



Nuovi Autoritarismi e Democrazie:
Diritto, Istituzioni, Società

Transformation of Academia and Education System upon the Russo-Ukrainian War: Russian and Ukrainian Experience

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Abstract

This analysis delves into the evolving historical narratives and academic freedom in Ukraine and Russia during the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. Before 2014, Russia underwent a shift from post-Soviet intellectual freedom to increased control under Putin. Subsequent years witnessed political persecution, censorship, and a scholar exodus. The conflict intensified academic suppression in Russia from 2014 to 2023, targeting dissenters. Meanwhile, Ukraine experienced notable education changes, emphasizing national identity. This study reveals the intricate interplay between geopolitics and academic autonomy, showcasing the contrasting educational trajectories in both nations amidst the complex dynamics of the ongoing conflict.

Keywords: Eastern European Studies – Education Politics – Political Repressions – Russian Studies – Russo-Ukrainian War

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1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2014, associated with Russia invasion of the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea, the education and science spheres of both countries have experienced significantly different development trends. However, some similarities have emerged since the escalation of the conflict, that has led to a full-scale war in February 2022. While the Ukrainian academy was striving for European integration, autonomy of universities, and freedom of intellectual creativity and integrity, the Russian case demonstrated the unconditional closure of the scientific sector from external interaction and the introduction of censorship, primarily for the humanities and social sciences. Faithful to these narratives, both Ukraine and Russia have been instrumentalizing the past and leaning onto nationalistic ideas, but with opposite intents: one to preserve their own identity and another to de-legitimize their neighboring country and secure their leadership¹.

In Ukraine, school closures and displacement of students have disturbed the educational course; the interferences are a consequence of the armed conflict. In Russia, the limitations on academia were driven by internal political shifts even before the war broke out. Hence, the lack of academic independence in the Russian perspective seems like an inherited trait of educational politics. However, the transformation of school curricula has some features of similarity between the two countries: interest in national history grew in proportion to the deterioration of the border conflict and reached its peak with the outbreak of the war. Thus, what exactly are we talking about, underlining the outlayer of nationalism trends in education? The process of nation-building in Ukraine through the integration of national identity discourse in education began in the early 2000s, touching on issues of repression and all sorts of pressures from the USSR and the Russian Empire. Therefore, the national history of Ukraine in education largely addresses the problems of silencing the genocide of the 1930s, and the Russian-Ukrainian war in 1910-1920s, revealing the dramatic depth of collective trauma². At the same time, Russia included nationalization in the education system by increasing the share of hours of history teaching in schools and universities and pulling its focus on another issue: the greatness of the USSR and the Russian Empire, building an opposite system of values³ based on justification of repression, glorification of wars, militarization of education⁴. If, initially, the vectors of educational development

¹ E. Mateo, *The Ukraine Crisis: A Clash of Narratives?*, in uc.web.ox.ac.uk/article/the-ukraine-crisis-a-clash-of-narratives; I. Khaldarova, *Brother or "Other"? Transformation of Strategic Narratives in Russian Television News During the Ukrainian Crisis*, in *Media, War & Conflict*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2021.

² P. Wintour, *The Revenge of History in Ukraine: Year of War Has Shaken Up World Order*, in theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/26/ukraine-war-revenge-of-history-how-geopolitics-shaping-conflict.

³ B. Stewart, *Kremlin Propaganda Is Part of the Curriculum in Russia, and Many Have No Choice but to Teach It*, in cbc.ca/news/world/russia-schools-propaganda-1.6957957.

⁴ I. Mijnsen, *The Victory Myth and Russia's Identity*, in *Russian Analytical Digest*, No. 304, 2018.

seem identical, with a closer inspection, it becomes clear that the goal the education systems have been reaching out to is dramatically different for each of them. And if, nowadays, in the Ukrainian case study, there is a decrease in democratization of education and an increase in censorship, it is related to the ongoing armed conflict with Russia and the limitations of pro-Russian influence. On the contrary, the trend of censorship and mass persecution of dissent in Russian academia originated directly from the period of formation of post-Soviet Russia, which is the key point of the case study analysis of the impact of the armed conflict on education and academia. Thus, studying the changes in the educational environment in Russia and Ukraine today, it is necessary to pay close attention not only to those processes that unfolded in the foreseeable past and those factors that are undoubtedly influential now but also to the historical features of the development of the education system in post-Soviet countries⁵.

In this case, it is hard to draw a parallel between the Ukrainian and Russian experiences, but it would be biased not to underline their unfortunate similarities. History, as a school subject, as common knowledge, and as an academic field, has become a battlefield in both Russia and Ukraine because historical narrative and cultural heritage are perceived as a core for national security, reaching a critical level of instrumentalization in geopolitics. Hence, instrumentalization of history in the political agenda poses an immediate risk of the semantic adjustments of the narrative. However, while Ukraine has been trying to delve into truth seeking and bring forward the silenced narratives of collective memory, Russia has been maintaining a new history narrative written by State institutions.

In order to avoid misleading evidence, it is significant to point out that the persecution of scientists in the 1990s is purely an inheritance of Soviet repression of academics⁶ and has intensified with the arrival of the current Russian president, Vladimir Putin. Subsequently, the arrests of scientists do not emerge as a new phenomenon, but merely continue a previously established tradition of restricting freedom in science.⁷ Therefore, this article not only addresses the problem of transformation of educational standards and processes in Russia and Ukraine during the armed conflict but also considers retrospective factors of the imperfections of the educational system both at the level of schools and higher education and underlines the critical turn into ideological upbringing and censorship in science.

In other words, the difference of narratives in modern Russia and Ukraine underscores the challenges faced by pedagogy institutions and scholars in

⁵ P.A. Druzhinin, *The Soviet Suppression of Academia. The Case of Konstantin Azadovsky*, Bloomsbury, 2022.

⁶ During the Soviet era, censorship and ideological control were central to education, with strict party lines and State-approved curricula. The lack of academic independence in Russian perspective seems like an inherited trait of the educational politics in the USSR. In the Soviet Union, dissenting voices were suppressed, leading to a homogenized education system, and in contemporary Russia, the persecution of intellectuals serves a similar purpose, curtailing academic independence.

⁷ D. Dubrovsky, K. Kaczmarska, *Authoritarian Modernisation and Academic Freedom: The Contradictions of Internationalisation and "Pockets of Effectiveness"*, in *Journal of Global Culture Studies*, Vol. 16, 2021.

maintaining academic integrity and freedom, reflecting the evolving dynamics of education and intellectual discourse in post-Soviet States under different geopolitical influences.

2. From the Liberalization to the State Censorship: The Dynamic of Political Conjecture in Russian Academia

2.1. Chronology of Persecution of Academics in Post-Soviet Russia before 2014

To understand the issue of political persecution of intellectuals in Russia, it is essential to examine the broader historical context. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought about a wave of intellectual and academic freedom, allowing scholars to explore previously restricted topics. However, this era of relative freedom was short-lived, as the Putin regime gradually sought to reestablish control over academia. So far, the politics of oppression of academics has had two stages: the first one ended in 2012 after a short liberalization break during the presidency of Dmitriy Medvedev, and the second one arose after 2014 as Putin regime got back to power with more limitations on human rights.

The Russian leadership also utilized legal measures to target academics perceived as threats. In the last 10 years, the hardest persecutions of academics and propaganda influence in education were detected. The years 2014 to 2021 witnessed a deepening of political repression in Russia, characterized by the tightening grip of the government on various aspects of society, including academia⁸. This period marked a continuation and intensification of the challenges faced by scholars, scientists, university teachers, and academics, with far-reaching consequences for academic freedom and the pursuit of knowledge. The Russian leadership enacted a series of regulations that directly impacted academic freedom. For instance, the “Foreign Agent” Law, originally introduced in 2012 but significantly expanded in 2014, required non-governmental organizations receiving foreign funding and engaging in “political activities” to register as foreign agents⁹. This legislation had a chilling effect on academic institutions, forcing them to navigate a complex web of regulations and stifling international collaboration. Moreover, scholars and academics increasingly self-censored their work to avoid the regime reprisals, hindering the free exchange of ideas and hindering innovation in various fields.

Prominent scholars such as Dmitry Dubrovsky, a sociologist and human rights activist, faced harassment, threats, and legal action for his critical views¹⁰, Valery Samoylov was arrested as well¹¹, and many others. These cases represent just a

⁸ D. Cocetti, *Under the State Supervision: Academic History in Putin’s Russia. An Interview with Alexander Makhov*, in *Storicamente*, No. 18, 2022.

⁹ See inoteka.io/ino/foreign-agents-en.

¹⁰ D. Dubrovsky, *Дмитрий Дубровский, Почему я уехал, или “заметки постороннего”* [Why I left, or “notes of an outsider”], in istorex.org/post.

¹¹ Judgment of the European Court of Human Rights of 24 April 2012. Case of Valeriy Samoylov v. the Russian Federation, in hudoc.echr.coe.int.

fraction of intellectuals who endured personal and professional consequences for expressing dissenting opinions. Furthermore, targeting private life became a common practice of the regime. A handful of scholars and university professors were persecuted because of their sexual orientation and gender identity¹²; not many of these cases ended up on open sources such as media, however, the evidence of witnesses and victims were presented into this research through anonymous interviews and local newspapers¹³. For instance, in the Moscow region a few academics were forced to leave their positions in 2010s because of their sexual orientation, and they had to escape from the country due to the threats that were coming from FSB. The same phenomenon was present nationwide, including the Perm Region, Ekaterinburg Region, Saints-Peterburg, and the South of Russia.

These actions committed by the regime caused an increase in the number of junior and advanced scholars who would leave the country. According to data from the Levada Center, a respected Russian polling organization, the number of academics leaving Russia due to political persecution and limitations on academic freedom surged. In 2014, approximately 10% of Russian scholars expressed their intention to leave the country¹⁴. By 2020, this number had more than doubled to nearly 25%. It is crucial to underline that since the beginning of the 2020s we have been talking about the Russian political system as a regime with traits of authoritarianism and totalitarianism as political repressions became a mass event and political opposition faced assassinations or such attempts (as Alexei Navalny). And with the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war, the tendencies got only stronger. Thus, all the presented data cannot mirror the full scale of the variation of public opinions or the forced migration statistics because respondents tend to protect themselves by not announcing their intentions to leave. To pose an example, some academics from Moscow, Urals, and Siberia leaving Russia in the 2020s did disclose it only *post factum*.

However, the statistics reveal the extent to which academics felt compelled to seek refuge abroad to safeguard their careers and personal freedoms. The exodus of scholars had a profound impact on Russian academic institutions. Universities and research centers struggled to retain talented faculty and attract international collaborations, resulting in a decline in research output. Moreover, the erosion of academic freedom hindered the critical exchange of ideas, stifling innovation and undermining the country's position in the global academic community.

¹² G. Kievsky, *Доцента САФУ расчитали из-за симпатии к секс-меньшинствам?* [SAFU associate professor fired because of sympathy for sex minorities], in 29.ru/text/gorod/2014/06/19/60282971/.

¹³ *Information on the Human Rights Situation in Russia for the OSCE's Moscow Mechanism*, in en.ovdinfo.org/information-human-rights-situation-russia-osces-moscow-mechanism.

¹⁴ A. Mazin, *Миграционные желания российских студентов: динамика, причины, последствия* [Migration Desires of Russian Students: Dynamics, Causes, Consequences], in *Проблемы современной экономики* [Problems of Modern Economy], No. 4, Vol. 68, 2018.

2.2. Russian Academia upon Russo-Ukrainian Conflict (2014-2023)

In Russia, the period from 2014 to 2021 was marked by the persecution of individuals who opposed the annexation of Crimea and voiced their objections to the ongoing conflict in Donbass, Ukraine. Academics, politicians, and journalists who expressed dissenting views found themselves targeted by State authorities. However, with the Russo-Ukrainian war breakout in February 2022, the number of arrested and persecuted academics has risen dramatically.

About 43 scientists related to STEM field alone have been prosecuted and arrested in Russia over the past 20 years, most of them are internationally-recognized specialists. Researchers from different regions of Russia have been prosecuted, but most often from Moscow, Urals, Siberia. Scholars are most frequently accused of «State treason» (Article 275, Criminal Code, CC), «Disclosure of State secrets» (Article 283 CC) and «Obtaining illegal access to State secrets» (Article 283.1 CC)¹⁵. Although Russian science is not a classified area and publishing the research results cannot be regarded as treason, the number of occurrences made it a practice rather than a coincidence.¹⁶

Between 2016 and 2021, as hostilities escalated in Donbass and the presence of Russian mercenaries and official armed forces became evident¹⁷, the article of Criminal Code on extremism and separatism¹⁸ was increasingly used against humanities scholars, journalists and human rights activists who spoke out in support of a sovereign Ukraine and against Russian military action. An important addition would be the comment that about 30% of all criminal cases were filed between 2020 and 2023¹⁹. It is exactly as many people were arrested in 3 years as in the previous two decades.

At the same time, charges of this kind are brought against scientists who are engaged in scientific and technical fields. This statistic does not include dozens of academic figures from the humanities and social sciences who were arrested on charges of extremism²⁰, discrediting of the Russian army, *etc.* Accounting for these

¹⁵ D. Serebryakov, *Громкие дела о госизмене в отношении российских ученых* [High-profile cases of State treason against Russian scientists], in tass.ru/info/15406673.

¹⁶ A. Benediktov, *Любая статья и доклад могут стать причиной обвинений в госизмене. В России продолжают арестовывать ученых. В Новосибирске их уже 4 за год* [Any article and report can give rise to charges of State treason. Scientists continue to be arrested in Russia. In Novosibirsk there are already 4 of them in a year], in currenttime.tv/a/obvineniy-gosizmene-rossii-uchenyh-novosibirske-32414540.html.

¹⁷ M. Galeotti, *Russia Is Massing Thousands of Troops on Ukraine's Border. Here's Why We Shouldn't Panic*, in [vox.com/2016/9/1/12729426/russia-troops-ukraine-border](https://www.vox.com/2016/9/1/12729426/russia-troops-ukraine-border); K. Roth, *Ukraine. Events of 2015*, in [hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/ukraine](https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/ukraine).

¹⁸ See consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_10699.

¹⁹ «Дела ученых»: как система ломает судьбы российских профессоров [“Affairs of Scientists”: How the System Breaks the Fates of Russian Professors], in ndn.info/publikatsii/62814-dela-uchenykh-kak-sistema-lomaet-sudby-rossijskikh-professorov.

²⁰ В Москве заочно арестовали за экстремизм учителя из движения Левое сопротивление Крылову [Krylova, a teacher from the Left Resistance movement, was arrested *in absentia* in Moscow for extremism], in tass.ru/proisshestviya/16264973.

people also makes it bigger on a geographical scale, since many scholars engaged in humanities were working or had origin from Southern regions of Russia and Caucasus. They were prosecuted for their liberal research, studies of repression and crimes of the USSR, and criticism of the Putin regime. Some historians were jailed for 20-25 years on charges of child pornography, drug distribution, and extremism. For instance, Yuri Dmitriev was incarcerated on the accounts of creation and possession of child pornography because he had in his personal archive a photo of himself with his young child that was not fully clothed. A human rights activist, journalist and historian, Vladimir Kara-Murza was charged with State treason because of anti-war position, and in 2022, a Moscow court sentenced him to 25 years in prison²¹. He was previously accused of drug possession (in 2018-2019, he was acquitted and released on parole) to prevent him from truth telling related to ethnic cleansing in the USSR and repressions in Russia. Then he was persecuted for discrediting the Russian army and separatism due to his public support of independent Ukraine (2020-2022).

The oppression of the scholars in humanitarian and social fields has two political motives, which can be pursued separately from each other, or the accusations can be made together. First, there is a ban on criticism of Soviet leaderships actions upon the Stalinism Era, Stalin personally, and critical analysis of the Red Army crimes (violations of the restrictions are punishable under the Criminal Code)²². Criminal Code violation would be also comparative studies between the USSR and the rest of totalitarian regimes in Europe (exclusively Nazi Germany). The amendments to the «Rehabilitation of Nazism» Act²³ put critical studies of the Soviet regime crimes equally to justification of the Nazi ideology as well. The official position on the inviolability of the Soviet past was finally strengthened in 2020, after the adoption of amendments to the Constitution: preservation of Soviet heritage is protected by Constitution of Russian Federation. Therefore, many historians are persecuted for comparing Putin's regime with the Soviet regime and studying totalitarianism and specifically the USSR. The second reason for persecution is the anti-war stance²⁴, not recognizing Crimea and Donbas as Russian, and calls for an end to the war. In other words, Putin's regime persecutes the very idea of freedom of academic creativity, freedom of speech, and punishes any manifestation of pacifism.

However, the persecution of historians began much earlier. The Law on Non-Commercial Organizations and Non-Agents, adopted in 2012, became one of the instruments of pressure on independent organizations engaged in historical research

²¹ S. Berkhead, *Gulag Historian's Persecution Is a Microcosm of Putin's Russia in The Dmitriev Affair*, in themoscowtimes.com/2023/06/13/in-the-dmitriev-affair-gulag-historians-persecution-is-a-microcosm-of-putins-russia.

²² I. Iashchenko, *Nationalistic Propaganda as a Strategy for Patriotic Upbringing in Russian Education*, in *Nuovi Autoritarismi e Democrazie: Diritto, Istituzioni, Società (NAD-DIS)*, No. 1, 2023.

²³ See consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_1069.

²⁴ D. Dubrovsky, *Война и академический мир* [War and the academic world], in cisrus.org/ru/2022/03/07/vojna-i-akademicheskij-mir.

and archival work. Primarily, we are referring to the Memorial Organization, which works to preserve the memory of the victims of political repression in the USSR and has been included in the register of foreign agents since 2014²⁵. The oppression of Memorial has taken several forms in more recent years. First, censorship and State-controlled media have undermined the organization's efforts to expose historical truth. Second, restrictive legislation has curtailed Memorial's activities, making it increasingly difficult for them to operate independently. Finally, international funds that supported the organization have faced restrictions or have been shut down altogether, limiting Memorial access to crucial resources.

More examples of instrumentalization of the "foreign agent" label include the case of the Perm 36 Museum (Museum of Political Repression in the Perm Region, Urals), whose owners intended to develop memory museums across the country, that was included on the foreign agent register in 2015-2016. Among those who faced repressions or threats are Yuri Dmitriev, head of Karelian Memorial, David Feldman, professor at Russian State University, Alexander Guryanov, head of the Polish Program at Memorial International, Kirill Alexandrov, and others²⁶.

Additionally, the George Soros Open Society Foundations²⁷, DAAD and Oxford Fund²⁸, which provided funding for research projects, subsidized students engaged in research projects, and published academic articles and books in Russia since the 2000s, have been recognized as undesirable organizations, foreign agents and banned in Russia. Thus, Russian scientists and students have lost alternative sources of funding and can now only apply for government grants that provide funding for projects that only serve the interests of today politics: military development and propaganda projects in the social sciences and humanities. Now, participation in scholarship programs of foundations, reception of grants, participation in conferences, seminars, summer schools, and other activities of foundations are applied as grounds for recognition of scientists as "foreign agents"²⁹.

However, mass arrests and dismissals with the outbreak of war are most often associated with the anti-war stance of scholars and criticism of Russia actions. In June 2023 alone, 3 new laws on criminal prosecution in denial of patriotism,

²⁵ J. Dettmer, *Historians Lament Dissolution of Russia's Memorial Historical Rights Group*, in voanews.com/a/historians-lament-dissolution-of-russia-s-memorial-historical-rights-group.

²⁶ "Честные историки воспринимаются как оппозиционеры" – Николай Сванидзе о деле главы карельского "Мемориала" Юрия Дмитриева ["Honest historians are perceived as oppositionists" – Nikolai Svanidze on the case of Yuri Dmitriev, head of the Karelian "Memorial"], in president-sovet.ru/presscenter/news/chestnye_istoriki_vosprinimayutsya_kak_oppozitsionery_nikolay_svanidze_o_dele_glavy_karelskogo_memor/.

²⁷ I. Egorov, *Фонд Сороса запретили в России* [The Soros Foundation has been banned in Russia], in rg.ru/2015/11/30/fond-site-anons.

²⁸ М. Poschutaev, *В России признали нежелательными "Фонд Ходорковского" и "Оксфордский российский фонд"* [The "Khodorkovsky Foundation" and the "Oxford Russian Foundation" have been recognized as undesirable in Russia], in bbc.com/russian/news-57669450.

²⁹ *Раскрыты источники финансирования политолога Екатерины Шульман* [The sources of financing of political scientist Ekaterina Shulman have been revealed], in mk.ru/politics/2022/06/20/raskryty-istochniki-finansirovaniya-politologa-ekateriny-shulman.html.

discrediting the army, and denying the unity of Russia and Ukraine were adopted. In addition, 43 amendments were adopted to toughen legislation in the field of limiting public opinion, calling any critics of either Russian troops or political decisions towards the Ukrainian conflict outlaw. This action brought up the number of anti-war arrests³⁰.

This legislative complex was used immediately against most known academics. For instance, Valery Garbuzov, a Russian historian, and political scientist³¹, was dismissed from his position as director of the Institute of the United States and Canada of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) at the initiative of the founder. The reason for the dismissal was the publication of an article criticizing Russian propaganda and analyzing the political myths of the USSR.

To avoid the persecutions, 28 distinguished scientists and professors, including globally recognized specialists and recipients of numerous awards, departed from Russia. According to Konstantin Sonin, an ex-professor at the Higher School of Economics, approximately 150 professors have left the institution³². Within the Institute for Humanitarian Historical and Theoretical Studies, a branch of the Higher School of Economics, 60% of the staff has been dismissed. The Scholars at Risk organization facilitated the departure of 200 individuals, while an additional 62 scientists received assistance from the German Alexander von Humboldt Foundation³³.

In the last five years, Russia has lost 50,000 people³⁴. The overall count of young researchers under 30 in Russia is on a decline – in 2010, the figure stood at 71 thousand, encompassing 4350 holding a university degree. By 2021, this number had reduced to 53 thousand, with 1750 holding university degrees³⁵. Following the USSR dissolution, Russia boasted 992 thousand researchers; yet the year 2021 marked a historic low, plummeting to 340 thousand. Over the past 1.5 years, official

³⁰ *To See More on the Anti-War Repressions: Wartime Repressions Report. May 2023*, in oi.legal/instruction/wartime-repressions-report-may-2023; *Нет войне* [NoWAR], in reports.ovd.info/no-to-war.

³¹ A. Ivanova, *Историка Гарбузова отстранили за колонку про пропаганду в РФ* [Historian Garbuzov suspended for column on Russian propaganda], in dw.com/ru/istorika-garbuzova-otstranili-ot-dolzности-posle-kolonki-o-propagande-v-rf.

³² D. Talanova, *Следите за уходом мысли 270 ученых уволились из топовых российских вузов после начала войны и уехали за границу: исследование Новой-Европа* [Follow the departure of thought. 270 scientists quit top Russian universities after the start of the war and went abroad: Nova-Europe study], in novayagazeta.eu/articles/2023/08/17/sledite-za-ukhodom-mysli.

³³ O. Zvyagintseva, *СМИ: после начала войны Россию покинули десятки известных ученых* [Media: dozens of famous scientists left Russia after the start of the war], in rus.err.ee/1608927893/smi-posle-nachala-voyny-rossiju-pokinuli-desjatki-izvestnyh-uchenyh.

³⁴ A. Martov, *Россия теряет ученых с катастрофической скоростью* (Russia is losing scientists at a catastrophic rate), in russian.eurasianet.org.

³⁵ O. Beshley, *“Провинциализация” науки и образования. Уезжают лучшие. После начала войны Россию покинули сотни ученых и преподавателей вузов* [“Provincialization” of science and education. The best are leaving. Hundreds of scientists and university professors left Russia after the beginning of the war], in currenttime.tv/a/uezhayut-voyny-rossiyu-pokinuli-sotni-uchenyh-prepodavateley/32419520.

records indicate an outflow of approximately 30,000 individuals³⁶. This diminishing trend raises concerns about the nation research capacity and poses challenges for sustaining a robust academic community.

3. Critical Impact of Russo-Ukrainian Conflict on Education and Academia in Ukraine

3.1. Ukrainian Case of Negative Outcomes of the Ongoing Conflict with Russia in Education and Academia: Ideological Adaptations of Teaching Narratives

The Ukrainian case shows that the construction of democratic institutions in the country and the development of statehood did not cause targeted persecution of scientists, nor was there ideological or militarized influence on school education. However, significant changes have appeared in the last ten years. They are primarily related to the process of nation-building and identity formation. These trends have been emerging since Euromaidan. This is the increasing nationalization in both schools and universities, the deepening and broadening of the discourse on identity both in the academy and in the public space, but also the desire to unify educational trajectories and identity through the introduction of a single State language. The following is a brief overview and analysis of the root causes of the transformations both at the legislative and structure levels during the conflict with Russia since 2014, focusing on the impact of the war that began in 2022.

The Ukrainian government response to the ongoing conflict has influenced the framing of historical events, with notable implications for all levels of education. In the school curriculum, there has been a discernible shift in the portrayal of historical events, focusing on a narrative that emphasizes Ukrainian national identity, resilience, and the struggle for independence. However, the presence of collective experience in Ukrainian public history shows that the main narrative has not diverged from the history of individuals, families, and different social groups (collective memory has been represented through the Collective Memory Institute of Ukraine, thematic museums, local and State-wide exhibitions). As can be observed, historical education has been focusing on the decolonization approach since 2014, when it began to study Soviet history in the context of understanding the USSR as an imperial State that destroyed the identity of all ethnic groups, establishing the supremacy of the Russian nation³⁷. These changes were introduced by the Ministry of Education at both school and higher education levels. These semantic shifts occurred along with the introduction of a meaningful block in the

³⁶ “Проект”: после начала войны Россию покинули десятки известных ученых [“Project”: dozens of famous scientists left Russia after the outbreak of war], in meduza.io/news/2023/03/27/proekt-posle-nachala-voyny-rossiyu-pokinuli-desyatki-izvestnyh-uchenyh.

³⁷ *Ukraine Removes Russian Language and Literature from School Curriculum*, in meduza.io/en/news/2022/08/16/ukraine-removes-russian-language-and-literature-from-school-curriculum.

educational process that addressed the problem of the growing Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Since the mid-2010s, the Ukrainian educational process has been discussing the problem of “Russian Fascism” (Russism)³⁸, the destructive concept of the “Russian world” (and “Russian Peace” which coexists with destruction), and the threat to Ukrainian identity from Russia.

Today educational system in Ukraine must address the Russian propaganda spread as well, which brings the politicization of school life and shapes the curricula in a particular way, giving the teaching hours to specialists who can illustrate pro-Russian ideology, help to detect fake-news and rewritten history narratives³⁹. Especially, the tools and narratives to fight Russian propaganda are needed to work with schoolchildren from the free territories that were occupied by Russian troops, since the kids were exposed heavily to the Kremlin brainwashing⁴⁰. This shift has been accompanied by a deliberate de-emphasis or exclusion of elements related to Russian influence, reflecting a response to the geopolitical tensions. The politicization and militarization of education have become evident, as educational materials increasingly highlight the role of Ukraine in resisting external aggression. Moreover, the conflict has prompted the actualization of contemporary political agendas within historical discourse, potentially influencing students perceptions of current events.

Thus, the transformation of the educational process in Ukraine reflects mainly one trend: the desire for nation-building, for the formation of Ukrainian identity through education and academia⁴¹. There is an increasing amount of research in the humanities aimed at studying Ukrainian history, Ukrainian literature, and the impact of the Soviet occupation on the traditional way of life and national culture of Ukraine. Much attention is also paid to the study of repressions and mass deportations of Ukrainians during Stalinism, which is in line with the political vector of Ukraine’s development and the recognition of the man-made famine in

³⁸ P. Wintour, *The War in Ukraine Has Unleashed a New Word in a Creative Play on Three Different Languages. Ukrainians Identify an Enemy: “Ruscism”*, in [nytimes.com/2022/04/22/magazine/ruscism-ukraine-russia-war](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/22/magazine/ruscism-ukraine-russia-war).

³⁹ E. Murrock, J. Amulya, M. Druckman, T. Liubyva, *Winning the War on State-Sponsored Propaganda: Results from an Impact Study of a Ukrainian News Media and Information Literacy Program*, in *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2018.

⁴⁰ V. Kazanevsky, *Милитаризация образования. Россияне превращают школы в “фабрики зомби”* [Militarization of education. Russians are turning schools into “zombie factories”], in gazeta.ua/ru/articles/poglyad/_militarizaciya-obrazovaniya-rossiyane-prevrashchayut-shkoly-v-fabriki-zombi/1158628; I. Hoban, *Militarization of Childhood(s) in Donbas: “Growing Together with the Republic”*, in *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 57, No. 1, 2021; B. Demianenko, A. Demianenko, *Militarization of the Educational Process in Occupied Crimea (2014 – 2019)*, in *East European Historical Bulletin*, No. 19, 2020.

⁴¹ *Ukraine/Russia: New History Textbook Is a Blatant Attempt to Unlawfully Indoctrinate School Children in Russia and Russian-Occupied Ukrainian Territories*, in [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/09/ukraine-russia-new-history-textbook-is-a-blatant-attempt-to-unlawfully-indoctrinate-school-children-in-russia-and-russian-occupied-ukrainian-territories](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/09/ukraine-russia-new-history-textbook-is-a-blatant-attempt-to-unlawfully-indoctrinate-school-children-in-russia-and-russian-occupied-ukrainian-territories).

1930 as genocide by the global partners⁴². While these changes may be seen as responses to the objective reality of the conflict with Russia, they also raise concerns about potential biases, limitations on academic freedom, and the long-term impact on students understanding of historical events. As a balanced and nuanced approach to teaching history is essential to fostering critical thinking and a comprehensive understanding of complex geopolitical realities. The State support is an amalgamation of new factors of relevance for research, but political conjuncture does not equal censorship in the field of the history teaching so far. However, what is the situation with literature and culture studies?

Changes in the literature curriculum have led to the almost complete elimination of Russian and Russian-speaking authors from the educational process both at the level of school education and at universities. The only exception is specialized linguistic higher education (foreign languages), where some Russian-speaking authors are retained for study. However, we are talking mainly about those authors who were of Ukrainian origin or carried out creative work on the territory of Ukraine, in particular, Nikolai Gogol⁴³. Thus, by 2022, between 20⁴⁴ and 40 Russian authors were excluded from the school curriculum on foreign literature⁴⁵. The Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine adopted the decision to exclude about 500 authors⁴⁶ from literature course at all levels of educational institutions, including classic authors⁴⁷ such as Alexander Pushkin, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Mikhail Lermontov, Lev Tolstoy, and others.

This process was approved with the outbreak of full-scale war in 2022. However, it became an agenda in 2018; there was a social survey supported by the Ministry of Culture on whether Russian authors should be removed from the educational process. Then only an order of 40% of the population voted in favor of censoring

⁴² Ukraine officially recognized the Holodomor as a genocide in 2006. The law criminalizing the denial of the Holodomor was enacted later, in 2015. This legislation, known as the Law «On Condemning the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes in Ukraine and Prohibiting Propaganda of Their Symbols» includes provisions criminalizing the denial of the Holodomor as an act of genocide against the Ukrainian people.

⁴³ I. Gromlyuk, *Без Достоевського і Лермонтова, але з українським Гоголем. Що може зникнути зі шкільних програм* [Without Dostoevsky and Lermontov, but with a Ukrainian Gogol. What may disappear from school curricula], in [bbc.com/ukrainian/news-61827502](https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/news-61827502).

⁴⁴ *23 рази російські автори вивчаються в українській програмі з 5 до 11 класу* [23 Russian authors are studied in the Ukrainian curriculum from 5th to 11th grade], in nus.org.ua/news/23-razy-rosijski-avtory-vyvchayutsya-v-ukrayinskij-programi-z-5-do-11-klasu.

⁴⁵ K. Kostyuk, V. Honcharuk, *Зі шкільної літератури вилучать твори російських авторів* [Works by Russian authors to be removed from school literature], in susilne.media/255137-ziskilnoi-programi-vilucut-rosijsku-literaturu-so-kazut-cerkaski-osvitani.

⁴⁶ S. Stretovich, *Не всіх 500 російських письменників ми повинні знати – можливо, вистачить і десяти* [We don't need to know all 500 Russian writers – perhaps ten will suffice], in lb.ua/culture/2022/07/08/522491_oleksandra_koval_ne_vsih_500.

⁴⁷ I. Pavlenko, *Russian Classics Excluded from Ukrainian School Program*, in kyivpost.com/post/1887.

Russian literature⁴⁸. Nevertheless, these trends coincide with the critical development of the conflict in Donbass in 2016-2018 and take a dramatic turn in 2021-2022. Thus, most of the decisions aimed at censoring literature do look like a response to the rising conflict.

And while there is an appealing possibility of justifying certain strict changes, some of them are more difficult to explain. In particular, the decisions to liquidate Russian-language collections of books and books authored by Russians in Ukrainian libraries, as decided by the Ministry of Culture⁴⁹, looks, unfortunately, like a borderline decision in the sphere of human rights violations. The act of liquidating books by authors of a specific ethnicity or nationality within libraries under governmental decisions not only constitutes a grave violation of the freedom of expression, a fundamental human right, but also undermines academic integrity, perpetuates cultural erasure, and fosters discrimination. By suppressing diverse perspectives, such actions inhibit the intellectual progress of society, hindering critical inquiry and the open exchange of ideas necessary for a well-rounded understanding of historical, cultural, and social issues. This form of censorship risks exacerbating social divisions, as it sends a message of exclusion and devaluation of certain ethnic communities. Internationally, such practices are likely to draw condemnation, damaging the reputation of the responsible authorities.

3.2. The Language Policy in Ukraine as a Response to the Escalation of the Conflict with Russia: Pros and Cons of One National Language Legislation

As a part of nation-building process, the Law of Ukraine on Education was adopted in 2017, which declared Ukrainian as the primary language of instruction in educational institutions. This legislation aimed to promote the Ukrainian language and enhance linguistic unity. However, Russia actively used this decision as an example of Russophobia⁵⁰, statistics below show that the decline in interest in the Russian language among the population reached a critical point in 2022⁵¹.

In the year 2014, Ukraine hosted a significant population of individuals conversant in Russian, chiefly clustered in the southern and eastern areas, encompassing Crimea. The dominance of Russian as the predominant language was approximated at 35-42%, as per the official census records of 2001. Nonetheless, discernible transformations transpired in the ensuing years⁵². By 2018, the

⁴⁸ *Almost 40% of Ukrainians Want Russian Literature Removed from the School Syllabus*, in chytomo.com/en/almost-40-of-ukrainians-want-russian-literature-removed-from-the-school-syllabus.

⁴⁹ D. Krechetova, *У Мінкульті розповіли, які російські книги треба першочергово вилучити з бібліотек* [The Ministry of Culture told which Russian books should be removed from libraries as a matter of priority], in life.pravda.com.ua/culture/2022/07/11/249511/.

⁵⁰ I. Iashchenko, *Understanding Russian Disinformation Strategies Inside and Outside the Country*, in aspensiaonline.it/understanding-russian-disinformation-strategies-inside-and-outside-the-country.

⁵¹ J. Clarkson, *War and Ukrainian Identity Through the Eyes of a Ukrainian Graduate Student*, in eitw.nd.edu/articles/war-and-ukrainian-identity-an-interview-with-a-ukrainian-graduate.

⁵² See ukrstat.gov.ua.

proportion of Ukrainians identifying Russian as their primary language had declined to 25-30%, and amid the ongoing conflict from 2022, the percentage dropped further, potentially falling below 20%⁵³. Notably, the linguistic landscape in Ukraine is intricate, characterized by a high degree of bilingualism, with many individuals proficient in both Ukrainian and Russian. The historical and geographical ties to Russia have often facilitated the predominance of Russian as a *lingua franca* in certain regions. Considering an approximate population of 8.8-9.5 million ethnically Russian individuals residing in the country, this translates to an estimated 20-22.5% of the total population being of Russian ethnicity.

Ukraine represents a diverse nation with a mosaic of ethnic groups. While Ukrainians constitute the majority, accounting for roughly 75% of the population, the country hosts substantial ethnic minority communities. Russians stand as the most prominent minority, comprising around 17-20% of the population⁵⁴. However, the distribution of ethnic groups across Ukraine is not uniform. The concentration of Russian ethnic groups is notably higher in the southern and eastern regions, while the western areas exhibit a larger presence of Ukrainians and other minority groups.

One significant occurrence is the Constitutional Court ruling in February 2018, declaring the 2012 language legislation unconstitutional. This lawmaking had previously recognized a language spoken by at least 10% of an *oblast*'s population as a regional language, granting it the right to be used in legal, educational, and governmental settings. Consequently, the law was invalidated, affirming Ukrainian as the exclusive official language nationwide. This act caused a shift of the whole education system from multiple language-based approach to one national language formation. It is one of the most pronounced examples of the negative outcomes of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, showing the level of politization of the education⁵⁵. This also caused sizable structural and semantic changes in the school and higher education. First, Russian-speaking classes and schools were losing the government support and closing. Second, Ukrainian language was legally imposed as the only language in all areas of life, starting with education.

Summing up, the school education reflects each round of the growing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Reducing the influence of the Russian language was the first step. The second one altered school programs regarding the following subjects: literature and history. As illustrated previously, nowadays, historical curricula draw focus on today events, meanwhile all Russian authors are removed from literature. These actions can certainly be considered an example of censorship. It is crucial to emphasize that under martial law the level of freedom of speech in Ukraine is decreasing and the risks of human rights violations are increasing.

⁵³ I. Iashchenko, *Russian Disinformation About the Ukrainian Conflict Since 2014: Fact-Checking and Analyzing Recurring Patterns*, in aspeniaonline.it/russian-disinformation-about-the-ukrainian-conflict-since-2014-fact-checking-and-recurring-patterns.

⁵⁴ *The Sixth National Poll: The Language Issue in Ukraine (March 19, 2022)*, in ratinggroup.ua/en/research/ukraine/language_issue_in_ukraine_march_19th_2022.html.

⁵⁵ L. Hyde, *War in Ukraine Has Another Front Line: The Classroom*, in politico.eu/article/ukraine-war-education-classroom-front-line-russia-occupation.

4. *Conclusions*

In conclusion, the evolution of educational systems in Ukraine and Russia upon the Russo-Ukrainian conflict has led to distinct trajectories in the development of education and science in both nations. The shifts significantly shaped the academic, societal, and political landscapes within these nations. The Russian system clearly meets the geopolitical goals of the current leader by investing in the development of ideas of patriotism, actively buying pluralism of opinion regarding military conflicts, and providing a justifiable system of political decisions. In practice, this is realized through the direct persecution of scholars and activists, as well as the introduction of propaganda in schools and universities. At the same time, the Ukrainian experience is significantly different in this sense and pursues the idea of national unity by popularizing Ukrainian culture and the Ukrainian language. The negative side of these actions is the abolition of Russian culture, the change of curricula in schools and universities, the destruction of Russian-language books and books of Russian authors in libraries, which is enshrined in legislative acts. Although both nations display a trend towards censorship and the persecution of dissent, the underlying causes differ. In Ukraine, the decrease in democratization of education and increased censorship linked to the ongoing conflict with Russia and limitations on pro-Russian influence.

The further examination of the Ukrainian and Russian experiences reveals a complex interplay between historical narratives, cultural heritage, and national security, transforming history into a contested battleground within both nations. While an unequivocal parallel may be elusive, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the unfortunate similarities that characterize the instrumentalization of history in the geopolitical agendas of Russia and Ukraine. In both contexts, history, whether as a school subject or academic field become a matter of national security. Even though both nations face evolving challenges in maintaining academic integrity amidst complex educational dynamics, representing a pivotal point in their historical narratives, it is possible to detect and observe the diverse vectors of the transformations based on the political regime and values shared by political actors and societies.