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COMPARATIVE APPROACHES  
TO THE BANDERIVETS PROPAGANDA  
IN WESTERN UKRAINE AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA  
AFTER 1945

The activities of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists are among the most controversial themes in modern history of Ukraine and the Soviet Union (Russia). While the sources related to the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the Banderevits are abundant in Soviet (Russian, Ukrainian) and Polish archives, and discussed in all its controversy in Soviet, Russian, Ukrainian, and Polish historiography, there is plenty of material focusing on the so-called Banderivets<sup>1</sup> in Czechoslovak archives and historiography. This study offers, in an introductory manner, a comparison of Banderivets propaganda in Western Ukraine and Czechoslovakia.<sup>2</sup> It also explores how

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Banderivets” to identify the group of Ukrainian rebels within the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) is admittedly vague and imprecise, and largely misused by the former Communist and contemporary propaganda, this study uses the term as it was ordinarily used in a number of Czechoslovak as well as Ukrainian documents after 1945.

<sup>2</sup> This study essentially draws from the collections of primary sources: Шмігель, М. (ред.), *УПА в світлі словацьких та чеських документів (1945–1948)*. Книга перша: Рейди УПА в документах війська та апарату безпеки ЧСР (1945–1946), Літопис української повстанської армії, т. 48, Торонто – Львів 2010 – Šmigel’s book, which will be extensively quoted in this study, is a collection of over two-hundred documents from different Czechoslovak national and local archives in the period of 1945 and 1946; it also introduces a representative sample of sources on the Banderivets’ activities in Czechoslovakia; *Електронний архів Українського визвольного руху*. [online: <<http://avr.org.ua/>>, cit. 2017-06-15]. There is plenty of other important archival material in the collections of primary sources and archives, for example: *Державний архів Служби безпеки України*, Київ, particularly the fund 16 and others; *Archiv bezpečnostních složek (ABS)*, Praha, particularly the fund 307; *Боротьба проти УПА і націоналістичного підпілля: інформаційні документи ЦК КП(б)У, обкомів партії, НКВС-МВС, МДБ-КДБ, 1943–1959*; *Літопис УПА*, т. 4, Київ – Торонто 2002; Богунов, С. – Боряк, Г. – Кокін, С. (ред.), *Роман Шухевич у документах радянських органів державної безпеки (1940–1950)*, т. 2, Київ 2007 – this book, which will be extensively quoted in this study, is a collection of over two-hundred documents from the Sectoral State Archive of the Security

Ukrainian<sup>3</sup> and Czechoslovak<sup>4</sup> materials differ or are in concert in terms of their assessment of Banderivets propaganda in the first years after the World War II. There is a premise – to be supported by wider analysis – that Czechoslovak materials show less emotional approach to the relations between the Banderivets, Russians (Soviets), Poles, Jews, and others. Czechoslovak materials seem to interpret the relations among the contesting groups on the territory of Western Ukraine, Eastern Poland and Eastern Czechoslovakia not without prejudice (which is indeed impossible), still, more pragmatically. One of the reasons might be that Czechoslovakia was not fully and so violently involved in the tragic events and hostilities since the breakout of World War II, and even earlier. Czechoslovakia was not part of the territory often referred by contemporary historians as “bloodlands” or “Western Borderlands” of the Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup>

Historical sources related to the period shortly after the end of the World War II show altogether different or conflicting view of future developments on the territory of Western Ukraine presented by Ukrainian nationalists, the so called Banderivets, on the one hand; and the representatives of Soviet power and the Communists on the other hand. This paper doesn't intend to explore how propaganda of those times influenced the relations between Soviets/Russians and Ukrainians in the Soviet period and continues to do so until today, or its

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Service of Ukraine related to the activities of Roman Shukhevych and UPA between 1940 and 1950; and many others.

<sup>3</sup> To the key publications addressing the Banderivets in Western Ukraine include Патриляк, І., *Перемога або смерть. Український визвольний рух у 1939–1960 роках*, Харків – Львів 2015; Rossoliński-Liebe, G., *Stepan Bandera. The Life and Afterlife of a Ukrainian Nationalist: Fascism, Genocide, and Cult*, Stuttgart 2014; Стасюк, О., *Видавничо-пропагандивна діяльність ОУН (1941–1953 рр.)*, Львів 2006; Amar, T. C., *The Paradox of Ukrainian Lviv. A Borderland City between Stalinists, Nazis, and Nationalists*, Ithaca – London 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Even though Czechoslovak sources related to the Banderivets activities in Czechoslovakia require deeper and more comprehensive analysis and interpretation, there are several publications on the topic, particularly: Fiala, J., *Zpráva o akci B*, Praha 1994; Vološčuk, I., *Ukrajinská povstalecká armáda v Československu v letech 1945–1949*, Praha 1999; Řepa, T., *Banderovci. Politické souvislosti, následky zneužití tématu komunistickou propagandou, návaznost na hybridní konflikt v současnosti*, Praha 2019. Further key interpretations include the studies by David Svoboda (although he focuses largely on the activities of Banderivets until 1945): Svoboda, D., *Dlouhá cesta do lesů. Politický vývoj ukrajinského integrálního nacionalismu a předpoklady vzniku Ukrajinské povstalecké armády, Securitas Imperii*, 2013, 22, 98–120. Among Slovak authors the most important is the introductory study by Michal Šmigel: Šmigel, M., *Rejdy UPA v dokumentoch vojenských a bezpečnostných štruktúr ČSR (1945–1946)*, in: Шмігель, М. (ред.), *УПА в світлі словацьких та чеських документів (1945–1948). Книга перша: Рейди УПА в документах війська та апарату безпеки ЧСР (1945–1946)*, Літопис української повстанської армії, т. 48, Торонто – Львів 2010, 47–83.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Snyder, T., *Bloodlands. Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, New York 2010; Statiev, A., *The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderland*, Cambridge 2010.

contribution to the evolution of modern Ukrainian national myth and the Soviet/Russian myth. Nonetheless, it is worth to mention the conflicting perceptions of the World War II and post-war period that have been gradually transformed into the collective memory of the two largest nations of the former Soviet empire.<sup>6</sup> The Soviet/Russian interpretation often resolutely rejects the positive historical role of the OUN and UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army), arguing “it contradicted the myth of the Great Patriotic War, which, in the 1960s, successfully superseded the myth of the October Revolution in its role as the founding myth of the USSR.”<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, the Ukrainian national scheme, “conceptualizes the history of the OUN and the UPA as one of the most important elements in the history of the nation.”<sup>8</sup> The theme of the OUN, UPA, and Bandera is controversial even for Ukrainian national discourse, because of the role the UPA played in murdering Jews, Poles, Soviets and even their uncooperative Ukrainian and UPA compatriots.<sup>9</sup> Although this study focuses on propagandist formulations in Ukrainian and Czechoslovak materials and their perception, it also touches upon such fundamentally different views of the Baderivets and hostile, bloody and violent “borderland” reality and events in terms of methodological approaches.

There is an abundance of sources and interpretations with strong arguments and proofs labelling Banderivets as Fascists, Nazis, murderers, nationalists and even chauvinists, cruel terrorists, etc.<sup>10</sup> Other contemporaries, commentators and historians present, with the help of historical material, completely different

<sup>6</sup> More on those concepts Tumis, S., *Historiografie hladomoru na Ukrajině v letech 1932–1933. Odras tragédie v sovětské a západní historiografii v době studené války jako zdroj pro porozumění kontroverzní diskusi o hladomoru v současné historické debatě, Historie – otázky – problémy*, 2016, 8, 2, 120–122; Yurchuk, Y., *The Nexus between Cultural Trauma, Collective Memory and Social Trust: A Glass Half-Full, Half-Empty or Shattered. The Case of Post-1991 Ukraine*, in: Törnqvist-Plewa, B. – Bernsand, N. (eds.), *Painful Pasts and Useful Memories Remembering and Forgetting in Europe*, Lund 2012, 76–79; Kuzio, T., *History, Memory and Nation Building in the Post-Soviet Colonial Space, Nationalities Papers*, 2020, 30, 2, 242–244.

<sup>7</sup> Yurchuk, Y., *The Nexus between Cultural Trauma, Collective Memory and Social Trust: A Glass Half-Full, Half-Empty or Shattered. The Case of Post-1991 Ukraine*, in: Törnqvist-Plewa, B. – Bernsand, N. (eds.), *Painful Pasts and Useful Memories Remembering and Forgetting in Europe*, Lund 2012, 77.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, 78.

<sup>9</sup> Грицак, Я., *Нарис історії України. Формування модерної нації XIX–XX століття*, Київ 2019, 496; Rossoliński-Liebe, G., *Stepan Bandera. The Life and Afterlife of a Ukrainian Nationalist: Fascism, Genocide, and Cult*, Stuttgart 2014, 301–305; Narvselius, E. – Bernsand, N., Lviv and Chernivtsi – Two Memory Cultures in the Western Ukrainian Borderland, in: Törnqvist-Plewa, B. – Bernsand, N., Narvselius, E. (eds.), *Beyond Transition? Memory and Identity Narratives in Eastern and Central Europe*, Lund 2015, 158.

<sup>10</sup> Those arguments are well advanced, for example, in: Rossoliński-Liebe: *Rossoliński-Liebe, G., Stepan Bandera. The Life and Afterlife of a Ukrainian Nationalist: Fascism, Genocide, and Cult*, Stuttgart 2014, 69–90. On the ideological, intellectual and conceptual basis of OUN/UPA/

image of the Banderivets, portraying them as anti-Fascists, anti-Nazi, national heroes, courageous guardians, soldiers, etc.<sup>11</sup> All those one-sided interpretations are based on selective use of sources and contribute to misunderstanding the extremely complex reality in the “Borderland regions”.<sup>12</sup>

While it is not difficult to find, for example, proofs for Fascist, or even Nazis nature of the Banderivets ideology particularly in the 1930s, there is plenty of material, especially related to the World War II and its aftermath that refutes any argument that they would have upheld any Fascist and Nazis ideas. Hence, any interpretation of such concepts in the “Borderland reality” has to be quite cautious: the Banderivets did have strong Fascist or even Nazis nature in the first phase of its activities (1930s), while later, during and after World War II, they rejected them. Yet, one has to also be mindful when exploring the nature of Banderivets Fascism/Nazism as well. Whilst the Ukrainian nationalists were represented by a number of “integral” Fascists, or Nazis,<sup>13</sup> it seems the Western Ukrainian version of Fascism/Nazism tended to serve more as an instrument to

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Banderivets movement cf. Potichnyj, P. J. – Shtendera, Y. (eds.), *Political Thought of the Ukrainian Underground 1943–1951*, Edmonton 1986, 119–126, 143–225.

<sup>11</sup> Volodymyr Viatrovych is the best-known advocate of the OUN-B. See, for example, Shkandrij, M., *Ukrainian Nationalism. Politics, Ideology, and Literature, 1929–1956*, New Haven – London 2015, 68. Among a number of his works I quote: В’ятрович, В., *За лапштунками «Волині-43»*. *Невідома польсько-українська війна*, Харків 2016. There is a number of influential Ukrainian historians who interpret this controversial topic in widely moderate manner. For example, Грицак, Я., *Нарис історії України. Формування модерної нації XIX–XX століття*, Київ 2019, 436–499; Кульчицький, С., *Червоний виклик. Історія комунізму в Україні від його народження до загибелі*, кн. 3, Київ 2013, 57–77, 124–128; Plokhly, S., *The Gates of Europe. A History of Ukraine*, New York – London 2015, 277–296.

<sup>12</sup> One-sided interpretations often stem from emotional national views of the “others”, deeply rooted in national identities and myths in historical narratives of different nations, and from propaganda. Given this still sensitive context, it is unsurprising that Polish, Russian/Soviet and Ukrainian interpretations of OUN/UPA activities differ widely. Cf. for example Marples, D. R., *Heroes and Villains. Creating National History in Contemporary Ukraine*, Budapest – New York 2007, 125–237. Discussions and controversies concerning Banderivets activities have recently become reignited even in public space among Czech Ukrainists when Milan Skála published his article on the controversial web page *Sputnik* condemning public commemoration of the Ukrainian nationalist Vasyl Makukh (former Banderivets) who committed suicide by self-immolation on Kreshchatyk in 1968 in protest against the Soviet rule of Ukraine and Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. See: [online: <<https://cz.sputniknews.com/nazory/201911110951093-v-praze-6-nechteji-sochu-koneva-ale-v-praze-10-vzpominajina-vojaka-armady-upa-ukrajinista-skala/?fbclid=IwAR0zL8vedmPag-tO4h7KXhfDCbdU76XTwHb3DVX4Fe47TgEH2OaOjQGg0ow>>, cit. 2020-01-26].

<sup>13</sup> See Rossoliński-Liebe, G., *Stepan Bandera. The Life and Afterlife of a Ukrainian Nationalist: Fascism, Genocide, and Cult*, Stuttgart 2014, 77–89. In this context role of Ukrainian Fascists such as Dmytro Dontsov is discussed. See for example Dontsov, D., *Die ukrainische Staatsidee und der Krieg gegen Russland*, Hamburg 2016.

enforce the nationalist aims of the movement – an independent Ukrainian state. Despite some undoubtedly influential integral Fascists/Nazis within the OUN/UPA, the Ukrainian nationalist movement was never, in general, integrally Fascist/Nazis, but much more integrally nationalist (sometimes even chauvinist) using the Fascist or even Nazis ideas for its national aims as a majority of national revisionists were dissatisfied with the post-Versailles settlement.<sup>14</sup> When the Fascist/Nazi ideas appeared to be an obstacle for their aims, it was easy for them to adopt critical attitude to them. Still, more of them defined themselves as democrats and relied upon the Americans and British as determined to the Soviet regime.<sup>15</sup>

In addressing the Ukrainian national movement and the phenomenon of the so-called Banderivets all narratives ought to be considered in order to understand the complex picture of the “Borderland reality”. In all their divergence and contrast, the aforementioned labels and narratives offer a portrait of the reality of Banderivets movement. The Banderivets were Fascists/Nazis, antisemites, chauvinists, murderers, and, at the same time, anti-Fascists/anti-Nazis, heroes, courageous soldiers fighting for independent Ukraine. They were both perpetrators and victims, villains and heroes. Timothy Snyder suggests that all groups living and operating in the “Borderland regions” were vulnerable, all were murderers and heroes.<sup>16</sup> The ratio between vulnerability and strength of the Banderivets, Poles, Soviets, Jews, Germans, ordinary local Ukrainians depended on circumstances, primarily on their ability to defend themselves from enemy attacks and to survive in times of turmoil: the more organized and armed the groups were, the higher was their chance to survive – and to violate as well.

Before comparing the archival documents, let’s briefly focus on historical context of the borderland territory of Poland, Soviet Union (Western Ukraine) and Czechoslovakia. The strong Bolshevich propaganda to be analysed herein was merely a supplement of the extensive Soviet effort to militarily suppress Ukrainian nationalists in Western Ukraine and in Eastern Poland. That left the Banderivets with a sole possibility to fight the mighty Soviet Communist power illegally and

<sup>14</sup> Potichnyj, P.J. – Shtendera, Y. (eds.), *Political Thought of the Ukrainian Underground 1943–1951*, Edmonton 1986, 169–174.

<sup>15</sup> A number of Banderivets documents trust in the United States and Great Britain, and some even fear there might be World War III. See, for example, Богунов, С. – Борзяк, Г. – Кокін, С. (ред.), *Роман Шухевич у документах радянських органів державної безпеки (1940–1950)*, т. 2, Київ 2007, 318–319, 436, 476; Шмігель, М. (ред.), *УПА в світлі словацьких та чеських документів (1945–1948). Книга перша: Рейди УПА в документах війська та апарату безпеки ЧСР (1945–1946)*, *Літопис української повстанської армії*, т. 48, Торонто – Львів 2010, 192–193, 215.

<sup>16</sup> Snyder, T., *Bloodlands. Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, New York 2010, *passim*.



in partisan manner.<sup>17</sup> In the end of 1945 and early 1946, the Soviet military was deployed in the Western parts of Ukraine with the aim to destroy the OUN and UPA. Within the scope of the operation Second Grand Blockade, the Soviet leadership sent several army divisions and regiments, along with police units to the Western Ukrainian borderlands. It is estimated that over 200 000 Soviet soldiers and policemen participated in the operation (they were located in approximately 4 000 garrisons ranging from 20 to 100 soldiers on the territory of Western Ukraine). Other military detachments blocked the roads to the regions controlled by the Banderivets. With the help of the Czechoslovak and Polish governments the Soviets also secured the borders with Western Ukraine, although the Banderivets succeeded in their raid to Slovakia in 1946 when they overcame the informational blockade and their mission had remarkable reception in international press. The results of the massive Soviet operation in 1945–1946 under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev were a way devastating, though not fatal for the Banderivets illegal organization. Despite severe losses (approximately 4 000 fighters were killed and nearly 10 000 captured, including a number of key leaders), they succeeded markedly in boycotting Soviet elections in February 1946. They forced the Bolshevik power to forge the electoral results (while officially 99 % voted for the common candidate of the Communists and independents, the estimates offered by the illegal groups spoke of mere 5 % voting voluntarily and less than one third of people were forced to vote by the Communists). During the first stage of the Second Grand Blockade, the Communists ultimately failed to suppress the Banderivets. During 1946, the Ukrainian nationalists relaunched their activities, changed tactic, diversified forces and continued to fight effectively the Soviet power until at least 1953.<sup>18</sup>

The Banderivets carried out insurgence into Czechoslovakia not only from the Soviet territory, but primarily from Eastern Polish lands where they had strong positions and bases after the World War II. The aim of the three raids into Czechoslovakia was fully propagandist and peaceful. Slovak historian Michal Šmigel' argues that the Ukrainian nationalists focused on Czechoslovak, particularly Slovak territory, as the process of Bolshevization (Sovietization) was carried out slowly in Slovakia and the Slovak Communists were weak. There was also a historic tradition of cooperation between the Ukrainian nationalist movement and Czechoslovakia. The Ukrainians also believed that the Slovak nationalists could be their potential allies in the anti-Bolshevik resistance (they believed the

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<sup>17</sup> The situation in Central and Eastern Europe after the World War II with focus on the situation in the Borderland regions (Ukraine, Poland and Slovakia) is analysed in detail in: Грицак, Я., *Нарис історії України. Формування модерної нації XIX–XX століття*, Київ 2019, 481–500.

<sup>18</sup> See further Патриляк, І., *Перемога або смерть.. Український визвольний рух у 1939–1960 роках*, Харків – Львів 2015, 444–484.

majority of population was even dissatisfied with dismantling of the wartime Slovak State and the restoration of Czechoslovakia). All raids were carried out by small groups of Banderivets (overall 500 people) who were moving through the territories of Eastern Slovakia during about one month. They were informing local rural population about their fight against the Soviet Communists. Afterwards, the disciplined Banderivets units returned to their bases without engaging in violence. According to the reports by the Czechoslovak National Security Corps (Sbor národní bezpečnosti), whilst the local policemen were unable to stop the Banderivets activities, they confirmed that the Banderivets raiders were not responsible for violent crimes in Slovakia. Even later, while some officers ascribed several bloody crimes to the Banderivets, the criminal activities were perpetrated by a number of different bands walking through Slovak forests and mountains, not by the Banderivets.<sup>19</sup>

There is an important anonymous Banderivets archival document called *Who Are the Banderivets and for What They Fight?* written in Russian in 1948. It is highly illustrative of how controversial were the common perceptions of the Soviets and Western Ukrainians, and how the Banderivets propagandists depicted the identity, not necessarily the reality of their movement.<sup>20</sup> This material will be compared with the reports of Czechoslovak offices edited in the collection of archival materials *UPA in the Light of Slovak and Czech Documents (1945–1948)*. Ukrainian nationalists reacted particularly to a number of labels given to them by Soviet Communists: for instance, kulaks, bourgeois, Anglo-American agents, bandits, Fascists, terrorists etc. and reciprocally called them as Bolshevik imperialists, bandits, hangmen, liars, occupants, Bolshevik magnates, exploiters, chauvinists, enslavers, galley-men. Their propaganda also found its reflection in their propagandist raids in Czechoslovakia even though their communication with the simple local folk could not be as sophisticated as in this document; they also used more direct instruments.

The Banderivets propaganda responded primarily to the Soviet accusations and misrepresentations of the Ukrainian nationalists. Finally, it focused on the explanation why they fought the Soviet power. The first category of arguments was related to the identity of Ukrainian insurgents. Primarily, they strongly refused as a blatant lie their identification with the German Nazis and later with

<sup>19</sup> Šmigel', M., Rejdy UPA v dokumentoch vojenských a bezpečnostných štruktúr ČSR (1945–1946), in: Шмігель, М. (ред.), *УПА в світлі словацьких та чеських документів (1945–1948)*. Книга перша: Рейди УПА в документах війська та апарату безпеки ЧСР (1945–1946), Літопис української повстанської армії, т. 48, Торонто – Львів 2010, 53–82.

<sup>20</sup> Кто такие бандеровцы и за что они борются. Выд 1948 р., in: *Електронний архів Українського визвольного руху*. [online: <<http://avr.org.ua/viewDoc/10595/>>, cit. 2017-06-15].

Anglo-American agents.<sup>21</sup> They convincingly argue that they fought illegally with the German Nazis from the beginning of the Hitler occupation since June 1941 when the Germans adopted to this act hostile position. The propagandist materials refer to the great losses of OUN and UPA rebels in their fight with the Germans – thousands of fighters died, among them legendary leaders such as Ivan Klymiv-Lehenda (Lviv), Dmitry Miron-Orlik (Kiev), Nikolai Lemik (Kharkovschina), Panteleimon Sak-Mohyla (Kiev), Serhei Sherstiuk (Krivoi Rih), along with many others. Last but not least, thousands of insurgents were arrested, including the OUN leader Stepan Bandera who was arrested in 1941 and only released in autumn 1944.<sup>22</sup> The OUN propagandists also kept refuting an accusation that they fought in the interest of Western imperialists, particularly the Americans – they emphasized that, in their struggle for Ukrainian independence, they relied solely on their strength and courage.<sup>23</sup>

They defined themselves as nationalist revolutionaries striving for national and social liberation of Ukraine.<sup>24</sup> They saw themselves as consistent, unique and the last remaining heroic fighters for Ukrainian liberation, an inspiration for all non-Russian nations in the Soviet Union, a frontline force against the oppressors. They further advocated their nationalist approach using ideological argument that “a nation is the supreme and the most continual type of human community, much more than class”. They argued that, in international context, it was a nation rather than class to be the focus of history. They linked nationalist and socio-economic reasons when claiming that “the key condition of improving the fate of working classes” in Ukraine “is the national–political liberation of the entire nation”. They supported the argument by saying that “instead of Ukrainian Bolsheviks receiving the commands directly from Kremlin and following them, our paramount aim is welfare and happiness of the Ukrainian nation”. Hence, their ultimate aim was the struggle against the Soviet aggressors and their agents, the Ukrainian Bolsheviks.<sup>25</sup>

While the Banderivets perceived themselves as nationalists, they also refused the accusation of chauvinist or imperialist nature of their movement. The propagandists claimed that they fought exclusively for their own national rights, moreover in line with the Soviet Constitution that awarded all nations the right to withdraw from the Soviet federation. Although the propagandists emphasized

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<sup>21</sup> Šmigel', M., Rejdy UPA v dokumentoch vojenských a bezpečnostných štruktúr ČSR (1945–1946), in: Шмігель, М. (ред.), *УПА в світлі словацьких та чеських документів (1945–1948). Книга перша: Рейди УПА в документах війська та апарату безпеки ЧСР (1945–1946), Літопис української повстанської армії*, т. 48, Торонто – Львів 2010, 1–2, 7.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, 3, 4, 7, 8.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, 8.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, 5, 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, 5.



their deep sympathies with all nations, namely the Poles and Russians which built their national states within their ethnographic territories, they tended to remain silent about their severe attacks against the Poles and Jews during the World War II. The tension, primarily with the Poles, left adverse impact on the relations of the two nations after the World War II, when the Poles were more inclined to side with the Soviet Bolsheviks against the Ukrainians.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to all the aforementioned nationalist arguments, the Banderivets propagandists strongly opposed the Bolshevik accusations labelling them *kulaks* and *bourgeoisie*. They refuted them on the basis that, as strong nationalists, they had nothing to do with those social or class categories. They strove to build classless society. All proponents of the OUN and UPA opposed the reconstitution of landowners and capitalists on the grounds that the Banderivets fight against all exploiters of Ukrainian people (those classes were perceived as hostile because, in earlier times, were related to Russians and Poles). The issue of land tenure was to be solved solely by the Ukrainians. The Banderivets opposed the Soviet experiments of *kolkhozes* (cooperative farms) and *sovkhozes* (state farms) because they perceived them as responsible for widespread catastrophic poverty and famines in the countryside. The identification of the Banderivets with the working and exploited social strata is manifested by the social composition of Western Ukrainian nationalists: small peasant landowners, the landless, working classes, university and secondary-school students.<sup>27</sup>

The highly negative view of the Soviet and Bolshevik power by OUN and UPA propagandists is based on several arguments. The critical accusation against the Soviet Bolsheviks drew from the fact that they suppressed and exploited the Ukrainian nation. They turned the Marxist ideas against them when they labelled them as real imperialists and exploiters. They opposed the Bolshevik propaganda which celebrated the Soviet Bolshevik state for “the best solution of national question in the world” and for the “establishment of genuine national democracy”. By contrast, they showed the Bolsheviks in relation to Ukraine and other non-Russian nations as pursuing the policy of merciless oppression and economic exploitation. Ukraine, similarly to other non-Russian nations, had no national-political rights, she was (they were) in a state of total political subjugation. The sovereignty of the Union republics was mere fiction. Hence, they argued, the Soviet Empire was actual successor of the Tsarist Russia with the Soviet republics being *gubernia* (governorates) deprived of any rights; even the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian Communist Party and the Ukrainian government had been unable to take any decision without being rubberstamped by the Kremlin. Moscow was seen as the actual imperial centre of the Soviet Union. Ukraine was also severely

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<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, 8–9.

exploited economically as the country was transformed into the arch-source of raw material supplying the Soviet Empire. Even building of the heavy industry in Ukraine served the aim to drain Ukraine of her industrial sources and agricultural products.<sup>28</sup>

The following category of arguments directed against the Soviet Bolsheviks addressed the very essence of the Soviet state as oppressive and inhuman. The Banderivets propaganda used the term *Bolshevik hangmen* referring to the introduction of violent measures aimed to eradicate the Ukrainian nation, including three famines. The death toll of this policy of extermination was c. 8 million Ukrainians. Additional hundreds of thousands men, women and children perished in Siberia and Central Asia where they were exiled by the Bolsheviks. As the authors of the document argue, “the Bolshevik hangmen murdered further hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian patriots in prisons, exile, concentration camps and direct executions”. They saw the evidence of inhuman, oppressive and exploitative character of the Soviet regime in replacing the old oppressors – landowners and capitalists – with new vermin: new Soviet elites, new class of Soviet tycoons. They argued that in no state ordinary people lived in such poverty and misery as in the victorious socialist Soviet Union: “the Bolsheviks transformed unhappy life in the Tsarist Russia into the galley-slave system.” The working classes of the Soviet Union found themselves in the position of genuine “ancient slaves”. While living standards of the working people were largely below the poverty line, the new elites boasted about plenitude of food, clothes, and extensive privileges. On the other hand, underprivileged groups were deprived of human rights or democracy. The Soviet state was rooted in bloody dictatorship of the Communist Party and barbarous terror exerted by the state police which controlled all life, even emotions and mind.<sup>29</sup>

This invaluable document ends with an emotional proclamation to the local population to fight against this parasitic and exploitative regime. It appeals to the foreign countries to oppose the Moscow imperialism, White or Red, Tsarist or Bolshevik, because the current rule over all the Soviet territories was the real threat not only to the Soviet non-Russian nations, but to all nations as the Soviet empire longed to reign over the entire world.<sup>30</sup>

This paper was to demonstrate the conflicting notions of the Soviet representatives and Western Ukrainian nationalists (or generally people living in Western borderland territories) that spurred serious crisis after the end of the World War II. At the time, the Soviet power was in a more advantageous position and finally imposed its “Truth”. Yet, throughout the Soviet and post-Soviet times,

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<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, 10–12.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, 12–14.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, 17–18.

this controversy lost none of its charge and has been revived by the proponents of opposing views. It remains highly topical until the time of writing this paper. Given that the radical propagandist formulations presented both by the Banderivets and Soviet representatives in the 1940s and the early 1950s markedly remind, in some way, of the present Russian and Ukrainian nationalist propaganda, research into the post-war Soviet and Banderivets propaganda is essential also for the design of the current collective memory and identity in Russia and Ukraine.

The aims of the Banderivets in Czechoslovakia can be well demonstrated on the example of instruction issued by a man nicknamed Nestor, responsible for propaganda. He was probably member of the Ukrainian Supreme Liberation Council and commander of the group (*kuryne*) Ren. The Banderivets “insurgents” were instructed to deal with the civilian population tactfully, particularly to talk with the Slovaks rather than the Ukrainians, primarily with the officers and intelligentsia. They weren’t to react violently to possible provocations and were to argue with patience against the myths of Banderivets as murderers and thieves. Their appearance in Czechoslovakia had raise sympathies, not fear. Even, they were to paint propagandist slogans on public buildings and private houses only with the consent by their owners and consult the right spelling and grammar of any slogan with teachers and clergy. They were to organize lectures and discussions, and to determinedly warn the people of Czechoslovakia against the Soviet Communist regime. In dealing with the locals they were to demonstrate their cultural maturity, for example not spit on the floor. The Banderivets propagandists in Slovak villages were to be composed of wise, intelligent and bright individuals. The Banderivets were explicitly warned against killing Jews and using antisemitic propaganda and not to touch the “Jewish issue” at all. They were to emphasize their fight for the independent Ukrainian state where the citizens would be free. They were to take some horses, sell them and use the money to purchase food, medication and ammunition to the people. They were allowed to accept gifts, but were to thank for them and give receipts. They were to send a letter to the Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš from Slovakia and ensure it would reach him: they were instructed to consult it with some anti-Bolshevik teachers or clergy. They were expected to behave decently so that they were seen positively by the people of Czechoslovakia and the entire Europe.<sup>31</sup>

The Czechoslovak National Security Corps reported about the Banderivets propagandist meetings with Czechoslovak citizens as follows:

- All reports agreed with the Banderivets irreconcilable emphasis on the fight with Soviet power, Communism and kolkhozes, and their hatred of the Soviet regime (sometimes of the Jews) with the aim to establish independent Ukraine;

<sup>31</sup> Vološčuk, I., *Ukrajinská povstalecká armáda v Československu v letech 1945–1949*, Praha 1999, 95–97.

some groups expressed fear of violent resettlement from Eastern Poland to Soviet Union: “We prefer to be shot by you than to come back to Poland.”<sup>32</sup>

- The Banderivets also emphasized their anticipation of war between the Soviet Union and the United States (they argued they were in contact with the governments of the United States and Great Britain).<sup>33</sup>

- They hoped to convince the Czechoslovak army and the public to cooperate: they stressed the peaceful intentions in Czechoslovakia (nobody had to be afraid of Banderivets), and admiration of the democratic Czechoslovak government. On the contrary, there was no democracy in Poland, they argued. They even guaranteed the safety to Slovak Communists, although strongly supported the Democratic Party in the elections.<sup>34</sup>

Czechoslovak archival documents suggest the Banderivets during their insurgence in Czechoslovakia behaved mostly in accordance with the Nestor instruction. The documents merely mention a few relatively minor incidents, such as threats of burning down a village by Banderivets in case of disclosure, or the rare cases of armed fights with Czechoslovak soldiers. Later, the Banderivets were accused of some murders in Slovakia as part of Communist propaganda. Nonetheless, no historical research until today proved any guilt of the Banderivets groups.<sup>35</sup>

While the Banderivets leadership quite rightly considered the results of “insurgence into Czechoslovakia” a success, these exercises shouldn’t be overrated. Great effort made by Banderivets during the first and second insurgence in Czechoslovakia could have hardly overturned the feeble and ever-deteriorating status of the Banderivets in the Borderlands of Eastern Poland, Czechoslovakia and Western Ukraine where they faced an orchestrated effort of the Soviet, Polish, and Czechoslovak forces (although, in 1945, or 1946, Eastern parts of Slovakia were unprepared for the Banderivets insurgence; later, in 1947 they suppressed most attempts of Banderivets to move to the West).<sup>36</sup> The weakness of Banderivets in Czechoslovakia was also affected by the successful elimination of the civilian network of the OUN around the Prague committee of the OUN in December 1945. The Prague OUN committee was founded in Prague in 1929.

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<sup>32</sup> Шмігель, М. (ред.), *УПА в світлі словацьких та чеських документів (1945–1948). Книга перша: Рейди УПА в документах війська та апарату безпеки ЧСР (1945–1946)*, Літопис української повстанської армії, т. 48, Торонто – Львів 2010, 229.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, 192–193, 215, 295.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, 132–134, 230, 260, 302, 310.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, 149, 154, 192, 209, 215, 249, 352–353.

<sup>36</sup> Šmigel', M., *Rejdy UPA v dokumentoch vojenských a bezpečnostných štruktúr ČSR (1945–1946)*, in: Шмігель, М. (ред.), *УПА в світлі словацьких та чеських документів (1945–1948). Книга перша: Рейди УПА в документах війська та апарату безпеки ЧСР (1945–1946)*, Літопис української повстанської армії, т. 48, Торонто – Львів 2010, 56–83.

Since 1942, after the foundation of the UPA, it served as a conspiracy agency in the Czech lands and Slovakia with a number of influential and effective agents. Since the end of 1945, the Banderivets lost all support by the civilians in Czechoslovakia and became extremely vulnerable.<sup>37</sup> Despite some manifestations of sympathies on the part of Slovak civilian population towards the Banderivets, which were strongly emphasized in Banderivets reports after the insurgence, majority of Slovaks were quite frightened by the appearance of the Banderivets in their villages, and mostly did not understand their aims. And, the most important, the activities of the Banderivets in Eastern Slovakia mobilized Czechoslovak politicians and security forces to perceive them as a serious threat and intensify their effort to suppress them in cooperation with the Soviet and Polish forces. In this sense, the activities of Banderivets in Czechoslovakia were quite counter-productive.<sup>38</sup>

## ABSTRACT

### **Comparative Approaches to the Banderivets Propaganda in Western Ukraine and Czechoslovakia after 1945**

*Stanislav Tumis*

The activities of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) – the so-called Banderivets, are among the most controversial topics in contemporary historical studies focusing on Ukraine and the Soviet Union (Russia). While Soviet (Russian) historiography portrays their struggle for independent Ukraine in highly negative terms (bourgeois nationalists, Fascists, Nazis, pogromchiks, etc.), many Ukrainians (though not all) see them as heroes. This rises a number of myths and questions concerning their political aims, means of their struggle, causes of their radicalism, etc. Interpretation of their aims and activities has been influenced by propaganda, a number of half-truths, and different highlights on both sides. This study offers a comparison of anti-Soviet propaganda of the OUN/UPA in Western Ukraine and propagandist insurgence in Czechoslovakia in times of geopolitical turmoil affecting the neighbouring Eastern Poland where the Banderivets held of crucial bases. Drawing from

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<sup>37</sup> Vološčuk, I., *Ukrajinská povstalecká armáda v Československu v letech 1945–1949*, Praha 1999, 73–78.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, 98–101.



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Ukrainian and Czechoslovak archival materials, the study discusses how the Banderivets portrayed themselves in Western Ukraine and Czechoslovakia.

**Key words:** Banderivets, OUN/UPA, Propaganda, Borderlands, Western Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, Soviet Union, Poland.

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