian tragedy (and Volhynia in general) predate the current government (that oft gets the blame for “politicizing” the issue), we can look into the results of how the relations were affected by this particular history policy. We’ve noted the issues on the Ukrainian side already, downplayed as they are by the government, but the question comes on whether the average Pole really hold the Volhynian tragedy close to heart? It remains to be seen on what will be the final results of the PiS government-supported policies on promoting Volhynia as “the Holocaust of the Poles”, but we have the survey showing the results of their predecessors’ work (which PiS and various organizations relevant to preserving memory of Polish victims ultimately criticized).

The survey was taken in 2013, 70 years after the tragedy of 1943. Although the Polish authorities claimed that the mentioned events greatly disturbed the society, and that the memory of the Volhynian tragedy was a constant factor of “Polish historical consciousness”, the 2013 sociological studies of the Center for the Study of Public Opinion “Harsh Memory. Volyn” it was determined that 47% of Poles did not know who was to blame for the tragedy and who were its victims [16]. The results were a revelation for the Polish politicum, who saw a need for expanding education on the matter, favoring specific narratives. Thus, the current President Duda put two goals for the Polish foreign policy: 1) protecting the good name of Poland in the world and strengthening its position in the international arena; 2) education of patriotism of the next generations of Poles. For this purpose, since November 2015, under the authority of the president, the Strategy of Poland’s historical policy has been developed [8, p. 79]. Yet there is the question of whether the implementation of said education was fully successful. Noting the rise of historical narratives that Ukrainians disagreed with in Poland, publisher Peter Dickinson nevertheless saw that “the Ukrainians never felt more welcome in Poland,” with its support in the midst of Moscow’s hybrid war efforts. He rightly noted that even with Poland declaring the Volhynian Tragedy an act of genocide in 2016, Polish and Ukrainian parliaments still issued a joint resolution recognizing the USSR and Nazi Germany as the initiators responsible for the start of World War II, and President Poroshenko’s initiative to pay respects to the victims of the massacres during the Warsaw Summit was important for strengthening diplomatic ties between the countries further [9]. That initiative could be seen as a top-level Ukrainian politician recognizing the Polish narrative on Volhynia, if only such actions on behalf of Ukrainian presidents weren’t already an established part of Ukrainian presidential diplomacy by that time.

Conclusions. The celebration of “our” nationalists and the condemnation of “theirs” is inevitable for close neighbors with a long history of both conflict and cooperation trying to build up something like a “history policy,” to manage memory politics on state level. When that policy is used to influence international politics, however, it becomes a matter of information warfare. So far, aside from reconciliatory initiatives from the Presidents of Ukraine, Polish governments did not achieve notable results with their “historical diplomacy” abroad, and, from what the surveys say, neither were they supremely effective in mobilizing support at home behind the idea of Volhynia as a core part of Polish historical consciousness. That may be related to the hardships of building up government-centric nationalism in peace time, if one extrapolates Ukrainian example of Moscow’s attacks



galvanizing support for the OUN as part of national memory across the nation. The rise of Moscow as a threat for the Eastern Europe similarly somewhat “mended” the wounds of Volhynia for the Poles, with Poland rallying to support Ukraine in many ways, despite Ukraine’s own nationalist memory revival being seemingly incompatible.

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