



Anti-Americanism and Anti-Western Sentiments in Europe and Post-Soviet States

Ideology and Politics Journal

№ 2(26), 2024

Anti-Americanism and Anti-Western Sentiments in Europe and Post-Soviet States

— Issue 2(26), 2024

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Ideology and Politics Journal

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ISSN 2227-6068

Address: via Giuseppe Compagnoni, 33, Milan 20129 Italy

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ANTI-AMERICANISM AND ANTI-WESTERN SENTIMENTS IN EUROPE AND POST-SOVIET STATES: INTRODUCTION

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Since discovering new lands in the Western hemisphere, America has become a symbol of new life, new opportunities, and a new Eden. For hundreds of thousands of migrants, America turned into a new home with possibilities to change life for the better and to achieve the unimaginable. American Revolution and War for Independence made the USA a symbol of freedom, democracy, progress, and the American Dream: possibilities for everyone working hard. At the same time, America became an object of criticism, primarily from the European elites who saw American society as cruel, uncultured, and without good taste, manners, and education. Later on, when the USA became an active actor on the international stage, critiques spread on the American government and foreign policy. Thus, critical approaches towards the USA, American policy, society, and culture transformed into the phenomenon of anti-Americanism.

Nowadays, there is no single definition of anti-Americanism. Public interest in this paradox is mirrored in the rise of different text materials and statistics about negative attitudes toward anti-Americanism. On the pages of the world-famous Wikipedia (founded in 2001), the first variant of the article about anti-Americanism appeared in 2003 as an English-language one. The number of languages in which an article about this phenomenon is presented is constantly increasing: in 2011, the material was provided in 19 languages; in 2013, in 25 languages; in 2019, in 34 languages, and in 2024, in 42 languages (*Wikipedia*). Anti-Americanism became a specific subject for scholars, whose active interest in studying this “anomaly” started in the 1990s. Till the mid-2020s, there is an enormous amount of research papers and individual and collective monographs dedicated to the critiques of the USA. Anti-Americanism also was and still is a specific object for sociological studies. Since the beginning of the 2000s, several annual surveys are regularly conducted to collect data about worldwide attitudes toward the USA. One of example of a long-lasting project is the Pew Global Attitudes Project, which allows us to see periods of the rise and fall of anti-Americanism in the world since first polls in 2003 (*Pew Research Center 2024*).

Today, we can find anti-American sentiments both inside and outside the USA, as well as among American opponents and partners. Therefore, anti-Americanism has become a notable phenomenon of international socio-political life. Brendon O'Connor identifies four phases of anti-Americanism: (1) from the first European colonies in North

America to the end of World War II; (2) during the Cold War (1945–1989); (3) after the end of the Cold War till tragedy of 11/9 2001; (4) since terrorist attack 11/9 2001 till today (O'Connor 2004: 78).

The increased negative attitudes toward the USA in the late 20th and early 21st centuries influenced the interest in further studying anti-Americanism. If we try to make some generalizations, we can probably note that contemporary anti-Americanism can be qualified as *comprehensive* (is interpreted by different scholars as ideology, philosophy, attitudes, tendency, outlook, etc.), *large-scale* (covers all social levels, widespread due to mass media), *universal* (is present in rhetoric of right and left political forces), *global* (can be found all over the globe, both among American allies as well as opponents), *undulatory* (world public opinion polls determine periods of rise and fall of the negative attitudes towards the USA), and *manipulative* (is used by politicians and business to attract the attention of the public, to explain fails in foreign or domestic policy, to mobilize voters, to advertize goods) phenomenon (Бессонова 2019).

This special issue of *Ideology and Politics Journal* was designed to focus on the interpretations of the negative perception of the USA in today's European and post-Soviet societies. We chose this region of the world for a few reasons: Europe is the 'mother' of America and, at the same time, the first critic of it; the post-Soviet states are interesting in the fact that part of them is already integrated into the Western environment (the EU and NATO), but all post-Soviet societies have a common anti-American background, which was or still is greatly influenced by Russian perceptions.

We sought to address such aspects as the origins of anti-American/anti-Western sentiments in today's Europe and post-Soviet states; Westernization/Americanization as an explanation/excuse of the negative attitudes towards the West/the USA; anti-American/anti-Western narratives in social networks, academia, cinema, advertising, literature, popular culture, etc.; hostility towards the West/America as a means of self-identity; anti-Americanism as a tool of political manipulation; pro- and anti-Americanism in post-communist states as a reflection of choice between East and West; case studies of liberal, social, sovereign-nationalist, radical and other anti-Americanisms; anti-Americanism as an ideology; anti-American/anti-Western sentiment in politics; anti-Americanism and justice and equality narratives.

Our expectations came true only partially. Most submitted articles focused on anti-Americanism, while anti-Western dimensions have attracted less attention. In the papers composing this specific volume, the readers can find basic methodological approaches to studying anti-Americanism, the ideas of the leading theorists in the field, the analysis of the roots and description of the manifestations and varieties of anti-Americanism, etc. The mentioned achievements in the study of the negative perceptions of the USA go through the suggested texts, while the authors of every paper focused on their own research subject.

A few factors influenced the specifics of the papers in this volume. First of all, it was the final phase of the 2024 presidential election race in the United States and the Russian-Ukrainian war, the end of which everyone associates in one way or another with the position of the newly elected US president. Therefore, among the topics of the

articles, readers will see many materials in which anti-Americanism is considered precisely in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Probably, this armed conflict caused more interest in the societies of Eastern Europe, as Putin's approach toward this region aims to take advantage of any opportunity to weaken the USA and EU, and dissemination of anti-American sentiments is one of the tools of the Russian propaganda within the long-lasting hybrid war. The war in Ukraine had a profound impact on Eastern Europe as it contributed to the further Westernization of this part of Europe (e.g., it consolidated NATO and the EU and led to the modernization of the Eastern European NATO members who delivered their Russian military equipment to Ukraine, cutting another string of Russian influence (Domaradzki 2024: 15)).

The issue opens with Mariia Panasiuk's paper on the critical analysis of anti-Americanism and American (Post)Modernity by three prominent philosophers. In her article, she explores the essential perspectives of modern-day America offered by Jean Baudrillard, Slavoj Žižek, and Giorgio Agamben. Each provides unique insights into contemporary American society's cultural, political, and ideological fabric, seen through the lenses of media theory, psychoanalytic Marxism, and biopolitical theory, respectively. Mariia Panasiuk underlines that although these philosophers critique modernity more broadly; their work offers vital perspectives for understanding the particular role of American hegemony in shaping global culture and politics. This paper links these critiques to anti-Americanism and provides a critical framework for understanding how power, ideology, and governance operate within the context of the United States

Ruslan Zaporozhchenko and Vyacheslav Nikulin presented a paper that focuses on anti-Americanism in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian War. The authors note that anti-Americanism remains a subject of active academic debate, as its interpretations range from hostile actions and statements towards the United States to criticism of specific American policies. The article's primary goal is to identify the ideological features of the construction of the anti-American policy in modern Russia and its impact on ideological orientations in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Ruslan Zaporozhchenko and Vyacheslav Nikulin present their considerations of anti-Americanism through the prism of Orientalism and ideology based on the ideas of Edward Said and Louis Althusser. The article emphasizes that contemporary Russian anti-Americanism is an instrument of internal legitimization of power and a means of establishing new configurations at the regional and global levels.

The following article, by Viktoriia Mykhtunenko and Yuliya Podriez, addresses the evolution of Russian anti-Americanism. The authors attempted to provide an overview of its origin, stages of formation, and consequences. They take a closer look at the transformation of Russian anti-Americanism from an ideological confrontation during the Cold War to being a part of current state policy, adopting new forms that reflect the interests of the contemporary Russian political regime. The authors note that Russians' foreign policy views reflect the state's policy on the global stage. The paper generally shows both inside and outside consequences of Russian anti-American rhetoric aimed at consolidating Russian society and escalating tensions and conflicts internationally.

Megan Hauser and Nataliia Kasianenko propose their vision on the place of the West in Ukrainian and Russian war narratives to answer the question: “To blame or not to blame?”. Their paper explores the place of the West in the competing political narratives during the first months of the full-scale Russian war in Ukraine. The chronological frame of the research covers the period from December 2021 until May 2022. Within the mentioned period, the authors examine the portrayal of the West in the dominant narratives of each country, focusing on the origins of this war, the key groups in this war, and the possibility of compromise or ceasefire. Megan Hauser and Nataliia Kasianenko found out exactly how official state narratives regarding the West changed during the first months of this war and whether Ukrainian and Russian leaders adjusted their political narratives.

Another dimension of the official narratives towards the West Olga Makliuk and Stanislav Cherkasov investigated in their paper dedicated to the image of Europe in Russian secondary school modern history textbooks. The analysis is based on a direct examination of the structure and content of the textbooks and how historical content is framed and delivered to students. It includes a detailed review of the language, illustrations, and problem-based assignments used in the textbooks. This thorough analysis allowed for identifying the standardized historical framework and the specific strategies employed to shape students' perceptions of Europe and the West. It is shown that Russian textbooks actively promote the negative image of the West as an enemy, with anti-Western sentiments becoming more pronounced as the timeline approaches the 21st century. It is argued that Russian secondary school modern history textbooks play a crucial role in shaping students' perceptions of Europe and the West, fostering a state-approved narrative and justifying Russia's internal and external policies.

Oleksandr Y. Vysotskyi's paper analyzed Ukrainian anti-Americanism during full-scale Russian aggression through the lens of the president of Ukraine's public diplomacy. This study explores the dynamic relationship between Ukraine and the United States, providing insights into the geopolitical and cultural factors shaping Ukrainian anti-Americanism during critical periods of full-scale war. The study finds that Ukrainian anti-Americanism is not static but oscillates between pro-Americanism and anti-Americanism, influenced by historical context and current geopolitical realities. This attempt is based on the method of deconstruction, which allows the author to identify the specifics, sources, and influence of Ukrainian anti-Americanism. The author concludes that the disappointment in American support during critical moments has fostered a proactive form of anti-Americanism among Ukrainian leaders, particularly President Zelenskyy, who uses public diplomacy to pressure the US and other global actors to take a stronger stand against Russian aggression.

More cases of Ukrainian anti-Americanism are analyzed in the research of Yevheniia Horiunova and Yana Horiunova, who studied anti-American and anti-Western sentiments in Crimea. The authors explore how the formation and spread of anti-American and anti-Western sentiments in Crimea are related to the large-scale Russian influence on the peninsula, so they compare the period before and after the occupation. The article illustrates the influence of Russian propaganda since the first years after the

collapse of the USSR and its further increase after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Researchers show the impact of pro-Russian organizations and parties and informational support of Russian and pro-Russian Crimean media on the creation of stable anti-Western sentiments in Crimea before the occupation. The paper presents an overview of the persistence of the negative image of Western countries in Crimea as an existential enemy that must be destroyed. Yevheniia Horiunova and Yana Horiunova conclude that the escalation of anti-Western rhetoric has reached a new level following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The comparative analysis of specific features of the negative attitudes toward the West is the subject of the study of Marin Gherman, Liubov Melnychuk, and Antonina Shuliak. Their paper addresses the anti-Western narratives in Ukraine and Romania, using the example of anti-Western information campaigns that took place constantly between 24 February 2022 and 24 February 2024. The authors collected and analyzed narratives in politicians' speeches, media discourse, and messages in social media and Telegram channels and concluded that these narratives are toxic and dangerous for democracy and information security. In the paper, the authors describe both differences and similarities in anti-Western narratives in Ukraine and Romania and conclude their common origin.

Another article contains a comparative case study of the regional dimension of anti-Americanism in Slovakia and Serbia by Kateryna Kasatkina and Kateryna Shymkevych. The research aims to analyze the historical roots, government stances, and the impact of global geopolitical shifts on anti-American attitudes in these nations and to explore the multifaceted nature of critical sentiments toward the USA across two distinct post-communist contexts. The authors resumed that Slovakia and Serbia had unique features that colored their expressions of anti-Americanism during the Cold War era, find out the different regional variations in the forms and expressions of anti-Americanism in the post-Cold War period, evaluate the impact of the US interventions in the Balkans, specifically in the 1999 NATO bombings, on anti-American sentiment across both societies. The comparative method provides insight into broader patterns of anti-Americanism in these states, evaluates Russian influence, and examines the implications for regional security and stability. The paper is also interesting by comparing anti-American sentiment in Slovakia and Serbia within the context of Russian aggression.

While most of the papers in this special volume contain research about the European and post-Soviet states, we also propose to our readers the research results about anti-American attitudes in the Algerian political science environment. The paper's authors, Khemis Mohammed, Benouareth Charafeddine, and Bara Samir, present a brief intro to the specifics of the Middle East and North Africa region's anti-American sentiments. The main aim of their research is to get an answer to whether the higher education in political sciences within Algerian universities tends to be ideologically biased or academically neutral toward the USA. The researchers surveyed to examine the extent of bias and neutrality of the overall attitudes toward the US within the Algerian political sciences community. The study has shown remarkable disparities among the respondents' attitudes, which appeared biased in some situations and neutral when the questionnaire required clear answers. The sample displayed proportionally a tendency

toward anti-Americanism, either when they banished any moralism toward the US actions and policies or when they failed to recognize some of the well-established facts about the US, such as its long-standing democratic traditions.

Another paper in this volume presents a summary of the anti-American attitudes in Black Sea region societies. Maryna Bessonova, Myroslava Lisovska, and Olena Pistrakevych analyze the current sentiments toward the United States among Black Sea nations. They concentrate on discovering the types of feelings towards America that are prevalent among political representatives and within the communities of the Black Sea states. They also explore various anti-American narratives that persist, even though all countries in the region, except Russia, are regarded as American partners, and analyze the factors that have influenced these attitudes.

In this volume, we also propose additional materials that fit into the framework of the issues of Westernization and democratization, which are closely connected with the discussions about opposition to the West in general and to the USA in particular.

This issue ends with the stand-alone research by Bálint Madlovics and Bálint Magyar focusing on the comparative analysis of de-democratization and re-democratization processes in Russia and Ukraine. They utilize the concept of patronalism to differentiate between distinct regime types: patronal democracy and patronal autocracy, in contrast to Western-style liberal democracy. The authors highlight the critical factors contributing to the decline of democracy, particularly the monopolization of political power and the patronalization of social networks – a combination they describe as the “fatal combination.” Bálint Madlovics and Bálint Magyar assess the impact of these factors on both Russia and Ukraine, concluding with an exploration of the war’s structural consequences: “the good news” (potential anti-patronal transformation in Ukraine), “the bad news” (the emergence of dictatorship in Russia and the threat of autocracy under Volodymyr Zelenskyy), and “the hope” (the signs pointing to Ukraine’s long-term transition from patronal to liberal democracy.)

This volume also includes reviews of books by Victoria Vdovychenko on Simona Merlo’s *“Ucraina contemporanea: Una storia complessa”* (2023), by Maksym Yali on Hana Josticova’s *“Mariupol 2013-2022: Stories of Mobilization and Resistance”* (2024), and by Olexandr Starukh on Mikhail Minakov’s *“The Post-Soviet Human: Philosophical Reflections on Post-Soviet History”* (2024).

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ARTICLES

THE INTERPLAY OF ANTI-AMERICANISM AND AMERICAN (POST)MODERNITY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS BY BAUDRILLARD, ŽIŽEK, AND AGAMBen

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Abstract: *This article explores the critical perspectives of modern-day America as offered by three prominent philosophers: Jean Baudrillard, Slavoj Žižek, and Giorgio Agamben. Each provides unique insights into the cultural, political, and ideological fabric of contemporary American society, seen through the lenses of media theory, psychoanalytic Marxism, and biopolitical theory, respectively. Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality dissects the pervasive influence of media in blurring reality and fiction in American culture, questioning the authenticity of societal interactions and structures. Žižek employs Lacanian psychoanalysis and Hegelian philosophy to critique the ideological underpinnings of American capitalism, focusing on the role of fantasy and misrecognition in sustaining consumerist and political structures. Agamben's examination of the state of exception explores how emergency laws have reshaped American democracy and citizenship, highlighting issues of governance, sovereignty, and human rights. Although these philosophers critique modernity more broadly, their work offers vital perspectives for understanding the particular role of American hegemony in shaping global culture and politics. This paper links these critiques to anti-Americanism and offers a critical framework for understanding how power, ideology, and governance operate within the context of the United States.*

Keywords: *Jean Baudrillard, Slavoj Žižek, Giorgio Agamben, American society, hyperreality, ideology, state of exception, biopolitics, anti-Americanism*

Submitted: 15 May 2024; **accepted:** 29 October 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

The introduction sets the stage for a critical examination of America, highlighting the relevance and influence of Baudrillard, Žižek, and Agamben in the philosophical discourse on culture, politics, and society, particularly in relation to the emergence of anti-Americanism. It outlines the need for a nuanced understanding of the ideological and material constructions that define American reality.

In the evolving landscape of contemporary America, the dynamics of culture, politics, and social structure present complex challenges and paradoxes that demand rigorous philosophical interrogation. This article engages with the critical perspectives of three influential continental philosophers – Jean Baudrillard, Slavoj Žižek, and Giorgio Agamben – who have each, in their unique ways, scrutinized the fabric of American society. Their critiques are not merely academic; they are deeply embedded in the everyday realities and the broader existential concerns of modern life.

This article selects Baudrillard, Žižek, and Agamben as they each offer profound critiques of modernity, with distinct frameworks that intersect when analyzing the ideological, political, and cultural fabric of America. What unites them is their interrogation of Western capitalist structures, with America often serving as the emblematic case of these systems. Baudrillard's analysis of hyperreality and media simulation, Žižek's critique of capitalist ideology, and Agamben's concept of biopolitical governance provide a multifaceted lens through which to examine American society. While none of these thinkers explicitly focus solely on America, their theories nonetheless resonate deeply with critiques of American hegemony in the context of global capitalism and governance.

Baudrillard's theories of hyperreality and simulation challenge our understanding of truth and representation in an age dominated by media and technology. His insights are crucial in a society where the distinction between reality and its representation becomes increasingly blurred, creating a world where images not only mirror reality but also precede and distort it. As Baudrillard himself notes,

Simulacra and simulation are no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. (Baudrillard 1994: 1)

Slavoj Žižek, through his synthesis of Hegelian philosophy, Marxist critique, and Lacanian psychoanalysis, confronts the ideological subtleties that underpin American capitalism. His work illuminates the intricate ways in which ideology and fantasy structure political discourse, cultural norms, and social identities. Žižek (2008) provocatively asserts that

ideology is not simply a *false consciousness*, an illusory representation of reality, it is rather this reality itself which is already to be conceived as *ideological*. (Žižek 2008: 15)

Giorgio Agamben, with his focus on the state of exception and biopolitics, explores how crises – whether they be of health, security, or economic – are managed, often at the expense of democracy and basic human rights, reshaping the very notion of citizenship and governance. Agamben (2005) describes how

the state of exception tends increasingly to appear as the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics. (Agamben 2005: 2)

This has been especially pertinent in the American context, where emergency measures often predetermine the limits of political and legal reform.

This article aims to synthesize these philosophical critiques to not only unravel the complex ideological and material constructions of American society but also to reflect on the implications these have for individual and collective existence in the global context. By delving into the philosophical depths offered by Baudrillard, Žižek, and Agamben, we seek to contribute to a nuanced understanding of American modernity, offering perspectives that are critical for navigating the challenges of the 21st century. The interplay of their theories provides a rich framework for analyzing the contradictions and challenges of American society, urging readers to reflect critically on the state of contemporary life and its future trajectories. As Foucault might suggest, it is through “the insurrection of subjugated knowledges” that we begin to see the contours of power and resistance that shape our world (Foucault 1980: 81).

In contemporary philosophical discourse, America is often scrutinized as a central symbol of modernity’s contradictions. This article examines how three prominent continental philosophers – Jean Baudrillard, Slavoj Žižek, and Giorgio Agamben – offer critical perspectives on American society. These thinkers were selected not only because of their influence in philosophical circles but also due to their unique insights into Western hegemony, capitalism, and governance, with America often serving as the most prominent example of these phenomena.

Baudrillard’s critique of hyperreality and the media-saturated nature of American culture, Žižek’s dissection of ideological manipulation within American capitalism, and Agamben’s theory of the state of exception, all provide a framework for understanding how power operates in the U.S. While these critiques target broader Western modernity, their analysis of America is particularly relevant given its global influence. This article seeks to connect their critiques with the ongoing discourse on anti-Americanism, illuminating how these thinkers’ philosophies resonate within the context of America’s global socio-political structures.

2. JEAN BAUDRILLARD: SIMULACRA AND AMERICA AS HYPERREALITY

This section delves into Baudrillard’s theory of simulacra and simulation, illustrating how America exemplifies the epitome of a hyperreal society where signs and symbols have supplanted reality, fostering a disconnection that can fuel anti-American sentiments. The discussion focuses on the impact of consumerism and media on American cultural identity and the implications for political engagement and social cohesion.

Jean Baudrillard’s critique of modern-day America is fundamentally grounded in his concept of hyperreality and simulacra, which he argues pervasively define the contemporary social landscape. According to Baudrillard (1994), America has become a society where simulations or copies of reality have become more real than reality itself, creating a world where the distinction between what is real and what is represented is

perpetually blurred. In this context, America is emblematic of Baudrillard's theoretical extremes, a society saturated by images and signs devoid of original reference, engulfed in its own creation of hyperreality.

In his seminal work, *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard (1994) posits that,

the territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory – precession of simulacra – it is the map that engenders the territory. (Baudrillard 1994: 1)

His assertion suggests that in America, media and cultural representations have not just represented reality but have started to shape and precede it. The implications of this for American society are profound, affecting everything from political processes to individual identity, consumer behavior, and social interactions.

Baudrillard further explores the implications of living in a hyperreal society in his analysis of the Gulf War, which he famously declared did not take place – at least not in the conventional sense of understood reality. Instead, he argued that what was experienced was a hyperreal version, filtered and shaped by media representations to the point where the actual war became indistinguishable from its televised depiction (Baudrillard 1995). This assertion can be extended to many aspects of American life, where events and lives are increasingly experienced through secondary representations rather than direct interaction.

Critics and scholars have variously responded to Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality. Eco (1986) acknowledges this shift towards hyperreality, noting that in a world full of signs,

the American imagination demands the real thing and, to attain it, must fabricate the absolute fake; where the boundaries between game and illusion are blurred. (Eco 1986: 8)

This observation aligns with Baudrillard's views on American culture as one that continuously oscillates between seeking authentic experiences and constructing their simulations.

Baudrillard's *America* (1988) provides a pointed critique of American culture as the epitome of hyperreality. As he famously noted,

America is the original version of modernity. We are the dubbed or subtitled version. America ducks the question of origins; it cultivates no origin or mythical authenticity; it has no past and no founding truth. Having known no primitive accumulation of time, it lives in a perpetual present. Having seen no slow, centuries-long accumulation of a principle of truth, it lives in perpetual simulation, in a perpetual present of signs. (Baudrillard 1988: 76)

This perspective underscores how America, in Baudrillard's view, is not just a physical space but a symbolic one, where images and signs have overtaken any sense of authentic experience.

In *America* (1988), Baudrillard embarks on a journey through the deserts, highways, and cities of the United States, painting a portrait of a society where hyperreality reigns

supreme. For Baudrillard, America epitomizes the dissolution of the distinction between reality and its representation, where media and consumer culture have created a world of simulacra (Baudrillard 1988: 67).

In his exploration of American landscapes and cityscapes, Baudrillard argues that America, with its vast highways, neon lights, and sprawling cities, represents the ultimate simulation – where reality is absorbed and transformed by images, signs, and consumption. This critique extends to American political life, where Baudrillard suggests that the symbols of democracy and freedom are simulacra, detached from their original referents and operationalized within a system of hyperreal governance (Baudrillard 1988: 109, 125).

The impact of Baudrillard's ideas extends beyond mere cultural critique. Political analysts and social theorists have used his concepts to discuss the ways in which American politics are mediated and understood. As Kellner (1989) explains,

the media pander to the masses, reproducing their taste, their interest in spectacle and entertainment, their fantasies and way of life, thereby giving rise to an implosion between mass consciousness and media phantasmagoria. (Kellner 1989: 69)

In such a mediated context, the American public participates in a political life that is as much a simulated reality as it is an engagement with actual political issues.

Jean Baudrillard's philosophical legacy, with its emphasis on simulacra and hyperreality, provides a critical framework for understanding the complexities and peculiarities of American society. It invites us to question the authenticity of our experiences and the realities we take for granted, pushing us to consider the profound impact of living in a world where reality is continuously manufactured and mediated.

Jean Baudrillard's critique of modern-day America extends beyond his analysis of hyperreality to encompass significant geopolitical events, such as the Gulf War and the War on Terrorism, as well as the role of media culture in shaping American consciousness. Baudrillard's provocative assertion that the Gulf War did not take place challenges conventional notions of war and reality. In his book *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (1995), he argues that the conflict was more a media spectacle than an actual military confrontation.

As he states,

this is why the Gulf War will not take place. It is neither reassuring nor comforting that it has become bogged in interminable suspense. In this sense, the gravity of the non-event in the Gulf is even greater than the event of war. (Baudrillard 1995: 24)

This perspective sheds light on the ways in which media representations can distort our understanding of global events, blurring the lines between reality and simulation.

Baudrillard's analysis of the War on Terrorism in America similarly challenges prevailing narratives. He contends that the response to acts of terror has led to a state of perpetual warfare, where the distinction between friend and enemy, legitimate and illegitimate violence, becomes increasingly blurred. As he observes,

the terrorists are taking 'simulation' referents (the towers, the market, the Western mega-culture) for real ones. (Baudrillard 2003: 71)

This critique underscores the profound impact of the War on Terrorism on American society, from the erosion of civil liberties to the normalization of militarized responses to perceived threats.

Baudrillard discusses other authors, a point that Philippe Muray (2002) also criticizes. He claims that they bring back "phantom values" and "phantom identity" to set against a disintegrated world (Baudrillard 2003: 71). Additionally, in her essay "In Search of the Child's Innocence" Caroline Heinrich (2004) argues that the terrorists themselves are part of a complete simulation, where the terrorist act is generated by models. Baudrillard's (2003) assertion regarding the collapse of the World Trade Center towers underscores the complex interplay between reality and simulation in contemporary society. He challenges us to interrogate the notion of the Real – the underlying truth or essence of an event – amidst the spectacle of media imagery and simulation.

According to Žižek (2002),

The ultimate and defining moment of the twentieth century was the direct experience of the Real as opposed to everyday social reality – the Real in its extreme violence as the price to be paid for peeling off the deceptive layers of reality. (Žižek 2002: 5–6)

In this context, Baudrillard suggests that

The collapse of the World Trade Center towers is unimaginable, but that is not enough to make it a real event. (Baudrillard 2003: 28)

The question is that of the Real.

According to Baudrillard (2003), who reads Žižek (2002),

the passion of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is the eschatological passion for the Real, the nostalgic passion for that lost or disappearing object. (Baudrillard 2003: 75)

In this context, Baudrillard suggests that the terrorists' actions can be seen as a response to this desperate quest for authenticity, albeit a misguided and destructive one. This provocative analysis invites us to critically examine the ways in which our longing for the Real shapes our perceptions and actions, illuminating the profound complexities of contemporary existence.

Moreover, Baudrillard's insights on American media culture offer a penetrating analysis of how images and simulations shape our understanding of reality. His influence can be discerned in popular culture, such as the film *The Matrix*, which draws heavily from his concept of simulacra. As Baudrillard (2004) notes,

The Matrix is surely the kind of film about the matrix that the matrix would have been able to produce. (Lancelin et al. 2004)

Here, he suggests that the film not only reflects but also participates in the hyperreal world it portrays, blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality.

Geoff Dyer, in his introduction to Baudrillard's book *America* (2010), highlights the philosopher's fascination with America as the epitome of hyperreality. Dyer (2010) observes,

Baudrillard's brilliance is so intoxicating as to blind us to the people who prepared his mental map. The master of the paradox is himself its victim: things Baudrillard experiences as revelations have already been itemized by American artists who, by doing so, collapsed the oppositions on which he depends, between "*social and cultural America*" on the one hand and "*absolute*" or "*astral*" America on the other. (Dyer 2010)

This perspective underscores Baudrillard's view of America as a hyperreal society where signs and symbols have supplanted reality, offering profound insights into the cultural, political, and existential dimensions of contemporary American life.

Baudrillard's multifaceted critique of modern-day America, encompassing geopolitical events, media culture, and societal structures, challenges us to reevaluate our assumptions about reality and representation in an age dominated by images and simulations.

Jean Baudrillard's perspective on the blockbuster film *The Matrix*, as expressed in his interview with *Le Nouvel Observateur* (2004), offers a critical lens through which to understand the intersection of his philosophy with popular culture. Baudrillard's response to the film reflects his skepticism towards its portrayal of virtual reality and simulation.

In the interview, Baudrillard expresses a degree of surprise at the film's direct reference to his work, particularly in the opening scene where the cover of *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994) is visible. He remarks,

Certainly there have been misinterpretations, which is why I have been hesitant until now to speak about *The Matrix*. The staff of the Wachowski brothers contacted me at various times following the release of the first episode in order to get me involved with the following ones, but this wasn't really conceivable (laughter). (Lancelin et al. 2004)

This reluctance suggests Baudrillard's reservations about the film's interpretation and application of his ideas.

Moreover, Baudrillard (2004) critiques the filmmakers for conflating the virtual with the real, stating,

They took the hypothesis of the virtual for an irrefutable fact and transformed it into a visible phantasm. (Lancelin et al. 2004)

His remark underscores his belief that the virtual world cannot be simply equated with reality, highlighting the complexities of simulation and representation that he explores in his work.

Other philosophers have also offered commentary on *The Matrix* and its philosophical themes. For example, Slavoj Žižek has analyzed the film's exploration of identity, ideology, and reality, drawing parallels to his own theories of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Marxist critique. Žižek (2002) suggests that *The Matrix* represents a

postmodern allegory of ideological control, where individuals are unaware of their own enslavement within a simulated reality.

In contrast, Cornel West, acclaimed for his portrayal of Councillor West in *The Matrix* films and a former Professor at Harvard and Princeton Universities, lauds the film saga for its depiction of the struggle for liberation and self-awareness. West interprets *The Matrix* as a metaphor for existential awakening, where individuals must confront the illusions of the world and break free from societal constraints.

West in his interview with the *Los Angeles Times* (2003) describes the film as “fascinating”, albeit subtly critiquing “salvation narratives”, emphasizing how themes in the sequel diverge from those in the original (Smith 2003). According to West,

The first was all about Neo as a salvation figure, saving the globe. The second is a devastating critique of all salvation stories. It has political implications. It has religious implications. (Smith 2003)

Through these varied perspectives, it becomes evident that *The Matrix* serves as a rich cultural artifact that prompts philosophical reflection on the nature of reality, identity, and power. While Baudrillard’s critique highlights the complexities of representation and simulation, other philosophers offer complementary insights into the film’s broader philosophical themes.

Baudrillard’s work critiques the role of American media in creating a world where reality and its representation are indistinguishable. His concept of hyperreality extends to political life, where media spectacle takes precedence over substantive political engagement. America, in this sense, becomes a critical example of Baudrillard’s theory of hyperreality, where simulations become reality itself.

In Baudrillard’s analysis, the implications of hyperreality extend beyond media and entertainment into the realm of politics, identity, and social interaction. American society, according to Baudrillard, thrives on the consumption of images – where the image of freedom, democracy, and capitalism prevails over the reality of their enactment. This creates a space where ideology is not critically examined but rather absorbed and reinforced through media spectacles.

Baudrillard’s analysis of America as a hyperreal society critiques its cultural and political structures as simulations detached from any real substance. For Baudrillard, America is not only a land of boundless possibility but also a society where the real has been supplanted by simulacra – representations that no longer correspond to any original reality. His exploration of media’s role in shaping perception positions America as the epitome of a simulated reality, making his work a critical reflection on American ideological dominance.

Baudrillard’s assertion that America is a society of simulacra – where the symbols of freedom and power no longer refer to any actual political or social reality – underlines his broader critique of American culture as one built on illusions.

This critique places Baudrillard’s analysis of America within the broader discourse of anti-Americanism. His dissection of American society’s reliance on signs and symbols

rather than authentic lived experience can be viewed as a critique of the ideological structures that support American global dominance. While Baudrillard's critique is not confined to America alone, his description of the U.S. as the quintessential hyperreal society positions America as a key example of his theory.

3. SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK: IDEOLOGY AND THE CAPITALIST DISCOURSE

Žižek's critical theory uses Lacan's psychoanalytic framework to analyze how ideological structures manipulate beliefs and desires within American society, often contributing to a sense of disillusionment and anti-American sentiment. This part examines Žižek's critiques of capitalism as seen through the lens of popular culture, political rhetoric, and social policy, exploring the contradictions and paradoxes that underlie American neoliberal endeavors.

Slavoj Žižek, renowned for his provocative and interdisciplinary approach, offers a trenchant critique of modern-day America that delves deep into the realms of ideology, capitalism, and cultural production. Drawing from a diverse range of influences, including Lacanian psychoanalysis, Hegelian dialectics, and Marxist theory, Žižek's analysis provides unique insights into the underlying contradictions and paradoxes of contemporary American society.

Slavoj Žižek's philosophical critique of modern-day America delves deep into the underlying ideological structures that shape contemporary society. Renowned for his synthesis of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Marxist theory, and continental philosophy, Žižek offers provocative insights into the contradictions and complexities of American culture, politics, and ideology.

At the heart of Žižek's analysis lies his interrogation of ideology – the unseen framework that governs our beliefs, desires, and social relations. He argues that ideology operates not through explicit rules or dogmas but through the very fabric of everyday life, shaping our perceptions and actions in subtle and often unconscious ways. As he famously states,

In vain do we try to break out of the ideological dream by “*opening our eyes and trying to see reality as it is*”, by throwing away the ideological spectacles. (Žižek 2008: 48)

In the context of American society, Žižek's critique exposes the ideological underpinnings of capitalism, consumerism, and political discourse, revealing how these systems perpetuate inequality, exploitation, and alienation.

One of Žižek's central themes is the pervasiveness of fantasy in contemporary culture and politics. Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis, he argues that fantasy serves as a shield against the traumatic Real, allowing individuals to sustain their sense of identity and meaning amidst the chaos of existence. In the American context, Žižek examines how fantasy operates at both the individual and collective levels, shaping cultural myths, political ideologies, and national identities. As he contends,

if one can achieve all that within capitalism, why not remain within the system? The problem lies with the “*utopian*” premise that it is *possible* to achieve all that within the coordinates of global capitalism. (Žižek 2009: 78)

This insight highlights the role of fantasy in sustaining the American dream – a mythic narrative that promises unlimited opportunity and upward mobility, even as it obscures the realities of systemic inequality and social injustice.

At the core of Žižek’s critique lies his examination of ideology and its pervasive impact on political discourse, cultural norms, and social structures. As Althusser (1971) famously asserts,

ideology represents the imaginary relations of individuals to their real conditions of existence. (Althusser 1971: 162)

Žižek (2008) suggests that while thinkers like Habermas and Foucault have made valuable contributions to the study of ideology, it is Althusser who represents a significant departure in theoretical approach. Althusser’s emphasis on the notion that ideology shapes individuals’ perceptions of their real conditions of existence is crucial here.

According to Žižek (2008),

Here Habermas and Foucault are two sides of the same coin – the real break is represented by Althusser, by his insistence on the fact that a certain cleft, a certain fissure, misrecognition, characterizes the human condition as such: by the thesis that the idea of the possible end of ideology is an ideological idea par excellence! (Žižek 2008: xxiv)

For Žižek, ideology is not simply a set of false beliefs but rather a fundamental dimension of subjectivity that shapes how we perceive and interact with the world. In the American context, Žižek argues that ideologies such as neoliberalism and multiculturalism function to conceal the underlying contradictions of capitalist society, perpetuating a false sense of harmony and consensus.

Moreover, Žižek’s analysis of American capitalism exposes the inherent tensions between its ideological façade and its material realities. In *Living in the End Times* (2010), he explores how the global financial crisis of 2008 laid bare the contradictions of capitalism, revealing the inherent instability and irrationality of the system (Žižek 2010). He provocatively declares,

All one has to do here is to compare the reaction to the financial meltdown of September 2008 with the Copenhagen conference of 2009: save the planet from global warming (alternatively: save the AIDS patients, save those dying for lack of funds for expensive treatments and operations, save the starving children, and so on) – all this can wait a little bit, but the call “*Save the banks!*” is an unconditional imperative which demands and receives immediate action. (Žižek 2010: 334)

Through this lens, Žižek challenges the prevailing narratives of capitalist triumphalism, highlighting instead the systemic inequalities and injustices that persist within American society.

Critics and colleagues have offered varied responses to Žižek’s critique of America. In the book *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (Butler,

Laclau, & Žižek 2000), Slavoj Žižek collaborates with fellow researchers Judith Butler and Ernesto Laclau in a dialogue that delves into critical issues concerning contemporary leftist politics. Žižek, known for his provocative and incisive analyses, engages in fruitful exchanges with Butler and Laclau, both of whom bring their unique perspectives to the table.

The collaboration between Žižek, Butler, and Laclau (2000) is particularly noteworthy given their shared interest in Hegelian philosophy and its implications for contemporary political theory. Butler's work, such as *Subjects of Desire* (2008), reflects her engagement with Hegelian themes, demonstrating her commitment to exploring the intersections of desire, subjectivity, and social norms within a Hegelian framework.

Similarly, Laclau and Mouffe's seminal work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985) lays the groundwork for understanding the concept of hegemony and its role in radical democratic politics, which inevitably pertains to America.

According to Bowman (n. d.),

Žižek always praised Laclau for giving direction and orientation to his thinking, making Laclau into something of a father figure. (Bowman n. d.)

This quote sheds light on the intellectual debt that Žižek acknowledges owing to Laclau, underscoring the significance of their intellectual relationship within the broader context of leftist theory.

Overall, the collaborative efforts of Žižek, Butler, and Laclau in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (2000) serve as a testament to the ongoing relevance of critical dialogue within the leftist tradition, as well as the enduring influence of Hegelian thought on contemporary political theory and practice.

Despite these criticisms, Žižek's critique of modern-day America remains a vital contribution to contemporary political and philosophical discourse. By exposing the ideological mechanisms that sustain capitalist hegemony and cultural conformity, Žižek invites us to question the underlying assumptions and power dynamics that shape our social reality. In doing so, he challenges us to imagine alternative futures and possibilities for collective emancipation and social change.

Slavoj Žižek's philosophical critique of modern-day America is characterized by his unique synthesis of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Hegelian dialectics, and Marxist theory. Through his prolific writings and provocative speeches, Žižek offers incisive insights into the ideological underpinnings and contradictions of contemporary American society. His analysis delves into the realms of politics, culture, and ideology, interrogating the mechanisms of power and control that shape the American psyche.

At the core of Žižek's critique lies his examination of ideology and its role in sustaining capitalist dynamics. In his seminal work, the documentary film *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, Žižek (2012) contends that ideology does not merely entail false consciousness but rather constitutes the fundamental substance shaping our reality. As he famously remarks,

It's not only our reality which enslaves us. The tragedy of our predicament when we are within ideology, is that when we think that we escape it into our dreams – at that point we are within ideology. (Žižek et al. 2012)

This perspective challenges conventional notions of ideology as mere illusion, emphasizing its pervasive influence on our beliefs and desires.

Moreover, Žižek's critique extends to the realm of popular culture, where he uncovers the ideological mechanisms at work in films, literature, and everyday practices. In his analysis of Hollywood blockbusters like *The Dark Knight* and *The Matrix*, Žižek (2006) reveals how these narratives reflect and reinforce dominant ideological fantasies, shaping our understanding of heroism, justice, and society. As he contends,

The Wachowski brothers' (sic!) hit, *The Matrix* (1999), brought this logic to its climax: the material reality we all experience and see around us is a virtual one, generated and coordinated by a gigantic megacomputer to which we are all attached; when the hero (played by Keanu Reeves) awakens into "real reality", he sees a desolate landscape littered with burnt-out ruins – what remained of Chicago after a global war. The resistance leader, Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne), utters the ironic greeting: "Welcome to the desert of the real." Was it not something of a similar order that took place in New York on 11 September? Its citizens were introduced to the "desert of the real" – to us, corrupted by Hollywood, the landscape and the shots we saw of the collapsing towers could not but remind us of the most breathtaking scenes from those great catastrophe films. (Žižek 2006: 271)

Žižek's philosophical project has elicited varied responses from critics and scholars. Terry Eagleton (2014), reviewing *Trouble in Paradise* and *Absolute Recoil* by Slavoj Žižek, describes him as "both breathtakingly perceptive and outrageously irresponsible" (Eagleton 2014). Eagleton's characterization underscores the complexity of Žižek's work, acknowledging its brilliance while also critiquing its tendency towards provocation.

Martha Nussbaum, in her review "Inheriting Socrates" (Nussbaum 2010), expresses a different perspective, criticizing Žižek's approach as a departure from traditional philosophical discourse. Nussbaum finds Žižek's segment in film *Examined Life* upsetting, viewing it as a betrayal of the Socratic tradition of dialogue and rigorous argumentation (Nussbaum 2010). According to Nussbaum, the film lacks the respectful treatment of opposing positions that is integral to philosophical inquiry.

Meanwhile, Žižek's unconventional style is evident in his advice: don't idealize, learn to love the world in all its imperfections while strolling through a London dump (Taylor 2008). This perspective challenges romantic notions of nature and completeness, aligning with *The Matrix* star Cornel West's stance on the inevitability of disappointment when striving for wholeness. While West may not fit Nussbaum's traditional definition of a philosopher, he certainly captivates audiences with his charismatic persona. Žižek's realism contrasts with Nussbaum's romanticism, as she struggles to embrace his unconventional approach.

Overall, the critiques and responses to Žižek's work highlight the contentious and thought-provoking nature of his philosophical contributions, underscoring the ongoing debate within academic circles regarding the merits and limitations of his ideas.

Despite these critiques, Žižek's influence in contemporary philosophy and cultural theory remains undeniable. His relentless interrogation of ideology, coupled with his willingness to confront uncomfortable truths, challenges us to rethink our assumptions about the world we inhabit. In the context of modern-day America, Žižek's critique offers a powerful tool for understanding the complexities of ideology, power, and resistance in an age of uncertainty and upheaval.

Slavoj Žižek, renowned for his bold and unorthodox perspectives, has offered thought-provoking analyses on a myriad of contemporary issues, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the presidency of Donald Trump, transgender rights, and American culture wars. As a Lacanian analyst, Žižek's approach to these topics is deeply rooted in psychoanalytic theory, challenging conventional wisdom and inviting audiences to confront uncomfortable truths.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Žižek's insights have shed light on the profound societal implications of the crisis. In his book *Pan(dem)ic! COVID-19 Shakes the World* (2020), he explores how the pandemic has exposed systemic inequalities and contradictions within capitalist societies. Žižek (2020) argues that the crisis has revealed the fragility of global capitalism and the need for radical structural change. As he provocatively states,

We should not be afraid to note some potentially beneficial side effect of the epidemic. [...] Amusement parks are turning into ghost towns – perfect, I cannot imagine a more boring and stupid place than Disneyland. Car production is seriously affected – good, this may compel us to think about alternatives to our obsession with individual vehicles. The list can go on. In a recent speech, Viktor Orban said: “*There is no such thing as a liberal. A liberal is nothing more than a Communist with a diploma.*” What if the opposite is true? (Žižek 2020: 45–46)

His critique extends beyond mere epidemiology to encompass broader socio-political dimensions, highlighting the need for systemic change in the face of existential threats.

Žižek's commentary on the presidency of Donald Trump is equally penetrating. In an appearance on Piers Morgan's show (2024), he remarked that,

my point here is that I am not totally against Trump because, you know, what you should never forget with all my critique of Trump is that this Trumpian new populism didn't fall from the Moon. It is an outcome, a result of the failure of the standard welfare state American left-liberal society. (*Piers Morgan Uncensored* 2024)

This bold statement underscores Žižek's view that Trump's political rhetoric and policies represent a departure from established norms, with far-reaching implications for American democracy and global politics. Žižek's critique of Trump extends beyond mere political commentary to engage with broader questions of ideology, fantasy, and the nature of power in contemporary society.

Žižek's engagement in American culture wars and his polemics with figures such as Jordan Peterson highlight his willingness to challenge prevailing orthodoxies and

engage in controversial debates. His appearances on platforms such as Piers Morgan's show demonstrate his ability to reach a wide audience with his ideas. Žižek's insights on topics ranging from geopolitics to popular culture offer a refreshing alternative to conventional wisdom, inviting audiences to question the status quo and imagine new possibilities for social change.

In the context of American neoliberalism, Žižek critiques the notion of freedom as it is presented in the U.S. He argues that this freedom is often a façade, masking the deeper social and economic structures that limit real political and economic emancipation. Žižek's analysis positions American capitalism as a global ideological force, one that extends its influence far beyond the borders of the U.S. His critique of America is thus deeply intertwined with a broader critique of Western capitalism and neoliberalism.

By perpetuating the myth of meritocracy and the promise of upward mobility, the American Dream not only masks the realities of inequality and exploitation within the U.S. but also fuels disillusionment and criticism abroad. As such, Žižek's work invites a reevaluation of the narratives surrounding American identity and values, underscoring the ideological mechanisms that both construct and undermine perceptions of America in a global context.

Slavoj Žižek's contributions to contemporary discourse encompass a wide range of topics, from the COVID-19 pandemic to *Barbenheimer*, and American culture wars. Through his rigorous analysis and fearless engagement with controversial issues, Žižek challenges audiences to confront uncomfortable truths and imagine new possibilities for collective action and social transformation.

Žižek's analysis of American capitalism dissects the ideological fantasies that sustain the system, particularly the American Dream. He critiques the way ideology operates through popular culture and political discourse, reinforcing capitalist structures and obscuring systemic inequalities. This critique situates American capitalism as both a domestic and global ideological force, revealing how these fantasies contribute to anti-American sentiments.

4. GIORGIO AGAMBEN: STATE OF EXCEPTION AND BIOPOLITICS

Agamben's concepts of the state of exception and biopolitics are applied to contemporary American governance, particularly in the context of the War on Terror and the response to crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. This analysis highlights how emergencies are used to suspend rights and alter legal norms, fundamentally changing the relationship between state and citizen, which in turn fosters anti-American sentiment both domestically and internationally.

Giorgio Agamben's philosophical critique of modern-day America offers profound insights into the intersections of politics, law, and biopolitics. Drawing from his extensive engagement with continental philosophy, political theory, and legal studies, Agamben provides a rigorous analysis of the contemporary condition, exposing the mechanisms of power and control that operate within society.

At the core of Agamben's critique lies his concept of the "state of exception" and biopolitics, which he explores in depth in his seminal work, *State of Exception* (Agamben 2005). According to Agamben (2005), the state of exception represents a suspension of the normal legal order, where sovereign power is exercised without limitation, often in the name of security or crisis management. As he contends,

The immediately biopolitical significance of the state of exception as the original structure in which law encompasses living beings by means of its own suspension emerges clearly in the "*military order*" issued by the president of the United States on Nov. 13, 2001, which authorized the "*indefinite detention*" and trial by "*military commissions*" (not to be confused with the military tribunals provided for by the law of war) of noncitizens suspected of involvement in terrorist activities. (Agamben 2005: 3)

In the context of modern-day America, Agamben's analysis sheds light on the erosion of civil liberties, the expansion of surveillance and control mechanisms, and the normalization of emergency measures in response to perceived threats.

Agamben's critique extends beyond the realm of politics to encompass broader questions of biopolitics and the governance of life itself. In his work *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998), he explores the ways in which modern states exercise control over populations through mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. As Agamben (1998) writes,

That constituting power never exhausts itself in constituted power is not enough: sovereign power can also, as such, maintain itself indefinitely, without ever passing over into actuality. (The troublemaker is precisely the one who tries to force sovereign power to translate itself into actuality). (Agamben 1998: 47)

This insight illuminates the ways in which biopolitical regimes regulate and manage life, from the administration of health care to the enforcement of social norms and the protection of borders.

Critics and colleagues have engaged with Agamben's ideas, offering both praise and scrutiny. Paul Patton (2007) examines Agamben's reinterpretation of Foucault's concepts of biopower and biopolitics. Agamben (1998) suggests that Foucault's idea of the politicization of bare life as "the decisive event of modernity" doesn't radically transform political-philosophical categories but rather constitutes the original nucleus of sovereign power (Patton 2007).

According to Agamben (1998), this inclusion of bare life in politics is the original activity of sovereign power. He introduces the concept of "inclusive exclusion" (Agamben 1998: 4) to explain how bare life was initially incorporated into the political realm (Agamben 1998: 9). Agamben argues that "the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power" (Agamben 1998: 6). This perspective leads Agamben to draw broad conclusions about modern politics, including the inherent contradictions in modern democracy's attempt to ground citizens' liberties in natural rights and the connection between liberal democracy and modern forms of totalitarianism (Patton 2007).

In her critique of Giorgio Agamben's theories, Judith Butler (2004) positions herself within a Foucauldian framework that views disciplinary power as not merely repressive, but as a vital force that sustains and revitalizes life. In contrast, Butler argues that sovereign-governmental power, which Agamben explores extensively, acts detrimentally upon life and populations (Butler 2004).

Loizidou (2007) elaborates on Butler's perspective, noting,

She suggests, by following Foucault, that disciplinary power is productive and vital in sustaining and revitalising life. On the other hand, sovereign-governmental power – as I explain by contrasting her understanding of this modality of power in “*Indefinite detention*” (Butler 2004) with that of Agamben – has the opposite effect on life and populations. (Loizidou 2007: 14)

This divergence underscores a fundamental disagreement between Butler and Agamben on the impact of different forms of power on human life, highlighting a critical discourse in contemporary political theory particularly in the context of critiques of American governance and biopolitical practices.

Nevertheless, Agamben's philosophical interventions offer a powerful critique of modern-day America and its implications for democracy, freedom, and human rights. His analysis of the state of exception, biopolitics, and sovereignty provides a framework for understanding the complexities of power and control in contemporary society. Through his work, Agamben invites readers to critically examine the mechanisms of governance and to imagine new possibilities for political action and resistance in an age of uncertainty and crisis.

At the heart of Agamben's critique lies his concept of the state of exception, which he explores in depth in his seminal work, *Where are We Now? The Epidemic as Politics* (2021). In *State of Exception* (2005) Agamben argues that in times of crisis, such as the War on Terrorism or the COVID-19 pandemic, governments often invoke a state of exception to justify the suspension of legal norms and the expansion of executive power. As Agamben (2021) writes on COVID-19,

The epidemic has made clear that the state of exception, to which our governments have actually accustomed us for quite some time, has become the normal condition. People are so used to living in conditions of perpetual crisis, that they seem not to realise that their lives have been reduced to a purely biological condition that has lost not only its political dimension, but also that of what is simply human. A society that exists in a perennial state of emergency cannot be free. We live in a society that has sacrificed freedom for so-called “*security reasons*” and has hence condemned itself to living in a perpetual state of fear and insecurity. (Agamben 2021: 18)

This insight sheds light on the ways in which emergency measures can become normalized, leading to a permanent state of emergency and the erosion of democratic principles.

Agamben's analysis of biopolitics further elucidates the complex dynamics of power and control in contemporary society. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, he

examines how states govern populations through mechanisms of surveillance, regulation, and normalization. Agamben (2021) argues that,

As Foucault's work has shown, biopolitics tends fatally to morph into *thanatopolitics*. As the law begins to deal explicitly with the biological life of citizens as a good that needs taking care of, this interest immediately takes a dark turn towards the idea of a life that is, as the title of a well-known work published in Germany in 1920 puts it, "unworthy of life [*lebensunwertes Leben*]". (Agamben 2021: 80)

This perspective highlights the ways in which biopolitical techniques are used to manage and control life itself, blurring the boundaries between the political and the biological.

Giorgio Agamben's critical engagement with contemporary America, as explored in Arne De Boever's book *Plastic Sovereignities: Agamben and the Politics of Aesthetics* (2016), offers a lens through which to examine the complex intersections of politics, law, and biopolitics in the United States. De Boever's (2016) analysis delves into Agamben's response to specific events and regulations, such as the implementation of fingerprinting requirements for travelers entering the United States, which Agamben vehemently opposed (De Boever 2016).

In his text *No to Bio-Political Tattooing*, Agamben (2004) articulates his refusal to comply with what he sees as exceptional and inhumane measures imposed by the U.S. government. He criticizes the regulation as emblematic of the contemporary biopolitical situation, invoking Michel Foucault's notion of "the progressive animalization of man" (Agamben 2004). Agamben's refusal to undergo fingerprinting reflects his broader critique of biopolitical control and the erosion of individual freedoms in modern society.

De Boever (2016) highlights Agamben's recurring theme of viewing the paradigm of modern politics not through the lens of the Greek city-state, Athens, but through the prism of the camp, specifically Auschwitz (Agamben 2004). By juxtaposing America as both Athens's antithesis and a contemporary instantiation of Auschwitz, Agamben challenges conventional understandings of political power and sovereignty (De Boever 2016: 259). This provocative figuration invites readers to confront uncomfortable parallels between historical atrocities and contemporary forms of governance.

However, Agamben's critique has not been without controversy. His comparison of COVID-19 lockdowns to Nazi Germany sparked widespread condemnation and debate within academia and beyond. Adam Kotsko (2022), in his article *What Happened to Giorgio Agamben?* questions the trajectory of Agamben's thought, suggesting that his provocative statements risk undermining his credibility and relevance (Kotsko 2022). This critique underscores the tensions inherent in Agamben's work, as he navigates the fine line between rigorous philosophical inquiry and sensationalist rhetoric.

Overall, Agamben's engagement with America offers a rich terrain for critical reflection on the complexities of modern politics, law, and biopolitics. Whether examining specific regulations or broader philosophical themes, Agamben's work challenges readers

to confront the ethical implications of state power and the erosion of individual freedoms in an increasingly securitized world.

Agamben's analysis of the state of exception highlights how crises are used as a pretext for expanding governmental control over citizens' lives. In the American context, this is evident in the creation of laws such as the USA PATRIOT Act and the establishment of Guantanamo Bay as a legal black hole where the rights of detainees are suspended. Agamben contends that this state of exception blurs the lines between democracy and dictatorship, as it allows for the exercise of sovereign power without legal constraints.

Agamben's critique of the state of exception and biopolitics focuses on how the U.S. government uses crises to justify the suspension of legal norms and the expansion of executive power. His analysis reveals the erosion of civil liberties in the name of security and highlights the broader implications of emergency governance in America, contributing to anti-American sentiment as citizens and critics perceive a drift toward authoritarianism.

Agamben's critique of American governance resonates with broader critiques of Western democracies, where the normalization of emergency measures has profound implications for civil liberties and human rights. His analysis of the state of exception in the American context reveals the fragility of democratic institutions in the face of crises.

5. SYNTHESIS: CONTEMPORARY (POSTMODERNIST) PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON AMERICAN ISSUES

The synthesis connects the insights of Baudrillard, Žižek, and Agamben, providing a philosophical critique of the structural and existential challenges in America, which often contribute to anti-American sentiments both domestically and globally. It discusses how these thinkers' philosophies help dissect the layers of reality, power, and control in American society and suggest pathways for critical engagement and reform.

In this article, we have explored the critiques of modern-day America by prominent philosophers such as Baudrillard, Žižek, and Agamben. These thinkers offer profound insights into the complexities of contemporary society, challenging conventional wisdom and inviting readers to question the dominant narratives of politics, culture, and identity.

Through their analyses of hyperreality, ideology, biopolitics, and sovereignty, they shed light on the ways in which power operates within America and the broader global context. Whether interrogating the role of media in shaping perceptions, dissecting the rhetoric of political populism, or examining the erosion of civil liberties, these philosophers provide a critical framework for understanding the challenges and contradictions of modernity.

By engaging with their ideas, readers are encouraged to confront uncomfortable truths and imagine new possibilities for collective action and social transformation in an age of uncertainty and crisis.

In the intricate tapestry of contemporary American society, the philosophical perspectives of Baudrillard, Žižek, and Agamben emerge as powerful lenses through which to scrutinize the structural and existential challenges facing the nation. These thinkers

offer profound insights into the layers of reality, power, and control that shape American life, inviting us to question the status quo and envision alternative futures.

Baudrillard's (1995) concept of hyperreality challenges us to confront the pervasive influence of media and simulation on our perception of truth. As he famously stated,

We have fallen into soft war, into the virtual impossibility of war which translates into the paltry fantasia where adversaries compete in de-escalation, as though the irruption or the event of war had become obscene and insupportable, no longer sustainable, like every real event moreover. Everything is therefore transposed into the virtual, and we are confronted with a virtual apocalypse, a hegemony ultimately much more dangerous than real apocalypse. (Baudrillard 1995: 27)

Through his analyses, Baudrillard unveils the ways in which images, symbols, and signs distort our understanding of reality, urging us to critically engage with the spectacle of contemporary life.

Žižek, drawing from Lacanian psychoanalysis and Marxist theory, exposes the ideological fantasies that animate political discourse and cultural norms. He challenges us to confront uncomfortable truths about power and inequality, urging us to ask ourselves that,

the problem, as he goes on to say, is that once we start to prohibit certain opinions, who will be next in line? The question is thus: how to counteract the fake liberal prohibition on racism? In the Chomsky mode, or by replacing it with a "true" prohibition? (Žižek 2010: 47)

Through his provocative interventions, Žižek inspires us to reimagine the possibilities for social change, free speech, and collective emancipation.

Agamben's critique of the state of exception and biopolitics confronts us with the sobering realities of governmental control and the erosion of civil liberties. He compels us to grapple with questions of sovereignty and bare life, urging us to resist the normalization of exceptional measures in the name of security. As he writes,

For a long time, one of the characteristic privileges of sovereign power was the right to decide life and death. Foucault's statement at the end of the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* sounds perfectly trivial. Yet the first time we encounter the expression "*right over life and death*". (Agamben 1998: 87)

Through his rigorous analysis, Agamben provides a framework for understanding the mechanisms through which power operates in contemporary society and suggests pathways for critical engagement and reform.

The critiques of Baudrillard, Žižek, and Agamben converge in their analysis of how power, ideology, and governance operate within the context of American society. Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality illustrates the role of media and consumer culture in shaping perceptions of reality in America, while Žižek's dissection of capitalist ideology reveals the fantasy structures that sustain systemic inequalities. Agamben's analysis of the state of exception and biopolitics critiques how crises are used to expand governmental control, often at the expense of individual rights and democratic processes.

Žižek's analysis of American capitalism exposes the ideological manipulation that sustains neoliberal structures, and Agamben's critique of biopolitics challenges the state of exception that characterizes American responses to crises such as the War on Terror and the COVID-19 pandemic. Together, these critiques align with broader discourses of anti-Americanism, particularly as they expose the contradictions and failings of American-led neoliberalism.

The philosophical critiques of Baudrillard, Žižek, and Agamben can be interpreted as inherently critical of American hegemony, as America embodies many of the global capitalist, biopolitical, and hyperreal tendencies they examine. Baudrillard's depiction of America as a hyperreal society exemplifies the critique of Western consumerist culture.

Collectively, these philosophers offer a comprehensive critique of the ideological and political structures that define American society. Their analyses, while rooted in broader critiques of modernity, are particularly relevant to understanding the unique role America plays in the global order. The U.S., as a dominant force in global capitalism, media, and governance, serves as a key example in each philosopher's framework, demonstrating the interplay between ideology, power, and control.

6. CONCLUSION

The conclusion emphasizes the continued relevance of these philosophers in critically assessing and understanding American societal issues, particularly in light of rising anti-Americanism. It calls for an integrated approach that combines philosophical inquiry with practical policy considerations to address the complexities of (post)modern American life.

In conclusion, the enduring relevance of Baudrillard, Žižek, and Agamben in critically assessing and understanding American societal issues cannot be overstated. Their penetrating analyses offer invaluable insights into the multifaceted challenges facing contemporary America, from the distortion of reality in a media-saturated society to the erosion of civil liberties in the name of security. As we navigate an increasingly complex and uncertain world, their perspectives serve as indispensable tools for unpacking the layers of power, control, and ideology that shape our lives.

Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, with its critique of simulation and spectacle, reminds us that "the simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth—it is the truth which conceals that there is none" (Baudrillard 1994: 1). Through his incisive analyses, Baudrillard challenges us to interrogate the constructed nature of reality and confront the pervasive influence of media and imagery in shaping our perceptions.

Žižek, drawing from psychoanalysis and Marxism, exposes the ideological fantasies that underpin political discourse and cultural norms. His insistence on

the extreme violence of liberation. You must be forced to be free. If you trust simply your spontaneous sense of well-being for whatever you will never get free. Freedom hurts. (Žižek et al. 2012)

underscores the urgency of critical engagement and political intervention in the face of systemic injustices.

Agamben's critique of the state of exception and biopolitics reveals the mechanisms through which power operates in contemporary society. He compels us to grapple with questions of sovereignty and bare life, urging us to resist the normalization of exceptional measures in the name of security. As he writes,

One of the elements that make the state of exception so difficult to define is certainly its close relationship to civil war, insurrection, and resistance. (Agamben 2005: 2)

However, the insights of these philosophers extend beyond mere critique; they also offer pathways for action and reform. By integrating philosophical inquiry with practical policy considerations, we can begin to address the complexities of modern American life in a more holistic and nuanced manner. As Judith Butler (2004) notes,

Our capacity to feel and to apprehend hangs in the balance. But so, too, does the fate of the reality of certain lives and deaths as well as the ability to think critically and publicly about the effects of war. (Butler 2004: xxi)

In this spirit, let us heed the call for critical engagement and imaginative intervention, drawing inspiration from the rich tradition of philosophical inquiry exemplified by Baudrillard, Žižek, and Agamben. Only through sustained dialogue, rigorous analysis, and principled action can we hope to navigate the challenges of our time and imagine new possibilities for a more just and equitable society.

In summary, the enduring legacy of Baudrillard, Žižek, and Agamben in the realm of contemporary philosophy lies not only in their incisive critiques of American societal issues but also in their call for transformative action. Their philosophical insights, rooted in rigorous analysis and critical inquiry, compel us to confront the complexities of modern American life with intellectual honesty and moral courage.

As we reflect on their contributions, it becomes evident that their perspectives offer more than just theoretical musings – they provide a roadmap for navigating the complexities of our time. Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality challenges us to question the constructed nature of our reality and the pervasive influence of media and simulation. Žižek's examination of ideology and fantasy urges us to resist the allure of ideological conformity and envision alternative futures. Agamben's critique of power and sovereignty calls us to question the erosion of civil liberties and the normalization of exceptional measures.

Moreover, the interdisciplinary nature of their work underscores the importance of integrating philosophical inquiry with practical policy considerations. As Arne De Boever (2016) observes,

While this is not the way in which Agamben's work has been received – he is generally considered an anti-sovereign thinker who calls for sovereignty's destruction – there are enough instances in his work that warrant a reconsideration of this reception. (De Boever 2016: 331)

By engaging with their ideas and insights, policymakers and practitioners can develop more nuanced approaches to addressing the pressing challenges facing contemporary America.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that their perspectives are not without controversy and critique. Critics have raised concerns about the potential for their analyses to veer towards abstraction and theoretical excess, while others question the efficacy of their proposed solutions. Nevertheless, it is precisely through open dialogue and critical engagement that we can refine and strengthen our understanding of the issues at hand.

Ultimately, the philosophical perspectives of Baudrillard, Žižek, and Agamben serve as beacons of intellectual inquiry and moral reflection in an increasingly complex and uncertain world. Their insights challenge us to confront uncomfortable truths, imagine new possibilities, and strive towards a more just and equitable society. As we navigate the challenges of our time, let us draw inspiration from their work and commit ourselves to the pursuit of knowledge, justice, and human flourishing.

The critiques of Baudrillard, Žižek, and Agamben offer powerful tools for understanding the contradictions at the heart of American society. Their critiques, while not explicitly anti-American, reveal the deep flaws in American capitalist, political, and cultural frameworks. As America continues to exert influence globally, these philosophical insights provide critical avenues for resisting hegemonic power and imagining alternative futures.

Baudrillard, Žižek, and Agamben each provide a framework for understanding the ideological and political challenges that define contemporary America. While their critiques extend beyond America, their insights into hyperreality, ideology, and the state of exception are particularly pertinent for understanding the dynamics of American society. This article situates their critiques within the broader discourse of anti-Americanism, offering a critical lens through which to analyze the contradictions of American (post)modernity.

As anti-American sentiment continues to shape global discourse, this article explores the critiques of American society offered by Baudrillard, Žižek, and Agamben. It also encourages readers to engage more deeply with their philosophical insights, aiming to better understand and confront the socio-political realities of the 21st century.

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ANTI-AMERICANISM AND THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR: IDEOLOGICAL ORIENTA(LISA)TIONS OF MODERN RUSSIA

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DOI: 10.36169/2227-6068.2024.02.00002

Abstract. *The present paper offers a comprehensive analysis of anti-Americanism as a multidimensional phenomenon with a focus on its manifestations in contemporary Russia, especially in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The authors note that anti-Americanism remains a subject of active academic debate, as its interpretations range from hostile actions and statements towards the United States to criticism of specific American policies. Historically, anti-Americanism has manifested itself in various forms, including the French demarche under Charles de Gaulle and numerous protests against US foreign policy in Europe and the world. The article focuses special attention on the Cold War period when the confrontation between the US and the USSR was a prime example of creating an enemy image through ideological propaganda, economic policies, and cultural conflicts. The main goal of the article is to identify the ideological features of the construction of anti-American policy of modern Russia and its impact on ideological orientations in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. An important place in the analysis is occupied by the ideas of Edward Said and Louis Althusser, which allow us to consider anti-Americanism through the prism of orientalism and ideology. The authors offer the author's matrix of comparative analysis, which helps to identify the key features of the ideological interpretation of Russian anti-Americanism. The article emphasizes that contemporary Russian anti-Americanism is not only an instrument of internal legitimization of power, but also a means of establishing new configurations at the regional and global levels. Russia, positioning itself as an alternative to American hegemony, actively uses anti-Americanism to strengthen its position in the international arena, especially in its relations with the states of the "Global South".*

Keywords: *Anti-Americanism, Russian-Ukrainian war, ideology, orientalism, post-Soviet space, hegemony, power, Global South, empire*

Submitted: 15 July 2024; **accepted:** 30 October 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

Anti-Americanism is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon about which modern political science has not yet formed a unified opinion. Some researchers define anti-Americanism as

any hostile action or expression that becomes part and parcel of an undifferentiated attack on the foreign policy, society, culture, and values of the United States. (Rubinstein & Smith 1988: 36)

Other researchers tend to believe that anti-Americanism is an opposition to specific American policies, which is reflected in specific political actions (Berman 2004: 5). Others, on the contrary, suggest that anti-Americanism should be seen as

rather a series of criticisms and prejudices regarding the United States that have haphazardly been labelled anti-Americanism. (O'Connor & Griffiths 2005: 11)

The reason for this multiple interpretation can be attributed to the lack of a clear demarcation between the discursive nature of “anti-Americanism” and scholarship, which may include interpreting anti-Americanism through other categories such as politics, power, ideology, or conflict.

Perhaps the most famous example of anti-Americanism is the “demarche” of France under the leadership of President Charles de Gaulle, who in 1966 withdrew the country from the military-political organization NATO. The reason for this geopolitical “gesture” was quite simple: France was in favor of the independence of European politics from the USA, which, after the Second World War, successfully fixed the establishment of American hegemony in international politics. On the other hand, both in France and in the countries of continental Europe, one could observe anti-American movements that opposed the Vietnam War, US foreign policy, and those values of American liberal democracy that were actively (and, as a rule, quite aggressively) spreading in the world. Although, as some scholars have argued, such practices of anti-Americanism were based more on political discourse (Snyder 2012), such practices nevertheless became the basis for a long discussion about the role of American policies in Europe and European reactions to such policies. Nevertheless, the roots of such anti-American practices tended to start their “journey into big politics” in narrow intellectual circles that criticized both liberal democracy and Marxist interpretations of post-war Europe (Klautke 2011: 1131).

A much more important period in the history of anti-Americanism relates to the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union during the second half of the 20th century. During the postwar period, the United States and the USSR engaged in geopolitical, military-industrial, and ideological confrontations that included participation in military conflicts such as the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the war in Afghanistan. Encyclopedic examples of the construction of an “enemy image” were provided both in the United States vis-à-vis the USSR (the policy of McCarthyism) and in the Soviet Union vis-à-vis the United States (the policy of fighting capitalism). The key features of such confrontation are the constitution of ideological propaganda, which was aimed at creating an image of the enemy; economic policy, which, among other things, contributed to the expansion of the influence of both empires and

the construction of two blocs – socialist and liberal-democratic; cultural conflicts and globalization, which became an important component of the construction of American hegemony. In our view, Tony Judt illustrates quite accurately how the clash of geopolitical and regional interests between the US and the USSR contributed to an intensified aggressive discourse that resulted in the rise of anti-Americanism (Judt 2005). Frances Saunders, on the other hand, shows the cultural and ideological aspects of the rise of anti-Americanism in many parts of the world, for example, through the funding of cultural and educational projects, influencing public opinion, and cultural diplomacy. And it was such actions that tended to be the cause of the growth of anti-Americanism, in which, for example, Europeans looked for opposites and contradictions (Saunders 2013: 183), while the Soviet leadership looked for a well-defined orthodoxy necessary to maintain the legitimacy of global power (Shlapentokh 1988). That is, anti-Americanism is directly linked to antagonism from outside, which both complements it and constructs an alternative orthodoxy.

The two theses, which are related to *geopolitical clash* and *cultural-ideological construction*, strangely enough, continue to dominate in the post-Cold War period. A particularly relevant interpretation of anti-Americanism is the Russian-Ukrainian war, which gained a full-scale phase of confrontation after 24 February 2022. After the collapse of the USSR, Russia labelled itself as its successor in order to ensure security and reproduction of the regional order in the post-Soviet space and continued the function of ensuring the world order on an equal footing with the United States (Slobodchikoff 2017: 79-80). However, the unwillingness of the United States to perceive Russia as an “equal partner”, as well as the geopolitical situation, contributed to the fact that Russia was gradually pushed out of the global order. This, in turn, led to several geopolitical consequences (Zaporozhchenko 2024):

- (1) Russia focused on reproducing regional hegemony, realizing its inability to secure global dominance fast enough.
- (2) Russia has begun to use channels of communication with states of the Global South to propose an alternative agenda at the global level, realizing that most such states are either ignored by the US and its allies or are not allowed into the autonomous field of international politics.
- (3) Russia gradually constructed the role of an alternative force to the United States, which led to the strengthening of anti-Americanism, i.e. Russia was oriented towards civilizational and historical opposition.

In other words, Russia's peripheral position suited it geographically, but it did not suit it geopolitically (and, much more importantly, geostrategically). Therefore, the ideological justification of its own geopolitical role in the world was both a tool for reproducing legitimacy within Russia itself and a mechanism for establishing new configurations at regional and global levels (Gill 1996). Ironically, anti-Americanism was chosen as the key factor for achieving this goal, as it fits perfectly into the historical-civilizational matrix of the confrontation between the “Russian World” and the “Western World”.

This article is aimed not so much at studying anti-Americanism as a socio-cultural and political phenomenon as at identifying the key features of Russian anti-Americanism through the prism of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The aim of this article is to identify the ideological features of the construction of the policy of anti-Americanism in contemporary Russia. The key research question we pose in this article is: *how does anti-Americanism influence the ideological orientations of contemporary Russia in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war?* We first focus on a brief history of anti-Americanism in contemporary Russia and the methodology of our study, which includes Edward Said's Orientalist approach and Louis Althusser's concept of ideology. After that, we proceed to a direct analysis of the manifestation of anti-Americanism in connection with the ideological apparatuses of the system of power in contemporary Russia. We offer the author's matrix of comparative analysis, which will help to identify the key features of the ideological interpretation of Russian anti-Americanism.

2. ANTI-AMERICANISM IN RUSSIA: A VERY SHORT INTRODUCTION

After the collapse of the USSR, Russia tried to find its geopolitical destination. Perhaps the most obvious step towards achieving this goal was to assert the USSR-Russia continuity, which meant, at a minimum, ensuring regional order in the post-Soviet space (regional hegemony) and, at a maximum, regaining its strong geopolitical position from the Cold War (global counter-hegemony). Firstly, Russia sought to retain its influence in the Middle East under the dominance of the US and other Western powers (Kreutz 2002). Secondly, it was important for Russia to maintain its dominance in the Eurasian region, but it was in an antagonistic choice between Westernization and geo-economism (Tsygankov 2003). Thirdly, Russia began the process of shaping an alternative global order, which implied weakening the US and Europe, as well as rapprochement with the states of the Global South and China (Kollaros 2023). Fourth, the geopolitical movements that began with the collapse of the USSR (NATO expansion in Eastern Europe, the strengthening of US economic and political relations with the post-Soviet countries, the ignoring of Russia's ambitions in the global "agenda") became the ground for the radicalization of both the foreign policy of the Russian leadership and the return to the ideas of *Russian irredentism*. If we look at the history of relations between Russia and the US after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, we can identify four key stages, each of which was characterized by a radicalization of Russian foreign policy towards the US, as well as an increase in Russia's aggressiveness towards other states:

- (1) The collapse of the USSR and attempts at rapprochement with the West (1991 – 1999).
- (2) Gradual cooling of the relationship (2000–2012).
- (3) Aggressive foreign policy and the role of the Challenger (2013–2021).
- (4) A policy of direct "clash of civilizations" (2022–now).

The first stage can be characterized as an attempt to bring Russia closer to the countries of the "West", primarily the USA and Western Europe (Sakwa 2003: 208). At this

stage, Russian foreign policy was aimed at rapprochement with the West, which included political and economic reforms, including Yegor Gaidar's "shock therapy", which led to radical economic transformation, but at the same time increased social inequality, fostered the development of the Russian oligarchy (Shleifer 2009) and increased hyperinflation. This period was also characterized by political reforms, including the adoption of the 1993 constitution and the liberalization of the political system. However, attempts at both liberalization and democratization failed as the system was not ready for a quick break with the authoritarian past (McFaul 2021). In terms of foreign policy, Russia joined the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization. In other words, this period is characterized by Russia's desire to integrate with the West, but economic and political difficulties and the lack of significant Western support led to disillusionment and a change in foreign policy vector. Perhaps it was the continued "ignoring" of Russia, as well as the fear of more systemic support, that caused Russia to oppose NATO and their operation in Kosovo in the late 1990s, including the bombing of Belgrade, which meant a gradual cooling of relations (Braun 2008).

The second stage can be characterized as a "soft turn" towards a harsher criticism of the US and Western European countries, as well as the re-establishment of a centralized system of governance in Russia itself. Vladimir Putin's coming to power, despite the initial continuation of a course of co-operation with the West, gradually constituted a more nationalist and anti-American agenda. The reasons for this were differences in geopolitical interests and internal changes in Russia aimed at strengthening state control. First, it is necessary to recall the process of large-scale nationalization of major campaigns in energy, natural resources, industry and the military-industrial complex. Second, the expansion into the geopolitical boundaries of the USSR, including the Chechen wars, support for separatists in Georgia, Moldova and Central Asia, and the conflict over the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004. Third, the instrumentalisation of energy resources (natural gas, oil, valuable metals), which increasingly began to be used as a tool to achieve geopolitical goals and a manifestation of regional ambitions. That is, during this period, the Russian leadership formed an independent foreign policy, the goals and manifestations of which were voiced by Vladimir Putin during his speech at the Munich Security Forum. Richard Sakwa rightly points out that

in the new realism there was a much sharper recognition of the limits of Russian power, grounded above all in economic weakness. (Sakwa 2003: 210)

The third stage can be characterized by a toughening of rhetoric towards the US and Western European countries, as well as Russia's transition in its foreign policy to "hard power" principles, which include the use of military power and economic (in Russia's case, energy) resources to achieve its foreign policy goals. James Sherr perfectly illustrates how Russia manages to combine such tools to exert pressure not only on neighboring states, but also on international organizations and regional alliances, such as the European Union (Sherr 2013). We tend to believe that at this stage Russia's foreign policy is aimed at asserting itself as a "*challenger*" in relation to Western hegemony, primarily American hegemony. This idea is consonant with the concept of challengers, which was proposed by George Modelski (1987). According to his concept, challengers

are states that challenge the dominant world hegemon to change the existing order of things. Challengers seek to offer alternative leadership and challenge the existing hegemon, often by opposing the dominant economic, political and military structures.

We can see that such a “geopolitical challenge” is long-lasting both temporally and spatially. At this stage, Russia annexes Crimea (2014), begins military support for the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, including sending a military contingent, interferes in the US presidential election, and increases information pressure on European states with the subsequent strengthening of friendly political regimes, as in the case of Hungary or Serbia. That is, the use of military force, interference in regional conflicts, cyberattacks and information operations have become key tools in the arsenal of Russian foreign policy. In our opinion, this has become a catalyst for the strengthening of anti-American sentiments in Russia, which sees itself as an alternative to American hegemony in the Eurasian region, including, above all, Europe and Central Asia. Since the West, in its pursuit of expansion, has been unable to seriously consider Russia’s strategic interests and act prudently (Peng 2017: 269).

The fourth stage is characterized by Russia’s direct confrontation with the West, which includes open military action, tough rhetoric and confrontational steps in the international arena. This policy is aimed at defending Russian interests and spheres of influence, as well as countering Western expansion. While the previous stages were oriented more towards the regional space of geopolitical action, the fourth stage is oriented towards the global space. Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine should be seen as just one point of bifurcation, which was provoked by Russia and should not be limited exclusively to the European region. Firstly, Russia is increasingly turning its attention to the states of the Global South, which have long been marginalized in the context of American hegemony and are therefore inclined to seek an alternative center of power. Secondly, support for anti-American sentiments is reflected in the formation and financing of political elites in European states, support for military coups in Africa (Burkina Faso, Gabon, Gambia, Mali, Sudan, Chad). The same period also saw more dynamic interaction between Russia and the states of the Global South, primarily through international organizations and regional associations such as the SCO or BRICS. Although some researchers have also noted that the Russian-Ukrainian war is fueling the formation of two blocs in Africa that latently or openly support one of the parties (Moti 2023), which could have unexpected consequences for the region.

Researchers have noted that contemporary Russian anti-Americanism is rather reactionary in nature, as the Russian leadership attempts to portray the current geopolitical situation as a reaction to US actions (Budraitskis 2022). This also explains the growth of radical movements in Russia and the radicalization of the political elite that structures public discourse. It was during the Putin era that anti-American considerations among the political elite became more homogenous and focused (Rivera & Bryan 2019), which can be seen in conjunction with the authoritarianism of the political regime, the construction of personalized power and the construction of practices of “satrapization” of territory and resources (Zaporozhchenko 2023: 124). We see that the radicalization of Russian foreign policy is directly proportional to the strengthening of

anti-Americanism as a legitimate basis for aggression. The ideological justification of anti-Americanism in Russia is usually based on the ontological antagonism between Western liberal democracy and the Russian concept of sovereignty and national self-sufficiency (for example, the concept of “Russian World”, the concept of “sovereign democracy”, the concept of Eurasianism). Political justification serves as a tool for mobilizing the population and legitimizing the actions of the Russian authorities, primarily to justify the need for an aggressive foreign policy. Historical justification, as a rule, is used as a common denominator for ideology and politics. History is used by the Russian leadership not only to illustrate the historical confrontation and Russia’s exceptional civilizational mission in various political forms, but also to justify its special place in history. Therefore, combining ideological, political and historical contexts allows us to take a broader look at the persistent practices of Russian anti-Americanism.

3. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES: INTERPELLATING ORIENTALISM

In her time, Christina Klein connected the problematics of Orientalism with the processes that took place in the Asian region during the Cold War. A really important aspect of her work is that culture and politics are always intertwined in the process of shaping public opinion. This means that political and ideological factors are integral to the construction of social reality. Christina Klein emphasizes that the perceptions of Asia that were formed during the Cold War continue to influence American society (Klein 2003). On the other hand, the use of Orientalism’s conceptual and methodological possibilities is also reflected in attempts to connect Orientalism to the military context. One possible variant of this “symbiosis” is attempts to analyze the Orientalist views that shape Western perceptions of wars fought in Eastern regions of the world. This includes the use of visual culture, ethical and political factors, stereotypes and beliefs (Barkawi & Stanski 2013).

Such studies have led us to think about the possibility of using postcolonial theory in relation to the constitution of anti-Americanism in contemporary Russia. We proceed from the fact that Russia, which for a long time in its history has been an empire in various political-regime forms (Zaporozhchenko 2023), is by nature a peripheral empire (Lieven 2006). This means that the peripheral logic of constructing a political system depends on the need to construct an antagonistic image that would justify the need to become a new center. Just as new states in the post-imperial space constitute historical memory and find structures to legitimize their own existence in history (national heroes, national culture and literature, historical battles and others), the peripheral empire also seeks to use its history to provide justification for its own existence. Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) argues that postcolonial societies seek to “provincialize” Europe, that is, to revise hegemonic historical narratives in which Europe (or, more broadly, the West) has been central as the standard of civilizational progress. Russia, as a former empire on the periphery of the global system, also participates in the process of “provincialization” of the West, but with unique features: unlike classical post-colonial states, Russia was not an object of colonization, but acted as an empire itself, which now must challenge the global dominance of the West. This process involves not only political and economic

rivalry, but also a cultural and historical revision of Western dominance, which allows Russia to assert its “exceptionalism” and an alternative path of development.

The methodological framework of our article focuses on two complementary approaches, the understanding of which will help to identify more clearly the key features of anti-Americanism. The first approach is related to Orientalism, which consists in interpreting the West as a system of constructing the image of the “Other” in relation to the East and everything “*Eastern*”. First, we are talking about the processes of stereotyping, mythology and Westernization, which helps to justify the dominant power of the West and to constitute a hegemonic order. Edward Said writes that

orientalism was a rationalization of colonial rule is to ignore the extent to which colonial rule was justified in advance by orientalism, rather than after the fact. (Said 1978: 39)

That is, Orientalism, as a practice of rationalization of domination and subordination, is a particular discourse (broadly speaking, a political action) that produces, disseminates and controls knowledge about the Orient. Here, in our view, it is very important to realize that Orientalism does not simply reflect the reality of the Orient but creates a new political and cultural language to interpret the Orient. Alexander Macfie, for example, quite interestingly captures Edward Said’s idea that Orientalism serves as a point of contact between orthodoxies, where unequal West and East exist, where awareness of this fact spreads (Macfie 2000: 220).

Equally important are the institutionalization of Orientalism and the structures of representation of Orientalism’s discursive practices. Edward Said points out that Orientalism became an institutionalized practice involving universities, research centers, colonial administrations, media, visual culture, and other structures. The task of such institutions was to produce, disseminate, and control Orientalist knowledge, which was used to maintain a particular colonial discourse within the hegemonic order (Said 1978: 164). Aamir Mufti, for example, writes about the institutionalization of the education system in British India, which contributed to the reinforcement of British dominance as well as the creation of Orientalist practices of perceiving both the colonial administration and India’s own history (Mufti 2010). Equally important is also that “cultural explanations allow the West access to the Orient as informed, authoritative and powerful subjects” (Schirato 1994: 45). It is this thesis that carries with it the potential of structures to represent discursive practices and construct the “Other” social reality. Practice of representation enables the use of power and the system of power relations to create conditions to control images, knowledge, and thus social reality. Although such “opportunism” of Edward Said has been criticized by other scholars (e.g., Mellor 2004), he nevertheless also finds opportunities for a deeper comparative analysis of representations (e.g., Rossow 2004).

In other words, Edward Said proposes the thesis that the West creates and uses stereotypical representations of the East to justify its power and dominance. However, what is important for us is to understand the foundations of anti-Americanism, which can be conceptualized as a practice of Orientalism, only the object will be the West, not the East. Such a methodological approach has been suggested by Ian Buruma and Avishai

Margalit (2005) who proposes the term *Occidentalism* as the opposite of *Orientalism*. While Orientalism views the East through the lens of Western perception, Occidentalism is the way in which the East and other non-Western regions see and make sense of the West; this perception is often characterized by hostility to Western modernity, democracy and liberalism. Another researcher, James Carrier, suggests that occidentalism should be seen as a process in which non-Western societies create their own narratives about the West, often negative or critical. He shows how images of the West can be used to justify internal political struggles or to justify resistance to globalization and Western influence (Carrier 1995). In other words, across cultures, occidentalism manifests itself in the form of resistance to Western hegemony, which is perceived as suppressing or ignoring alternative forms of identity and subjectivity (Venn 2000).

Here and below we will make use of the key features of occidentalism, among which: (1) the West appears in occidentalism as a civilization that is opposed to and always in confrontation with other cultures; (2) occidentalism involves the idealization of traditional values that are opposed to Western individualism, secularism, and capitalism; and (3) occidentalism can be a tool to legitimize authoritarian regimes or radical movements that claim to protect their peoples from Western influence. We suggest that in this context occidentalism refers not only to the criticism and rejection of Western civilization, but also to the processes by which Eastern or other non-Western societies shape their collective images of the West, often hostile or stereotypical. And here it is important to clarify that occidentalism is presented as a reactionary process that emerges in response to Western dominance in the political, cultural and economic spheres, and is often formed as a form of resistance or protest against the globalization, modernization and imperialism with which Western countries are associated. And since occidentalism builds on Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, we will use key features of both approaches to maximize the research result.

Therefore, the main thesis that we propose, and which we will explore further, is that elements of occidentalism can be seen in Russian anti-Americanism, where the West (especially the US) is portrayed as a source of threat, decadence and immorality, a threat to traditional values and development. Just as the West used orientalism to construct an image of the East, Russia uses anti-Americanism to create an image of the enemy in the person of the US, which helps to consolidate domestic support and justify foreign policy. Such practices, which have ideological roots, are a reality of contemporary Russian foreign policy. Therefore, in order to "dissect" them more thoroughly, we suggest using Louis Althusser's concept of ideology to identify the mechanisms through which these images are created and used to maintain power and resist external pressure.

Louis Althusser's concept of ideology, perhaps, still remains ambiguous and, to a greater extent, provocative. However, its conceptual possibilities allow us to uncover the normative and value structures of the reproduction of social reality. A key feature and merit of Althusser can be considered to be the separation of the ideological and repressive apparatuses of the state, which are necessary both for constructing the social reality of society and for fixing hegemonic norms and rules. Louis Althusser points out that "ideology is not always taken seriously as an existing practice" (Althusser 1985: 167),

and therefore ideology is presented as “those individuals’ imaginary relation to the real relations in which they live” (Althusser 2014: 183). In order to try and understand ideology, not in the context of an absent history, but in the context of a *militant* reality, Louis Althusser introduces the category of apparatuses of the state to show how these apparatuses function to enforce the dominant ideology, ensuring the reproduction of the conditions necessary for capitalism to flourish. The ideological apparatuses of the state are structures and organizations at various social levels that shape people’s beliefs and behavior according to the needs of the political system. Ideological apparatuses include the education system, media and mass media, religion and church, the institution of the family, culture and politics.

The other side of the reproduction of ideology is the repressive apparatuses of the state, to which the author includes the police, prosecutor’s office, army, judicial system, repressive-punitive structures, political institutions and structures of the state as a whole. In other words, repressive apparatuses are structures that ensure the functioning of the state through suppression, coercion and the use of force. Unlike the ideological apparatuses of the state, which function mainly through ideology (in other words, persuasion), repressive apparatuses ensure the implementation of state decisions through coercion and violence. These structures are centralized and function as a unit, maintaining order and control through force (Althusser 2014: 42). Therefore, the ideological and repressive apparatuses of the state work together to create false and flexible combinations of repression and ideologization of being. The latter, among other things, is necessary for the reproduction of social order and the maintenance of permanent social conflict.

However, it is much more important to understand not only how and in what way the ideological justification of social order is constituted, but how the various ideological apparatuses ensure the process of interpellation, that is, the creation of subjectivity. Interpellation takes place through a challenge or appeal directed at a person who recognizes himself in this appeal and thus becomes the subject of ideology. The process of interpellation consists of three key ideological acts (Althusser 2014: 191):

- (1) *hailing* individuals to include them in the structure of social action, such as when an individual shouts something to another individual and thus encourages them to act;
- (2) *transforming* individuals into subjects through the process of invocation, as the individual who instinctively or purposefully agrees to respond involves himself or herself in the process of invocation;
- (3) *immanence of* ideology, which exists through proclamations and appeals to individuals, and thus integrates individuals into a common ideological field.

We see that in the context of contemporary Russia, anti-Americanism is often used as a tool of state ideology to form and support national identity and political legitimacy. Within Russian ideology, anti-Americanism is used to form an image of an “external enemy” that mobilizes society around certain values and ideas. State ideological apparatuses such as state media, the education system, religion and political institutions

actively promote anti-American rhetoric that serves as a means of mobilizing public opinion. Here, a research optic that bridges Orientalism and state ideological apparatuses to identify key features of Russian anti-Americanism seems quite interesting. We propose to consider the ideological apparatuses of the state in the context of Russian anti-Americanism as a mechanism for using Orientalist representations of the “Other World” to interpellated the citizens of their state. That is, orientalist stereotypes about the United States, for example, are used as antagonistic structures of confrontation between tradition and innovation, liberalism and traditionalism, secularism and religiosity, materialism and postmaterialism.

On the other hand, we see the active use of historical memory and memory politics, especially in the context of the Second World War, the history of the Romanov Russian Empire or the Soviet Union. Here, Orientalism is a space of possibilities within which various factors of instrumentalization of historical memory, its nationalization, and ideological transformation are constructed. It is not so much a question of identifying new features as of using established narratives, such as American imperialism or “decaying Europe”, which are presented as barbaric and incapable subjects of global culture. This encourages greater use of information policy and media to actively oppose Western influence as it is shaped as dangerous and chaotic. The key task of Russian imperialism is to form sustainable structures for the reproduction of the civilizing mission of maintaining order, tradition, and power.

4. MANIFESTATIONS OF ANTI-AMERICANISM IN RUSSIAN POLITICS

Today, especially in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, anti-Americanism is widely used in Russian politics and media to shape public opinion and justify foreign policy decisions. Vladimir Putin’s speeches often include criticism of the United States, accusations of attempts to dominate and interfere in the affairs of other countries, and more. Such rhetoric resonates with Russian society, which is tired of economic hardship and looking for an external enemy. Back in 2014, Vladimir Putin spoke at the Valdai Forum, where he accused the United States of seeking global hegemony and violating international law. Today, in almost every speech, such accusations sound like targeted political rhetoric of the Russian authorities. The Russian media actively support this line by distorting information about the events in Ukraine and presenting them as part of a Western conspiracy against Russia. Russian state media actively support an anti-American agenda, covering international events considering the confrontation with the United States. This includes criticizing US foreign policy, military interventions and sanctions, as well as promoting an alternative view on global issues.

We see that Russian anti-Americanism is primarily used to create an image of the US as the “Other”, which helps Russian power structures to consolidate internal unity and mobilize society to fight an external threat. An important feature of this “Other” is a paradoxical interpretation where the US as a global hegemon is perceived as a threat to Russia; but the US as a global brand (economic, financial, productive, and cultural) is still recognized. In the context of anti-Americanism, Russia presents the US as aggressive, expansionist and culturally alien, especially in the context of the spread of liberal values

that are opposed to the traditional values of Russian society. To achieve this goal and reproduce the necessary policies, Russian power structures use the tools of stereotyping and mythologization, i.e. the use of images, symbols and meanings in media and political rhetoric. They also use cultural identification, in which anti-Americanism is necessary for the construction of cultural identity and, more importantly, political identity. In Russia, anti-Americanism is often linked to Orthodox and Slavic values that are opposed to Western liberal ideas.

The core of Russian anti-Americanism, in our view, is a rhetoric of resistance, which Edward Said defined through the formation of sets of representations of the Orient as “Other” and “exotic” to instrumentalize these representations for the reproduction of power and control. The optics of occidentalism that we propose to use demonstrates the use of anti-Americanism as a rhetoric of resistance in contemporary Russia. This means that new political and social discourses are established regarding American hegemony, American imperialism or American neo-colonialism. In this case, the rhetoric of resistance will not only be directed against Americanization, but also for the constitution of national sovereignty and civilizational (historical) identity.

Firstly, the anti-colonial rhetoric of contemporary Russia¹ is increasingly used to build geopolitical communication with the states of the “Global South”. The Russian authorities appeal to the colonial past of such states, pushing them to find another alternative to American hegemony. The situation with military coups in Africa, as well as increased actions in Latin America, demonstrates that Russia uses colonial rhetoric to fix the gap between the center (the US and its allies) – and the periphery (post-colonial states). Second, Russia actively uses history as a tool to reproduce anti-American rhetoric. We propose considering the instrumentalisation of historical memory as a process of using historical events, symbols and narratives to achieve political goals and shape public opinion. Examples of the instrumentalisation of historical memory are:

- (1) *Revision of historical events* – rethinking and reinterpreting the role of the Soviet Union in international politics or Stalin’s policies of industrialization and collectivization, including the justification or exaltation of specific historical events or personalities. This can also include the revival of military parades and “Victory Day” celebrations².
- (2) *Stigmatization of dissenters and construction of subalterns* – historical individuals or social groups that opposed the Soviet Union or oppose the Russian-Ukrainian war are stigmatized and blamed and excluded from

¹ You can read more about the anti-colonial rhetoric of modern Russia in the work of Professor Edyta Bojanowska “*Putin’s Anti-Colonial Agenda?*”. The author claims that Putin uses this rhetoric as a tool to justify aggression against Ukraine and to attract the countries of the “Global South” to his side. The article emphasizes the hypocrisy of the Russian position, as Russia itself has an imperialist past and present, which is not mentioned in official propaganda.

² Marlène Laruelle, in her work “*Russia’s Ideological Construction in the Context of the War in Ukraine*”, views “Victory Day” as a central event in the Russian calendar, used to strengthen patriotic feelings and justify current political actions. Whereas Russian history is interpreted through the prism of heroic events such as the Great Patriotic War, which allows the Kremlin to legitimize its power and strengthen national unity, especially in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

social discourse and politics. This fits into the concept of subalterns, in which social groups emerge that are deprived of their own voice and representation in the power structure, for example, the voices of mothers whose children are at war or of civil society organizations that oppose the war are ignored.

- (3) *Appeal to historical fact* – the annexation of Crimea in 2014 was justified by the Russian authorities as the return of Russian territories that were unjustly given to Ukraine. Such “territorial revisionism” is not only a mechanism of expansion, but also a structure for maintaining political order (Pisciotta 2023), such as retaining power and creating favorable conditions for the reproduction of support by elite groups.
- (4) *“Defender of Peace”* – any empire always positions itself as “Defender of Peace” (Münkler 2007), where peace implies the political order that has been established. This means that the empire assumes the role of liberator and defender of territories or populations, such as the defense of the Russian-speaking population or the fight against the “fascist and Nazi Kiev regime”.

Third, Russian anti-Americanism policy is also invested in the system of building global alliances, for example, through regional or international organizations such as the SCO, BRICS or CSTO. The most obvious alliance that took shape during the Russian-Ukrainian war is the Moscow-Tehran-Beijing triangle. The attempt to form such an alliance suggests that Russia, as a Challenger, is unable to challenge US hegemony on its own and therefore needs allies. Russia and Iran are major exporters of oil and gas, which has attracted interest from China, whose economy needs energy resources to maintain its status as the “factory of the world”. Mutual trade and investment, especially in infrastructure projects and technology, have also been increasing in recent years. Equally important is co-operation on regional security issues in Central Asia and the Middle East, which are geostrategic mechanisms for maintaining confrontation with American influence in these regions and beyond. Although the seriousness of such a geostrategic alliance has been questioned by some scholars who point to symbolic steps to demonstrate the authenticity of such an alliance rather than coordinated global action (Grajewski 2022).

Next, we will examine the ideological state apparatuses that are used by the structures of power to reproduce anti-Americanism. The role of ideological state apparatuses cannot be underestimated, as they shape the perception of the world and create the social reality of society. Russian media (Russia 1, Channel One, Russia 24 and others), which are state-owned, regularly broadcast materials that form a negative image of the United States. Such programs emphasize aggressive US foreign policy, interference in the affairs of other countries, double standards, political or economic consequences of US hegemony. To the Russian media we should also add Internet resources, such as various channels and groups in social networks or websites that are engaged in covering the activities of the Russian authorities in a positive way and criticizing US activities. We can recall the interference of the Russian “bot factory” in the US presidential election, but

we can also speak about the active use of social media as a tool of propaganda and spreading disinformation (Kiforchuk 2023). No less interesting is the study that analyses the perception of the Russian-Ukrainian war in the context of its discussion by Russian citizens in Russian social networks. The authors conclude that the Russian military invasion of Ukraine was discussed mainly in relation to losses in the Russian army, and that allusions to World War II, including Russia's fight against Nazism and defense of the *civilized world*, were common (Urman & Makhortykh 2022). Equally interesting is also a study indicating that Russia's authoritarian and more competitive regime uses social media to construct strategic narratives in the Russian-Ukrainian war, including narratives of anti-Americanism (Ptaszek, Yuskiv & Khomych 2024).

The use of media and social networks is one of the ways of interpellation, i.e. the formation of citizens as subjects of anti-Americanism. Ideological interpellation in the context of Russian anti-Americanism embodies the process of forming public consciousness and political attitudes directed against the United States and the West as a whole. One of the key elements of ideological interpellation in this context is the creation and maintenance of the image of an external enemy, which is used to mobilize public opinion and justify domestic political and social decisions. Russian state propaganda actively reproduces this image through the media, political speeches and educational programs, emphasizing the dominant role of the US in global politics and its alleged anti-Russian aggression. We see military-patriotic education programs¹ being created in contemporary Russia from various militarized organizations and structures of the Russian armed forces.

The aim of such state initiatives is to build a legitimate and universally shared political discourse where Russia represents a stronghold of tradition and history that "external enemies" are trying to destroy. In this context, patriotic discourse is also being reinforced in Russian media and social networks, such as calls for patriotism and defense of the state, joining the armed forces, and ignoring American culture, goods and services. Although researchers have noted that the Russian state strategy of militarizing and strengthening patriotism among young people has faced some pushback, it has employed all possible ideological and repressive tools to achieve societal consolidation against external threats (Pynnöniemi 2021).

If we use the idea of Antoni Gramsci (1971) that any hegemony is always built on an ideological foundation, then, consequently, any ideological mechanisms and tools will be used with the perspective of achieving hegemony, i.e. the consent of citizens to the established order of things. For contemporary Russia, hegemony and consensus are integral characteristics of the resilience of the political system and Vladimir Putin's regime. Achieving a stable hegemonic order within Russia itself is achieved through both

¹ Jennifer Mathers and Allyson Edwards note that military-patriotic education in Russia occupies a special place, since it is aimed at forming a "united front" that should justify and support the actions of the Russian government. This initiative is seen as part of a broader strategy to strengthen national identity and support political stability in the face of current geopolitical tensions, especially in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. You can read the article in more detail at the following link: <https://theconversation.com/russia-programme-of-patriotic-education-aims-to-create-next-generation-of-putin-faithful-181511>

the use of occidentalism and other mechanisms, such as the mobilization of public opinion. The Russian authorities actively use anti-American sentiments to divert attention from domestic problems and consolidate society around a common enemy – the United States. Efe Tokdemir has rightly observed that anti-Americanism tends to serve as a tool of political mobilization and consolidation to allow governments to divert attention from domestic problems and rally the population against a common external enemy (Tokdemir 2017). In such a context, anti-Americanism is often used by the Russian authorities to legitimize authoritarian methods of governance and support the current political regime. Putin's administration, for example, presents itself as 100 percent Russian and anti-Western, which strengthens its position among nationalist-minded citizens.

Russia also uses anti-Americanism as part of its foreign policy strategy to strengthen its influence in the world, as active opposition to the U.S. in the international arena helps it build alternative alliances and expand its geopolitical interests. The last factor we highlight concerns active control over the information space within Russia itself and interference in the information spaces of other states. The purpose of such practices is quite simple: propaganda and disinformation are aimed at strengthening the negative perception of the US and its policies not only inside Russia, but also outside it, primarily in European states, as well as in the states of the "Global South". Some authors note a paradoxical situation where Russia's balance of power and ambitions are not identical, so it tries to maintain regional hegemony by seeking allies in other regions, while it needs not to lose hegemony at home (Russo 2018).

The last key aspect we will examine concerns the repressive state apparatuses that Russia uses to reproduce the political order and mark its legitimacy. Anti-Americanism, as an ideology and policy, justifies repressive measures against domestic opponents or internal threats that undermine the established order. Repressive apparatuses such as police, prosecutors, authorities, courts, and the military use anti-Americanism to identify internal threats, like the McCarthyism policies in the United States in the second half of the 20th century. Examples of such repressive measures include the Foreign Agents Act, Navalny's Case, social media censorship, detention of social activists, military-patriotic education, marginalization of specific social groups, and others. Censorship in social media is justified by the need to control information and block access to resources that disseminate information that negatively reflects power or supports American values (sovereign internet). Navalny's case can be positioned as a construct of a "traitor to the Motherland" who has been accused of collaborating with Western intelligence services and betraying national interests. Open protest against the Russian-Ukrainian war, for example, entails new forms of "ostracism" (culture of cancellation), as happened with Russian cultural industry representatives who spoke out against the war.

In other words, Russian state media systematically support a negative perception of American foreign policy, emphasizing its aggressive aspects and double standards. This contributes not only to mobilizing public opinion inside the country, but also strengthens the legitimacy of the authoritarian regime, showing it as a defender of national interests against external threats. Anti-Americanism is used to form alternative alliances and

strengthen Russia's geopolitical position in the international arena. Opposition to the United States allows Russia to play the role of a key geopolitical actor, looking for allies among countries that share anti-American sentiments or are concerned about US dominance. In order to illustrate our proposed matrix for analyzing occidentalism, we offer the following table.

Table 1. Analytical matrix for studying manifestations of Russian anti-Americanism

Creating an image of the "Other"	Stereotyping and mythologization	In the Russian media, the US is often portrayed as an aggressive imperialist seeking world domination.
	Cultural identification	Traditionalism is opposed to liberalism; materialism is opposed to post-materialism.
The rhetoric of resistance	Anti-colonial rhetoric	Statements by Russian leaders about the need to resist American imperialism.
	Instrumentalization of historical memory	A look back at the Soviet era and the struggle against American influence, including the victory in World War II.
	Regional and global alliances	Russia's strategic co-operation with China and Iran on the basis of common anti-American positions.
Ideological reproduction	Ideological apparatuses of the state	Examining curricula and school textbooks for anti-American rhetoric
	Ideological interpellation	Calls in the Russian media for patriotism and defense of the Motherland from Western influence.
	Hegemony and consensus	Analysis of political campaigns where anti-American rhetoric is used to mobilize support
Repressive measures	Repressive apparatuses of the state	Examples of repression against activists accused of pro-American sympathies.
	Legitimization of repression	Justification of arrests and bans on opposition parties and organizations.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Researchers of anti-Americanism argue that in many countries, anti-Americanism serves as a useful political tool for leaders to deflect criticism and mobilize support by positioning the United States as a convenient scapegoat for domestic problems (Rubin & Rubin 2004). Contemporary Russia's use of anti-Americanism only confirms this thesis, as

Russian anti-Americanism is a component of the political regime and its legitimization practices. The Russian-Ukrainian war, as one of the aggressive manifestations of such Russian policy, demonstrates the instrumental nature of anti-Americanism. Anti-Americanism is used by the Russian government to strengthen its legitimacy inside the country, as well as to promote an alternative global order in the system of international relations. Presenting the US as an external enemy and alien “Other” performs the function of diverting public attention from domestic problems and focuses on strengthening internal unity and national identity, which is based on Russia’s historical memory, culture and civilizational mission in the region and the world. Therefore, the Russian-Ukrainian war should be seen not only as a local event, which it could be, but as a global one, which it is. Here we will reiterate that the Russian-Ukrainian war is used by Russia as a fight against American hegemony and not to take into account the interests and ambitions of the Russian leadership. Consequently, the war helps both to strengthen anti-American rhetoric and to justify Russia’s foreign policy and geopolitical actions.

The use of Louis Althusser’s concept of ideology demonstrates how anti-Americanism is interpellated into the consciousness of citizens through various ideological apparatuses of the state, including media, social networks, education, culture, and religion. This contributes to the mass dissemination of anti-American sentiment and its entrenchment in the public consciousness. Whereas the application of Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism allows us to understand how anti-Americanism is shaped through the creation of a distorted image of the US as an enemy. Such practices aim to reinforce nationalist, radicalized and traditionalist sentiments; to support aggressive foreign policy; and to articulate hostile rhetoric. Occidentalism, which is a characteristic feature of contemporary Russian geopolitical actions, can serve as a conceptual matrix to explain the actions of the Russian leadership. However, further and more thorough research into this issue may reveal other scenarios and options for the ideological justification of Russian hegemonic ambitions.

One such option could be the study of anti-Americanism in conjunction with the concepts and theories of “Russian World”, Eurasianism or “Rashism.” As for the functional component of the Russian leadership’s use of anti-Americanism, it also manifests itself in foreign policy. Russia, which is trying to rethink and reformat the global order, offers an alternative to various international actors that are either excluded from the American hegemonic order or ignored by the United States. Such actors include, above all, China, Iran, and the states of the “Global South”. Increased cooperation with such states, the formation of situational or permanent alliances, support for military coups, and energy policy are mechanisms through which Russia accumulates anti-American sentiment in the world. Since both Russia’s geopolitical and military-industrial positions are not sufficient, it is forced to compile a global anti-American discourse, bringing civilizational and ideological character to it.

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EVOLUTION OF RUSSIAN ANTI-AMERICANISM: ORIGIN, STAGES OF FORMATION AND CONSEQUENCES

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DOI: 10.36169/2227-6068.2024.02.00003

Abstract. *The article examines the evolution of Russian anti-Americanism, a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has influenced international politics and the relations between Russia and the United States. The study begins with an analysis of the historical roots of this phenomenon, tracing back to the imperial era when ideas of opposition to the West became a foundational element of Russian political culture. In the Soviet era, anti-Americanism gained official status and was instrumentalized as part of the ideological struggle against the capitalist system. The article outlines the main stages in the development of Russian anti-Americanism, from its early manifestations in the 19th century to its extensive spread in the 20th century, including a sharp rise in the post-Soviet period. During this period, anti-Americanism transformed: from an ideological confrontation, it became part of state policy, adopting new forms that reflect the interests of the contemporary Russian political regime. The authors note that Russians' foreign policy views are a significant component in shaping and implementing the state's policy on the global stage. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to examine the evolution of the perception of the United States in Russian public opinion. A series of events in the second decade of the 21st century intensified the confrontation between Russia and the United States, significantly impacting public opinion. Following the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, anti-Americanism within Russia acquired a stable character. As demonstrated in the study, the consequences of Russian anti-Americanism have both domestic and foreign policy dimensions. Domestically, anti-American rhetoric is used to consolidate society around the authorities, decrease trust in Western democracies, and justify repressive measures. On the international stage, anti-Americanism increases tensions in relations with Western countries, fosters the formation of antagonistic coalitions, and escalates conflicts.*

Keywords: anti-Americanism, propaganda, USA, Russia

Submitted: 16 July 2024; **accepted:** 05 November 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

When starting a study devoted to anti-Americanism in Russia, any researcher faces the problem that anti-Americanism as a phenomenon does not have an established interpretation. In the Russian Federation, anti-Americanism often is related to radical groups or movements that protest against the “Americanization” of their state. Quite frequently, anti-Americanism is perceived in Russia as a common manifestation of xenophobia, simply focused on one single state. However, it is highly questionable to what extent this interpretation can explain how ordinary xenophobia could develop in all social strata on such a large scale.

The popularity of studies and publications on the topic of anti-Americanism in Russia has been growing over recent decades, especially amid the worsening relations with the United States and Western countries in general. In academic, journalistic, and media circles, anti-Americanism as a research subject receives particular attention, as it helps to better understand Russia’s domestic politics, public sentiments, and cultural stereotypes. The reasons behind the rising popularity of such works are linked to the relevance of this topic in political, social, and media contexts. In this study, we take Paul Hollander’s concept of anti-Americanism as a basis: anti-Americanism is a set of ideas and actions directed against the social, political, and other systems that have developed in the United States (Hollander 1995).

The study aims to analyze the evolution of Russian anti-Americanism, identifying its origins, stages of formation, “ideological” components, and consequences. The foundation of anti-Americanism in Russia has a complex structure shaped by historical, political, ideological, and cultural factors that have deepened over decades. This phenomenon did not emerge suddenly but rather developed gradually under the influence of the Soviet past, political competition between the two superpowers, and ideological opposition that began during the Cold War era.

Anti-Americanism in Russia occupies a central place in the country’s general negative attitude towards the West, a sentiment with deep historical roots that has developed over centuries. This phenomenon became especially pronounced in the post-Soviet period when the United States and its allies appeared to the Russian political elite as the primary existential enemy, threatening the stability and independence of the nation, according to Russian leaders. This essay examines the interdependence of Russian anti-Americanism with antagonism toward the West as a whole, its causes, and its impact on international relations.

Historically, the opposition between Russia and the West began in the imperial period when the growing influence of European powers prompted Russian rulers to promote the idea of a “unique path” for Russia, distinct from the Western model. This idea gained popularity throughout the 19th century and found its most radical expression in the 20th century, during the Soviet Union’s existence. The USSR positioned itself as an alternative to the capitalist West, and the United States became the embodiment of ideological opposition. Anti-American rhetoric became part of Soviet policy, cultivated to sustain ideological conflict with the “Western world”.

After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Russian-Western relations had an opportunity for improvement. Still, the Russian elite began perceiving the West's active influence in Eastern Europe and former Soviet republics as a threat. NATO expansion, support for democratic movements in the post-Soviet states, and sanctions against Russia in response to its policies became catalysts for a new stage of antagonism. In this period, anti-Americanism again became a central element of state rhetoric, emphasizing the "threat" posed by the U.S. as the leader of the Western world. This perception of the U.S. became closely intertwined with a negative view of the West as a whole.

This negative attitude is reinforced by mass media and official propaganda, where the U.S. is depicted as the source of "destructive" democratic ideas that, in the view of Russian authorities, undermine national values and sovereignty. Russian anti-Americanism extends across a broad spectrum of Western culture and politics, from the rejection of liberal values to the refusal of joint efforts in security. Thus, for Russia, the U.S. has become not merely a political rival but a symbol of the entire West, representing an "existential threat".

The consequences of this stance extend far beyond bilateral relations between Russia and the U.S. Russian anti-Americanism affects domestic politics, used to consolidate society, lower trust in democratic values, and justify repressive measures. In foreign policy, it leads to support for countries and regimes that oppose the West and the formation of alliances that challenge Western norms and the international order. Thus, Russian anti-Americanism is only part of a deeper trend-hostility towards Western models of society and values. As the analysis shows, anti-Americanism in Russia is inseparably linked with a general anti-Western approach, enabling Russian authorities to strengthen internal control and advance their political ideology.

Russia has always had a highly developed identity based on the "us" versus "them" opposition. It should be noted that today, in the context of globalization, identity considerations are becoming more relevant, with studies of national identity gaining particular importance. The opposition between Russia and the United States (a state that plays the role of an *enemy* rather than just a significant *Other* for Russia's national identity) is now actively included in Russians' identification strategies. The stereotypes of the mass consciousness, which have a long historical origin, are at work here. Anti-Americanism in Russia has deep roots dating back to the Cold War. The rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union was the foundation of a bipolar world order in which each state saw the other as its primary ideological adversary. During that time, anti-American rhetoric was firmly embedded in Soviet propaganda, portraying the U.S. as an aggressive, imperialist opponent. This image helped mobilize Soviet society and emphasize unity against a "common enemy". Even after the Soviet Union's dissolution, these views persisted in the minds of many, forming a foundation for contemporary anti-American sentiments.

The Russian state actively promotes the ideology of "sovereign democracy", positioning it in opposition to the Western liberal model. This ideology asserts that Russia has its own "unique path", distinct from Western standards and values. The U.S., as the primary representative of the Western world, is portrayed as a negative example,

reinforcing the notion that the Western model of development is foreign and potentially dangerous for Russia. Ideological anti-Americanism is also used to justify authoritarian measures, which Russian authorities frame as “necessary for preserving sovereignty”.

2. ORIGINS OF CURRENT RUSSIAN ANTI-AMERICANISM

Due to historical and geopolitical circumstances, the image of the United States occupies an essential place in Russian national identity; like Europe, the United States is considered the most important “other” in Russia. That is why, in recent years, perceptions of the American political system, social order, norms and values, and behavioral patterns, including the state's achievements and failures have been increasingly compared to Russian realities. One of the consequences of the importance of the United States for the national identity of Russians is the phenomenon of anti-Americanism. Anti-Americanism has become an important political tool in modern Russia. Amid deteriorating relations with the West, particularly following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the imposition of economic sanctions, anti-American rhetoric helps unite the public around the idea of defending national interests. Additionally, criticism of the U.S. in domestic policy serves to divert attention from internal issues such as corruption, economic difficulties, and declining living standards. The U.S. is frequently accused of interfering in Russia's internal affairs, reinforcing the image of America as an external enemy.

First attitudes towards the USA appeared in the 18th – 19th centuries. Russia viewed the creation of the United States with some caution, although neutrally, as America was geographically and politically distant. The United States had no direct influence on Russian politics or economy, so official contact with the new state remained limited. The Russian Empire focused more on European powers and its territorial interests, particularly in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus.

The Russian Empire, being an absolute monarchy, viewed republican ideas and democratic values, represented by the United States, with suspicion. After the American Revolution, the ideas of republicanism and liberty began to spread worldwide, which was seen as a potential threat to monarchic regimes, including Russia. There was growing unease among the Russian ruling circles about the United States, which could serve as an example for radical elements within the empire. However, ideas inspired by the American Revolution emerged among the Russian intelligentsia and nobility. Although direct sympathy for America was not widespread, the ideas of liberty and human rights began to penetrate intellectual circles in Russia, creating tension between traditional monarchic values and liberal ideas.

Russia and the United States were formally on the same side of the barricades in both World Wars. Until the beginning of the Cold War, attitudes toward America were generally interested and friendly. The USSR used American equipment, and specialists were constantly exchanged. The cooling in relations came with the beginning of the Cold War, when instead of the main enemy number 1, the Germans, myths appeared about the “CIA hand”. During the Soviet era, this confrontation reached its peak. There was, for example, a myth that the USSR lived in a hostile environment of countries that were only

seeking to push for the fall of the communist regime and then the plundering of the state. However, political anti-Americanism had nothing to do with the so-called “everyday” anti-Americanism because ordinary Soviet citizens, living in isolation, could only express anti-American sentiments in statements such as: “Thank you that we were not born in slave America” or others. It is quite natural that after the collapse of the USSR, despite the transition to the “Western” model of development, dislike of the United States could well have persisted and become the basis for modern anti-Americanism.

Before tracing the evolution of Russian anti-Americanism, it is necessary to understand the nature of this phenomenon and its types which can help to explain its origin. In its most general form, anti-Americanism can be understood as a complex phenomenon that manifests itself in the expression of negative feelings towards the United States – its policies, norms, values, symbols, as well as towards Americans themselves. The reasons for the emergence and manifestation of anti-American sentiment in each state can be completely different: they include, for example, nationalism, anti-Western sentiment, anti-capitalism, fear of nuclear war, and much more. According to another point of view, hostility toward the United States may originate from two sources. First, the world domination of the United States in the twentieth century (the US victory in the Cold War, the widespread use of the English language, and the irresistible desire of millions worldwide to move to America) requires an explanation. Second, all those who attribute negative characteristics and traits to Americans have a negative attitude toward the American way of life, culture, and politics. They explicitly or implicitly oppose the United States with their qualities, including national peculiarities. In other words, using hatred of America can be considered one of the most effective and easiest ways to maintain national unity.

There are two types of anti-Americanism. The hypotheses assume the heterogeneity of anti-American attitudes. The classical division of anti-Americanism into “irrational” and “rational” belongs to the American researcher Paul Hollander (1995). The meaning of this division is clear: while in the first case, it refers to hostility to everything connected with America in one way or another, in the second instance, it refers to disagreement with the public policy of the US government or criticism of some aspects of American society, which may be completely justified. Another interpretation is related to the alleged roots of the two types of anti-Americanism: while some psychological reactions can cause irrational anti-Americanism, rational anti-Americanism should be interpreted as a political position.

The theories of the origin of anti-Americanism in Russia offer various approaches to analyzing this phenomenon, and many authors examine it from different perspectives. One of the main theories is the ideological theory, which emphasizes the contrast between Western liberal ideas and Russia’s traditional authoritarian values. According to this theory, negative attitudes toward the United States arise from the opposition between Western liberalism and Russian sovereignty, supported by the ideology of “sovereign democracy”. This is confirmed by the research of Andrey Zorin, who notes that anti-Americanism arose as part of Russia’s geopolitical strategy aimed at rejecting Western values, noting:

...the past was intended to replace a dangerous and uncertain future for the empire, and Russian history, with its rooted institutions of Orthodoxy and autocracy, turned out to be the only repository of nationality and the last alternative to Europeanization. (Зорин 2001: 372)

The historical-political theory focuses on how anti-Americanism resulted from historical events, particularly the Cold War. After this period, many Soviet stereotypes and perceptions of the United States remained in the collective consciousness, even after the collapse of the USSR (Гольд 2011: 106). The cultural theory emphasizes how media and propaganda shaped perceptions of the U.S. as an aggressive, imperialist state, especially during the Soviet era (Birnbaum 2015).

The socio-psychological theory explains anti-Americanism as part of the need for national self-esteem. After the collapse of the USSR, Russia sought new ways to support national identity and blaming the U.S. for all its troubles became one of the tools for restoring national pride. Finally, the media and propaganda theory points to how the media in Russia actively contributes to the creation of a negative image of the United States. Igor Bunin has studied the role of the media in disseminating anti-American rhetoric, which has become an important tool for supporting nationalist and patriotic sentiments in society. According to his observation, during political crises and social instability, the media often use the image of the United States as an external enemy to strengthen internal unity (Бунин 2009). These theories complement each other and help explain why anti-Americanism has become an important part of Russian politics and culture, supporting a negative image of the United States in society and political discourse in Russia.

Among the many theories explaining the origin of anti-Americanism in Russia, two are most popular: *situational* and *instrumental*. The situational and instrumental theories of the origin of anti-Americanism are generally not associated with a specific author, as they represent a general approach to analyzing how foreign policy and social events can influence public attitudes towards the United States. However, this approach is used in the works of many scholars who analyze the dynamics of Russian anti-Americanism in response to certain historical situations and international conflicts. According to the situational theory, the rise of anti-Americanism in Russia is temporary and is related to the current state of relations and political power, which has not changed in Russia for more than 20 years (Sokolov et al. 2018).

In this context, this approach is often applied in the works of Alexander Dugin, who studies the dynamics of changes in Russia's foreign relations with the United States, particularly in the context of geopolitical crises (Дугин 1997: 210). Data from mass polls support the situational theory, but the surge in anti-American sentiment among the elites occurred even before the events experts viewed as catalysts for anti-Americanism. For example, after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, anti-Americanism became an important tool for mobilizing support for the government and legitimizing foreign policy. This phenomenon was analyzed in the works of Tatyana Ryabova (Рябова 2014) and Yuri Levada (Левада 2008), who note that anti-American rhetoric in Russia is used to

strengthen national identity and increase support for the political regime through the image of the United States as the main enemy.

Proponents of the instrumental theory believe hostility to the United States was artificially constructed by powerful groups (for example, political elites, government structures, the military, or business circles that have influence over Russia's domestic and foreign policies) to achieve competitive advantages in the electoral struggle, and then used in the *modus operandi* of the "ideology of a besieged fortress" (Андреев 2011). The consolidation of the authoritarian regime was ensured by the need to counter the external threat associated with the aggressive imperialist and allegedly Russophobic actions of the United States. Empirical evidence is available to support this theory. Let's compare the dynamics of changes in the establishment's attitudes and the masses toward the United States. The growth of anti-Americanism among the elites is outpacing the corresponding trend among the general population (Haass 2008). Anti-Americanism in Russia is likely broadcast from above, and state propaganda is used to spread

Anti-Americanism in Russia has deep roots that trace back to the Soviet era, and it largely stems from Soviet anti-Americanism, retaining many common features in its development. Despite changes in the political landscape of the state following the collapse of the USSR, the core principles and mechanisms of anti-American rhetoric have not only been preserved but have also undergone transformations, responding to the new realities of post-Soviet Russia (Birnbaum 2015).

Considering the peculiarities of Russian anti-Americanism, it is worth mentioning that anti-Americanism in Russia is rather for domestic use and not directed at Americans themselves. A negative image of the United States in the context of Russian realities is necessary to maintain a positive collective identity, as justifying the superiority of "our own" over "others" leads to the consolidation of the nation and the strengthening of national identity.

Significantly, in addition to the internal needs of national identity, contemporary Russian anti-Americanism is largely political and situational. The instability and ambiguity of relations between Russia and the United States, the divergence of interests between Russia and America in multiple aspects of international politics, or the Russian society's rejection of American foreign policy in general or only its individual manifestations cause hostility toward the United States. In addition, the events of recent years have shown that in modern Russia, anti-American discourse can also become a factor in domestic politics and be used quite successfully for political mobilization by various political forces (Бессонова 2019).

As for the origins of modern anti-Americanism, there are several different points of view. Some see its origins in the growing expansionist sentiments of the Russian elite. The most radical supporters of this position reduce everything to the imperial ambitions of the Russian president. Another group of analysts points to Russia's role in the escalation of the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the US and NATO's response to the Kremlin's external aggression (Keohane & Katzenstein 2006). These positions differ not only in terms of "who is to blame" but also in terms of "what to do": blame for the conflict

automatically determines the content of the parties' mutual claims and is, therefore, a key aspect of developing a strategy for de-escalating tensions.

A historical retrospective reveals the evolution of Russian anti-Americanism best. It is worth noting that Russian-American relations until the first half of the twentieth century were characterized as friendly and partnership and did not have a pronounced anti-Russian or anti-American orientation. The first official bilateral treaty between the Russian Empire and the North American United States, the Russian-American Convention on Friendly Relations, Commerce, Navigation, and Fishing, was signed in 1824. The convention guaranteed both countries equal rights to fishing and shipping in the Pacific Ocean and regulated the rules of trade between Russian sailors and merchants and the local population of the Northwest coast of America (Shlapentokh 2011: 877). Then, in 1832, the parties signed the "Russian-American Treaty of Commerce and Navigation," which updated and significantly expanded the provisions of the previous convention and became the basis for the stable and sustainable development of Russian-American relations.

In the USSR, official propaganda did not form hatred of the American people in the minds of the Soviet people, separating them from the reactionary high political circles of the United States. In the 1930s, Stalin called for a combination of Soviet scale and American energy, enterprise, and ingenuity.

For the first time, anti-American rhetoric was used as a tool of political propaganda by the USSR at the beginning of the Cold War. On the one hand, anti-Americanism was manifested through the prism of ideological and political rivalry between the two main and only poles of the international system (O'Connor 2004: 79). The rivalry meant a systematic rejection by each side of an alternative way of organizing the social, economic, and political aspects of life within its regional bloc and the entire world order. In other words, the "us vs. them" dichotomy was followed by the rejection of the American political system, the American values of individual freedom and democracy, and the American ideal of a market economy. On the other hand, anti-Americanism meant that Soviet citizens rejected the value gap between the "Soviet idea" based on collectivism and the radically opposite "American dream" with its individualism and the desire for self-improvement.

It is important to emphasize that this value gap between the countries was not a constant value: it narrowed or widened depending on the internal or external political course of each party. For example, the so-called "détente" of Soviet-American relations in the 1960s and early 1970s was based on the idea of a developed industrial society and the coincidence of the national interests of both countries in maintaining international stability.

At the end of the 1980s, a song by the band Nautilus Pompilius with the lyrics: "Farewell America, where I have never been". The United States remained an unattainable dream for most Soviet people. During the 1990s, Russia saw an evolution in public attitudes toward the United States. After the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and the declaration of Russia's independence, it seemed that anti-Americanism would gradually fade, as Russia embarked on the path of transitional democracy and openness to the West.

However, despite attempts to establish better relations, anti-American sentiments did not disappear but rather adapted to the new conditions (Sokolov et al. 2018). For the most part, most Russians had a positive view of America. Anti-Americanism was latent and largely situational as a reaction to Washington's aggressive behavior on the world stage. At the same time, many Russian citizens perceived the United States' policy as aggressive but not directly directed against Russia.

Russians' attitudes toward the United States are reflected in public opinion polls regularly conducted by various sociological services. It is important to note that this attitude is not static; it changes depending on the context of Russian-American relations and is also determined by the reaction of Russians to US foreign policy actions and domestic political changes in the state itself. It is worth noting that the trend toward anti-Americanism has been growing in Russian society rather chaotically. We will try to analyze the peak points when and because of which accidents anti-American sentiment among the Russian population intensified.

Between December 1998 and May 1999, the number of Russian citizens with a negative attitude toward America dropped by 35 percentage points to 32%. In December 1998, the United States and the United Kingdom carried out the "Desert Fox" military operation against Iraq, aimed at preventing the state from producing weapons of mass destruction. Russia opposed the campaign. However, just a year later, the perception of Americans by Russians returned to its previous level and even improved slightly (Krastev 2007: 15). In 1999, social surveys recorded a jump (from 10 to 54%) in the negative attitude of Russians toward the United States caused by the conflict in Kosovo (Петрова et al. 1999). However, already in September 2001, negative attitudes toward the United States dropped to 28% due to the terrorist attacks in New York (Walt 2011).

The second significant shift in public sentiment occurred in the spring of 2003, during the U.S. and allied invasion of Iraq, which led to the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. At that time, the number of people with a positive attitude towards American citizens dropped below 30%. It fell even lower – to less than 25% – in the summer of 2008 amid the armed conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Over 65% of respondents had a negative view of American citizens then. However, by May 2010, the situation had changed dramatically – 60% of those surveyed stated that they viewed the U.S. positively, while 27% held the opposite opinion (Левада Центр 2010).

The last and most violent surge of anti-Americanism in Russia began in 2014 (the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine, Russia's annexation of Crimea, Russia's incitement of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, and in 2022 – the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine). The U.S. government's support for Ukraine has led to strong state anti-American propaganda and an increase in anti-American sentiment among the Russian population. According to a survey conducted by the Levada Center, Russian dislike of the United States reached a historic high in May 2014: currently, 71% of Russians say they have a negative attitude towards America. In the early 1990s, fewer than 10% of Russian citizens expressed affection for the United States. Over the years, dissatisfaction with America's policies grew. However, with such a record-high figure of 71%, sociologists encountered this for the first time. "Anti-Americanism continues to rise, reaching a

historic high in May 2014: 71% of Russians rated their attitude as 'mostly bad' or 'very bad' (BBC news 2014).

3. THE EVOLUTION OF ANTI-AMERICANISM

If we trace the evolution of anti-Americanism after the collapse of the USSR, we can identify several stages:

1. The beginning of the 1990s: the attitude toward the United States as a possible ally. Most anti-Americanism researchers note that in the early 1990s, the United States was the unconditional role model and main reference point in foreign policy for most of the Russian population. From the standpoint of today, when criticism of American politics and the Western way of life is reaching global proportions, this seems incredible. According to the results of polls from 1990 to 1991, the United States aroused the greatest interest among people from all countries in the world. If asked which Western countries Russia should cooperate with first, most respondents gave an unconditional preference to the United States (74%) because America was perceived as the richest and most developed state in the West. During this short period, the United States served as a benchmark and was considered a reliable partner whose support could be counted on. If anyone was expected to help, it was primarily the United States (37%) (Cohen, Dale 2010).

In 1992, cooperation with the United States was a higher priority for Russian citizens than cooperation even with the CIS: 38% vs. 25%. In light of these figures, Boris Yeltsin's foreign policy aimed at cooperation with the United States seemed quite logical. However, in 1993, the priorities changed: the ratio was already 35% to 45% in favor of the CIS (Cohen, Dale 2010). The deepening economic crisis made it clear that Russia would not be able to reach the level of development of the United States shortly. Russians' admiration for the United States is giving way to disappointment.

It is worth noting that anti-Americanism in Russia in the early 1990s was marginal. The carriers of anti-Americanism were not the political elite and common citizens but intellectuals and politicians of the Soviet era, for whom confrontation with the United States was a natural state. Mass anti-Americanism was virtually impossible because, during this period, the mass consciousness of Russian citizens was open to the world and lived in hope for the best.

2. The middle 1990s marked a decline in Russian-American relations. Toward the middle of the 1990s, the image of the United States in the public mind gradually began to change. First of all, estimates of this state's role on the world stage are deteriorating, specific steps taken by America in the foreign policy arena are increasingly criticized, and discontent is accumulating. At the same time, the general attitude toward the United States remains positive, which, to some extent, concealed the transformations taking place in Russian public opinion. At this stage, it is not so much the attitude toward the state that is changing as the image of the United States and its content.

One of the first challenges to the positive attitude of Russians toward the United States was the American military campaign in Iraq in 1993. At that time, Russian public

opinion was divided as follows: one-third of the population was ready to support the US actions, but half was against them (with 26% in favor of “strongly condemning” the bombing) (Левада Центр 2000). It is difficult to say what prevailed then: rejection of the war or dissatisfaction with the fact that such decisions no longer take into account Russia's opinion.

However, from 1995 to 1996, most people continued to assess the United States' actions toward Russia as friendly. The United States was not yet perceived as an enemy; this view was held by no more than 7% of respondents – compared to the first place and 62% in 2012 (Левада Центр 2012). However, the United States was already on the general list of enemies, albeit only in sixth place after the “mafia”, “corrupt bureaucrats”, “Chechens”, and so on, and this state was no longer perceived as an ally.

3. The late 1990s: the crisis in Russian-American relations. The events of 1998-1999 were decisive in determining Russia's attitude toward the United States. Most often, researchers cite the NATO bombing of Kosovo as the main event that led to a sharp deterioration in Russian attitudes toward the United States. It is true, but only partially. In addition to the intervention of NATO forces in Yugoslavia, the two years since then have seen US military action in Iraq, the start of the second Chechen war, which has led to sharp criticism of Russia by the West, the US announcing its withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, and the first eastward expansion of NATO since the collapse of the USSR. Russian relations with America did not withstand such a severe test of strength.

In 1998, the global financial crisis erupted, affecting Russia as well. After the 1998 default, it became clear that the results of the first years of Russian capitalism were ineffective: production fell, prices soared and monopolists dictated their terms on the market, privatization, and democracy turned into uncontrolled corruption and freedom into arbitrariness. The Russian authorities, trying to justify their inability to overcome the crisis, chose the tactic of undermining the authority of the United States in Russian society. Thus, the anti-American agenda was formed in its modern sense. It was in the late 1990s that the government took control of the process of forming and spreading anti-American sentiment in Russian society, using a variety of propaganda methods. Playing on patriotic feelings and using foreign policy to maintain the legitimacy of the government will become a favorite technique of the next Russian president. All of the above allows us to conclude that by the time Putin came to the presidency in early 2000, the image of the United States had already acquired familiar shapes, but without the help of daily television propaganda, it would not have been possible to turn the United States into the main enemy of the Russian state and society.

4. At the beginning of the 2000s, the United States was the main rival. A new opportunity to change Russian-American relations arose after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. At that time, the tragic events shocked most of Russia's population. People perceived the cooperation between Putin and Bush as a sign of the revival of Russia's foreign policy role, and the “joint fight against international terrorism” was considered the main thing that brought the two countries closer together (51% of respondents in 2002) (Левада Центр 2002). However, Russia failed to build new relations with the United States and to gain recognition in the eyes of its Western partners and

prestige in the international arena, which could then be converted into voter support. This was probably the last chance for conflict-free relations with the West, and it was lost.

The next turning point in the emergence of anti-Americanism in Russia began in 2003-2004 when U.S. ground forces invaded Iraq, a series of “color revolutions” supported by the West and perceived by the Russian elite as a clear threat to Putin’s “regime”, and the second wave of NATO’s eastward expansion. It is worth noting that during Putin’s first term in office, he considered Russia’s accession to NATO, expecting special conditions of accession and Russia’s prominent place in the Alliance. However, the United States was not ready to grant Russia special conditions and did not want to see Russia in NATO overall. At the same time, the Russian leadership finally realized the futility of discussions about Russia’s accession to Euro-Atlantic security structures. As a result, Russia’s foreign policy gradually turned toward confrontation with the West and the United States, and along with it, Russian public opinion gradually drifted from cooperation to isolation and confrontation. Since then, national polls began to record a growing trend toward Russia’s alienation from the United States and NATO amid talk of its “special path”. Thus, if in 2002 half of the state’s population supported cooperation with the military bloc, and a quarter were against it, the situation reversed over the next ten years (Rasmussen 2014).

The “reset” of Russian-American relations initiated by D. Medvedev and B. Obama in 2009 did not result in a spiritual and ideological rapprochement between the two nations: it practically did not affect the mass political consciousness of Russian citizens. However, it was also the first time a negative attitude toward the European Union and Ukraine, whose leadership in the Russian-Georgian conflict took Georgia’s side, was recorded. Russia’s unilateral recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia revived the anti-American rhetoric of the Cold War. It indicated the prospect of new contradictions. The conflict in the Caucasus significantly affected Russia’s international reputation, which limited the sustainability of its partnership with the United States (Яневский 2011: 183).

At the same time, a characteristic feature of the experience of the collapse of the USSR is manifested: the denial of subjectivity to the former Soviet republics and the unwillingness to admit that the Western path of development may be more attractive to them than following the Russian course. This pattern can be seen in Georgia and especially in Ukraine.

Thus, it was in the 2000s that Russia moved from rhetoric to state policy in its anti-Americanism. The anti-American rhetoric of the Russian government was personally sanctioned by Vladimir Putin in his famous address to the Federal Assembly in May 2006. Although he did not explicitly name the United States, he said, “Comrade wolf knows who to eat – he eats and does not listen”, thereby positioning the U.S. as an enemy. Since then, anti-American rhetoric has become legalized in Russia (Medetsky 2006).

5. The rise of official anti-Americanism in Russia, which began in 2012, is connected to several key factors, both internal and external. One of the main reasons was the intensification of political relations between Russia and the United States, caused by several significant events. First, in 2012, the Magnitsky Act was passed in the United

States, imposing sanctions on Russian officials involved in human rights violations. This act provoked sharp discontent in the Kremlin, as it was seen as interference in Russia's internal affairs and an attempt by the U.S. to limit the state's sovereignty (Левада Центр 2013).

Second, after the 2012 presidential elections in Russia and Vladimir Putin's return to the presidency, a new phase of political repression began in the state. During this period, large-scale protests against the election results took place, with the West, particularly the U.S., expressing support for the opposition. The Kremlin used these events to create the image of the U.S. as an enemy that supports the opposition and seeks to destabilize the political situation in Russia. Another significant factor was the growing distrust of Western institutions, particularly after Russian media began actively spreading the idea that the U.S. supported "color revolutions" and sought to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries (Бессонова 2024: 305–306). This narrative was used to justify authoritarian policies and mobilize support from the population based on the confrontation with the West.

Moreover, in 2012, rhetoric about the threats posed by NATO intensified, seen as a strategic threat to Russia, as well as contradictions surrounding the conflict in Syria, where the U.S. actively supported the opposition, while Russia backed Bashar al-Assad's government. Thus, the rise of anti-Americanism in Russia in 2012 was linked to internal political processes, the Kremlin's desire to strengthen its power through an external enemy, and external political conflicts with the U.S., particularly in the context of sanctions, political support for the opposition, and international conflicts.

6. The annexation of Ukrainian Crimea (2014) and the confrontation in Russian-American relations. Long before the events of 2014, the majority of the Russian population had formed an image of the United States as the main threat to Russia's security, a global gendarme and puppeteer pulling the strings of regimes in Russia's neighboring countries and forcing them to pursue policies that are unfriendly to Russia. It is worth noting that official speeches by American leaders about the non-recognition of the quasi-referendums in Crimea and eastern Ukraine and the non-recognition of Crimea as part of any state other than Ukraine caused this escalation. It was then that the United States was declared enemy number 1 on all of Russia's central television channels, and it did not take long to convince public opinion of the correctness of this thesis, as society was ready for this turn of events (Левада Центр 2021).

7. Complete freezing of Russian-American relations (February 2022 – Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine). The peculiarity of the current conflict between Russia, the United States, and other Western countries is its severity and duration. The general hostility toward the United States has been growing almost continuously since the end of 2012. Immediately after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the public support for Ukraine from the United States, attitudes toward the U.S. in Russia sharply worsened. Accordingly, negative attitudes toward the United States increased from 44% in 2014 to 73% in 2022 of the Russian population (Левада Центр 2022). In addition, unlike previous conflicts, 2014–2015 also saw a sharp collapse in public perceptions of relations between Russia and the United States: throughout the 2000s, the

population gradually grew to understand that relations between the countries were “cool” as most people defined these relations as “tense” and even “hostile”.

According to a survey by the leading research center Levada Center, in 2024, anti-American sentiment in Russia is not only increasing but has also risen to its highest level in almost 15 years (the survey shows that 76% of respondents in May 2024 have a poor or generally poor attitude toward the United States) (Левада Центр 2024). Only 38% of respondents perceived the United States as an unfriendly state a year ago. This figure rose to 44% in January, 56% in early March, and 61% by the end of the same month (Левада Центр 2023). This figure is significantly higher than the 60% level of anti-American sentiment after Russia's war with Georgia when state media accused the West of interfering in the conflict (Pew Research Center 2008). It is hard to believe that in April 1990, when the Soviet Union was in its last days, only 7% of Russians said they had a negative or somewhat negative view of the former Cold War enemy. After gaining widespread popularity, anti-Americanism became an independent factor in Russia's domestic politics. Those political forces that tried to ignore it (for example, the Yabluko party) have disappeared from the political arena. Others, with varying degrees of sincerity, are responding to the demand, thereby supporting the mood prevailing in Russian society. The younger generations who grew up in the relatively “open” noughties were more relaxed about the United States (Buckly 2007: 128). But each new crisis in international relations draws Russian youth into the mainstream of anti-American sentiment. The search for new enemies consolidates people and elites alike, who unite in the face of an external threat. Thus, anti-Americanism in Russia is gaining an instrumental dimension, which is becoming an increasingly important factor in the development of domestic and foreign policy.

The consequences of anti-Americanism to both the state and society are extremely serious. It's not like during the Cold War when people on both sides of the Iron Curtain sincerely believed that bad governments deceived good nations. In Russian society, due to information secrecy and a high level of state propaganda, distorted reasons for anti-Russian sentiment in the world are spreading, and anti-American ideas are being formed. However, Russian anti-Americanism is rather strange. It either primitivizes the situation so far or complicates it with unimaginable conspiracy theories and mysticism that lead even the most experienced experts to a dead end.

However, leaving aside the foreign policy implications of anti-Americanism, we are interested in the domestic political aspect. Like any “anti-...”, Russian anti-Americanism is not an ideology of opposition to the United States and competition with it, but a pretext and incentive to do something “to spite” the United States. It is easy to see how this could end up if we analyze Russia's previous history, where anti-Ottoman, anti-Polish, and anti-Swedish sentiments became the basis of realpolitik (Sokolov et al. 2018). Given the Russian president's phantasmagorical statements about the use of nuclear weapons, the transition from anti-American sentiment to real conflict is taking on real shape. And total television propaganda will make such aggression justified in the eyes of ordinary Russian citizens. Primarily since this is the easiest way for an ordinary person to show their “involvement” in big politics as they understand it.

The problem is that everyday anti-Americanism is spreading rapidly, not from the bottom (from ordinary citizens to the elite), but rather from the top (from the political elite through the propaganda media to ordinary citizens). Politicians and scholars are talking about the sinister plans of the United States and the immanent Russophobia of Americans. And they seem to believe what they are saying. The everyday anti-Americanism that prevails in Russia's political space adjusts Russian policy by imposing false and dangerous guidelines on it. It is enough to replace the idea of Russia's industrial development and new industrialization, about which the Russian leadership talks so much, with talk us emphasize: only talk about the fight against America and Russian politics will be filled with the glitter of "verbal statehood". It certainly "inspires" society. However, "verbal statehood" yields nothing but wasted budgets and further disappointment or even criminal cases.

It is extremely difficult to try to contain the wave of anti-Americanism in society. Nevertheless, it is vital, at least in order not to fall out of reality. Fighting against the "American evil empire", the Russian leadership no longer sees real enemies and not external enemies, but internal ones. And it's not even about the level of corruption in the state or unjustified spending on the military-defense complex. It is about the "ineffectiveness" of the state's functioning, both in the political or economic sense and the social one. Therefore, today's active anti-American campaign in Russia is aimed only at "distraction" or "sabotage".

Thus, anti-Americanism in Russian top political circles and Russian public opinion is a real phenomenon that tends to strengthen and expand its sphere of influence. The Soviet anti-American propaganda and the anti-American rhetoric of Russia's current political leaders differ in content but are similar in their focus – the consciousness of the state's citizens. Anti-Americanism in any of its manifestations undermines the foundations of civil society in Russia, negatively affects the moral and psychological climate in the state, causes xenophobia and isolationism, scares away Western investors, worsens Russia's image abroad, and negatively affects Russian-American relations (Friedman 2012). To overcome or limit the extent of anti-American rhetoric in Russia, a whole range of measures should be used: first, a positive change in the socio-economic situation in the state and an increase in the standard of living of the population; second, certain work at the level of government and society as a whole to overcome negative stereotypes of perception of the United States and Americans, as well as expanding the sphere of influence of public diplomacy: increasing the number of various exchange programs and cooperation between the media of both countries, third, changing the official rhetoric towards cooperation rather than searching for enemies, which means abolishing state propaganda and creating a system of independent media.

However, the most radical and effective way to change Russia's international image and reduce anti-Americanism would be to make real positive changes in all spheres of Russian society. These include changing the current dictatorial government, democratizing the political system, improving the efficiency of the Russian economy, fighting corruption, developing domestic business, providing guarantees to foreign companies, raising the standard of living and improving the quality of life, humanizing

the social sphere, and optimizing the state's foreign policy, especially towards the United States.

4. CONCLUSION

Anti-Americanism in Russia has deep historical roots that trace back to the Soviet era and continue to the present day. Changes in the political context, internal social and economic processes, as well as foreign policy factors such as sanctions, military conflicts, and competition for geopolitical influence, have contributed to the evolution of this ideology. From the Soviet era, when the United States was seen as the main opponent of the socialist bloc, to the present, when anti-Americanism is used as a tool for internal politics to mobilize support for the regime, attitudes toward the U.S. in Russia have repeatedly changed. However, the core elements of anti-American rhetoric have remained constant. The enemy rhetoric, actively employed by state media and politicians, creates the image of the U.S. as a threat to Russia's sovereignty and stability, allowing the authorities to strengthen national unity and support for the political regime in the face of both external and internal instability. Therefore, the prevalence of anti-American attitudes in Russian society is not surprising. While Russians' attitudes towards the United States have changed based on information, it generally aligns with Russia's current foreign policy as a state with openly expansionist tendencies. It is not unexpected, given that for many decades Soviet Russia was the primary geopolitical adversary of the United States. Nevertheless, Russian anti-Americanism is primarily a domestic political issue that does not significantly impact global politics.

The majority of the public, who have no personal experience of staying in the West, communicating with foreigners, and do not show much interest in what is happening abroad, form their perception of the United States primarily from the media. When discussing the United States, people often merely repeat what they have heard from TV (including the president, officials, and propagandists). In some matters (such as cooperation with NATO), public opinion also seems to coincide with government decisions. For most Russians, it is rather challenging to move beyond conspiratorial ideas about the United States (and the world in general).

However, the almost synchronous dynamics of the attitudes of Russia's elites and the general population toward the United States, which can be observed since the first half of the 1990s, does not allow us to doubt the simple explanation that the population merely follows state propaganda in this matter. The propaganda itself uses (reinforces or, on the contrary, suppresses) the patterns existing in the minds of equally the elites and the population (many, though not all, statements by senior officials that fit this logic sound quite sincere).

The hostile attitude toward U.S. dominance on the world stage turns into a desire to control the destiny of the globe and change the governments of neighboring countries at their discretion. The idea that Russia is being suppressed by the United States and talk of the need to ensure its independence at this stage, while indicative of the uncertainty of the average Russian citizen, can be used by the authorities to justify revanchist policies.

Nevertheless, the main conclusion of the study concerns the question of whether specific or universal factors are responsible for the spread of anti-Americanism in Russia. The regression analysis shows that stable links exist between anti-Americanism and changes in the socio-economic and cultural spheres. It means that it is impossible to understand anti-Americanism by focusing exclusively on the peculiarities of Russia's domestic policy. However, it is worth noting that Russian anti-Americanism is an artificially created phenomenon: it is forced upon the people by the authorities and serves as a tool for realizing state political goals and a convenient cover for the failures and mistakes of the political authorities.

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TO BLAME OR NOT TO BLAME? THE PLACE OF THE WEST IN UKRAINIAN AND RUSSIAN WAR NARRATIVES

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DOI: 10.36169/2227-6068.2024.02.00004

Abstract. *This paper explores the place of the West in the competing political narratives during the first months of the full-scale Russian war in Ukraine. We focus on comparing the statements of top-level national leaders in Russia and Ukraine from December 2021 until May 2022. Using discourse analysis, we hone in on the key themes from the dominant war narratives. In particular, we examine the portrayal of the West in the dominant narratives in each country, focusing on the origins of this war, the key groups in this war, and the possibility of compromise or ceasefire. In addition, we evaluate the degrees of consistency and change in the political narratives during this dynamic war. Overall, we find that official state narratives on the West do evolve and change during the early months of this war as both Ukrainian and Russian leaders adjusted their political narratives to fit changing circumstances. While Russia focused increasingly on the West, as opposed to NATO, Ukraine directed much of its communications at NATO in particular. This reveals differing goals in the utility of both narratives, with Ukraine focused on concrete military support while Russia painted the West as a unified threat to Russia.*

Keywords: *narratives, war, Russia, Ukraine, the West*

Submitted: 13 July 2024; **accepted:** 03 November 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

To what extent are outside actors implicated in the political narratives of a violent interstate conflict? In this article, we examine how Ukrainian and Russian political leaders engage with the role of the West in their political narratives both before and in the early months of the ongoing war (from December 2021 until May 2022). Since the full-scale Russian invasion on February 24, 2022, the course of this dynamic war has presented significant shifts in the short-term aims of Russia as well as the territory held by both sides. Based on these changing conditions, we look to statements made by the government leaders of both states, in the form of traditional speeches and in online posts and messages, to gauge when and how they implicate the West in their public narratives.

We contend that political narratives are especially salient during a war. The degree of urgency and the severity of the consequences is much higher, which means that the words of political leaders are not just aimed at persuading government officials or voters. Instead, the words of leaders can have an impact on the very safety of the population and the territorial integrity of state. They may use narratives to build domestic coalitions, to seek outside support, and to potentially elucidate the conditions for ending the war. We are especially interested in how the wartime narratives in both Russia and Ukraine discuss the role of the West, as both states have increasingly pursued competing foreign policies relating to the West over the last 20 years. How have Ukrainian and Russian leaders attempted to frame the place of the West in this war?

In particular, this research allows us to consider both pro- and anti-Western narratives in Ukraine and Russia, based on the evolving political discourse of the political leaders in the early months of the war. By tracking the way that each side characterizes the West, we can evaluate the way Ukrainian and Russian leaders involve and blame the West as the intensity of the war grew. While the Russian side was decidedly more anti-Western in its rhetoric, we detected changes to the tone and frequency of such language as the Russian effort pulled back from its push towards Kyiv. We also noticed that the Ukrainian side was not consistently pro-Western in its narratives, with narratives evolving depending on the on-the-ground conditions and the West's degree of involvement in the war. We observed a growing gap between the two sides in the conception of what role the West plays in this war, and what role it should play in the post-war reality.

Given our focus on political narratives, this article begins first with a brief overview of the relevant literature on this topic. Next, we provide the context of the Russian war in Ukraine, followed by the discussion of Russian and Ukrainian conflict narratives, especially as they pertain to the place of the West. Then, we explain our usage of discourse analysis to examine how each side characterizes the West. Finally, we present our findings and draw our conclusions related to the context of this war.

2. WHY POLITICAL NARRATIVES

We focus on political narratives based on the understanding that political leaders use the power of their words to achieve their goals. Political narratives allow leaders to influence how the public perceives and responds to key events. The analysis of political narratives

helps us identify dominant explanations used by political leaders to persuade, inform, and control society directly and indirectly. State officials use political narratives in all aspects of policymaking because stories help the public better understand how and why the government creates policies (Borins 2011). We can also see the value of political narratives as tools of soft power internationally. According to Laura Roselle, Alister Miskommon, and Ben O'Loughlin (Roselle et al. 2014: 76), political narratives are "setting out what characterizes any state in the world, or how the world works." In this paper, we are particularly interested in strategic narratives around war. We consider the work of state officials in creating political narratives during war time to be deliberate and intentional. Political leaders have to make strategic decisions regarding the content of their narratives and the meaning behind their words. Therefore, we assume that the speeches, statements, and comments of political elites, particularly in times of conflict, are neither accidental nor random. At the same time, we do not assume that political narratives are always factually correct, coherent, consistent or effective. In fact, leaders may want to intentionally mislead their audiences by providing inconsistent or inaccurate messages.

Our paper builds upon prior research on strategic political narratives pertaining to the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Since this article focuses on the full-scale war between the two states, we are particularly interested in how state leaders use political narratives in times of conflict. Academic literature highlights the value of these narratives in explaining and simplifying the reality of war for different audiences. According to Laura Roselle, Alister Miskommon, and Ben O'Loughlin

the combatants and their grievances, claims and aspirations are all subject to characterization, the attribution of motives, and attention to any reputation earned. (Roselle et al. 2014: 79)

Narratives help construct and reconstruct positions of participants in a war while helping guide the public in their understanding of how events evolve. We also use political narratives to better understand all sides in a conflict, the so-called in-groups and outgroups. This allows leaders to establish their own understanding of a war, their adversaries and allies. Leaders often make their narratives personal and relatable by using stories and familiar cultural or historical references (Claessen 2021). We can also trace how a conflict has evolved and escalated into a violent war by examining the transformation of stories and worldviews in political narratives over time. The literature highlights that political leaders often rely on conspiracy theories and disinformation in their political narratives. While strategic narratives are rarely explicitly violent, the use of conspiracy theories can help vilify an adversary in a conflict and justify violence against this adversary (Baele 2019).

3. BACKGROUND OF THE RUSSIAN WAR AGAINST UKRAINE

Russia officially began its full-scale war against Ukraine on February 24, 2022. On this day, the Russian military began airstrikes on Ukrainian cities, hitting both military targets and civilian areas with high-powered missiles and artillery. At the same time, the Russian

troops advanced into the territory of Ukraine from multiple directions (Leonhardt 2022). Regional scholars and experts see this full-scale war as an escalation of the existing conflict that Russia started in Ukraine in 2014 (Sasse and Lackner 2018; Shveda and Park 2016). Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity in 2013-2014 (the Euromaidan) resulted in regime change when the pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovich, fled Ukraine after mass anti-government protests turned violent. Subsequently, the Kremlin rejected the legitimacy of the revolution, instead asserting that it amounted to an illegal coup that was orchestrated by Western governments. In February 2014, Yanukovich was ousted from power and a transitional government in Kyiv was formed. Russia's leadership used this power vacuum in Ukraine and quickly moved in to occupy and forcibly annex the Crimean Peninsula. President Putin justified the annexation by organizing a public referendum in Crimea that was both non-transparent and illegitimate. Russia's leader labeled this annexation as a successful return of Crimea into its historic homeland. Since 2014, the rhetoric of Russia's government officials has turned progressively more anti-Western and more aggressive towards Ukraine and its pro-European government. President Putin repeatedly called for the defense of Russia and its traditional values from Western imperialism and liberalism. Russian leaders also highlighted the need to protect the Russian-speaking populations in Crimea and the Donbas from what the Kremlin labeled as the nationalist regime in Kyiv. The state-controlled media in Russia ramped up its attacks on Ukraine, calling it a puppet state mired in corruption, mob rule and neo-Nazi forces all controlled by the United States. This perspective contrasted with how most Ukrainians saw their regime post-Yanukovich, as a democracy that may be young and flawed but moving towards Europe (Pomerantsev & Weiss 2014; Sokol 2019).

Russia's leaders viewed the rather effortless and bloodless annexation of Crimea as a success that could be replicated. Just a few months later, they began to actively support the protests in multiple cities across Eastern Ukraine. Local separatists and Russian proxy forces worked together in April 2014 to ignite public protests and gain control over local government administrations with the intention of repeating the "Crimean scenario." In the two regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, the separatists were successful in establishing control over the local government and proclaiming the creation of the so-called "people's republics" in May of 2014. A violent conflict broke out between the separatists and the Ukrainian military. Russia has supplied the separatist militias with arms, financial resources, and logistical support while officially denying any involvement in the conflict. The Ukrainian government and its Western allies viewed Russia's actions in the Donbas as a violation of international law. The war in the Donbas and Russia's involvement in Ukraine gained more international attention in July 2014 after rebel groups used a missile provided by Russia and accidentally downed a Malaysian Airlines flight (COE 2022). Russia denied any responsibility for this tragic event, instead blaming the Ukrainian military for downing the aircraft. Russia remained actively involved in the two "people's republics" from April 2014 until February 2022. It helped fund the budgets of the "republics", continued to support their military forces, and initiated the policy of "passportization" in 2015 allowing the residents of the two "republics" to obtain Russian citizenship under simplified procedures (*Президент России* 2019). Interestingly, Russia made no moves to annex the territories of the "people's republics" until February 2022.

The war in the Donbas lasted for almost eight years and took the lives of more than 14,000 combatants and civilians before Russia initiated its full-scale invasion in early 2022 (HRMMU 2022).

Russia began active preparations for the full-scale war against Ukraine in the fall of 2021 when it amassed tens of thousands of its troops and military equipment along Ukraine's border. Western governments shared their intelligence with the government in Kyiv warning the Ukrainian officials that the full-scale war was inevitable. The Russian leadership denied any intentions to escalate the war in Ukraine even when the Russian military had over 100,000 troops deployed to the Ukrainian border in January 2022 (Leonhardt 2022). The start of the full-scale war in February 2022 still came as a shock and a surprise to the public in both Russia and Ukraine. One of the reasons many people were in denial about the war and its severity may have to do with the narratives of state leaders in Ukraine and Russia prior to February 24, 2022. President Putin continued to deny any allegations of Russia's plans to attack Ukraine militarily calling it "Western paranoia" and "provocation", Ukraine's President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, projected the messages of calm. Zelenskyy repeatedly stressed that Ukrainians should not be intimidated by Russia since the Ukrainian military is well prepared to defend the country, and Ukraine had the full support of its Western allies. The intentions behind the Russian war against Ukraine were initially outlined by Putin in his February speech on the eve of the full-scale invasion. He addressed the Russian public announcing the need for the so-called "special military operation", much of which was geared against military threats of NATO and the West. On the side of Ukraine, its armed forces have been particularly resilient on the battlefield while the leadership of Ukraine relied on Western allies in resisting the Russian aggression. At the same time, many Ukrainians see this as a war between Russia and the West with Ukrainians carrying the brunt of the losses. Moreover, President Zelenskyy and the Western leaders have presented different visions of peace and victory for Ukraine (Kube et al. 2023; Tyshchenko 2024). Considering how dynamic and violent this war is, we ask the question: how do state leaders create and evolve their political narratives during an interstate war?

4. POLITICAL NARRATIVES AND THE RUSSIAN AGGRESSION IN UKRAINE SINCE 2014

We will now turn to an overview of past research on political narratives in the context of Ukraine-Russia relations post-2014. The annexation of Crimea and the start of the Donbas conflict in 2014 both dramatically changed the relations between the two states, marking the start of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Since 2014, multiple studies used narrative analysis to gain a better understanding of these events. Most of these studies focused exclusively on the analysis of Russian narratives (Leichtova 2016; Drozdova & Robinson 2019; Claessen 2021; Strycharz 2022). Still, some scholars chose to explore how Ukrainian narratives evolved over the years in response to Russia's aggression (Stebelsky 2018). The assessment of this literature reveals two dominant themes in Russian and Ukrainian political narratives. The first theme focuses on explaining the annexation of Crimea and the Donbas conflict before 2022 from the perspectives of both sides, including Russia's justification for intervening in Ukraine and the role of the West

in these events. The second theme in the academic literature focuses on how each side conceptualizes Ukrainian identity, Ukraine as a state, and the engagement of the West with both Ukraine and Russia.

State officials in both Ukraine and Russia deployed political narratives to explain the events of the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas. These strategic narratives often employed historical references to provide the useful background in explaining these political developments. Russian officials often relied on the narrative of the Soviet Union as beneficial for Ukraine's political and socio-economic development (Hopf 2016). The annexation of Crimea by Russia was presented as the correction of a historical mistake committed by the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev who "gifted" Crimea to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (Leichtova 2016). On the Ukrainian side, the dominant narrative post-2014 was that of Russian imperialism, with Ukraine as a European state and a historical victim of this imperial conquest (Stebelsky 2018).

Moreover, political narratives in both countries advanced the vision of the events in Ukraine at several levels, the national level and the level of the international system. At the international system level, Ukrainian narratives linked the events of 2014 to an imbalance of power in the international system. At the national level, Ukraine's leaders explained the loss of Crimea to Russia in 2014 as the result of the weakness and fragility of the Ukrainian government in the aftermath of the Euromaidan revolution. Ukrainian narratives on Crimea reiterated the idea that this loss was temporary and there is no alternative for the Ukrainian state other than returning Crimea under Ukraine's control (Lenton 2022). On the side of Russia, state leaders often highlighted the perceived "threat to compatriots" at the national level as the justification of the annexation of Crimea (Strycharz 2022). At the international system level, Russian narratives positioned Russia as the pole of power in opposition to the Western bloc of powerful states. While addressing the instability in Ukraine, Russia's leadership blamed American hegemony, Western interference, and NATO expansion. Russia accused Western states of anti-Russian foreign policies, the promotion of *Russophobia* in the former Soviet states, and fueling the Color Revolutions in the region (Hutchings & Tolz 2015). Moreover, Russia's leaders repeatedly utilized the "legitimation discourse" by referencing the example of Western intervention in Kosovo as the justification of Russia's annexation of Crimea. Official state narratives in Russia often emphasize that all states in the international system should respect and follow a rules-based order. Yet when it comes to a practical implementation of this order, Russia's leaders use Kosovo as a convenient precedent for situations when powerful states can circumvent international law in favor of their geopolitical interests (Rotaru & Troncota 2017).

The topics of Ukrainian statehood and national identity have been central in the political narratives of the two states, particularly after the Euromaidan events. Russian narratives have long highlighted the significance of state sovereignty, particularly when discussing international relations and criticizing the actions of the West, and specifically the United States, in undermining the sovereignty of other states (Tsygankov 2019). From the perspective of Russia, the events following the Euromaidan protests of 2013-2014 undermined Ukraine's sovereignty. Specifically, Russian narratives portray the ousting of

President Yanukovych as a violent and illegal coup that was sanctioned and even facilitated by the West (Lazarenko 2019; Smoor 2017). This kind of rhetoric highlights the Russian perspective on Ukraine as a state that lacks independence and sovereignty, with its government captured by radical domestic forces and powerful external actors. Even prior to 2014, Soviet and Russian leaders referred to Ukraine and Belarus as “brotherly nations” that along with Russia form a single community. Official Russian narratives often presented Ukraine and its people as part of the broader Russian civilization (Kuzio 2017; Kuzio 2018). After 2014, in response to Western sanctions and Ukraine’s decisive turn toward Europe, Russia’s leaders have expanded the category of outgroups (enemies, collaborators, traitors). Political narratives frequently mentioned internal and external conspirators who worked to undermine Russia in different ways (Lipman 2016). Ukraine and its post-Maidan government became one of the main outgroups for Russia, as Russian officials rejected the legitimacy of the new government in Kyiv and warned the public about the influence of radical ultranationalists in Ukraine’s new government.

Since Ukraine gained its independence in 1991, Ukrainian political narratives implicitly and explicitly centered on the topic of Ukrainian identity (Korostelina 2013). This focus became even more prominent after 2014. After the ouster of Victor Yanukovych, Ukrainian leaders often highlighted the distinctive nature of Ukraine’s national identity. They also presented the Russian state as an aggressor that actively worked to diminish and undermine the Ukrainian nation (Smoor 2017). After the Euromaidan, new security threats brought on by the annexation of Crimea and the start of the Donbas conflict prompted Ukraine’s post-Maidan government to renew the country’s pro-European course and reduce its dependence on Russia. The government passed specific decommunization laws in 2015 that involved the removal of communist-era monuments, changing the names of thousands of streets and public places affiliated with Soviet officials and history, among other actions that aimed to commemorate the history of Ukraine as an independent state (Kuzio 2018). Ukraine’s post-Maidan leaders placed a specific emphasis on de-Russification without officially rejecting the Russian language. Instead, the Ukrainian government engaged in promoting the Ukrainian language and culture and highlighting the European vector in Ukraine’s political future (Kulyk 2018).

5. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

After reviewing how political narratives have been used in Russia and Ukraine before the start of the full-scale war, we now turn to a review of the methods and data used in our paper. We utilize discourse analysis, which is a qualitative method of textual data interpretation. Discourse analysis also involves interpreting the meaning behind political narratives to uncover specific positions, views, attitudes, and practices that leaders aim to convey to the public.

We focus in particular on the onset and initial months of the conflict to best capture how the strategic narratives explain the war and the place of the West in it. Based on our observations of these first few months, we focus specifically on three different stages of the conflict:

- 1) December 1, 2021-February 23, 2022, as the pre-war period;
- 2) February 24-March 31, 2022, as the first stage of the war when Russia seemed to be set on capturing control of Kyiv;
- 3) April 1-May 31, 2022, as the beginning of the new stage of the war with Russia pulling back its troops in some regions and focusing on “liberating” the Donbas.¹

We use data from official government websites and social media accounts of top-level national leaders in Ukraine and Russia to collect textual data relevant to the war Russia initiated against Ukraine. We systematically collected the speeches of presidents (Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Vladimir Putin) and other key political leaders who actively discussed the war in both countries during the time period of December 1, 2021-May 31, 2022. These were the foreign ministers in both states (Dmytro Kuleba and Sergey Lavrov), Ukraine’s Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov, Russia’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova, and Russia’s presidential press secretary Dmitry Peskov. After the initial data collection, only speeches and posts related to the war in Ukraine were selected for further analysis. We systematically read through the content of leaders’ speeches and posts to identify key themes and patterns.

In our analysis of textual data, we examined how both sides included the West in their discussions of the reasons behind the conflict as well as the battlefield conditions and evolution of the war. Relying on Baele’s (2019) work that highlights major groups involved in conspiratorial narratives, we apply this analytical approach to analyze and compare the strategic narratives of state leaders in Ukraine and Russia. We specifically focus on the extent of including the West in the in-group (pure in-group), the outgroups (close and far outgroups), as well as the hybrid groups (traitors and contaminated in-groups). This allows us to examine whether either side is “othering” or embracing the West in its strategic war narratives.

6. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Discourse Analysis of Ukrainian Statements

The core focus of our discourse analysis was examining the place of the West in this war. We also analyzed how Ukrainian leaders described key actors in this war, specifically zooming in on how different Western actors were portrayed in the early months of the war.

In describing the goals of the war, Ukraine’s leaders discussed the objectives that both Ukraine and Russia aimed to achieve with the West being featured as a key actor in these narratives. While discussing the goals of Ukraine in the war with Russia, all of Ukraine’s leaders in our analysis are consistent throughout the time period under study. They describe the core goals of ending the war, restoring sovereignty and territorial

¹ We concede that the cutoff date for stages 2 and 3 is not exact, but it reflects media reports documenting the Russian retreat at the end of March 2022.

integrity of Ukraine and gaining specific security guarantees for Ukraine with the West as one guarantor of these arrangements. Ukraine's Defense Minister Reznikov also reiterated the need to work with Western allies to stop the Russian aggression and to achieve complete victory over Russia. Both Zelenskyy and Reznikov explain that successful negotiations with Russia would only be possible if Ukraine wins the war on the battlefield. This would allow Ukraine to negotiate from the position of strength and reclaim its lost territory (including the previously occupied Crimea and parts of the Donbas), while also making it possible to obtain future security guarantees from Russia. President Zelenskyy also highlights Ukraine's goal of gaining full membership in the European Union while emphasizing that Ukraine is currently defending Europe from Russia's attacks on its security, democracy, and values.

While discussing Russia's ultimate goals in this war against Ukraine, Ukrainian narratives evolve over time to emphasize the escalation of Russia's aggression. In January 2022, one month before the start of the full-scale war, Ukraine's Defense Minister repeatedly reiterated that Russia's threats were primarily directed at NATO and the EU, not so much at Ukraine. According to Reznikov, Russia was attempting to dominate the international system, "the goal of the Kremlin is not Ukraine, they want the world to be afraid." Even after the full-scale war began, Reznikov argued that even though Russia aimed to destroy the Ukrainian state, its true objective was to challenge Western institutions and to intimidate the world. In the first few months of the war, both Zelenskyy and Kuleba discussed Russia's goals of destroying Ukraine as a state, capturing its capital, and eliminating President Zelenskyy. This rhetoric has escalated over time, with Ukraine's Foreign Minister Kuleba identifying Russia's goals of terrorizing civilians and maximizing destruction. While Zelenskyy repeatedly mentioned Russia's goals of destroying Ukrainian people and their culture, he also emphasized that Russia's aims go beyond Ukraine. In one of his speeches in March of 2022, Ukraine's President addressed Europeans stating,

their goal is Europe. Decisive influence on your life, control over your policy, destruction of your values. Not only ours. Democracy, human rights, equality, freedom... The same values as ours. (*President of Ukraine 2022b*)

By May 2022, leaders' narratives incorporated references to the genocidal aims of Russia by highlighting the imperial aims of Russia's rulers and their hatred of all Ukrainians. Ukrainian leaders explicitly link the destruction of the Ukrainian state with Russian intimidation of NATO and the EU, while the attacks on Ukrainian civilians are portrayed as attacks on European values, culture and democracy. These narratives escalate the degree of threat in describing Russia's genocidal objectives in Ukraine, as they straddle both the national and international system levels.

Based on our analysis, Ukrainian narratives contained several categories of in-groups. We began by examining the conceptualization of heroes in this war. Ukraine's leaders continuously emphasize the heroic deeds of the Ukrainian military, border guards, territorial defense units, rescuers, medical workers, policemen, nuclear plant workers, and humanitarian workers. Ukraine's Defense Minister calls the Ukrainian army "the most powerful army in Europe" made up of highly motivated professionals with the unconditional support of the entire Ukrainian nation. Outside of domestic actors,

Zelenskyy also points to European leaders who visited Kyiv since the start of the full-scale war as heroes and true supporters of the Ukrainian people.

Western states and leaders are particularly prominent in political narratives related to Ukraine's allies and partners. Ukrainian narratives mainly identified the Western states (the EU countries, the U.S., Canada, the U.K., Japan, Australia) as the largest allies and supporters of Ukraine. President Zelenskyy continuously refers to Ukraine's allies as "the civilized world" that is facing the hostile and barbaric Russian state, increasingly alienated from the West and many global institutions in the course of the war. Ukrainian narratives describe Ukraine as a European nation that defends European values and requires the help of its allies. Our analysis of political narratives revealed that the biggest focus during all three time periods under study was on the importance of assisting Ukraine with funding, the delivery of arms and security systems. In addition, Ukraine's leaders discuss sanctions against Russia, withdrawal of business from Russia, and ending trade with Russia (in particular, energy trade) as the necessary forms of Western assistance to Ukraine. President Zelenskyy also discusses institutional cooperation with the West as important for collecting and sharing data on Russia's war crimes to keep Russian leaders accountable for the atrocities they commit. He calls on Western partners to create a new international organization that would help make Russia financially accountable for its aggression in different countries around the world. On 20 May 2022, Zelenskyy elaborates,

Under such an agreement, Russian funds and property under the jurisdiction of partner countries must be seized or frozen, and then confiscated and directed to a specially created fund from which all victims of Russian aggression can receive appropriate compensation. (Zelenskiy 2022)

Ukrainian narratives also highlight the heroic deeds of foreign volunteers who travel to Ukraine to fight alongside Ukrainians. Similarly, Ukraine's leaders praise the efforts of Western allies in negotiating with Russia when it comes to prisoner exchanges, humanitarian corridors for civilians, and opening up Ukrainian grain exports. Finally, political narratives frequently reference the West in describing the future for Ukraine. Specifically, leaders discuss the role of Western partners in creating a new collective security agreement for Ukraine, backed by a system of modern air defense. President Zelenskyy also describes the plans for Ukraine's post-war reconstruction, which would involve patronage of other countries over individual cities in Ukraine.

While examining the nature of Ukrainian demands and requests toward Western allies, we noticed that those demands evolved and escalated as the war continued. In the pre-war period, Defense Minister Reznikov emphasizes how important it is for Ukraine to receive Western weapons and financial support to be able to contain Russia, while highlighting that it was solely the task of the Ukrainian people to protect Ukraine from its enemies. Understandably, these pleas for military assistance became more urgent in the early war period. In March of 2022, Zelenskyy was more forceful in his rhetoric as he described the slow response of Western allies to the war, the refusal of NATO members to close airspace over Ukraine, and the overall Western fear of Russian escalation. On

3 March 2022 Ukraine's Foreign Minister Kuleba made these demands for assistance more personal for Western allies,

Dear partners who still have not provided Ukraine with military aircraft: how can you sleep when Ukrainian children are under bombs in Mariupol, Kherson, Kharkiv, other cities? You can take this decision now. Do it! (Kuleba 2022a)

Ukrainian narratives present these requests for support not as favors and handouts but as an investment in future European security, and as an immediate necessity in light of the ongoing Russian aggression. Kuleba also describes Western military and financial assistance as an alternative to having Westerners physically fighting in this war. He calls this arrangement the Ukrainian Fair deal, noting that

Partners provide us with all the heavy weapons we need - We fight and stop Russia now, so that partners don't have to fight later. (Kuleba 2022b)

President Zelenskyy repeatedly compares Ukraine to a shield that protects Europe from Russian aggression.

Since the topic of NATO as a military alliance has been quite prominent in Russian narratives since 2014, we examined NATO-related content in Ukrainian narratives as well. Ukraine's leaders view NATO as an important ally in this war against Russia. In the pre-war period, we saw frequent discussions about the place of Ukraine in NATO as a future member and as an important element of NATO's defense system for Eastern Europe. In February of 2022, President Zelenskyy spoke about Ukraine's future in NATO in an ambiguous manner, "We do not signal that NATO membership is not our goal." He also repeatedly described as unacceptable Russia's demands for Ukraine's neutrality and abandoning any future plans of joining NATO. Foreign Minister Kuleba is more direct in highlighting NATO membership as a strategic goal for Ukraine. Foreign Minister Reznikov talks about Ukraine's military cooperation with NATO resulting in de-facto integration of Ukraine into NATO. Reznikov consistently notes that by supplying Ukrainians with NATO-grade weapons and military equipment, Western countries contribute to the strengthening of NATO's eastern flank. Ukrainian leaders changed their NATO-related rhetoric in the early war period. In March of 2022, President Zelenskyy announced his agreement to accept an alternative set of security guarantees for Ukraine from Russia in lieu of NATO membership. During this early war period, Zelenskyy became more critical of NATO. On March 4th, he responded to NATO's refusal to close Ukraine's airspace,

All the people who will die starting from this day will also die because of you. Because of your weakness. Because of your disunity. (*President of Ukraine* 2022a)

In April 2022 he describes the history of NATO's weak response to Russian aggression against Ukraine dating back to 2008,

They thought that by refusing Ukraine (as a NATO member), they would be able to appease Russia, to convince it to respect Ukraine and live normally next to us. During the 14 years since that miscalculation, Ukraine has experienced a revolution and eight years of war in Donbas. And now we are fighting for life in the most horrific war in Europe since World War II. (*President of Ukraine* 2022c)

Foreign Minister Kuleba is more careful in not blaming the Russian aggression against Ukraine on NATO, reiterating the idea that Russia is solely responsible for causing the current war.

Discourse Analysis of Russian Statements

We next turn to the statements of Russian leaders, Putin, Lavrov, Peskov and Zakharova, similarly analyzing the extent to which they included the West. While we detected some shifts in Russia's specific goals during this six-month time period, we also observed that the West was consistently cited by Russian officials as a reason for Russian activity. This was done both explicitly and implicitly. Prior to the start of the war, Sergei Lavrov often placed prominent focus on NATO and the West and its actions in deepening military ties with Ukraine. For example, Lavrov stated on December 31st, 2021, that,

NATO member states are systematically transforming Ukraine into a military foothold against Russia, building their bases there and using its territory for military exercises. (*The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2021*)

and later stated that,

the West fails to honor its obligations in terms of indivisibility of security and ignores our interests, although we laid them out in an extremely straightforward and clear way. (*The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2022a*)

Russian officials often presented the situation as one extending back decades, as Lavrov stated on February 15th, 2022 that,

when NATO started to expand once again by including the Baltic republics, we asked our Western colleagues why it was being done in the absence of any threats. (*The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2022b*)

This reference to the 2004 NATO expansion is used to assert that the West and NATO have been responsible for inflaming tensions with Russia for almost two decades. The Russian discourse also explicitly asserted that the Ukrainian government was beholden to the West and that it lacked state sovereignty, connecting this back to the 2014 Euromaidan protests and the Russian perception that the ouster of Yanukovych was “an anti-constitutional coup”, as exemplified by Lavrov on February 15th, 2022:

but why was Europe silent and unperturbed by the Ukrainian coup? Obviously because those capitals, including the three countries whose ministers signed the agreement, which was later broken by the coup perpetrators, were also willing to side with the people who had proclaimed that they were for the West, not for Russia, despite the anti-constitutional coup and the ensuing bloodshed. (*The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2022b*).

Overall, prior to the February 24th invasion, Russian accounts of Ukrainian domestic and international politics largely center the West as a guilty party and an active participant in Ukraine's affairs. This also emphasizes how Russia sees the West as an out-group that rejects Russia and that has further pulled Ukraine into its orbit.

The Russian narrative expanded beyond this overt focus on Western dominance at the onset of the war, with Putin's national address on February 21st seen as a crucial turning point. That speech continued to highlight the significance of the West for Ukraine's political trajectory since 2014, stating that the West subverted the independence of Ukraine's judiciary, that there had been a

constant flow of Western weapons to Ukraine. (*Президент России 2022*)

and that the West is only using Ukraine to harm Russia, as

Their one and only goal is to hold back the development of Russia. (*Президент России 2022*)

Yet Putin also attributed much greater agency on the part of Ukrainian officials in their dealings with the West, stating,

Kiev tried to use dialogue with Russia as a bargaining chip in its relations with the West. (*Президент России 2022*)

Moreover, Putin asserted that Ukraine's foreign relations are tied to its own political institutions, since, in his perspective,

Ukraine actually never had stable traditions of real statehood. And, therefore, in 1991 it opted for mindlessly emulating foreign models, which have no relation to history or Ukrainian realities. (*Президент России 2022*)

Putin then connects this to the role of Western linkages, stating that,

Ukraine itself was placed under external control, directed not only from the Western capitals, but also on the ground, as the saying goes, through an entire network of foreign advisors, NGOs and other institutions present in Ukraine. (*Президент России 2022*)

In announcing the invasion, or the so-called "special military operation" on February 24th, 2022, Putin explained that Russia's actions were in pursuit of nationwide changes in Ukraine, consistently highlighting his stated goal of "demilitarizing and denazifying" Ukraine. The goal of "demilitarization" has overt connections to the West, while "denazification" has a more implicit tie to the West, based on our discourse analysis. Putin and others described that to them, demilitarization meant that Ukraine would be neutral in its relations and that Ukraine would surrender its capability to attack Russia. For Russia, neutrality means that Ukraine would cease receiving support from the West and NATO, and that it would never join the military alliance. Lavrov stated this quite bluntly on March 10th, saying,

we don't want the militarization of Ukraine...We don't want Ukraine to become a neo-Nazi state...We want Ukraine to be a neutral state. (*The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2022c*)

The Russian usage of the word "nazi", in the context of its demands for denazification, quickly increased in the statements of many Russian officials. Their meaning has typically focused on perceived anti-Russian policies and attitudes within Ukraine, and a Western tolerance of those policies. Lavrov has been the most specific, pointing to the shift in Ukraine away from the Russian language, and the historical

connection that Nazi Germany had in fighting the Soviets during World War II. For example, Lavrov emphasized his impression of the widespread embrace of Ukrainian nationalist figures Roman Shukhevich and Stephan Bandera, which have a controversial history due to their collaboration with Nazi Germany (Marples 2007). Lavrov and other Russian officials asserted that these figures were widely revered, and that the West had tolerated or ignored those tendencies¹.

While Russian officials put forward those demands of demilitarization and denazification, their rhetoric often blatantly cited the West as its true foes. In their statements, Russian officials commonly referred to the so-called “Collective West”, a term used to characterize the West as a unified and coherent block of countries, led by the United States. In using this phrase, Russian leaders highlighted how they were threatened by such a powerful grouping, and that the “Collective West” had attempted to subsume Ukraine. Russian leaders did not treat Ukraine as a sovereign state, alleging that the West had swept Ukraine up into its orbit and was manipulating it for its own geopolitical purposes. As one example, Lavrov stated as much on March 16th, that

this concerns the international order, rather than Ukraine alone... Under President Joe Biden, the United States set the goal of subordinating Europe, and it has succeeded in forcing Europe to implicitly follow US policies. (*The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation* 2022d)

Russia’s version of events paints a coordinated and conspiratorial effort by the West to take control of other states so that they can challenge Russia and its security.

Russia’s military campaign shifted away from its pursuit of regime change in Kyiv in April and May, with the scope narrowing to Eastern Ukraine and the Donbas. We also noticed that Russian statements mentioned the goals of demilitarization and denazification less frequently. Given this change, how was the place of the West in Russian narratives impacted? Analyzing the discourse from April 1st through May 31st, we detected that the West remained a prominent source of instigation and blame for the war in Ukraine. Russian officials asserted that they sought to protect and liberate the Donbas region from the prevalence of so-called Nazis, and they increasingly implicated the West in these arguments, asserting that the West had been meddling in Ukraine since World War I, fostering a culture of anti-Russian sentiment. The West was still presented as a nefarious force that was using Ukraine as a way to get to Russia, such as Putin saying on April 12th, “the main goal of the West is not to help Ukraine. Ukraine is just a means to reaching goals that have nothing to do with the interests of the Ukrainian people.” Putin also demonstrated that he saw a power differential within the West, pointing to, “Europe’s insulting and humiliating position with regard to its sovereign, that is, the United States,” alleging that the U.S. is the primary decision maker among the broader West. We also noticed that Russian officials frequently used terms such as “russophobe”

¹ Both figures were leaders and combatants in the broader effort to fight for independence from the Soviet Union during World War II. They sought training, support and collaboration from Nazi Germany in that pursuit. The popular reverence for figures like them has grown in Ukraine since 2014, in response to Russian aggression.

and “anti-Russian” in connection with the West after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Sergei Lavrov was the most explicit and direct in his communications. For example, Lavrov said that “Popular Russophobia has taken on an unprecedented scale in many Western countries, where, to our regret, it is nurtured by government circles” in May of 2022. He also suggested that the allegations of crimes against humanity in the Ukrainian city of Bucha were false, and that they were part of a concerted effort to tarnish Russia’s image, and to prevent any meaningful peace talks. Speaking on April 30th, Lavrov alleged that “the Ukrainian security services staged a crude, bloody provocation in Bucha with the help of the West, to complicate the negotiation process, among other things.” So, while the objectives of the Russian military had changed, the tenor of Russia’s accusations towards the West remained hostile and accusatory.

Our main takeaway on the role of the West in Russian narratives is that they place the West in a central and controlling position, and that the West dictates orders and policies to Ukraine. The Russian worldview underlying these narratives appears to be one with a cabal of Western powers pulling the strings in many different global efforts, manipulating states like Ukraine, and unfairly targeting Russia in the process. Whether or not Russian officials actually believe their assertions is unclear, and that is not a question we can answer with any certainty. Even so, we have observed that these stories are widely disseminated by Russian officials, and that they have been used to provide the justification for Russia’s “special military operation”. As discussed earlier, narratives can help leaders rally support and mobilize their citizenry, and they may also help Russia amass talking points when seeking new allies in China and the Global South. The honesty of the narratives is not a requirement for them to still hold instrumental value for Russia’s foreign policy.

The Place of the West: Comparison of Russian and Ukrainian Narratives

In our analyses, we observed that both the Ukrainian and Russian sides deployed narratives for multiple reasons. By engaging in direct communication with their respective populations, Russian and Ukrainian leaders are aiming to build domestic support for the war effort, and to explain the governments’ actions and objectives. This has been especially clear as the war progressed and the scope of the war shifted more to Eastern Ukraine. Moreover, both sides have engaged with international audiences and regularly bring up the role of the West in connection to the war. Yet we also noted a few differences. One has to do with the primary speakers, when it comes to the war narratives. In Ukraine, President Zelenskyy has been consistently prolific in his public remarks since the start of the war, and has often implicitly and explicitly engaged in outreach to international actors, especially Western states and NATO. On the other hand, in Russia we observed that it was Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov who devoted the greatest amount of attention to the war, speaking the most and also implicating the West regularly, both for causing the war and for shaping its course. President Putin spoke far less frequently in Russia when compared to Zelenskyy, but he too supported an anti-Western narrative as the war continued.

We observed adaptation in the wartime narratives as the conditions of the war shifted in April and May of 2022. In both cases, Ukrainian and Russian leaders adjusted their portrayal of the West and their demands for Western actions. Ukrainian leaders revealed a growing frustration with NATO, and became more assertive in their push for concrete Western support. In Ukraine, the specific demands from the West evolved, with greater attention paid to concrete security guarantees from NATO and for international organizations to pursue war crimes charges. Russian leaders also increasingly demanded security guarantees, just as Ukrainian leaders did. In the case of Russia, these are security guarantees against the West, more specifically against the United States, while for Ukraine these are security guarantees in partnership with the West. For Russia, on the other hand, more direct references were made towards the West, rather than NATO, especially as the war entered its second and third months. This demonstrates that Russia differentiates between NATO and the West, and increasingly focused on the West, and in particular the US, as a foe in the war. Russian narratives highlighted its perception that the West was anti-Russian, guilty of so-called “Russophobia”. This portrayal framed the West as foes that unfairly maligned Russia and that the West ignored the plight of Russian speakers in Ukraine. Russian narratives also pushed the notion that the West were fabricating stories like the massacres and alleged human rights abuses in Bucha, as part of an effort to “cancel” Russia in the global community.

In summation, the narratives of Ukraine and Russia rest upon increasingly distinct worldviews, assumptions and even basic facts. Our analysis shows that Russian narratives rest upon the notion that it is fighting against the West, while Ukraine views the war as fighting both with the West but also for NATO and the West. Another distinction in the narratives of the two states reveals that Russia views the West as a monolithic entity with the U.S. as the leading state and the main aggressor. Ukrainian leaders view the West as a group of actors that are more distinct, with Ukraine being a member of a larger European family. At the same time, as the war progressed, Ukrainian leaders did not shy away from criticizing Western actors like NATO for their weak and inadequate support. Ultimately, both sides in this war seem to view it as the conflict between Russia and the West. While Russia may see Ukraine as lacking sovereignty and as a pawn of the U.S. and the West, Ukraine presents itself as a free European state tragically caught in-between the two battling global forces. Zelenskyy famously summarized this sentiment in a joke during his interview with the American comedian David Letterman in late 2022

Two Jewish guys from Odesa meet up.

One asks the other: “So what’s the situation? What are people saying?”

“Russia is fighting NATO.”

“Are you serious?”

“Yes, yes! Russia is fighting NATO.”

“So how’s it going?”

“Well, 70,000 Russian soldiers are dead. The missile stockpile has almost been depleted. A lot of equipment is damaged, blown up.”

“And what about NATO?”

“What about NATO? NATO hasn’t even arrived yet (The Time of Israel 2022).”

7. PROSPECTS FOR DE-ESCALATION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

We began this paper by asking how leaders in Ukraine and Russia have attempted to frame the place of the West in this war. Through our discourse analysis, we have examined and compared the key themes in the political narratives of Ukrainian and Russian leaders during the first months of the full-scale war that Russia started in Ukraine. Overall, we find that these official narratives evolved and adjusted to the changes in this violent war. On the Ukrainian side, we discovered that the narratives describing Russia's goals in this war have changed, becoming more expansive and fatalistic over time. Narratives pertaining to the NATO alliance became more urgent and critical after the full-scale invasion, as Ukraine's leaders emphasized the need for more NATO assistance to Ukraine. On the Russian side, they continued to blame the West, ratcheting up their version of Western blame and complicity.

Both Ukraine and Russia agree that the West is a party to this war, at least based on their public narratives. For Ukraine, this means that any resolution of the war needs to involve the West as well. For Russia, the involvement of the West in the resolution of the war would further solidify their perception that Ukraine is just a tool of the West in its anti-Russia agenda, further undermining Ukraine's sovereignty. What further complicates any future prospects of peace or de-escalation is the notion that Ukraine and the West may have different ideas about the conditions for peace and what the post-war reality may look like. Ukraine as the state carrying the brunt of this war in terms of human and material costs would not want this war to be resolved on Western terms alone. At the same time, public moods and perceptions in the West may not align with this view. The Western public do not constantly agree that the Russian war in Ukraine is a matter of national interest for Western states (Cerde 2023). Others may argue that since the West is so actively involved in supporting Ukraine in this war, the West also gets to decide when, how, and on what terms any potential peace agreement could be signed.

We can identify multiple avenues for future research on this topic. The most obvious concerns the ways that narratives may be tailored towards a particular audience. Given the enormous focus that both Ukraine and Russia devote to the West, we suspect that they may alter their narratives depending upon whether they are speaking to their own populations versus the international community. We also wonder whether each side varies the content of their narratives depending upon the method of communication. While Ukrainian leaders like Zelenskyy ramped up their usage of social media and digital technologies, Russia constricted access to Western social media outlets. Given this notable split in an otherwise globalized world, we see value in a deeper focus on the effects of a growing technological divide between Russia and Ukraine. A third research avenue concerns how Russia intentionally incorporates charged and conspiratorial language into its narratives. We noted the usage of phrases like "nazism", "cancel culture" and "fake news". It seems possible that Russia aims to link their ambitions in Ukraine with these other global trends.

This topic is timely and important. As of this writing, there have been more than 32,000 civilian casualties in Ukraine, including over 11,000 killed and 21,000 injured (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 2024: 3). The UN

estimates that since February 24, 2022, this war has displaced more than 13 million Ukrainians (UNHCR 2024). While official statistics on military casualties on both sides of this war have been inconsistent, estimates point to at least 31,000 Ukrainian soldiers having been killed in the first two years of the war (AP World News 2024). On the Russian side, estimates for military casualties range from about 50,000 to over 500,000 (Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty 2024). Finally, many estimate that over 800,000 Russians have fled their own country, with waves taking place at the start of the war and again after the mobilization in September 2022 (Matusevich 2024). The research on strategic narratives helps us examine the stories and compare explanations offered by state leaders in this war, especially how they see the place of the West and what role the West must play in its resolution.

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THE IMAGE OF EUROPE AND ANTI-WESTERN NARRATIVES IN RUSSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL MODERN HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

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DOI: 10.36169/2227-6068.2024.02.00005

Abstract. *The article examines the anti-Western discourse in the texts of modern history textbooks used in Russian secondary schools. The analysis is based on a direct examination of the structure and content of the textbooks and includes a detailed review of the language, illustrations, and problem-based assignments used in the textbooks, providing a comprehensive understanding of how historical content is framed and delivered to students. This thorough analysis allowed for the identification of the standardized historical framework and the specific strategies employed to shape students' perceptions of Europe and the West. It is shown that Russian textbooks actively promote the negative image of the West as an enemy, with anti-Western sentiments becoming more pronounced as the timeline approaches the 21st century. This trend significantly justifies foreign policy decisions, depicting Europe as subservient to US policies. The study highlights the use of a comprehensive range of didactic tools, including illustrative and cognitive problem-based assignments, to guide students towards pre-determined conclusions and shape the official state-sanctioned version of history. It is argued that Russian secondary school modern history textbooks play a crucial role in shaping students' perceptions of Europe and the West, fostering a state-approved narrative that portrays the West as an adversary and justifies Russia's internal and external policies.*

Keywords: *historical policy, propaganda, ideological dimension of historical narratives, manipulation, falsification, "image of Europe", Russian secondary school modern history textbooks, anti-Western narratives*

Submitted: 10 July 2024; **accepted:** 01 November 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of the ideological dimension of historical narratives cannot be regarded as fundamentally new; Western European countries have already accumulated extensive experience in studying this topic. Scholars have noted its ideological context and potential use in explaining political processes and phenomena of social life. It is well known that historical narratives influence the formation of historical consciousness. The Russian-Ukrainian war has made the issues of historical memory more relevant than ever. It should be noted that the aforementioned issue is important not only for Russians and Ukrainians but also for many European countries as well. Historical policy, with its ideological dimension, has gone far beyond the boundaries of domestic politics and has become an important foreign policy imperative.

Based on recent research, a growing number of scholars are investigating the profound impact of history textbooks on societal consciousness. Levstik (2015) emphasize the pivotal role of history education in shaping students' perspectives from an early age, influencing their understanding of national identity and historical narratives. Lowenthal's (2015) exploration in "The Past is a Foreign Country – Revisited" underscores how historical interpretations embedded in textbooks can perpetuate or challenge cultural memory and societal perceptions. Psaltis (2017) extends this discourse by examining the intersection of history education and conflict transformation, highlighting how curriculum design can facilitate reconciliation and understanding in post-conflict societies. Pingel (2010), in the UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research, provides a methodological framework for assessing the socio-political implications of history textbooks, emphasizing the need for critical analysis and revision to foster inclusive and accurate historical narratives. Collectively, these studies underscore the significance of history textbooks not only as educational tools but also as potent agents in shaping collective memory and social values.

The aim of our research is to analyze the main Russian historical narratives about the West, as well as the "image of Europe" formed under the influence of modern history textbooks. The subject of analysis primarily includes modern history textbooks for grades 10-11 (from 1914 to the present).

2. INSTITUTIONAL DIMENSION: SEARCHING FOR GUIDELINES

With the beginning of the war, explaining the state's foreign policy became an essential part of the Russian education system. According to the decision of the Russian Ministry of Education, the "Conversations about Important Things" as a class hour were introduced at every secondary school, to be held as the first lesson on Mondays. The program content and methodological recommendations included a mandatory lesson on the "special operation", aiming to convince children of Russia's special liberation mission and to form a heroic image of Russian soldiers (*Новини BBC* 2022).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, new independent states embarked on the path of forming new historical narratives, with Russia being an exception, indicating a crisis of Russian identity. Historian Ivan Kurilla notes that Vladimir Putin came to power

with a clear understanding of the importance of national history and began building Russian identity by asserting the Russian royal flag and coat of arms, renewing the Soviet national anthem, and actively using “patriotic” rhetoric of returning to the “glorious past”. Consequently, continuing Soviet traditions of controlling historiography, Russia embarked on the path of forming an unchallenged “patriotic historical canon” (Курилла 2004: 50–57).

In this context, the analysis of school textbooks is revealing. Since the Soviet era during the Cold War, amid Soviet-American confrontation, Russian textbooks actively shaped the “image of the decaying West”, the “enemy image”, and anti-American ideas, which are now extrapolated into contemporary Russian society. In this context, it is important to examine the image of Europe formed by Russian history textbooks today.

Pjotr Sauer reporter for the one of the leading British periodicals, *The Guardian*, reports that the Kremlin tightened control over historical narratives in schools during Vladimir Putin's era, significantly intensifying this trend after the full-scale war against Ukraine in 2022 (Sauer 2023). In the first year of the full-scale war, the Russian Ministry of Education issued Order No. 858 on September 21, 2022, which approved the federal list of textbooks allowed for use in implementing educational programs accredited by the state (*Министерство Просвещения Российской Федерации* 2022). A new history textbook for the 11th grade was published in 2023. The Guardian quotes Putin's assistant and one of the ideologists of historical content, Vladimir Medinsky:

Such a short time to create a textbook has never been seen in our country. (Sauer 2023)

One of the most famous and controversial Russian history textbooks, edited under the direction of Vladimir Medinsky, is analyzed in this article. Medinsky's history textbook reflects historical events from the perspective of imperial ideology actively promoted in the Russian Federation. The textbook emphasizes positive aspects of the past while ignoring or minimizing negative ones. Historical facts are interpreted through the lens of the current political situation and the needs of the Russian state apparatus (Мединский & Торкунов 2023).

The research is based on the analysis of history textbook texts recommended for use in schools. Textual analysis reveals key themes, approaches to interpreting historical events, and the connection between historical narratives and contemporary political ideology. These new history textbooks for 11th-grade students present Russia's invasion of Ukraine as part of Moscow's historical mission. The new history book also claims that the “main goal” of the West is to “destabilize the situation inside Russia” and portrays Moscow as a victim of Western aggression fighting for its survival. The textbook cites Putin's essay “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians” and emphasizes that the war in Ukraine began to “stop fighting started by the West”. Ukraine is characterized as an “artificial state”, asserting that “Russia was truly robbed” when Ukraine gained independence in 1991 (Sauer 2023).

The idea of creating a single official history textbook was first announced by Vladimir Putin at the official level in February 2013 during a meeting of the Council for

Interethnic Relations. Notably, the initiative for creating unified history textbooks came from Putin himself rather than Russian historians or representatives of the academic community, many of whom publicly opposed the implementation of such ideas, questioning their appropriateness. In April 2013, during the annual press conference “Direct Line with Vladimir Putin”, the topic of a unified history textbook became one of the top mentioned by the Russian president and received practical official approval at the government program level. According to Putin, “the textbook should be based on a single concept of continuous Russian history” (*Стандарт* 2013).

Continuing the traditional Soviet paradigm of direct and demonstrative political leader intervention in school textbook writing, Putin assigned the implementation of the state order for the officially single version of Russian history to the newly created Russian Historical Society. Declaring continuity with the historical society of imperial Russia, it was headed by the Speaker of the State Duma Sergey Naryshkin, an engineer-radio technician and economist by education. Overcoming opposition from some academic circles of the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the official institution authorized to conduct state research projects in the field of history, the Russian authorities created a new, fully controlled institution under the guise of public discussion of the president's initiative.

The task of rethinking Russian history assigned to the society was timed to the 400th anniversary of the Romanov dynasty, directly reflected in the commission's work results. In June 2013, the organization's presidium, which had the legal status of a public non-profit, identified “31 controversial episodes that need to be explained to history teachers”. The final result of the commission's work was a document titled “Unified Historical and Cultural Standard”, the structure and text of which deserve separate analysis. The document consists of a preface and seven chapters that consistently reveal the key aspects of the nationwide concept of presenting history, highlighted in chronological order (*Стандарт* 2013).

The first part of the *Standard*, dedicated to conceptual foundations, draws special attention. The controversial nature of theoretical approaches is evident at the level of attempts to combine direct opposites. In the first part, the developers call for abandoning old ideologized schemes of historical interpretation, contrasting them with a “cultural-anthropological approach” and even the development of critical thinking:

Contemporary school textbooks continue to be dominated by the traditional focus on political history, rooted in the imperial and Soviet schools. This leads to the overshadowing of the role of personalities, social institutions and structures, socio-cultural factors, and everyday life, ultimately distorting historical reality. Moreover, a modern textbook should stimulate students to acquire historical knowledge from other sources, and teachers should facilitate students' mastering of research techniques, developing their critical thinking by teaching text analysis, ways of finding and selecting information, comparing different viewpoints, distinguishing facts from their interpretations, (*Стандарт* 2013: 1–5)

However, the subsequent exposition leaves no doubt about the consistency of adhering to the declared principles, effectively negating them. The call to “compare different

viewpoints”, which suddenly disappears from the focus, is replaced by other categories with clearly defined directive-evaluative judgments:

It is advisable to emphasize mass heroism in liberation wars, primarily the Patriotic Wars of 1812 and 1941-1945. It is important to highlight the feat of the people; Russia is the largest country in the world. Due to this fact, a significant component of national historical consciousness has formed. This thesis should become a pivotal point of the textbook. (*Стандарт* 2013: 6–7)

3. BACKGROUND: ANALYSIS OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE IMAGE OF THE «WEST» FROM 1914 TO THE MID-20th CENTURY BASED ON THE MATERIALS FROM TEXTBOOKS FOR 10th GRADE

It is notable that when covering European history of the 19th century, authors tend to avoid emphasizing significant differences between Western European countries and Russia, instead highlighting that during this period, Russia was an integral part of European civilization. The 10th-grade textbook also mentions that the cultural and social processes occurring in Russia during this period had much in common with broader European trends. For example, the textbook emphasizes the significance of Russian art, literature, and music. Thus, the authors aim to show that in many aspects, Russia was an inseparable part of the European space, ignoring or minimizing political and ideological differences. For instance, in the description of the Industrial Revolution, Russia is positioned as one of the world's leading states:

The Industrial Revolution opened a new chapter in history. The formation of an industrial society began in the countries of Europe and North America. At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, new factory chimneys continued to rise to the sky, ever larger trading ships were launched, and locomotive whistles were heard even in the most remote provinces. In the early 20th century, transcontinental railways were built in the USA, Canada, and Russia. (*Сопоко-Цюна* 2019: 10)

At the same time, it is emphasized that Russia shared not only the overall European achievements but also the general European problems:

Unprecedented mass migration occurred. From 1870 to 1914, about 26 million people left Europe. They primarily emigrated from Italy, Austria-Hungary, the Balkan lands, and the Russian Empire. People fled from poverty and national oppression. (*Сопоко-Цюна* 2019: 14)

The presence of contradictions between Russia and other members of the Entente on the eve of World War I is constantly highlighted at the level of the East-West antithesis. The textbook emphasizes that despite efforts to resolve problems, the conflicts of interest between Russia and its Western allies remained significant. This was especially true regarding the Balkan issue, where Russia sought to strengthen its influence, while Western states, particularly Great Britain and France, had their own strategic interests. For example, the textbook notes that during the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, Russia actively supported the Slavic peoples, which caused concern in London and Paris, fearing Russia's excessive strengthening in this region. These contradictions, despite the

temporary rapprochement at the beginning of the 20th century, highlight the deep complexity of relations between Russia and other major Western powers, which were forced to seek compromises in the face of the growing threat of a global conflict:

Eventually, Russia joined the Entente. Britain tried to settle relations with Russia, which, in turn, sought rapprochement with Britain after the defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. (Copoko-Цюна 2019: 26)

This focus is maintained in the question for the paragraph:

Why did Britain, France, and Russia enter into allied relations, given that there were serious contradictions between them? (Copoko-Цюна 2019: 26)

It is worth noting that ideologically charged questions are usually addressed at an advanced level according to the textbook structure:

The textbook has two types of texts: traditional paragraphs (basic and advanced levels) and materials for independent work and project activities (advanced level). Questions and tasks in the textbook are also divided into two levels. The second level is intended for those who study the subject at an advanced level. (Copoko-Цюна 2019: 9)

Significant bias is observed in attempts to describe the causes of World War I: state ideology plays a key role in forming historical narratives. As in Soviet textbooks, the imperialist nature of the war is emphasized, and Western capitalist countries are blamed for inciting the conflict. However, given the new political realities, the approach to describing the causes of the war has somewhat changed, taking into account the interests of state ideology and political course. The peaceful aspirations of Russia to help the fraternal Slavic peoples are outlined in contrast to the aggressive plans of the collective West:

Britain hoped to crush... Austria-Hungary hoped to deal with Serbia... Germany had plans to defeat France and Britain... Instead, Russia, in turn, considered it important... to assist the Pan-Slavic movement in the Balkans. (Copoko-Цюна 2019: 27)

One of the attempts to fit Russian history into a broader European context is the actual copying of the Soviet dogma about the decisive influence of the Russian Revolution of 1917 on world history:

The great Russian revolution began the wave of revolutions even during the war. It had a tremendous impact on the situation in Europe and the world. (Copoko-Цюна 2019: 41)

Other revolutions are interpreted as “Attempts to do as in Russia”. Such an interpretation of events undoubtedly demonstrates an attempt to present the Russian Revolution of 1917 as a key catalyst for global changes, fitting it into the context of European revolutionary processes. This also reflects the tendency to centralize the Russian experience in global history, emphasizing its uniqueness and influence. Consequently, the authors of the textbook attempt to show that the events in Russia became a kind of a model for other revolutionary movements in Europe and beyond. In particular, the textbook notes that the revolutionary waves that swept through Germany, Hungary, and

other countries took the Russian experience as inspiration and a model for their own social and political transformations. This interpretation helps build a narrative in which Russia acts as a leading subject of global historical changes that influenced the course of the 20th century.

The blame for the split between Soviet Russia and the collective West is entirely placed on the latter:

Soviet Russia was not represented at the Paris Peace Conference and not only was excluded from creating the post-war peace order, but also became the object of intervention by Western states. (Copoko-Цюна 2019: 50)

At the same time, the bilateral treaty with Germany in Rapallo is positioned as an important diplomatic breakthrough for Soviet Russia on the world stage:

The Rapallo Treaty opened the era of recognizing Soviet Russia and establishing diplomatic relations in 1924 with many countries (with the USA only in 1933). (Copoko-Цюна 2019: 51)

The phrase “Soviet Russia” is given clear preference over the use of the official name of the state – the USSR. This approach to presenting history clearly reflects the tendency to portray Soviet Russia as a victim of the aggressive policy of the West, contributing to the creation of the image of a “besieged fortress”. This allows emphasizing that the Soviet state, despite international isolation and hostile actions by Western countries, managed to achieve significant diplomatic successes. The Rapallo Treaty is presented as a key moment symbolizing a breakthrough in international relations and the beginning of the recognition of Soviet Russia on the world stage. Such a narrative not only highlights the importance of Soviet diplomacy but also provides an additional focus on the separateness and self-sufficiency of the Soviet state. The choice of the phrase “Soviet Russia” instead of “USSR” emphasizes the continuity and historical role of Russia as the main subject in the context of the Soviet era, resulting in the formation of the perception of its leading role in world processes.

A particular emphasis on the idea that fascist ideology originates from Western European countries is traced several times in the textbook text:

Simultaneously, in 1918-1919, a right-wing radical extremist movement emerged in several Western countries (primarily in Italy and Germany), receiving the general name fascism. (Copoko-Цюна 2019: 41)

This emphasis allows the textbook author to highlight the connection between Western political culture and the emergence of fascist movements, which are associated with extreme forms of right-wing radicalism and violence. This creates a contrast between the ideological foundations of the West and the Soviet system, emphasizing the negative consequences of Western political processes. In the textbook, fascism is presented as a phenomenon closely related to crises in democratic forms of government. Thus, the emergence of fascist movements is presented as a logical result of Western political development, discrediting Western models of governance and emphasizing the advantages of the Soviet system.

“The countries of the West” constantly appear as personified collective entities, for example, Chapter 6 of the textbook is titled “Western Countries in the 1920s. USA, Great Britain, France, Germany”. This approach allows simplifying complex historical processes by generalizing them to the actions of individual states representing the entire Western world. This contributes to creating a particular image of “Western countries” acting as a single subject, often contrasted with the Soviet bloc. The textbook emphasizes the common political and economic characteristics of these countries, such as the capitalist system, political crises, and social and economic challenges they faced in the interwar period. This generalized perspective allows easier formation of certain perceptions and stereotypes about the West, particularly highlighting its weaknesses and internal contradictions. It also allows clearly contrasting the collective West with Russia, emphasizing its uniqueness and the advantages stated by the authors over Western societies (Сороко-Цюна 2019: 53).

The leading role of the USA in post-war European recovery is regarded as a well-thought-out mechanism for turning European countries into satellites of the USA:

This meant that the economic center of the capitalist world finally shifted to the USA. The USA took on solving European problems not only to save their credits issued to European countries but also due to fears of revolutionary upheavals. The plan of the American banker Charles Dawes was a cunning financial combination. The USA entered World War I late, and their human losses were small. During World War I, the USA turned from a debtor of Europe into an international creditor. (Сороко-Цюна 2019: 51)

Thus, the textbook presents the role of the USA in post-war European recovery as a part of a strategic plan to establish its economic and political dominance. Particular attention is given to the economic dependence of European countries on American credits, forming a new structure of international relations where the USA acted as the leader. This dependence, according to the textbook, allowed the United States to control economic and political processes in Europe, contributing to the transformation of European states into allies or, as emphasized in the text, satellites of the USA. Such an approach allows the Dawes Plan to be viewed not only as an economic stabilization tool but also as a means of political influence. To reinforce this idea, a question is posed: “Why did the United States take the initiative in the recovery of war-torn European economies?” (Сороко-Цюна 2019: 53) This question encourages students to consider the premeditated nature of American foreign policy and its impact on the post-war world order, emphasizing that these actions were part of a broader strategic plan to strengthen U.S. global influence.

The demonization of the U.S. image is reflected throughout the textbook with statements such as:

The Ku Klux Klan became active again. The number of members in this racist organization increased tenfold in the early 1920s, reaching 5 million. Racial discrimination became widespread, especially in the South. Schoolteacher J. Scopes was convicted for teaching Charles Darwin's theory of evolution («the monkey trial»). The frenzy of profit and stock market speculation had another side: the country was shaken by scandals involving corruption among members of

Congress and the government. The underground business flourished, particularly illegal production. (Сороко-Цюна 2019: 56)

This depiction of the U.S. in the textbook creates an image of a country beset by internal problems and social conflicts. Such emphasis on negative phenomena fosters a critical attitude towards the U.S. among students, highlighting the discrepancies between proclaimed democratic values and social and political issues. Furthermore, it allows the textbook authors to underscore the moral and social superiority of the Soviet system over the Western one, casting doubt on the image of the U.S. as the leader of world democracy. Additionally, such mentions serve as a tool to foster a critical attitude towards the U.S. among students, amplifying negative perceptions of the Western world and its values.

4. BACKGROUND: ANALYSIS OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE IMAGE OF THE «WEST» FROM THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20th CENTURY TO THE PRESENT BASED ON THE MATERIALS FROM TEXTBOOKS FOR 11th GRADE

Let's make an overview of the second part of the 20th century in Russian history textbooks. In *the History of Russia. 1945 – early 21st Century. 11th Grade. Basic Level. Textbook* section 10 about Foreign Policy in 1953–1964 tells:

In March 1954, Malenkov was the first to declare the inadmissibility of exchange conflicts in the presence of nuclear weapons. He believed that the peaceful future of the Soviet people could be ensured by developing relations with Western countries. The most important task of Soviet diplomacy became the prevention of armed conflict in Europe and the preservation of borders established after World War II. The threat of nuclear retaliation became a serious factor in negotiations with the West. The USSR took an active part in resolving the Suez Crisis of 1956 when British, French, and Israeli troops invaded Egypt in response to the nationalization of the Suez Canal. The aggression was stopped partly due to the presence of the USSR's "nuclear argument". (Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 125)

An interesting task for students follows this paragraph:

In historical science, there are controversial issues with various, often contradictory viewpoints. Below is one of the disputed perspectives in historical science: The foreign policy course of the Soviet leadership in 1953–1964 was based on the principles of peaceful coexistence with capitalist countries. Using historical knowledge, provide two arguments to support this view and two arguments to refute it. (Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 132–133)

Thus, after World War II, the theme of «peace preservation» became a milestone of Soviet propaganda. The USSR engages in dialogue with Western countries about maintaining peace, while simultaneously declaring that the presence of nuclear weapons is a significant argument in this very dialogue.

Section 17 is dedicated to the Foreign Policy of the USSR in 1964–1985. Analyzing the events of the 1960s–1980s, the textbook pays particular attention to relations with Central and Eastern European countries, primarily within the socialist bloc. It notes that

by the mid-1960s, the once united socialist camp was split under the influence of the decisions of the 20th Congress of the CPSU.¹ (Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 193)

In 1969, the USA and other NATO countries supported the USSR's proposal for a pan-European Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, and in 1970, a Soviet-West German treaty was signed, in which the parties recognized post-war borders in Europe.

The culmination of the process was the signing of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe by the heads of 33 European states, as well as the USA and Canada, in Helsinki on August 1, 1975. (Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 195)

Evaluation of Events in Czechoslovakia ("Prague Spring" 1968) proposes traditional Soviet approach. The textbook declares that in December 1967, the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia changed, with O. Dubchek becoming the new leader. A photo of him with L. Brezhnev is followed by the comment that

the Soviet leadership anxiously observed the developments in Czechoslovakia, delaying military intervention until the last moment. (Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 198)

The textbook asserts that the events in Czechoslovakia forced the USSR to reassess its principles of cooperation and take steps to strengthen the economic and military integration of Eastern European countries. It highlights the figure of L. Walensa, noting that Western countries actively supported *Solidarity* in Poland. In 1983, Walensa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1980, massive worker protests began in Poland, posing a political challenge to the state authorities.

Overall, M. Gorbachev's policy during the Perestroika period (1985–1991), known as *New Political Thinking*, which aimed at reducing confrontation with the West, improving relations with Western countries, reducing nuclear arms, enhancing peacekeeping efforts, and participating in international organizations, is deemed in the textbook's dictionary as flawed. This is because it presumed abandoning the conclusion of the contemporary world's division into two opposing socio-political systems (socialist and capitalist) and prioritizing universal human values over any others (class, national, religious, etc.) (Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 433).

In section 28, "Russia and the World. Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation in the 1990s," the textbook asserts its main ideas: Russia, as the successor of the USSR, retained its status as a nuclear power. Along its perimeter, instead of the former "security belt" of friendly countries, new threats emerged. These were associated with the rise to power in some Eastern European countries and post-Soviet states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, etc.) of nationalist politicians hostile to Russia and the Russian-speaking population. Due to the unprepared withdrawal of Russian troops from Eastern European countries, carried out in an unjustifiably accelerated mode, the combat readiness of the Russian army sharply weakened. Russia's foreign policy, built on a willingness to make concessions, was perceived in other countries as a sign of weakness. In reality, Western

¹ CPSU – Communist Party of the Soviet Union

leaders had no intention of compromising their interests for the sake of “friendship” with Russia. It is declared that NATO's aggression in Yugoslavia led to a change in Russia's policy towards the West:

As Russia returned to an independent political course, relations with Western countries deteriorated.

Relations with Ukraine are shown through the prism of the West:

However, Kyiv, incited by the West and anti-Russian politicians from the western regions, increasingly distanced itself from Moscow. Ukraine was being turned into 'anti-Russia.

One of the conclusions in this section:

Russia's desire to establish fair and equal relations with the West, taking into account mutual interests, was not reciprocated. (Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 321).

No less noteworthy is the task at the end of the section:

Provide specific examples of Western countries infringing on Russia's national interests in the 1990s. Why did Western countries increasingly ignore Russia's interests during this period? (Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 324)

Sections 34-35 are dedicated to the foreign policy in the early 21st century and focuses on Russia in the Modern World. Western foreign policy in the textbooks is described as

American dictatorship and control: the EU countries, yielding to the political dictatorship of the USA, curtailed several joint projects with Russia. In this situation, our country had to seek more reliable partners. (Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 374)

The subsection titled “Growth of Russia's International Authority and Renewed Confrontation with Western Countries in 2008–2020” states that

in contrast to the anti-Russian policies of the West, the further development of friendly relations between Russia and China became evident.

The conclusion section emphasizes anti-Western sentiments:

In Russia's foreign policy at the beginning of the 21st century, noticeable changes occurred. From a country that was in the wake of the West after the collapse of the USSR, Russia returned to being a key global player whose actions on the international stage are dictated by national interests. Russia's desire to pursue a sovereign and independent foreign policy provoked a hostile reaction from Western countries, primarily the USA. (Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 379)

On page 382 of the 11th-grade textbook, one of the important dates suggested for memorization is “2022 – freezing of Russia's gold and currency reserves by Western countries”, and the state of Russia after the introduction of sanctions is evaluated positively, specifically stating,

contrary to Western expectations, anti-Russian sanctions stimulated the development of import substitution and domestic production. (Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 379)

It should be noted that in Russian history textbooks, the activities of the European Union (EU) and the processes of European integration are generally evaluated primarily from the perspective of defending so-called “Russian national interests”. Firstly, the expansion of the EU to the east, particularly the inclusion of the Baltic and Eastern European countries, is critically examined as creating new challenges for Russia, including economic, political, and military aspects. Secondly, Western European countries are considered NATO members, which pose a threat to Russian security. Thirdly, textbooks after 2014 evaluate European sanctions in response to the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in eastern Ukraine and assert that the EU is not an independent subject in implementing foreign policy but acts in the interests of the USA.

Analyzing the current state of international relations, Russian foreign policy, and relations with Western countries, the textbook declares that the EU countries yielded to the political diktat of the USA and actually curtailed a number of joint projects with Russia. Consequently, “in this situation, our country had to seek more reliable partners”. One of the tasks for the text of the paragraph is to identify three significant reasons for the complications in relations between Russia and Western countries in the 2010s. Students are essentially led to the conclusion regarding the confrontation between Western countries and Russia in the modern stage, the main reason for which is the infringement on Russia's national interests (Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 380).

The justification for the modern foreign policy course of Russia is stated as “Countering the Western strategy towards Russia”. The ideas of the West are described as “fixed ideas” aimed at destabilizing Russia, with the goal of fragmentation and control over its resources. A separate topic in the textbooks became the falsification of history, in which Western countries are specifically accused at the modern stage.

The USA and the EU have spent enormous sums on preparing special educational programs in history, so-called “textbooks”. No effort or funds were spared to “reboot our brains” (their professional term), to convince us of the “inherent aggressiveness and colonial nature” of Russia. (Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 394)

One of the questions to the paragraph text sounds like this:

Provide examples of historical falsification by Western countries. Which historical period is most subject to falsification today, and why? (Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 395)

Regarding the analysis of history falsification issues the textbook highlights the following topics:

1. The European Parliament resolution of September 19, 2019, condemning all forms of totalitarianism, including Nazism, Stalinism, and other totalitarian regimes, emphasizes that these regimes led to millions of victims, including through the Holocaust, genocides, deportations, and mass murders. The resolution supports the

recognition of August 23 as European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism. This date symbolizes the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939 (*European Parliament Resolution* 2019). Textbook condemns the resolution and the declaration to be a form of history falsification.

2. Dismantling of Soviet era monuments in Europe. The image of the West is vividly demonstrated by the quote from the textbook:

So the West fights those who can no longer defend themselves – the dead.
(Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 394)

3. Political leaders and their evaluations. For example, W. Churchill is characterized as an uncompromising politician and staunch anti-communist who, in the summer of 1945, signed a plan for “attacking the USSR with the use of Wehrmacht units”. The authors of the textbook then speculate that

today even Sir Churchill (who, by the way, repeatedly emphasized the decisive contribution of the USSR to the Victory of 1945), having familiarized himself with the “new Western version of history”, would think that the world has gone completely mad. (Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 395)

5. “EUROPE AND THE WEST” IN ILLUSTRATIONS, DOCUMENTS AND ANALYTICAL ASSIGNMENTS

Illustrative material in history textbooks serves important functions by enabling the visualization of information, making learning more accessible and comprehensible. Illustrations often contain additional meanings that students can learn to recognize and interpret. It is noteworthy that images have a powerful emotional impact and can evoke deep experiences, which contribute to the better retention of material. Moreover, the interactive format (maps, diagrams, photographs, paintings, etc.) fosters the development of analytical skills. In this context, it is important to investigate how Europe is portrayed through the illustrative content presented in Russian textbooks.

One of the recent textbooks from 2023, designed for the 11th grade by authors Vladimir Medinsky and Anatolyi Torkunov, is particularly noteworthy. The textbook is developed according to the requirements of the Federal State Educational Standard of Secondary General Education, as per the Order of the Ministry of Education No. 732 dated August 12, 2022, and the Concept of Teaching the Course “History of Russia” in educational institutions of the Russian Federation. The textbook covers the main events of Russian history from 1945 to the early 2020s and is rich in illustrative material. Significant attention is given to the interconnection of events in national and foreign history (Мединский & Торкунов 2023).

Chapter 4 of the textbook is titled “The Place and Role of the USSR in the Post-War World. Foreign Policy of the USSR 1945–1953”. The illustrative material in this chapter is particularly notable. For instance, on page 39, there is a section called “Interesting Details”, which graphically, through a colorful histogram, demonstrates the results of a survey conducted by the French Institute of Public Opinion among the republic's residents over different years. Respondents were asked: “Which nation, in your

opinion, made the greatest contribution to the defeat of Germany in 1945?”. Based on the histogram figures, students are invited to comment on the survey results and explain the changes in the views of French citizens over the years: 1945, 1994, 2004, and 2015.

Figure 1. Histogram from the textbook: Results of the poll on the question, “Which nation, in your opinion, made the greatest contribution to the defeat of Germany in 1945?”. The task for the students: “Comment on the results of the surveys. How can you explain the changes?”



Source: Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 40.

In May 1945, the perceived contribution to the victory in World War II was as follows: USSR 57%, USA 20%, and Great Britain 12%. By 1994, the figures changed to USSR 25%, USA 49%, and Great Britain 16%. In 2004, the distribution was 20%, 58%, and 16%, respectively. In 2015, the perceived contributions were USSR 23%, USA 54%, and Great Britain 18% (Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 38–40).

It is worth recalling that the idea of “victory over Nazism, primarily achieved by the Soviet people”, is one of the cornerstones of Russian historiography. Thus, students are led to the conclusion that in European countries, exemplified by France, public opinion is formed in a way that effectively diminishes the significance of the Soviet Union's historical victory in the war and exaggerates the roles of the USA and Great Britain.

The principle of visualization in history education is largely realized through work with historical documents. Direct engagement of students with written sources encourages them to explain the content and fosters a sense of involvement in the events being studied.

Let's pay attention to the documents offered to students for discussion, along with the questions and tasks related to the text of the paragraphs. One of the recurring themes is the opposition of the Russian Federation/Soviet Union to the *West*. We propose few examples.

Section: Summing Up. World War II.

During the occupation and retreat, the enemies blew up thousands of bridges, destroyed 6,000 hospitals, looted and burned historical palaces near Leningrad,

desecrated the estates of A. Pushkin, L. Tolstoy, and hundreds of museums. Ancient Russian churches in Novgorod and Pskov lay in ruins. Countless cultural valuables were taken to Germany from museum storages, including the famous Amber Room from Tsarskoye Selo. The issue of restitution (return of cultural property) remains relevant for our country to this day. (Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 8)

Cold War.

However, the standard of living of the population grew slowly. The main reason was the enormous demographic, economic, and resource losses of the country from 1941–1945 and the Cold War started by the Western bloc led by the USA. (Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 18)

Incorporation of the Baltic States into the USSR and its significance.

In the Baltic republics, old enterprises were reconstructed and new ones were built in the fields of mechanical engineering, instrument making, shipbuilding, and radio industry. By 1950, the volume of industrial production in the Lithuanian SSR exceeded the indicators of independent Lithuania in 1940 by 1.9 times; in the Latvian SSR and Estonian SSR – by 3 and 3.4 times, respectively. (Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 24)

In the World History textbook for the 10th grade by Oleh Soroko-Tsyupa, the concepts of integration and regional integration are examined using the example of Western and Central Europe, related to the transformation of international relations and the formation of regional centers of power under the leadership of the United States of America (Сороко-Цюпа 2019: 51).

Section: Thinking, Comparing, Reflecting. The leitmotif of many sections in the textbooks is the formation of a cult of strength and, consequently, a positive attitude towards “strong power”, towards dictatorship.

I.V. Stalin in 1931 said: “The backwards are beaten. We are 50–100 years behind the advanced countries. We must cover this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or they crush us”. Argue the position of I.V. Stalin. (Сороко-Цюпа 2019: 51)

Textbooks from different years articulate the same issues differently, allowing for the tracking of changes in the influence of power on historical issues and reflecting the current state of relations, which can be the subject of a separate study. In the context of our article, we note, for example, that the 2012 Russian history textbook by Vladimir Shestakov considers the events of the 1960s in Czechoslovakia in the context of the general crisis of relations with the West (Шестаков 2012). Slightly different accents are present in the 2022 textbook, where the events of April 1968 – the “Prague Spring” – are characterized as “a public discussion that turned into an internal crisis, actively fueled by the West” (Чубарьян 2022).

Section Questions and Tasks for the Paragraph, one of the questions is formulated as follows:

Which provisions of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe did Western countries attempt to use during the ideological confrontation with the USSR? (Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 200)

In the 10th-grade textbook, there is a separate paragraph dedicated to the falsification of the history of the Great Patriotic War. It is noted that in some countries, entire “institutes of national memory” are working in this direction, falsifying history. A specific area of falsification is identified as placing equal responsibility for starting the war on Germany and the USSR. (A new type of task, for example, *Find the Document*, students have to read the OSCE Resolution, which condemns Stalinism on par with Nazism and supports the idea of the European Parliament to declare August 23 as the Europe-wide Day of Remembrance for the victims of Stalinism and Nazism). Moreover, the accusations against Soviet soldiers of crimes against the civilian population of liberated countries are declared unsubstantiated (Торкунов 2022: 107).

Section: Glossary of Terms and Concepts. One of the important themes in history textbooks is “nostalgia for the USSR”. The term “Parade of Sovereignities” is interpreted as the process of anti-Russian forces adopting declarations of state sovereignty by republics and autonomies within the USSR and the RSFSR, leading to the collapse of the USSR (Мединский & Торкунов 2023: 433).

6. CONCLUSION

Russian textbooks actively cultivate the negative image of the West as an enemy among students. Despite the apparent variety and presence of different authorial versions of textbooks, there is a clearly defined standard of history that strictly regulates historical content. All authors work within this framework, ensuring a consistent narrative across different textbooks. This standardization underscores the controlled nature of historical education in Russian secondary schools. Chronologically, as we approach the 21st century, anti-Western sentiments become more pronounced and categorical, significantly justifying foreign policy decisions. Europe is effectively denied the ability to pursue an independent international policy and is viewed as being in the wake of US policies. A full range of didactic tools, including illustrative and cognitive problem-based assignments, is employed to guide students towards pre-determined conclusions and to shape the official state version of history. This educational strategy ensures that students internalize a state-sanctioned historical narrative. The dominant themes in the historical narrative include the assertion of the USSR's leading role in the victory in World War II, the minimization of the West's contribution, and the emphasis on Russia's leading role within the USSR. Additionally, there is a recurring topic of blaming the collective West for the collapse of the USSR and the socialist bloc countries. The narrative asserts that the return to power and the policy of “strength” are the only possible scenarios for Russia's modern policy towards the West. Internal problems in Russia are often linked to the necessity of countering the West. This narrative strategy creates a sense of external threat that justifies domestic issues and unites public opinion against a common external adversary.

Russian secondary school modern history textbooks play a crucial role in shaping the negative perception of Europe and the West among students. By adhering to a standardized historical framework, employing a wide range of didactic tools, and

emphasizing certain historical themes, these textbooks foster a state-approved narrative that portrays the West as an adversary and justifies Russia's internal and external policies.

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UKRAINIAN ANTI-AMERICANISM DURING FULL-SCALE RUSSIAN AGGRESSION THROUGH THE LENS OF THE PRESIDENT OF UKRAINE'S PUBLIC DIPLOMACY: A DECONSTRUCTIVE ATTEMPT

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DOI: 10.36169/2227-6068.2024.02.00006

Abstract. *The paper examines the complex phenomenon of Ukrainian anti-Americanism amidst the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. Despite American support, anti-American sentiment persists in Ukraine, influenced by historical grievances, perceived inadequacies in American leadership, and the existential threat posed by Russia. This study explores the dynamic relationship between Ukraine and the United States, providing insights into the geopolitical and cultural factors shaping Ukrainian anti-Americanism during critical periods of full-scale war. The study finds that Ukrainian anti-Americanism is not static but oscillates between pro-Americanism and anti-Americanism, influenced by historical context and current geopolitical realities. The disappointment in American support during critical moments has fostered a proactive form of anti-Americanism among Ukrainian leaders, particularly President Zelensky, who uses public diplomacy to pressure the US and other global actors to take a stronger stand against Russian aggression. The research proves that this anti-Americanism is a reaction to Ukraine's forced dependence on the US and the perceived inadequacy of its leadership in ensuring global security. At its core, Ukrainian anti-Americanism is an expression of frustration with the inadequacy of the American response to Russian aggression. It reflects a deeper desire for global leadership and solidarity in defending democratic values and national sovereignty. It is also shaped by a historical narrative of survival and resistance, where America's role is seen through the prism of Ukraine's existential struggle against Russian imperialism. The reconstruction of Ukrainian anti-Americanism has revealed that agents of Ukrainian anti-Americanism, while criticizing American policy, also seek to engage the United States and other global players in collective efforts to maintain international law and order. This ideology of Ukrainian anti-Americanism prompts Ukraine to call for greater global solidarity and leadership, advocating for a multipolar world where leadership is shared among countries, promoting a united front against aggression and tyranny.*

Keywords: *anti-Americanism, Russia-Ukraine war, geopolitics, public diplomacy, international communication, international relations, security, culture*

Submitted: 13 July 2024; **accepted:** 3 November 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

Anti-Americanism can be broadly defined as a negative attitude toward the United States, its government, actors, values, institutions, culture, or its implementation of policies in the global world. This negative attitude has various degrees of irrational and rational expression, ranging from emotions, feelings, fears, and sentiments to well-thought-out criticism, ideology, and strategy. Anti-Americanism has historical roots dating back to the early 19th century. It is often the result of a combination of political, economic, and cultural grievances, where critics may see America as a hegemonic power that undermines local autonomy, imposes undesirable policies, or, conversely, does not do enough to protect democratic ideals. Anti-Americanism varies in different contexts and regions, shaped by local history and interaction with the United States. It can manifest in opposition to American interventionism, cultural imperialism, economic policies, or the inability to live up to proclaimed ideals such as democracy and freedom. Conversely, pro-Americanism represents a positive attitude toward the United States, where its influence and leadership are seen as beneficial or exemplary. This includes an admiration for American values such as democracy, individual freedom, and economic opportunity and a hope that these values will be effectively supported worldwide. Anti-Americanism and pro-Americanism often oscillate depending on current geopolitical or economic conditions, and both attitudes are present even in societies with strong American support.

Some scholars in the field of American studies tend to attribute its origins to the 1820s and 1930s (O'Connor 2020: XVI). Although the term “anti-Americanism” in the sense of being hostile or antagonistic to American values and interests appears as early as 1812, it was mainly applied to Americans themselves (Friedman 2012: 24–25). Ukrainian anti-Americanism dates back to 1919 and is associated with the position of the US administration, in particular, represented by US Secretary of State Robert Lansing, in preserving an indivisible Russia (Камінський 2012: 149). The exact position of the U.S. administration was expressed during George H.W. Bush's visit to Kyiv on 1 August 1991, but concerning the Soviet Union. *“Freedom is not the same as independence. Americans do not support those who seek independence...”*, (Камінський 2012: 309) George H.W. Bush said in his address to Ukrainian parliamentarians.

Despite the US support for Ukraine amidst Russian aggression, Ukrainian anti-Americanism continues to be a significant aspect of the political consciousness and culture of Ukrainians. It has its own unique characteristics, reality, and impact on political and international relations. Ukrainian anti-Americanism is a complex, historically conditioned form of anti-American sentiment that has particularly developed during the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war. It serves as both a reaction to historical experiences and a response to the perceived inadequacy of American support during critical moments in Ukraine's struggle against Russian aggression.

According to a March 2024 survey by sociologists, the positive attitude of Ukrainians toward the United States has decreased from 89.2% to 80% compared to August 2023 (Разумков Центр 2024). While the percentage of explicit Ukrainian anti-Americanists stood at 12.9% as of March 2024, it is a phenomenon driven by objective circumstances and causes. In addition, Ukrainian anti-Americanism will likely significantly

impact the specifics of Ukrainian-American relations in the future. However, the relevance of this study is determined not only by this context but by the entire spectrum of relations in the global arena related to countering Russian aggression and restoring the rule of law in the world.

The study aims to reveal the essence and specificity of Ukrainian anti-Americanism in the context of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war through the lens of the public diplomacy of the President of Ukraine and using deconstructivist analysis.

2. METHODOLOGY

The basic methodology of this study is deconstruction. Deconstruction is a method that tries to reveal the true implicit meanings behind stereotypical ideas and superficial interpretations through distinction and inversion (Derrida 1981: 20; Derrida 1997: 161-162; Caputo 2021). For our study, distinction means equating the pro-Americanism-anti-Americanism opposition, analyzing the components of this opposition and their disputes, and analyzing their sources to understand how they work as a whole in the reality of the current full-scale aggressive war. The inversion assumes that anti-Americanism is a transformed form of pro-Americanism as a commitment to American culture through its negation. At the stage of inversion, we try to find traces of pro-Americanism in anti-Americanism. We assume that pro-Americanism and anti-Americanism are interconnected phenomena. So are deconstruction and reconstruction. Thus, consistent deconstruction invariably involves reconstruction, in this case, of Ukrainian anti-Americanism. The method of deconstruction allows us to identify the specifics, sources, and influence of Ukrainian anti-Americanism without repressing pro-Americanism. It is also important to emphasize that deconstruction allows us to interpret both pro-Americanism and anti-Americanism as replenishment, compensation for the lack of agency or leadership of Ukraine on the global stage. But this applies not only to Ukraine but to all countries around the world.

According to Derrida, meaning cannot be considered fixed or static; it is constantly evolving. It emerges from a constant process of negotiation between competing concepts (Derrida 1981: 41).

An additional, complementary methodological tool for the study of Ukrainian anti-Americanism is the metamodern approach, which primarily involves considering any phenomenon as a balancing of different polarities in the process of oscillation between them (Vermeulen, & van den Akker 2010; 2015, van den Akker et al. 2017; Rowson 2021; Pipere & Mārtinsonsone 2022; Ceriello 2022; Dember 2023). In this case, it is mainly about the oscillation between anti-Americanism and pro-Americanism. However, this approach also implies understanding the oscillations between other poles, such as optimism and pessimism, hope and despair, national interests and global concerns, realism and idealism. In the following, we will try to comprehend how these poles of oscillation are related to Ukrainian anti-Americanism. In general, the metamodern approach to the study of Ukrainian anti-Americanism allows for a more nuanced and multifaceted examination of its specifics.

3. RESULTS

The riddle of Ukrainian anti-Americanism

The riddle of Ukrainian anti-Americanism is that there is always a certain oscillation between pro-Americanism and anti-Americanism. Moreover, Ukrainian anti-Americanism has always been different at each historical stage. For example, from Ukraine's independence until the Russian aggression, anti-American views in Ukraine have been closely related to pro-Russian ones, as noted by Maryna Bessonova (Бессонова 2012: 115–117; 2019: 26). Here, one can even note the pro-Americanism/anti-Americanism divide as a technology of polarizing Ukrainian society used by political forces. The then oscillation between pro-Americanism and anti-Americanism was very well documented in the fundamental conceptual document “The Main Directions of Ukraine’s Foreign Policy”, which was adopted by the Verkhovna Rada on 2 July 1993. It determined the strategic direction of Ukraine's foreign policy and stated that for the Ukrainian state, “relations with the United States of America as a country whose policy significantly affects the development of international events are of particular importance” (*Верховна Рада України* 1993) and, at the same time, Ukrainian-Russian relations were determined as “relations of special partnership”.

After the Russian aggression in 2014 and especially with the outbreak of the full-scale Russia-Ukraine war in February 2024, Ukrainian anti-Americanism was reborn. It was now rooted in disillusioned pro-Americanism. The people of Ukraine felt victimized by Russia's aggressive policy, which naturally implied hope for a savior, the world leader in the United States. The new pro-Americanism was forced and associated with the hope of salvation from the existential threat that Russia represented.

However, the US savior turned out to be strange in its behavior. It did not want to fulfill its role. It had to be forced to fulfill its role as a world leader by activating global public opinion. There was an interesting intense oscillation between pro-Americanism as hope for the United States and anti-Americanism as disappointment in its readiness and will to help Ukraine defend its sovereignty from Russian aggression. During this period, two types of anti-Americanism emerged as a disappointment: passive and proactive. Passive anti-Americanism was simply an irrational reaction reminiscent of the behavior of a “hurt child.” In contrast, proactive anti-Americanism was a response of responsible leadership hiding behind the mask of pro-Americanism and appealing to the US world leadership. We could only find out what Ukrainian proactive anti-Americanists thought in moments of extreme annoyance or despair when real anti-Americanism peeped through the cracks of formal pro-Americanism. This anti-Americanism was the embodiment of condemnation of American isolationism, indecision, caution, and the traditional orientation toward Russia as a respected international player. Whereas in most countries anti-Americanism is associated with the past, Ukrainian anti-Americanism is associated with the future, namely, with the possible defeat or outcome of a full-scale Russia-Ukraine war and its nature. If it is not a full but a half victory, and with great material and human losses, this will become the foundation of the future of Ukrainian anti-Americanism, which will most likely be seen as the result of a terrible betrayal by the United States.

Sources of Ukrainian anti-Americanism in the period of full-scale aggression

One of the main sources of Ukrainian anti-Americanism during the full-scale Russia-Ukraine war was the American establishment's disbelief in Ukraine's victory over the aggressor, even in the possibility of resisting it. It was manifested in the proposal to the President of Ukraine to evacuate (Harris et al. 2022). The categorical negative response of the Ukrainian leadership, represented by V. Zelensky, to this proposal, is key to understanding Ukrainian anti-Americanism, which will become characteristic of Ukraine's top leadership during a large-scale war.

Ukrainian anti-Americanism, as represented by V. Zelensky and his team, is a leadership or proactive anti-Americanism that is focused on criticizing American policy and the American establishment for its passivity or lack of activity and leadership concerning Russia's violations of international law. Already in his speech to the US Congress on 16 March 2022, V. Zelensky made a diplomatic criticism of the lack of leadership and efforts to counter Russian aggression. The Ukrainian president veiled his criticism of the Americans' slowness with words of gratitude.

Ukraine is grateful to the United States for its overwhelming support. For all that your state and your people have already done for our freedom. For weapons and ammunition, for training and funding, for leadership in the free world, which helps put pressure on the aggressor economically. I am grateful to President Biden for his personal involvement, for his sincere commitment to the defense of Ukraine and democracy around the world. I am grateful to you for the resolution, which recognizes all those who commit crimes against the Ukrainian people as war criminals. However, now, in the darkest time for our country, for the whole of Europe, I urge you to do more!... Take the lead!... (*President of Ukraine 2022a*)

There are different ways to criticize. The art of criticism is not to offend the object of criticism but to make him correct his shortcomings, change his behavior, and overcome what causes it. And here, V. Zelensky shows the wonders of praise, which skillfully conceals anti-Americanism but does not eliminate it.

Today it takes to be the Leader of the world. Being the Leader of the world means to be the Leader of Peace. Peace in your country does not depend anymore only on you and your people. It depends on those next to you, on those who are strong. Strong does not mean big. Strong is brave and ready to fight for the life of his citizens and citizens of the world. For human rights, for freedom, for the right to live decently and to die when your time comes, not when it is wanted by someone else, by your neighbor... And as the Leader of my nation I am addressing President Biden. You are the Leader of the nation, of your great nation. I wish you to be the Leader of the world. Being the Leader of the world means to be the Leader of Peace. (*President of Ukraine 2022a*)

If we judge superficially, without diving deeper into the context, an outside observer will only see pro-Americanism. However, we must understand the depth of the Ukrainian president's despair behind such appeals to greater U.S. leadership, when insufficient support from Ukraine's main ally threatens to turn into defeat under the onslaught of the Russian aggressor at any moment.

Another source of Ukrainian anti-Americanism during the large-scale war was the distrust of the Ukrainian leadership in American leaders, namely J. Biden and D. Trump. Thus, on 28 May 2024, at a press conference in Brussels, Volodymyr Zelensky said:

I believe that the Peace Summit and the other leaders who are looking at the reaction of the United States of America need President Biden. His absence would only be applauded by Putin, personally applauded by Putin, and it would be a standing ovation. (Bondarieva 2024)

The Ukrainian political leader's anti-Americanism is breaking through the thickness of diplomatic politeness in the form of a reproach for the weakness of American decisions in response to Russian aggression. Zelensky said:

I know that America supports the summit, but we do not know at what level. I believe that this is not a very strong decision, with all due respect to every person in the United States of America. (Bondarieva 2024)

Indicative of Ukrainian anti-Americanism were the words of V. Zelensky at the World Economic Forum in Davos on 17 January 2024, in response to the statements of former US President Donald Trump, and the Republican candidate in the upcoming elections, about the possibility of quickly ending the war through territorial compromises. The Ukrainian president noted:

Let's imagine that we do not agree to give up our territories, then Trump will stop helping us... For some reason, Trump thinks that if we allow Putin to enter Ukraine completely, Russia will stop... My father always told me: think first, then speak. (Куницький 2024)

This is nothing more than an accusation against one of the main contenders for the American presidency of ill-considered and hasty conclusions.

Already in an interview with *The Guardian* at the end of May 2024, V. Zelensky noted that D. Trump could become a loser president if he decides to end the war at the expense of Ukraine. Zelensky said:

Let's imagine that Trump became president and decided to end the war at the expense of Ukraine, for example, and somehow received confirmation from Putin that this is stopped, that's it. Ukrainians will not put up with this, but he can then say that he is not giving us support, weapons, or finances. Of course, Ukraine cannot fight a multi-million army without weapons. And imagine for a second that after that Putin will go further. Who will this US president be for the whole world then? He will be very weak. (Президент України 2024)

According to the Ukrainian leader, it will be not only about the American president as a person but also about the institutional capacity of the United States. Volodymyr Zelensky used such expressions: "they will become very weak", "will not be leaders in the world", their international influence "will be zero" (Президент України 2024).

The Ukrainian president criticized certain American politicians for their lack of understanding of what Ukraine is facing, in particular Republican Senator James David Vance. In February 2024, he stated that even if Ukraine received money, it would not change the outcome of the war. In response, V. Zelensky said he was not sure Vance

“understands what is going on here.” “Of course he doesn’t understand, God bless you don’t have the war on your territory” (Halasz & Kottasová 2024).

The lack of timely and adequate assistance from the US in the fight against the aggressor has contributed to a rise in Ukrainian anti-American sentiment. From August 2023 to March 2024, this sentiment's number of explicit supporters increased by 2.4 times, reaching a share of 12.9% (Разумков Центр 2024). It is worth reminding that the delay in the decision to allocate US aid to Ukraine was due to political games between Republicans and Democrats in connection with the presidential election campaign.

Even the adoption of the long-awaited decision to assist was met with distrust by the Ukrainian leadership, represented by V. Zelensky, which was disguised by words of gratitude.

It is very important to implement all of our agreements with President Biden one hundred percent. Thank you, America! (*President of Ukraine 2024*)

Here we see the traditional oscillation between anti-American distrust and pro-American gratitude.

Anti-Americanism, driven by irritation mixed with despair, has been repeatedly manifested in the Ukrainian president's speeches to the American establishment as a reaction to the slow disbursement of defense aid. Thus, in a speech to American governors, V. Zelensky said:

The main thing is not to waste time, not to lose the chance we have. To act now, and help now. The Ukrainians do it so that the Americans do not have to fight. Together, we are gaining new strength of our nations. And I am sure that we will always be successful. (*President of Ukraine 2023e*)

Here, the Ukrainian president moves from calling for a hurry up with aid, which is evidence of anti-Americanism, to predicting joint success between Ukraine and the United States, which in turn indicates clear pro-Americanism. Zelensky's pro-American statements emphasize common values:

It is with Ukraine that America has the opportunity to protect its values, which match ours. And also – our cooperation creates new growth for our security and yours... (*President of Ukraine 2023e*)

The oscillation between pro-Americanism and anti-Americanism is clearly visible in Zelensky's speeches. Starting from anti-Americanism as a bitter disappointment in American allies and contrast to it, the Ukrainian president sought to demonstrate his extreme pro-Americanism to influence the American public. Thus, speaking to American students, he mentioned an offer to evacuate him personally but did not mention that the offer came from U.S. officials.

I was offered help with transport instead of help with weapons! (*President of Ukraine 2022b*)

At the same time, V. Zelensky extremely exalted the role of the United States in the world, seeking to arouse the sympathy and favor of Americans:

...There are states that contribute as much as possible to protect freedom. To stop the aggression. To guarantee the force of international law. It is this role that the United States has chosen, and I am very grateful to your people, to your leaders for that choice. (*President of Ukraine 2022b*)

While praising America, the Ukrainian president simultaneously appeals to the identity of Americans, to their sense of pride in the role of their country:

How do you respond to challenges? What do you do when you see injustice? And I really want you to choose this path for yourself. The path of clear awareness of who you are. The path of agency. Because if it is your choice, it will always be the choice of your country. (*President of Ukraine 2022b*)

An important source of Ukrainian anti-Americanism during the large-scale war was the preservation of American relations with Russia, in particular at the level of city twinning. The Ukrainian leadership perceived this as helping the Russians justify their aggression against Ukraine. Thus, V. Zelensky noted in his speech to the mayors of American cities:

You know that dozens of American cities maintain the so-called "brotherhood" with the cities of the Russian Federation. Chicago and Moscow. Jacksonville and Murmansk. San Diego - Vladivostok. Albany and Tula. What do these connections give you? Probably nothing. But they give Russia the opportunity to say that it is not isolated, even after beginning such a war. Each of you sees how the Russian army wages war and what it is doing to the peaceful cities of Ukraine. Its cruelty is no different from the tyrannies of earlier times. (*President of Ukraine 2022d*)

Here, Zelensky compares Russia's practice of destroying Ukrainian cities to the tyranny of past eras, contrasting it with the free world of American values. Immediately, he moves from anti-Americanism, condemning the brotherhood of cities to glorifying US leadership and expressing gratitude for supporting Ukraine:

Thanks to the leadership of the United States and the support of all our partners, Ukraine's bravery receives the necessary weapons to fight for freedom. (*President of Ukraine 2022d*)

Addressing his American audience, he connects American leadership in the defense of freedom to each listener personally:

You can also become the people who choose to defend freedom and thus put an end to the history of tyranny. (*President of Ukraine 2022d*)

The Ukrainian president goes further, actually calling on Americans to become the voice of pressure on Russia and to cut all ties with the Russians as murderers of civilians and enemies of the free world:

Therefore, call for even more pressure on Russia. Don't help it justify itself. Don't maintain ties with it. And please do not allow those who have become murderers to call you their brothers and sisters. (*President of Ukraine 2022d*)

Here, too, as before, we see an oscillation between anti-Americanism and pro-Americanism. V. Zelensky's anti-Americanism points to a negative feature of American political reality and proposes to get rid of it, while his pro-Americanism demonstrates

boundless faith in American leadership and the ability of Americans to defend freedom from tyranny.

Various US restrictions, including on the supply of certain types of weapons and their use on Russian territory, have also become one of the sources of Ukrainian anti-Americanism at the presidential level. On 22 December 2022, in front of the US Congress, Zelensky said:

I believe there should be no taboos between us in our alliance. (*President of Ukraine 2022i*)

From pessimism, from disbelief in the U.S. Congress's ability to make the necessary decisions, from carefully hidden anti-Americanism, V. Zelensky moved on to optimism of a future joint victory with America, to solidarity with it, to unrestrained pan-Americanism, which was symbolized by the flag from the defenders of Bakhmut handed over to U.S. congressmen:

So, let these decisions be taken!... This flag is a symbol of our victory in this war! We stand, we fight and we will win. Because we are united. Ukraine, America and the entire free world. (*President of Ukraine 2022i*)

Reconstructing Ukrainian anti-Americanism

Deconstruction ultimately implies a way out of the binary of anti-Americanism and pro-Americanism. We need to find another meaning based on which to reconstruct Ukrainian anti-Americanism. It is symptomatic that V. Zelensky keeps returning to the idea of leadership as a sufficient influence to ensure security and the rule of law. He calls for leadership from every nation he addresses to guarantee a just international order. It is these calls for leadership that reveal a lack or absence of it.

This is the fissure that makes pro-Americanism and anti-Americanism possible, as it holds the hope for or disillusionment with true U.S. global leadership. Without America as a world leader, there would be no pro-Americanism and anti-Americanism. In one of his speeches to the American public, V. Zelensky said:

Our unbreakable stance, our principled nature, and the help from our friends, above all – the United States of America, which is a global leader in the defense of freedom, are the guarantee that evil will not win this battle. Evil should not go any further. (*President of Ukraine 2023a*)

One of the very visible cracks that exposes the despair, pessimism, and disillusionment with US global leadership is the concept of betrayal. V. Zelensky said:

Thank you to all Americans who dream with us that evil has no chance! I met with representatives of both parties of Congress, both houses, with President Biden, his team – I met in Washington, in Kyiv. And I am sure that America will not betray freedom. (*President of Ukraine 2023a*)

Here, we see despair, not confidence, and the prospect that Ukraine could become the next Afghanistan for the United States.

Ukraine's weakness in the face of Russian aggression is another crack that is camouflaged by its role as a defender of Europe and the entire civilized world against Russian tyranny:

Every Ukrainian life sacrificed for freedom is a saved life of our neighbors: Poles, Lithuanians, Moldovans and other free European nations. We have to talk about it frankly. The Kremlin never, never wanted to stop by conquering only Ukraine. Never! Other European states – your allies in Europe, the peoples in Asia – they are as much targets for Russia as Ukraine. Russia does not recognize any borders, and there is no such tyranny that does not claim the global destruction of freedom. *(President of Ukraine 2023a)*

Another crack hidden by narratives about shared values and a common security future is the divergence of interests between Ukraine and the United States in confronting Russia, particularly regarding the nature and pace of hostilities. Thus, V. Zelensky said:

We, Ukrainians and Americans, equally understand the dangers of tyranny. *(President of Ukraine 2022d)*

All these semantic gaps and cracks in the pro-American and anti-American statements of the Ukrainian president allow us to clarify the reconstructed essence of Ukrainian anti-Americanism, first, as Ukraine's forced existential dependence on the United States and second, as a consequence of one hand, unjustified hopes for America as a world leader, disappointment in its role as a guarantor of the rule of international law, and, on the other hand, active coercion of the United States to fulfill its obligations to the civilized world as a global leader through pressure on public opinion both in America and around the world. The instrument of such pressure is mainly the public diplomacy of the Ukrainian president, the starting point of which is Ukrainian anti-Americanism as a reaction to the weakness and inadequacy of American policy to the Russian threat to peace and security. In this regard, V. Zelensky's words are indicative:

I am grateful to President Biden for uniting the free world when the Russian threat arose... However, Russia's war against Ukraine is still ongoing. And right now, as you are listening to my address, the Ukrainian military are dying on the battlefield. The Russian army is shelling our cities with artillery and aircraft... Maybe we are missing something in our true strength? Maybe we are not using all the capacity of our influence and our leadership? And this is my question to the United States, both to the parties and to society; to both Democrats and Republicans; to the Congress and to the President. It is time to be one hundred percent influential. We can defeat tyranny. Indeed, every one of us – every one – is the leader of our time. We can reliably defend freedom. We can stop blackmail by a person who has no place on our list at all. If we are up to it, then we must do it. Because influence obliges us to do so. *(President of Ukraine 2022h)*

In the context of the above, V. Zelensky, who offers leadership or its strengthening before parliaments and audiences of influential citizens of European and Asian countries, is implementing Ukrainian anti-Americanism. This is especially true and striking concerning the United Kingdom, which could become the main center of power in Europe if American isolationism prevails. Thus, addressing the British, V. Zelensky stated:

If everyone in the world – or at least the vast majority – were steadfast and courageous leaders as Ukraine, as Britain, I am sure we would have already ended this war and restored peace throughout our liberated territory for all our people. *(President of Ukraine 2022c)*

At the same time, Ukrainian anti-Americanism, although proactive in Zelensky's public diplomacy practice, hinders the building of productive relations with America as an ally. Its inversion in pro-American statements only camouflages it. The real way out of the binary of anti-Americanism and pro-Americanism is found when Zelensky comes to solidarity based on a desired future or shared values:

I'm sure that after this war, something will change in the relationship between you – the American people – and us. It is already changing. We became much closer in our feelings. We know for sure that we mean the same thing when we say the word 'freedom'. *(President of Ukraine 2022g)*

Speaking to the American public, the Ukrainian president went further, trying to achieve global solidarity:

Just recall: when else was the European Union as united and capable of acting together as it is now, when else did we together with our partners - in particular with the United States of America, with President Biden - manage to unite Europe and the entire free world around the struggle for freedom, for our values, the values of freedom? We did an unprecedented thing. And this is not just a temporary thing, this is a fundamental factor. The struggle for our independence is a struggle for the right to stability, the right to security for all of us... *(President of Ukraine 2022e)*

It should be noted that global solidarity is, first and foremost, a joint commitment and joint action by international actors – states, organizations, and individuals – to support nations or groups in crises, based on common ethical, legal, and humanitarian principles. This kind of solidarity implies active participation in the maintenance of global peace, security, and human rights, going beyond individual national interests in favor of collective well-being and justice. In addition, this solidarity is expressed through diplomatic support, humanitarian aid, economic sanctions against aggressors, legal accountability measures, and advocacy for the protection of fundamental human freedoms and the integrity of international law. Global solidarity is not just a reaction or support but active and principled international cooperation. Above all, it is a united approach that goes beyond mere sympathy and includes concrete actions that strengthen international norms and protect human dignity.

In another speech to the American public, V. Zelensky goes beyond the binary of anti-Americanism and pro-Americanism, universalizing leadership, placing it above the division of the planet into nations and regions, while linking it to the global solidarity of the world. The Ukrainian president said:

Leadership and peace are two things that are directly related. The fact is that we have become leaders in the war. We were all forced to become leaders in the war – in the fight against the evil that started this war. We have achieved an unprecedented unification of the free world. And by the way, I want to thank the

United States of America and President Biden, all our American friends for their contribution to this unification. (*President of Ukraine 2022f*)

In fact, the leadership of each nation and their global solidarity is the quintessence of Ukrainian anti-Americanism, as it cancels the exclusive claim of the United States to global leadership. At the same time, it does not deny American leadership but only balances it with the leadership of other nations where American leadership is insufficient. In essence, this is the concept of a new world order: leadership by each nation and their solidarity for global peace, security, and human rights, going beyond individual national interests in favor of collective welfare and justice. This is nothing more than a new rethinking of the world order in favor of multipolarity.

If we try to rethink any narratives through the prism of this newly understood, reconstructed ideology of proactive Ukrainian anti-Americanism, we will understand the logic of V. Zelensky's foreign policy and public diplomacy. In this regard, it is significant that in his speeches he tries to emphasize the leadership of each nation and reach as many audiences from different countries as possible (*Vysotskyi et al. 2023*).

As a platform for the practical implementation of the leadership of each nation and global solidarity, V. Zelensky proposed a *10-point Ukrainian Peace Formula* (*President of Ukraine 2023f*), based on the norms of the UN Charter and resolutions.

As the Ukrainian president noted,

The Ukrainian Peace Formula is addressed primarily to the world – and this is its strength. It is addressed to everyone who can participate in the implementation of specific points of the Formula and become a co-creator of the victory over evil – a co-creator of peace. (*President of Ukraine 2023d*)

V. Zelensky suggested that each nation to whose audience he was addressing should choose the point of the peace formula that would allow it to demonstrate its leadership (*President of Ukraine 2023d*). The Ukrainian president said:

Everyone who joins our formula actually makes it their own. And I am sure that the Ukrainian formula for peace can become a German formula for peace, a European formula for peace, a formula for peace for the world. (*President of Ukraine 2023b*)

It is worth noting that V. Zelensky not only proposes the Ukrainian formula for peace as a platform for leadership of each nation and global solidarity but also specifies the values and principles of such solidarity in the process of public diplomacy:

Until now, the world has not had a Formula that could stop aggressors. Ukraine offers it. Ukraine offers the world salvation from war. To do this, we need to unite and make Russia the last aggressor. So that only peace reigns after the defeat of its invasion of Ukraine. We, people, have different cultures, different views, different national flags. But we equally want security for ourselves, our children and grandchildren. And our lives are equally burned to ashes if, God forbid, war comes. Everyone in the world must do everything possible to ensure that wars leave only shadows on the stones of history and that this can only be seen in museums. Everyone in the world must respect other nations. Everyone in the world must recognize state borders. Everyone in the world must defend justice. Everyone

in the world must care about life. Everyone in the world must take peace as their duty. (*President of Ukraine 2023c*)

Based on the ideology of Ukrainian anti-Americanism, which implies leadership of each nation and global solidarity for peace, any Ukrainian pro-American or anti-American narratives, especially in the context of V. Zelensky's public diplomacy, can only be seen as having secondary, instrumental significance, in particular as communication technologies of pressure or encouragement. Because, as we have seen, proactive Ukrainian anti-Americanism is much more far-reaching and comprehensive in its ambitions.

Passive Ukrainian anti-Americanism differs significantly from proactive anti-Americanism. We have previously mentioned that passive anti-Americanism can be seen as an irrational response, reminiscent of the behavior of a "hurt child". In this view, passive anti-Americanism is considered a sign of immaturity or a society that is not fully developed. It is so irrational that instead of making an objective assessment of reality and taking responsible and constructive actions, it seeks to shift the blame for a possible defeat in Ukraine's war with Russia onto the United States. This blame is placed on its cautious or isolationist policy, as well as on American presidents and politicians from both parties who are guided by their domestic political interests. This viewpoint was articulated most clearly by one of the Ukrainian political analysts, Yuriy Bohdanov:

Trump, his son (who has the most direct access to him), his closest associates like Musk, and the couch potato Vance are essentially saying the following: "We want you to die because it's convenient for us". There is no language and no hints about "strengthening Ukraine's negotiating position" or even a discussion about expanding our defense capabilities. Like the Democrats have. We are literally being told, "You will die because it is more convenient for us". Even if we don't like Democrats (and we have every reason to), we shouldn't forget that the choice is between a controlled escalation with limited assistance on the one hand and a complete cessation on the other. (Богданов 2024)

Thus, passive Ukrainian anti-Americanists do not like Democrats because of the limited aid and Republicans because they want Ukrainians to die for their domestic political interests.

Another Ukrainian analyst, Oleksandr Kochetkov, echoes Yuriy Bogdanov's sentiment by stating that

presidential candidate D. Trump unequivocally supported 'the Kremlin's plan', publicly stating his intention to '*get the US out of the war in Ukraine*' as soon as possible... This can only be done if Ukraine's 'soft capitulation' is achieved. However, the problem is exacerbated by the fact that our so-called main ally, Democrat J. Biden, continues to demonstrate lethargy and uncertainty about authorizing the use of long-range missiles. In chess, this is called a zugzwang: Democrats are indecisive about the necessary support for Ukraine, and Republicans are ready to stop this support decisively. (Кочетков 2024)

As we can see, passive Ukrainian anti-Americanism is evident in the form of feelings and fears in response to certain aspects of American policy, as well as to the

statements and actions of American leaders. It is not driven by ideology, strategy, or technology and aims not to push nations toward global leadership and unity for peace. It also does not rely on communication technologies for pressure or persuasion, remaining at the level of emotions and attitudes.

4. CONCLUSION

By its very nature, Ukrainian anti-Americanism is multifaceted and deeply rooted in historical, cultural, and political contexts. Ukrainian anti-American sentiment has evolved under the influence of various external and internal factors and is characterized by a unique oscillation between pro-Americanism and anti-Americanism. Ukrainian anti-Americanism is not a monolithic or static phenomenon. It changes at different historical stages and is characterized by a dynamic interaction of opposing sentiments. The metamodern approach highlights these fluctuations, emphasizing the balancing act between hope and disappointment, nationalism and globalism, realism and idealism. The specificity of Ukrainian anti-Americanism lies in its dual nature: it is both a reaction to Ukraine's geopolitical position and experience as well as a consequence of this position. Ukrainian anti-Americanism is closely intertwined with the country's desire for sovereignty and the perception of inconsistent American support.

Historically, Ukrainian anti-Americanism dates back to the early twentieth century, influenced by U.S. policy toward Russia and the Soviet Union. Its modern sources are rooted in Ukrainians' perception of the inadequacy of American support at critical moments of full-scale Russian aggression. Ukrainian anti-Americanism during the current war stems from a sense of betrayal and unmet expectations. Ukrainians hoped for strong American leadership and support in the fight against Russian aggression, but the reality often fell short of these expectations, leading to growing frustration.

The method of deconstruction reveals the ambivalence of Ukrainians toward the United States. Pro-Americanism and anti-Americanism are interconnected, with disillusionment with American politics fueling anti-American sentiment, while basic pro-American values remain.

At its core, Ukrainian anti-Americanism is an expression of frustration with the inadequacy of the American response to Russian aggression. It reflects a deeper desire for global leadership and solidarity in the defense of democratic values and national sovereignty. It is also shaped by a historical narrative of survival and resistance, where America's role is seen through the prism of Ukraine's existential struggle against Russian imperialism. Ukrainian anti-Americanism affects international relations, especially in the context of the full-scale Russia-Ukraine war. In particular, it determines the dynamics of Ukrainian-American relations in a certain way, specifying diplomatic strategies and public diplomacy.

The reconstruction of Ukrainian anti-Americanism has revealed that agents of Ukrainian anti-Americanism, while criticizing American policy, also seek to engage the United States and other global players in collective efforts to maintain international law and order. This ideology of Ukrainian anti-Americanism prompts Ukraine to call for

greater global solidarity and leadership, advocating for a multipolar world where leadership is shared among countries, promoting a united front against aggression and tyranny.

Thus, Ukrainian anti-Americanism is a complex and evolving phenomenon. It reflects the interaction of historical grievances, contemporary geopolitical challenges, and a deep desire for international solidarity and effective global leadership. The current full-scale Russia-Ukraine war has strengthened the potential of Ukrainian anti-Americanism as an important factor in international relations against the backdrop of Ukraine's urgent need for consistent and decisive support from world powers, especially the United States.

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ANTI-AMERICANISM AND ANTI-WESTERN SENTIMENTS IN CRIMEA: BEFORE AND AFTER THE RUSSIAN OCCUPATION

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DOI: 10.36169/2227-6068.2024.02.00007

Abstract. *The issue of the formation and spread of anti-American and anti-Western sentiments in Crimea is closely related to the large-scale Russian influence on the peninsula. Throughout the period before the occupation, Crimea was under the influence of Russian socio-political discourse, which determined the negative attitude of most Crimeans towards Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic integration, contradicting Russia's expansionist plans for the peninsula. Pro-Russian organizations and parties with informational support from Russian and Crimean media created anti-Western sentiments in Crimea before the occupation. Anti-Western rhetoric has persisted on the peninsula after its occupation by Russia, escalating to a new level following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The Kremlin employs a comprehensive set of propaganda tools to discredit the USA and the EU, who support Ukraine, creating an image of Western countries as an existential enemy that must be destroyed.*

Keywords: USA, EU, Ukraine, Crimea, Russia, propaganda, manipulation, media

Submitted: 12 July 2024; **accepted:** 3 November 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

Before the Russian occupation of Crimea, several interrelated factors influenced the formation of anti-Western sentiments there. There was the dichotomy of Ukraine's foreign policy course: oscillation between two integration vectors – the Western (EU and NATO) and the Eastern (Russian integration projects). Despite choosing European and Euro-Atlantic integration as Ukraine's strategic goal back in the early 1990s, the realization of this goal faced serious resistance from Russia, which sought to maintain control over the post-Soviet states. With colossal informational influence on Ukrainian society, the Russian authorities tried to impose their own narratives on Ukrainians, pushing for support of the Eurasian integration vector. The Kremlin is pursuing this project in the context of restoring the Soviet Union (USSR 2.0). The reintegration processes of the post-Soviet space intensified after the speech of Russian President V. Putin at the Munich Security Conference in 2007 ("Munich Speech"), where he accused the "collective West" of encroaching on the Russian sphere of influence – the former USSR territories. Thus, Moscow began to exert political, economic, and informational pressure on Ukraine, attempting to force Kyiv to change its development vector. Despite active cooperation with the EU and NATO, the Kremlin promotes its own narratives in Ukraine regarding the inevitability of choosing only one option (the West or Russia). According to Russian logic, this configuration automatically makes the Western political vector in Ukraine anti-Russian (if you are not with us, you are against us).

Crimea held special significance in Russian plans due to several factors. Despite the dissolution of the USSR and Russia's agreement to the existing state borders as of 1991, part of the Russian political establishment refused to recognize the transfer of the Crimean region to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1954, demanding a revision of this decision. The Russian Supreme Soviet adopted such a resolution in May 1992, supporting separatist processes in Crimea. The firm stance of Russian President B. Yeltsin, who had a conflict with his own parliament, prevented the initiation of the separation process of Crimea from Ukraine. However, certain Russian politicians continually referred to the issue of Crimea, hinting at the necessity of its "return".

2. THE FORMATION OF ANTI-WESTERN NARRATIVES: CAUSES AND PERIODIZATION

In the Russian socio-political discourse, the notion developed that the fate of Crimea would depend on Ukraine's choice of integration path: in the event of pursuing European and Euro-Atlantic integration, Russia was ready to lay claim to the peninsula. Through its influence agents in Crimea – pro-Russian organizations (Russian Bloc, Russian Community of Crimea), political parties (Communist Party, Progressive Socialist Party, and at times, the Party of Regions), and media (both Russian and pro-Russian) – the Kremlin aimed not only to garner public support for its integration projects but also to lay the groundwork for a possible future annexation of the peninsula.

Russian narratives had some popularity in Crimea due to the ethnic composition of the peninsula's population. In Crimea, ethnic Russians were the dominant ethnic group, comprising about 60%, and over 90% of Crimeans used the Russian language in everyday

life (Горюнова 2024: 48). More than 55% of Crimeans and 66,7% of Sevastopol residents considered themselves part of Russian cultural traditions. An additional 15% of Crimeans and 19% of Sevastopol residents identified with Soviet cultural traditions (*Національна безпека і оборона* 2008: 5). Considering Russian President Putin's nostalgia for the USSR, the collapse of which he considered "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century", this part of the population of Crimea supported Russian narratives.

This significantly facilitated the spread of anti-Western ideas by Kremlin among the peninsula's residents, influencing the socio-political attitudes of Crimeans. In his speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, Russian President V. Putin articulated the main grievances against the "West": US hegemony and NATO's eastward expansion, which subsequently began to be actively used by pro-Russian forces in Crimea (*Financial Times* 2007). Ukraine's pro-Western course is perceived in Crimea as a threat to Russia, inevitably leading to a deterioration of Russian-Ukrainian relations – 64.6% of Crimeans expressed this concern in 2007 (*Національна безпека і оборона* 2008: 9).

The location of the Russian Black Sea Fleet's military base in Sevastopol played an important role in promoting anti-Western narratives in Crimea. It should be noted that during the division of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet, Russia achieved both quantitative and qualitative advantages, acquiring the majority of the combat-ready ships. Ukrainian researcher Stepan Pryidun notes the connection of the issue of stationing the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea with the signing of the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and Russia, in which the Kremlin recognized the existing Ukrainian borders with Crimea, included (Прийдун 2018: 118).

When studying anti-Western sentiments in Crimea, several periods need to be identified. The first period (1991–1999) was more neutral, as local politicians were engaged in a struggle with the central Ukrainian government, which sought to maintain control over the peninsula. The separatist forces of Crimea openly oriented towards Russia, promised a transition to the ruble zone and economic integration with Russia. In 1992-1993, the Russian parliament demanded a review of Crimea's status and declared Sevastopol a Russian city (Горюнова 2024: 30).

Ukraine's suppression of Crimean pro-Russian separatism coincided with the gradual deterioration of Russian-American relations and the Kremlin's activation of its own integration projects. During the second period (1999–2004) we observe a gradual increase in anti-Western rhetoric, and during the third stage (2005–2010), it becomes somewhat radicalized with anti-NATO protests. The victory of V. Yanukovich in the presidential election, who campaigned under pro-Russian slogans, temporarily reduced the level of anti-Western rhetoric in Crimea (2010–2013). However, amidst the backdrop of the Euromaidan, there is a cultivation of anti-Western and anti-American sentiments on the peninsula (*Урядовий кур'єр* 2020). Following the Russian occupation, the Kremlin continues to foster anti-Western sentiments in Crimea through controlled media, whose rhetoric becomes openly aggressive with the onset of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

3. ANTI-WESTERN SENTIMENTS IN CRIMEA BEFORE RUSSIAN OCCUPATION

In the early 2000s, Russia began to pressure Ukraine, using energy and trade leverage to force Kyiv to join integration projects under its leadership. One such project was the Single Economic Space, established by the agreement signed in September 2003 in Yalta. A few days after signing the agreement, Russia began constructing a dam to the Ukrainian island of Tuzla, located in the Kerch Strait. The signing of a bilateral agreement that made the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait a shared maritime space resolved the conflict diplomatically (Гай-Нижник 2017: 79). Russia's attempts to change Ukraine's foreign policy vector activated the actions of pro-Russian forces in Crimea, which began to criticize the country's pro-Western course, along with the EU and NATO

After the victory of V. Yushchenko in the presidential elections in Ukraine, who actively lobbied for Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic integration, protests against the North Atlantic Alliance began in Crimea.

In the first case, the arrival of the American military ship "Advantage" at the port of Feodosia on May 28, 2006 triggered the protests. The ship brought equipment and specialists to Crimea for the engineering re-equipment of the Sary Krym training ground as part of the Ukrainian-American agreement to assist in the development of Ukraine's coastal military infrastructure. Several political parties in Crimea, which held a majority in the local parliament (the Party of Regions, the Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU), the Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine (PSPU), along with pro-Russian organizations ("Russian Community of Crimea", "Union of Soviet Officers"), representatives of the Russian Liberal Democratic Party, and Cossack units, began to blockade the ship, trying to prevent it from unloading. At the same time, Russian State Duma member and director of the Institute of CIS Countries, K. Zatulin, actively condemned Kyiv's rapprochement with NATO at rallies and press conferences in Crimea (*Радіо Свобода* 2006).

On May 29, local authorities convened an extraordinary session of the Feodosia City Council, where pro-Russian political parties held the majority. At the meeting, they declared the city a "NATO-free territory". Later, the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea declared the entire peninsula a "NATO-free territory" (Корреспондент 2006). Influenced by the protests and the pro-Russian lobby the Verkhovna Rada did not grant permission for foreign military units to enter Ukraine. Consequently, they forced Ukraine to cancel some of the exercises.

It is worth noting that the visit of the American military ship to Crimea in 2006 was far from the first: after the collapse of the USSR, an American command ship stayed in Sevastopol for several days in 1998. In the following years, US military ships entered Sevastopol several times. However, until 2005, all these visits passed calmly.

In 2008, against Russian aggression against Georgia, the number of NATO ships' visits to Sevastopol increased. For example, on September 1, 2008, the US Coast Guard ship USS Dallas (SSN-700) docked in Sevastopol and was met by protesters. The rally involved representatives of pro-Russian parties and the "Russian Bloc". Activists greeted the military ship with slogans: "NATO go away!" "Yankees go home!" and "Sevastopol against NATO", preventing the sailors from disembarking (*Крым. Реалии* 2021).

A similar situation occurred with the visit of the US Navy hydrographic ship USS Pathfinder (AGS-1) and the command ship USS Mount Whitney. Protesters from pro-Russian city organizations surrounded the marine terminal, preventing the sailors from going into the city. In March 2009, communists and representatives of the "Russian Bloc" blocked the US Navy frigate USS Klakring in Sevastopol (*Крым. Реалии* 2021).

In the summer of 2009, pro-Russian activists again disrupted part of the Sea Breeze-2009 exercises near Lake Donuzlav (western Crimea). Leonid Hrach, the leader of the Crimean Communists, led this action. The organizers of other anti-American protests, the PSPU and the "Russian Bloc", assisted him in that. As Hrach recalled, after the occupation of the peninsula, Russia was behind their actions:

Without Moscow, we would not have won Donuzlav. There, we essentially arrested the landing of the American-Ukrainian forces and forced them to leave. (*Медуза* 2017)

The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine failed to make a decision on allowing foreign units into the territory of Ukraine.

It should be noted that the anti-NATO protests generally reflected public sentiments in Crimea. According to sociological studies from 2007–2008, almost two-thirds of Crimeans (74,6%) and nearly 89% of Sevastopol residents did not support joining NATO, viewing the Alliance as an "aggressive military bloc". Additionally, 72,6% of Crimeans assessed NATO's influence on international processes as negative (*Національна безпека і оборона* 2008: 9).

The situation regarding support for EU membership was no better: only 25,9% supported Ukraine's European integration (in Sevastopol – 23,3%) (*Національна безпека і оборона* 2008: 59). Across Ukraine over 48,6% of respondents supported joining the EU (*Національна безпека і оборона* 2007: 62).

Such a position among Crimeans can be explained both by a lack of awareness regarding the North Atlantic Alliance and by the anti-Western rhetoric of local pro-Russian politicians. On the eve of the Russian invasion of Georgia, leader L. Hrach stated that "Crimeans will never agree to remain part of Ukraine if it gets involved in NATO" (*Корреспондент* 2008).

Notably, among the main negative consequences of Ukraine potentially joining NATO, Crimeans cited worsening relations with Russia (64,6%); another 40% believed that such a step would lead to Ukraine losing its political independence, echoing Kremlin narratives. In contrast, 70,7% of Crimeans preferred Ukraine's integration into a defense union with Russia and CIS countries. It's worth noting that 64% of respondents would not support joining NATO even if Russia were to join the Alliance (*Національна безпека і оборона* 2008: 10). This indicates the strong influence of both Russian and local propaganda and the subconscious exclusion of the possibility of Russia joining the Alliance amidst its criticism by Russian media.

Protests against NATO can be explained by the military nature of the organization but protests against the opening of the American Presence Post in Simferopol as a diplomatic establishment had a distinctly anti-American character. The American mission

opened as a logical continuation of the “Charter on Strategic Partnership” between Ukraine and the United States, signed in December 2008. This diplomatic mission was to consist of several American diplomats with various functions, ranging from organizing cultural events to reporting on the political situation on the peninsula (YHIAH 2008).

On January 2, 2009, the “Russian Community of Crimea” issued a statement against the opening of the American Presence Post, accusing the USA of wanting to create an “intelligence center under the diplomatic cover, whose activities will be directed against the Russian Black Sea Fleet, which restrains Ukraine's involvement in NATO”. One of the leaders of the pro-Russian forces on the peninsula and the Vice Speaker of Crimea (from the Party of Regions), S. Tsekov, insisted that the Crimean Parliament prohibit the opening of the American mission in Crimea. They ignored explanations by the Ambassador to Ukraine, W. Taylor, who noted that this mission would attract American investments to Crimea and implement aid programs (for example, in healthcare) (*Радио Свобода* 2009).

In early 2009, pro-Russian forces held several protest actions in Simferopol – the last one on the eve of the local parliament's session, which gathered the maximum number of participants – around 200 people. On February 18, 2009, the Crimean Parliament expressed opposition to the opening of the American representation and sent a corresponding appeal to the leadership of Ukraine and the Chairman of the UN General Assembly. The document emphasized that the decision to open a USA diplomatic mission

is perceived by the majority of the Crimean public as provocative, aimed at undermining political stability, worsening strategically important Ukrainian-Russian relations, because Crimea is a special geopolitical region, and the true goals of the United States are not in doubt. (YHIAH 2009)

The anti-American and generally anti-Western rhetoric in Crimea aimed to demonstrate to Western partners and the central Ukrainian authorities that the peninsula was within the zone of Russian influence. Therefore, through Crimea and other pro-Russian regions of Ukraine (the southeast), the Kremlin attempted to draw Ukraine into its own integration projects as part of the strategic plan to restore control over the post-Soviet space.

It should be noted that certain Crimean media outlets played an important role in promoting Russian narratives on the peninsula, using various manipulative techniques to instill the desired ideas in the minds of Crimeans. These Crimean media periodically criticized Ukraine's European integration and Euro-Atlantic course, retransmitting Russian narratives about “American interference in Ukraine's internal affairs”: accusing the United States of organizing “color revolutions”, “Washington's desire to turn Crimea into a NATO base” (to expel the Russian Black Sea Fleet from Crimea), and others. Crimean media accused the USA of supporting Crimean Tatar and pro-Ukrainian organizations on the peninsula. Media described that NATO “frightened” Crimeans, narratives softly criticized the EU as an entity “under USA control”, “having numerous problems”, and “not welcoming Ukraine” (Гаврилова 2008). Overall, such narratives created a negative attitude towards the USA, NATO, and the EU among Crimeans to keep the peninsula within the sphere of Russian influence (“Crimea is a Russian enclave in Ukraine”).

Some representatives of the Crimean scientific community, through pro-Russian media, attempted to promote Russian narratives regarding the “essence of Ukraine”. For example, A. Filatov, an associate professor at V.I. Vernadsky Taurida National University, noted in 2009 that to counter Russia

Ukraine as a state project and Ukrainian identity as a myth began to be created in the second half of the 19th century at the initiative of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. (Филатов 2009)

Thus, such narratives portrayed Ukraine as an anti-Russian project of the West, which aims to distance Crimeans from Kyiv's pro-Western course. V. Putin recently made similar claims (about the artificiality of the Ukrainian state) in an interview with T. Carlson (TCN 2024).

During the period from 2010 to 2013, there was a shift in the political discourse in Crimea, especially in the context of Ukraine's internal and external policies. The anti-NATO rhetoric became less prominent in the Crimean information space. This shift was largely due to the elected President of Ukraine at the time, V. Yanukovich, returning to a policy of multi-vectorism. This strategy aimed to balance between the European Union and the Russian Federation. Of particular importance was the issue of NATO in the political discourse. Ukraine has abandoned Euro-Atlantic integration, cementing non-aligned status at the legislative level (*Про засади* 2010). V. Yanukovich also extends the basing of the Russian fleet in Crimea until 2042, which strengthens Russia's position in Crimea (*Про ратифікацію...* 2010).

Public sentiments in Crimea overall remained unchanged. A survey in 2011 demonstrated that 51% of Crimeans saw NATO as a threat to Ukraine (across the entire country, this figure was only 20,6%). 12,6% emphasized a threat from the United States, and only 3,8% considered Russia a threat (*Національна безпека і оборона* 2011: 33). Assessing the influence of countries and international organizations on the situation in Crimea, experts determined that Russia has the greatest impact on the peninsula (7,85 out of 10). Ukraine followed in second place with a score of 7,60. The European Union ranked fourth (after the CIS), while the USA and NATO were at the bottom of the list, trailing behind China, Turkey, and Romania (*Національна безпека і оборона* 2011: 33).

Despite the Ukrainian government's rejection of Euro-Atlantic integration, anti-NATO actions in Crimea continued and became more aggressive. Visits by Alliance American ships to Sevastopol were not only met with protests but also with the launching of mock missiles or mines. For instance, in January 2012, the USS Wella Gulf cruiser of the US Navy encountered about 60 protesters from the Communist Party, the PSPU and the Union of Soviet Officers. They demanded the ship leave the bay and chanted “Yankees, go home!”. Activists staged a provocation with an American flag, on which they placed a mock mine, doused it with gasoline, and set it on fire (*Крым. Реалии* 2021).

At the same time, in the summer of 2012, several NATO ships arrived in St. Petersburg for joint military exercises. Among them were the American cruiser “Normandy,” French and British destroyers. Russians did not protest against this visit but

even went on excursions to the military ships (*Российская газета* 2012). This illustrates Russia's deliberate influence on shaping anti-Western sentiments in Crimea.

Nevertheless, the Ukrainian government continued its course towards European integration, preparing to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union. In contrast, the Kremlin, being interested in integrating Ukraine into the Eurasian project, threatens Kyiv with the loss of Crimea and other regions on the eve of the signing of the Agreement with the EU. Following Yanukovich's meeting with Putin on November 9, 2013, the Ukrainian president urgently convened a closed-door meeting with senior officials and stated that Ukraine would not sign the Association Agreement with the EU in Vilnius. He responded on the note about possible protest actions (Maidan):

We will deal with Maidan and revolution somehow. Putin clearly said that after signing the association, he would take Crimea with Sevastopol, then Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Zaporizhzhia... (Головко 2015: 9)

In the fall of 2013, the Crimean authorities fully supported the central government's decision to reject European integration. However, local pro-European forces joined the nationwide protests, which, although small in number, caused dissatisfaction among pro-Russian forces because they spoiled the media narrative that "Crimea is against the EU". The Crimean authorities, represented by the Party of Regions, organized Anti-Maidan rallies with members of state organizations, where they increasingly voiced harsh criticism of the EU.

Attempts by the US and the EU to help resolve the crisis in Ukraine became a catalyst for increasing anti-Western rhetoric in Crimea in the winter of 2014. Following the lead of Russian media, certain local media outlets began accusing Washington and Brussels of "interfering in Ukraine's internal affairs", describing the Ukrainian civil protest as "Western-inspired" in the context of the "continuation of color revolutions".

The marketing department of the 'color revolution factory' is capable of endlessly repeating the scenario (with adjustments and specifics for the target group). This does not indicate a lack of imagination but a rational business approach: there is no need to radically change the marketing strategy if it already yields good results. Thus, they offer an 'upgraded' version of Yushchenko to the new generation of Maidan and expect a decent level of sales. (*Крымская правда* 2014a)

It should be noted that these messages reflect the Russian scientific and political discourse. They view the protests in the post-Soviet states as "attempts by the US to establish control over the former Soviet republics". For example, Russian researcher A. Naumov notes that

an external factor played an almost key role in the victory of 'color revolutions' in the post-Soviet space — the powerful and multifaceted support of the opposition by the US and the EU. On the foreign policy stage, the Western allies (or supervisors) of the opposition appropriated and actively used the status of supreme arbitrator in the dispute between the official authorities and the protest movement... Western capitals declared the actions of the opposition legitimate, even when its representatives violated the law. Accordingly, the actions of the

authorities to defend themselves were a priori seen as illegitimate in the eyes of world public opinion. (Hayмов 2014: 167)

The participants in the pro-government rallies in Crimea, attempting to discredit Western countries, accused them of promoting and imposing “non-traditional values” through their support of LGBT communities. Consequently, Europe began to be referred to as “Gayropa” at rallies and sometimes in the media.

Criticism of the “collective West” for supporting LGBT communities in Russia intensified during 2012–2013. Initially, in March 2012, Russian Foreign Minister S. Lavrov criticized the EU, stating that Western values (primarily the protection of the gay community) are not universal, and that the West supposedly imposed them on Russia. In 2013, the Russian Security Council addressed the topic of same-sex marriages as a “threat to national security”. At the end of 2013, during the Valdai Forum, V. Putin himself compared same-sex relationships to Satanism.

According to Russian analysts, labeling European civilization with the concept of “Gayropa” becomes a factor in supporting the collective identity of Russians and their political mobilization (Рябова & Рябов 2013: 33). Using these themes in Crimea had to mobilize pro-Russian Crimeans to oppose the Western political vector of Ukraine and the Euromaidan, which supported European integration.

Thus, the main anti-Western theses promoted during the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity in Crimea were fundamentally Russian in nature. However, they found necessary support in Crimean society due to the relatively high percentage of the pro-Russian population, the dominance of Russian narratives, and the treacherous position of the local authorities, who were concerned about their future in post-revolutionary Ukraine.

4. ANTI-WESTERN SENTIMENTS IN CRIMEA DURING RUSSIAN OCCUPATION

After the Russian occupation of Crimea and its incorporation into the Russian socio-political system, anti-Western rhetoric became an important part of the socio-political discourse. Both general Russian political trends and local factors drive the rise of anti-Western ideas on the peninsula. Firstly, the USA and the EU did not recognize Russia's attempted annexation of Crimea and continued to insist that the peninsula remains part of Ukraine. Secondly, throughout 2014, the USA and the EU imposed sanctions that complicated social and economic life in Crimea. The West applied these sanctions against several Crimean enterprises expropriated under the guise of nationalization. The EU's sanction policy significantly restricted foreign trade with Crimea. They banned the import of energy and telecommunications equipment and prohibited the export of over 250 Crimean goods. Crimean ports were closed to European ships, and European entrepreneurs were strictly limited in their ability to conduct business on the occupied peninsula. Additionally, the USA banned the supply of IT services to the peninsula, leading to a massive exodus of programmers from Crimea (Горюнова 2024: 110). At the same time, after the occupation of Crimea, the Kremlin increasingly insisted on global confrontation with the USA, reverting to the rhetoric of the Cold War era.

Anti-Americanism gained momentum in Russian society after the 2012 presidential elections: the number of Russians with a favorable view of the USA gradually decreased from 64% to 43% by January 2014. However, following the occupation of Crimea and the Russian invasion of Donbas, the number of those with a negative perception of the USA soared to a record 70%. While the “Crimean consensus” (an unspoken agreement between the Russian government and society regarding the occupation of the peninsula) was in effect, this figure remained consistently above 50%. However, in 2019, the situation began to change: the number of Russians with positive and negative views of the USA nearly equalized at around 42–43%. After the start of the full-scale war by Russia against Ukraine, the number of opponents of the United States again exceeded 70% (*Левада-Центр* 2023).

Similarly, sentiments towards the EU have changed in Russia: during 2012–2013, over 60% of Russians had a favorable view of the European Union. However, from January 2014 (against the backdrop of the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine), this number decreased to 25%. Since 2019, there has been a renewed increase in positive attitudes among Russians, rising to 40–45%. However, from February 2022, there was another sharp decline, dropping to 20% (*Левада-Центр* 2023).

As Putin's authoritarian regime destroyed opposition media, central resources, which gradually transformed into propaganda tools, shaped the information agenda. Consequently, they act merely as retransmitters of Kremlin narratives, widely using manipulative techniques to influence public opinion. A similar situation occurs in the Crimean media space after the Russian occupation of the peninsula.

During 2014–2015, there was a radical reduction of media in Crimea: the Russian authorities retained only media outlets loyal to them, using the re-registration procedure to achieve this. As of 2012, there were 1,240 registered printed media outlets in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, but only 222 were actually being published (Егорова и Чумичева 2013). After the Russian occupation and the re-registration of media under Russian legislation there were 163 print publications remaining in the Crimea, which supposedly reflected the actual situation in the media landscape (*Роскомнадзор* 2015). On the other hand, the Russian registration procedure allowed for the suppression of disloyal media. For example, Russia denied the registration of the Crimean Tatar TV channel ATR, which attempted to provide objective information during the occupation. After the occupation, there were no media outlets in the Ukrainian language left in Crimea, although in 2012, 17% of Crimean periodicals were published in Ukrainian (bilingual publications or exclusively in Ukrainian) (Егорова & Чумичева 2013).

With control over the media, the Russian authorities promote necessary narratives within Crimean society, including anti-American and anti-European themes. One of the explanations for the Russian occupation of Crimea, besides “protection from Banderites” (defining Ukrainians as collaborators of fascists) and “returning to the mother harbor”, is presented as a preventive measure: “If not Russia, then NATO would have occupied Crimea”. To support this claim, in the spring of 2014, Russian media cited “data about Pentagon plans to establish intelligence centers in Sevastopol schools”. Russian “blogger-researchers” drew these conclusions while analyzing data on US government

procurement. According to their information, the US Navy command was behind the funding for the renovation of several Sevastopol schools. The Crimean occupation government confirmed former plans for renovation by American funds. Later, in an interview with Russian media, a physical education teacher from School No. 5 stated that the school “had to agree to the American proposal because of poverty”. Russian journalists explained the Pentagon's “interest” in this school due to its “strategic location”: its windows provide a view of the city and the Belbek airfield, located a few kilometers away (*Комсомольская правда* 2014).

After the Russian occupation and full integration of Crimea into the Russian media space, local outlets began to use propaganda rhetoric similar to that of their Russian colleagues. Among Crimean publications, the largest in scale in applying propagandistic methods is “Crimean Truth”, where nearly every article concerning Ukraine, the USA, or the EU includes a range of manipulative techniques. The newspaper boasts the highest circulation among Crimean media (over 30 000 copies) and an online version.

It's worth noting that among all the publication's articles, the most popular (in terms of views) is the “Analytics” section, which has been written for over 20 years by commentator M. Filippov. Between 2014 and 2023, he published approximately a thousand articles on international events, almost all of which contain anti-American rhetoric. For instance, in an article on the Indo-Pakistani conflict, the author explicitly notes that Washington has no involvement in it, however, “the causes of this conflict lie in the colonial policy of the Anglo-Saxons” (*Крымская правда* 2019b).

One of the key themes for the post-communist “Kryimskaya pravda” (“Crimean Truth”) is the struggle against globalization (“the global hegemony of the USA”), which, according to its commentator, is now led by Russia. Since 2022, the authors have elevated Russia's status, positioning it as a “state that not only challenges Western hegemony but is also ready to lead a new anti-colonial movement”. These assertions illustrate the Kremlin's desire to garner support among countries of the “global South” by utilizing their historical anti-colonial struggles.

This position reflects the Kremlin's strategic decision to portray Russia as a counterbalance to Western dominance alongside countries that have recently shed colonial dependence. It allows Russia to advance a narrative where it positions itself as a champion of a multipolar world, actively opposing what it perceives as Western imperialism and hegemony.

Therefore, accusations of Western countries engaging in “neo-colonialism” become dominant against the backdrop of full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine. The publications offer both conspiracy theories and purportedly analytical reflections. For example, “Kryimskaya pravda” popularizes the thesis that “the West dismantled the USSR to enrich themselves with its wealth”. This conspiracy theory allows them to critique the current policies of Western countries, which they describe as a “new crusade of colonizers” against Russia.

They (Western countries – author's emphasis) are willing to endure for greater gains, counting on compensating their own expenses in the short term through

the redistribution of Russia's resources – just as they participated in the division of the USSR's legacy. (*Крымская правда* 2022e)

We have to note that all the opinions of the commentators lack any substantiation – readers have to perceive them as truth.

In this “Russia’s anti-colonial struggle”, the US receives the label of “chief colonizer of the world”, and such narratives interpret its allies as “colonies of Washington”. For instance, such narratives describe Japan as the “Pacific colony of the USA”, the EU as a “civil colonial administration” for European countries, and NATO as a “military colonial administration” (*Крымская правда* 2022a).

This approach leads readers to believe that all US allies lack autonomy, and Washington “uses” them for its own interests. This rhetoric is gaining particular popularity against the backdrop of Moscow's unsuccessful attempts to sow discord among EU countries to minimize support for Ukraine against Russian aggression.

Another publication, “Krymskoe echo” (“Crimean Echo”) which positions itself as an “resource for intellectuals”, also features colonial narratives, although on a smaller scale. The publication's rhetoric is not as aggressive, but the conclusions are almost identical:

one should not expect anything good from Western people, because they have five hundred years of colonial history behind them. (Плугин 2021)

A favorite manipulative tactic of the “Crimean Truth” commentators is the practice of labeling, some of which were popular during the Cold War (“Uncle Sam” for the USA), while others are more contemporary. In general, the publication's language often resembles Soviet-era rhetoric but in a reversed form. For example, they labeled the US government as the “Washington Regional Committee”, analogous to the Soviet structure – the regional committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which provided ideological leadership in Soviet regions. Russian propagandists use this approach to suggest that Washington exerts ideological influence over Eastern European countries that have chosen to integrate into NATO and the EU.

After the Russian occupation of Crimea, the label “hegemon” is increasingly applied to the United States – a term that in the Soviet Union was used to denote the proletariat as the global leader of change. Traditional Soviet-time definitions have to lead the reader to believe that “the same fate awaits the USA” and the “global hegemon is doomed to failure”, which will mark the end of the “Pax Americana” era after the US loses its superpower status. However, the “weakness of the USA” is not demonstrated through numbers or facts, which are traditional for analytical materials, but rather through allusions to the last years of the USSR, hinting that Washington faces a similar fate:

Like the USSR, the flagship of the collective West will sink due to the irresponsibility of the ruling elites, tempted by the illusion of their omnipotence and falling into the most terrible of mortal sins – the sin of pride. (*Крымская правда* 2018b)

In general, the theme of the “sinfulness of the West” occupies a significant place in the media rhetoric of Crimea, which tries to portray Russia as the “bastion of morality” in contrast to the “sinful West”. Lacking other means to criticize Western countries with

their high standard of living, the Kremlin starts to play on traditional values. As one of the Crimean authors writes:

Indeed, the rainbow flag is today the flag of the USA and the West. There is now a high birth rate with serious anomalies. The anarchic freedom of relationships influenced parents of these children of debauchery. (Хаджибатилов 2020)

The homophobic rhetoric in Crimea fully aligns with the logic and practical steps of the Kremlin regarding the restriction of LGBT rights and the return to traditional values. According to Snyder, this way, the Putin regime tries to further demonize the democratic West, whose liberalism threatens Russian authoritarianism.

The goal of the campaign against gays was to transform the demands of democracy into a vague threat to Russian innocence: voting = the West = sodomy. (Snyder 2018: 72)

In an attempt to promote “traditional Russian values”, Crimea has begun a campaign against popular global holidays like Halloween and Valentine's Day, labeling them as “alien to Crimeans”. The first to come under attack was Halloween, banned in the peninsula's schools in the fall of 2015. The occupation head of the “Republic of Crimea”, Aksyonov, declared that this “holiday is dedicated to evil” and is “a secret plan of the West against Russia”. He stated:

The dark traditions of Halloween have to undermine the spirit, moral values, and traditions of Russia. (*The Telegraph* 2015)

Restricting the celebration of Valentine's Day proved to be more challenging, although Aksyonov annually urged the youth to abandon it due to its Western nature. In 2016 he said:

I consider this “holiday” to be on par with Halloween. Both are spiritual trash brought to Russia by the winds of the 1990s. (*Лента.ру* 2016)

In 2018, the Russian Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports of Crimea banned festive events in Crimean schools. However, Crimean youth continued to celebrate Valentine's Day, albeit less publicly.

Pro-Russian Crimean authorities accused Washington of “violating international law norms, disrespecting the sovereignty of nations that stand in their path to hegemony”, and organizing “color revolutions”. Thus, the main accusation against the USA is that

they trade the state sovereignty of countries – from Ukraine to Syria. (*Крымская правда* 2017)

Let's note that the anti-Western rhetoric in the analyzed Crimean media has undergone a certain evolution. In the early years following the occupation (termed “reunification” in Russian interpretation), the emphasis was on the “weakness” of the West, which “will never fight for Ukraine”. Crimean journalists assure Crimeans that “Western sanctions are painless for Crimea because they can be easily bypassed”. But at the same time:

A few days after obstacles like Apple and Google began to appear for Crimea, instructions appeared online on how to bypass these dreadful prohibitions: change

the city in your profile to any non-Crimean one... Owners of Android gadgets should use anonymizers. (Долгов 2015)

The anti-European rhetoric at this stage also lacks variability: The EU is initially termed a “satellite of Washington”; later, it “received” the status of the “vassal of the USA”. Crimean observers perceived European summits where decisions in support of Ukraine as “low-grade soap operas” without excitement or interest for the Kremlin, where you “can predict all decisions in advance” (*Крымская правда* 2014b).

Since 2018, anti-Western rhetoric in Crimean discourse has gradually intensified, largely due to a shift in Russia's foreign policy direction overall. The Kremlin has conspicuously abandoned its European strategy in favor of a “special path” (described as “Eurasianism” or “geopolitical solitude” by Kremlin ideologist V. Surkov). Russian leadership's hopes that the West would gradually recognize not only Russia's status in Crimea but also Moscow's right to Ukraine as a zone of its geopolitical interests have not materialized. Therefore, Surkov notes that in 2014, Russia “completed its epic journey to the West”, and now awaits centuries of geopolitical solitude because it represents a unique “dual civilization” that encompasses both East and West, and thus cannot be purely Asian or European (Surkov 2018). However, such solitude does not imply isolation within its own borders; on the contrary, it demands further expansion for exporting internal chaos to safeguard Russian statehood (Сурков 2021).

The shift in overall Russian rhetoric becomes an occasion for Crimean observers, who accuse the West of “attempts to undermine international stability”, reverting to a “new Cold War” with its “arms race” (*Крымская правда* 2019a). Local narratives see the consequence of this “escalation” in Crimea as attempts by the Americans to “seize Crimea”.

Returning Crimea to its native harbor forced the American establishment to perceive Russia as a threat to its global hegemony. The US and its allies refuse to recognize the Russian status of the peninsula, imposed extensive economic sanctions against Russia and Crimea, and are engaged in a global hybrid war, the ultimate goal of which is to return Crimea to Ukraine eventually. (Машенко 2020)

Another author goes beyond just de-occupation of Crimea, warning of US nuclear weapons on the peninsula:

Five-star generals of the Pentagon talk about the need to turn Crimea into a base for their nuclear missiles. (*Крымская правда* 2019c)

In the Crimean information space, stories emerge about “American bio-laboratories” in Georgia and Ukraine (specifically in the neighboring Kherson region adjacent to Crimea). Media reminded Crimeans that it was Russia that “saved” them from a similar facility in Simferopol, where allegedly

Americans were planning to conduct biological and medical experiments not only on animals but also on humans. (*Крымская правда* 2020)

Undoubtedly, such conspiratorial stories in various publications had only one goal – to intimidate Crimeans and provoke hatred towards the USA.

Crimean media reflect their anti-American sentiments in their attitude towards international organizations that, albeit slowly, gradually adopt decisions recognizing Russia as an aggressor and occupier. Russian propaganda accuses these international bodies of “working for Washington”. One of the observers from “Crimean Truth” notes:

The American approach is simple and pragmatic: any international organization must either serve as a compliant tool or be destroyed. Essentially, these are equivalent. (*Крымская правда* 2018a)

Narratives in Crimea portrayed the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 as preventive measures against the West, which is conducting a hybrid war against Russia (“anti-Russian crusade of the collective West”). This manipulation of facts aims to make Crimean readers believe that it was the West that started the war against Russia, not Russian troops that invaded Ukraine in February 2022:

...the current military special operation for the demilitarization and denazification of territories occupied by *modern-day Hitlerites* (a term used for the Ukrainian authorities – my emphasis) of the former USSR is just one of the fronts of the collective West's hybrid war against Russia. (*Крымская правда* 2022f)

As the war drags on, it transforms in the propaganda rhetoric into a “battle between universal Good (Russia) and Evil (the West)”.

Thus, according to materials from Crimean media, Russia's struggle against the “collective West” has two key dimensions. Firstly, there is the thesis of Russia's confrontation with “global capital led by the USA” in the fight for world resources (anti-globalism and anti-colonialism):

The descendants of pirates and slave owners (Americans – author's emphasis) used to live at the expense of others. Our (Russian – author's emphasis) historical mission is to stand in the way of various geopolitical parasites. (*Крымская правда* 2022b)

Secondly, they described the aggression against Ukraine as an “existential war of Russia against the global Evil/Antichrist”, a “sacred war” against the “satanic world order implemented by Washington” (*Крымская правда* 2022d).

Since the Kremlin's blitzkrieg in Ukraine failed, there is a need to mobilize Russian society. To achieve this, the media begin actively using comparisons with World War II (interpreted in Russia as the Great Patriotic War). As a result of this approach, Russian media portrayed Western countries supporting Ukraine as “fascist states”. The media replaced the term “collective West” with new labels such as the “Anglo-Saxon Reich” or the “Fourth Reich”, whose leaders (“grandchildren of Goebbels”) face inevitable defeat by Russia (“the brown sunset of Europe”). Pro-Russian media don't mention the anti-Hitler coalition of World War II; instead, they tell their readers that the current war is “the West's attempt to take revenge for 1945”:

Old Europe has shown its true face and eagerly seized the opportunity to take revenge for its defeat in 1945. (*Крымская правда* 2022c)

Our analysis of publications demonstrates the extensive use of various manipulation techniques by Crimean media. Among the most frequently encountered, in

addition to labeling, are: substitution of concepts and ignoring facts, hate speech, selective choice of experts, which makes objective coverage of events impossible, and heightened metaphorical language in the texts.

The repeated use of labels becomes the norm, aiming to form a persistent perception of the labeled countries in such a light among readers. For example, media positioned Poland as the “Hyena of Europe”, accused of desiring to seize western Ukrainian lands. They hinted at Moldova's past within Romania, which, according to the Kremlin's logic, also claims the territory of its neighboring country. Consequently, Russian propaganda attempts to attribute imperial ambitions to European countries, ambitions that are actually harbored by the Russian authorities regarding the post-Soviet space. The Baltic states, formerly referred to as the “Baltic countries” (*Pribaltika*) in the USSR, are again grouped together, but in a different format – as the *Pribaltiyskiye vymiraty* (“Pri-Baltic Extinct States”), implying the non-viability of these nations. They completely stripped Ukraine of its internationally recognized name, being referred to as the “former Ukrainian SSR”. Notably, this term appears in other publications, indicating a general political line of the Russian Federation, which Crimean media are implementing.

Russian propaganda rhetoric seeks new themes to “demonstrate the defeat of the West”, initially scaring Europe with an “energy apocalypse”, and then with a nuclear “act of retribution” (if Ukraine strikes Crimea). Simultaneously, the media we analyzed attempt to show a “split among allies”, using any differences in views between the USA and European countries:

Washington has once again shown that the main principle of its policy is to use other countries to achieve its own interests. The USA forces European states to finance the Kyiv regime at the expense of their residents' well-being. (*Крымская правда* 2023)

The main goal is to assure readers that Russia is fighting the United States through the hands of Ukraine and other European countries, whose policies in this case appear as “suicidal” or “euthanasia” to Crimean propagandists. However, in 2024, we observe a decrease in publications on this topic and a certain pessimistic direction – they repeat the theses about nuclear strikes on Europe, indicating a lack of new ideas in Crimean propaganda (*Крымская правда* 2024).

5. CONCLUSION

Consequently, anti-Western and anti-American rhetoric in Crimea existed even before its occupation. It was precisely through Russia's opposition to the EU and the US that Moscow contributed to shaping a negative perception of Western countries among Crimeans. Conversely, Russia itself was perceived as a friendly country by a significant portion of Crimeans, especially among those of Russian ethnicity and those influenced by Russian-Soviet cultural norms. Pro-Russian political forces on the peninsula helped to spread Russian narratives in Crimean society. The intensification of pro-Western policies in Ukraine during President V. Yushchenko's presidency led to a series of anti-Western actions in Crimea, supported by the pro-Russian majority of local parliament.

After the occupation, the Russian occupying authorities in Crimea conducted a restructuring of the media landscape, allowing only pro-government information resources to operate. With complete control over information, the Kremlin, through these controlled media outlets, imposes the necessary viewpoints and manipulates the consciousness of Crimeans. We find out that these Crimean media employed manipulative techniques even before the occupation and now use them as their primary tools to influence readers and enforce desired narratives. As the US and EU opposed the Russian occupation of Crimea and supported Ukraine, anti-Western rhetoric has escalated each year, portraying Western countries (the “collective West”) as enemies of Russia. With the onset of full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine, the hostile language of these Crimean media reaches its peak, framing the US and EU as existential enemies trying to “destroy Russia”.

On the whole, the overall goal of these publications is to instill in the reader a steadfast belief that Russia is engaged not in an aggressive but a “just, liberating, patriotic war for its future” against the “fascists of today” or even “universal evil”. This narrative frames it as a “struggle of good against evil”, aiming not only to justify to Crimeans the aggression against Ukraine but also to mobilize them for war and elevate levels of patriotism.

It should be noted that assessing the impact of this propaganda on Crimeans is impossible, as under occupation, any sociological surveys on political topics would not be relevant due to fears for freedom and safety. Moreover, since 2022, several changes in Russian legislation have made any alternative political position grounds for criminal prosecution and imprisonment. Even a social media post with #NoWar! can lead to administrative fines. However, judging by the relatively low levels of mobilization among Crimeans for war, we can assume that the Kremlin's propaganda rhetoric has not achieved its mobilization objectives.

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ANTI-WESTERN NARRATIVES IN UKRAINE AND ROMANIA (COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS)¹

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DOI: 10.36169/2227-6068.2024.02.00008

Abstract. *The article analyses the main anti-Western narratives in Ukraine and Romania, the principal author of which is the Russian Federation. Based on the methods of comparison and discourse analysis, the study describes the main most toxic and dangerous narratives (propaganda, disinformation, fakes) for democracy and information security in two neighboring countries, one of which is an EU member and the other one is defending itself from a full-scale Russian invasion. Anti-Western information campaigns took place constantly in Ukraine and Romania between 24 February 2022 and 24 February 2024. In Romania, anti-Western narratives aimed at reducing support for Ukraine during the war and mobilizing society for a possible exit from the EU or NATO. In Ukraine, war propaganda methods focused on sowing panic and accusing the West of fomenting the military conflict. Despite the different styles of information presentation, the anti-Western narratives in both countries are essentially the same. The authors found similarities between the anti-Western narratives spread in each country. (the transformation of both countries into Western colonies, the loss of their sovereignty, NATO/US/EU's fault for the war, the ineffectiveness of sanctions, the invincibility of the Russian army, etc.) by analyzing politicians' speeches, media discourse, messages on social media and Telegram channels.*

Keywords: *anti-Western narratives, Ukraine, Romania, Russian Federation, propaganda, disinformation*

Submitted: 12 July 2024; **accepted:** 3 November 2024

¹ Acknowledgements. We are indebted to every soldier of the Armed Forces of Ukraine who is defending Ukraine from the aggression of the enemy Russia! We are particularly grateful to the governments of all countries in the world. We would like to thank each individual for their support; without their help, this work would never have been possible, and they did not leave Ukrainians alone in the war and supported us in the difficult struggle! We pay tribute to everyone who died for Ukraine's independence during Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine!

1. INTRODUCTION

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has become the most important foreign policy factor for all of Ukraine's Western neighbors. Cyber-attacks, information offensives, the promotion of propaganda narratives, and fake news all accompanied military operations on the territory of Ukraine. Among the most toxic and dangerous narratives for democracy and stability in Eastern European societies are anti-Western (anti-European, anti-American) information campaigns. Such narratives have been spreading in Ukraine, as well as in the EU, long before February 24, 2022, when Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a full-scale invasion, calling it a 'special operation' (Леженекова 2022).

In 2013, Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, reflected on unconventional, non-military methods of warfare in his article *The Value of Science in Foresight* (Герасимов 2013). The article is a fundamental conceptual document that justifies Russia's hybrid war against the West. The Russian general writes that information warfare opens up wide "asymmetric opportunities" to reduce the enemy's combat potential. He analyzes various unconventional methods of confrontation shifting towards the widespread use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other measures that affect the protest potential of the population. The Russian general highlights:

All this is complemented by military measures of a covert nature, in particular, the implementation of measures of information confrontation. (Герасимов 2013)

The article emphasizes Russia's constant war against its opponents, and the media is considered an element of permanent influence or an unconventional weapon.

In this context, the Gerasimov Doctrine was the basis for the Russian-Ukrainian war unleashed in 2014 (the annexation of the Crimean peninsula and hostilities in eastern Ukraine). Russia directed false narratives not only against Kyiv but also against the West to weaken it. In the book *"Hybrid War. Survive and Win"*, Ukrainian political scientist Yevhen Mahda analyses the information and psychological aspects of hybrid warfare as a form of weakening Ukraine and the West through Russian propaganda (Магда 2015). The scholar draws attention to the fact that political leaders of the Russian Federation and state media representatives studied the audience's reaction and information flows in Western countries to influence the internal political process effectively. At the same time, Romanian media expert Marian Voicu points out the fact that anti-Western narratives were promoted through various channels in 2014–2018, not only in Ukraine but also in Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, and Germany. According to the author, Russia's narratives have a limited number of themes and approaches, influencing the mass consciousness through a multi-level system of Russian government media, bots, trolls, and fake social media pages (Voicu 2022: 343). The author proposed using the "metanarrative" concept, which he views as "a linguistic system that allows analyzing the structure and symbols of fake news". (Voicu 2022: 12)

It is worth mentioning a number of studies revealing the essence of Russian propaganda and its indirect impact on European societies. Joanna Szostek examines the symbolic competition between the "pro-Western and anti-Russian" narratives promoted

by Kyiv and the “pro-Russian and anti-Western” narratives projected by Moscow (Szostek 2017). Andreas Kappeler studies the narratives of the political class in the Russian Federation through the prism of the politics of history and imperial heritage in Russian-Ukrainian relations. Kappeler characterizes these relations as a narrative asymmetry represented by Russia's hegemony over Ukraine (Kappeler 2014). Eva Claessen, a researcher at The Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies, studies the evolution of Russia's anti-Western narratives after Kyiv chose European integration as a foreign policy vector (Claessen 2021). We have to consider studies on disinformation in Ukraine (Gherman 2023; Mahda 2015), Romania (Soare 2023; Rachieru 2022), the EU, and the US (Boulègue and Polyakova 2021). However, these studies lack comparative analyses. As a group of researchers led by Jan Zilinsky, a professor at the Technical University of Munich, notes despite numerous works in this field there is a “dearth of comparative evidence in the study of disinformation” (Zilinsky et al. 2024: 14).

Relevance of the topic. Due to the escalation of conflicts in “vulnerable” regions around the world, the system of international relations is obviously undergoing significant transformations. Under such circumstances, regional cooperation can significantly affect the content and dynamics of interstate relations and, ultimately, geopolitical trends and patterns. Regional collaboration is crucial for Ukraine's current challenging geopolitical and historical environment.

First, Ukraine needs the support of as many countries as possible against the backdrop of Russia's full-scale invasion. Cooperation with neighboring Romania is becoming an essential aspect of ensuring the security and development of the region, as well as Ukraine's integration into Western European political, economic, and security associations.

Secondly, Romania is actively involved in decision-making in European and Euro-Atlantic institutions, influencing the states' integration processes on the European continent and ensuring stability in Central and Eastern Europe. Understanding and supporting its historical experience in the context of Ukraine's path to European integration is very important. Romania has demonstrated unwavering support for Ukraine since 2014, when Russia launched a hybrid war against Kyiv and during the full-scale invasion in February 2022. Such support continues to this day.

Thirdly, anti-Western rhetoric presents in the information space of both Ukraine and Romania and is one of the key narratives in the information component of Russian state policy. It is worth noting that massive anti-Western propaganda is constantly updating and improving the methods of spreading anti-Western narratives and changing their forms. In particular, the targeted formation of the image of Ukraine as a “state dependent on the West” or that countries that help Ukraine are at risk of being drawn into war.

Fourth, the narratives of anti-Western rhetoric are being filled with narratives in both Ukraine and Romania at a very rapid pace due to the expansion of communication tools and forms of presenting anti-Western narratives in the Ukrainian and Romanian information spaces. Neighboring states should take concerted action to combat Russian propaganda, which is an integral part of Russian state policy.

Information war is essential to Russia's foreign policy toward the West due to historical experience and the Kremlin's strategic goals. Since Soviet times, ideological struggle actively used propaganda and disinformation. Russia has adopted such experience, adapting it to modern conditions, particularly in the digital era when information spreads rapidly and globally. Opportunities to influence the masses have become more accessible with the development of the Internet, social media, and targeted advertising technologies.

One of the key techniques of the Russian information war is to intensify interstate conflicts that have arisen throughout the shared history. Russia is constantly trying to weaken the unity of societies by provoking confrontation between different groups and destabilizing democratic systems. Romania is one of the most vulnerable states to Russian information warfare. Romania's complicated history of relations with Ukraine, its geopolitical location, and internal socio-economic and ethnic factors can be factors used to split society.

The research methodology. In this research we use both general scientific methods and special methods of political science. It is important that the paper analyses a wide range of problems and phenomena, for which we used the appropriate conceptual tools. We tried to conduct a classic comparison that focused on analyzing Ukrainian and Romanian sources (media, social media pages, and Telegram channels).

Based on this study's structure, the paper's authors paid special attention to binary analysis and a comparison method. The binary analysis is limited to comparing two states carefully selected according to the problem and subject matter of the study. M. Dogan and D. Pelassy distinguish two variants (types) of binary analysis: implicit and explicit. An example of an implicit binary comparison is the study of objects in relation to which the researcher is "other", i.e., a representative of other cultural habits, other citizenship, and value orientations (Dogan & Pélassy 1990: 126). That is, the researcher evaluates phenomena and processes and compares them based on his or her own subjective perceptions and attitudes. The very dialectic of the process of such comparison contributes to strengthening our understanding of ourselves, our own culture, and our own society. We get to know our country better, especially its potential, when we start analyzing and comparing other countries. In many cases, this method can also contribute to a deeper understanding (or even the creation of new) general theoretical positions. M. Dogan and D. Pélassy suggest applying the method of binary comparison to states that have similar contextual features of political processes, even if the purpose of the analysis is to identify differences that exist between them in one or more specific areas (Dogan & Pélassy 1990: 127). As we have already noted, as the simplest form of comparison, the binary strategy is a good tool for broad theoretical generalizations.

One of the methodological principles we apply is the principle of scientific modeling and theory building known as Occam's Razor (the principle of simplicity). Occam's Razor is a principle of logic attributed to the medieval scholastic philosopher William of Ockham. The principle states that one should not make more assumptions than the minimum required. We compared the anti-Western narratives in Ukraine and Romania in the simplest and most accessible way possible, because according to the stated

principle, the simplest model should be chosen from a set of available equivalent models of any issue, phenomenon or process. We have also adopted the principle of induction in the humanities (logical induction), which is based on formal logical inference that makes it possible to draw a general conclusion based on the analysis of individual facts. Obviously, given the comparative nature of this research paper, we have taken into account R. Macridis's requirements for comparison in terms of analysis at the abstract level in the context of providing means for testing hypotheses (Macridis 1967: 42).

We have also used modern methods of political communication (Gosselin 1995), combined with elements of linguistic analysis (Toolan 2001). Such methods complement the classical approaches of political science and allow us to take into account the peculiarities of information and hybrid wars using anti-Western narratives as a weapon. In the study, we understand narratives as similar information flows (messages) that aim to manipulate mass consciousness and shape sentiments against the West in the context of the war in Ukraine.

2. ANTI-WESTERN NARRATIVES IN UKRAINE

The violent, illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula located within the Ukrainian administrative units, namely the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol from Ukraine and their unilateral, illegal incorporation into the Russian Federation as subjects of the Federation the "Republic of Crimea" and the "city of federal significance Sevastopol" was proclaimed by the Russian Federation on March 18, 2014. It became the starting point for the outbreak of the military conflict in eastern Ukraine in the same year and enabled its escalation into a full-scale war. All the events determined the necessity and profitability of constantly filling the information space of Ukraine and neighboring countries, including Romania, with anti-Western rhetoric as an effective tool of the Russian propaganda machine.

The constant presence of information flows from the Russian Federation in Ukraine provides an opportunity to form a negative image of its geopolitical opponents, the US/EU, and justify a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, or even more so to create its own positive image based on fake unconfirmed historical facts aimed at an anti-Western audience. Russia is constantly trying to impose its own stereotypes on the history of Ukraine in its propaganda TV shows. For example, the name "Ukraine" is allegedly derived from the word "outskirts" or, as we often hear the Russian dictator say, "Lenin invented Ukraine". One of the main "pillars" on which Russia is trying to maintain its propaganda policy is the claim to the heritage of Kyivan Rus' and the emphasis on the fact that Ukraine is a stateless nation. There is a widespread myth about Batu Khan's conquest of Kyivan Rus' and the relocation of the center from Kyiv to Moscow. However, at that time, it was the center of the Golden Horde, and it was obvious that Slavs were not allowed to enter it. During the Soviet era, Soviet historiography interpreted all events as if the medieval history of Kyiv ended after 1240, but in fact the Grand Duchy of Kyiv existed for almost 200 years, until 1471, after which it became a voivodeship. The last Grand Duke of Kyiv was Semen Olelkovich, whose power extended to Kyiv, the modern Right Bank, the Sivershchyna, and the Left Bank up to the Samara River. Moreover, the principality had

its own army, minted its own coinage, and the residence of the Grand Duke was in the Kyiv Castle (Бікарчук 2022).

According to the Bulgarian scholar Tsvetan Todorov, whose research covers a wide range of sciences such as sociology, political science, philosophy, and history, in everyday life, “people think, perceive, and make moral choices according to narrative structures” (Todorov, 1977: 45), so everything Ukrainians see and hear directly affects the formation of public opinion and position. Researchers explain that the vulnerability of Ukrainians to anti-Western rhetoric originated from the constant disappointment of Ukrainians in improving their quality of life, the lack of an effective fight against corruption, and the lack of effective implementation of further reforms on the path to the EU. Russian propaganda constantly used the confusing and lengthy process of Ukraine’s European integration and the mistakes made by officials on the way to European institutions to discredit Ukraine’s European integration course. It persistently offers a much more “promising” alternative: mutually beneficial cooperation between Ukraine and Russia. The outbreak of war in Ukraine finally “dispelled the dreams” of Ukrainians about Ukraine’s integration prospects in the coming years.

To spread anti-Western narratives effectively and powerfully, Russia uses all available tools, including audio-visual media, online media, and social networks that have flooded the world in the twenty-first century. We have divided the sources of anti-Western rhetoric into the following groups: 1) classical media (periodicals, television, radio); 2) Russian and pro-Russian politicians, embassy officials, public figures, opinion leaders; 3) employees of scientific/educational institutions and institutions with anti-Western views; 4) pro-Russian journalists and bloggers; 5) online media, which regularly updates the information and quickly disseminates news to large groups of people; 6) social networks (X (Twitter), Telegram, Facebook); 7) online platforms (YouTube, TikTok). All the above-mentioned information agents and resources simultaneously transmit information to large, small, accurate, conditional, official, unofficial, and reference groups.

So let’s take a look at the anti-Western narratives relayed by the Russian propaganda machine that threaten the information security of Ukraine and Romania in action.

Russia is liberating Ukraine. On the morning of February 24, 2022, Russia’s large-scale aggression against Ukraine began. Moscow was counting on a quick and lightning-fast victory. According to the Kremlin’s beliefs, the “legitimate” President Viktor Yanukovich was to enter Kyiv in triumph, thus presenting the occupation as an act of liberation of Ukraine forced by Russia. Russia presented these events as simply a part of a “special operation” to restore order but not the occupation. Accordingly, Russia interpreted the seizure of Ukrainian territories as the “restoration of historical justice” (Сливенко 2023b). Russia claimed that it was locals of the southeastern regions of Ukraine who were planning a “voluntary” referendum on joining the Russian Federation and, in Odesa, a public trial of “criminals who organized the Odesa Khatyn.” Russia seems to be aiming to free Ukraine from nationalists and Banderites who abuse the Russian-speaking population and are the cause of Ukraine’s troubles. Moreover, the West guides their actions. Russia is conducting “denazification” for the benefit of the entire Ukrainian

people (Самигін 2022). Russia interprets everything as if it is not seizing what is not its own, but reclaiming what it has lost. However, it is quite obvious that the term “restoration of historical justice” refers to the real occupation of Ukrainian territories (Сливенко 2023b) and the abduction of Ukrainian children.

In his interviews, Russian President Vladimir Putin repeatedly spreads anti-Western narratives and justifies the war he started against Ukraine. He accuses the United States of “letting the genie out of the bottle” and being the only ones to blame for the war and tries to shift the responsibility from himself to other countries. His statements also aim to create an image of the United States as a failure that has failed to cope with global challenges. (Лукашевська 2024).

As a result, the Kremlin is simply trying to justify and legitimize in the eyes of the entire international community and Russians its “bloody” seizure of Ukrainian territories, their annexation, the holding of pseudo-referendums, and the “liberation” of Ukraine”.

The West uses Ukraine as a puppet. Russian propagandists claim that Ukraine is a state that is formally sovereign and independent, but someone governed it “from outside”. They claim that Western/EU countries have “own interests” in developing the Eastern European region, so they made all political decisions regarding Ukraine’s internal agenda. Moscow is trying to prove the “collective West” governs Ukraine, the “collective West” poses a direct threat to the sovereignty of other countries. Administrators of propaganda telegram channels resort to rhetoric that European and American officials have “ambitious interests” to turn Ukraine into their colony and call the West “imperial” (Сливенко 2023a).

In one of the interviews with the pro-Russian channel “NewsOne” and published on the Youtube channel of the popular blogger Anatoliy Sharia, the People’s Deputy, representative of the opposition party “Opposition Platform – For Life” stated that one of the biggest problems hindering the economic and social development of Ukraine is external governance. He also emphasized that during the entire period of Ukraine’s independence, attempts at external governance were made only by the European Union and the United States. The politician recalled that these attempts became especially active at the height of Euromaidan (NewsOne 2020).

NATO member countries are involved or will be directly involved in the war. NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is an international organization created on April 4, 1949 for the collective defense of the countries of Western Europe and North America in accordance with the principles of Article 51 of the UN Charter. According to the Washington Treaty, each member state of the Alliance bears additional responsibility and benefits from participation in the system of collective security. Article 5 provides that an armed attack on one or more NATO members will be treated as an attack on all members and that “they agree that in the event of such an attack each of them ... will render assistance to the Party or Parties attacked, and shall immediately take, individually or jointly with other Parties, such actions as may be deemed necessary, including the use of armed force, in order to restore and preserve security in the North Atlantic region”. The collective security systems

available today do not provide such unprecedented guarantees of security, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders and state sovereignty.

However, anti-Western narratives represent the principles of collective defense in a completely different way. The speeches of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Sergey Lavrov, who declares that the USA is waging a war against Russia, deserve special attention. The conclusions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia about “the preparation of Ukraine for the task of strategic defeat of Russia” create an image of aggressiveness and attack intentions. This is an element of disinformation and political manipulation aimed at creating for the United States the image of an enemy who is waiting for an advantageous moment to launch a devastating blow (Вонс 2023).

The most popular sub-narrative claimed that other countries would soon “become part of the war” going on in Ukraine. The posts, for example, concerned Poland, Slovakia and NATO joining the war in the future.

The narrative that “the government can drag Poland into the war” was revived after the manipulation of disinformers around the words of the Polish ambassador to France, Jan Emeryk Roszcziszewski, who said that “if Ukraine loses, Poland will have to go to war”. He meant that after the fall of Ukraine, the Baltic states and Poland will be in direct danger. As the Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security figured out, Russian disinformation used this out-of-context sentence to prove that Poland was allegedly “planning to start a war” (SPRAVDI 2023).

As the “Correspondent” writes in an article with the sensational title “NATO troops in Ukraine: who is ready to fight for freedom”, statements by individual countries that they are ready to send their own troops to Ukraine are increasingly heard in Europe. But NATO is sharply against such an escalation of the conflict (Шипуля 2024).

The Telegram channel of the Russian propagandist Olga Shariy spreads anti-American propaganda about the fact that NATO troops are already in Ukraine and tries to prove it and confirm the words of Vladimir Putin with all kinds of “facts” (See Fig.1).

Russia aims such information streams at forming the opinion that NATO troops are already directly participating in military operations in Ukraine; the West will make decisions for everyone and drag NATO member states into the war.

The West, the EU and NATO are weak and will fall apart. The message is most popular among those who discredit the stability and strength of Western institutions. Most of the reports claimed that “NATO is weak and has no chance to stand up to the Russian military” and insisted that the US was losing its influence in the alliance and, therefore, Ukraine's joining it would do nothing for it.

One of the largest and most popular Telegram channels was “First” with 447,000 subscribers (now the number of followers decreased). At first glance, it does not stand out from the others with harsh pro-Russian publications. However, the analysis of interaction with other channels shows that it belongs to the pool supported by the Russian Federation and spreads anti-Western narratives. For example, one of the publications

talks about the US losing its influence in Africa and instead strengthening it with Russia (See Fig.2). (First 2024).

One of the popular anonymous Telegram channels that spreads pro-Kremlin anti-Western propaganda and publishes unverified information is Sheptun Ukraine War (*Шептун [whisperer]. Україна Війна*), which had more than 50,000 subscribers. In their publications, there are constant messages about the failures of the West and the lack of cohesion of actions. Thus, in one of the posts, we read that US drones failed their mission in Ukraine (See Fig.3) (*Шептун* 2024).

No less interesting is the rhetoric that Putin will destroy Western democracy. In order to finally bury the EU and NATO together with all democratic institutions, Putin does not need to lead Russian tanks to Berlin and Paris.

The Kremlin's efforts in Europe increase the demand for a "strong hand" at the head of the state, so the death of Western democracy is no longer something fantastic. Historian and former political adviser Thomas Clausen expressed this opinion on the pages of the British publication "The Telegraph". Clausen emphasizes:

The key to Putin's victory is not an all-out war against NATO, but the use of non-military weapons and the undermining of democratic states. In short, Putin wins when liberal democracies lose the will to fight and that day could be catastrophically close. (Clausen 2024)

Moreover, he predicts very catastrophic events:

Putin defeats Ukraine and advances to Moldova and the Suwalki corridor, Trump withdraws the USA from NATO, and the only nuclear deterrent in Europe, France's nuclear weapons, is under the control of [pro-Russian right-wing populist Marine], Le Pen. This would leave Europe's eastern flank dangerously open. (Clausen 2024)

Non-aligned countries choose the side of Russia, not the West. Messages in this category of narratives centered around accusations of pushing the international community toward a "world war" by aiding Ukraine. Narratives attempted to blur Russia's responsibility for the aggression against Ukraine and to show the US as "an equally responsible party" (SPRAVDI 2023). Ten countries in Europe have chosen the status of neutral states. Still, since the beginning of the war, they have supported Ukraine politically and humanitarially and have also joined the sanctions against Moscow.

For example, Switzerland remains the oldest neutral and, in fact, the only non-aligned state in Europe with a full-fledged army. However, after the open Russian invasion of Ukraine, Switzerland condemned Moscow and joined the EU sanctions against Russia. Austria is considered neutral according to the 1955 Declaration. Still, in 1995, Austria joined the EU and, therefore, is now involved in aid to Ukraine, including military aid, although at the bilateral level, it emphasizes exclusively humanitarian support. Ireland has followed a policy of military neutrality since the Second World War and, after its end, decided not to join NATO. Ireland does not consider itself politically neutral and now clearly declares its support for Ukraine and condemns Russia. As a member of the EU since 1973, Ireland adheres to European sanctions against Moscow and, like Austria, is limited only to humanitarian aid to Ukraine on a bilateral level. Malta recorded its

neutrality and non-alignment in the 1987 constitution but joined the EU in 2004, and therefore contributes to aid to Ukraine and adheres to sanctions against Russia.

Serbia and Hungary, which have strong political ties with the Russian Federation, deserve special attention. Yes, Serbia has declared itself militarily neutral since 2007. Since 2012, Serbia has been a candidate for EU membership, but unlike most other candidate countries, it has not joined the European sanctions against Russia. Another exceptional state is Hungary. The special case of Hungary in Europe is that the Russia-friendly government of Viktor Orbán declares its de facto neutrality and, at the state level, is limited to humanitarian aid to Ukraine. However, Hungary is not a non-aligned country. It joined NATO in 1999 and has been a member of the EU since 2004 (Цюпин 2023).

The West/NATO provoked the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Messages that blamed the West for the war dominated the anti-Western narratives. Such narratives underline that the West allegedly “provoked” the war and emphasized its determination to use Ukraine in its own interests. Chinese quotes disseminated, popularized, and promoted the narratives that the West and NATO allegedly “are responsible for the war in Ukraine”. They also claimed that the US is a terrorist state that attacks other countries. This sub-narrative remains popular as of April 1, 2023 (SPRAVDI 2023).

The narrative aims at finding those responsible for the start of the war in Ukraine, and of course, “NATO allegedly provoked the war in Ukraine.” It is the West that is exacerbating military conflicts and pushing for armed conflicts. Vladimir Putin expresses his dissatisfaction with the location of military systems close to the borders of Russia, as well as the further movement of NATO to the borders of the Russian Federation.

Propagandists quote Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, who said at a meeting of the Russian Defense Board that the Ukrainian military is allegedly fighting in the interests of a war between the United States and Russia. They said that almost half a million soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine died during the full-scale invasion. He also emphasized that during the counteroffensive, the Ukrainian military allegedly failed to achieve the goals set for them by “NATO instructors”, and in this way were able to dispel the myth of the superiority of Western weapons (Baranovska 2024).

In 2021, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused the United States of trying to provoke a war in Ukraine in order to impose sanctions against Russia. In particular, he said: “I do not rule out that there is such a desire to fuel militaristic sentiments, make a “little war”, then blame us, introduce new sanctions to suppress our competitiveness”. Lavrov said that the US is pumping Ukraine with weapons and bragging that it delivered \$2.5 billion worth of weapons to Ukrainians (BBC News Ukraine 2021). Thus, a year before the full-scale invasion, Russia was already talking about war and blaming the West.

Western countries and their institutions ignore the will of their citizens. Anti-Western narratives introduced the rhetoric into the information circulation to discredit the activities of NATO and the EU and manipulate public opinion based on allegedly violating the rights of EU and US citizens. This should provoke outrage and cause protests

in the US and EU member states. Moreover, some messages talked about the fact that “Western politicians take care of Ukraine at the expense of their own citizens”.

There have been widespread reports that Ukrainians are profiting from aid provided by the governments of their host countries, portraying Ukrainian refugees as exploiting the war for their own gain and abusing their position. The narratives repeatedly discussed the ingratitude of Ukrainians to the citizens of the host states.

Instead, on the second day of the war, Putin directly called the Ukrainian population and the army to an armed rebellion:

Take power into your own hands! It seems that it is easier for us to come to an agreement with you than with this bunch of drug addicts and neo-Nazis who settled in Kyiv and took the entire Ukrainian people hostage. (*AFP News Agency* 2022)

He showed that he “cares” about the rights of Ukrainians.

Even two years before the full-scale invasion, there were messages discrediting the government's actions to improve the lives of Ukrainians and the work of Ukrainians themselves, and, after all, it was about the fact that Ukraine ranked 93rd out of 100 in the rating of food costs compiled by the US Department of Agriculture. They claim that on average, Ukrainians spend 42% of their income on food, only citizens of Uganda, Kazakhstan, Angola, Bangladesh and Nigeria spend more on food (*Trukha Ukraine* 2020).

The war in Ukraine is beneficial to the West and they will fight to the last Ukrainian. The thesis builds on earlier pro-Kremlin narratives about the immediate need for peace talks and insists that while Russia seeks “peace”, “the West is ready to continue the war in Ukraine” (SPRAVDI 2023).

When it became clear that the blitzkrieg against Ukraine had failed, the propaganda changed to a new order: they said that the West had prepared the Armed Forces well, and the cadre soldiers were also Nazis. There were many more Nazis than expected. Propaganda tries to accuse the USA of complicity in the killing of civilians through the supply of weapons to Ukraine. For example, for Kyiv, Donbas is a foreign territory, and therefore, “Ukrainian militants” is a term that is increasingly replacing “nationalists” who fight without looking back at the harm to civilians because they hate them (Самигін 2022).

The President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, was also often quoted. He believes that NATO is “pulling its troops into Ukraine” under the guise of training centers, alliance bases are being created on the territory of the country, and in training camps, NATO “purposefully teaches to work with Belarus.” He added that he discussed this situation with Putin and “agreed that they will take some action”. Obviously, Russian missiles will be installed on the border with Ukraine (*See Fig.4*) (*Инсайдер UA* 2021).

Subsequently, in August 2022, during a speech at the 10th Moscow Conference on International Security, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that the United States was trying to “prolong the conflict in Ukraine”. According to Putin, the USA and its vassals rudely interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign states and try to force independent

states to submit to their will by threats, blackmail and pressure. He noted that the collective West needs conflicts to maintain its hegemony, and that is why they

decided the fate of the Ukrainian people as cannon fodder, implemented the “anti-Russia” project, pumped up and continued to pump up the Kyiv regime with weapons. (Собенко 2022)

The information space full of “Russian truth” that Russia supposedly wants “peace” and Western “warmongers perpetuate suffering and conflict” by constantly sending weapons to Ukraine. The idea of providing aid to Ukraine is portrayed as “futile” and only perpetuates the war, leading to further suffering (SPRAVDI 2023).

There are Western biological weapons laboratories in Ukraine / The war in Ukraine is part of a global conspiracy. A surprise was the long-running plot about the existence of biolaboratories and biological weapons in Ukraine under the patronage of the Americans. The narratives accused the son of the US president of financing the laboratories to attract attention and to get weight to this sensation. There is the old story of 2020 when the pro-Russian politician and oligarch Viktor Medvedchuk raised an information wave about “15 US military biolaboratories in Ukraine”, which, as it turns out, was done with an eye on its future deployment.

The story of the “secret weapon of mass destruction” is clearly in line with Russian propaganda about so-called “precedents”. It seems that the West recklessly creates bad precedents, so don't complain about Russia, which is simply taking an example. Previously, the Kremlin juggled the “Kosovo precedent” to explain its creation and recognition of a number of separatist pseudo-republics.

The addressees of fairy tales about “biothreats” are poorly educated and superstitious Russian masses – the environment from which the participants of the “special operation” are mainly recruited. Such people can be scared of TVs (without being ashamed and without worrying about the reputation) with a specially created “genetic weapon against the Slavs, which was supposed to be carried by birds” (Самигін 2022).

He spares no effort in propagandizing and spreading theories about a world conspiracy. The narratives describes the war in Ukraine as part of a “transnational banking conspiracy” and “a major source of income for the West”, which profits from war-related industries. The conspiracy also promotes the idea that the alleged “the world's elites use the war as a distraction and a testing ground to continue a secret monetary program in an attempt to ban cash and create virtual money to enslave the people”.

In addition, other narratives claim that the war in Ukraine is a “conspiracy” and was allegedly “planned for years by the West”. The purpose of these messages is to blame the West for the war in Ukraine and portray Russia as the victim of a transnational, evil conspiracy that provoked the violent war.

Some news sources tend to claim that “the whole war is staged”, ignoring the fact that these two narratives are at odds with each other (SPRAVDI 2023).

Sanctions hurt the West more than Russia. Moscow constantly tries to downplay the impact of sanctions on its economy, although researchers say that the Russian

economy is suffering huge losses due to Western sanctions. In international topics, Russia promoted the topic that the economic crisis in the USA and various European countries is a consequence of the conflict with the Russian Federation. Therefore, it is enough to establish “pragmatic” relations so that the crisis disappears. The export of Ukrainian grain has become another global narrative where Russia wants to demonstrate its peacefulness, constructiveness and desire to feed humanity (Самигін 2022). For example, Russia spread the images from protests in Munich against high as “proof” that ordinary Westerners were suffering more because of anti-Russian sanctions.

The misinformers said that some countries in Eastern and Central Europe are banning the import of Ukrainian grain, calling on the Moldovan government to do the same in order to save the local economy and follow the example of governments that do not want to support Ukraine at their own expense. Moreover, they say that “many countries have banned the import of Ukrainian grain because it threatens people and their health” (*SPRAVDI* 2023).

Messages about the strength and stability of the Russian economy are constantly coming from the mouth of the President of the Russian Federation, who claims that the USA, the EU and the allied countries of Ukraine persistently tried to harm Russia with the help of large-scale sanctions, but Russia found new buyers for its oil, which was sold at significantly reduced prices. Russia learned to evade the \$60 per barrel oil price cap imposed by the G7 countries as global oil prices began to rise again (Коваленко 2023). However, the effect of the sanctions is obvious, because as of May 2024, the Russian ruble has collapsed to a new figure.

3. ANTI-WESTERN NARRATIVES IN ROMANIA

In the context of Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine, anti-Western and anti-American narratives in the media space and social networks in Romania have increased significantly. According to the observations of Romanian media expert Marian Voicu, the key false narrative in the Romanian media space after Romania's accession to the EU in 2007 was the narrative of the country's transformation into a poor, underdeveloped colony of the West (Voicu 2018: 228). After the illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, the emergence of the war in Donbas, and the Russian Federation's large-scale invasion of Ukraine, this anti-Western narrative has become a topic of active public and even political debate.

Another key false narrative propagated during this period is the state's loss of national sovereignty. Research conducted in the context of the war in Ukraine, as a factor affecting social and political life in Romania, shows that the narratives about the loss of sovereignty due to the fault of the West and the transformation of the country into a colony are an electoral tool of extremist forces, which aims to mobilize society (Soare 2023). This research section will analyze the main anti-Western narratives in the Romanian media space and social networks in 2022–2023.

Romania is a “poor colony of the West”. According to this anti-Western narrative, after joining the EU, Romanians became very poor, factories closed, and large American

or European corporations used the country. The international actors aim to destroy not only the country's economy but also to impoverish Romanian society spiritually. The narrative, which has been spreading in the Romanian media space since the 90s of the last century, has its roots in the anti-capitalist propaganda of the communist regime of Nicolae Ceausescu EU or NATOThe narrative is used mainly for electoral purposes and to justify Russia's actions in the Eastern European geopolitical space (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, etc.).

According to a report by experts Funky Citizens, who studied anti-Western narratives in Romania as part of NATO-backed research projects in 2021, overtly pro-Russian narratives lack support among the general public, but "more subtle informational interventions" target other international actors, such as the EU or NATO, proved to be influential on the territory of Romania. It is worth mentioning the narrative that Western countries have a negative influence on Romanian culture and traditions. The narratives in the media emphasized that Romania is an Orthodox country, like Russia, while the West serves foreign civilizational interests. With the help of this narrative, Russia is trying to alienate the Romanian public from Western countries. Even pro-European citizens can fall victim to anti-Western propaganda, according to the scholarly treatise Funky Citizens (Funky Citizens 2021: 7). In addition, with the growth of populist tendencies in the EU, Russian propaganda finds more and more support even among its traditional opponents, using opportunism, Euroscepticism or nationalism.

Romania lost its sovereignty in favor of the USA or the EU. According to this narrative, various secret security services, with the help of Western public or political projects, control Romanians. Brussels, Washington, and Western investment groups ruled the country. They are deliberately destroying the remnants of Romania's national sovereignty. In the run-up to Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine, fringe political leaders and pro-Russian media circulated a narrative of EU pressure on the Romanian leadership to relinquish national sovereignty voluntarily. According to the disinformation spread by Senator Diana Șoșoacă and the Sputnik news site, the West forced Romania to renounce the Constitution and its sovereignty. The false interpretation of the headline constructs the narrative. It attributes someone else's words to a statement by the director of the European Commission's representation in Bucharest. On December 21, 2021, the Court of the European Union issued a decision confirming the principle of supremacy of European law over national law. Romanian courts can issue decisions that violate the position of the Constitutional Court if they conflict with European law (Gomboș 2022: 229).

Internal European debates about the decision of the Court of Justice of the European Union have actively used various media and politicians to spread the narrative of the country's loss of sovereignty. Diana Șoșoacă, one of Romania's most controversial politicians, is often quoted by the pro-Kremlin news site Sputnik, which named her the 2021 politician and announced that the senator intends to run for president of Romania. Until 2022, this site, which also had a Romanian version, regularly used anti-Western themes, quoting fringe political or public figures.

Romania will be forced to enter the war with Russia. According to this narrative, Romania will be forced to go to war with Russia after becoming a colony of the EU and the USA. This will happen under the pressure of the West or because of the personal ambitions of the president, the ruling coalition in the parliament, which receives direct instructions from Brussels, or because of the state policy imposed by the “American masters of the country”. This narrative arose before the start of the war in Ukraine and spread in various forms in the public space. In 2022-2024, the narrative interprets the decision to increase Romania's defense capabilities not as a form of response to Russia's aggression in Ukraine but as preparation for an “inevitable war”. The narrative spread the approach about the need to sign a peace treaty between Ukraine and Russia and to change the logic of war to the logic of negotiations for the “peaceful settlement of the Ukrainian issue”. In March 2023, extremist and populist political forces in Romania accused the president of trying to drag the country into war. Narratives circulating on social media at the time (Lasca 2023) suggested that the Romanian Parliament had voted to enter the country into a war against Russia and that personnel from the Romanian Armed Forces and the Ministry of the Interior would be sent outside the country without the consent and knowledge of the people. Narratives also noted that by the order of President Klaus Iohannis, the war would definitely come to the territory of Romania. In fact, the speech of the president and the presentation of information related to the armed forces at the joint session of the two chambers of the Romanian legislature is only a formal procedure that takes place every year.

In the period studied by us, calls could be found in the Romanian media space for the need to conduct NATO military operations against Ukraine and not against Russia. The senator mentioned above, Diana Șoșoacă, known for her anti-Ukrainian and anti-Western position, said that Ukraine attacked Romania with sea mines, so NATO should start a war against Kyiv. In fact, the mine she was talking about, which reached the shores of Romania in 2023, was from the Second World War. The mines that Ukraine has placed near its shores have to protect its own territory. The paradox of this false narrative is obvious. On the one hand, Russian propaganda accuses the West of dragging Romania into the war, and on the other hand, calls on NATO to launch a full-scale war against Ukraine (Manu 2023).

The West is weaker than Russia, and the world learned the truth about the war in Ukraine. According to this anti-Western narrative, Russia cannot be defeated militarily, and the West is losing its position in the world. Therefore, Ukraine should no longer be supported in this war. Various media outlets in Romania wrote at the end of 2023 that the world began to understand the truth about the war in Ukraine, and popular support for Kyiv had significantly decreased in the EU (Constantinescu 2023). The narrative uses the notion of “war fatigue” felt by the Western world, generalizing the individual opinions of certain journalists and reinforcing the Kremlin's propaganda messages. Even though the Russian invasion is strongly condemned both officially and by the general population of Romania, the narrative aims to convince society that no one supports Kyiv anymore, so Romania should abandon this policy. It is worth noting that sometimes false narratives in Romania are based on quotes from Ukrainian pro-Kremlin media. “Active News” writes:

According to the sources referred to by the Ukrainian publication “Strana”, as a rule, Belgium and other countries of Eastern Europe also spoke out against the EU’s aid to Ukraine in a well-informed manner. Will Romania be among them? (Constantinescu 2023)

Anti-Western narratives from Ukraine entered the Romanian media space to manipulate public opinion. Narratives presented the negotiation processes within the framework of EU political structures to the Romanian public as disputes regarding the rejection of the course of support for Ukraine.

Romania must adhere to an isolationist policy. According to this narrative, Bucharest must return to old methods of political and economic governance and free itself from EU and US control. To recover economically, according to this narrative, Romanians are urged to stop buying Western goods, not to work for foreign corporations, and not to participate in democratic process. The call for freedom from the “yoke of foreigners” is actually a call for rejecting democracy. “Active News” writes in February 2023:

You voted for your representatives, you should listen to them! But they are already spoiled by your conquerors! They do not represent your interests, but the interests of foreigners. Nothing good can be expected from them. (Side 2023)

According to this narrative, Romania’s natural resources and assets have been confiscated by foreigners and Romanians can reclaim them if their country becomes economically isolated from the West. Romanians have to stop buying Western products, while there is no mention of severing relations with Russia or countries from other continents in this article. In fact, the states that chose isolationism in the last century have disastrous consequences. Narratives present information biasedly and take quotes from various politicians’ statements out of context.

The West is deliberately bringing Romania and Moldova closer together in order to provoke Russia. According to this narrative, the rapprochement between Romania and the Republic of Moldova is a hybrid Western attack on Russia and Russian interests in the region. Pro-Russian social networks and Telegram channels spread messages about Russia’s historical right to determine the politics of the Republic of Moldova According to the Telegram channel “Triunghiul basarabean”:

They want to gather together as many lands as possible with a Romanian-speaking population. Western corporations coordinated this national project and directed it against the vital interests of Russia. The achievement of Romania’s national interests is presented to the followers of this ideology as something possible only in the conditions of a significantly weakened Russia. (*Triunghiul basarabean* 2023)

There is no evidence to support the narrative that the West is encouraging the idea of a merger between the two countries as part of a plan against Russia. In fact, by launching this narrative, Moscow only wants to justify its own revisionist actions, which resulted, among other things, in the two autonomous entities in Moldova (Transnistria and Gagauzia, which retain an uncertain status). In addition, this thesis is a continuation of the metanarrative, according to which Russia is a victim of “Western expansion”, being forced to wage war on the territory of Ukraine. The political reality differs significantly

from these narratives: while Russia is waging a hybrid war against Chisinau, Romania was the first state to recognize the independence of the Republic of Moldova, its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Romania also actively supports Moldova's European integration aspirations (Marina 2024) and also helps Ukraine to strengthen its defense capabilities in the context of the Russian invasion.

Romanians want their country to leave NATO and the EU. According to this narrative, Romanian society opposes NATO and EU policies. Most Romanian citizens want their country to withdraw from these international organizations. Although contradicted by polls, various media outlets, politicians, and fringe social media pages propagate this narrative. "This is the merit of the EU, which irritated peoples and nations. It is also thanks to the decline of the American empire that forces us to help Ukraine", reports Gold FM Radio. The article emphasizes that only leaving NATO and the EU can save Romania from becoming a colony of the West (Groza 2022).

The narrative contradicts sociological research and doesn't reflect the study of public opinion in the country. According to a poll conducted by the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy (IRES) in April 2024, 73% of Romanians believe that their country should remain in the EU. Over the past 10 years, more than half of Romanians have traveled to EU countries, and more than half have someone in their family working in a European country. In addition, every fifth Romanian has worked in an EU country in the last decade, and every 10 Romanians have someone studying in the EU in their family. 6% of the research participants claim to have received European funding during the last 10 years. 40% of Romanians consider Russia's war against Ukraine to be the main threat to the EU in the next five years (Mihăiescu 2024).

NATO is waging war against Russia on the territory of Ukraine. According to the narrative, the war between Russia and Ukraine that began in 2014 is effectively a war waged by NATO against Moscow. Initially, the narrative allowed Moscow to justify its actions on the territory of the former Soviet republics. When Russian forces began to suffer defeats in Ukraine in 2022, the narrative changed. A new thesis emerged that Russia is actually opposing NATO/the West, who are using Ukrainians as cannon fodder (Cristoiu 2022). The narratives accused NATO/USA of forcing Ukraine to fight against Russia to shift responsibility for the war from the aggressor to the victim (Ukraine) and its allies (NATO). In fact, Russia invaded Ukraine on several fronts, setting conditions for Kyiv that meant capitulation and renunciation of its own statehood: disarmament, change of political regime, surrender of some territories, renunciation of the right to decide the course of foreign policy, etc. During 2021, some media actively spread information about the anti-Russian policy of NATO, the EU, and the USA in the countries of Eastern Europe. The mass media and social networks presented Russia as a besieged fortress protecting the Christian faith and morality. Therefore, Russia has the right to defend itself against Western aggression on the territory of Ukraine and other states (Gherman 2022: 102).

The West is imposing a sanitary dictatorship on the world and Romania. According to this narrative, the COVID-19 pandemic was a figment of the West, particularly the US, and people continue to die from the effects of vaccinations. The war in Ukraine is a continuation of the West's plan to destroy humanity. These conspiracy theories emerged

in the context of the pandemic when topics such as dangerous vaccinations and the efforts of the global elite to keep humanity under control and reduce the population spread. Even though the government lifted anti-Covid restrictions and vaccination rates were negligible, false narratives related to a “sanitary dictatorship” and vaccination continued to emerge in Romania after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. According to a study by the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), Russian propaganda used the pandemic to spread anti-Western narratives about the incompetence of EU and US doctors and the use of vaccination for political purposes (Boulègue and Polyakova 2021). Some political forces in Romania appealed to the Parliament not to allow the adoption of laws that would legalize the “sanitary dictatorship” (AUR 2021). Humanity will forever remain a “prisoner” of a state of emergency imposed under the pretext of fictitious pandemics, according to a false narrative spreading in Romania.

Sanctions negatively affect only EU countries. According to this narrative, Russia is not concerned about the West's economic sanctions because they do not affect it negatively. Still, they cause a severe economic crisis in countries such as Romania. Economic sanctions imposed on Moscow (including limitation of oil price) do not affect the Russian economy but determine the impoverishment of the Romanian population. As Romanian researcher Ileana Rachieru noted, the sanctions narrative is aimed at a poorly educated audience and seeks to manipulate public opinion. (Rachieru 2022: 474). Although the impact of sanctions may be perceived as limited in the short term, over time, they will prove effective. In addition, all sanctions are fully in line with the obligations under international law that the EU adheres to. According to the observations of economists, although the Russian economy is doing better than expected, the sanctions are having a big impact on it. Russia's macroeconomic environment has deteriorated significantly, mainly as a result of sanctions. Signs of economic fragility are multiplying, and money invested in weapons and ammunition is simply being destroyed on the territory of Ukraine (Sullivan 2024).

We tried to conduct a comparative analysis of anti-Western narratives in Ukraine and Romania and to prove that the methods and tools of Russian propaganda are constantly updated and may sound different. Still, their goal is the same – to discredit the West (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparison table and matching of anti-Western narratives in Ukraine and Romania

Anti-Western narratives in Ukraine	Anti-Western narratives in Romania
Russia liberates Ukraine from the West	Romania is “the poor colony of the West”
The West uses Ukraine as a puppet	Romania lost its sovereignty in favor of the USA or the EU
NATO member countries are or will be directly involved in the war	Romania will be forced to enter the war with Russia

Non-aligned countries choose the side of Russia, not the West	Romania must follow an isolationist policy
Western countries and their institutions ignore the will of their citizens	The West is deliberately bringing Romania and Moldova closer to provoke Russia
The war in Ukraine is beneficial to the West, and they will fight to the last Ukrainian	Romanians want their country to leave NATO and the EU
There are Western biological weapons laboratories in Ukraine	The West is imposing a sanitary dictatorship on the world and Romania
The war in Ukraine is part of a global conspiracy	NATO is waging war against Russia on the territory of Ukraine
Sanctions hurt the West more than Russia	Sanctions negatively influence only the EU countries

4. CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, anti-Western rhetoric and Russian propaganda with its key messages have penetrated both the Ukrainian information space and the information space of Romania and other European Union states. The analysis of the results of the study allows us to draw conclusions about the systematic spread of anti-Western narratives of Russian state propaganda in the information space of both Ukraine and Romania. Disinformation campaigns with anti-Western rhetoric on the part of the Russian Federation have become a real challenge for Ukraine and Romania, the two neighboring states with strong historical, cultural, and economic ties.

Ukrainian and Romanian information spaces are constantly filled with anti-Western narratives about “loss of sovereignty”, “weakness of the EU/NATO/USA”, “instability”, “foreign governance”, and “global conspiracy” against the background of positive coverage of the Russian policy. The commonality of topics and the synchronization of anti-Western messages in Ukraine and Romania allows Russia to ensure the effect of a common information space of neighboring states and contributes to the formation of a limited positive image of the Russian Federation among both Ukrainians and Romanians.

The anti-Western campaigns we analyzed are permanent in the territories of Ukraine and Romania. We discovered common themes but different tools and approaches to their dissemination. In Romania, anti-Western narratives aim to reduce the level of support for Ukraine during the war and lead to the mobilization of society for a possible exit from the EU or NATO in the future. In Ukraine, panic and accusing the West of inciting a military conflict used to sow by methods of military propaganda. Despite the different styles of presentation of information and its adaptation according to each country's socio-political and mental context, the anti-Western narratives in both countries are identical. Starting from February 24, 2024, there have been significantly more fake narratives in the

information space of both countries, which indirectly, slowly but surely shift the emphasis from the official narrative “Russia is the aggressor” and the false narrative “The West is guilty of the war”. Most of the narratives we examined undermine and distort the sense of security in both countries.

For both Ukrainian and Romanian societies and states, the issue of countering and preventing the spread of disinformation campaigns by the Russian Federation is highly urgent. Because of the common threat, the two neighboring states must coordinate their actions to counter Russian propaganda. The Ukrainian and Romanian governments, together with international partners and public organizations of their countries, should constantly develop effective strategies and legislative mechanisms to combat Russian anti-Western propaganda.

Information war is a relatively inexpensive and effective way to destabilize Western societies (without resorting to direct aggression), which allows Russia to influence the international arena using modern information technologies, social media, and cyber tools. Russian “troll factories” and “Kremlin bots” have become tools for spreading fake news, propaganda, and disinformation.

Russia uses information war as an effective tool since it allows it to compensate for weaknesses in other areas, influence world politics, and sow discord among its opponents. Russian propaganda actively applies historical, political, and ethnic conflicts between Ukraine and Romania to manipulate and have an influence on public opinion in both countries. The Kremlin seeks to split the West, sow distrust of its neighbors, and intensify interstate conflicts, making information warfare in the context of global information interdependence a critical element of Russia's strategy in the region and shaping its political landscape.

Figure 1. Screenshot of the Telegram channel of the Russian propagandist Olga Shariy

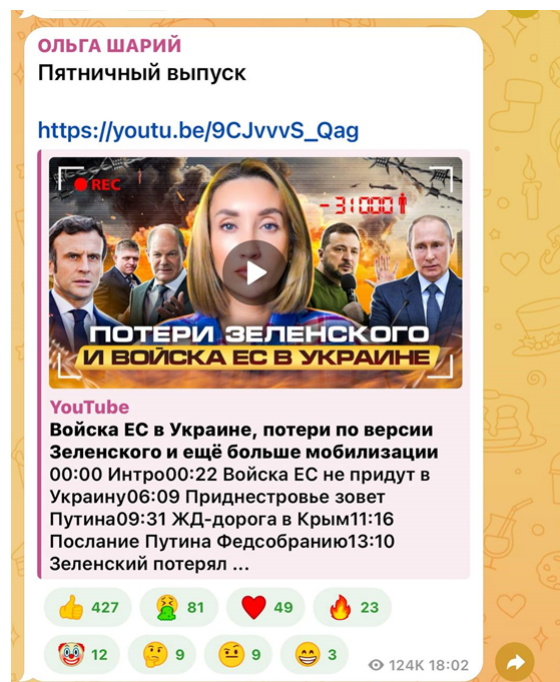


Figure 2. Screenshot of the Telegram channel “First. Новости войны” (First. News of the War)



Figure 3. Screenshot of the Telegram channel “Шептун.Украина Война”

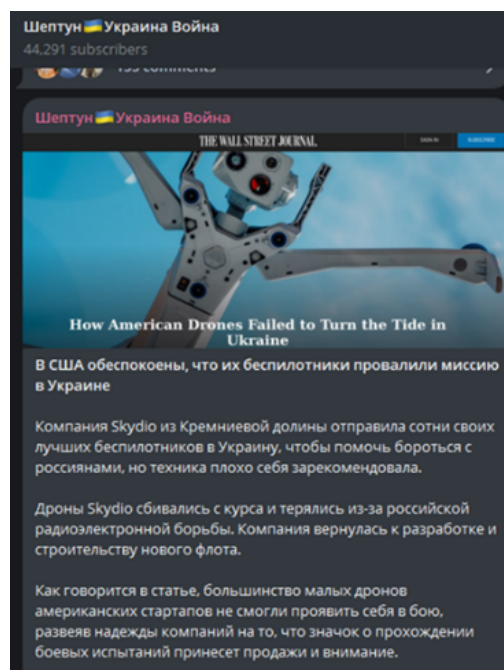


Figure 4. Screenshot of the Telegram channel Інсайдер UA



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REGIONAL DIMENSIONS OF ANTI-AMERICANISM IN POST-COMMUNIST STATES: THE CASES OF SLOVAKIA AND SERBIA ¹

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DOI: 10.36169/2227-6068.2024.02.00009

Abstract. *This article examines the regional dimensions of anti-Americanism in post-communist states, focusing on Slovakia and Serbia. The research aims to analyze the historical roots, government stances, and the impact of global geopolitical shifts, such as the war in Ukraine, on anti-American sentiment in these nations. Methodologically, the study combines political discourse analysis with a comparative approach, supported by a historical-problematic framework, to understand patterns of anti-Americanism in these countries. The scientific novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive approach to exploring the multifaceted nature of anti-American sentiment across two distinct post-communist contexts. The findings conclude that anti-Americanism in Slovakia and Serbia is shaped by complex ties with Russia, Cold War legacies, and current geopolitical dynamics, with Russia's aggression against Ukraine intensifying the East-West divide. Analysis of political discourse in Slovakia and Serbia reveals a contrast between official government positions and public attitudes toward the United States, where prevalent anti-American sentiments are often fueled by political leaders portraying the USA as an aggressor, especially in the context of NATO's actions. This ambivalence is further deepened by historical traumas, such as the NATO bombing in Serbia and Slovakia's pursuit of neutrality.*

Keywords: *Anti-Americanism, United States, Slovakia, Serbia*

Submitted: 12 July 2024; **accepted:** 3 November 2024

¹ The article was prepared under the support of the European Union NextGenerationEU project.

1. INTRODUCTION

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has heightened the geopolitical divide between East and West, shifting threat perceptions across Europe. We can see this shift in post-communist Central and Southeast European countries with complex historical, economic, and cultural relations with Russia. These ties, rooted in the legacy of the Cold War, energy dependencies, and shared Slavic heritage, have typically fostered anti-American sentiments that persist in various degrees across these nations. This legacy continues to influence the politics of these countries in the evolving regional landscape.

This paper proposes to explore the regional dimensions of anti-American in post-communist countries such as Slovakia and Serbia. The selection of these states for the case study might appear challenging due to their differing geopolitical contexts. This approach is grounded in observing how shared post-communist legacies and region-specific experiences shape diverse forms of anti-American sentiment. The states under analysis differ: Slovakia is involved in Western institutions and EU membership, and Serbia has complex relationships with Russia and the West. This divergence makes them fitting case studies, providing insight into regional anti-American sentiment, which varies based on historical alliances, economic ties, and differing foreign policy strategies. This approach also allows for broader insights into anti-American sentiment in post-communist Europe, highlighting shared patterns and regional distinctions.

The study of anti-Americanism engages scholars from various fields, including history, sociology, political science, philosophy, and psychology. Most research has focused on anti-Americanism as a global phenomenon. Significant contributions include the works of Paul Hollander (1995), Giacomo Chiozza (Chiozza 2010), Max Paul Friedman (Friedman 2012), Peter J. Katzenstein and Robert O. Keohane (Katzenstein & Keohane 2007a, 2007b), Brendon O'Connor (O'Connor 2019). Theoretical mechanisms and empirical evidence of anti-Americanism in Europe are detailed in the works of Heiko Beyer and Ulf Liebe (Beyer & Liebe 2014), Jessica Gienow-Hecht (Gienow-Hecht 2006) and Andrei Markovits (Markovits 2007). Research on the national specificities of anti-Americanism has primarily focused on Western Europe – on anti-communist bloc countries, as examined by Dan Diner (Diner 1996), Sophie Meunier (Meunier 2007), Philippe Roger (Roger 2006), or on post-Soviet states in Eastern Europe, as researched by Walter D. Connor (Connor 2004), Maryna Bessonova (Бессонова 2012), Sharon Werning Rivera and James D. Bryan (Rivera & Bryan 2019).

Despite extensive research on anti-Americanism, the specifics of anti-American sentiment in Central Europe and the Balkans remain underexplored in academic literature. There is also a shortage of comprehensive comparative studies on anti-American sentiments in post-communist countries that were not part of the Soviet Union but were involved in the ideological American - Soviet confrontation during the Cold War. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the case of Slovakia and Serbia, countries with a communist past, providing a detailed understanding of the regional aspects of this phenomenon in a comparative context.

This research aims to analyze the regional dimensions of anti-Americanism in post-communist states, focusing on Slovakia and Serbia. The research objectives include the following: to identify the historical roots that have shaped specific attitudes toward the United States and determine the factors that contributed to anti-American sentiments, particularly those arising from their communist past; to trace the evolution of US perceptions within the political discourse of Slovakia and Serbia in the post-bipolar era; explore how global geopolitical shifts, such as Russian aggression against Ukraine, impact the dynamics of anti-Americanism in these nations.

Before analyzing the regional dimensions of anti-Americanism in post-communist states, it is important first to consolidate existing interpretations of this phenomenon. Researchers define anti-Americanism as an ideology, a tendency, a bias, or prejudice against the United States that manifests in various forms, such as animus (Markovits 2007: 11), “syndrome” (Gienow-Hecht 2006: 1069), or “systematic opposition, a sort of allergic reaction to America as a whole” (Toinet 1990: 219).

Anti-American sentiment is complex and multifaceted, often stemming from a combination of political, economic, historical, religious, cultural, and psychological factors. In his examination of the causes behind the emergence of anti-American sentiments in different nations, American scholar Paul Hollander distinguishes between their “irrational” and “rational” nature. In the first case, it involves hostility towards anything associated with America, while in the second; it pertains to disagreement with US government policies or criticism of certain aspects of American society, which can be quite justified. Another distinction relates to the presumed roots of these two types of anti-Americanism: if irrational anti-Americanism can be attributed to psychological reactions, rational anti-Americanism should be interpreted as a political stance (Hollander 1995). Hollander’s framework offers a perspective on the complex blend of irrational and rational elements within anti-American sentiment in Slovakia and Serbia, clarifying how these attitudes have developed and changed over time.

Peter J. Katzenstein and Robert O. Keohane’s typology is invaluable for a better understanding of regional variations in anti-American sentiments. They define anti-Americanism as a “psychological tendency to hold negative views of the United States and of American society in general” (Katzenstein & Keohane 2007b: 12), distinguishing it into four forms: liberal anti-Americanism, highlighting perceived United States hypocrisy and failures in world politics; social anti-Americanism, opposing social disparities within American society and found in European welfare states; sovereign-nationalist anti-Americanism, protecting national sovereignty and identity from American influence; and radical anti-Americanism, viewing the US as inherently hostile and promoting global violence (Katzenstein & Keohane 2007b: 28–38). Katzenstein and Keohane’s framework emphasizes the need to differentiate between opposition to US policies and more profound, more ingrained anti-American sentiments.

While some scholars measure anti-Americanism through behavioral indicators like protests and riots (Tai et al. 1973: 457–460), most research relies on analyzing political discourse or utilizing survey data. So Giacomo Chiozza identifies anti-Americanism as an “ideational phenomenon, an attitude, and a political belief that can be measured through

the answers individuals give to survey items” (Chiozza 2009: 37). Analyzing individual opinions leads to a deeper understanding of collective attitudes in different cultures, nations, and regions.

This research methodology combines political discourse analysis with a comparative method supported by the historical-problematic framework. This combination allows for identifying the roots of pro- and anti-American sentiments and tracing their evolution. The political discourse analysis focuses on examining speeches and official statements by political leaders, especially during election periods, regarding Slovakia–U.S. and Serbia–U.S. relations, with particular attention to the impact of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. This approach identifies recurring themes, arguments, and patterns influencing Slovakia’s and Serbia’s attitudes toward the United States. The comparative method provides insight into broader patterns of anti-Americanism in these states, evaluates Russian influence, and examines the implications for regional security and stability. Comparing anti-American sentiment in Slovakia and Serbia within the context of Russian aggression is essential given their shared communist past, contrasting geopolitical orientations, and the strategic significance of their foreign policy choices.

2. ANTI-AMERICANISM IN SLOVAKIA

Slovakia’s independence in 1993 marked a pivotal shift in its foreign relations, notably establishing close ties with the United States. The US played an indispensable role in Slovakia’s transition to democracy and its integration into Western institutions such as NATO. According to Slovak researcher Dušan Fischer, Slovak–US relations “stand on four pillars: culture, politics, investment, and strength” (Fischer 2019: 158). Among these, the political dimension has been the most impactful, both domestically and globally. Significant events like the Iraq invasion and NATO’s bombings in Serbia have drawn considerable public criticism in Slovakia. Fischer highlights that the Slovak public often opposed their government’s pro-American stances, particularly in foreign policy.

Political parties frequently broadcast anti-American narratives as well. Slovak sociologist and political scientist Grigorij Mesežnikov notes this trend mainly within nationalist and populist far-right parties, which support Russia and oppose NATO and Europeanization. Experts linked the rise of anti-Americanism with the “illiberal regression of democracy”, which emboldens these political parties (Mesežnikov 2020: 106). Additionally, the widespread belief in conspiracy theories among Slovaks (54%) further fuels their susceptibility to anti-American sentiments (Hajdu et al., 2022: 11). The cultural dimension has also become more prominent in recent years as local conservatives resist the influence of American liberal values. The global geopolitical shifts, especially the war in Ukraine, have intensified these anti-American sentiments, impacting Slovakia’s domestic and foreign policies.

The Ideological Framework of Anti-Americanism in Slovakia

In the early 20th century, Slovakia, as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, remained predominantly rural and economically underdeveloped compared to other parts

of the Empire, with minimal direct exposure to the United States. While the broader European skepticism toward rising American economic and cultural influence was present to a degree, this sentiment was distinct from the Russophilia found in Slovak intellectual circles in the 19th century. Figures such as Ľudovít Štúr and Ján Kollár promoted Pan-Slavic ideals, which included admiration for Russia as a cultural and spiritual ally rather than an anti-American stance (Kaša 2017: 202–205). Their advocacy focused on the aspiration for greater national rights within the multi-ethnic empire, positioning Russia as a potential supporter of Slovak autonomy. Slovak sociologists and analysts observe that Russophilia in this period reflected a preference for cultural kinship with Slavic nations, which became idealized in contrast to other neighboring influences (Cuprik 2016). Thus, while American influence sometimes met with European skepticism, Slovak Russophilia was more about cultural affinity than direct opposition to the United States.

The formation of the First Czechoslovak Republic in 1918 marked a significant shift in the political landscape. The new state, as a democratic republic, was oriented toward strong ties to Western powers, including the United States. The initial relationship with Washington was positive, driven by American support for the principle of self-determination, which President Woodrow Wilson championed (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic 2023). However, despite these favorable beginnings, traces of anti-American sentiment developed, influenced partly by leftist ideological trends and concerns over growing US cultural and economic influence, which Europeans viewed as challenging traditional industries and values (Nolan 1994: 108–110).

In the 1920s and 1930s, various political ideologies, including nationalism and socialism, emerged in Central and Eastern Europe. These ideologies often critiqued capitalism and liberal democracy, systems closely associated with the United States. The growing influence of socialist and communist ideas in Czechoslovakia included a critique of American capitalism and its impacts. Additionally, being predominantly rural and conservative, Slovakia had a cultural identity somewhat at odds with the liberalism associated with American culture. Some Europeans saw the spread of American movies, music, and lifestyle as a form of limited but cultural dominance (Kirschbaum 2016: 158–162).

After World War II, Czechoslovakia appeared in the Soviet sphere of influence. Although the country's leadership initially expressed interest in joining the Marshall Plan to support economic recovery, Soviet pressure soon forced a withdrawal, underscoring the limits of their autonomy. The political landscape in Czechoslovakia shifted dramatically as the Communist Party gained significant power, partly due to the country's liberation from Nazi occupation, mainly by Soviet forces, supported by US troops and local resistance groups. The Western Allies, primarily the US Army, paused their advance near an agreed demarcation line, allowing the Soviets to take control of Prague. The initial post-war government was a coalition, but the Communists held significant sway. In February 1948, they executed a coup d'état and solidified their control over the government, establishing Czechoslovakia as a socialist state aligned with the USSR. This

marked the beginning of a four-decade-long period where Czechoslovakia, including Slovakia, adopted a staunchly pro-communist and anti-American position.

The ideological foundations of anti-Americanism during this period were deeply rooted in the Marxist-Leninist doctrines promoted by the Soviet Union. Communist propaganda portrayed the United States as the epitome of capitalist exploitation, as an oppressor of the working class, contrasting it with the socialist ideals of equality and communal ownership. Moreover, that time narratives depicted the USA as an aggressive imperialist power that sought to dominate other nations through economic, military, and cultural means (Dickins 2017: 65–67). The Korean War and, later, the Vietnam War reinforced these narratives as examples of American imperialism.

The Czechoslovak government, under communist rule, implemented extensive propaganda campaigns to instill anti-American sentiment among the population. State-controlled media, education systems, and cultural institutions played roles in disseminating anti-American messages. Newspapers, radio, and later television portrayed the United States in a negative light, emphasizing issues such as racial inequality, crime, and economic disparities. However, as Tom Dickins notes, anti-American sentiments among Czechs and Slovaks were not dominant. This was due to the United States' significant role in supporting the establishment of the First Czechoslovak Republic in 1918. Additionally, the significant Czech and Slovak diaspora in the USA, formed during the interwar period, maintained strong connections with their homeland (Dickins 2017: 74–75).

The Prague Spring of 1968 marked a brief period of political liberalization and reform in Czechoslovakia, led by Alexander Dubček, who aimed for a more open and progressive society. However, the Soviet-led invasion in August 1968 crushed these reforms and reestablished hardline communist control. In the years leading up to the Velvet Revolution of 1989, Czechoslovakia remained part of the socialist bloc while still retaining its liberal aspirations, which later influenced its orientation after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Thus, Slovakia's ideological framework of anti-American sentiments has a complex and contradictory structure. These sentiments stem from general European skepticism toward the spread of American influence. Pan-Slavic ideas fostered closer ties with Russia and an orientation towards the East, which Slovak populist parties would later leverage. The communist era and Soviet influence helped embed negative stereotypes of the United States in Slovak society, shaping anti-American sentiments as part of the broader ideological outlook promoted during the Cold War. Nonetheless, the ideological foundation of these sentiments was not entirely solid. The US support for Czechoslovakia's independence and the cultural ties of the Czech and Slovak diaspora challenged the strength of negativism toward the USA. Subsequently, this ideological framework significantly impacted and laid the groundwork for the complex relationship between Slovakia and the United States that evolved in the following decades.

Anti-Americanism as a Strategy for Political Populism in Slovakia

The end of the bipolar confrontation and the collapse of the Soviet Union prompted Central European countries to reevaluate their interests, goals, policies, and alliances within the context of their regained independence. In this environment, the Slovak Republic, which gained independence in 1993, sought to balance Western integration and establish partnerships with the United States while maintaining traditional ties with Russia.

In the early years of independence, the new state faced the challenge of building its political and economic systems. The United States played a pivotal role in supporting Slovakia's transition to democracy and a market economy by providing financial aid, technical assistance, and political backing for the Slovak Republic's bid to join Western institutions. However, those years were politically unstable under the leadership of Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar. His authoritarian style and reluctance to implement necessary democratic reforms strained Bratislava's relations with the West. Concerns over governance, human rights, and the rule of law led to Slovakia's initial exclusion from the first round of NATO enlargement in 1997 (Nelson & Szayna 1997). This contributed to a political climate that was more receptive to anti-American rhetoric.

The election of Mikuláš Dzurinda as Prime Minister in 1998 marked a turning point. His government prioritized democratic reforms, economic liberalization, and integration with Western institutions. Washington warmly received Bratislava's renewed commitment to these principles. It also provided substantial support for Slovakia's NATO and EU membership bids.

Now, we can evaluate Slovakia's post-communist path as a model of a successful transition to a liberal-democratic regime and a functioning market economy. Nonetheless, the early years of independence demonstrated that Slovakia remained a site of intense political competition between advocates of liberal-democratic values and proponents of illiberal and authoritarian approaches. According to researchers Grigorij Mesežnikov and Ol'ga Gyárfášová, since the 1990s, the Slovak party system has been characterized by polarization driven primarily by contrasting approaches to governance rather than ideological differences. We can divide the country's political parties into two main groups based on this difference. The first group comprises programmatic parties with clearly articulated ideological orientations that uphold liberal-democratic values. The second group includes political parties that favor an authoritarian style of governance, leveraging populism and nationalism to mobilize voters (Mesežnikov & Gyárfášová, 2018: 80–81). The former group tends to be pro-Western and pro-American. In contrast, the latter frequently adopts a pro-Russian stance or argues that Westernization is being imposed on Slovakia at the expense of its traditional values and sovereignty. Despite the marked polarization within the political sector, Slovakia's institutional foundations, principles of constitutional liberalism, European integration, and transatlantic ties have firmly taken root. Nevertheless, the rhetoric of these nationalist-populist parties continues to stoke anti-Western and anti-American sentiments among segments of the Slovak populace, often at odds with the officially declared position of the Slovak government.

Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, anti-American sentiments have intensified in Europe. It was mainly a reaction to NATO's actions in Yugoslavia in 1999 and the Iraq War in 2003. The Slovak government's support for US military actions in Iraq was a strategic move aimed at securing NATO membership. However, Slovaks perceived these interventions as examples of American aggression and a destabilizing force in international affairs (Fila 2003). However, it sparked significant public opposition and heightened anti-American sentiments within Slovak society. Opposition forces capitalized on the war's unpopularity to mobilize voters in the 2006 elections. It led to the victory of the left-wing nationalist and populist political party "Direction – Social Democracy" ("SMER – sociálna demokracia"). Robert Fico led the party. He subsequently became prime minister and condemned the Iraq War as "unbelievably unjust and wrong" (*Reuters* 2007). In 2007, his government agreed to withdraw Slovak troops.

In the 2000s, economic, diplomatic, and cultural ties between the United States and the Slovak Republic strengthened significantly. After joining NATO in 2004 and President George Bush's visit in 2008, Slovakia pushed for visa-free travel to the USA, emphasizing its transatlantic integration. The visa requirement was abolished on November 17, 2008. It was a significant political and psychological milestone for Slovakia, marking its integration into Western structures alongside its Schengen and Euro-zone accessions and completing its efforts to join the democratic developed world (Demeš 2023: 72). The visa-free regime facilitated more intensive exchanges between Slovakia and the United States in education, science, and culture. Young people actively participated in various exchange programs, shaping their views on America and its lifestyle through personal experience, contributing to the growth of pro-American sentiments in society. Meanwhile, the older generation felt nostalgia for the perceived stability and social security of the communist era, contrasting with the uncertainties brought by post-communist transitions. This nostalgia frequently manifests as skepticism towards American capitalism and policies. Slovak sociologist Michal Vašečka argues that Slovak anti-Americanism is rooted in a broader rejection of modernity. He observes that while Slovaks may embrace the material aspects of Western life, they resist adopting Western cultural norms and values (*Aktuality.sk* 2022).

The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and the subsequent conflict in Ukraine's Donbass region significantly heightened tensions between Russia and the West, including the United States. In response, Slovakia, aligning with the EU Council, condemned the violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and supported EU and US sanctions against Russia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic 2014). Bratislava also actively engaged with Washington on regional security issues, notably through efforts to bolster the country's defense capabilities. It included the Partnership program between the Slovak Armed Forces and the Indiana National Guard and the training exercise – "Slovak Shield 2015" (Packett 2015). However, political leaders, including Prime Minister Robert Fico, were vocal critics of Western sanctions on Russia, labeling them as "absurd" and detrimental to Slovak economic interests (Tomek & Doroshev 2016). This criticism illustrated a pragmatic approach within the Slovak political establishment, aiming to balance relations with both the West and Russia.

Slovak society's stance on the situation in Ukraine was not unequivocal. While some supported Ukraine's sovereignty and the EU and US responses to Russian aggression, others sympathized with Russia due to historical, economic, and cultural ties, as well as active disinformation campaigns by the Kremlin. Russian propaganda in Slovakia aims to discredit Ukraine, the United States, NATO, and the EU by portraying them negatively and promoting conspiracy theories. It seeks to undermine Ukraine's revolution, depict the United States as seeking global domination, present NATO as an aggressor, and paint the EU as ineffective. Additionally, it promotes a positive image of Russian foreign policy, justifying Russia's actions as defensive against Western aggression (Smoleňová 2015). These efforts focused on creating skepticism and mistrust toward Western institutions and policies.

In 2016 the think tank Globsec studied the influence of Russian propaganda on shaping public opinion regarding East and West geopolitical orientation and support for NATO and EU membership in Central European countries. Public opinion polls revealed that anti-American sentiments significantly contributed to distrust towards NATO. Over 60% of Slovaks believed that the USA used NATO to control small countries like Slovakia, and 48% thought that the USA was responsible for the conflict in Ukraine. Overall, 59% of Slovaks viewed the US's role in Europe and the world negatively (Globsec 2016).

Anti-American and anti-NATO sentiments in Slovakia, fueled by Kremlin disinformation campaigns, led to opposition against an initiative to install a missile defense system in Central Europe. This initiative, which involved neighboring countries such as the Czech Republic and Poland, faced resistance in Slovakia due to concerns about provoking Russia and escalating regional tensions. The Slovak pro-Russian opposition, led by Robert Fico, also strongly criticized a new Slovak-US Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA). They argued that the agreement would undermine Slovakia's sovereignty, potentially allow for a permanent US military presence, enable the deployment of nuclear weapons, and provoke Russia (APNews 2022). On 8 February 2022, when lawmakers debated the DCA, thousands of Slovaks rallied to protest a military defense treaty between their nation and the United States, both members of NATO. The protesters waved national flags and banners such as "Stop USA Army" (APNews 2022). The opposition saw the DCA as a counterbalance to Moscow's regional influence but simultaneously portrayed the United States as the aggressor. In his public speeches, Fico frequently utilized entrenched anti-American clichés, including the slogan "Yankees, go home". Interestingly, Fico supported the treaty when he started negotiations with the US in 2018 but has since turned into a vocal opponent (APNews 2022).

He also accused Slovak President Zuzana Čaputová of being a US agent and asserted that she "should remove her American uniform" (Smer-SSD 2022a). Despite this opposition and large-scale protests in Bratislava, Slovak Republic and the United States of America signed the 10-year agreement in early 2022 (U.S. Department of State 2022), just three weeks before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 shocked Europe, prompting widespread condemnation and expressions of solidarity with Ukraine. It was in stark contrast to the more ambivalent attitude seen since 2014. In Slovakia, initial

public reactions included demonstrations supporting Ukraine and calls for more decisive action against Russian aggression (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic* 2022). It marked a unity with Western policies.

Full-scale invasion prompted a significant shift in Slovak public opinion regarding Russia, the USA, and NATO. According to a Globsec poll from spring 2022, 66% of Slovaks considered the invasion unprovoked and unjustified, which resonated with older generations' memories of the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Furthermore, 62% viewed NATO as vital for Slovak sovereignty and territorial integrity, while 61% felt that the presence of NATO troops on Slovakia's eastern border bolstered national security (Klingová 2022). Additionally, support for NATO and its role in European security increased substantially, with approval for NATO membership rising from 63% in 2021 to 72% in 2022 (Hajdu et al. 2022: 28–29). The United States' prominent role in the Western response improved its image among Slovaks, who now see the US as a crucial ally in countering Russian aggression. Despite this, some residual skepticism persists.

The escalation of Russian aggression has strengthened the strategic partnership between the USA and Slovakia. This collaboration addresses Russia's aggression, enhances security through bilateral military cooperation, and tackles energy security and disinformation (U.S. Embassy in Slovakia 2022). Both Washington and Bratislava have recognized the importance of countering pro-Russian propaganda as a critical aspect of regional security. According to Slovak researcher Miroslava Pisklová, Slovaks are particularly vulnerable to disinformation, propaganda, and conspiracy theories compared to other Central European nations. This vulnerability arises from factors such as political instability, declining trust in institutions, economic challenges, and pro-Russian sentiments (Pisklová 2022: 27–28). Disinformation, mainly when disseminated by political authorities and parties during election campaigns, can significantly influence public opinion, deepen societal divisions, and erode trust in democratic processes and institutions. This issue has been a primary concern for Slovakia's Western partners, particularly the United States.

In the 2023 parliamentary elections, the left-wing nationalist and populist political party “Smer,” known for its anti-American and pro-Russian stance, secured a decisive victory. This return to power signified heightened political instability and economic challenges, further exacerbated by ongoing conflict, pervasive disinformation, and a diminishing commitment to democratic values and freedoms. Public opinion polls revealed that over 88,7% of Slovaks expressed growing concern regarding the economic repercussions of the war (*Ako sa máte Slovensko?* 2022). Additionally, previous surveys indicated that two-thirds of Slovaks were willing to trade some rights and freedoms for better finance (Hajdu et al., 2020). The electoral campaign of the “Smer” party and its leader, Robert Fico, strategically leveraged these voter concerns to gain support.

Several key patterns are evident in examining Smer's anti-American rhetoric from 2022 to 2023. Party leader Robert Fico consistently portrayed the conflict in Ukraine as a broader geopolitical struggle between Russia and the United States rather than a localized issue. He criticized the US for alleged breaches of international law (*Smer-SSD* 2022b). He drew historical parallels with past American military interventions, such as

the bombings of Belgrade and the invasion of Iraq (*Smer-SSD* 2022c). Fico denounced NATO's expansion as a direct threat to Russian security and accused the US of being the primary aggressor. He opposed military aid to Ukraine, asserting that it conflicted with Slovak national interests, and criticized both the Slovak government and President Čaputová for their pro-NATO and pro-American policies (*Smer-SSD* 2022d). Fico argued that the US military presence near Russian borders strategically benefited American foreign policy (*Smer-SSD* 2022d) and opposed Ukraine's potential NATO membership (*Smer-SSD* 2022c). He accused the Slovak government and the EU of exacerbating the conflict and aligning with US interests, advocating for a peaceful resolution to serve Slovakia's national interests better (*Smer-SSD* 2022c; *Smer-SSD* 2022d). Thus, Robert Fico effectively mobilized support by positioning himself as a defender of Slovak national interests. This outcome underscores the enduring influence of anti-American sentiment in Slovak politics. It highlights the complex dynamics that post-communist states navigate in their relations with Eastern and Western powers.

The presidential elections 2024 were pivotal in determining the country's geopolitical orientation and internal political dynamics. Peter Pellegrini, a former Prime Minister of Slovakia, won the runoff election. He leads the "Voice – Social Democracy party" ("Hlas-SD") (a social democratic and populist political party). He is known for his centrist and pragmatic approach, balancing pro-Western and pro-Russian sentiments. His political path also includes close ties to the "SMER" party and its leader, Robert Fico: Pellegrini previously served as vice-chairman of SMER and led its electoral list in the 2020 parliamentary elections.

As a pro-EU politician, Pellegrini will likely maintain Slovakia's strong ties with NATO and the European Union. Commentators expected him to advocate for a robust partnership with the United States, emphasizing shared security interests, economic cooperation, and technological collaboration. Despite this, we can find elements of anti-Americanism in his political rhetoric and policies. So, Peter Pellegrini has voiced concerns about NATO's expansion and the presence of US military forces in Europe (*HLAS* 2022a). While supporting Slovakia's membership in NATO, he has often stressed the need for a balanced foreign policy that does not overly depend on military alliances with the United States (*HLAS* 2022b). He has also been cautious about trade agreements with the USA, emphasizing the need to protect Slovak industries and ensure that agreements do not disproportionately benefit American corporations at the expense of local businesses. Therefore, Pellegrini has expressed reservations about the economic sanctions imposed by the EU and the USA on Russia. He argues that these sanctions are unlikely to bring peace to Ukraine and may harm Slovakia's economic stability (Čop 2022). Despite his criticisms, the Slovak leader carefully maintains a balanced approach, recognizing the importance of Slovakia's alliances with the US and NATO. His anti-American rhetoric is often tempered by pragmatic considerations, ensuring that he does not alienate pro-Western constituents or international partners.

Slovakia presents a unique case in Central Europe where traditional, historically rooted anti-American sentiments coexist with pro-American, Atlantic-oriented ones. This ambivalence is rooted in the historical development of relations between the two

countries and Slovakia's longstanding ties with Russia. Anti-American sentiments stem from general European skepticism towards the spread of American influence, as well as Pan-Slavic ideas, and an orientation towards the East. The communist past and Soviet propaganda contributed to the development of enduring negative stereotypes of the United States, elevating anti-Americanism to a political stance during the Cold War. Since independence, Slovakia successfully transitioned to democracy and solidified its course towards European and transatlantic integration. However, the Slovak Republic remains a battleground of intense political competition between supporters of liberal-democratic values with a pro-Western and pro-American orientation and proponents of illiberal and authoritarian approaches, who use populism, nationalism, and anti-American rhetoric to mobilize voters. It causes polarization in Slovak society regarding American policies and significantly impacts economic and cultural interactions between the two nations. Challenges to regional security, such as Russian aggression against Ukraine, have further deepened the divide among Slovaks regarding the future of their transatlantic partnership.

3. FICTIONAL ANTI-AMERICANISM IN SERBIA AND ITS FEATURES

The February–March 2024 Western Balkans Region Poll of the International Republicans Institute (IRI) shows that 36% of Serbs see the USA as the greatest threat to their country (*IRI* 2024: 55). This trend is critical in public opinion polls in recent years. Polls demonstrate an increasing anti-American sentiment and a desire to get closer to Russia. Washington understands these negative tensions and tries to change the relationship with Belgrade to a more constructive and positive one. The Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić is using it to press on the American position towards Kosovo and get bonuses from the European Union. At the same time, Vučić continues to balance the US, the EU, and the Russian Federation. He often made anti-Western statements and criticized Brussels and Washington, using pro-Kremlin propaganda about the so-called collective West.

On the other hand, Vučić supports ties with Moscow as an ally of different international organizations and the Balkan region. Aleksandar Vučić and anti-American narratives are closely related because he returned anti-NATO and anti-US tensions in Serbian public life and society. He became the prime minister of Serbia in 2014, and since then, Vučić has been trying to ensure absolute support for his authoritarian rule. He chose anti-American sentiments because the NATO air campaign in 1999 against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY, comprising Serbia and Montenegro) remains an un-lived trauma of Serbian society. It was an excellent method to mobilize Serbs around him and the Serbian Progressive Party (ruled in Serbia since 2014). Also, it was an excellent way to have Russian support in the United Nations and other international platforms, cooperating with Moscow in the gas and oil spheres. Serbs show to Vučić as a defender of their interests and Serbia, its territorial integrity and sovereignty. As a result, citizens in the country have confidence in a strong government, a strong country, and a strong army. They are also sure they can count on the support of friendly Russia. Against this background, in the last decade, anti-Americanism in Serbia deepened and took root in society. It is constantly used to their advantage not only by the Serbian authorities but

also by Russian propaganda. For Moscow, Serbian anti-Americanism has become an additional tool for destabilizing the Balkan region and fighting European integration here.

From Friendship to Anti-Americanism

The United States recognized the Principality of Serbia in 1867 (Амбасада САД у Србији 2020). Establishing full-fledged diplomatic relations lasted until 1881–1882 and benefited both countries (Rastović 2020). Serbia strengthened its position following the Berlin Congress of 1878, which affirmed its independence. As the Ottoman Empire sought to reclaim its former territories, Belgrade sought external allies, including Great Britain, the Russian Empire, France, the Kingdom of Romania, and the Principality of Montenegro. The support of the United States, a significant power in the Americas, was also essential. Serbian leadership believed that US backing could deter the Ottoman Empire and other states from altering borders in the Balkans.

With the outbreak of World War I, Serbia faced severe challenges, prompting US authorities to provide humanitarian assistance. From 1914 to 1916, the Serbian diaspora and citizens sent funds, food, seeds, and agricultural tools while facilitating the relocation of refugees to the United States. According to Serbian historian Radila Vucetic, since 1917, Washington has provided Serbia with \$1 million in monthly aid (Anđelković 2022). On July 28, 1918, US President Woodrow Wilson ordered the flow of the Serbian flag over the White House, which the Serbian government viewed as significant support (Амбасада САД у Србији 2020).

Serbian scholars interpret this as the highest level of US support (Anđelković 2022; Simić et al. 2021: 81–94), which facilitated the US recognition of the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in 1919 (US Department of State n.d.a). Hence, US–Serbian diplomatic relations continued under this new Balkan state, whose establishment aligned with Wilson’s 14 Points. Meanwhile, the United States severed its separate relations with Montenegro, which it had formally recognized on March 31, 1905 (U.S. Department of State n.d. b). With the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, uniting the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs with the Kingdom of Montenegro, the White House deemed separate US-Montenegrin relations unnecessary. From 1920 to 1991, diplomatic ties persisted with the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (later Federal Yugoslavia), where Serbia played a central role.

In the interwar years, diplomatic relations were sporadic. The European countries used it for their political interests. Great Britain, France, Germany, Turkey, and Italy competed for spheres of influence on the Balkan Peninsula, seeking to create various military-political blocs on the eve of the Second World War. It couldn’t protect the Kingdom of Yugoslavia; the Germans and their allies occupied it in 1941. The Yugoslav government, formed after the coup on the 27th of March 1941, immigrated to London. The American mission left Belgrade in mid-May of the same year. Relations between the two states continued with emigration. Washington even went so far as to raise the status of its representation in Yugoslavia to an embassy (U.S. Department of State n.d. a). The US Embassy returned to Belgrade in 1945.

Between 1941 and 1945, US–Yugoslav relations evolved as Washington initially backed Draža Mihailović's royalist movement, which sought to reinstate the Karadjordjević monarchy. American officials hoped his forces could collaborate with Josip Broz Tito's communist partisans, comprising not only Serbs but also Croats, Montenegrins, Slovenes, Bosniaks, and Roma. However, Mihailović, representing Serbian royalist interests, was unpopular among other ethnic groups who resisted a monarchy led by the Serbian dynasty. This division prompted the US to shift its support to Tito, whose partisans received formal backing in 1943 following the Tehran Conference. With widespread civilian support, Soviet backing, and an independent approach to liberation without Red Army assistance, Tito's postwar position was strong. His pragmatic approach kept Yugoslavia free from Soviet influence, allowing an independent course in both domestic and foreign affairs (Шимкевич 2023a).

The United States saw Federal Yugoslavia and its leader as crucial partners in curbing Stalin's influence in the Balkans. The rift between Josip Broz Tito and Joseph Stalin in 1948 fostered close cooperation with the US under the Truman Doctrine of 1947, both sides made mutual concessions; for instance, Yugoslavia refrained from supporting Greek communists, prompting the White House to provide economic and financial aid despite domestic ambivalence (*U.S. Department of State* n.d. c). Additionally, with US support, Yugoslavia became a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 1949, displacing Soviet-aligned Czechoslovakia. The Balkan state also received loans from the US, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. President Harry Truman authorized the export of materials and equipment necessary for revitalizing key industries. This US support enabled Yugoslavia to strengthen economic ties with Italy, the UK, Austria, and other socialist countries. A significant milestone occurred in 1950 when Truman approved \$16 million in aid for Yugoslav armed forces, with further assistance from Great Britain (£2 million) and Norway (a five-year loan to address food shortages). By 1951, cooperation significantly expanded as Yugoslavia joined the American Mutual Defense Assistance Act (Шимкевич 2023a).

Josip Broz Tito didn't pursue full integration of the nation into Western military and economic structures. Although rumors circulated about potential NATO membership, these hopes were unfulfilled. Instead, he and the leaders of Egypt and India established the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961 (Шимкевич 2022). In response, the United States gradually decreased economic aid, which frustrated the Yugoslav government. As the political situation in the Soviet Union shifted, Tito moved toward a partial rapprochement with Moscow, resulting in a decline in relations with Washington throughout the 1960s and 1970s. While diplomatic ties remained intact, the US employed political pressure and interference in internal affairs. The Yugoslav leader largely disregarded the changing American stance, continuing his political maneuvers until his death in May 1980. The following decade saw ongoing economic and political cooperation, with the US closely monitoring rising nationalism in Serbia and other republics. Tensions escalated in 1991 with the disintegration of Yugoslavia and subsequent attacks by the Yugoslav People's Army on Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. On May 21, 1992, the United States declared it did not recognize the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as the legal successor to

the previous federation (*U.S. Department of State* n.d. a). The United States recalled the ambassador and established a temporary diplomatic mission instead of the embassy.

Support from Washington for Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with accusations of Serbian aggression, *marked the emergence of anti-American sentiment*. This feeling intensified after NATO began airstrikes on Serb positions in these regions. Serbian scholars note that this shift occurred during Bill Clinton's presidency, particularly in 1993, when pressure was exerted on the Serbian leadership, leading to a disinformation campaign against them. Anti-Americanism grew further amid the escalating situation in Kosovo, especially from 1997 to 1999, when the international community, including the US, sought to mediate the conflict through the International Contact Group. However, the Serbian government, under Slobodan Milošević, refused to withdraw police forces from Kosovo, and negotiations with the Kosovo Liberation Army were fruitless.

On March 24, 1999, NATO began an air campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which lasted 78 days. This operation fueled anti-American feelings not only in Serbia and Montenegro but globally, as protests erupted against the bombing of civilian targets. The absence of clear communication from the Atlantic Alliance exacerbated discontent among its member states, leading to widespread anti-NATO and anti-American demonstrations, with the target symbol emerging as a rallying cry (*CNN* 1999; Dobbs 1999; Faiola 1999). Activists, athletes, and members of the Serbian diaspora used this imagery in various forms across Serbia, supported by Milošević, who propagated the narrative of civil resistance (Atanasovski 2016). Additionally, Russia launched a campaign against the US and NATO, further entrenching anti-American sentiment in Serbian society, which became deeply rooted after Washington recognized Kosovo's independence in 2008.

Thus, attitudes toward the United States in Serbia have undergone a significant transformation, moving from initial friendship to a sense of anti-Americanism. Positive relations characterized early diplomatic interactions, particularly during World War I, when the US provided significant humanitarian aid. However, the shift in US support during World War II and the subsequent Cold War alignment with communist Yugoslavia fostered a complex relationship. The 1990s brought a dramatic shift, especially with NATO's military actions in the Balkans and the subsequent recognition of Kosovo's independence, which deepened feelings of mistrust.

Articulation of Anti-Americanism under Aleksandar Vučić's Administration

On March 23, 1999, the US severed diplomatic ties with Serbia, closing its mission in Belgrade. Relations were restored after the 2000 elections in Yugoslavia when Serbian authorities extradited President Slobodan Milošević to the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague. Diplomatic correspondence between US President Bill Clinton and Serbian leader Vojislav Koštunica on November 12, 2000, marked the official resumption of relations, and the US Embassy reopened six months later, with Washington recognizing Serbia as the legal successor of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (*U.S. Department of State* n.d. a).

However, the extradition fostered a negative perception of the US within Serbian society. Authorities made minimal efforts to communicate the role of the US in the economic recovery of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, leading to a biased portrayal in the media. Coverage often focused on international pressure for cooperation with the ICTY and the conditionality of American financial aid, which primarily benefited Montenegro and Kosovo due to Belgrade's initial refusal to acknowledge the tribunal's jurisdiction. Despite this, the US supported reforms and democratization through various programs.

The government-controlled Serbian media (Reporters Without Borders, 2017) primarily overlooked American assistance, promoting the narrative that Russia was Serbia's largest investor and trade partner (Glavonjić, 2018; Nikoletić, 2023). This silence ignored Serbia's dependency on Western funding established during the conflicts initiated by Milošević in the early 1990s. Following Milošević's extradition, US Congress released \$100 million in aid, with a significant portion allocated to Serbia (Шимкевич 2023c).

Belgrade maintained relations with the US while simultaneously promoting anti-American rhetoric and adopting a hostile stance towards NATO. Following its independence from Montenegro in 2006, Serbia's foreign policy emphasized military neutrality, formally adopted in 2019 (Шимкевич 2023b: 128). This stance allowed Serbian authorities to arm the country while engaging in cooperative military efforts with NATO under the "Partnership for Peace" Program, alongside conducting exercises with Russia and other European nations (*Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Serbia n.d.*).

Despite the potential for strengthened partnerships, the sentiment of grievance in US–Serbian relations persisted, particularly after the fall of the Milošević regime. This attitude intensified with Aleksandar Vučić's ascendance to the premiership in 2014. A long-time member of the Serbian Radical Party, which espouses Serbian nationalism, Vučić transitioned to the ruling Serbian Progressive Party. His experience in managing narratives significantly influenced his leadership approach (Jovanovic, 2019). Anti-American sentiment became a central theme in his public statements, emphasizing perceived injustices towards Serbs, particularly following the 1999 NATO air campaign against the former Yugoslavia. This rhetoric has galvanized domestic support while framing the US as a historical adversary.

Serbia's external partners focused on cooperation with Kosovo under EU guidance and US oversight. The leadership framed Serbia as a victim needing protection, garnering support from Russia, China, and North Korea for its anti-American stance. These nations characterized the US as a global evil, echoing Serbian claims about the illegal NATO bombing of the former Yugoslavia, which lacked UN Security Council approval. This alliance allowed Serbia to secure votes in the UN, complicating discussions on Kosovo's independence due to Russian and Chinese vetoes.

Upon becoming president in 2017, Vučić intensified his anti-American rhetoric, amplifying themes of a "collective West", "the countries of the QUINT", and "anti-Serbian positions" from the US and EU. These terms used interchangeably, created a perception that the US led a Western bloc intent on targeting Serbia for the 1990s wars. Vučić's

framing echoed Russian propaganda, portraying the US as an adversary while highlighting “fraternal” ties between Serbs and Russians, deepened through cultural and historical myths (Shymkevych 2023: 9–10). This messaging overshadowed Russia's less favorable actions against Serbia in the past, including supporting sanctions and withdrawing from the Balkans during the 1990s conflicts (*UN Security Council* 1990s).

As Serbia's prime minister and president, Aleksandar Vučić navigated challenges related to Russian aggression against Ukraine, taking a distinct stance toward US and EU policies. Although a European Union candidate, Serbia refrained from fully aligning with European sanctions on Russia, citing Serbia's historical connections with Moscow and Russia's support during the 1990s. Serbia abstained from the UN General Assembly's 2014 Resolution 68/262 vote but later, in March 2022, supported the GA UN Resolution condemning the invasion of Ukraine while excluding Crimea-related votes (*Embassy of Ukraine to the Republic of Serbia* 2023). Vučić has aimed to balance relations with Russia and the West, formally supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity in the UN but invoking NATO's 1999 intervention in Serbia to underscore domestic anti-NATO sentiment. This nuanced stance reflects Serbia's complex historical ties and ongoing effort to maintain favorable relations with Western and Russian interests.

The February–March 2024 IRI survey highlights strong anti-Western sentiment in Serbia, with 43% blaming the West for the Ukraine-Russia conflict and 54% favoring Russia's stance (IRI 2024: 83). Serbian public opinion sees Ukraine as a battleground between the US and Russia, with support for Moscow perceived as resistance to US influence in the region. Vučić's administration, with Kremlin-backed media support, promotes narratives reinforcing independence from the West, using outlets like *Russia Today Balkans* and *Sputnik* (Brey 2021: 10–12). The long-standing anti-American sentiment is evident in the low ratings Serbs give US–Serbia relations, consistently between 2 and 3 on a five-point scale (*Institut za evropske poslove* 2018–2023). Optimism for improving ties has decreased – from 40% in 2018 to 28% in 2023 (*Stavovi građana Srbije prema Americi* 2023: 10). However, the perceived value of US relations grew slightly, with 10.7% seeing US ties as crucial in 2023, up from 4.7% in 2018 (*Stavovi građana Srbije prema Americi* 2018: 11; 2023: 18).

While public opinion is mainly pro-Russia, with Serbia seen as Moscow's ally, some respondents (46% in 2023) favor balanced relations with both the US and Russia (*Stavovi građana Srbije prema Americi* 2023: 20). This dual alignment aligns with Serbia's strategic stance of maintaining ties with both powers, influenced heavily by pro-Russian media and a significant Russian expatriate presence that bolsters this pro-Moscow orientation.

These details allow us to conclude that anti-Americanism is unnatural for Serbian society. It is an acquired phenomenon, the birth of which began in the 1990s. The bifurcation point in the development of anti-American sentiments was the year 1999 and the NATO air campaign against the FRY. Almost immediately after the cessation of airstrikes, the signing of the peace agreement (NATO 1999), and the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 of June 10th, 1999 (*UN Security Council* 1990s), the political leadership of Serbia began to mobilize the country's citizens around them. Serbian authorities offered well-crafted narratives that made it possible to identify, on an

emotional and physical level, who was to blame for the loss of Kosovo, the bombing and sanctions against Serbia and Yugoslavia. Therefore, narratives about “NATO aggression”, “Kosovo is Serbia”, and “Serbs are victims of aggression” have taken root in society. The authorities decided to strengthen the effect by revising textbooks for schools (Becović 2022: 209–228). They specifically refer to the “aggression of the NATO bloc” against the FRY, the involvement of the alliance and the United States in the secession of Kosovo, and Pristina’s declaration of independence in 2008.

The “top-bottom” construction of anti-Americanism in Serbia, spreading “correct” sentiments through the media and social networks, and financing of relevant scientific research and analytical materials led to strengthening Serbs’ negative perceptions of the USA and NATO. With the rise of Aleksandar Vučić to the top of power, anti-American rhetoric began to intensify at the annual events dedicated to the beginning of the bombing. He has always emphasized and continues to do so that Serbia will never join the alliance. At the same time, he emphasizes the heroism and patriotism of the Serbs and Serbia, who could resist the mighty NATO. In his speeches, the Serbian leader and his entourage justify the need to preserve and develop “military neutrality” through such messages. According to public opinion polls conducted by the IRI, the Institute of European Affairs in Belgrade, and several other sociological institutions, Serbs have a rather negative attitude towards the country’s cooperation with NATO.

In the IRI’s poll for February-March 2024, the question was, “Which relations with NATO will most benefit the country in the future?” the most significant number of respondents answered “no relationship” – 39% (in 2022, this figure was 46%). A little less than 30% believe communication is necessary but not cooperation. 21% of respondents are in favor of collaboration with the alliance (IRI 2024: 98).

A 2022 report by the Institute of European Relations in Belgrade shows that more than 81% of Serbs oppose Serbia’s membership in NATO. However, almost 10% support the country’s entry into the alliance (*Stavovi građana Srbije prema NATO-a* 2022: 8). Such a negative attitude exists in Serbian society, as the results of the report show, since 2016 (*Stavovi građana Srbije prema NATO-a* 2022: 9). The number of respondents ready to see Serbia in NATO is gradually decreasing. The same study cites the main reasons why, according to the Serbs, the alliance began to carry out airstrikes. In the first place in 2022 were the military interests of the USA (military bases, weapons tests) – 10,5%. In 2022, the second most important reason for Serbs was the interest and political reasons of the USA, the West, and major powers—10,1%. In 2018, 15,2% of respondents considered this the primary cause (*Stavovi građana Srbije prema NATO-a* 2022: 10–11).

Among other reasons, the Serbs cite the creation of an independent Kosovo and its separation from Serbia, economic interests, geopolitical tasks, the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the politics of Slobodan Milošević, anti-Serbian politics, etc. The answer of the Serbian respondents is always in the last position in the polls, “the ethnic cleansing of Albanians in Kosovo”. That is, the Serbs still don’t admit their guilt for the crimes committed in Kosovo. This is another reason for the government’s successful policy regarding spreading and deepening anti-American sentiments in society. The corresponding attitude is also reflected in the answers of the Serbs to the question,

“Would you forgive the Alliance for the bombing?” In 2022, 56,5% of respondents answered “no” and 29,1% “yes” (*Stavovi građana Srbije prema NATO-a 2022*: 16). Serbs aren’t ready to forgive and believe that the time for reconciliation regarding the bombing has not yet come. Polls also show that Serbs are willing to consider improving relations with the United States if Kosovo returns to Serbian control. It is the most popular option among respondents in various sociological polls.

The United States is a hostage in such a situation, although it is trying to change the attitude of the Serbs. After signing the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995, Washington chose several directions of cooperation with the Serbs in Serbia and the Republika Srpska (BiH). First, it was political support for pro-European and pro-American politicians, their parties, and various institutions. That is the policy of “educating” Serbs loyal to Washington. According to the plan of the USA, this was supposed to give positive results in the long term – the accession of Serbia and BiH to the EU and NATO, ensuring stability in the region, and developing relations between the Balkan countries.

After Dayton in 1995, the NATO bombings in 1999, and the overthrow of Milošević in 2000, the United States was unable to convey to the Serbs their guilt in inciting wars, forming nationalist rhetoric, and committing several war crimes and acts of genocide. The constant manipulation by the Serbian authorities that the victims are the Serbs and Serbia is not the aggressor country. A similar policy is present in the Republika Srpska (BiH) and Montenegro.

Washington is trying to engage in cultural diplomacy in Serbia, involving politicians, journalists, researchers, and scientists (U.S. Embassy in Serbia n.d.). It is essential for the United States to “whiten” its reputation among Serbs, so it supports various studies on American-Serbian relations and cooperates with non-governmental organizations and opposition media (*Serbian–American Cooperation Grants, Young Balkan Leaders, General Staff project, Congress of Serbian–American Friendship, etc.*). There was also a bet on cooperation with the Serbian diaspora in the USA, formed there during the Second World War. The United States doesn’t forget about developing economic, financial, and investment relations, in which the Serbian leadership is highly interested. Unfortunately, the listed areas of American diplomacy do not allow eradicating anti-Americanism or swaying public opinion in one’s favor. The USA, like NATO, continues to be perceived by parts of the collective West, towards which Serbs have developed a hostile attitude due to government policy and Russian interference.

Anti-Americanism in Serbia is already clearly instrumentalized and rooted in Serbian society because of artificial processes caused by the actions of the country’s leadership and assistance from Russia. Politicians, the media, social networks, the head of state, and Belgrade’s friends in Moscow, Beijing, and Pyongyang act as channels for the spread of anti-American sentiments. The development of anti-Americanism among Serbs became possible thanks to the skillful play of the acting president Aleksandar Vučić on the emotions of his citizens, who saw in him a defender against accusations of aggression against neighboring countries, war crimes, and genocide in Srebrenica. This approach allowed Vučić and his entourage to form a network of appropriate mechanisms

that constantly fueled anti-American sentiments in society and led to their escalation at the right moments.

The United States is trying to improve its image in Serbia through cultural and public diplomacy, propaganda, and economic and military cooperation with Belgrade. However, the weakness of such efforts is the reluctance to put pressure on Aleksandar Vučić and develop a stricter course towards Serbia. It allows Belgrade to act as an exporter of anti-Americanism to neighboring Balkan and Central European countries.

4. CONCLUSION

Anti-Americanism in Slovakia and Serbia demonstrates distinct regional characteristics shaped by historical, political, economic, and cultural factors. It is not solely a leftover ideology from the communist era but is an active tool for political elites to mobilize support and consolidate power. Consequently, anti-Americanism functions as a strategic political resource. Notably, the sentiments and regional responses to anti-Americanism are often driven more by intrinsic contradictions than genuine concerns regarding the United States and its policies.

The comparative analysis of the historical roots of anti-Americanism in Slovakia and Serbia during the late 19th and early 20th centuries demonstrates that both countries experienced complex relationships with the United States, shaped by their unique national contexts and geopolitical realities. In Slovakia, the formation of national identity occurred in a context that appealed to cultural kinship with Slavic nations, shaped by a longing for autonomy and a reaction to the perceived cultural imperialism of the United States. This historical backdrop and a later critique of American capitalism fueled skepticism toward American influence, even as the Slovak diaspora maintained connections to the US. Conversely, Serbia's initial engagement with the United States focused on mutual support and recognition. However, the interwar period and World War II tested this relationship. The shift in US support, particularly towards Tito's Partisans, complicated the earlier goodwill, leading to a gradual erosion of trust. Ultimately, while both countries shared moments of positive engagement with the United States, the historical roots of anti-American sentiment diverged significantly, reflecting their distinct political development.

The Cold War era offers a comparison, reflecting both shared features and distinctive regional characteristics. In both Slovakia and Serbia, Cold War-era anti-Americanism was shaped significantly by the Soviet narrative that framed the US as a capitalist threat to socialism and a global antagonist. This portrayal emphasized US militarism, interventionism, and economic exploitation. Throughout the Eastern Bloc, including Slovakia (then part of Czechoslovakia) and Serbia (then part of Yugoslavia), American values were depicted as inherently hostile to socialist ideals. The media and education systems reinforced this image, embedding anti-American sentiment in the public's understanding. As a result, anti-Americanism often took the form of ideological opposition to capitalism and Western democracy.

However, Slovakia and Serbia also had unique features that colored their expressions of anti-Americanism during the Cold War era. As part of Czechoslovakia, Slovakia's anti-Americanism was largely passive and imposed from the top down due to its alignment with Soviet policies. Slovakia's position as a satellite state meant its political discourse closely mirrored the USSR's stance, portraying the US as an ideological adversary without an intense, region-specific enmity. Slovakia's anti-Americanism was thus rational and pragmatic, largely devoid of intense emotion. As part of Yugoslavia, Serbia displayed a more complex form of anti-Americanism rooted in Tito's independent socialist path. Unlike Slovakia, Yugoslavia under Tito pursued a non-aligned stance, openly criticizing both US and Soviet policies. Serbian anti-Americanism was thus more nationalistic and independent, often expressing both sovereign-nationalist anti-Americanism and a broader, radical distrust of Western powers. Tito's policies allowed Yugoslavia to engage with the West economically while politically opposing it, making Serbian anti-Americanism multifaceted. It combined ideological criticism with a defense of national sovereignty, especially against perceived Western interference.

In the post-Cold War period, anti-Americanism in Slovakia and Serbia evolved within the context of transitioning political landscapes, contrasting national identities, and influencing the impact of American foreign policy on each region. As post-communist countries, Slovakia and Serbia shared some ideological criticisms of the United States but also displayed distinct regional variations in the forms and expressions of anti-Americanism. After the Cold War, both countries experienced shifts in political ideology as they transitioned from communist regimes to more open societies. Anti-Americanism in both nations reflected ambivalence toward US influence in the region, often combining critique of American policies with broader apprehensions about Western dominance and interference.

The US interventions in the Balkans, specifically in the 1999 NATO bombings, contributed to anti-American sentiment across both regions, though with different intensities and underlying motivations. In Slovakia, anti-Americanism remained moderate and essentially politically pragmatic. Slovakia pursued integration with Western Europe, joining NATO in 2004 and the EU in 2004, and positioned the US as an essential ally, albeit overbearing. Slovak political discourse exhibited liberal anti-Americanism: a critique of US foreign policy that focused on promoting democracy while engaging in military actions abroad. Thus, Slovak anti-Americanism remained rational and policy-oriented, lacking the deep-rooted hostility visible in other parts of Eastern Europe. In Serbia, anti-Americanism during this period was more intense and culturally rooted, influenced heavily by the legacy of the 1990s Yugoslav wars and NATO's intervention in 1999. Serbian anti-Americanism was both sovereign-nationalist and radical. Serbians saw the US as an enemy of Serbian sovereignty and identity, especially following NATO's air campaign, which left a profound impact on the Serbian collective memory. US support for Kosovo's independence in 2008 exacerbated this hostility because Serbia viewed it as a direct affront to its territorial integrity. As a result, Serbian anti-Americanism developed into a combination of rational and irrational elements: rational in its political opposition to specific American policies but irrational in its cultural rejection of American values.

In the last decade, anti-Americanism in Slovakia and Serbia, two post-communist countries, evolved in response to geopolitical events, particularly the Russian aggression in Ukraine and broader East-West tensions. While both nations displayed some ideological critiques of the United States, the nature and intensity of their anti-Americanism reflected distinct regional influences, political motivations, and socio-historical backgrounds. Since 2014, pro-Russian narratives impacted Slovakia and Serbia, who now see the United States as a threat to regional stability. This view often reflects liberal and sovereign-nationalist anti-Americanism. Both countries exhibit skepticism toward US influence, particularly around NATO's military presence, portraying it as undermining national sovereignty. The key differences between these two countries during this period were as follows. As an EU and NATO member, this sentiment is typically pragmatic for Slovakia, showing up as critique rather than deep-seated opposition. Slovakia's political alignment with the West tempers any anti-American sentiment that might otherwise be more pronounced. Slovak discourse often reflects liberal anti-Americanism, critiquing specific US policies while supporting cooperation on security issues. Criticisms tend to focus on opposition to American unilateralism in foreign policy, particularly visible around the war in Ukraine and subsequent NATO responses, which Slovak officials and the public saw as overly aggressive or escalatory. Slovakia's government generally supports sanctions against Russia, and although some public sentiment remains mixed, political rhetoric has avoided the intense anti-Americanism seen. In Serbia, anti-Americanism since 2014 has been markedly intense and culturally rooted, with a dominant sovereign-nationalist orientation. Serbian political rhetoric regularly portrays the US as a central antagonist, drawing on historical grievances. This period has reinforced radical anti-Americanism, as US support for Ukraine is viewed as another instance of American interference, echoing its stance on Kosovo. Under President Aleksandar Vučić, Serbian political discourse increasingly uses anti-American narratives to underscore Serbian independence from Western influence. Vučić's alignment with Russia on many issues has strengthened Serbian skepticism of the West, particularly around US-backed efforts for Kosovo's independence, which Serbia sees as a direct affront to its sovereignty. Moreover, the Serbian media often amplifies Russian narratives, portraying the US as a supporter of regional instability and a driver of anti-Serbian policies.

To conclude, anti-Americanism in Slovakia and Serbia demonstrates both rational and irrational aspects, where Slovakia leans toward a more measured, rational critique of American policy. At the same time, Serbia exhibits more entrenched, emotionally charged anti-Americanism due to historical and cultural influences. These dynamics underscore how regional differences and historical legacies shape the nature and depth of anti-American sentiment in post-communist Europe.

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DOES THE ALGERIAN POLITICAL SCIENCES COMMUNITY HAVE ANTI-AMERICAN ATTITUDES?

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DOI: 10.36169/2227-6068.2024.02.00010

Abstract. *Given that anti-Americanism in Algeria has intensified significantly in recent years according to surveys of Pew, Global Attitude Project (GAP), and Arab Barometer (AB), does that mean that Algerian academics in mainstream political science could be implicitly a part of that pervasive phenomenon? We have initially surveyed to examine the extent of bias and neutrality of the overall attitudes toward the U.S. within the Algerian political sciences community. The study has shown remarkable disparities among the respondents' attitudes, which appeared biased in some situations and neutral when the questionnaire required clear answers. The sample displayed proportionally a tendency toward anti-Americanism, either when they banished any moralism toward the U.S. actions and policies or when they failed to recognize some of the well-established facts about the US, such as its long-standing democratic traditions.*

Keywords: *Anti-Americanism; Algerian political sciences community; Neutral elite; The U.S. image; attitudinal responses*

Submitted: 13 July 2024; **accepted:** 3 November 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

Back when one of the authors was in his class with the students of the second master's degree in strategy and security studies, during a course on "American foreign and security policies", they were brainstorming different ideas and questioning the U.S. power, foreign policy, hegemony, and its overall interactions in the international system. The purpose of the course's sequence was to examine the accuracy of the students' information about the US, and then eventually, the debate took another stream. However, a 'cherry picking' has occurred in many students' views. Students quietly ignored proven facts about the U.S. supremacy power in international relations while they solely focused on the downsides of the U.S. power. This unexpected conclusion led the author seriously to ask further questions such as: what exactly makes political sciences students who supposedly know very well about the topic involved massively in a cherry-picking fallacy?

Initially, our focus will be on the lecturers, graduates, and students of political sciences in Algeria, who partially constitute the elite opinion leadership and are the most knowledgeable about the United States under their scientific affiliation. They compose a specific group in the region where societal and political anti-Americanism is quite widespread and overpassed 50 percent in Algeria, according to Pew, Global Attitude Project (GAP), and the Arab Barometer (AB), after using a survey of 58.000 Arab citizens in the Middle East and North Africa (Glas & Spierings 2020).

The survey of Blaydes and Linzer has provided a descriptive scheme of the elite's orientations toward the United States in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA region), where the competition between the secularists and the Islamists has a marginal bearing on the anti-Americanism case. We know that secularists were generally associated with leaning political movements and positioned themselves in opposition to the U.S. as a part of the political environment of the Cold War. Islamists have also sought to leverage anti-Americanism sentiment for political ends. Accordingly, Blaydes and Linzer asserted that anti-Americanism in Muslim countries is an elite-led phenomenon that intensifies during the greater political competition between Islamists and secular nationalists (Blaydes & Linzer 2012).

Like many other MENA countries, Algeria has witnessed a surge of Islamic political movements right after the Iranian Revolution 1979. The proponents of Islamism in Algeria had subsequently formed their political parties throughout the 1980s and 1990s, even after having lost their luster during the Algerian Civil War. The Islamic rhetoric has become more pervasive among Algerian people across the country, and Islamic anti-Americanism could have been one of the main reasons behind the prevalence of the phenomenon among them as well.

The number of universities in Algeria has increased exponentially recently. It has outnumbered 100 academic institutions, with 1.7 million students. All this has contributed to a significant increase in the numbers of professors and students of political sciences as well. Thus, the spread of Islamic or any other kind of anti-Americanism among Algerian political science adherents would be striking due to their unbiased, well-professed knowledge of the United States, for most of them.

2. BACKGROUND, THEORY, AND HYPOTHESES

Historically, anti-American thought has been a pure European product, and more specifically, it was created by some of the greatest European minds of the past two centuries, who contributed to its making before it spread to the rest of the world. Although European anti-Americanism evolved in the scientific thought of the mid-eighteenth century, which is known as the “degeneracy thesis” (Ceaser 2003). According to naturalists Buffon and Cornelius de Pouw, proponents of the degeneration thesis, “Nobody could live in the new world whose discovery was the biggest tragedy that happened to mankind” (Piel 2014) or “It is a great and terrible spectacle to see one half of the globe so disfavored by nature that everything found there is degenerate or monstrous.” (Ceaser 2003). Therefore, the degeneration thesis occurred as an initial layer of what has transformed lately to anti-Americanism; such a thesis relies mainly on the different environment (e.g., inferior atmospheric conditions) in the New World. However, the romantic thinkers have placed degeneracy as an intellectual attitude towards the United States exclusively, and not Canada, Mexico, or any other nation from the New World.

Since then, anti-Americanism has reaffirmed its narrative as a global phenomenon. ‘Unreasoning animosity’ and ‘jealousy,’ far from being understood by the Americans, made them repeatedly ask, “Why do they hate us?” as the *New York Times* revealed in 1913. “They” were Canadians at that time, but now, the phenomenon has taken the world by storm, and the same question would have been asked again, maybe in other phrases like “Why does the world love to hate us?” (Friedman 2012).

The answers provided for these fundamental questions have shown the predominance of a psychopathology approach to anti-Americanism. These answers have, since then, mainly remained similar to those that appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century. Sayings often mentioned, like “unreasoning animosity”, “jealousy” toward “the best country in the world”, and “envy” of our “political and social and industrial success”, never disappeared from the daily discussions, even though anti-Americanism has undergone significant transitions.

For many scholars, criticism of the United States is a persistent psychological device that societies have resorted to and have been resorting to ever since America appeared in the world (Rubin & Rubin, 2004). Therefore, the consensus has come to approve what Americans have heard for a hundred years: “Foreigners are irrational and ill-informed about the best country in the world” (Friedman 2012). Nevertheless, scholars are constantly expressing their concerns and investigating whether anti-Americanism has become the dominant frame of the U.S. worldwide. This is what led Chiozza (2011) to reformulate the fundamental questions that underlie anti-Americanism in recent debates: instead of “Why do they hate us?” the questions should be asked accordingly: “Do they?” and “Who exactly are they?”.

Indeed, empirical analysis, which frequently has cited the issues of anti-Americanism, such as the Global Attitudes Project of Pew, has shown that anti-Americanism was not a predominant orientation among the foreign public (Chiozza 2011) after having administered a survey to 38,000 people in 42 countries in the summer of

2002. The vast majority of respondents in the survey tended to manifest a favorable reaction to the United States whenever they were asked to offer a general evaluation. However, the dislike of the United States was widespread and intense only among Islamic respondents in the Middle East and Pakistan, and it was predominant in such disparate places in the world like Angola, Argentina, and Bangladesh.

Since then, it is evident that certain degrees of negative attitudes toward the United States have become quite common worldwide, but the intensity and the widespread of these sentiments in the MENA region are remarkable. Accordingly, religious background was probably the primary explanatory factor for this phenomenon in the MENA region (Blaydes & Linzer 2012; Chiozza 2004; Ciftci et al. 2017).

Moreover, Ciftci et al. (2017) have noticed an upsurge in anti-Americanism, led by radical religious groups like al-Qaeda. In the MENA region, many have shown sympathy and favorable attitudes toward these radical groups, along with more profound degrees of resentment toward American culture. Anti-Americanism in the MENA region has become more virulent (Darwish 2003) and more intense than in any other area in the world, which implies the need for another theoretical model that transcends the conventional *“what America does”* versus *“who America is”*.

A further study may dismiss any presumption of cultural correlation of anti-Americanism in the MENA region when it is recognized as a wave of hate inflamed mainly by the U.S. due to its unconditional support for Israel, which has enabled it to defeat and humiliate the Arabs (Abdallah 2003: 62). There is no room to end this hatred only through a profound revision of the U.S. foreign policy. Scholars who have assessed anti-Americanism as a negative evaluation of American interventionism have supported these findings, and they have considered U.S. policies as self-interested imperialism harming MENA citizens (Makdisi 2002; Parker 1988; Pitchford 2011; Tessler 2003).

The debate has progressively broadened to provide further explanations over the correlation between the Islamic outlook and anti-Americanism, whether the Muslims who dislike the United States do so based on cultural-religious values or otherwise (Paz 2003). We could find arguments that cultural anti-Americanism proposes that Arab citizens' religion (Islam) instead is used to construct and reinforce antagonistic boundaries between “the secular Christian” United States and the “Islamic Arab region” (Huntington 1993). For many Muslims, the anti-American sentiment would be an expression of overall opposition to democracy, market, and modern ideologies. Anti-Americanism is reflected accordingly as a state of psychological refuge for societies that fail to overcome their shortcomings, and they have nothing left but hatred, envy, and resentment. This kind of feeling is allegedly rife in Islamic countries “more than anything else” (McNeill 1993).

Ciftci et al (2017) have attributed the reason behind the widespread anti-Americanism in the MENA region to Islamic fundamentalism, and more specifically to the “Literalist outlook” of the Islamic scriptures, where it is evident that the majority of Muslims hold a favorable view towards that literalist interpretation. Al-Qaeda, as a proponent of that interpretation of Islam, has, therefore, succeeded in creating rhetoric of anti-Americanism, starting by depicting America as a “far enemy” in their ideology. However, there have been other scholars who argued that the reaffirmation of Islam,

whatever its specific sectarian form, means the repudiation of European and American influence upon local society, politics, and morals. Thus, Huntington pointed out that the "underlying problems for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism, it is Islam [*itself*], a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed by the inferiority of their power" (Huntington 2000).

In Table 1, we suggest the classification of the definitions and dimensions of different perspectives of anti-Americanism, which different political scientists propose.

Table 1. Anti-Americanism literature

Anti-Americanism perspectives	Definition	Dimensions	Literature
Historical perspectives	<p>1-Anti-Americanism phenomenon we can understand only by being familiar with its history (Ellwood 1999).</p> <p>2-Anti-Americanism Is a sentiment that has existed since the creation of America itself (Tomja 2013)</p>	<p>1. Elitist anti-Americanism: countries in which the elite has a long history to underestimate the American culture (Katzenstein & Keohane 2007)</p> <p>2. Legacy anti-Americanism: the cumulative historical actions of the U.S. toward a receiver society. Therefore, anti-Americanism is rooted in the history and memories of the U.S. policies (Katzenstein & 2007)</p>	(Armus 2007; Baker & Cupery 2013; Blaydes & Linzer 2012; Ceaser 2003; Criss 2002; Friedman 2012; Granatstein & Stuart 1997; Güney 2008; Hakjooon 2010; Kim 2017; Makdisi 2002; Markovits 2005; O'connor 2004; Parmar 2004; Qiu-bin 2008; Roger 2005; Rubin & Rubin 2004; Stuart 1997; Rivera & Bryan 2019)
Psychological perspective	Anti-Americanism is an attitude embedded in cognitive schemas, emotions, and norms.	<p>1. Cognitive schema: is a process through which the United States and its actions are perceived.</p> <p>2. Emotional dimension: the extent to which the United States is feared, the sentiments of hate and weakness.</p> <p>3. Normative standpoint: anti-Americanism can serve as identity markers or as ways to regulate behavior.</p> <p>4. Norms: People rationally shape their behavior to fit their expectations of what others will do.</p>	(Ameli, 2007; Bowen, 2007; Brooks, 2008; Chiozza, 2007, 2009; Coen, 2009; Gienow-Hecht, 2006; Gilmore, Meeks, & Domke, 2013; Kizilbash, 1988; Knappertsbusch, 2013; McPherson, 2004; Nimer, 2007; Paz, 2003; Ross, 2010; Sinno, 2008; Stivachtis, 2007; Tkacheva, 2019)

Political perspective	Political anti-Americanism takes shape as reactions from U.S. practices, (foreign policies, and values).	<p>1. Social Anti-Americanism: stem from a set of liberal values in a broader set of social and political arrangements that the U.S. translates into actions.</p> <p>2. Sovereign-Nationalist Anti-Americanism: Sovereign-nationalists concentrate on protecting their state values against all kinds of U.S. interventions, which could pose stability threats and form uncertain situations that contradict with their principal values.</p> <p>3. Radical Anti-Americanism: The U.S. economic and political power and institutional practices make a mirror of the radicalizing world especially states that disclaim from any principal values carried by the U.S. constantly form Anti-Americanism threats.</p>	(Katzenstein & Keohane 2007).
Sociological perspective	Anti-Americanism involves an "us/them" cleavage such as those of race, ethnicity, class, and religion	The movements develop in times of change that suggest an uncomfortable situation that poses an uncertain case or a threat to the previous situation, therefore, the new change will bring a more organized movement against the new one.	(McAdam 2011)

Working hypotheses

Algeria, along with MENA countries, has earned the reputation of being the most anti-American region in the world. Still, we assume that higher education in political sciences within Algerian universities tended to shape the attitudes of the Algerians toward domestic and foreign political issues, and it could also have a formative effect on attitudes toward the United States. Because of receiving several courses on U.S. policies, we argue that the outputs of teaching political sciences in Algerian universities might be sufficient to generate favorable opinions about the US.

This hypothesis relies on Gentzkow and Shapiro's approach that considered that "individuals who are more educated will always be better informed on the politically neutral measure" (Gentzkow & Shapiro 2004). Blaydes and Linzer have suggested that anti-Americanism theories neglect the importance of intermediary roles played by political elites to form people's opinions (as a process from up to bottom) (Blaydes & Linzer 2012). Therefore, the connection between anti-Americanism and the elites differ substantially according to elite type, whether ideologically biased or academically neutral.

The neutral elite, as we have to assume in this study, are framed as highly educated, objective, and unbiased; such elite often shows more awareness when making prejudices and stereotypes it is somehow more able than any other elite type to answer correctly the fundamental questions about the US, such as, "*What the United States is?*" or

"*What does the United States do?*". On the contrary, Katzenstein and Keohane assumed otherwise, "perhaps the worst misconceptions are found in universities, where academics who have not studied the subject are eager to enunciate their favored single-factor explanation for anti-Americanism" (Katzenstein & Keohane 2007) may be the most ironic thing is the single-factor explanation for anti-Americanism comes from someone who studies or teaches political sciences.

Moreover, a positive image toward the U.S. made by some of the elite members who have received an education in political sciences, inclined towards that attitude, due to their Realism and pragmatism, gets them into a sort of conviction by the American leadership as a superpower in the current international system. On the other hand, there is another array of those who like American realism and pragmatism but are not entirely sure if they can show a similar appreciation for American moralism, values, and beliefs.

We have tested the hypothesis that implies the role of political sciences education in framing specific images in the United States.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): being a student or lecturer of political sciences in Algeria can provide you with unbiased attitudes toward the U.S.

Lars Willnat et al. argue that the mass media is an important source of political information (Willnat et al. 2006). These mass media outlets are usually criticized for not giving in-depth coverage of any political phenomenon. But to form and carry out anti-Americanism or pro-Americanism sentiments, there must be at least a media source to feed this sentiment.

We also assume that the respondents with direct access to the U.S. official documents and available reports, combined with their sound knowledge of the English language, will likely have a positive attitude toward the U.S. and vice versa (Gentzkow & Shapiro 2004). Furthermore, individuals who master the English language are the ones who appreciate the positive image of the U.S..

Given that the respondents in our sample are political sciences students, they have more significant interaction with the English language, and they are individuals who possess abundant knowledge of politics and international relations. Thus, we expect to find a significant association between respondents' attitudes toward the U.S. and their sources of information.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): the variation of data sources about the U.S. may engender significant differences in perceptions and frames among Algerian students/lecturers of political sciences.

Hypothesis 3 (H3) Regardless, the debate over U.S. foreign policies often gives rise to heated controversies between supporting and opposing views; the attitudes toward the U.S. may differ, in fact, for various reasons, including the level of the American educational system and the high standards of life in America. Those factors might create good impressions about the U.S. worldwide. Katzenstein and Keohane corroborated this when they argue that an individual can like or dislike different aspects of American

society simultaneously, "America has been both the dream and the nightmare," to use the words of Hanna Arendt (Arendt 1994)

The respondents would have multidimensional attitudes that may exist simultaneously toward certain American aspects.

Methodology

This research studies data collected through a three-part questionnaire consisting primarily of two attitudinal scales. The first part of the scale was devoted to measuring the respondents' attitudes toward the US, relying on their profession and educational background (Alpha 0.54). This part also contains 26 five-point Likert-scale questions range, including five assessments, from 1 to 5, where 1 strongly disagrees and 5 strongly agrees.

The second part of the questionnaire was thus devoted to the respondents' data sources in all aspects relating to the U.S. (alpha 0.61), including 15 five-point Likert-scale questions, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) up to 5 (strongly agree). The third part of the questionnaire measured whether the respondents have multidimensional attitudes regarding the U.S. (alpha 0.86). This part also has five five-point Likert-scale questions, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) up to 5 (strongly agree). We would also point out that the survey was distributed in Arabic and English.

We have used the "SPSS 26" version for data analysis. Respondents' attitudinal scales have been recorded to calculate the overall mean scores for each attitude. The measurement of the multidimensional attitude is shown in Table 2, through using the coefficient of Pearson to demonstrate the hypothetical association between the statement "*You are entirely sure that the U.S. power is in decline*" (inevitable decline) and the statements referring to the expected time scales of that decline, which were as follows (20 years, 50 years and 100 years). The same statement has also been tested to determine the correlation with other statements that address issues relating to U.S. foreign policies (what America does). However, the study has subsequently examined the correlation between the variation in respondents' data sources and their frames and perceptions of the US. It is important to note that the one-way ANOVA test applied to the survey's groups did not indicate any statistical significance between males versus females or lecturers versus students.

Sample description and respondents' affiliation

We addressed our questionnaire via Facebook and emails during curfew caused by the health situation provoked by COVID-19 (23/06/2020) until (10/03/2021). We have received ninety-eight replies from about one hundred and fifteen sent questionnaires, including five responses from the English version of the survey. Here are universities and number of responses from those, who reacted to our questionnaire: University of Algiers (10), University of Annaba (6), University of Batna (1), University of Blida (1), University of Boumerdes (1), University of Constantine (1), University of Ghardaia (3), University of Laghouat (6), University of Oran (6), University of Ouargla (47), University of Saida (3), University of Setif (1), University of Skikda (1), University of Tamanrasset (4), University of Tebessa (3), University of Tizi Ouzou (4). The survey sample includes forty-

two lecturers, nineteen students with a bachelor's degree, and thirty-seven students with a master's degree from sixteen Algerian Universities.

3. RESULTS

More than half of the respondents who participated were females (64.3 percent) and 35.7 percent were males. Most participants were between 29 and 40 years old, with 53.1 percent being 19 to 62. Students represented 16 different universities, where the southern region of Algeria accounted for 52.9 percent of the sample, whereas 16.6 percent represented the northern region, 11.7 percent from the Eastern, and 8.8 percent from the Western region.

The overall Attitudes towards the U.S image

The respondents favor the “strongly agree” segment in the following items. (1) *“You believe that America is biased in favor of Israel’s interests”* (mean = 4,4); (2) *“America is constantly interfering in other countries’ internal affairs”* (mean = 4,2); (3) *“The U.S. is putting pressure on the IGOs to serve its interests”* (mean = 4,4); (4) *“The U.S. controls the international oil market”* (mean = 4,2); (5) *“The U.S. violates international laws”* (mean = 4,3). In addition, the respondents are in favor of the “strongly disagree” segment in the following items. (1) *“Morals and ethics determine U.S. foreign policies”* (mean = 1, 73); (2) *“America is a cooperative and honest partner with other countries”* (mean = 1, 76).

Table 2. Respondents’ attitudes towards the U.S image

Statements	Mean	Median	Standard	Variance
You are totally certain that the U.S. power is in decline	3,0918	3,0000	1,21066	1,466
The U.S. power will decline due to a severe economic crisis	3,0918	3,0000	1,14051	1,301
The U.S. power will decline due to a political crisis.	2,9286	2,5000	1,13292	1,284
The U.S. power will decline due to brutal ethno-demographical strife	2,5612	2,0000	1,14032	1,300
China’s actual rising is spelling the end of the American power	2,7857	2,0000	1,24561	1,552
The U.S. will remain a power for only another 20 years	2,4796	3,0000	0,97631	0,953
The U.S. will remain a power for only another 50 years	2,6020	3,0000	0,85843	0,737
The U.S. power will not collapse for at least another hundred years.	3,2143	3,0000	1,11457	1,242
The American decline would be a positive outcome for the Islamic world	3,1939	3,0000	1,32118	1,746
Morals and ethics determine U.S. foreign policies.	1,7347	2,0000	0,89155	0,795
US behavior is Realist by nature.	4,1224	4,0000	1,11471	1,243

Would you admit that America is the most significant power from the end of the cold war until the present?	3,8878	4,0000	1,15663	1,338
Would you agree that America is the most significant power history has ever known?	2,5306	2,0000	1,18586	1,406
You believe that America is biased in favor of Israel's interests	4,4592	5,0000	0,82697	0,684
America is constantly interfering in other countries' internal affairs	4,2755	4,0000	0,82212	0,676
America is a cooperative and honest partner with other countries.	1,7653	2,0000	0,84708	0,718
US policies support human rights.	2,3673	2,0000	1,18746	1,410
The U.S. is putting pressure on the IGOs to serve its interests.	4,4388	4,0000	0,61033	0,373
The U.S. controls international relations.	4,0306	4,0000	0,91329	0,834
The U.S. controls the international oil market.	4,2041	4,0000	0,73160	0,535
The U.S. violates international laws.	4,3163	4,5000	0,83230	0,693
The U.S. is using its military power against weaker countries like Iraq due to its aggressive nature.	4,3061	5,0000	0,87824	0,771
You see that the U.S. is a country of personal freedom.	3,3980	4,0000	1,20771	1,459
You are impressed by the U.S. aid and assistance to poor countries	2,3061	2,0000	1,06885	1,142
You see that the U.S. is a country of law and order.	3,3265	4,0000	1,19945	1,439
You see that the U.S. is a country of democracy.	3,3571	4,0000	1,19492	1,428

Respondent's information sources about U.S image

The respondents strongly agreed with the statement *"Your research on the web has contributed to your cumulative knowledge about the US"* (mean = 4.2) but, they replied agree with the following statements *"Reading non-US writers has helped you to obtain cumulative knowledge about the US"* (mean = 3,81), *"Your academic and research activities in university curricula relating to U.S. topics have increased your knowledge about U.S. issue"* (mean = 3,98), *"The University courses provide you with accurate knowledge about the US"* (mean = 3,63), *"Several TV programs have provided you with the necessary information about the US"* (mean = 3,63), *"You trust your own information about America"* (mean = 3,55), *"It is preferable to obtain data related to U.S. issues from U.S. official resources"* (mean = 3,51), *"Joining 'the American corner' at your university has contributed to increasing your U.S. culture knowledge"* (mean = 3,45), *"IGOs reports have an impact on your own views concerning U.S policies"* (mean = 3,51). Moreover, they have responded neutral to the following statements *"The*

English language remains the main obstacle preventing you from getting accurate knowledge about the US (mean = 2,97), *“Your information about America comes from reading U.S. novels”* (mean = 3,06), *“The public broadcasting influences your positions toward the U.S. policies”* (mean = 3,19), *“Watching American films has created in you a body of information about America”* (mean = 3,30).

Table 3. Respondent's information sources about U.S image

Statements	Mean	Median	Standard deviation	Variance
You consider the American official reports, which are released by the Department of Defense or the White house, reliable sources to obtain information about America and its future.	3,0918	3,0000	1,25252	1,569
It is preferable to obtain data related to U.S. issues from U.S. official resources.	3,5612	4,0000	1,05583	1,115
You trust your own information about America	3,5510	4,0000	0,94293	0,889
The English language remains the main obstacle preventing you from getting accurate knowledge about the US.	2,9796	3,5000	1,32369	1,752
Watching American films has created in you a body of information about America	3,3061	4,0000	1,15239	1,328
Several TV programs have provided you the necessary information about the US.	3,6327	4,0000	0,99884	0,998
Your information about America comes from reading U.S. novels.	3,0612	3,0000	1,04355	1,089
Reading non-US writers has helped you to obtain cumulative knowledge about the US.	3,8163	4,0000	0,73705	0,543
Your reliance on social media has helped you to adopt individual attitudes toward U.S. policies.	3,3980	4,0000	1,12827	1,273
Your research on the web has contributed to your cumulative knowledge about the US.	4,2245	4,0000	0,56588	0,320
The University courses provide you with accurate knowledge about the US.	3,6327	4,0000	1,13417	1,286
The public broadcasting influences your positions toward the U.S. policies.	3,1939	3,0000	1,01187	1,024
Your academic and research activities in university curricula relating to U.S. topics have increased your knowledge about U.S. issues.	3,9898	4,0000	0,85548	0,732
Joining 'the American corner' at your university has contributed to increasing your U.S. culture knowledge.	3,4592	4,0000	0,97567	0,952

IGOs reports have an impact on your own views concerning U.S policies	3,5102	4,0000	1,03789	1,077
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Respondents' attitudes towards life and immigration to the US

The respondents replied agreed with the statement *“You want to study in America”* (mean = 3.44), but they were disagree regarding the following statements: *“You have applied for a job in America”* (mean = 2.15); *“You have applied for an American scholarship”* (mean = 2.20); *“You are considering obtaining U.S. citizenship”* (mean = 2.48).

Table 4. Respondents' attitudes toward life and immigration to the US

Statements	Mean	Median	Standard deviation	Variance
You are considering obtaining U.S. citizenship.	2,4898	2,0000	1,27016	1,613
You want to study in America.	3,4490	4,0000	1,28531	1,652
You have applied for an American scholarship.	2,2041	2,0000	0,87295	0,762
You have applied for a job in America.	2,1531	2,0000	0,88925	0,791
You are thinking of immigrating to the U.S. through American immigration programs.	2,8673	2,0000	1,34423	1,807

Table 5. The correlation between a statement in which the U.S. will inevitably decline and the causes, and the expected time scales

You are fully certain that the U.S. power is in decline	R	P value
The U.S. power will decline due to a severe economic crisis	0,487**	0,000
The U.S. power will decline due to a political crisis.	0,409**	0,000
The U.S. power will decline due to brutal ethno-demographic strife	0,331**	0,001
China's actual rising is spelling the end of the American power	0,351**	0,000
The U.S. will remain a power for only another 20 years	0,455**	0,000
The U.S. will remain a power for only another 50 years	0,133	0,193
The U.S. power will not collapse for at least another hundred years	-0,213 [†]	0,035
The American decline would be a positive outcome for the Islamic world	0,318**	0,001
Would you admit that America is the most significant power from the end of the cold war until the present?	-0,241 [†]	0,017

Would you agree that America is the most significant power history has ever known?	-0,355**	0,000
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** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

An association is found between “The U.S. power will decline due to brutal ethno-demographic strife” (P=0,001), “The U.S. power will decline due to a severe economic crisis” (P=0,000), “The U.S. power will decline due to a political crisis” (P=0,000), “China’s actual rising is spelling the end of the American power” (P=0,000), “The U.S. will remain a power for only another 20 years” (P=0,000).

Table 6. The correlation between a statement in which the U.S. will inevitably decline and what America does category (U.S foreign policies)

You are fully certain that the U.S. power is in decline	R	P value
Morals and ethics determine U.S. foreign policies.	-0,073	0,476
US behavior is Realist by nature.	-0,193	0,057
You believe that America is biased in favor of Israel’s interests	0,209*	0,039
America is constantly interfering in other countries' internal affairs	0,115	0,258
America is a cooperative and honest partner with other countries.	-0,327**	0,001
US policies support human rights.	-0,382**	0,000
The U.S. is putting pressure on the IGOs to serve its interests.	0,088	0,389
The U.S. controls international relations.	0,038	0,707
The U.S. controls the international oil market.	0,045	0,663
The U.S. violates international laws.	0,361**	0,000
The U.S. is using its military power against weaker countries like Iraq due to its aggressive nature.	0,075	0,464
You are impressed by the U.S. aid and assistance to poor countries	-0,398**	0,000

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

An association has been found between the following items: “Is America a cooperative and honest partner with other countries?” (P=0,001), and “Do U.S. policies support human rights?” (P=0,000), “does the U.S. violate international laws?” (P=0,000), how far the respondents were impressed by the U.S. aid and assistance to poor countries (P=0,000).

Table 7. The correlation between the variation in respondents' data sources and their frames and perceptions on the U.S.

You trust your own information about America	R	P value
You consider the American official reports, which are released by the Department of Defense or the White house, reliable sources to obtain information about America and its future.	0,377**	0,000
It is preferable to obtain data related to U.S. issues from U.S. official resources.	0,326**	0,001
The English language remains the main obstacle preventing you from getting accurate knowledge about the US.	-0,023	0,821
Watching American films has created in you a body of information about America	0,007	0,943
Several TV programs have provided you with the necessary information about the US.	0,139	0,173
Your information about America comes from reading U.S. novels.	0,143	0,160
Reading non-U.S. writers has helped you to obtain cumulative knowledge about the U.S.	0,152	0,136
Your reliance on social media has helped you to adopt individual attitudes toward U.S. policies.	-0,178	0,079
Your research on the web has contributed to your cumulative knowledge about the US.	0,108	0,292
The University courses provide you with accurate knowledge about the U.S.	0,186	0,067
Public broadcasting influences your positions toward U.S. policies.	-0,113	0,269
Your academic and research activities in university curricula relating to U.S. topics have increased your knowledge about U.S. issues.	0,063	0,538
Joining 'the American corner' at your university has contributed to increasing your U.S. culture knowledge.	0,083	0,415
IGOs reports have an impact on your own views concerning U.S policies	0,052	0,612

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

An association has been found between if the respondents “consider the American official reports, which are released by the Department of Defense or the White House, reliable sources to obtain information about America and its future” (P=0,000), “It is preferable to obtain data related to U.S. issues from U.S. official resources” (P=0,001).

4. DISCUSSIONS

The results have reaffirmed Mathew and Jesse's presumption about the existence of a positive correlation between the owners of higher education and their neutrality toward political issues. Nevertheless, we can take into account the influence of regional variations as suggested by Chiozza, which led him to conclude that the relationship between education and anti-Americanism varies in cross-regions and cross-attitudinal dimensions as further explanatory factors of the phenomenon (Chiozza 2009). However, Chiozza's findings were not significantly different from our results, precisely in his note that anti-Americanism is less common among Africans with higher degrees of educational attainment. The same applies to educated people in the Middle East, who are significantly less likely to have negative views of the U.S. (Chiozza 2009), and they almost share some socio-cultural traits with North Africans.

This survey is directed mainly toward the highly educated population, specifically those who belong to the mainstream political science in Algerian universities. We can describe the results that have emerged as a mixture of biased and neutral attitudes to the U.S. image. For instance, the responses were almost neutral regarding the possible external and internal triggers of the US's inevitable decline, such as the rise of China, severe political crisis outbreak in the US, ethnic-demographic strife in the US, and a crisis hitting the American economy. The replies kept their neutrality even for the projected time scales where the U.S. decline was supposed to happen (twenty years, fifty years, and one hundred years). For some, this may be regarded as evidence of the absence of anti-American elements. Still, concerning what falls under U.S. actions and policies, the respondents have shown some bias against the US, which others might interpret as anti-American.

According to Russell Berman, anti-Americanism has many sources and multiple forms, but there is only one source figure quite prominent, which is the high moral standard that the United States has set for itself and others (Berman 2004). The essence of moralism that has evolved in American politics as a resort to justify any decisions made in foreign policy has probably led to an opposite reaction among other people so that when specific actions were considered ethical domestically for Americans, the same acts were not perceived, by people from different cultural orientations.

Thus, the idea that U.S. actions are determined by morality and ethics has not received significant support from our respondents. Instead, we assume that our sample has fallen somehow under the narrative identifying America as a hostile and aggressive state. Some intellectuals worldwide have endorsed that narrative widely, and there is no room, consequently, to see America as an honest partner in their eyes. This evaluation could have been even worse when dealing with American favoritism towards Israel, which existed, according to our respondents.

John Bowen has hinted at the growing awareness among people about the signs of inconsistencies in U.S. policies and institutions (Bowen 2011). To refer to increasing skepticism directed against the U.S. civil rights issues, the 2020 Gallup Law and Order Index have also indicated that the U.S. was only slightly above the global average of 80% reported feeling safe. Then, the situation was compounded by the aggravated violence

and insecurity that erupted following the "Black Lives Matter" movement and the Capitol insurrection on 6th January 2021.

These factors have probably misled our respondents to overlook some substantive facts, that the U.S. still enjoys properties of rules of law and democracy, so the answers to the question of *'You see that the U.S. is a country of law and order'* were therefore neutral. However, they strongly agree about *'whether the U.S. violates international laws'*. This would suggest that our participants tend to produce neutral responses even when it comes to certain objective facts about the US's nature and substance. To understand this outcome, we must draw clear lines between anti-Americanism and what interferes with it.

This survey showed whether our respondents have negative attitudes toward the U.S. in areas such as *"American bias in favor of Israel"*, *"America is constantly interfering in other countries' internal affairs"*, and *"the U.S. violates international laws"*. However, they have taken a neutral stance when it comes particularly to Islamic anti-Americanism, through the question: *"The American decline would be a positive outcome for the Islamic world"*. Accordingly, Algerian political scholars in Algeria have probably tended to be free of Islamic Ideology in their conception of the US' image, contrary to the general impression associated between the Islamic world and the extreme levels of anti-Americanism. Then, the reasons for these negative attitudes among our respondents are entirely consistent with the explanations of the following scholars (Abdallah 2003; Makdisi 2002; Parker 1988; Pitchford 2011; Tessler 2003), as discussed above.

However, the survey revealed significant discrepancies between those who have held a neutral stance and those who have opted for negative attitudes towards the U.S. image. We assume that the variation of information sources about the U.S. among respondents might have been the reason for those attitudinal disparities (H2). It is based on Camber Warren's thesis in his piece *'Explosive Connections'*, when he argues that individuals who usually use social media tend to have more extreme attitudes (Warren 2015). Nevertheless, our respondents cannot be considered as such because the survey findings have shown that social media was not regarded as a primary information source for them in general matters relating to the US. They seem, therefore, less likely to have extreme anti-American sentiments.

Yet, unlike Warren's suggestion, Marc Neugröschel has presumed that anti-Americanism along with anti-Semitism were just products of conspiracy fantasies made by conventional media outlets, such as TV networks and newspapers, to frame Israel and America as collaborators in- or interchangeable representation of evil, controlling the humanity and wreaking havoc on the world. In contrast, The Internet and social media are portrayed as means of communication that can be used to oppose and sideline that narrative (Neugröschel 2021).

Thus, using the Internet as a primary source of information about the U.S. among our respondents, and more specifically when they prefer the official U.S. reports as the most reliable sources available online, would make them under the influence of the opposing narrative of anti-Americanism or anti-Semitism, which is accordingly viewed as a redemptive battle for the emancipation of humanity. However, it appears that our

respondents have demonstrated a sort of selectivity concerning the data sources by their affiliation with the Political science's disciplines.

Finally, from the questionnaire responses, our respondents seem likely to have multidimensional attitudes toward the US. Therefore, they seem more willing to get a scholarship to study in the US, but they do not express a similar interest in immigration opportunities to the US. These findings may reaffirm an established pattern indicated by other researchers, who argued that anti-Americanism is a heterogeneous phenomenon, mainly due to the diversity in America's characteristics itself (Katzenstein & Keohane 2007), not to mention that America is inherently multidimensional and multifaceted, as stated by Chiozza (Chiozza 2007).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The present study has attempted since the beginning to go into the dilemma facing the Algerian political science community to subdue their biases and anti-American sentiments in all matters concerning the U.S. as a subject of scientific inquiry, bearing in mind that this community particularly has been perceived to be most unbiased, neutral, and accurate, unlike the rest of the public mood. Meanwhile, some of the recent surveys that covered the MENA region indicated a prevalence of anti-Americanism that overpassed 50 percent in Algeria among ordinary people regardless of their affiliation to political sciences. As reflected in Pew, Global Attitude Project (GAP), and the Arab Barometer (AB), after using a survey of 58.000 Arab citizens in the Middle East and North Africa (Glas & Spierings 2021).

Therefore, we have surveyed how far anti-Americanism is a widespread phenomenon among the Algerian political sciences community. By submitting a questionnaire via Facebook and emails, among those who replied, there are forty-two lecturers, nineteen students with a bachelor's degree, and thirty-seven students with a master's degree from sixteen Algerian Universities. Their replies have provided U.S. with further explanations for the phenomenon in Algeria.

The survey reflected the complexity of the anti-Americanism phenomenon when the respondents articulated multidimensional attitudes towards the US. They suggested their love to America by appreciating the access to its educational system, in return, they were not that interested when it comes to immigration and the possibility of acquiring American citizenship, a finding which emphasized by other scholar's contributions.

The participants did not show anti-American attitudes when dealing with the most appropriate way to obtain their data about the US. Moreover, they demonstrate a great interest in American sources of information, which are first-hand and credible. Arguably, it makes sense, considering a large proportion of them are lecturers and researchers who know the scientific methods to distinguish reliable information adequately. It could also be argued that American sources of information, such as official reports, are publicly available.

However, the fundamental observation we have witnessed in this study was the presence of attitudinal disparities among the respondents, as a mixture of biased and neutral responses in cases requires clear answers. Hence, they displayed a tendency towards anti-Americanism proportionally, either when they banished any moralism in the U.S. actions and policies or when they failed to recognize the objective facts that are well-known about the US, such as democracy and the rule of law. It is noteworthy that this modest type of anti-Americanism within the Algerian political science community does not refer precisely to Islamic anti-Americanism.

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ATTITUDES TOWARD THE U.S. IN THE BLACK SEA REGION: THE CASES OF TÜRKIYE, BULGARIA, AND ROMANIA

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DOI: 10.36169/2227-6068.2024.02.00011

Abstract. *The article attempts to make a general overview of the current attitudes towards the United States of America among the Black Sea states, in Türkiye, Bulgaria, and Romania in particular. They focused on finding out what kind of sentiments towards America are present among the representatives of the political circles and within the societies in the Black Sea states; are there any anti-American narratives while taking into account the fact that all countries of the region except Russia are considered as American partners; what factors influenced these attitudes. The evolution of anti-Americanism in the Black Sea region, particularly in Türkiye, Bulgaria, and Romania, reflects a complex interplay of historical legacies, geopolitical dynamics, and internal political factors. While Türkiye grapples with mixed sentiments and a balancing act between the U.S. and Russia, Bulgaria's public opinion reflects a complex interplay of pro-European aspirations and historical ties to Russia. Romania, on the other hand, showcases a predominantly favorable attitude towards the U.S., driven by security concerns and a commitment to NATO, despite some critical voices. The ongoing Russian aggression in Ukraine has further influenced these dynamics, highlighting the strategic importance of the Black Sea region in U.S. foreign policy*

Keywords: *Black Sea region, anti-Americanism, attitudes, Russian-Ukrainian war, Türkiye, Bulgaria, Romania*

Submitted: 15 July 2024; **accepted:** 9 November 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's world, the United States of America still plays a leading role in the international relations system. This country is the focus of enormous attention of both practitioners and theorists because of the U.S.'s direct or indirect influence on many current political, economic, security, and other issues around the world. Reaction to American policy and politics, government, society, culture, etc., became a specific feature of current political life both on the international and national levels. On the one hand, America (in this article, the word "America" will be used as a synonym of the name of the United States of America) was and still is the embodiment of the land of possibilities and success, a place where dreams come true, a reliable partner and the one who supports. On the other hand, America's active involvement and sometimes outright interference in many international and domestic affairs in the different parts of the world, direct and indirect pressure, and neglect of the opinion of others formed another image of the U.S. – the country with the "big stick policy", "imperialist", "world policeman" etc.

Nowadays, attitudes towards the U.S. have already formed around the globe. In various societies, they have their own origin, reasons, traditions, and peculiarities. One can find regions with the dominant positive or negative sentiments towards America; also, some countries with mixed feelings towards the U.S. evolve depending on circumstances, internal and international political, economic, and security situations, America's activities, and its reaction to specific events. One can find regional, national, religious, geographical, and other diversities in the sentiments towards the U.S. These specific features can help better understand the bilateral and multinational relations, consequences, and results of the U.S. foreign policy and characteristics of particular societies, their political life, and political culture.

The Black Sea has been one of the critical regions for U.S. foreign policy since the middle of the 20th century. During the Cold War for America, it was a region under the dominance of Soviet influence and a potential threat to Turkey, the only American ally in the Black Sea at that time, as all other littoral states were or within the structure of the USSR, or in the orbit of Soviet foreign policy. Soviet influence was also crucial in the ideological sphere, significantly impacting attitudes towards the U.S., the West, and NATO in the Black Sea countries. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union caused deep transformations in regional and global international relations, which influenced the configuration of the powers in the region: Turkey and Russia became the leading players as it was centuries before. The end of the Cold War also pushed changes in the attitudes towards the U.S., whose involvement in the region is closely associated with NATO.

After the Cold War, Russia's renewed imperial ambitions to control the Black Sea as a key to the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean Sea actualized American interest in the region. We should consider Russian aggression towards Georgia in 2008 and support of creating Abkhazia as a quasi-state on the Black Sea, Russian occupation, and annexation in 2014 of Ukrainian Crimea not only as regional events but also as more broad and deep attempts to reconstruct the world order. Finally, the Russian full-scale

invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 fundamentally destabilized the region and produced more insecurity among the Black Sea littoral states (Melvin & Seskuria 2022: 1)

As many observers concluded, such a situation directly threatens peace and prosperity not only for the Black Sea states but also for the North Atlantic community, which was “a bedrock of U.S. foreign policy since 1945” (Hooker Jr. 2023). The U.S., as well as European and even global concerns about the region, were connected not only with the military actions but also with the issues of food security, economic stability, violation of human rights, and international law. American vital interests in the region are closely tied with the necessity to strengthen transatlantic security architecture based on NATO, stabilize the Black Sea situation, and consolidate the Euro-Atlantic community (Hooker Jr. 2023).

America’s current involvement in the Black Sea region is mirrored in the discussions of the Black Sea Security Strategy introduced in the U.S. Congress in March 2023 as the Black Sea Security Act of 2023. This Act was incorporated into the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024, signed by the President, and became Public Law 118-31 on December 22, 2023 (*Congress.gov* 2023b). American interest was expressed in support of the efforts to prevent the spread of further armed conflict in Europe by recognizing the Black Sea region as an arena of Russian aggression (*Congress.gov* 2023a). In general, the U.S. new strategy towards the Black Sea region focuses on the work “within NATO and with NATO Allies, and it is aimed to develop a long-term strategy to enhance security, establish a permanent, sustainable presence along NATO’s eastern flank, and bolster the democratic resilience of its allies and partners in the region” (*Congress.gov* 2023a). Section 1247 of the Public Law 118-31 outlines five main ways of the United States policy towards the region: increase coordination with NATO and the European Union; deepening the economic ties; strengthening energy security; support efforts to bolster the Black Sea states to democratic resilience; and enhancement of security assistance with regional partners under the values and interests of the United States. This document name as “Black Sea states” Türkiye, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia, and special attention in this document is paid to Türkiye, and China is also mentioned.

All these developments in the region had a determinative impact not only on the political establishment on national and international levels but also on public opinion about Russia, Ukraine, and also about NATO, and the U.S., as half of the Black Sea countries are already NATO members. The Black Sea is no longer a silently accepted sphere of Russian dominance but the area of increasing Western presence (Domaradzki 2024: 15). The main reason for Russia’s aggression towards such littoral states as Georgia and Ukraine was their desire to join NATO.

The proposed paper attempts to make a general overview of the current attitudes towards the United States of America among the Black Sea states that are not former Soviet republics: Türkiye, Bulgaria, and Romania. Of course, the comprehensive analysis should present the study of all the littoral states, including Ukraine, Georgia, Russia, and Moldova (even though it has no direct access to the sea). The review of the anti-American attitudes of the last-mentioned states will be the subject of the following research.

The study within this paper aims to find out what kind of sentiments towards America are present among the representatives of the political circles and within the societies in the Black Sea states; are there any anti-American narratives while taking into account the fact that all countries of the region except Russia are considered as American partners; what factors influenced these attitudes. The paper will start with a brief retrospective of the bilateral relations between the U.S. and Black Sea states. Following this, we will present descriptions and analyses of the region's current developments and attitudes toward America.

2. TÜRKİYE

Relations between the United States and Türkiye (that time the Ottoman Empire) were first established in 1831. Almost a century later, in 1927, diplomatic relations were established with the Republic of Türkiye (United States Department of State. Türkiye). Further bilateral relations developed within the Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement (1947), which de facto was implementing the Truman Doctrine and the United States' Containment policy during the Cold War. Türkiye joined the West and the U.S. in deterring communist influence. It was caused by the threat of the potential Soviet invasion and attempts to control the Straits of the Dardanelles (Tuba 2015: 254).

As seen from the Western point of view, during the early Cold War, the support for the West was practically unanimous across the country and went beyond military and security considerations (NATO n.d.). From NATO's point of view, Türkiye was a cornerstone of Western security on its southern flank. Türkiye was and still is the only Muslim-majority state in the NATO (Yahya 2014). That is why it was and still is a unique and vital ally of the United States in the region. While Türkiye and the U.S. have some contradictions in their approaches towards the Middle East, in the Black Sea region, Türkiye is a critical regional partner, and the U.S. has a great interest in keeping Türkiye connected to the Euro-Atlantic community. The U.S.'s most interest in the Republic of Türkiye lies in security issues: since Türkiye entered NATO in 1952 and controls the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, which link the Black Sea with the Mediterranean. Turkey joined the U.S. in their efforts to defeat terrorist organizations, and in 2015, opened its military basis for the partners of the Global Coalition to Counter the Islamic State.

Turkish professor Ozan Örmeci pointed out two visible peaks of anti-Americanism in Türkiye: the late 1960s – 1970s and the early 2000s (Örmeci 2024: 39). In the opinion of other Turkish researchers, the first manifestations of anti-Americanism in Türkiye appeared in the middle of the twentieth century. As Ünlü Bilgiç Tuba underlines, criticism was focused on the fact that Türkiye did not become an equal ally but “was downgraded to a U.S. colony” and that American but not Turkish interests determined their bilateral relations (Tuba 2015: 251). Güney Aylin named among the first reasons for the rising of anti-American sentiments in Türkiye such events as the removal of Jupiter missiles from Türkiye in the aftermath of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis without prior consultation with Ankara, the Cyprus crisis, reaction to the American financial assistance as compensation on the opium production ban which was interpreted in Türkiye as interference in Türkiye's domestic politics (Güney 2008: 472–473). Additionally to those who were critical of the

U.S. for the above reasons, some Turks were negative towards the United States within the frame of leftist views for whom American foreign policy was imperialistic (Tuba 2015: 262). Anti-American complaints exaggerated by left propaganda were aimed at American military presence and espionage activities, accusations that the Turkish nation was being poisoned by American wheat and that archaeological treasures were being smuggled out of Türkiye (Güney 2008: 474).

Besides leftist concerns, anti-American sentiments spread in a more influential elite minority among the press, universities, and students. Ünlü Bilgiç Tuba defines that negative and critical sentiments towards American policy and citizens appeared already in the 1950s-1960s and also spread among rightists and conservatives (Tuba 2015: 267). Researchers also singled out cultural and economic negative sentiments toward the U.S., but in general, anti-Americanists were a minority in Türkiye.

In the last decade of the Cold War, Türkiye lost its confidence in the United States because Türkiye's security was perceived as a hostage of American policy (Güney 2008: 475). This caused the re-orientation of Turkish foreign policy and led to the distancing from the U.S. and improving relations with non-Western states. The cut of American military aid to Türkiye in the 1990s and conflicting views on the war in Iraq initiated by the U.S. at the beginning of the 2000s led to the rise of negative attitudes toward American foreign policy not only among elites but also among Turkish people.

In 2001, after the terrorist attack on the United States, Türkiye, as well as almost all states around the world, showed solidarity with this country. Türkiye joined the International Security Assistance Force and officially supported the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan. However, the American war in Iraq under the slogan of the "global war on terrorism" and the U.S. cooperation with Peshmerga forces in Iraqi Kurdistan led to the further distancing of two historical allies and resulted in lowering support for the United States in Türkiye. James Kapsis stated that differences over Iraq weakened U.S.-Turkish relations (Kapsis 2005: 389). The Kurdish issue supplemented criticism toward the U.S. Ozan Örmeci named two main reasons which led to the rise of anti-American sentiments in Turkish society at that time: the first reason was American growing cooperation with Kurdish Peshmerga forces caused by the non-adoption of a motion in the Turkish parliament to deploy U.S. troops in Türkiye on March 1, 2003; and the second one it was a conflict between U.S. and Turkish soldiers in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq, July 4, 2003, known as the "hood incident" (Örmeci 2024: 42). As Kapsis noted according to public opinion polls, 82 percent of Turkish respondents had an unapproving view of the U.S. and believed the United States threatens world peace (Kapsis 2005: 380). In 2003, 53.6 percent of the respondents believed that a U.S. intervention without a Turkish military occupation of northern Iraq would result in the establishment of a Kurdish state, and 60.5 percent were sure that the United States favored the establishment of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq (Uslu et al. 2005: 77). Polls confirm that growing numbers of Turks perceive their NATO ally more as a national security threat, rather than a strategic partner (Taşpınar 2005: 2). According to Pew Research Center poll 71 percent of Turkish respondents worried about potential U.S. military threat (Kohut 2003). The peak of negative attitudes toward the United States occurred in the spring of 2003 when such views as "very unfavorable" (67%

in March, 68% in May) and “somewhat unfavorable” (17% in March, 15% in May) dominated Turkish public opinion (Erdoğan 2005: 6). At the same time, the two countries were still trying to work together on the Iraq issue, and there was no serious crisis between Türkiye and the United States.

As Örmeci argued, the U.S. seemed to have lost the support of such categories of Turkish society as the far-left, Islamists, the mainstream left and right, as well as the Armed Forces and security bureaucracy. Örmeci predicated that this created a comfortable ground for the further development of Turkish anti-Americanism and even led to more positive perceptions of the Turkish traditional enemy – Russia, which started to transform into a more trusted ally (Örmeci 2024: 42).

Many researchers agreed that the main reasons for the rise of anti-Americanism in Türkiye in the early 2000s were the Iraq War and foreign policy conducted by the Bush-junior administration (Erdoğan 2005: 15-16). The United States was seen as acting in its own interests, without consideration for other states, the same as it was perceived in Türkiye in the 1960s – 1970s. There is also an opinion that the disappearance of the shared common enemy (the Soviet Union) was one more reason why anti-American sentiments started to dominate in Türkiye in the early 2000s (Taşpınar 2005: 3).

The current-day anti-Americanism in Türkiye takes its roots from the anti-Americanism of the early 2000s. Pew Research Center’s surveys confirm this tendency in their polls. Before the 2003 Iraq War, Turkish opinions of the U.S. were less negative. According to the results of the Global Attitudes Surveying 2002-2014, the culmination of the unfavorable views on the U.S. was in 2003 and 2007 (83%), in 2008 and 2011 (77%) (Poushter 2014). Opinions toward the U.S. have been relatively steady over the decade, 2004-2014, with the dominance of negative attitudes. This was also visible in the attitudes toward NATO. In 2014, a negative opinion toward NATO prevailed: 53% had a “very unfavorable,” 17% had a “somewhat unfavorable” opinion, and only 19% had a favorable view of the alliance (*Pew Research Center* 2014: 11).

The main reasons for the contradictions between Türkiye and the U.S. were not only the refusal for the passage of American troops to Iraq in 2003 but also breaking up Türkiye with Israel and destroying the U.S.–Israel–Turkey triangle in 2010, Turkish policy in Syria out of line with U.S. interests in 2011. The final distancing occurred in 2016 when Türkiye blamed the United States for the July coup.

Negative attitudes toward the U.S. further progressed after the failed military coup in 2016. Several surveys were conducted by the Kadir Has University (Istanbul) to determine public perceptions of Turkish foreign policy. According to these public opinion polls, the peak of negative attitudes toward the U.S. was in the years after 2016. For example, in 2015 – 35.3%, in 2016 – 44.1%, in 2017 – 66.5%, in 2018 – 60.2%, in 2019 – 81.3%, in 2020 – 70%, in 2021 – 54%, in 2022 – 42.7% of the respondents perceive the United States as a threat to Türkiye. It also was combined with the minimum percentage of attitudes to the U.S. as Türkiye’s friend/ally: in 2015 – 5.9%, in 2016 – 2.6%, in 2017 and 2018 – 0.6%, in 2019 – 5.4%, in 2020 – 7.3%, in 2021 – 16.7% (Örmeci 2024: 43-44).

The tendency of strengthening negative attitudes toward the U.S. remains in the following years. Under the full-scale Russian aggression on Ukraine, nearly 90% of Turkish respondents perceived the United States as a hostile country (poll conducted in December 2022 by the Turkish company Gezici (Aydınlık 2023)). Surveys also showed negative attitudes toward NATO. The opinion that the U.S. and NATO are the real cause of the war is more prevalent in Türkiye than other reasons: Metropoll's 2022 mid-April survey showed that 46 percent of Turks blame the U.S. and NATO for the war; 30 percent blame Russia (Makovsky 2022). At the same time, 62.6% of Turkish respondents believed that Russia is a friendly country, and 72.8% favored good relations with Russia (Aydınlık 2023).

Türkiye's policy toward the war is a balance between Russia and Ukraine. Finally, it aims to strengthen the Turkish position in the Black Sea, in NATO, and in the international arena in general (the important role of Türkiye in the grain export agreement and cease-fire initiatives). On the one hand, Türkiye closed the Straits to Russian military vessels, limiting Russia's ability to reinforce its Black Sea fleet. On the other hand, many Russians relocated their owned businesses to Türkiye; Türkiye did not join sanctions against Russia for economic reasons (import and export of each other's commodities, cooperation on natural gas and oil pipelines, Russian technical assistance in constructing nuclear plants, mutual interests in Central Asia). All this is a sign of the attraction between these two countries and further distancing in the relationship with the U.S. And, as Mehmet Yegin and Salim Çevik noted, Türkiye managed to pursue a pro-Ukrainian policy without being anti-Russian (Yegin & Çevik 2024).

There are still issues that negatively influence Turkish-American relations and attitudes toward the U.S.: American position on Türkiye's contradictions with Greece, Türkiye's blocking NATO candidacies of Sweden and Finland, Turkish application to purchase the F-16 and the U.S. secondary sanctions on Türkiye in October 2024 (Psaledakis & Lewis 2024). These caused reasons for the rise of critical attitudes towards the U.S. Biden's administration was also too strict on the issues of democracy and human rights, so there are expectations that with the next Trump administration in Washington, improvement of Turkish-American relations is possible. At the same time, some of the most significant problems in Türkiye-U.S. relations occurred during Trump's first presidency. A public opinion poll conducted in January – March 2024 by Pew Research Center shows that 80% of Turks have unfavorable opinions on the U.S. The majority of the respondents have little or no confidence in American presidents (that time, President Biden (87%) and former President Trump (86%)) (Clancy et al. 2024).

Generally, we can note that in Türkiye, people have mixed attitudes toward the U.S., which evolved from favorable sentiments at the beginning of the Cold War to unfavorable in the 2000-2020s. In addition to geopolitical, security, and economic roots of the critical or openly negative outlook on the U.S., Turkish official anti-Western narratives, which can be beneficial for national politicians, fueled anti-American discourse (Tokdemir et al. 2024: 103).

3. BULGARIA

The United States of America and the Republic of Bulgaria established their relations in 1903. They were suspended twice: from 1941 to 1947 and 1950 to 1959. The first time was because of World War II: Bulgaria declared war on the United States on December 13, 1941, and the U.S. did the same on June 5, 1942. At the war's end, the Soviet Army occupied Bulgaria and was proclaimed a People's Republic on September 15, 1946. However, the United States, for a while, still recognized the representatives of the Bulgarian pre-war government within the framework of the activities of the Allied Control Commission, which dealt with the defeated Axis countries. Finally, the U.S. and Bulgaria restored diplomatic relations in 1947. Bulgaria severed second-time diplomatic relations with the United States in 1950, when the U.S. Ambassador to Bulgaria, Donald Read Heath, was blamed for espionage and support of the plot to overthrow the Bulgarian communist government. In 1959, Bulgaria dropped all charges against the American ambassador and restored diplomatic relations with the U.S. (U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria n.d.). During the Cold War, Bulgaria was considered one of the most loyal satellites of the U.S.S.R. There were even rumors of making Bulgaria the 16th republic of the U.S.S.R. Russian influence in Bulgaria originated from history (e.g., the Russian-Turkish wars of the 19th century and the perception of Russia as a liberator from the Ottoman Empire and protector of Slavs) and Orthodox religion, and nowadays, Russia has a significant effect on today's Bulgarian politics and society.

After the collapse of communism in the region, the intensity of bilateral contacts increased sharply. The U.S. included Bulgaria in the financial and technical assistance according to the Support for East European Democracies Act 1989 (SEED Act), which aimed to facilitate the development of democratic institutions, political pluralism, and free market economies. Bulgaria graduated from the SEED program in 2007 following its EU accession, having received over \$600 million in U.S. assistance since 1990 (U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria n.d.). During the first post-communist years, Bulgaria closely cooperated with the U.S. in economic and military spheres, considering them as areas of mutual interest (Грушецкий 2016: 72–73).

American national interests in Bulgaria lay in the field of logistical support for American contingents in South-Eastern Europe and the Middle East (Yugoslavia in 1999, Afghanistan in 2001, and Iraq in 2003). The United States has consistently supported Bulgaria's accession to NATO and the European Union (CAЩ 2024). But at the same time, there was a specific discussion within the Bulgarian political circles about whether to join NATO or not (Грушецкий 2015: 21–22), and the Bulgarian society demonstrated traditional Russophile views, as well as the attitude towards NATO as an enemy (Грушецкий 2015: 20). While Bulgaria was on its way to joining NATO, and Bulgarian authorities were negotiating whether to support the U.S. military actions in Iraq, in Bulgarian society, there were still strong critical or negative attitudes towards the U.S. As Vassilev notes, in 2003, over 64% of the Bulgarian respondents feared terrorist attacks if Bulgaria backed the U.S. invasion of Iraq. (Vassilev 2006).

In 2004, Bulgaria became a member of NATO; in 2006, the United States and Bulgaria signed the U.S.-Bulgarian Defense Cooperation Agreement, which allows the

United States to have shared use and access to several Bulgarian military facilities (Domaradzki 2024: 10). The access facilitates joint training between the U.S. military and Bulgarian militaries. In 2007, Bulgaria became a member of the European Union. These developments influenced the intensification of the interaction between the two countries both on a bilateral basis and within the framework of NATO and EU–US cooperation.

However, at the same time, there were apparent anti-NATO attitudes in Bulgarian society. One of the openly anti-NATO parties is the ultranationalist party *Ataka* (*Ataka/Attack*), which positions it as "neither left nor right, but Bulgarian". It was formed in 2005 and has won seats in parliament a few times, but since 2021, it has been an extra-parliamentary political force. From the very beginning of its activity, this party opposes Bulgarian membership in NATO, and its program demands Bulgaria leave NATO, complete neutrality, and no foreign military bases on Bulgarian territory. The leader of *Ataka*, Volen Siderov, is known as being respectful of Putin and Hugo Chávez, presidents of Russia and Venezuela famous for their anti-American rhetoric.

Adrien Serre and Georgi Tashev noted that before the formation of this political party in Bulgaria, there was

the political elite's consensus on key issues: they all agreed on EU and NATO memberships being prime goals, no matter the cost; they also seemed to agree on Bulgaria having to play the good student role before Western Europe and the United States. (Serre & Tashev 2011: 3)

The reflection of such attitudes Bulgarian journalist Ivan Bakalov mentioned in his interview to Maria Guineva:

Many people get irritated seeing the servility of some Bulgarian politicians when it comes to America; as they were irritated before by the servility towards the Soviet Union. Many Bulgarians have this notion that the former ally and big brother - the Soviet Union (Russia) is now replaced by the U.S. This is, however, not quite true. There are just some particular reasons to believe so. And they are sometimes fueled by statements of American Ambassadors to Sofia, who publically criticize Bulgarian authorities – often rightfully so, but not very tactfully. And people say to themselves – look at these Americans how they issue orders to us. (Guineva 2010)

Negative attitudes toward the United States in Bulgaria are based not only on the legacy of the Cold War and traditional perceptions of American foreign policy but also on the rejection of the politics and behavior of national political establishment and American diplomats.

Such political parties as *Ataka* used problems caused by the economic crisis and unsuccessful reforms to attract voters and to earn popularity by criticizing the West and the U.S. Already in 2005, the U.S. embassy in Sofia warned of the increasing anti-American stance of the nationalist *Ataka* party. The embassy noted in one of its cables that new political party maintained strong and public ties with Russian diplomats. The U.S. embassy was very concerned about the *Ataka* daily newspaper, launched not long after the party itself was officially founded in 2005, remarking that the paper's

slick format, professional editing, and provocative anti-American headlines have caused circulation to surge to the level of some of the smaller mainstream dailies. (BIRN 2011)

The anti-American sentiment from the party focused on U.S. military facilities on Bulgarian soil and the country's participation in the Iraq coalition. Among the traditional narratives of the *Ataka* daily were blames on the U.S. and its allies for the plight of Bulgarians and the establishment of U.S. bases "without paying a penny for them". Leader of *Ataka* Siderov warned that shared military bases would turn the country into a terrorist target and might be used as U.S. nuclear bases. He underlined in his dailies that

the Americans will be allowed to pollute the bases and transform them into drug trafficking centers,

and that Bulgaria have to

"follow foreign orders" and "send troops wherever Washington tells us to, and give all possible bases to the American assassins of children and women. (BIRN 2011)

Ataka's daily newspaper depicted the party's cooperation with Russia (e.g., the article headlined "Russia Will React to U.S. Basing", meeting with the Russian ambassador, where Siderov discussed U.S. military presence in Bulgaria (BIRN 2011).

The issue of the U.S. military presence in Bulgaria remained the main in anti-NATO and anti-American narratives. For example, in 2007, during the visit of then-president George W. Bush to Bulgaria, a protest of 200-300 people came out to express their grievance toward the United States because of the war and Washington's policies in Iraq. It was very opposite to the joyful crowd of thousands in the center of Sofia, as it was in 1999 during Bill Clinton's visit. The Bulgarians were seriously concerned that American training bases in Bulgaria could become a springboard for possible military action against Iran. That one day, they might find themselves on the front lines of a military conflict (Deutsche Welle 2007).

Events of 2014, when Russia started its aggression on Ukraine, impacted the further rise of the anti-Western and pro-Russian attitudes in Bulgaria. In March 2014, the main Bulgarian political parties were divided on how to react to the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia because of the country's energy dependence on Russia and obligations to join Western partners within the EU and NATO. Finally, Bulgaria announced its commitment to all sanctions on Russia, but soon it caused social-economic security challenges and critiques in Bulgarian society.

Pro-Russian politicians' narratives combined support of Russia and blame on the EU and the U.S. *Ataka* recognized Crimea, annexed in 2014 by Russia, as part of the Russian Federation. The party was invited to observe the 'referendum' in March 2014. In 2015, it sent its representatives to Crimea to assure both Russian and Russian-installed Crimean officials of the party's support. (Coynash 2015). During this visit in February 2015 *Ataka* delegation met the Russian President's representative in Crimea, Oleg Belaventsev, who thanked the delegation for their moral support:

We know well what Europe and the U.S. have done to Bulgaria. You were a thriving country, and see what's happened now. Therefore, a huge thank you for your support. (Coynash 2015)

So, anti-Western and anti-American sentiments were additional touch points in relations with Russia.

The public opinion poll in May 2014 showed that 60% of Bulgarian respondents attributed the responsibility of the 'Ukrainian crisis' (first stage of the Russian aggression to Ukraine) to the West, 38% supported the annexation of Crimea while 35% approved the decision of not recognizing it and 24% expressed no opinion on the topic. 40% expressed their support of EU membership and 22% for a hypothetical Bulgarian membership of the Eurasian Economic Community launched by Russia (Crombois 2021). Polish expert Jakub Pieńkowski notes that Bulgarian society remains hostile to the U.S. and sympathetic towards Russia: according to Gallup survey from 2016 only 17% of Bulgarians described the U.S. as an ally, while 42% preferred Russia (Pieńkowski 2019). For such parties as *Ataka*, the issue of lifting sanctions against Russia became one more slogan they used together with anti-Western/anti-NATO slogans.

When Russia started the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, official Sofia supported all the sanctions. It declared that Bulgaria would become a very predictable and strong supporter of NATO and EU decisions (Bayer 2022). As of the beginning of 2024, Bulgaria supports all twelve EU packages of sanctions imposed on Russia. In February 2024 Parliament Chair Rosen Zhelyazkov noted Bulgarian concerns:

the continued designation by Russia of a temporary warning zone in the Black Sea, which includes parts of the Bulgarian exclusive economic zone, is perceived as a serious threat to Bulgaria's national security and economic interests and freedom of navigation. (Vodenova 2024)

At the same time, we can find the opposite interpretations from openly anti-Western and pro-Russian parties in Bulgaria, who traditionally accused the U.S. of interference in national domestic affairs.

E.g., political party *Rusofili za vazrazhdane na Otechestvoto* ("Russophiles for the Revival of the Fatherland"), established in 2008, first and the only one successful election campaign in 2014, now – extra-parliamentary, cooperated in different election coalitions with left-wing nationalists, *Ataka* party and communists. In 2021 *Rusofili za vazrazhdane na Otechestvoto* signed a memorandum of cooperation with Putin's *United Russia* party. When signing the agreement of future cooperation the following issues were discussed: the increase in military tension in the Black Sea and the initiative for Bulgaria to become a zone of peace and refuse to participate in the NATO Defender military exercises scheduled for the spring-summer of 2021 (*Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството* 2021). The same issues are mentioned in the constitution of this political party: "transforming the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Black Sea waters into a "Zone of Peace"; preventing the presence of foreign military forces in our country" (*Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството* 2022a), in its program "the existence of foreign military formations and foreign military bases in Bulgaria. It is unacceptable for our country to be turned into a frontline state, a target of foreign missiles (*Русофили за*

възраждане на Отечеството 2024a). On their website, one can find materials repeating Russian narratives (e.g., about American biolaboratories in Ukraine (*Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството* 2022b)).

The program of this party on the parliamentary elections 2024 contained items, which combined anti-NATO and pro-Russian vectors:

3. We are for leaving NATO. Membership in this military organization is a threat to Bulgarian national security. 4. We are for leaving the European Union and Bulgaria's orientation towards BRICS. 5. The Bulgarian people must preserve and enrich their centuries-old civilizational ties with Russia. Bulgaria must restore its economic relations with Russia by accelerating the import of much cheaper Russian gas and electricity. (*Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството* 2024b)

In March 2024, the leader of the party, Nikolay Malinov, published the overview of the results of the survey "Russia and the Bulgarians 2023" conducted by G Consulting in December 2023, commissioned by PH Media Group and distributed by other opposition media. The results of the survey claim that despite the rampant propaganda hatred of Russia, about 60% of Bulgarians have a positive attitude towards it, and only about 20% have a negative one. Only 29% of Bulgarians believe that Bulgaria will be more successful in defending its interests in the EU and NATO; 61% do not accept this. 65% of respondents are convinced that Washington and Brussels dictate Bulgaria's foreign policy and serve foreign interests; 47% of respondents believe that good relations with Russia would protect Bulgaria from excessive dependence on the U.S. and the West, while 34% disagree with such a statement; 48% of Bulgarians believe that U.S. and EU sanctions against Russia should be lifted; 64% of those interviewed tend to agree, while 20% disagree with the statement, "Despite being a member of the EU and NATO, Bulgaria must assert its right to maintain close ties with Russia, as Hungary and Turkey do, for example". In addition to highlighting pro-Russian sentiments, the report also contains anti-American narratives alleging the United States Bulgarian media funding and interference in Bulgarian politics by supporting NGOs accusing those "who take money from the U.S. to 'develop democracy' and denigrate Russia" (*Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството* 2024c).

Another example is one of the openly anti-American political forces in today's Bulgaria: the far-right ultra-nationalist *Vazrazhdane* (Revival Party). The views of its followers combine anti-NATO rhetoric, populism, and xenophobia. The party was established in 2014 and independently ran in elections for the first time in 2017, where they received 1.11% of the vote. In the 2023 elections, the party achieved 14.16%, becoming the third political party in the Bulgarian parliament. In the October 2024 elections, *Vazrazhdane* repeated its success, again securing third place. The party claims to be the only patriotic party in Bulgaria. A key issue in *Vazrazhdane's* agenda is closing American bases on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria and holding a referendum on NATO membership. The party has declared these slogans in the Defense section of its program (*Възраждане* 2024).

This party is active in organizing protests with anti-Western, anti-NATO and anti-American slogans. For example, in September 2023 *Vazrazhdane* organized a massive

meeting against the policies of the pro-Western government, calling for the government to resign and for the closure of NATO military bases. Hundreds of protestors waved Bulgarian and Russian national flags and carried placards reading "American bases out! Bulgaria is a zone of peace"; they walked from the building of parliament to the monument to the Soviet army. Such manifestations give arguments for the opinion that this party receives support from Putin (Vassileva 2024). The leader of *Vazrazhdane*, Kostadin Kostadinov told the crowd:

The last instruction that came from the masters of Bulgaria, from the U.S., is for Bulgaria to make a new military base. NATO Out! (Nenov 2023)

When the Black Sea Security Strategy was discussed in the U.S. Congress in March 2023, and the main aim was announced as to prevent the spread of further armed conflict in Europe by recognizing the Black Sea region as an arena of Russian aggression, *Vazrazhdane* reacted to it as follows:

They are dragging Bulgaria into a military conflict and limiting it to the Black Sea region. It is becoming increasingly clear that NATO is not protecting us but is preparing to turn us into another scorched-earth territory. It is becoming increasingly clear that behind NATO is the intention of a dying empire to destroy Bulgaria...

We at *Vazrazhdan* were the first to signal that the Americans wanted to build their base in Burgas Bay. We remind you that this base will be foreign territory, like all other American bases in our country, for which the U.S. does not pay rent, and the Bulgarian government has neither free access nor control. That is, we already have occupied territories.. The U.S. does not want the war to spread to Europe but to be limited here, that is, to include us...

...Obviously, the U.S. wants to be present in the Black Sea and is prioritizing systems for monitoring and intelligence on Russia's operations in the Black Sea region (*Възраждане* 2023).

Manifestations of anti-Americanism in Bulgaria intensified during the election of the Patriarch of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in the summer of 2024. The Patriarch elected became Daniel (then Metropolitan of Vidin), who has openly supported the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine and is an ardent opponent of the autonomy of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (in December 2018, he condemned the Unification Council in Kyiv, calling it uncanonical). The presence of other candidates accused of serving together with Ukrainian "schismatics" in the election list caused considerable discussion. The media discussed that the U.S. would install (take) a patriarch under American control. The most active was the leader of the Bulgarian far-right *Vazrazhdane* (Revival party), Kostadin Kostadinov, who claimed his address to the Bulgarian President to convene the Advisory Council on National Security. Kostadinov 's rhetoric was about external intervention, directly from the U.S., which aims to place a patriarch subordinate to itself at the head of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (Костадинов 2024). He saw the main danger for Bulgaria and Bulgarian state security in possible schism with the Russian Church as the largest Orthodox Church.

We have to mention that these anti-American voices are loud but not dominant in Bulgaria. Russian aggression to Ukraine and destabilization of the security situation in the Black Sea region influenced Bulgarian public opinion. GLOBSEC survey in February 2024 shows that while the Bulgarian audience is divided in their attitudes toward the question of who is primarily responsible for the war in Ukraine: Russia (43.9%) or the West (34.4%), but in general support for NATO membership and the perception of the U.S. as Sofia's crucial strategic partner rise (Filipova 2024).

According to the to the "NATO Audience Research: pre-Summit polling results" conducted in April–May 2024, pro-NATO attitudes increased in Bulgaria: 66% of Bulgarians consider Russia's war against Ukraine may have affected the safety and security of their country (in 2022, it was 61%); 66% agree their country to remain a member of NATO (excluding 'don't know' responses, 62% in 2022); 69% consider the Alliance to be necessary for the future security of their country (63% in 2022), 56% think their country is more safe as a result of cooperation between North American and European NATO nations (52% in 2022) (NATO 2024).

Other research confirms this tendency, e.g., similar pro-Western trends shows findings from a nationally representative poll by the Alpha Research Agency for the Humanitarian and Social Research Foundation conducted in May 2024. In Bulgaria, support for NATO membership has soared since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with approval rising from 28% to 40% over the past seven years, taking into account all the positives and negatives of this (Nikolov 2024). The recent survey also points to growing support for the EU, declining support for Russia, and increasing disapproval of Vladimir Putin. In 2024, 33.7% of Bulgarians have a negative view of Russia, compared to just 8.2% in 2018. Putin's image in Bulgaria has also suffered considerably. It has fallen from 45.2% in 2018 to 22.1% in 2024. Currently, 49.5% of Bulgarians have a negative view of Putin. He is no longer seen as a "peacemaker" but as "an unimaginable entity that can take any arbitrary action without respecting the human rights and national sovereignty of other countries" (ALPHA Research 2024).

The data for 2024 show 61% support for Bulgaria's European belonging and EU membership, while only 16% disapprove. Experts comment that the increase of these indicators appeared due to the war in Ukraine, which has helped many Bulgarian citizens realize the possible damage of leaving the EU.

Therefore, as positive sentiment towards Bulgaria's membership in NATO and the EU increases, the basis for anti-Western, anti-NATO, and anti-American views decreases. Bulgarian respondents remain firmly committed to EU membership, while pro-Russian attitudes are also entrenched as ambivalence in assessing responsibility for the Kremlin's war against Ukraine continues unabated (Filipova 2024).

4. ROMANIA

Relations between the United States and Romania started in 1881 when the United States recognized the Kingdom of Romania as an independent state. Diplomatic relations were severed on December 12, 1941, when Romania declared war on the United States, and

were reestablished on October 1, 1946 (United States Department of State, Romania). During the Cold War, communist authorities led Romania, and they had a strained relationship with the United States. They vacillated from warm to cold. In the 1960s, with Romania's distancing from the Soviets after the invasion of Czechoslovakia (1968), U.S.-Romanian relations improved. Still, in the 1980s, the violence of human rights in Romania caused criticisms from the U.S., and this had an impact on the strained character of bilateral relations. (U.S. Embassy in Romania).

Relations improved and strengthened since December 1989 when Romanians unseated the Communist regime, and Romania's policies became pro-Western. Romania was the first country to join NATO's Partnership for Peace program in January 1994. In 1997, a strategic partnership between the U.S. and Romania was initiated, and it became a start for further western orientation of Romanian foreign policy and Romania's integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures. Partnership with the U.S. and cooperation with the European Union (EU) and NATO are considered a "strategic conceptual triad" of Romania's foreign policy. (Președintele României). So, two of the three pillars are closely connected with the United States. Romania joined the U.S. in the fight against terrorism, contributed to multinational forces in Afghanistan.

Official Romanian policy is very pro-American. Close cooperation with the U.S. within Strategic Partnership and NATO (for example, the Agreement on the deployment of the U.S. ballistic missile defense system in Romania) is interpreted as bolstering of defense and deterrence posture on NATO's Eastern Flank, where the Black Sea is considered as strategically crucial for transatlantic security (*Joint Statement* 2019).

Romanian researcher Gabriel C. Gherasim notes that the majority of Romanian citizens are much more favorable to the United States than the majority in other European countries. It is hardly possible to find a comprehensive study exclusively or thematically dedicated to anti-Americanism in Romania (Gherasim 2015: 172). However, we can still find critical attitudes toward the U.S. In his analysis, Gabriel C. Gherasim singles out four main dimensions of anti-Americanism in Romania: (1) cultural and ideological (prejudices about the United States and its people); (2) economic (the economic impact of the United States' interests in worldwide affairs and on the Romanian economy); (3) psychological (misconceptions about liberal mentalities and practices); (4) religious (mainstream Orthodox religious tradition which instills a set of beliefs and behaviors at odds with the United States' religious and secular traditions of thought).

The age criteria can make a primary division of the supporters or critics of America in Romania: more or less conscious anti-Americanism is much more widespread in the attitudes of Romanian citizens over 40 years of age, so anti-American attitudes divide middle-aged and elderly citizens from their young counterparts who usually favorable, seduced and/or positive in their perceptions of the United States. Gherasim assessed the nature of Romanian anti-Americanism as fundamentally ambivalent and affective which he explained as follows:

culturally and politically, Romanians are caught between a relatively intuitive admiration for the American enthusiasm for success and their commitment to self-

fulfillment and a certain kind of contempt regarding their naivety and shallowness. (Gherasim 2015: 181)

Factors that can cause critical or negative attitudes towards the U.S. in Romania can include the following: discrepancy between the attractiveness of the “American dream” ideology and its effectiveness in the real world; reverent attitudes towards the military capabilities of the United States and considering it as a potentially harmful source of global insecurity. Nevertheless, the Romanian need for security evacuates criticism and resentment about the destructive potential of American ‘militarism’.

The Romanians’ commitment to NATO is primarily influenced by their fear of Russia and the weak capabilities of the Romanian armed forces in confronting present-day challenges. The greatest danger to Romania is the prospect of a second Belarus, i.e., a Russian dominated neighbor, in Moldova wedged between Ukraine and Romania, with a Russian-sponsored enclave Transnistria, and war in Ukraine (when the Black Sea and territories on the border are on the potential attacks. That is why there is a consensus in Romanian society towards NATO, which in other post-Soviet states can be one of the debate factors.

Let’s look through the results of some surveys – to find out the presence or absence of any anti-American sentiments.

The 2018 survey presented the following (AVANGARDE 2018): on the question “Please tell us which of these countries you would like us to have the closest relations with?” the U.S. occupied the first place (with 37%), second was Germany (25%), third France (11%). At the same time, attitudes towards then-president Trump were not so favorable. He was third with 29% positive opinion after Emmanuel Macron (38%) and Angela Merkel (37%). Trump also got the top place in the opinion “Neither good nor bad” 33%. In 2018, Romanians considered Russia the biggest enemy of Romania’s interests (such an answer on the open question gave 31% of the respondents, Hungary was second (9%), and the U.S. was third with 5%.

Attitudes towards a certain American president can also influence the rise or fall of negative perceptions of the U.S. E.g., during the first Trump presidency, inaccurate statements from the U.S. president and his general messages of distrust in the traditional media negatively contributed to Romania’s already unstable informational environment (Ioan 2020).

The majority of Romanians (53%) supported the opinion that NATO military presence in Romania “should remain the same as now”, 33% even support a possible increase in the number of military personnel, and only 14% consider the variant to reduce the number of soldiers. 74% approve that the U.S. should continue to be Romania’s leading strategic partner (in the questionnaire, such a question was only about the United States). Romanians also support American influence on Romanian domestic policy: 87% consider that American ambassadors have to continue supporting the fight against political corruption launched by the DNA (while in other countries with a higher level of anti-Americanism, such activities for sure would be qualified for interference into the domestic policy) (AVANGARDE 2018).

The potential threat from Russia (as Romania shares a border with both Ukraine and Moldova, states that have experienced Russia's military threat in practical terms) caused the location of the largest NATO military base in Europe in Romania. This country is significant for the EU and NATO strategically, but the West can only benefit from it if the local population believes their country's membership in the Western institutional system and the respect for the rule of law and fundamental rights is beneficial to them.

Romanian support for NATO membership significantly exceeded, likely as a result of Russia's unprovoked aggression against Ukraine: in 2021, 77% of Romanians supported staying in NATO; in 2022 – 80%; in 2023 – 89%; in 2024 – 88% (Szicherle 2024: 9). This increasing support also translated to an increase in the proportion of Romanians who agree that their NATO membership lowers the chance that a foreign nation would attack them. In 2022, 62% agreed with such an assertion; in 2022, 73%, and in 2024 – 78% (Szicherle 2024: 10).

When it comes to strategic partners for Romanians, the U.S. is rated on the top: in 2021, 47% of Romanians consider the U.S. as the most important strategic partner (Germany was second with 42%); in 2022 – 75% (the same year the United Kingdom was second with 23%, Germany and France got 19% each), in 2023 and 2024 the percentage come a little bit down – 53%, but still, the U.S. was considered as the most important partner (Szicherle 2024: 11). The biggest security threat was Russia (in 2020 – 30%, 2022 – 58%, 2023 – 64%, and 2024 – 73%). But at the exact moment, certain percentages of Romanians view the U.S. as a threat: in 2020 – 15%; in 2022 – 14%; in 2023 – 11%; in 2024, once more, 14% (Szicherle 2024: 12).

Main Romanian political parties support the growth of Romania's authority at the NATO level and the development of a strategic partnership with the United States, including the increase in the American military presence in Romania. Parties of the center-left (Social Democrats) and center-right (National Liberals) have swapped control peacefully and even governed together for a time. That is why Romania is considered America's and the EU's indispensable ally in Eastern Europe.

There are no openly anti-American or anti-European/anti-Western parties in Romania. The far-right Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) formed in 2019, which, in the elections of 2024, unexpectedly took second place, does not call for withdrawal from NATO. AUR declares that it would like Romania to be a leader in Central and Eastern Europe within the European Union and to integrate the Republic of Moldova into Romania. The party describes itself as pro-NATO and views the integration of Moldova into Romania as strengthening NATO's eastern flank. AUR also is criticizing NATO and EU's help to Ukraine with narratives that are very close to the Russian ones. That is why the central question of the Romanian elections 2024 was the alternative to switch the vector of the development from the West to the East, Putin's Russia (Bran 2024).

Frustration with the EU, NATO, or democracy already exists in Romania. It was caused by the long process of becoming a full member of the border-free Schengen area, concerns about inflation, economic problems, the war in Ukraine, and the effects of EU green policies. Such frustration creates a danger of establishing authoritarian-minded authorities, which can fuel the rise of local extremist Eurosceptic political forces. In

Romania, the emerging far-right Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) is not pro-Kremlin because they consider Russia a threat to Romania. However, they disseminate anti-West, illiberal, and anti-EU narratives that could alienate Romania from its allies. Some of its members did take pro-Kremlin positions, for instance, when they called for the “return” of some Ukrainian regions to Romania (Szicherle 2024).

The manifestations of anti-American sentiment in recent years have been linked to Russian propaganda and disinformation in the Romanian information space. Russia's primary goals are to weaken trust in NATO and to incite anti-Western, particularly anti-American and Eurosceptic sentiments (Linden 2024). An example of such disinformation is the article by the well-known Romanian journalist Claudia Marcu, dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the strategic partnership between the United States and Romania, “Strategic Partnership with the U.S. 25 years of NOTHING” in the “National Newspaper”. In this article she speaks of the complete helplessness of Romania's Strategic Partnership with the U.S. and, as a result, only the transformation of Romania into an importer of American weapons (Marcu 2022). This article caused a negative resonance in Romanian society. Although it was recognized as disinformation and its author was openly pro-Russian, it received support from a particular group of citizens. The negative resonance in Romanian society shows that most citizens reject such information. However, even a tiny audience supporting such views can contribute to spreading disinformation and destabilization (Necșuțu 2022).

5. CONCLUSION

As the Black Sea region is regarded in the U.S. as a barrier against Russian expansionism, and the region is an important trade and export route for American partners' food commodities and energy, the issue of the perceptions of the U.S. in the littoral states is an essential factor of (in)stability in the region.

Türkiye has experienced a significant evolution in its attitudes towards the United States, marked by distinct peaks of anti-American sentiment. Initially, during the Cold War, Türkiye was a staunch ally of the U.S., primarily due to the shared goal of containing Soviet influence. However, the late 1960s and early 2000s saw notable anti-Americanism emerge, driven by events such as the Iraq War and perceived U.S. disregard for Turkish interests. The failed military coup in 2016 further exacerbated negative sentiments, with a substantial portion of the Turkish population viewing the U.S. as a threat. Despite these challenges, Türkiye continues to navigate a complex relationship with the U.S., balancing its NATO commitments with growing ties to Russia, particularly in the context of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

Bulgaria presents a hybrid landscape of attitudes towards the U.S., characterized by historical and religious ties to Russia and a complex relationship with NATO. Following the end of communism, Bulgaria sought closer ties with the West, joining NATO in 2004 and receiving significant U.S. assistance. However, anti-American sentiments persisted, particularly among nationalist groups like the Ataka party, which capitalized on economic grievances and historical Russophile sentiments. The Russian aggression against Ukraine

in 2014 further complicated Bulgaria's stance, leading to increased anti-Western narratives while simultaneously fostering a pro-NATO consensus among the broader population. Before the full-scale invasion to Ukraine, Bulgarian society remain hostile to the U.S. and sympathetic towards Russia. But surveys of 2022–2024 indicate a growing support for NATO and a decline in pro-Russian attitudes, suggesting a shift in public opinion influenced by regional security concerns.

Romania has maintained a generally favorable view of the United States, particularly after the fall of communism, which led to a strategic partnership with the U.S. and NATO membership. Romanian society largely supports American influence, viewing the U.S. as a crucial ally in the face of Russian aggression. However, critical attitudes do exist, often linked to perceptions of American foreign policy and military presence. The ongoing war in Ukraine has reinforced Romania's commitment to NATO, with public support for membership rising significantly in recent years. Despite some anti-American sentiments fueled by disinformation and dissatisfaction with domestic issues, Romania's political landscape remains predominantly pro-American, reflecting a consensus among major political parties to strengthen ties with the U.S. and enhance national security.

In summary, the evolution of anti-Americanism in Türkiye, Bulgaria, and Romania is shaped by historical legacies, geopolitical dynamics, and internal political factors. While Türkiye grapples with mixed sentiments and a balancing act between the U.S. and Russia, Bulgaria's public opinion reflects a complex interplay of pro-European aspirations and historical ties to Russia. Romania, on the other hand, showcases a predominantly favorable attitude towards the U.S., driven by security concerns and a commitment to NATO, despite some critical voices. The ongoing Russian aggression in Ukraine has further influenced these dynamics, highlighting the strategic importance of the Black Sea region in U.S. foreign policy.

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THE FATAL COMBINATION: HOW DEMOCRACY DIED IN RUSSIA AND HOW IT MAY SURVIVE IN UKRAINE

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DOI: 10.36169/2227-6068.2024.02.00012

Abstract. *This article presents a comparative examination of de- and re-democratization processes in Russia and Ukraine, utilizing the concept of patronalism to delineate distinct regime types: patronal democracy and patronal autocracy, in contrast to Western-style liberal democracy. The analysis emphasizes the critical factors leading to the decline of democracy, specifically the monopolization of political power and the patronalization of social networks – the so-called “fatal combination.” In Russia, these factors converged under Vladimir Putin’s leadership, resulting in the death of democracy even before the war began. In contrast, while Ukraine has faced recurring autocratic attempts, the fatal combination has not fully materialized, though it has led to cyclical regime dynamics. The article concludes by examining the structural consequences of the war: “the good news” (potential anti-patronal transformation in Ukraine), “the bad news” (the rise of dictatorship in Russia and the threat of autocracy under Volodymyr Zelensky), and “the hope” (the elements indicating Ukraine’s long-term transition from patronal to liberal democracy).*

Keywords: *de-democratization, patronal democracy, patronal autocracy, regime cycles, informality*

Submitted: 13 March 2024; **accepted:** 3 July 2024

War is a state of exception. In a country that suffers a full-scale invasion, all aspects of the regime – society, economy, and politics – are subordinated to the needs of national defense. Power is centralized in the hands of the dominant political force organizing the defense; elections are not conducted; political competition is suspended. War overrides democracy.

But what happens after the war? Can democracy return? Ukraine has been in a state of exception, as described above, for three years now, since February 24, 2022, and the prolongation of the war is making more and more people to wonder what is left of Ukrainian democracy. Of course, Ukraine has never been a perfect liberal democracy and has consistently scored low in various international rankings on indicators such as the rule of law and corruption. However, it hasn't been Russia either. Ukraine did not develop the kind of single-pyramid rule that characterized Putin's regime but instead maintained a competitive, multi-pyramid system. Whenever attempts to create a single-pyramid rule were made – most notably by presidents Leonid Kuchma and Viktor Yanukovych – they were resisted by the color revolutions. The Euromaidan Revolution of 2013 and the election of the charismatic, anti-oligarch president Volodymyr Zelensky in 2019 indicated that things were moving in a positive direction. During the invasion, Zelensky strengthened his social and international legitimacy and used his power to crack down on the Ukrainian oligarchs who were weakened by the ravages of war.

Zelensky is concentrating power and neutralizing the oligarchs in Ukraine. For many, this may sound familiar: Vladimir Putin, after seizing supermajority in the Duma elections of 2003, also concentrated power and neutralized the oligarchs in Russia. This was followed by the decline and eventual death of Russian democracy. The question is whether we should be concerned about a similar scenario in Ukraine. Is it not true that, in the aftermath of the war and the suspension of political competition, Zelensky is creating the single-pyramid system that none of his predecessors could achieve? Is Zelensky saving Ukraine at the expense of democracy?

The answer is both yes and no. Ukrainian democracy is at risk but has a good chance of survival. The main reason for this is that Zelensky's single-pyramid rule during the war, efforts toward de-oligarchization, and the social and historical context are markedly different from what we have seen in Putin's Russia. To explain this, we need to analyze the trajectories of the Ukrainian and Russian regimes in parallel. We will see that while Putin is steering Russia further towards dictatorship in the course of the war, the terrible destruction shaking Ukraine's political and economic system to its core also holds the potential to rid the country of its stubborn structures. This analysis not only sheds light on a salient issue – the structural consequences of the Russia-Ukraine war – but also provides an opportunity to classify two post-communist countries within a regime typology. By examining the processes of de-democratization, we can identify the combination of processes that is indeed fatal for democracies.

1. PATRONAL DEMOCRACY AND PATRONAL AUTOCRACY

Before the war, Ukraine was most in the spotlight during the period of the so-called color revolutions: the Orange Revolution of 2004 and the Euromaidan, or Revolution of Dignity, of 2013. Such revolts, the likes of which took place in other post-communist countries as well, were met with considerable optimism by Western observers. Mainstream comparative regime theory thinks in terms of a democracy-dictatorship axis: there are two polar types, Western-type, rule-of-law based liberal democracy and openly repressive, classical dictatorship; in between lies a broad “grey zone” with various “hybrid regimes,” “electoral democracies,” “competitive authoritarianisms,” and so on. Interpreted along this axis, the color revolutions appeared to be replacing a regime closer to the repressive pole with one closer to the free pole. Liberal democracy was apparently coming.

The failure to meet these expectations, along with the resurgence of corrupt regimes following most color revolutions (Pop-Eleches & Robertson 2014) suggests that the mainstream democracy-dictatorship axis is insufficient for understanding these countries. This approach focuses on surface-level factors, namely, the political institutions, and employs categories originally developed for liberal democracies. When we refer to “parties,” “party competition,” or even a “government” that extends its power in a way that threatens democracy, we are carrying over implicit assumptions from the Western liberal context that do not hold in the post-communist region.

Three such hidden axioms can be identified: (1) the spheres of social action (political, economic, and communal) are separated, autonomous, and their relationship is formalized, regulated, and transparent; (2) the *de jure* position of the actors coincides with their *de facto* position; and (3) the state, by definition, serves the common good, against which corruption or “bad policies” can only exist as deviations that the system seeks to eradicate. Challenging these axioms¹ reveals a very different world from that of liberal democracies. A world in which (1) economic actors possess informal political power (oligarchs) and political actors wield informal economic power (poligarchs); (2) legal status does not necessarily coincide with sociological reality, and one may lack autonomy over their constitutional or proprietary position; and (3) the state may, by definition, serve private interests rather than the public interest, elevating corruption from an offense to be prosecuted to a public policy.

The Ukrainian and Russian regimes differ in many ways, but they share one thing: the dominant presence of *patronalism*. It is to this phenomenon that the dissolving of the three axioms leads. The concept of patronalism was popularized by Henry Hale in his book *Patronal Politics*, which focused on regime dynamics in the post-Soviet region (Hale 2015). In our work, we define patronalism, or the patron-client relationship, as a particular, hierarchical form of informality.

In patronal regimes, decision-making is removed from formal decision-making bodies. Decisions are not made by the parties, their executive committees, or their formal memberships; rather, they occur within informal circles lacking formal membership. In

¹ For a more detailed exposition, see Magyar & Madlovics (2022).

pre-war Ukraine, what appeared to be a competition between parties was, in fact a competition among informal patronal networks in the guise of parties. Ukrainian scholar Mikhail Minakov (2019) calls them political-economic “clans”; in our terminology, they are referred to as *adopted political families*. Members of the adopted political family consist of both individuals holding formal positions of power (such as presidents, members of parliament, judges, prosecutors, heads of state-owned companies, etc.) and those who do not (heads of private companies, oligarchs, criminal groups, church leaders, etc.). The head of the family is the chief patron, and the loyalty to and dependence on them binds the informal web of adopted family members together in a broadly pyramidal, patron-client hierarchy. This network, and in particular the inner circle or “court” of the chief patron, uses the parties: they are not autonomous entities but transmission belts, relaying the chief patron’s informal agenda into the formal realm of politics.

Ukraine is a multi-pyramid system with several adopted political families. Even prior to the regime change, the country showed elements of patronal politics within the state party. Three regional groups from Kharkiv, Stalino/Donetsk, and Dnepropetrovsk represented the three largest party units and industrial clusters, providing factional competition and alternately occupying the positions of First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party and Chairperson of the Council of Ministers. A system of competing patronal networks grew out of these roots after the country became independent in 1991. Minakov outlines the positions controlled by the Ukrainian adopted political families as follows. In the Dnipropetrovsk group, the informal patronal network of the Privat Group has controlled separate members of parliament (MPs), parliamentary parties and factions (since 1998), deputy heads of the National Bank, as well as managers and board members of state-owned gas and oil companies. Meanwhile, the Kuchma-Pinchuk network has controlled separate MPs, deputy ministers, and vice-general prosecutors (since 2005).

In contrast, the Donetsk regional group is comprised of “old” adopted political families that have controlled the Party of Regions, vice prime ministers, governors, MPs, separate ministers and deputy ministers, the Tax Administration, etc.; “new” families that have controlled governors and mayors of Donetsk (1996-2014), positions in the Party of Regions, Opposition Bloc, separate MPs, parliamentary factions (from 1998), prosecutors general, separate ministers etc.; and some smaller networks that have controlled the judiciary and separate courts, the Central Electoral Commission, various ministers, and state-owned companies (Minakov 2019: 234–37).

Furthermore, decisions within an adopted political family are not made by collective bodies but by individuals, with the chief patron and sub-patrons acting under their authority. The political, economic, and communal resources belonging to the family are not controlled through the bureaucratic chains familiar from communist dictatorship but through personal, clientelist chains. The essence of the clients’ dependence on the chief patron is that he or she is able (or perceived to be able) to turn normative regulations into discretionary regulations. This means using corruption as a disciplinary tool: the chief patron can control law enforcers to selectively apply or ignore the law in a targeted, tailored manner, or, in some cases, if he controls lawmakers, to custom-tailor the rules to

punish or reward certain actors. What is referred to in Russian as *krysha*, meaning “roof,” is precisely this form of personal protection from the criminal consequences of informality that transgresses the law. While loyal clients benefit from *krysha* and targeted state benefits, disloyal, outsider, or hostile actors are subjected to official investigations, police or prosecutorial procedures, custom-tailored “lexes,” and other kinds of attacks (even black PR), suffering moral, material, and/or physical damage (Ledeneva 2006).

With such informal dynamics under the surface of formal politics, Ukraine is not a liberal democracy; it is a *patronal democracy* (Table 1). The regime that emerged after the post-communist transition following the country’s independence was not primarily driven by voter demands, ideologies, and party competition for power but by the twin motives of power and wealth of the rivaling adopted political families.

Table 1. Comparative summary of ideal-type liberal democracy, patronal democracy, and patronal autocracy

	Liberal democracy	Patronal democracy	Patronal autocracy
RULING ELITE	multi-pyramid non-patronal system	multi-pyramid informal patronal system	single-pyramid informal patronal system
	politicians autonomous MPs	politicians/poligarchs partially patronalized MPs	poligarchs patronalized MPs
	autonomous major entrepreneurs	autonomous oligarchs	dependent oligarchs
	autonomous elites democratic political elite	partially patronalized elites competing patronal political elites	patronalized elites monopolistic patronal political elite
STATE- BUSINESS RELATIONS	lobbying	state capture	oligarch capture
	corruption as non- structural deviation	corruption as structural deviation	corruption as system- constituting element
	free-market capitalism	patronal capitalism	mafia capitalism
SOCIAL DYNAMICS	free civil society	free civil society	subjugated civil society
	legitimacy challenger is an anomaly	legitimacy challenger is a norm	accomplished legitimacy challenge
	stable equilibrium of competing political parties (democratic consolidation)	dynamic equilibrium of competing patronal networks (regime cycles)	stable equilibrium of a single-pyramid patronal network (autocratic consolidation)

In contrast, Russia is a *patronal autocracy* rather than a non-patronal conservative autocracy that would focus solely on monopolizing power in the political sphere. At first, Russian oligarchs were the patrons while politicians served as the clients. Despite President Boris Yeltsin's attempt to build an own patronal pyramid by mobilizing regional political machines and financial-industrial groups in the 1996 elections, he ruled under the shadow of oligarchs like Vladimir Gusinsky and Boris Berezovsky, who owned substantial media empires, as well as Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the country's wealthiest man who controlled much of Russia's natural resources as the CEO of Yukos oil company. Putin's infamous crackdown on the oligarchs – exiling Gusinsky and Berezovsky and imprisoning Khodorkovsky after 2003 – signaled his reversal of the patron-client roles and captured the oligarchs rather than being dependent on them. He became the chief patron of the Russian regime, with enormous inequality in power vis-à-vis his clients. The resulting elite structure, which persists today despite numerous crises, is a *single-pyramid patronal network*. Instead of a competitive landscape of multiple adopted political families, there is only one adopted political family comprising Putin's security forces (*siloviki*), the top federal bureaucracy, and the oligarchs. All competing forces have been subjugated, marginalized, or eliminated.

Figures 1-2 show the regime trajectories of Russia and Ukraine. The democracy-dictatorship axis is expanded into a triangle, which now contains three polar types of regimes: liberal democracy, communist dictatorship, and patronal autocracy. In between are the intermediate types: patronal democracy, conservative autocracy, and market-exploiting dictatorship. Countries move in this conceptual space spanned by the polar types, which are defined along political dimensions (plurality of power networks, the ruling party's function, etc.), economic dimensions (dominant coordination mechanism, corruption, etc.), and social dimensions (autonomy of civil society, etc.). The triangle was divided along each dimension and projected onto each other, giving for each point in the triangle the regime it represents according to all dimensions.¹ Intuitively, understanding how the triangle works can be achieved by considering the three polar types as *language-forming poles*. These are the regimes that require an independent language, that is, their own words and grammar, to describe them. In liberal democracy, you find terms like “politician,” “political party,” and “capitalist entrepreneur”; in a communist dictatorship, you encounter “cadre,” “nomenklatura,” and “state enterprise manager”; and in patronal autocracy, you have “oligarch,” “adopted political family,” and “oligarch,” respectively. The grammar, meaning the conceptual framework for each system, is drawn from the relationship between the various actors and institutions, which denotes a *sui generis* structure. Once we identify the “primary languages” of the polar types, we can mix the secondary languages of the intermediate types from them. Similar to a color wheel, where an intermediate color can be mixed from two primary colors (for example, orange from yellow and red), the language of patronal democracy combines the languages of its two neighbors: plural and competitive liberal democracy (“multi-pyramid”) and corruption-driven patronal autocracy (“informal patronalism”).

¹ The dimensions and the exact functioning of the triangle can be observed on our website in the form a 3D interactive model. See <https://www.postcommunistregimes.com/3d-trajectories/>.

Figure 1. Modeled trajectory of Russia (1964–2022)

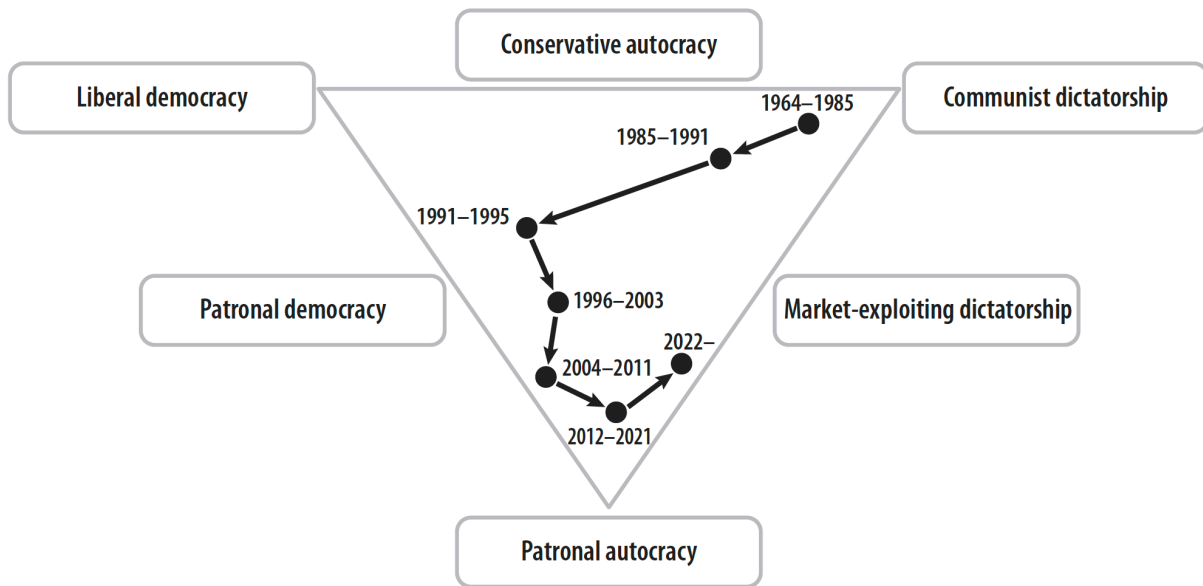
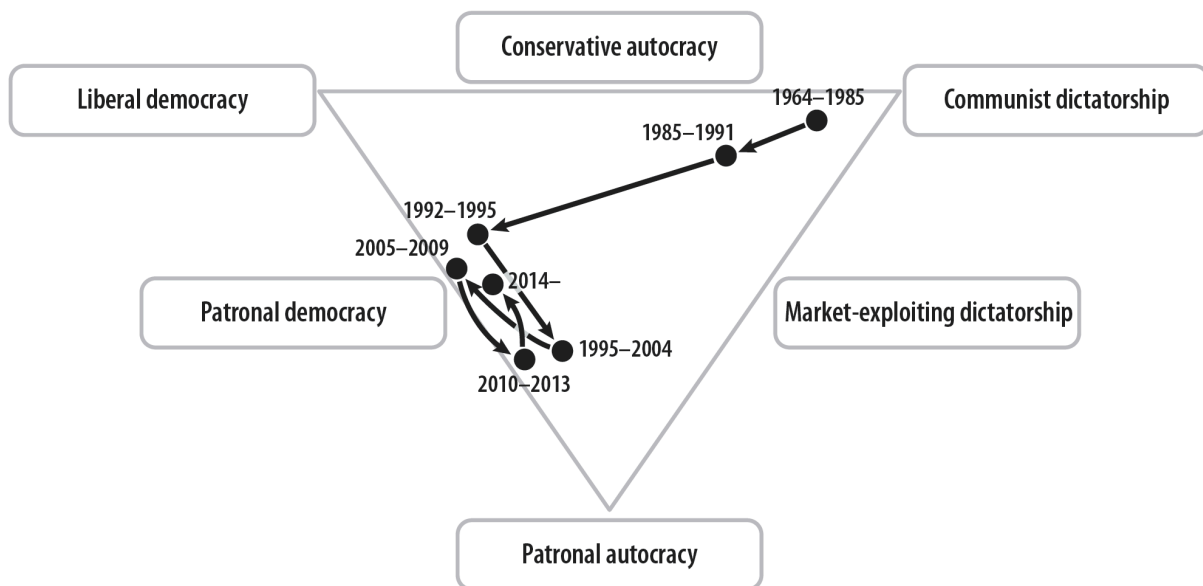


Figure 2. Modeled trajectory of Ukraine (1964–2022)



Source: Magyar and Madlovics (2022).

The trajectories show that Russia and Ukraine – unlike countries like Estonia, Poland, or Hungary – have never transitioned into liberal democracies. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, they moved towards patronal regimes. In Ukraine, a patronal democracy was created, which, despite attempts to create a single-pyramid rule did not become an autocracy but operated in a state of dynamic equilibrium. In Russia, this kind of equilibrium could not be sustained, leading to the emergence of a patronal autocracy. The question is what causes this divergence. If both regimes are patronal and both possess informal, oligarchic stubborn structures, what has enabled democracy in Ukraine to survive while it perished in Russia? The answer lies in the different levels of autocratization and in the emergence, or absence, of what is the fatal combination for

democracy: the monopolization of political power and the patronalization of social networks.

2. THE FATAL COMBINATION: THREE STAGES OF AUTOCRATIZATION

Democracy is always at risk within a patronal democracy. Attacking the institutions and “the rules of the game” instead of abiding by them is not an anomaly but rather the norm. This occurs because whichever patronal network comes to power, under whatever ideological banner it flies, ultimately wants the same thing: to maximize its power and access to resources. The fundamental obstacles to this at the level of state power include constitutional institutions, such as the machinery of checks and balances, and the danger that rival adopted political families can remove them from power through elections. Moreover, as the Ukrainian example shows, rival networks exercise parallel control over different parts of the state, which means that opposition networks consistently engage in partial state capture alongside the ruling network. It is this limited and precarious situation that the ruling network seeks to overcome, ensuring the fulfillment of its power and wealth objectives. Indeed, it wants single-pyramid rule: the ruling network always aims to replace patronal democracy with patronal autocracy.

Such attempts have been made in Ukraine under all the adopted political families, but under the presidencies of Viktor Yushchenko and Petro Poroshenko they were not strong enough to pose a systemic challenge to the democratic system (Fisun and Movchan 2023). Such a challenge was posed by the two presidents whose rule ended in a color revolution – Leonid Kuchma (1994–2005) and Viktor Yanukovich (2010–2014). During his first presidential term, Kuchma essentially coerced parliament into changing the constitution into a fully presidential model and formed a pact with the emerging oligarchs that allowed him to concentrate economic power and media control. Once in power, Yanukovich repealed the 2006 constitutional amendment that limited presidential powers and, alongside his disciplined parliamentary faction, began integrating the patronal networks of other positions of power (represented by the Reforms for the Future parliamentary faction, the United Center party, as well as former presidents Poroshenko and Yushchenko) into his newly adopted political family. The “Family,” as it was also colloquially called in Ukraine, included actors with no formal power as well, such as Yanukovich’s son Oleksandr, who became one of the wealthiest oligarchs in the country during this period.

Their presidencies are marked in the Ukrainian trajectory by the arrows pointing “downwards,” towards patronal autocracy. But they were followed by arrows pointing “upwards” as well, meaning their attempts to break democracy down were reversed. This was made possible by the fact that only a relatively early stage of autocratization was reached.

We can distinguish three phases of autocratization: (1) the autocratic attempt, (2) the autocratic breakthrough, and (3) the autocratic consolidation. An *autocratic attempt* involves a series of formal institutional changes aimed at breaking down checks and balances and eliminating the separation of powers. Court packing, replacing the heads of

civil courts, taking over prosecution with clients, weakening local governments, rewriting electoral rules to favor a majoritarian direction, and amending the constitution to expand the competencies of the executive all belong to the arsenal of an autocratic attempt.

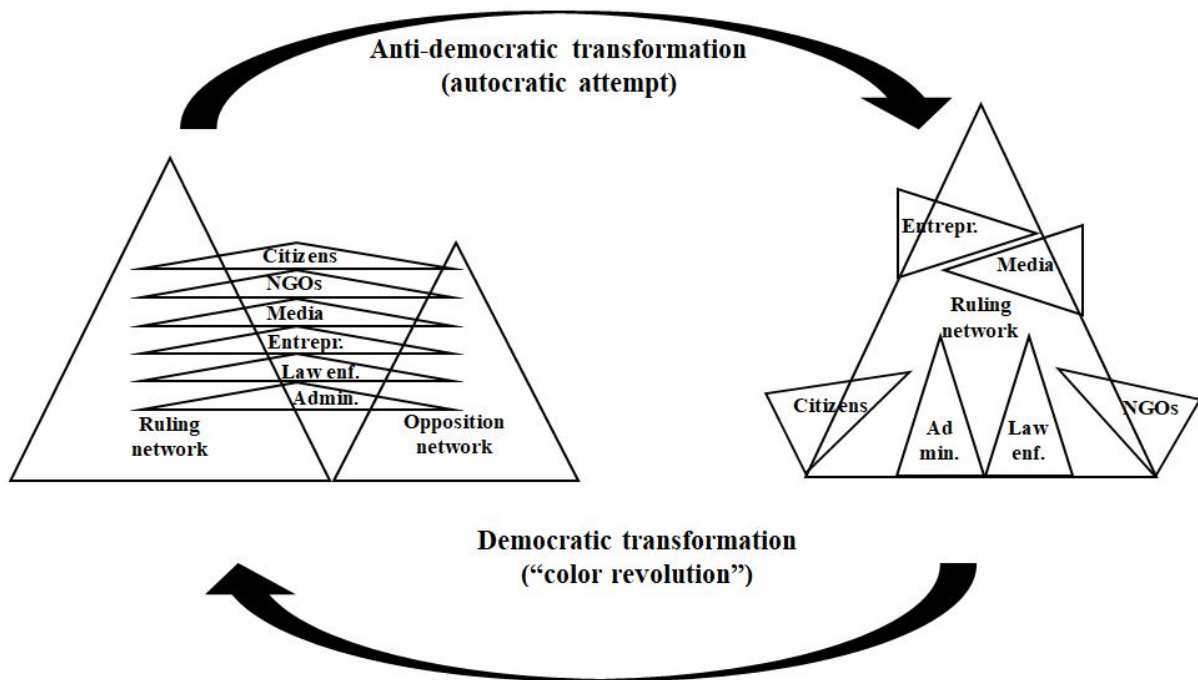
The success of an autocratic attempt mainly depends on one factor: whether the would-be autocrat gets the monopoly on political power, typically by winning the elections with a supermajority. This gives them the power to change the constitution, modify the electoral system, and appoint the heads of institutions that provide checks and balances unilaterally (i.e., without the consent of the opposition). They do not *de jure* abolish the separation of powers but *de facto* connect them through their competences of appointment in a single patron-client vertical. This is the moment when we can discuss the autocratic breakthrough following an *autocratic attempt*.

The third and final step is *autocratic consolidation*. This lengthy process in which the autocrat destroys the sociological foundation of democratic pluralism: the autonomy of competing elite groups (effective opposition) and civil society (potential opposition). The former includes the opposition parties in a liberal democracy, the adopted political families in a patronal democracy; the latter, in the broader sense of civil society, includes the four groups that control politically relevant resources. These comprise entrepreneurs (material resources), the media (publicity), NGOs (watchdog functions), and citizens (civil liberties). While competing elites actively challenge the ruling network, it is civil society's autonomous resources that allow new alternative power centers to arise. Therefore, in cases of co-optation of the opposition, there remains the possibility for new competitors to enter the political arena.

While autocratic breakthrough means the monopolization of political power, autocratic consolidation refers to the patronalization of social networks. Patronalization involves replacing autonomous positions with positions dependent on the chief patron and their ruling network. The means of submission are varied and can be more than just direct: like a chokehold in wrestling, where the opponent can breathe if he stays still, but if he starts to move, the arm around his neck tightens. It is possible to exist under the radar, but in the case of political activism, the arsenal of patronal politics is activated, based on the gradual creation of situations of institutional, financial and personal dependency (Magyar & Madlovics 2022: 141–49, 177–79).

Rendering autonomous existence economically unviable in both the public and private spheres undermines both effective and potential opposition, thereby creating an unchallenged autocracy. In other words, the completion of autocratic consolidation eliminates the possibility of comeback to democracy through elections. This is *the fatal combination* for democracy: the monopolization of political power neutralizes limits within the state (such as the separation of powers), while the patronalization of social networks neutralizes limits outside the state (including effective and potential opposition). This is illustrated on the right side of Figure 3, where a single-pyramid patronal network controls all state actors along with the dominant part of civil society.

Figure 3. The structure of multi-pyramid and single-pyramid patronal networks and regime cycles



The fatal combination took shape in Russia, which became a patronal autocracy under Putin. An autocratic breakthrough was achieved after the 2003 parliamentary elections. Having reformed the state to regain strength, Putin's United Russia party secured an absolute majority, which was expanded by the "purchase" of non-party deputies to form a constitutional majority. In this way, the monopolization component of the fatal combination was effectively achieved. In the following years, this was further reinforced by institutional manipulation, electoral fraud, and state violence, escalating after the 2012 post-election protests in Moscow. Among the individuals who mobilized the masses, Boris Nemtsov was assassinated in 2015, while Alexei Navalny was sentenced to prison in 2013, survived an attempted poisoning in 2020, and died in a Siberian penal colony in 2024.

Putin's single-pyramid network took control of most of the politically relevant institutional and financial resources in Russia from 2003 to 2012. The crackdown on oligarchs on the one hand and the repressive measures limiting the room for maneuver of independent media, entrepreneurs, NGOs, and citizens on the other led to autocratic consolidation. The regime also made a sustained effort to counter foreign sources that were independent and the autonomies they might create. This process culminated in 2012, when a series of repressive laws and amendments were passed by the State Duma, most notably the addition of a "foreign agent" clause to the NGO law and the ban on foreign bank accounts and financial assets for legislators and high-ranking officials. As the regime tightened its grip, the autonomies of civil society eroded (Yavlinsky 2019). In

the 2016 and 2021 Duma elections, United Russia's constitutional majority was secured through even more serious vote-rigging than before, reinforcing the sense in society that the regime cannot be replaced through elections.

In Ukraine, the fatal combination was not realized. This is because the structure of a patronal democracy resembles the left side of Figure 3 rather than the right side. There is not one adopted political family that is dominant, but several; and although the state is captured by the adopted political families, none of them controls the entire polity. The fact that none of them has monopoly power, that each can only use a limited range of instruments of public authority, and that each patron's position is dependent on political turns allows actors independent of them to maintain a greater degree of autonomy. Figure 3 schematically depicts on the left side the competing pyramids (two for simplicity: the ruling and the opposition), along with the partly patronalized yet partly autonomous groups in between them. These groups include state actors, administration, and law enforcement on one side, and the four groups of civil society on the other. The fact that they are not subject to a patronal network gives them room for maneuver and the possibility to use their resources in defense against attempts to break democracy. Ukrainian oligarchs too enjoyed considerably more autonomy than Russian ones, and the empowered oligarch-controlled parliament guaranteed that poligarchs could be kept in check (Markus 2017).

Democracy in Ukraine endured because, under such circumstances, the ruling adopted political families could only make autocratic attempts, and even in the cases of Kuchma and Yanukovych, who approached an autocratic breakthrough, true autocratic consolidation was not attainable. Despite their efforts at patronalization, civil society and the opposition networks, and oligarchs maintained a great degree of autonomy and were able to resist. This allowed for the reversal of autocratization through electoral or extra-electoral restitution, such as the color revolutions.

Only one element of Figure 3 remains unexplained: the arrows connecting the multi-pyramid and single-pyramid settings. They indicate *regime cycles*, the cyclical alternation between autocratic and democratic movements. The challenge of the color revolutions – the problem that eluded Western observers focused on formal politics – lies here: There was a democratic transformation but no anti-patronal transformation. The ruling network was defeated, yet the opposition networks remained. Political families, oligarchs, the stubborn structures remained. Although revolutionary movements marched under slogans of democracy, transparency, and anti-corruption, behind the masses' democratic aspirations lay the political, financial, and media resources of the to-be suppressed oligarchs and networks. After the revolution, another party came to power, still backed by an adopted political family; it aimed to break down democracy just like its predecessor did; and when its autocratic attempt failed, the regime returned to Square One. The pendulum-like movement of the Ukrainian trajectory illustrates this. Ukraine did not become a patronal autocracy, but it also could not transition to liberal democracy either.

3. THE GOOD NEWS: THE END OF REGIME CYCLES IN UKRAINE

What is the impact of the war on the Ukrainian regime? Can such an external shock break decades of regime cycles? In fact, there were anti-patronal attempts even before the full-scale invasion, especially after the Revolution of Dignity. First, the revolution brought a change in the role of the people and civil society in Ukraine's political system. While they had been overshadowed by the adopted political families before, they now wanted "a seat at the table," that is, to be involved in decision-making. Increasing social activism manifested in the mushrooming of anti-corruption NGOs in Ukraine, yielding initiatives like ProZorro, a digital platform developed by non-governmental actors and businesses providing radical transparency in public procurement (Huss 2023). Second, the decentralization reform of 2014 empowered local self-government and reinforced the autonomy of *oblasts* and regional power networks in relation to the central government. Third, the anti-patronal agenda was elevated to the rank of central politics with the landslide victory of Volodymyr Zelensky in 2019.

Zelensky is the first anti-patronal president of post-communist Ukraine. Although he was supported by an oligarch, Ihor Kolomoyskyi, he rose to power without being a chief patron himself or backed by an adopted political family. He introduced an anti-oligarch law in 2021 and pushed for several restrictions on oligarchs, such as prohibiting them from financing political parties, acquiring large-scale privatization assets, submitting e-declarations, and facing increased taxes. However, the battle was far from over at this point. Zelensky's anti-patronal efforts resulted in conflicts with oligarchs and other representatives of the stubborn structures of Ukrainian patronalism. Before 2022, the success of the anti-patronal attempt was highly uncertain.

The full-scale invasion brought terrible human and material damage, but it also tipped the balance in favor of anti-patronal forces in Ukraine. First, the oligarchs suffered heavy losses in the war, losing a significant part of their wealth, assets, and markets. Some of them, like Rinat Akhmetov, the country's wealthiest man, even support defensive efforts by launching lines for the production of military goods, acquisition and supply of military equipment and disbursing hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of aid to the Ukrainian military and civilian residents (Burakovsky & Yukhymenko 2023). The oligarchs choose wisely: even an anti-patronal president is better for them compared to Putin, a patronal autocrat whose oligarchs occupy a subordinate position (not to mention the mysterious deaths of several Russian oligarchs over the past three years (Petrov 2023: 8).

Second, as the state shifts into war mode and power is centralized, Zelensky introduces more severe anti-oligarch measures than before, including the nationalization of key assets formerly in the hands of oligarchs. The full-scale invasion brought a significant increase in Zelensky's popular legitimacy: according to the Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index, the average trust of the Ukrainian population in the President, on a scale of 1 to 10, rose from 3.3 to 7.9 between 2021 and 2022, respectively.¹

¹ Data from the polls of Center for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD). Available at <https://www.scoreforpeace.org> (accessed: 25 January 2025).

By 2024, this number has dropped to 4.4, which indicates war fatigue but is still higher than the population's pre-invasion level of trust in Zelensky.

Third, Zelensky's wartime governance, unlike Putin's regime in Russia, faces autonomous feedback from two sources: Ukrainian society and Western donors. Both parties urge the regime toward anti-patronal transformation, as they need assurance that their efforts will not ultimately serve corrupt, oligarchic ends. Without social trust, there can be no sacrifice, voluntarism, or creativity; and without the support of Western public opinion, Western governments cannot sustain support for Ukraine, and credibility would be undermined if it were revealed that funds were being dissipated through corrupt channels. Alongside Zelensky's broader anti-patronal agenda, this also explains why corruption scandals are followed by severe personal consequences, such as the dismissal of Kyrylo Tymoshenko, Deputy Head of the President's Office, and Ruslan Dziuba, deputy commander of the National Guard responsible for the logistics division, in 2023.

At this point, we can answer the question posed at the beginning of the article: Zelensky's concentration of power and crackdown on the oligarchs is not the same as what Putin did in the mid-2000s in Russia. On the one hand, his emerging power network shows certain similarities to patronal networks. It is a pyramid-like hierarchy with personal loyalty of clients, such as Andriy Yermak, a film producer and close friend of Zelensky's who became his chief of staff. It is also based on increasing executive power at the expense of the parliament, a trend that Zelensky had started even before 2022 (Minakov 2023). On the other hand, three factors typically indicative of a patronal president are absent: (1) centrally-led corporate raiding, i.e., the takeover of rivals' companies using illegitimate state coercion; (2) the creation of an own oligarchy; (3) being or becoming a wealthy oligarch himself.

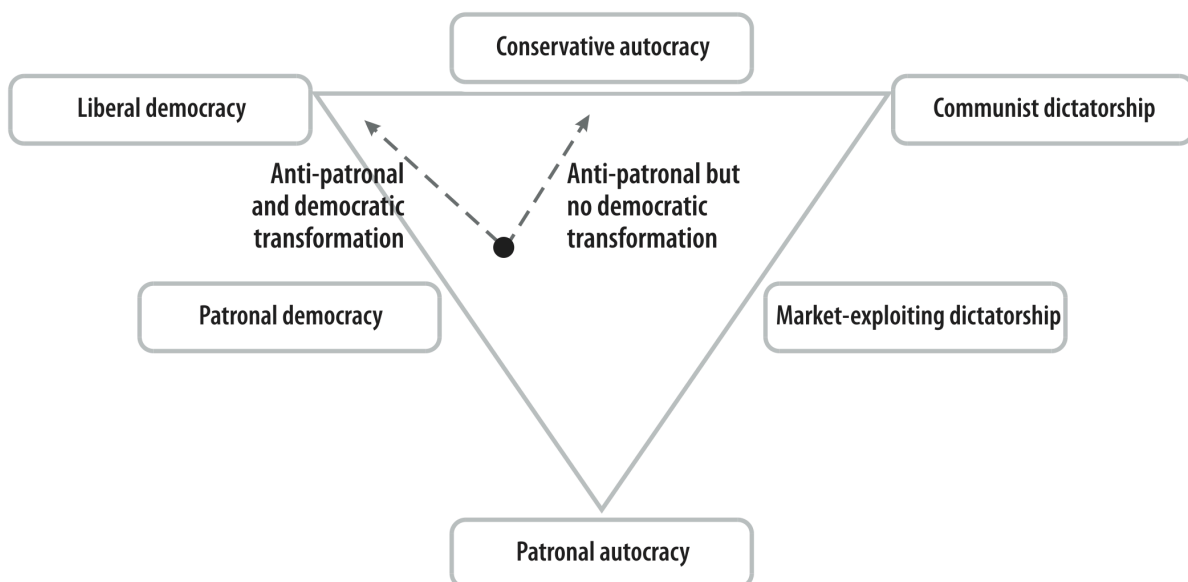
These three factors were signs of the patronal politics of former Ukrainian presidents. Ministries under Yanukovych became, in the words of a tax official, "weapons of the Presidential Administration against any business" (Rojansky 2014: 427) routinely forcing companies to the ownership orbit of his adopted political family. New oligarchs constantly emerged since the privatization period, among them presidents' family members like Oleksandr Yanukovych or Viktor Pinchuk, Kuchma's son-in-law. Finally, the presidents were typically rich poligarchs, using their informal ties to amass large wealth before and during their terms. In the case of Zelensky, we can see neither of the three factors. Wartime nationalization of oligarchic assets is not followed by targeted re-privatization to his clients, as it is often seen in patronal autocracies ("transit-nationalization") (Magyar & Madlovics 2022: 121–27). Unlike a chief patron, he does not dispense targeted rewards and punishments to loyalists and opponents; instead, he implements normative anti-oligarch measures, affecting even his former supporter, Kolomoyskyi, who has been placed under pre-trial arrest on charges of money laundering and fraud. Additionally, Zelensky has not enriched himself or his closest circle. With such forces in charge, the conditions are favorable for an unprecedented anti-patronal transformation in Ukraine.

4. THE BAD NEWS: EMERGING DICTATORSHIP IN RUSSIA AND THE THREAT OF AUTOCRACY IN UKRAINE

On February 24, 2022, a patronal autocracy attacked a patronal democracy. Three years into the war, both regimes have moved from their previous equilibria. However, while Ukraine breaks free from regime cycles, Russia is increasingly moving toward a more open dictatorship. The war brings formal organizations and chains of command (e.g., military, secret services, and state bureaucracy) to the fore, parallel to the devaluation and increasing vulnerability of oligarchic elements. Just hours after the invasion started, Putin repeated his 2003 meeting with the oligarchs by summoning 37 of them to the Kremlin. This time, however, the meeting was not about reversing patron-client roles but delivering a threat in a war situation to curb possible critical dissent. As in 2003, Putin's words were backed by actions: retribution against critical oligarchs like Oleg Tinkov (who was forced to sell his bank at 3 percent of its value) and disciplinary measures within the patronal network signal the removal of even limited bargaining power of informal power-holders. Simultaneously, political repression has intensified in Russia: as Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski pointed out, there are more political prisoners in Russia today than during the Brezhnev era in the USSR (*Odessa Journal* 2024; cf. Reznikova & Korostelev 2024).

On the other hand, the possibility of anti-patronal transformation in Ukraine should not be confused with a straightforward progression toward liberal democracy. The development of a Western-type, 'free and fair' regime of political competition with separated spheres of social action is just one possibility that can emerge in the wake of de-oligarchization. Alternatively, it may lead to the development of a conservative autocracy: a regime that is non-patronal yet also non-democratic (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Possible trajectories of the Ukrainian regime after the war



In the post-communist region, we have so far seen two trajectories towards conservative autocracy. The first started in a liberal democracy, Poland, where after 2015 Jarosław Kaczyński began an autocratic attempt on ideological grounds. The other attempt happened earlier, and it started in a patronal democracy, Georgia. The latter was also similar to Zelensky's situation in that the president in question, Mikheil Saakashvili, enjoyed enormous social legitimacy after the Rose Revolution of 2003 and implemented a vigorous anti-patronal program of arrests, imprisonments and the trimming of corruptible state bodies (Mizsei 2019: 546–60). However, the accompanying autocratic attempt was reversed by electoral means. Kaczyński was also defeated in the Polish elections of 2023. For in these regimes there was no autocratic consolidation: since political actors in Georgia and Poland did not seek to patronalize the economic and communal spheres, competing autonomous structures were not abolished and elections were not emptied in the absence of an effective opposition.

In Ukraine, elections were suspended due to the war, and it is difficult to imagine them taking place before the invasion ends. Approximately a third of the population has fled the country, a significant portion of voters and potential elected officials are in the trenches, and election rallies and polling stations would be obvious targets for the Russian aggressor. While these factors make the absence of elections understandable, the longer the war drags on and the longer political competition remains suspended, the more the structures of pluralism are eroded and the inertia of the single-pyramid rule increases.

At the same time, the government was also empowered to violate various autonomies of civil society, citing the war and the prevention of Russia's hybrid influence. In the media field, a law was adopted on 29 December, 2022 under which the National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council (NRADA, the members of which are appointed by parliament and the president) is able to temporarily ban the work of online mass media without a court hearing, issue binding orders to editorial offices, regulate the work of cable and online television operators, and cancel the registration of print media. For similar, war-related reasons, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), which is seen by many as a Russian agent, has become an essentially persecuted church, with its activities banned in a number of cities, several of its priests stripped of their citizenship, and a presidential decree restricting its religious activities adopted in December 2022. With martial law being in effect, civil liberties have been curtailed, especially the freedom of assembly and expression with the ban on mass protests.

It can be argued that these are just temporary measures and represent a provisional suspension of the logic of democratic competition in times of war. However, in Georgia in the Saakashvili era, it could be seen that measures there were believed to be temporary, such as "cutting corners" (i.e., arbitrariness) in anti-corruption justice, can indeed become permanent (Mizsei 2019: 555–59). If we look at the history of "temporary" measures introduced in response to war emergencies, we can see that even in Western democracies, they were often not phased out once the danger had passed – they became part of the new normal (Higgs 1987).

The problem of democracy in post-war Ukraine is the opposite of that of the regime cycles. During the regime cycles, democratic transformation was not accompanied by anti-patronal transformation; now, after the war, anti-patronal transformation may not be accompanied by democratic transformation or the return to pluralistic competition.

5. THE HOPE: WHY DEMOCRACY IN UKRAINE MAY SURVIVE

Ukrainian democracy has a chance to survive the war. This is precisely what the comparative analysis with the Russian example shows. In the Russian case, the development of this fatal combination was a long, decades-long process. Putin's single-pyramid rule is the result of a systematic erosion of social autonomies, where an autocrat deliberately and incrementally subjugated, eliminated, and/or marginalized groups that were or could have been politically and economically relevant alternatives. In contrast, in Ukraine, single-pyramid rule arose from a historical moment: the full-scale invasion. Political competition is frozen but potentially "defrostable" because its sociological foundations remain in place.

Civil society groups are not oppressed but take an active role in Ukraine's patriotic war. As Hungarian military expert András Rácz put it, Zelensky's strategy is "socially inclusive warfighting" as opposed to Putin's "socially exclusive warfighting" (Rácz 2023). The level of commitment to democracy in the society is growing as well: in May 2023, a national average of 94% of Ukrainians said that it was important for them that Ukraine becomes a fully functioning democracy (as opposed to 76% in December 2021), and by this the three most important things they meant were equal justice for all, freedom of speech, and free and fair elections (Opportunities and Challenges Facing Ukraine's Democratic Transition 2024).

Additionally, the Zelensky administration fails to pursue the systematic abolition of social autonomies. The fact that Zelensky is not inherently anti-democratic is also indicated by his electoral reform adopted in 2019. While the direction of such reforms in patronal autocracies (as observed in Russia, Moldova, or Hungary) has always been a majoritarian system to facilitate the incumbent chief patron's retention of a constitutional majority, Ukraine's mixed-member majoritarian electoral system was replaced with a type of open-list proportional representation. Indeed, Zelensky's concentration of power is partially a necessity due to the war and partially, before 2022, a paradoxical situation: to break the state capture by informal patronal networks, strong presidential power and the ability to act are needed.

Finally, the democratizing effect of integration into the Western international alliance system should be mentioned, in particular Ukraine's status as a candidate for membership in the European Union. As long as Ukraine actively tries to meet the criteria for entry, the EU's rule of law criteria can act as a brake on autocratic tendencies.

Of course, Ukraine's future is uncertain. It depends to a large extent on the outcome of the war and the country's ability to preserve its sovereignty. However, the current trends offer reasons for hope. For democracy in Ukraine to endure, we need to focus on these factors: the continued engagement of civil society (and thus the creation

of accountability, as it is possible, under war circumstances), the absence of self-serving autocratic decisions, and the democratizing influence of Western actors. With anti-patronal transformation underway, these factors have the potential to turn Ukraine's trajectory from conservative autocracy and, in the long term, make way for a transition from patronal democracy to liberal democracy.

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REVIEWS

BOOK REVIEW:

Merlo, Simona. (2023). *La costruzione dell'Ucraina contemporanea. Una storia complessa*. Bologna: il Mulino

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The history of Ukraine is marked by complexity, requiring a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to grasp its intricacies fully. As Orest Subtelny aptly remarked, “Modern Ukrainian history is the story of a people emerging from centuries of foreign rule to claim a state of their own” (*Ukraine: A History*). Simona Merlo’s *La costruzione dell'Ucraina contemporanea. Una storia complessa* offers a profound examination of Ukraine’s modern historical and geopolitical evolution, focusing on the transition from the Soviet era to the formation of contemporary Ukraine. The book demonstrates Merlo’s deep understanding of Ukraine’s distinctive socio-political and cultural history.

The book’s structure contains multiple chapters, and it carefully dissects Ukraine’s development from its Soviet past to the current complexities of its status as an independent state. Merlo masterfully navigates through historical, political, and cultural contexts, emphasizing the ways in which Ukraine’s past has shaped its present geopolitical landscape. One of her central arguments is rejecting the notion of bifurcation of Ukraine into “Western” and “Eastern” entities. Instead, she presents Ukraine as a multi-ethnic, value-driven state where democracy has long been a focal point of struggle.

The bipolar model, which divides Ukraine along the Dnipro River into a Ukrainian-speaking, Greek Catholic West and a Russian-speaking, Orthodox East, does not fully capture the country’s cultural, linguistic, demographic, and religious complexity. Similarly, its variation, which splits Ukraine into four macro-regions, has also proven to be an inadequate interpretative framework.

This analysis highlights the oversimplification often used to explain Ukraine’s regional diversity. Instead, a rich and intricate tapestry of identities and historical experiences characterized Ukraine, which cannot be neatly categorized by language, religion, or geography. Ukraine’s cultural and political landscape reflects centuries of influence from different empires, nations, and religious communities, contributing to a more nuanced and diverse national identity.

The book traces the multi-layered history of the territory, from its roots in the Kyivan Rus to the influence of the Polish-Lithuanian kingdom (or called in the book “Commonwealth”), the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and eventually the Soviet Union. Merlo’s ability to weave together these disparate historical threads demonstrates

Ukraine's complex past and how it influences contemporary political and cultural divisions.

Merlo's work touches upon the contradictions of nation-building in Ukraine, especially in light of its Soviet legacy. Her analysis shows that the creation of modern Ukraine was not a linear process but one fraught with internal and external challenges. She names two main factors that influenced Ukraine's post-independence struggle: its Soviet past and the difficulties in fostering a cohesive national identity amid regional differences and external pressures, especially from Russia.

In the first chapter, "*Preludio: l'Ucraina sovietica*", Merlo begins with an exploration of the roots from the Middle Ages to the Soviet times with a particular focus on the 17th and 19th centuries when the Ukrainian cultural and political leaders set preconditions for the fight for the independence at the beginning of the 20th century. The author clearly explains the Soviet approach in the so-called "Ukrainization" of Ukrainian territories as well as its people, which in reality was rather its Sovietization. Specifically, it marked a Bolshevik-style Ukrainization, achieved through Sovietizing the primate city. It reflects how, instead of fostering a distinct national identity, the policy was more about embedding Soviet ideological control within the Ukrainian framework, especially in urban centers like Kyiv, aligning local governance and culture with the more extensive Soviet system.

A special interest in this chapter takes place in describing the historical implications of various empires on Galicia, Bukovyna, Volyn, and Crimea, especially during the First and Second World Wars.

The incorporation of territories into Soviet Ukraine significantly impacted its geopolitical, demographic, ethnic, and linguistic balance. The homogenization policies applied in these regions, in the form of Ukrainization, were a form of Sovietization in reality.

The broader goal was to strengthen identity in these regions while simultaneously diminishing the influence of other ethnic groups, aligning these territories more closely with Soviet ideological goals under the guise of national unity. This approach often downplayed the cultural diversity of the population in favor of a monolithic Ukrainian national identity that served the broader objectives of Soviet control.

Ukraine was among the republics most significantly impacted by the Soviet economic reforms. With its substantial industrial power, the Soviets expected Ukraine to play a decisive role in achieving the ambitious economic expansion plans set forth by Soviet leadership. The primary objective of this plan was to close the gap between the Soviet economy and the capitalist economies of the West. Ukraine's industrial capacity was seen as essential to the success of this initiative, reflecting its strategic importance in Soviet economic planning.

In the second chapter, "*Perebudova: la perestroika in Ucraina*", Merlo analyzes the impact of Gorbachev's reforms on Ukraine, noting how these reforms, intended to preserve the Soviet Union, ultimately fueled nationalist movements that led to Ukraine's independence. The author provides an in-depth exploration of perestroika and glasnost,

contextualizing their effects on Ukraine's evolving national consciousness and its eventual drive toward sovereignty. The Chernobyl disaster, as Merlo thoroughly describes, played a pivotal role in altering perceptions of Soviet governance and the viability of Soviet expansionist policies, particularly in the nuclear energy sector.

In particular, Merlo emphasizes that while Gorbachev's reforms were supposed to salvage the Soviet Union in Ukraine, they had the opposite effect, encouraging nationalist movements that would later lead to independence. This chapter is particularly insightful, highlighting the distinct Ukrainian experience during the Soviet-wide transformation.

The author puts efforts in providing much more analytical details of the "reform", embodied in the twin concepts of perestroika and glasnost, which were thoroughly outlined by Mikhail Gorbachev on February 25, 1986, during the opening session of the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Gorbachev delivered a long and comprehensive political report outlining a program for the coming months, with a central focus on perestroika in its various forms: Perestroika of thought, Technological perestroika, Economic perestroika, Perestroika of the economic mechanism, Psychological perestroika of cadres, Perestroika of the social structure.

This process paired perestroika with glasnost (openness) towards the existing system and the complete democratization of socialist society. The aim was not merely to initiate a "restructuring" process but to push forward a radical, bold reform, particularly in the economic sphere, while simultaneously applying glasnost.

Chernobyl tragedy was thoroughly described in the book by Merlo when the Soviet Union interpreted the tragedy "in a completely different way", viewing it as "yet another reminder that the nuclear age demands new political thinking". In Ukraine, a republic that represented only 2.6% of the Soviet Union's total land area, approximately 40% of the Soviet Union's nuclear power plants were either operational or under construction at the time of the Chernobyl disaster. Ukraine played a crucial role in the expansion of nuclear energy within the Soviet Union, not only due to its industrial centrality within the European part of the USSR but also because of its proximity to Eastern European countries.

Merlo places particular interest in Soviet archival documents published in the 1990s. They reveal that Kyiv's leadership was fully involved in the Soviet Union's nuclear expansion plans. For example, a joint decree from December 1971, signed by Petro Shelest and Volodymyr Shcherbytsky – then the First Secretary and Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR, respectively – expressed dissatisfaction with the slow pace of nuclear power plant construction in Ukraine. The decree laid out a series of measures to accelerate the development of these plants despite all security precautions.

This involvement of Ukraine's leadership underscores the republic's active participation in the Soviet Union's strategic energy initiatives, emphasizing how critical Ukraine was to the broader Soviet plans for nuclear modernization.

The rise of language-focused societies reflects a broader reawakening of national consciousness within Ukraine during the late Soviet period. It coincided with the policy

reforms of glasnost and perestroika, which facilitated the resurgence of cultural and linguistic expressions suppressed under Soviet rule. These movements were significant not only for their immediate impact on language policy but also for their role in the broader process of Ukrainian national self-assertion during a time of political and social transformation.

These informal groups grew more substantial and led to developments further elaborated in chapter three, *“La svolta del 1989”*.

It covers the rise of informal national movements during perestroika and the crystallization of political opposition to Soviet control. Merlo highlights the importance of the Rukh movement and the significant role played by intellectuals and writers in fostering Ukrainian national identity. The 1989 semi-free elections are portrayed as a critical juncture in Ukraine’s journey toward independence, setting the stage for the declaration of sovereignty in 1991.

A critical element in the relationship between the Communist Party and Rukh lay in the hybrid nature of the latter. This characteristic gained prominence as the movement expanded by integrating informal groups. The intellectual class played a pivotal role in forming the Rukh movement, mainly through members of the Union of Writers of Ukraine and Taras Shevchenko’s Institute of Literature at the Academy of Sciences of Kyiv. These institutions were integral to the Soviet system, serving as representatives of the cultural elite in the capital. The individuals associated with these bodies, although deeply embedded within Soviet structures, fostered a national consciousness centered on promoting and preserving Ukrainian culture. This intellectual environment provided fertile ground for the emergence of Rukh as a movement advocating for cultural and national identity within Ukraine.

Additionally, the precedent set by the Baltic national fronts influenced the strategic decision to expand Rukh’s outreach beyond the intellectual community and engage broader societal groups. These fronts not only actively promoted national movements within their respective republics but also sought to extend support to similar causes in other Soviet republics. This broader mission of national solidarity across borders significantly shaped the trajectory of Rukh, as it evolved from a primarily intellectual initiative into a more comprehensive national movement, being important in the first electoral campaign in 1989.

It inevitably was connected to the spike of democratic processes in Ukraine the same year, characterized by a series of simultaneous and turbulent events such as street demonstrations, public meetings, strikes, and protests. These occurrences engaged various societal actors, extending beyond intellectual circles to workers from multiple sectors, trade unions, and youth organizations. The motivations for these mobilizations were diverse yet interconnected, reflecting the regional particularities of Ukraine. These multifaceted developments illustrated a convergence of nationalistic and socio-economic grievances, contributing to the region’s broader dynamics of political transformation.

In *“L’Ucraina sovrana”*, Merlo delves into Ukraine’s path toward sovereignty, focusing on the political and social transformations that ensued after it declared

independence. The author skillfully traces the growing tensions between Ukraine and Russia, particularly regarding the strategic importance of the Black Sea fleet and the Crimean Peninsula. The author convincingly argues that Ukraine's independence was not merely a consequence of Soviet collapse but a deliberate outcome of its own political and civil movements. Merlo correctly stipulates that the 1990 elections represented a significant turning point in Ukrainian politics, both for the crystallization of forces opposed to the Communist Party and for the shift in direction within the party itself. These elections marked a critical moment in Ukraine's journey toward greater political pluralism, as they showcased the growing power of opposition groups and signaled the beginning of the Communist Party's waning dominance in the political landscape.

The elections also highlighted internal shifts within the Communist Party, reflecting broader changes across the Soviet Union at the time. This period was pivotal in Ukraine's political transformation, eventually leading to its declaration of independence in 1991. After that, an essential step in the form of a referendum took place, which was boycotted not only by the Baltic republics but also by Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova. The question posed to Soviet citizens read: "Do you consider it necessary to preserve the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a renewed federation of sovereign republics with equal rights, in which the rights and freedoms of individuals of all nationalities are fully guaranteed?". This formulation was likely intentionally ambiguous and contradictory, containing an inherent paradox by juxtaposing the terms "federation" and "sovereignty", which are mutually exclusive.

Merlo's final chapters bring the reader to the present, dealing with Ukraine's ongoing struggle for sovereignty, especially in the face of Russian aggression. Chapter five, "*L'Ucraina indipendente*", explores the early challenges of state-building in independent Ukraine, including the political and economic transformations required to assert sovereignty.

Merlo also explores the collapse of the Soviet Union from a Ukrainian perspective, making a compelling case that Ukraine's independence was not merely a byproduct of Soviet disintegration but a deliberate act by its political elites and civil society. She highlights key events, such as the 1991 referendum, where over 90% of Ukrainians voted for independence, as critical moments in the country's path to sovereignty.

The author correctly indicates key pitfalls for Ukraine as a maritime country presented by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The roots lie in the 90s when Ukraine became an independent state. The Soviet Black Sea fleet, as is widely recognized, was primarily based in the city of Sevastopol, Crimea, a location deemed "strategic" due to the presence of nuclear weapons. Additionally, the region hosted numerous naval facilities, which, during the Soviet era, provided key services, including specialized training, to other Soviet fleets. Furthermore, the symbolic significance of Sevastopol and its fleet for Russian nationalism further complicated the resolution of the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv.

The linguistic issue was a longstanding matter, originating from the "korenizatsiya" policies of the 1920s, and it reemerged as a significant concern for the leadership of Soviet Ukraine during the perestroika era. This resurgence was mainly

driven by debates initiated by intellectual circles surrounding the Society for the Ukrainian Language. Amidst this national awakening, the Supreme Soviet of the republic enacted the "Law on the Languages of the Ukrainian SSR" in October 1989. This legislation, remaining unamended, would continue to serve as the foundational legal framework for language policy in independent Ukraine.

The final chapter, "*Epilogo. Una costruzione ancora incompiuta*", brings the reader to the present day, addressing Ukraine's ongoing struggle for sovereignty, especially in light of Russian aggression. The author critically assesses the 2022 Russian invasion, tracing its roots back to unresolved tensions in the 1990s, particularly regarding Crimea and the Black Sea fleet.

Beginning in the 1990s, Ukraine witnessed the emergence of patrimonialism, with influential oligarchic groups playing a central role. These oligarchies primarily originated from regional clans associated with the Soviet-era *nomenklatura* and were characterized by a close intertwining of economic and political power. The electoral victory of Yanukovich in the 2010 presidential elections signified not only the re-establishment of a dominant power pyramid but also the creation of a nepotistic system centered on the president, his relatives, and close associates, collectively referred to as the "family." The Revolution of Dignity did not dismantle the influence of the oligarchs. After the Orange Revolution, competition among various power pyramids reemerged.

The political dominance of the oligarchs was facilitated by the ongoing institutional fragility of Ukraine following its independence, the absence of a comprehensive reform agenda, and the lack of political parties capable of channeling the demands for structural changes from society. After the Orange Revolution, the Yushchenko administration's promotion of national identity domestically and alignment with the West internationally contributed to the increasing polarization of the linguistic issue. The irreconcilability of these two stances is at the core of the conflict that erupted in the spring of 2014. Though described as "hybrid" or "low-intensity," this conflict persisted for eight years, culminating in the Russian invasion of February 24, 2022.

Merlo concludes with an exploration of Ukraine's incomplete journey toward modernity, emphasizing the nation's persistent challenges in its fight for territorial integrity and democratic governance.

In sum, Simona Merlo's *La costruzione dell'Ucraina contemporanea* is essential for those seeking a deeper understanding of Ukraine's complex history and its current geopolitical challenges. Merlo's rigorous analysis and ability to synthesize Ukraine's multifaceted past into a cohesive narrative make this book invaluable for scholars, policymakers, and anyone interested in the region's history and future. The author does not shy away from addressing complex and often controversial topics, making her work a critical contribution to the ongoing discourse surrounding Ukraine's identity, sovereignty, and struggle against external aggression.

BOOK REVIEW:

**Josticova, Hana. (2024). *Mariupol 2013-2022: Stories of mobilization and resistance*.
Budapest, New York: Central European University Press**

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The monograph "Mariupol 2013-2022: stories of Mobilization and Resistance", written by Hana Josticova, represents one of the first attempts to describe and explain with the usage of the methodology of social and political sciences the reasons for the tragic events that took place in the South-East part of Ukraine, called "Priazovie".

The book's basic approach is represented as an interview and story-telling of individuals who actively participated in the events that started in December of 2013 after the attempt of President of Ukraine Victor Yanukovich and his team to suppress the protests in Kyiv. The protests that sparked after his denial to sign the European Association agreement with the EU at the EU Summit in Vilnius finally led to the slaughter of protestants on Maidan during 18-20th of February 2014. After that, Yanukovich's actual patron, the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, ordered him to flee to Crimea and then to Russia and launched a special military operation named "Russian Spring" in Crimea. These events finally led to the occupation and illegal annexation of the peninsula in March 2014 after the so-called 'referendum', held with the help of Russian troops located in Crimea, in violation of both Ukrainian and international laws. After the weak and insufficient reaction of officials in Kyiv, Brussels, and Washington on the Crimean challenge, which Putin considered as a weakness and absence of readiness to react, the so-called "Russian Spring" in the Donbas region sparked.

Describing the methodology used in the book, the author explains her choice in the following way:

I am therefore paying attention to narratives and stories and using them as a research method to study the foundations and course of mobilization. First, by analyzing narrative resonance, the effect of narratives on mobilization is reflected in the receptivity of audiences toward some while opposition toward other narratives. By observing the individual dimension of narratives, we examine the language locals use to talk about events and the stories they tell to learn about the meanings they attribute to them. (Josticova 2024: 11)

... In order to study and make sense of these complexities, I bridge ethnography and social movement concepts, bringing cognitive factors and local characteristics into the analysis of social mobilization. The combination of interpretive social movements literature and ethnographic research methods allows for assessing social mobilization at its various stages of activism or participation in movements

and thus informs why individuals choose to or choose not to take action in the first place. (Josticova 2024: 13)

This approach can be considered entirely justified and appropriate. It is essential to mention that in an attempt to clarify the motivation of people who participated in social movements and protests in Donbas in 2014, the author interviewed representatives from the opposite sides. Some of them, as the author later found out, took official positions in the occupational administration of Mariupol after its occupation and illegal annexation by the Russian Federation in 2022.

The book begins with a brief outline of the history of the region where Mariupol is located. Concisely, Hana Josticova describes the specifics of the Donbas and Priazovie regions with particular attention to the history of the settlement there. Regarding the logical structure of the monograph, it should be mentioned that the author was absolutely right to start with a brief history of the city before describing and analyzing the events that took place in 2013–2014. It is crucial to understand better local mentality and identities, which played a significant role in the social mobilization of the people of Mariupol.

Hana Josticova describes the waves of several migrations, particularly during the period of industrialization in the USSR in the 1930s, when Mariupol became a prominent industrial city with substantial metallurgic potential even for the USSR, not talking only about Ukraine. The author gives a historical retrospective review of the migration of tens of thousands of peasants and low-qualified laborers. These people came from the territory of Russia, and they searched for better living conditions and wages in the construction of industrial and metallurgic plants and factories in the Donbas and Priazovie regions. It was that time when the metallurgic steel plant “Azovstal” was built, which nowadays became world-known for its heroic defenders in the spring of 2022. The plant became the last fortress of besieged Mariupol and a shelter for thousands of civilians, who were rescued in massive bomb shelters of “Azovstal”. These shelters were built up for the case of atomic war during the Cold War but were used by civilians to avoid huge 500 and 1000-kg bombs dropped on “Azovstal” from Russian planes in March-April of 2022.

If we return to the historical overview, we have to note that Donbas, Priazovie, and Mariupol are not unique in the sense of mass labor migration. But it would be worth paying more attention to studying the city’s history and ethnic aspects. It is crucial to understand the differences in local identities, even between citizens of Mariupol and the rest of the Donetsk region, not talking about the rest of Ukraine. When talking about the history of Priazovie, we should have paid more attention to the Greek part of Mariupol’s inhabitants. Traditional point of view considers that the historical basis of the future Mariupol city started with Ukrainian Cossacks (“Kalmiuska palanka”), who formed temporal for-posts in that area since the 17th century. In fact, the city’s real history began in 1779 with the establishment of a town with its modern name given by the Greeks. This ethnic group was forcefully removed by Russian empress Katherine the Second from Crimea in 1778 on the territories of the contemporary Dnipropetrovsk region and a year later to a region nowadays called Priazovie. The resettlement to Priazovie happened after

many Greeks died in the winter of 1778-1779 because of diseases, lack of drinking water, and lack of time to build houses before severe winter came. It was rather deportation than resettlement inclined to weaken the Crimean Khanate, which was at that time the vassal of the Ottoman Empire, after its defeat in the war with the Russian Empire in 1774. For many centuries, the Greeks were the social group that controlled the trade in Crimea and, therefore, were making significant contributions to the Khanate's economy, which helped to develop its army and to oppose the growing power of the Russian Empire in the Sea of Azov and Black Sea region in those times.

This ethnic group played a vital role in Mariupol's history. Of course, the book is focused on the other issues, but the Greek factor needs a unique, complex, and extended study. Nevertheless, Ukrainian historians have already done some of them, mainly at Mariupol State University during the 1990s and 2000s (Терентьева & Балабанов 2008). They can be invaluable for the author if she continues her study of Russian aggression against Ukraine during 2014–2024, including its “hybrid” stage, described in the book, as well as a full-scale invasion, which is still going on

In general, the proposed historical overview allows a better understanding of how the structure of the population of the Donbas region as a whole and Mariupol, particularly, was formed. It would explain why Mariupol residents, particularly the elites and representatives of civil society, strongly opposed the definition of “people of Donbas” itself when it concerned them. We have to mention that the artificial “people of Donbas” was the basic notion of Russian propaganda directed at the split of Ukrainian society. It was created to provoke the territories' separation and support the “Anti-Maidan” movement. The book also describes how the simultaneous forced “russification” of local inhabitants changed the population's structure.

Hana Josticova also touches upon the information impact issue on the events in the region. She describes in detail how Russia occupied the information space in Donbas and Priazovie in particular. These historical retrospectives allow us to explain why the ideas of the so-called “Russian World” were widely supported for many years by local inhabitants and what were the role of Russian propaganda and the mechanisms of so-called “soft power”, such as popular TV programs on TV, Russian pop music, literature, Russian Christian-Orthodox Church, etc.

The author describes how historical and religious myths were created and disseminated with the help of modern technological tools and how they spread in Donbas and Priazovie. In the book, we can find the overview of the conversion of various social groups of different ethnic and social origins into a political entity of “Russian people” and how the political identities of the people on occupied territories of Ukraine, particularly in Mariupol and Donbas region, as a whole, changed.

It concerns not only the Russian-speaking majority of the region, including citizens of Mariupol, but also Greeks who live there, whose ancestors were deported from Crimea at the end of the 18th century, and thousands were repressed, imprisoned, or killed during the terror of Stalin regime in 1937-1938 during so-called “Greek operation” fulfilled by NKVD. The historical retrospective and studying the particular case of the removal of Greeks from Crimea to Priazovie allows us a better understanding of the role of the

Christian-Orthodox church as a key institution and mechanism of Russian propaganda not only in the previous periods but in the hybrid Russian warfare against Ukraine in 2014–2022. Even nowadays, a historical myth that Katherine the Second “rescued Christian-Orthodox Greeks of Crimea from Mohammedan yoke” is still very popular among part of Ukrainians of Greek origin. That is why they remain in occupied Mariupol and nearby villages, and they are mainly loyal to occupational authorities and Russia.

In general, the brief historical part of the book is very valuable and relevant for describing the cultural, religious, and ethnic landscape of the region and the influences that impacted the views of local citizens and their identities, including regional and national. It makes it possible to understand hidden senses in the interviews in the central part of the book, which proposes an enormous variety of the personal perceptions of the local inhabitants.

The author also analyzes another critical factor – individuals who have played a crucial role in the events since 2013 in Donbas and Priazovie. The book pays special attention to a Ukrainian tycoon, Rinat Akhmetov, who owned Mariupol's most significant industrial plants and critical media outlets, including local TV channels and newspapers.

Considering his level of power in Donbas and Priazovie, he received the nickname “The owner of Donbas”. This power included financial and economic aspects and influence in the criminal world. Therefore, it is considered that he could have curbed the sparks of “*Russian Spring*” in Donbas at the very beginning. Still, he didn't, trying to use his status and influence in negotiations with representatives of a new power in Kyiv to save his control over the area. At the same time, taking into account his close business ties with Russia, which was the most important market for the products of his enterprises, he was also trying to keep the balance with the representatives of the so-called “DPR” (“Donetsk People's Republic”) after he captured the power in Donetsk and Mariupol, instead of using of all his leverages of power to assist the police and Ukrainian Army to curb the local separatists and criminals, supported by Russian special services.

In this regard, parallels can be drawn with another region, namely Kharkiv, where local supporters of the “Russian World” and criminals brought from the territory of the Russian Federation by Russian special services captured the administrative buildings. It allows understanding that there were several variants of the development of events, including the failure of the “Russian Spring” in Donbas.

The author managed to collect a considerable amount of information and to restore the picture of the unfolding of the “*Russian Spring*” in Mariupol, including the names and nicknames of criminal elements who participated in the terrorist attacks on police departments in the spring of 2014. The author also tried to explain, giving concrete facts, the sabotage by the representatives of special services of Ukraine in Mariupol, including the security service of Ukraine. Based on the investigations made lately by the Security Service of Ukraine, the author describes in chapter 9 how the Russian FSB tried to corrupt the representatives of Ukrainian special services and push them to sabotage the resistance to the “Russian Spring” in Mariupol when separatists and criminals, sponsored and controlled by Russian special services, captured the power. It shows the similarity with the actions in Crimea in February – March of 2014, where Russia also used

local criminal elements to capture administrative buildings and create network checkpoints to control the logistics in the peninsula.

As was mentioned above, one of the key goals of the book was not just to describe the consequence of events starting from the *Euromaidan* and *Antimaidan* protests in Kyiv and its outcomes in Mariupol in 2013 and finishing with the full-scale invasion of Russia to Ukraine, but what is more important – to understand the motivation of people who participated in those events from both sides.

The events of November 2013 – February 2014 have come to a modern history of Ukraine as the “Revolution of Dignity”. They are considered in political sciences as a point in which the Ukrainian nation made its civilization choice, shifting from the so-called “Russian World” with its authoritarian rule, vertical structure of power, and superiority of the role of the State and its interests under human rights towards European civilization and becoming a part of Western World as a whole, where human rights and the rule of law form the basis of the system of values of people and relations between citizens and state institutions in the societies belonging to it.

In chapter 8, the author gives a retrospective analysis of the formation of basic narratives of the supporters of the “*Russian World*” in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts starting from the 1990s, such as

... promoting a referendum on federalization or decentralization of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasti; associating Ukraine with fascism and “Banderovtsy” and marginalization of the Russian language; and promoting the cultural, political, and historical role of Russia. (Josticova 2024: 119)

The author also explains why these narratives found broad support among locals, and she defines the key social, economic, and political factors of it. Remarkably, the narrative of holding the referendum in this region for the federalization of Ukraine in the 1990s and 2000s during the “*Orange Revolution*” in 2004:

The narratives of federalism had both popular resonance founded on social and economic grievances and mobilizing potential for elites to exploit for electoral and business purposes. (Josticova 2024: 123)

The author describes the mechanisms of historical and cultural grounds for creating and disseminating propaganda myths aimed at splitting Ukrainian society and opposing different regions of Ukraine for political reasons by local elites, who gained control over the most popular local media outlets. At the same time, these narratives were also disseminated by Russian Federal channels, which were most prevalent among locals. Here, the author shows the differences in interests between the Kremlin and local tycoons, such as Rinat Akhmetov, and the cooperation needed to promote the same narratives.

Finally, as we can see, Akhmetov’s attempts to promote the narratives of Russian propaganda during the periods of two Maidans in Donetsk and Mariupol led to the loss of all his assets in the region after the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Russia to Ukraine. At the same time, this analysis shows the basic instruments used by Russia, local

tycoons, and representatives of political elites to mobilize the population and control media space.

In chapter 9, the author describes the differences in local identities among local inhabitants based on mental, ethnic, cultural, and political differences of the citizens of different social groups, trying to define how they form with the help of propaganda, the mindset the supporters of “Russian World”, Ukraine and the “people of Donbas” which played a prominent role during the events of 2014–2022 for their social mobilization. For these purposes, the author forms focus groups and interviews the locals to discover their views and reasoning for supporting Russia or Ukraine.

At the same time, the author describes the formation and development of “Mariupol resistance” during 2014–2022, the representatives of which initially were accepted as a marginal group, and the self-defense of Mariupol, which played an essential role during the defense of Mariupol after the beginning of full-scale invasion to Ukraine in February 2022.

In the last chapter, the author describes the tragic events of the humanitarian catastrophe in Mariupol during the spring of 2022 when Mariupol was besieged, and the representatives of the Mariupol Resistance were trying their best to help local inhabitants to survive under constant shelling and bombardments of the city. The author pays attention to their motivation to stand against Russian aggression, participation in the pro-Ukrainian meetings in late February, and their reaction to the destroyed Drama theater after Putin acknowledged the “independence” of the so-called “DNR” and “LNR” (“Luhansk People’s Republic”).

As a person who was born and spent half of my life in Mariupol and know most of the key heroes from the book personally, and witnessed the unfolding of key events of “Russian Spring” in 2014, I agree with the following conclusions of the author made at the very end of the monograph:

Combining these accounts with documentary analysis of the chronology of events from November 2013 and the variety of groups and networks of the “Russian Spring” and *opolchenie* movements, the onset of the conventional war between Russia and Ukraine is easier to comprehend operationally – the “Russian Spring” developed into an armed rebellion that was aided by the Russian Federation but supported by a critical mass of ordinary residents both actively and passively. This was enough for a rebellion to sustain itself for the time being but not enough to sustain a war; had Russia not sustained and increased the support thereof, the *opolchenie* would have crumbled. This was clear by July 2014 in the light of the successes of Ukrainian liberation missions. (Josticova 2024: 182–183)

We can completely agree with the author:

... if there were to be one takeaway from this book, let it be this: individuals are as critical as masses, ideas as important as material resources, and beliefs and emotions as powerful as weapons. (Josticova 2024: 184)

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BOOK REVIEW:

Minakov, Mikhail (2024). *The Post-Soviet Human. Philosophical Reflections on Post-Soviet History*. Kyiv: Laurus – Milano: Koinè

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Mikhail Minakov's book deals with transformational processes in the post-communist countries of the former USSR from the late 1980s to 2022. Analyzing a variety of material, the author acts not only as a historian but also as a philosopher, sociologist, and political analyst, giving depth to the research. The book is an essential contribution to understanding post-communist communities and their evolution in a rapidly changing world. The work raises complex issues of emancipation of the peoples of the former USSR. The reader is offered a broad description of various concepts that have attempted to understand the essence of transformational processes. It is not just a scientific study but an invitation to a dialogue about the future of the countries of the region in the face of global challenges. And there is no chance of not accepting such an invitation.

When analyzing the history of the recent past, it is impossible to avoid contradictions and personal projections. After all, most readers have their own experience and understanding of this period. At the same time, a modernity researcher is always included in ongoing processes and, therefore, is in a bubble of his or her own experience. Apparently, feeling this, the author ironically refers to his own work as a "testament of a post-Soviet person".

The central idea of the study is the definition of 'post-Soviet human' as a general "designation of several generations of people and societies whose collective experiences of self-improvement were associated with the destruction of the Soviet social world and the revolutionary attempt to create new social worlds" (p. 29). The author also attempts to conceptualize the post-Soviet period based on understanding history as a combination of continuity and caesura (p. 30).

In the introduction, the author defines the scope of the study, emphasizing that the post-Soviet era ended in 2022 with the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which was a decisive blow to the post-Soviet order. In the author's opinion, it is from this moment that the post-Soviet period can be considered a completed period and become a subject for scientific research. The post-Soviet era has clear chronological outlines, starting with the destructive-creative processes of 1989–1991 and ending with the tragic events of 2022.

The book is dedicated to a post-Soviet human who has distinguished himself in creating new social worlds and political systems. The author seeks to explore how this

human used the opportunities that appeared to him after 1991 for self-expression and political creativity.

The book is written in three languages and has a structure that includes philosophical reflection, a description of the stages of development of post-Soviet peoples, an idea of the post-Soviet transition, and a summary of democratic and autocratic achievements. The book also examines the lessons of the post-Soviet experience that may be useful for the times to come.

In the first part of the study, the author defines the philosophical aspects of post-Soviet history. In particular, the central category of the study is the “post-Soviet person.” In his understanding, the post-Soviet person is a cultural and anthropological type formed between 1991 and 2022, when significant social, political, and economic changes occurred in Eastern Europe and Northern Eurasia. This type of person emerged from the experience of self-improvement associated with the destruction of the Soviet social world and the attempt to create a new social reality. This person is characterized by the ability to be creative and destructive, manifested in his desire for freedom, individuality, and new beginnings.

According to the author, this person lives in conditions of constant change, where the struggle for new opportunities and fear of them defines his existence. Post-Soviet human faces contradictions between democratic aspirations and authoritarian tendencies, between the desire to achieve economic freedom and the risks of oligarchic control. Such a person is a witness and participant in historical caesuras that shape new political and social realities and his or her experience is essential for understanding contemporary societies in the region.

Thus, the author concludes that a post-Soviet person is not just an individual but a representative of an entire generation trying to find its place in a changing world and realize its potential in the face of new challenges and opportunities.

This person does not exist in a vacuum but in reality. And the ontology of his existence is characterized by four main features, which the author calls the “post-Soviet tetrad”, which shape his socio-economic and cultural-political context:

1. *Democratization* – a process that directs the political creativity of post-Soviet societies toward building new political cultures and systems based on the separation of powers, the rule of law, and human rights.
2. *Marketization* – the transformation of the economy, which involves the transition to market relations, the privatization of state property, and the creation of an entrepreneurial class that supports the market economy.
3. *Nationalization* – the process of forming new nation-states, accompanied by the search for identity and the struggle between ethnic and civic nationalisms.
4. *Europeanization* – regional integration aimed at harmonizing political, legal, and economic systems, which aims to ensure peaceful coexistence between Eastern and Western European countries.

These four trends, traditionally used to characterize this period in the region's development, interact and shape the complex and contradictory nature of post-Soviet development.

The book's second part examines the logic of development and identifies the stages of the post-Soviet era, which the author additionally qualifies as "interwar".

According to the author, the post-Soviet period began with the caesura of 1989–1991 and ended in 2022, when the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine started. During this time, the political communities that emerged from the collapse of the Soviet Union went through five stages.

The first stage (1989–1991) is associated with the emergence of the tendencies that made up the post-Soviet tetrad and the opening of opportunities for political creativity. The second stage (1992–1994) was a time of realization of revolutionary opportunities when new power elites began to form new states and economic projects. The third stage (1995–2000) was characterized by stabilizing new political and economic systems when the ex-Soviet population had to accept new conditions of existence. The fourth stage (2001–2008) allowed the post-Soviet peoples to assess the results of their development but also led to an intensification of the power struggle. The last stage (2008–2022) manifested itself in strengthening autocratic tendencies and conflict between post-Soviet countries.

The author identifies specific features that define each of these stages. The first stage was characterized by destructive-creative processes that led to the collapse of the Soviet order. The second stage was a time of formation of new states and search for rules of coexistence. The third stage was a moment of stabilization when new political systems began to be institutionalized. The fourth stage turned out to be a period of assessment of achievements but also exacerbated contradictions between different political forces. The last stage demonstrated the growth of authoritarianism and conflict, leading to the end of the post-Soviet period.

Such periodization undoubtedly has a certain logic and the right to exist. At the same time, conflicts between countries began during the collapse of the USSR. They had their own logic of confrontation when the former imperial center created local conflicts within new communities to ensure its control and influence.

Thus, in the author's opinion, the post-Soviet interwar era consists of five stages, each with its own characteristic features, reflecting the complex transition process from the Soviet past to new social and political realities. These stages demonstrate how post-Soviet societies tried to adapt to new conditions while preserving elements of the Soviet legacy and facing new challenges.

In the book's third part, the author examines the main concepts and ideas used in the assessment of transformation processes. The essence of the evolution of ideas presented in the third chapter lies in the transformation of the perception of the post-Soviet era and its impact on the societies of Eastern Europe and Northern Eurasia. The author emphasizes that history not only moves in continuous intervals but is also shaped through narrative practices that reflect changes in public consciousness.

At the beginning of the post-Soviet period, visions of the future were optimistic, with hopes for democratization and economic progress. However, these hopes clashed with harsh reality over time, leading to disappointment.

The evolution of ideas also reflects changes in scientific approaches to studying the post-Soviet transit. Initially, optimistic concepts dominated, but researchers began to pay attention to the real problems that post-Soviet societies faced over time. It led to a critical review of previous ideas and the formation of new theories that consider the complexity and multifaceted nature of the post-Soviet experience.

Thus, the evolution of perceptions in the third chapter demonstrates how changes in the political, social, and economic context have influenced perceptions of the post-Soviet era, shaping new perspectives for understanding its consequences and challenges. Among the authors who study the post-Soviet transit and form the main context for understanding the post-Soviet era, its challenges and opportunities, as well as its impact on modern societies in the region are Oleg Havrylyshyn, Natalia Panina and Yevhen Holovakha, Charles Fairbank, and Pavlo Kutuyev.

The final, fourth part identifies the “fruits of post-Soviet political creativity”. This part examines the post-Soviet era as a period characterized by vivid, dramatic events in the lives of the peoples of Eastern Europe and Northern Eurasia. The author emphasizes that the results of these processes are of critical importance for understanding the fragility of democratic achievements and the infrastructure of peace in the region. During the post-Soviet era, communities experienced stages associated with restoring statehood, ideological pluralism, competitive politics, and social inclusion, where freedom and subordination, democratic creativity, and authoritarian innovation coexisted.

The author attempts to balance the achievements of post-Soviet nations in the context of democratic political creativity, noting that the main achievements were new states with distributed power, political and legal systems guided by the principles of the rule of law, strong parliaments, autonomous courts, multi-party systems, free media, and active civil society. However, alongside these achievements, the post-Soviet period also proved to be a time of authoritarian political creativity, where many individuals and communities wasted their potential on institutions that were subservient to ruling groups and disregarded political freedom.

Thus, post-Soviet political creativity manifests itself in the complex balance between democratic and authoritarian tendencies that shape the socio-political structures of the region. The author emphasizes that the post-Soviet period became a time not only for the destruction of old orders but also for the creation of new ones, which requires critical reflection and analysis, especially in the context of recent events that led to the end of this era.

Thus, Mikhail Minakov, in his study, emphasizes the unprecedentedness of the “post-Soviet” era, which opened up opportunities for personal freedom and collective emancipation in Eastern Europe and Northern Eurasia. The author points out that the evolution of 1991 did not require victims comparable to those during the Civil War, although the collapse of the USSR and the caesura of 1989–1991 led to significant losses.

Those who survived received opportunities that their ancestors were deprived of, but post-Soviet human could not justify hopes, which led to disappointment. However, the author himself did not compare the consequences of the period of the millennium transition with the time of the collapse and subsequent consolidation of the empire in 1917-1922, which was retouched in the historiography of the USSR times in the term “civil war”. Perhaps the positive consequences for some “post-Soviet” peoples, as the author claims, will be slightly exaggerated. Depopulation, degradation of the social system, infrastructure, scientific sphere, and technological level of development have taken on a considerable scale, and the exceptions that have occurred only confirm the general trend.

The continuation of the strengths of any work is its contradictions and aspects that can be considered debatable. They are also present in Mikhail Minakov's book, so it is worth briefly outlining them.

In his research, the author consistently defines a geographic region as “Eastern Europe and Northern Eurasia.” The boundaries of these regions are not universally accepted. In the fourth chapter, when the author analyzes the achievements of democratic creativity of the “post-Soviet peoples”, three different categories of states are analyzed: Estonia, an EU country; Russia and Ukraine, two countries that, according to the new definition of some authors, are qualified as Eastern European and North Eurasian; and Uzbekistan, which does not belong to this region and is a country in Central Asia. Therefore, the geographical dimension of the “post-Soviet region” applied by Mikhail Minakov should be clarified or redefined.

Another point of discussion is the definition of the chronological boundaries of the study. There is no doubt that there is logic in the framework: 1989–2022. However, the Russian-Ukrainian war began with the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Georgia faced such a situation in 2008, and Moldova faced it in the early 1990s. And at the same time, the escalation of the war in 2022 between the two largest Slavic countries in the world has changed little for the countries of Central Asia. The Russian-Ukrainian war is not over yet, so we are dealing with an unfinished process that may make assessments premature.

The very concept of “post-Soviet” can be considered debatable. The author himself discusses its shortcomings. In our opinion, there is an urgent need to replace it. Is it appropriate to use the ideologized term of the Cold War era, adding the particle “post-”? The concept itself contains a vagueness and confusion in its content. It has its roots in the idea of the “Soviet people” – an ideological construct from the distant 1939 that was never fully realized, so in order to be “post-Soviet”, it must first be “Soviet”.

If we formally analyze the roots of “(post)Soviet” – “councils” (“soviets”), we will see that they had a formal meaning in the old (USSR-era) system of power because the communist party governed all spheres of life. Instead, since 1991, the party has disappeared in the new coordinate system, and the “councils” as bodies of government not only remained but also transformed and began to acquire a new meaning. And today, for example, in Ukraine, the government can formally be qualified as “Soviet”, that which is based on “councils”: from the sole legislative body – the Verkhovna Rada [Supreme Council] of Ukraine, to the self-governing body of the territorial community – the

community council. Therefore, formally, the modern citizen of Ukraine is completely “Soviet”, without the prefix “post-”, although not communist at all. This is a different “Sovietness,” as in principle, the Sovietness of the 1920s and 1930s, 1950s, and 1980s differed.

The question also arises whether it is appropriate to speak of a “Soviet Ukrainian” and a “Soviet Estonian” during the USSR. As is known, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics consisted of 15 national republics, the national (ethno-cultural) component being the only reliable one in the name. After all, it was not precisely a Union (but rather an empire) and not always a republic (because it was not the people who ruled, but the party), but the definition of “socialism” is rather the subject of a serious “theological” dispute. Maybe it’s time to eliminate the old ideological definitions and move on to another, perhaps purely geographical definition? Mikhail Minakov’s book actually “pushes” towards such a discussion.

A number of the author’s thoughts also attract attention. Despite the opportunities opened up in the 1990s, post-Soviet people often succumbed to the temptations of consumer capitalism and individualism, which strengthened authoritarian tendencies and the fragility of freedom. Reviewing the events 2022, the author notes that post-Soviet societies could not go the path of emancipation, remaining in the rut of imperialism and colonialism. The Russians betrayed the federation, and other nations could not realize their collective project, stuck between geopolitical projects. Summing up, we must support the fair statement about the need to learn the lessons of post-Soviet history. Countries risk repeating past mistakes without developing their own reflection, undermining their creative achievements. The author calls for deconstructing authoritarian regimes so new republics can cope with imperial-colonial structures. In this process, each person’s choice determines what the world will be like after the current caesura. And it is the completeness of taking into account past lessons that is decisive for building a stable future.

Overall, the work very clearly poses a fundamental question: Do we sufficiently understand ourselves and the structure and logic of the transformational processes that have occurred and are occurring? But no less important in this context are the questions – will we be able to apply an adequate tool for self-analysis in the conditions of memory wars (and direct wars)? As the author aptly puts it, the 1990s are over, but clarity is gone (p. 89). So, in the strange world of the 2020s, understanding the last thirty years requires increased attention. Dialogue and open discussion are needed, including, no matter how difficult it may be, in Ukraine, where, unfortunately, a ban on thinking is gradually taking place, which has never stopped in the East of Ukraine.

Anti-Americanism and Anti-Western Sentiments in Europe and Post-Soviet States

Issue 2(26), 2024

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Ideology and Politics Journal

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ISSN 2227-6068

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