

The beginning of the celebrations of the centenary of Ukraine's independence

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January 2018 saw the first celebrations commemorating the centenary of Ukraine's fight for independence (1917–1921). The first two of these events, commemorating the declaration of independence (22 January 1918) and the battle of Kruty (29 January 1918), were surprisingly small-scale, especially with regard to the participation of Ukraine's leadership in them. This may mean that the ruling elite has no concept of how to use the centenary to solidify its political position, also in the context of the presidential and parliamentary elections planned for 2019. At the same time, a profound shift in the narrative regarding the fight from a century ago has been evident in the media reports and educational materials published by the Ukrainian Institute for National Remembrance (UINP). The emphasis is no longer placed on the armed struggle and the continuation of the leftist tradition of the government of the Ukrainian People's Republic; instead, priority is given to the efforts to build a state and create its institutions, including professional armed forces. The anarchist-revolutionary traditions are criticised, and the importance of order and discipline is highlighted.

There has been a revival of positive remembrances of hetman Pavlo Skoropadskyi, an opponent of revolutionary trends and a 'founding father' of numerous institutions of cultural and academic life, some of which survived the collapse of independent Ukraine; until recently, he had been erased from society's memory. This rehabilitation of him may be viewed as a response to a short-term demand from a state entangled in war and threatened by social life tumbling into anarchy, a state with persistently weak structures and institutions. However, considering that this new narrative, which has been prepared by the UINP and its collaborators, is being propagated in forms that are targeted mainly at teachers, there is no doubt that there is much more to it, and that a permanent modification to the nation's historical tradition is at stake. This new narrative is focused on Ukraine alone (although not exclusively on Ukrainians:

it comprises the Crimean Tatars and other ethnic minorities as well). Poland is presented as an enemy, albeit of secondary importance, and information regarding the 1920 Polish-Ukrainian alliance is being omitted and ignored.

In the upcoming months, subsequent centenaries will be commemorated in Ukraine, including the centenary of the adoption of the national emblem, the introduction of the national currency, the recapture of Crimea and the creation of the Ukrainian Naval Forces. In November 2018, celebrations to commemorate the centenary of the establishment of the West Ukrainian People's Republic and the beginning of the war with Poland over Lviv, will be organised, likely also at the state level. The celebrations commemorating the war, which will coincide with Polish initiatives to commemorate the same historical events, may trigger new disputes in bilateral relations.

The celebrations of the centenary of proclamation of independence ...

The official celebrations of the centenary of proclamation of the independence of the Ukrainian People's Republic (UNR), which happened when the Fourth Universal of the Ukrainian Central Council was adopted, and of the battle of Kruty, which was of symbolic significance for the Ukrainian fight for independence in the early twentieth century, were organised on a surprisingly small scale. In contrast to expectations, no special session of Ukraine's parliament was held, and no military parade or similar state-organised celebrations took place. During

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his meeting with the diplomatic corps on 16 January, President Petro Poroshenko failed to even mention the centenary of independence. The main festive event was a gala held in the Ukrainian House, attended by parliamentarians, bishops, diplomats and others prominent figures, during which the President delivered a speech¹. He also laid flowers (unaccompanied by representatives of the military) at the statue of Mykhailo Hrushevskyi², the only UNR leader to have a statue in Kyiv, as well as at the statues of the first victims of the Euromaidan (the anniversary of their deaths also falls on 22 January). The grassroots celebrations were limited to the traditional 'chain of unity' held on one of Kyiv's

bridges. However, the purpose of this event is to commemorate not the declaration of independence but the proclamation (exactly a year later) of the unification of the UNR, with the West Ukrainian People's Republic (ZUNR), located in Eastern Galicia. Since 1999, this event has been celebrated as the Day of Unity (sobornost'). For their part, the residents of Kyiv on that day were more inclined to commemorate those killed during the Euromaidan. President Poroshenko's speech in the Ukrainian House was mainly a eulogy to a strong state and a strong military, and to the unity of a nation facing a threat. The president criticised the socialist nature of the UNR, the unending disputes among its leaders, the failure to take care of the military, including in particular the "destructive phenomenon of atamanship", which in his view some would wish to revive in contemporary Ukraine. The president also reiterated the opinion, which has been spreading in Ukraine for some time now, that "without 1917 there would not have been a 1991" (i.e. the year in which Ukraine regained independence). It is worth noting that in speaking of Ukraine's leaders at that time, Poroshenko mentioned hetman Skoropadskyi first and expressed his respect for him. Only later did he mention Symon Petlura, albeit slightly ironically, referring to him as the author of the pamphlet entitled 'The Moscow louse'³. The third historical figure the president mentioned was Nestor Makhno. The president pointed to him as a warning and an example of the 'atamanship' (anarchy) which threatened the state. On the one hand, the President's speech was more focused on contemporary Ukraine than on the events from a century ago. On the other hand, it reflected the new historical narrative which is being promoted by the Ukrainian Institute for National Remembrance (more on this later). This is not a sign of conservatism, but rather of the need

¹ <http://www.president.gov.ua/news/vistup-prezidenta-ukrayini-na-urochistomu-zibranni-z-nagodi-45530>

² For basic information on the early 20th century activists discussed in the text see the Appendix.

³ A propaganda brochure targeting Ukrainian country people published in 1925 in Paris.

to focus all social forces around the structures of the state. This need is justified by the ongoing war. It also favours those forces that oppose radical political and economic changes.

...and of the battle of Kruty

In contrast to expectations, the state did not commemorate the centenary of the battle of Kruty in a solemn manner. The president laid flowers on the graves of those killed in the war near the Orthodox church at Askold's Mound (in downtown Kyiv) and in the Lukyanovsky Cemetery. At the last moment, he decided not to take part in the celebrations in Kruty thereby lowering the official status of the celebrations held there. On the same day, Poroshenko named the Military Institute of Telecommunication and Digitisation after the Heroes of Kruty.

Reviving positive memories of Skorpadoskyi means placing an emphasis on the peaceful building of the state, on law and order, on the state, rather than on society.

The celebrations in Kruty were co-organised by the Ministry of Defence, but the minister himself did not attend them. The main element of these celebrations was the arrival from Kyiv on a special 'unity train' of around 400 pupils from military secondary schools from all over Ukraine. It is worth noting that national flags were the only flags flown during the event.

In Kyiv, historical reconstruction groups organised an event to commemorate the clash between republican troops and Bolshevik insurgent units in the Arsenal factory (which happened concurrently with the battle of Kruty). In the evening, the main grassroots celebrations took place: several thousand people attended a march in the centre of Kyiv, which culminated in the unveiling of a monument to the heroes of Kruty in Lviv Square. The monument is a plain cross carved out of stone and designed accord-

ing to Cossack tradition. It stands in contrast to the grandeur of the monuments to those killed in the ongoing war. At first glance, it is evident that this is a grassroots initiative, not one devised at the state or city level. During the event, aside from national flags, red and black flags were flown, which in Ukraine are increasingly often viewed as a symbol of the fight against external violence. Alongside this, a memorial plaque was set in the wall of the train station in Bakhmach to commemorate those who fought to defend it in January 1918 (the clashes with the Bolsheviks, which took place several days before the battle of Kruty, have not been included in the national historical narrative).

The celebrations of the centenary of independence gave the impression that Ukrainian politicians did not care much about this event. The political elite in Kyiv has been increasingly interested in the preparations for the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for 2019. It seems that the main political actors do not view these celebrations as an opportunity to win political capital. Neither Poroshenko nor Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman or the other potential presidential candidates have shown any major interest in historical issues (unlike Viktor Yushchenko and Leonid Kuchma before him, albeit in different ways).

However, it cannot be ruled out that the historical motive will be taken up later on during the electoral campaign (the presidential campaign in particular). The new narrative regarding the centenary of independence may promote Poroshenko as the 'stabiliser of the state' and the signals regarding the threat of anarchy may be interpreted as criticism targeting Yulia Tymoshenko, who may be one of his main counter-candidates. However, for the time being, both the government camp and the main opposition forces seem comfortable with the fact that the turn towards history is happening without their involvement, which enables them to use it (or not) depending on the situation.

At the same time, an active part of society has increasingly demonstrated not so much an interest in history as a demand for a patriotic

narrative that would respond to the situation of a country which is waging a prolonged but not very intensive war. The young generation, which is shouldering the main burden of the defence effort, needs it in particular. And the war with Russia from a century ago, which was largely waged by voluntary and non-regular units, evokes rather obvious associations with the war which is currently taking place.

On the day of the centenary of the proclamation of the UNR's independence, a bill was submitted to Ukrainian parliament on restoring the legal continuity between the UNR and contemporary Ukraine. It should be expected that it will be included in the agenda of the parliamentary session in spring 2018.

The celebrations organised as part of unofficial initiatives (including by political parties that remain outside the present establishment) were on a smaller scale than those which the state could organise. However, their appeal is stronger because they are viewed as grassroots initiatives (there is a high level of distrust of state institutions in Ukraine).

Building the new narrative of remembrance

So far, the official narrative regarding the events from before a century has been dominated by the history of the UNR and its leaders: Symon Petlura, Mykhailo Hrushevskyi and Volodymyr Vynnychenko. Emphasis has been placed almost exclusively on the armed struggle, rather than on the efforts to build a state. The Lviv-based ZUNR, itself an example of an efficient creation of civilian and military structures, has remained on the sidelines, and the Ukrainian State (Ukrayinska derzhava) under hetman Skoropadskyi was completely excluded from the history of the fight for independence because it was viewed as 'reactionary', 'German-inspired' (these opinions were for-

mulated back in Soviet times) and 'pro-Russian'. In recent months, attempts have been made to revise this image of the past and to focus not on the war (which ultimately was lost) but on the efforts to create a state and its culture. These efforts resulted in the nation becoming solidified and – indirectly – in the Bolsheviks being forced to give their state a federal structure, which was tantamount with preserving a portion of the UNR's heritage.

The Kyiv-based newspaper *Den* daily announced that 2018 would be the Year of the Hetmanate, and named hetman Skoropadskyi as the patron of Ukrainian liberalism⁴. This should be viewed as bizarre – a conservative aristocrat who viewed the Ukrainian state as a hereditary monarchy is definitely not suited to be the patron of liberals. However, he is an excellent patron for promoters of the state, because almost all the Ukrainian institutions that survived the fall of independence were created during his rule and under his patronage.

The creation of the new narrative is most evident in the methodological materials for teachers prepared in recent weeks by the Ukrainian Institute for National Remembrance⁵. On the list entitled 'One hundred faces of the Ukrainian revolution' Petlura was only ranked twentieth. He was outdistanced not only by Yevhen Petrushevych, the president of the ZUNR, but also even by Dmytro Vitovskyi, who was commander of its military for a short period. The

⁴ For example see Ігор Сюдюков, «Заборонена» історія, *День*, 19 January 2018, <https://day.kyiv.ua/uk/article/po-drobysci/zaboronena-istoriya>, accessed 23 January 2018. On subsequent days the newspaper regularly published history-related materials for the general public dedicated to the hetman and his state.

⁵ 100 облич Української революції, http://www.memory.gov.ua/sites/default/files/100_oblich_0.pdf; methodological guidelines regarding this material: <http://www.memory.gov.ua/news/institut-pidgotuvav-ilyustrativnii-proekt-100-oblich-ukrainskoi-revolutsii>; the brochure 100 років боротьби: Українська революція 1917–1921 (One hundred years of fighting: the Ukrainian revolution 1917–1921), unr.memory.gov.ua/metodichni-materiali/nashi-vidannya-broshura-100-rokiv-borotbi-ukrainska-revolutsiya-1917-1921, all accessed 1 February 2018. For more methodological materials: unr.memory.gov.ua/metodichni-materiali/metodichni-materiali. When printed in high resolution, some of these materials can be displayed as ready exhibitions.

symbolic figure who is most popular today, Hrushevskiy, was ranked first, and hetman Skoropadskiy was ranked second. Mykola Mikhnovskiy was ranked third; in 1917 he was one of the few consistent independence fighters, but his role in the process of building the UNR was rather insignificant. Vynnychenko, the actual leader of the UNR in 1917–18, was only ranked fourth. Fifth place was taken by Borys Martos, back then the UNR's minister of agriculture, and sixth place by Serhiy Yefremov, a proponent of Ukraine's autonomy;

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in January 1918 he actually opposed the plan to declare independence. Aside from politicians and military commanders, the list included numerous social activists, academics, writers and artists (including a large group of theatre directors and performers). The latter group also included those who accepted the new reality post-1921, avoided the repression of the 1930s and were included in the pantheon of Soviet art, such as the great filmmaker Oleksandr Dovzhenko and the well-known poet Pavlo Tychyna. This is an important confirmation of the fact that the anathema of de-Communisation does not apply to those who were prominent artists and scientists in Soviet times.

The process discussed here entails much more than just a shift of emphases; it entails a change in the narrative. To restore Skoropadskiy's reputation means placing the emphasis on the peaceful building of the state, on law and order (which the hetman managed to maintain for some six months, largely due to the protection

offered by German and Austrian troops), and also on the regular (and not the revolutionary) army. Thus the emphasis is placed on the state, not on society. There has also been a move away from the tendency to place the country people and the agrarian question at the centre of the events of that time; instead, the urban elites have been restored to their former place in history. Actually, this is tantamount to the eradication of Soviet schemes of thinking about history. The process of shaping the new narrative has just begun. Previous actions by the Ukrainian Institute for National Remembrance indicate that its leadership is oriented towards long-term activities: not on 're-educating' the present society, but rather on shaping the new generation. This is why on the occasion of major anniversaries the Institute publishes methodological materials for teachers⁶, as well as infographics which appeal to the young generation better than essays. In recent months it has been distributing a board game dedicated to the fight for independence, free of charge.

The place of Poland in the new narrative of remembrance

From Poland's point of view, the main elements in Polish-Ukrainian relations in 1917–21 are the Piłsudski–Petlura alliance of 1920 and the preceding war between the Republic of Poland, which at that time was reviving its own structures, and the newly created ZUNR. Meanwhile, from the perspective of contemporary Ukraine, both of these events are of secondary importance: the failed 1920 spring campaign (the so-called Kyiv Offensive) was merely an episode, and the price of the alliance was very high, as Petlura agreed to cede Eastern Galicia and Volhynia to Poland (the 1921 Polish-Soviet

⁶ A methodological guidebook regarding the German-perpetrated crime in Babi Yar was published almost concurrently with the publications mentioned in the text; www.memory.gov.ua/news/u-kievi-prezentuyut-posibnik-dlya-vchiteliv, accessed 1 February 2018.

peace treaty only confirmed these decisions). This may be one of the reasons why Petlura is being pushed into the background today. Similarly, the 1918–19 war over Lviv does not belong to the mainstream of Ukrainian thinking about the nation's history: at present, Ukraine's enemy is not Poland.

These methodological materials hardly ever mention the alliance with Poland. The 'One hundred years of fighting' brochure contains a short passage regarding "the Warsaw accord of 21 April 1920" interpreted as "breaking Ukraine's international isolation" and winning "military support [...] in exchange for territorial concessions". Another section of the brochure mentions the fact that in Poland an infantry division under General Bezruchko was being formed, which "entered Kyiv alongside the Polish troops". Another section of the brochure claims that "in the autumn of 1920 the UNR army was abandoned by its allies...", whereas the preceding passage mentions "...the Polish-Ukrainian war of 1918–19". The latter event is referred to as "Poland's aggression". A biographical note on Vyacheslav Lypynskyi in 'One hundred faces...' states that he "was a descendant of an old noble family" but fails to mention that the family was Polish (the Lipiński family came from Mazovia).

Bezruchko's biographical note in 'One hundred faces...' contains a blatant historical falsehood. It says that "historians view him as a Ukrainian who saved Warsaw from the Bolsheviks during the Miracle on the Vistula [...]. The heroic defence of Zamość during the Polish-Soviet war brought him his greatest fame. The city's defenders managed to stop Budyonny's cavalry for two days, which enabled the Poles to win the battle near Warsaw". In fact, the defence of Zamość against Budyonny, which indeed was led by Bezruchko, took place on 28–31 August, which means that it could not have affected the result of the battle of Warsaw, which took place much earlier. The thesis regarding Bezruchko's participation in saving Warsaw, which has been

promoted in Ukrainian historiography and journalism for many years, is likely to become an important element of Ukraine's historical policy in the next few years.

The historical continuity of the Ukrainian state

One of the goals of 2015's de-Communistation laws was to restore the legal continuity between the UNR and contemporary Ukraine. Back then, the relevant section was removed at the last moment, one possible reason being that it was contained in the preamble and omitted the formal and legal aspect of the matter. The expectation was that this section of the law would be withdrawn for only a short time, and would be restored in a more favourable situation. Indeed, on the day of the centenary of the UNR's declaration of independence, a relevant bill was submitted to the Ukrainian parliament⁷ by a group of MPs from the nationalist Svoboda party. For the time being, it is not known whether the bill was consulted with the UINP and whether it will be the only bill on this matter. However, it should be expected that this topic will be included in the agenda of the parliamentary session in spring 2018. Pursuant to the bill, Ukraine is the legal successor to the UNR, after the collapse of which "between 18 March 1921 and 23 August 1991 it had the status of an occupied country". This legal succession is only symbolic: the bill states that all international accords signed by the UNR (including the 1920 Warsaw accord pursuant to which Eastern Galicia and Volhynia were ceded to Poland) lost their legal validity on 18 March 1921 (i.e. when the Treaty of Riga was signed). The bill also confirmed the validity of the law on Ukraine's legal succession of 12 September 1991. So, in legal terms nothing

⁷ Олег Ярославович Тягнибок, Україна – правонаступниця УНР. Проект закону; <http://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/tiahnybok/5a65f7a43a75a/>, accessed 22 January 2018.

has changed: the international treaties and internal legal acts adopted by the Ukrainian SSR remain in force, even if the UkrSSR is considered a structure of occupation. The only change is in the symbolic identity of the state – and as such it will be very important.

Summary

The anniversaries of the successive events related to Ukraine's fight for independence will continue until the autumn of 2020. However, the minor involvement of the state authorities in the celebrations surrounding the most important of these events, i.e. the proclamation of independence, suggests that the celebrations of other anniversaries (more often of failures than victories) may be treated likewise. Due to their present political significance, the spring 2018 anniversaries of the Ukrainian army (in cooperation with the German army) seizing eastern Ukraine and Crimea may be among the few exceptions.

The anniversary celebrations that will be organised in 2019 will be strongly affected by the dual electoral campaign. At this point, it is difficult to predict how the main actors will wish to employ (or avoid) them. Celebrations will certainly be organised to commemorate the centenary of Ukraine's unification (in January 2019), and in March 2019 Ukraine will be faced with the problem of remembering the anti-Jewish pogroms carried out during the war for independence, because of the centenary of the biggest such pogrom (in Proskuriv, now Khmelnytskyi).

In November 2018, the local government in Eastern Galicia will definitely organise celebrations of the centenary of the ZUNR (which will also be the centenary of the conflict with Poland); these will inevitably coincide with Polish celebrations of the centenary of the defence of Lviv (some of which will be organised in the city), and will also revive the dispute regarding the question as to which of the then warring sides in the war over Eastern Galicia was the defender and which was the aggressor. In the remaining part of the country (particularly in Kyiv) grassroots celebrations should be expected (organised mainly by nationalist groups). However, the scale of the national government's involvement in the celebrations will depend on the state of Polish-Ukrainian relations at that time. Although this centenary has been included in the annual official list of celebrations⁸, it is just one of fifty such events: the experience of previous years indicates that many such anniversaries receive little attention.

Regardless of the dynamic of the official celebrations, a new way of thinking about the events of a century ago is increasingly evident: the emphasis is being shifted from defending the state to building the state, which also includes developing the national culture from heroism to professionalism (including in military issues). Moreover, what is being stressed is the fact that Ukraine fought for its independence on its own (the importance of the alliances with Germany, and later Poland, is being omitted), and the war for independence that broke out in January 1917 lasted as long as until 1991.

⁸ Resolution by Ukraine's Supreme Council of 8 February 2018. (w1c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_1?pf3511=62855, access 9 February 2018). It is noteworthy that the note on the website of the Ukrainian Institute for National Remembrance regarding this resolution (www.memory.gov.ua/news/rada-ukhvalila-perelik-pamyatnikh-dat-i-yuvileiv-u-2018-rotsi, accessed 9 February 2018) only mentions four anniversaries: the centenary of the adoption of the national emblem, of the introduction of the national currency and the recapture of Crimea, and the four hundredth anniversary of hetman Sahaidachny's attack on Muscovy (an element of the war between the Republic of Poland and Russia).

APPENDIX

Historical figures mentioned in the text

Marko Bezruchko (1883–1944), a Russian army officer, from 1918 a Ukrainian army officer, in 1920 he led the defence of Zamość, and spent his later life in exile in Poland.

Oleksandr Dovzhenko (1894–1956), participant in the fight for independence at the beginning of 1918. Post-1920, a filmmaker, one of the most prominent figures in Soviet cinema in the 1920s, considered one of the masters of world cinema.

Mykhailo Hrushevskiy (1886–1934), Ukraine's most prominent historian, in 1917–18 president of the Ukrainian Central Council, frequently and mistakenly considered Ukraine's first president. In 1919–24 in exile in Czechoslovakia, later in the USSR.

Serhiy Yefremov (1876–1939), outstanding literary scholar, in 1917–18 a member of the executive body of the Ukrainian Central Council, opponent of Ukraine's declaration of independence. In spring 1918 he withdrew from public life to pursue an academic career. In 1930, he was arrested by the NKVD, died in prison.

Vyacheslav Lypynskiy aka Waclaw Lipiński (1882–1931), a Polish landowner, Ukrainian by choice, political activist, creator of Ukrainian conservatism, post-1920 in exile in Austria and Germany, collaborator of hetman Skoropadskiy.

Borys Martos (1879–1977), activist and promoter of the cooperative movement, author of the Ukrainian agrarian reform, in 1919 held the office of prime minister of the UNR and other posts. Post-1920, in exile in Germany, Czechoslovakia and the USA.

Mykola Mikhnovskiy (1873–1924), columnist, author of the pamphlet 'Samostiyna Ukrayina' [Independent Ukraine] (1900), in which he was the first to formulate the demand for Ukraine's independence. In summer 1917 he organised Ukrainian armed forces (modelled on the structures of the tsar's army); later he withdrew from public life and remained in Ukraine.

Symon Petlura (1879–1926), initiator of the creation of the new Ukrainian armed forces (not modelled on the structures of the tsar's army), the leader of the uprising against hetman Skoropadskiy in autumn 1918, and later head of the UNR Directorate. In spring 1920, he entered into an alliance with Poland, under which the state borders were delineated and later confirmed in the Polish-Soviet peace treaty. Post-1920, in exile in Poland and France. He was assassinated by the NKVD.

Yevhen Petrushevych (1863–1940), a Galician politician, member of parliament of the Austrian Empire, president and later dictator of the ZUNR, head of its government in exile (until 1923), spent his later life in exile in Austria and Germany.

Pavlo Skoropadskyi (1873–1945), descendant of a prominent elite Cossack family, professional serviceman in the Russian army, from 1917 a proponent of the Ukrainian national movement. Between April and December 1918, Hetman of the Ukrainian State (this was the name of the hetman-led state; the name and the system of the UNR had been abandoned), spent his later life in exile in Germany, leader of the conservative wing of the Ukrainian émigré community.

Pavlo Tychyna (1891–1967), poet and activist in the amateur artistic movement, author of several poems dedicated to Ukraine's fight for independence (including the well-known 'At Askold's Mound / They were buried...' dedicated to the heroes of the battle of Kruty). He did not take part in the fight for independence. Post-1920, a prominent poet and social activist, a deputy to the Supreme Council of the Ukrainian SSR and the USSR.

Dmytro Vitovskyi (1887–1919), officer of the Ukrainian Sich Riflemen (a voluntary formation in the Austrian army), organiser of the Ukrainian uprising in Eastern Galicia in November 1918, the first commander of the ZUNR's armed forces. He was killed in an aviation accident.

Volodymyr Vynnychenko (1880–1951), columnist, writer and socialist movement activist, the *de facto* leader of the Ukrainian Central Council, in 1917–18 head of the Central Secretariat (the government) of Ukraine. Post-1918, in exile in France.

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