

“Its Own Patriotic War”

World War II in the Official Ukrainian Discourse on the Ongoing War

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For eight decades, Ukrainian society has maintained, constructed, and transformed the memory of World War II/the Great Patriotic War (WWII/GPW).¹ In the official attitude towards the GPW/WWII, profound changes took place in 2014. They were caused by the shock of Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of war in the Donbas – as well as by the decision to distance Ukraine from Russian propaganda associated with the mythology of the GPW, a decision made more necessary by Donbas separatists’ use of St. George’s ribbons and red banners.² At the same time, the outbreak of hostilities in the Donbas in April 2014, which escalated into full-scale fighting in the summer of 2014 and winter of 2015, provoked parallels with

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- 1 I use two definitions, and each refers to one of two models of memory about this war that are present in Ukrainian society. The GPW model can be conditionally defined as (post-)Soviet and the WWII model as nationally Ukrainian. The first focuses on events of 1941–1945 and commemorates the ‘Great Victory’ and the liberation deeds of the Red Army. The second emphasises the Ukrainian context of the war of 1939–1945 and its victims.
 - 2 See Julie Fedor, Simon Lewis, and Tatiana Zhurzhenko, “Introduction: War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus”, in: Julie Fedor, Markku Kangaspuro, Jussi Lassila, and Tatiana Zhurzhenko (eds.), *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 4–20; Alexandr Osipian, “Historical Myths, Enemy Images, and Regional Identity in the Donbass Insurgency (Spring 2014)”, *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 1/1, 2015, 116–118; Alexandr Osipian, “World War II Memory Politics in Russia and Ukraine and Their Uses During the Conflict in the Donbas (Spring–Summer 2014)”, in: Korine Amacher, Andrii Portnov, and Victoriia Serhienko (eds.), *Official History in Eastern Europe*, Osnabrück: Fibre, 2020, 282–288; and Dmytro Tytarenko, “‘Vrah vnov vstupył na nashu zemlyu...’: Velyka Vitchyznyana / II svitova viyna v politytsi pamyati na terytoriyi samoproholoshenoyi DNR (2014–2016 rr.)” (“‘The Enemy Has Again Set Foot on Our Land...’: The Great Patriotic/World War II in the Memory Politics on the Territory of the Self-Proclaimed DPR (2014–2016)”), *Historians.in.ua*, <https://www.historians.in.ua/index.php/en/istoriya-i-pamyat-vazhki-pitannya/2399-dmitro-titarenko-vrag-vnov-vstupil-na-nas-hu-zemlyu-velika-vitchiznyana-ii-svitova-vijna-v-polititsi-pam-yati-na-teritoriji-samoprogh-oloshenoyi-dnr-2014-2016-rr> [accessed: 31.07.2024].

the events of WWII. Ukrainian officials also embraced the rhetoric and clichés from the Soviet vision of the GPW in 2014 and 2015.³ While the May 2014 commemoration slogan was “Never Again!”, in 2015 the emphasis shifted to “We Remember. We are winning”. In the public discourse, a vision of continuity was created, from the generation of WWII veterans as defenders/liberators of the Ukrainian homeland then to the contemporary Anti-Terrorist Operation fighters as successors to their cause now.⁴

At the same time, the reaction of the Ukrainian authorities, and in particular the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (UINP), as well as civil activists, was to intentionally distance public discourse from the (post-)Soviet vision of the GPW that is accepted in Russia.⁵ In its methodological materials, the UINP proposed to move away from martial displays towards emphasising the human face of war, such as the fate of Ukrainians caught in the conflict. Additionally, a move was made to break down the concept of the GPW and reframe the conflict in the broader context of WWII.⁶ A visual manifestation of the change in discourse was the choice of the

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- 3 Andrii Portnov, “Velikaya Otechestvennaya vojna 2014–2015” (“The Great Patriotic War of 2014–2015”), <http://urokiistorii.ru/node/52475> [accessed: 31.07.2024].
 - 4 Jochen Hellbeck and Dmytro Tytarenko, “My pobedim, kak pobedili 70 let nazad nashi dedy i pradedy: Ukraina: prazdnovaniye Dnya Pobedy v teni novoy voyny” (“We Will Win as Our Grandfathers and Great-Grandfathers Won 70 Years Ago: Ukraine: Celebrations of Victory Day in the Shadow of the New War”), *Neprikosnovennyy zapas (Untouchable Reserve)* 4/108, 2016, <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2016/4/my-pobedim-kak-pobedili-70-let-na-zad-nashi-dedy-i-pradedy.html> [accessed: 27.02.2023]; Andriy Stets, “Memorial voyinam ATO roztashuyut na terytoriyi muzeyu Druhoyi svitovoyi viyny u Kyevi” (“A Memorial to the ATO Soldiers Will be Placed on the Territory of the Second World War Museum in Kyiv”), *Zaxid.net*, 08 May 2017, https://zaxid.net/memorial_voyinam_ato_roztashuyut_na_teritoriyi_muzeyu_drugoyi_svitovoyi_viyni_u_kyevi_n1425349 [accessed: 27.02.2023]; and Informatsiynе ahentstvo PRAVDA (PRAVDA Information Agency), “V muzeyi istoriyi Ukrainy u Druhii svitovoyi viyny vidkrylas vystavka ‘Chetverte pokolinnya’” (“The Exhibition ‘The Fourth Generation’ Opened in the Museum of the History of Ukraine during the Second World War”), YouTube video, 3:26, 08 May 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgseHqpDltc> [accessed: 31.07.2024].
 - 5 On the change of discourse in legislative acts, see: Oleksandr Hrytsenko, *Dekomunizatsiya v Ukraini yak derzhavna polityka i yak sotsiokulturne yavyshe (Decommunisation in Ukraine as a State Policy and as a Sociocultural Phenomenon)*, Kyiv: Instytut politychnykh i etnonatsionalnykh doslidzhen im. I. F. Kurasa NAN Ukrainy; Instytut kulturolohiyi NAM Ukrainy, 2019, 168–169.
 - 6 Detector Media, “Yak vysvitlyuvaty Den Peremohy. Rekomendatsiyi Instytutu natsionalnoyi pamyati” (“How to Cover Victory Day: Recommendations of the Institute of National Memory”), 05 May 2014, <https://ms.detector.media/profstandarti/post/898/2014-05-05-yak-vysvitlyuvaty-den-peremohy-rekomendatsii-instytutu-natsionalnoi-pamyati/> [accessed: 31.07.2024]. Oleksandr Hrytsenko analysed in detail the discourse of the UINP and the ‘decommunisation laws’ in the context of WWII. See: Hrytsenko, *Dekomunizatsiya*, 134–145.

red poppy as the main symbol of commemoration, a reminder of the victims of the war. A second major change was the attempt to shift the main day of remembrance to 8 May, the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation, thereby moving closer to European practices. However, celebrations of Victory Day on 9 May continued as well.

A new narrative and concept of how the war should be remembered were presented in the exhibition *Ukrainian World War II* by the UINP. The exhibition placed local events of the war in a global context, with the story beginning with the fate of Carpathian Ukraine in March 1939. In general, not much space was given to the combat actions themselves; instead, the focus fell on the fate of people and included topics such as the Holocaust, *Ostarbeiter*, prisoners of war, collaboration, life under occupation, punitive actions, the nationalist and Soviet resistance movements, and the Ukrainian–Polish conflict.⁷

On 24 February 2022, Ukrainians, following Russia's full-scale invasion, became participants in a new war. Already in February, numerous caricatures and comparisons of the Russian invasion forces with the troops of the Third Reich were circulating on social media. This reaction shows that for Ukrainians, the images from WWII history are a kind of mental standard: it is through comparison with them that contemporary events are presented and comprehended. Similar comparisons were made by officials at various levels. In 2022, the main slogan for 8 and 9 May was: "We defeated Nazism – we will defeat Ruscism!" Such a slogan draws explicit parallels between WWII and the ongoing war. It also echoes the 2015 slogan, "We Remember. We are winning."

In this paper, I analyse the rhetoric of Ukrainian government agencies and officials of various levels to determine how the topic of WWII is exploited in the context of the full-scale Russo–Ukrainian War. What aspects of the myth of WWII are in demand in the crisis conditions of the invasion? And what (comparative) language is used to describe the Second World War and the ongoing Russo–Ukrainian War? I aim to answer these questions using discourse analysis.

For the analysis, I selected posts from the first year of the war, from 24 February 2022 to 24 February 2023, from official Facebook pages, which in the current and recent Ukrainian reality serve as one of the means of disseminating official information. These pages represent different levels of government and military leadership. Namely, these are the pages of the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU), and the General Staff of the AFU. Meanwhile, regionally, the analysis focuses on the

7 Institute of National Memory (UINP), "Vystavka 'Ukrayinska Druha svitova'" ("The Ukrainian Second World War' Exhibition"), <https://uinp.gov.ua/vystavkovi-proekty/vystavka-ukrayinska-druha-svitova> [accessed: 31.07.2024]. About changes in the presentation of WWII in official memory policy see also: Tadeus Olszański, "The Great Decommunisation: Ukraine's Wartime Historical Policy", *OSW Point of View* 65, September 2017, 26–40.

Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, which represents Southern Ukraine. Before the full-scale invasion, sociological research characterised the oblast as strongly emotionally connected to the historical memory of WWII. In my work, this oblast is represented by the pages of Head of the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast State Administration Valentyn Reznichenko (dismissed from office on 24 January 2023), Head of the Dnipro Oblast Council Mykola Lukashuk, and the military Operational Command (OC) “East” (*“Skhid”*), situated in Dnipro. Lastly, locally, I look at Kryvyi Rih, the second most populous city in the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast.⁸ Its officials do not have their own presence on social media, apart from Oleksandr Vilkul. Vilkul was appointed head of the Military–Civilian Administration of Kryvyi Rih on 26 February 2022 and is the head of the city’s Defence Council. His official Facebook page is the main source of information on the situation in Kryvyi Rih since the beginning of the war.

The President’s and regional officials’ pages are presented as personal, containing only names and titles. The content of all the selected pages is thematically homogeneous and designed to communicate with citizens: it features reports on current activities, newsletters, daily summaries in text or video format, posts on holidays or memorable dates, and motivational posts. Thus, the language and message of these posts are intended for the widest possible audience among Ukrainians. Vilkul’s appeals to the WWII topic are of particular interest given his background: over the past couple of decades, he has been a consistent supporter of the idea of ‘protecting the memory of the Victory’ – that is, the post-Soviet discourse at the regional and all-Ukrainian level. In addition, his page is the only one from the selection that has some posts in Russian. Nevertheless, the posts on the analysed pages generally represent a single discourse, which allows us to perceive them as a kind of metatext. The only exception is the content from the General Staff of the AFU page, where the discourse produced by the UINP is strongly represented.

The posts related to WWII topics in the sample are mostly commemorative, written on memorial days or anniversaries connected to WWII. The table below allows us to visualise the frequency of appeals on specific dates.

8 The Facebook pages of Kryvyi Rih military units limit their posts to information about the life and activity of military departments, without references to the past. Therefore, I did not include their content in this analysis.

Figure 1: Reference to WWII by Date and Ukrainian Official

	Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation 8.05.	Victory Day 9.05.	Day of Remembrance and Sorrow 22.06.	Anniversary of the Start of WWII 1.09.	Day of Partisan Glory 22.09.	Babyn Yar Anniversary 29.09.	Day of the Liberation of Ukraine 28.10.
President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy	+++	+	++	+		+	+
Commander-in-Chief of the AFU	+	+				+	
General Staff of the AFU	++++	+	+	+		+	+
Head of the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast State Administration Valentyn Reznichenko	+	+	+			+	+
Head of the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast Council Mykola Lukashuk	+	+				+	+
OC "East"	++++	+	+				+
Head of the Military-Civilian Administration of Kryvyi Rih Oleksandr Vilkuk	+++		+		+		+

There is also a single ‘spontaneous’ post without any apparent reference to current events or the WWII calendar: on 20 March 2022, the Commander-in-Chief’s page presented modern Ukrainian warriors as descendants of Red Army soldiers who fought against the German invaders.⁹

Enemies Then and Now

The most common references to WWII in the posts of the selected pages refer to the image of the enemy. The activities of the modern Russian Federation are clearly identified with those of the Nazi Third Reich. Russia is presented as the reincarnation of Hitler’s Germany. For example, the page of the General Staff shares, “the criminal history of Nazism did not end in 1945, but [...] continued in the modern Russian Federation”.¹⁰ Lukashuk posted a similar idea on 8 May: “Nazism has transformed into Ruscism. Putin’s regime wants to destroy our nation, as the Nazis once tried to destroy us”.¹¹ In a post he published the next day, he states that “the sign of equality between hitler and putin [lower case in the original] has long been set”, and the reason for this is the repetition of Nazi acts by Russians.¹² President Zelensky’s posts also draw similar parallels. In a speech on 8 May, he stated:

In Ukraine, a bloody reconstruction of Nazism has been organised. Fanatical imitation of this regime. Its ideas, actions, words, and symbols. Maniacal reproduction – down to the detail – of its atrocities and “alibis” that seem to give evil a sacred purpose.¹³

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- 9 Holovnokomanduvach ZS Ukrayiny / CinC AF of Ukraine, “Nikoly zнову... Na zhal, tse ne tak...” (“Never again... Unfortunately, that’s not the case...”), Facebook post, 08 May 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=3060183750958951> [accessed: 27.02.2023].
- 10 Heneralnyy shtab ZSU / General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, “Do Dnya pamyati ta prymyrennya...” (“To the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation...”), Facebook post, 07 May 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbidoQ9isApXrZxWAGpj uoydLhF6CnZxrmADixLZJkfy3VCD93mNvzuAtVfGeHKZPk1UI> [accessed: 27.02.2023] [author’s trans.].
- 11 Mykola Lukashuk, “Holovne – shchob ne bulo viyny...” (“The main thing is that there should be no war...”), Facebook post, 08 May 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/MVLukashuk/posts/pfbidoHt3c2wPdpv1jRF8UbG97Sh7Nzm8fyidu8EtQicWwQ3jCnhAzf57ap3CUZd7WKLLI> [accessed: 27.02.2023] [author’s trans.].
- 12 Mykola Lukashuk, “Sohodni my vidznachayemo 77-mu richnytsyu...” (“Today we celebrate the 77th anniversary...”), Facebook post, 09 May 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/MVLukashuk/posts/pfbidoSsCLn4zA1F1oxx4ggVRHSMHw1QvYLwNjwKfjyimswwgRMnHFFNGud3XB Ump7KiqAtI> [accessed: 31.07.2024].
- 13 Volodymyr Zelensky, “Tsohorich my kazhemo ‘Nikoly zнову’ inakshe...” (“This year we say ‘Never again’ in a different way...”), Facebook post, 08 May 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=442165114339716> [accessed: 31.07.2024] [author’s trans.]. For the text

Numerous parallels are drawn between the Nazi crimes committed during WWII throughout Europe and the atrocities committed by Russians in Ukraine today. The General Staff's page makes a similar comparison in a post dedicated to the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation:

Austria's annexation [is like] the attempt of the illegal temporary occupation of Crimea, the protection of German-speaking people in the Sudetenland [is like] the protection of Russian-speakers in Eastern Ukraine, the denial of the existence of Poland and the people of Israel by Hitler and German Nazism [is like] the denial of the existence of Ukraine and its people by Putin and Russian Nazism.¹⁴

On the anniversary of the Babyn Yar massacre, the page of the Commander-in-Chief of the AFU stated: "it is painfully difficult to talk about its repetition in Mariupol, Bucha, Irpin, Izyum and other cities".¹⁵ Crimes were similarly compared on Zelenskyy's page on 27 October: "[Russia] organises blockades and filtration camps. And Syrets becomes Olenivka. It destroys towns and villages. And Koriukivka becomes Bucha".¹⁶ Similarly, after the de-occupation of the Kharkiv Oblast, Zelenskyy pointed to direct parallels regarding the occupant's actions: "Torture was a widespread practice in the occupied territory. The Nazis did it. This is what the Rus-

version, see: President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Official Website, "Zvernennia Prezydenta Ukrainy z nahody Dnia pam'ati ta prymyrennia" ("Address of the President of Ukraine on the Occasion of the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation"), 08 May 2022, <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/zvernennya-prezydenta-ukrayini-z-nagodi-dnya-pamyati-ta-prim-74885> [accessed: 31.07.2024].

- 14 Heneralnyy shtab, "Do Dnya pamyati ta prymyrennya".
- 15 Holovnokomanduvach ZS Ukrainy / CinC AF of Ukraine, "Sohodni mav chest poznayomytysya..." ("Today I had the honour to meet..."), Facebook post, 29 September 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/CinCAFU/posts/pfbidoTYJ8S3z5QEhCVmuFMnHvmZUBa5wNvwyxApDKthaFX5Hu1hQa7NSWCYazF8ionqI> [accessed: 27.02.2023] [author's trans.].
- 16 Volodymyr Zelenskyy, "Zlo zavzhdy pochynaye odnakovo..." ("Evil always starts in the same way..."), Facebook post, 27 October 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=574046394479712> [accessed: 31.07.2024] [author's trans.]. During the Nazi occupation, about 30,000 Soviet activists, POWs, and Jews were murdered in the Syrets concentration camp in Kyiv. In the village of Olenivka, an explosion at a prison for Ukrainian POWs on the night of 29 July 2022 killed a few dozen Ukrainian prisoners and injured more than 150. In Koryukivka, a town in the Chernihiv Oblast, occupants massacred about 7000 people of the population in 1943, while in Bucha, a suburb of Kyiv, Russian troops killed more than 400 civilians during the occupation in March 2022.

cists do”.¹⁷ In this way, ‘Ruscism’ is labelled a repetition of Nazism with equivalent accompanying atrocities.¹⁸

The identification of Russian atrocities with those of the Nazis is also seen in the narration of uploaded videos. On 9 May, the Commander-in-Chief of the AFU’s page uploaded a video with English subtitles in which footage of Nazi atrocities and destruction in Europe is presented in parallel with footage of the suffering and destruction caused by the Russian invasion.¹⁹ Alongside direct identification, it is also common practice to present the ‘succession’ of enemies, as the Commander-in-Chief of the AFU did on 8 May: “In 1939–1945 the enemy was the Nazis, and today it is the Ruscists – the Russian version of imperial nationalism and fascism”.²⁰ At the same time, the Nazis remain the ‘etalon’ with which modern Russia is compared. For example, on 28 October, Vilkul mentioned the liberation of Ukraine “from German fascists”: “We are at war with an enemy who is no less cruel. This enemy is the Russian fascist”.²¹

References to WWII in posts not devoted to commemorative dates appear in the vocabulary used to describe current events. Such references include mentions of the “Kremlin Fuhrer”²² or “the horrors of the Russian Auschwitz [in Ukrainian text used

17 Volodymyr Zelenskyy, “Sohodni v Izyumi Kharkivskoyi oblasti...” (“Today in Izyum in the Kharkiv Oblast...”), Facebook post, 17 September 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1519134511858182> [accessed: 31.07.2024] [author’s trans.].

18 Volodymyr Zelenskyy, “Tak samo, yak Kyivshchynu...” (“In the same way as in the Kyiv Oblast...”), Facebook post, 18 September 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/zelenskiy.official/posts/pfbid0244YxALVV6Ga6WMT4RZUvTkxhdujyHxqcwCBrxGL99iqoaY7ACogZCcYSzw28ey38l> [accessed: 31.07.2024].

19 Holovnokomanduvach ZS Ukrainy / CinC AF of Ukraine, “Never again?..”, Facebook post, 09 May 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/CinCAFU/videos/526275025573107/> [accessed: 31.07.2024].

20 Heneralnyy shtab ZSU / General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, “Peremohly natsyzm – peremozhemo i rashyzm!...” (“We defeated Nazism – we will defeat Ruscism!...”), Facebook post, 08 May 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0zFQD8geqPcFWTPYxhMiwcsCp6pvrukK2TP2asGZPKgWpml9dTZc6Y9ibkYUxtiXVei> [accessed: 31.07.2024] [author’s trans.].

21 Oleksandr Vilkul, “Bryfinh nachalnyka viyskovoyi administratsiyi Kryvoho Rohu O.Vilkula 28 10 22...” (“Briefing of the Head of the Military Administration of Kryvyi Rih O.Vilkul 28 10 22...”), Facebook post, 28 October 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=666158901742437> [accessed: 31.07.2024] [author’s trans.].

22 Heneralnyy shtab ZSU / General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, “My zirvaly plany kremlivskoho fyurera!...” (“We foiled the plans of the Kremlin Führer!...”), Facebook post, 05 April 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=553634419287322> [accessed: 31.07.2024] [author’s trans.].

'Oświęcim' – D.S.]".²³ The reference to the 'Russian Auschwitz' appears on the page of the OC "East". This post exposes the hollowness of Russian promises about the humane treatment of prisoners. However, it is significant that at the same time, the OC "East" referenced the traditions of the Soviet repressive system and called Russians the "heirs to the almost century-old experience of the NKVD".²⁴ In this way, Nazi and Soviet crimes are combined in the same context.

One post on the page of the General Staff of the AFU was structured similarly, although it looks strange from a logical standpoint. The post discusses finding a container with metal dentures in a Russian torture chamber in the de-occupied Kharkiv Oblast.²⁵ It opens with a hashtagged headline: "#putin's_ruscism = #hitler's_nazism" and is accompanied by an image comparing the recent find with a container of dentures from Buchenwald found in the spring of 1945. However, the text of the post does not mention Nazis and instead states that "Russian military executioners are descendants of *Oprichniki*²⁶ executioners, tsarist executioners, human-hating executioners of the diabolical organs of the Soviet Union – the Cheka-OGPU, NKVD, SMERSH, KGB".²⁷ As we can see, in the modern Ukrainian context, the images of Nazi concentration camps and bodies like the Gestapo are less significant than the images of the Soviet repressive system.

However, it is noteworthy that although the agencies of national memory (and above all the UINP) present a narrative that shows both the Soviet and Nazi regimes as hostile to Ukraine, and present-day Russia also manifests its succession from the USSR in various forms, the exploitation of the topic of Soviet crimes during WWII (for example, the massive looting and rape by Soviet soldiers in Germany in 1945, which could be compared with Russian crimes in Ukraine) is not widespread in the analysed discourse. This can be explained by the practice of referring to WWII

23 Operativne komanduvannya "Skhid" (Operational Command "East"), "Kreml vzhe vstyh obminyaty..." ("The Kremlin has already exchanged..."), Facebook post, 29 October 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=5853012694737823> [accessed: 31.07.2024] [author's trans.].

24 Operativne komanduvannya "Skhid", "Kreml vzhe vstyh obminyaty".

25 Later, it turned out that the container most likely belonged to a local dentist and was just seized by the Russians. *Khmarochos*, "Politsiya pereviryaye, chy nalezhaly zoloti zuby z kativni sela Pisky-Radkivski mistsevomu stomatolohu" ("Police Check Whether Gold Teeth From the Pisky-Radkivski Torture Chamber Belonged to a Local Dentist"), 06 October 2022, <https://hmarochos.kiev.ua/2022/10/06/policziya-pereviryaye-chy-nalezhaly-zoloti-zu-by-z-kativni-sela-pisky-radkivski-misczevomu-stomatologu/> [accessed: 31.07.2024].

26 *Oprichniki* were members of the bodyguard corps established by Tsar Ivan the Terrible in the 16th century.

27 Heneralnyy shtab ZSU / General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, "#putinsky_rashyzm = #hitlerivskyy_natsyzm..." ("#putin's_ruscism = #hitler's_nazism"...), Facebook post, 05 October 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid03XDieGmr4xdKVABD2GYr6E3DwXvAaL6PLS9VAVLnp3e8Y8Q7CbYGiisPQLMHuMtl> [accessed: 31.07.2024] [author's trans.].

mostly on former Soviet anniversaries, thereby not providing the right context for references to Soviet crimes. But on the other hand, direct or implicit contemporary self-identification with the generation of Ukrainian fighters of the Red Army (more on this below) naturally does not imply solidarity with or emphasis on the crimes of the Red Army. Thus, Soviet crimes are mentioned on other dates, such as Holodomor Remembrance Day, the Day of the Deportation of Crimean Tatars, or the Day of Remembrance of Victims of Political Repression, during which WWII is 'left out'. In the analysed selection, discussions of Soviet responsibility for these crimes and the accompanying presentation of the succession of Stalin's Soviet Union by present-day Russia appear only in the posts on the page of the General Staff of the AFU, which for the most part amount to compilations of UINP materials.

When Did That War Begin for Ukraine?

The rejection of the concept of the 'Great Patriotic War' is a central tenet of the new discourse that the UINP has promoted since 2014. WWII-era events in Ukraine are now placed in the wider framework of the history of WWII. One result of this change is that the years of significance have expanded from the traditional years of the Great Patriotic War, 1941–1945, to the wider timeframe of 1939–1945. Currently, the official date of the beginning of the Second World War in Ukraine is no longer 22 June 1941, when Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union, but 1 September 1939. At this point, Hitler invaded Poland; the territories of the present-day Ukrainian regions of Galicia and Volhynia, then part of the Polish state, became a battlefield.

However, in the context of the full-scale war of 2022, 1 September 1939 did not cause reflection in my analysed sources. It was mentioned on only two of the pages – that of Zelenskyy and of the General Staff. And in both cases, the posts addressed the Polish people (yet both are also in Ukrainian). In his speech, Zelenskyy compares the beginning of the war on 1 September 1939 – with the bombing of the Polish city of Wieluń – to the 24 February 2022 attack on Ukrainian cities. He also compares Nazi crimes against the Polish people to the current crimes of Russia against Ukrainians. He then says that “the morning of 1 September, the morning of 22 June, and the morning of 24 February” should not be repeated.²⁸ This list seems revealing: the

28 Volodymyr Zelenskyy, “1 veresnya 1939 roku...” (“1 September of the year 1939...”), Facebook post, 01 September 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=3174257042887794> [accessed: 31.07.2024]. For the text version of the speech, see: *ArmiiaInform* (ArmyInformation), “Prezydent zvernuvsia do narodu Polshchi u 83-tiu richnytsiu pochatku Druhoi svitovoi viiny” (“The President Addressed the People of Poland on the 83rd Anniversary of the Beginning of World War II”), 01 September 2022, <https://armyinform.com.ua/2022/09/01/prezydent-zvernuvsia-do-narodu-polshchi-u-83-tyu-richnyczyu-pochatku-drugoyi-svito-voyi-vijny/> [accessed: 31.07.2024].

'Polish' date is put on par with the two 'Ukrainian' dates, and 1 September is not presented as Ukraine's 'own' date.

The post published on 1 September on the page of the General Staff is eclectic in structure and broad in content. Discursively, it presents the aforementioned position of the UINP. It begins by expressing solidarity with the Polish Army and the Polish people, quoting the Deputy Prime Minister of the National Defence of Poland, who drew parallels between the attacks on Poland in 1939 and Ukraine in 2022. What follows is a lengthy piece based on materials developed by the UINP, which also uses fragments of the presidential speech (without indicating the source). There is a revealing supplement to his words: the text adds that, along with Wieluń, "Lviv and other Western Ukrainian cities were bombed". It then describes the participation of Ukrainians in the armies of the United Nations and presents a deconstruction of myths (prepared by the UINP) of the Soviet Russian discourses around WWII. Already the first paragraph states that "[t]he chronological framework of the 'Great Patriotic War' [...] does not correspond to the experience of the Ukrainian people during World War II".²⁹

Two months earlier, the page of the General Staff presented 22 June 1941 as the day the war "between Nazi Germany and the Communist Soviet Union" began, as well as just a part of the larger war raging in Europe. The post emphasised the victims of both regimes, German and Soviet:

The German–Soviet War demonstrated the destructive power of both totalitarian regimes. Everyone knows the crimes of the Nazis in the occupied territories of Ukraine: the Holocaust, the shooting of civilians, the creation of death camps, and the burning of villages. No less brutal were the crimes of the Stalinist regime: the executions of political prisoners in Western Ukraine in June–July 1941, the destruction of the centre of Kyiv in the fall of that year, the blowing up of the DniproHES [the Dnipro Hydroelectric Station], and then the deportation of the Crimean Tatars, the forced eviction of indigenous Ukrainians from their ethnic lands.³⁰

29 Heneralnyy shtab ZSU / General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, "1 veresnya, Zbroyni Syly Ukrainy solidarizuyutsya..." ("1 September, the Armed Forces of Ukraine Stand in Solidarity..."), Facebook post, 01 September 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbidoiijcqMXCWFfKkEwTVzXAc2eBk2zwGGvqCNUUj4eENCz8RRDyAtWD4eiDjtEFcal> [accessed: 31.07.2024] [author's trans].

30 Heneralnyy shtab ZSU / General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, "22 chervnya – Den skorboty i vshanuvannya..." ("22 June is the Day of Mourning and Commemoration..."), Facebook post, 22 June 2022, [https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbido2v88PBfWCvdyuM\]m1hjwR3epqgx1GAKz\]36GghuzaVnGbjSjXvmMwz3uEaYx3gRsyI](https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbido2v88PBfWCvdyuM]m1hjwR3epqgx1GAKz]36GghuzaVnGbjSjXvmMwz3uEaYx3gRsyI) [accessed: 31.07.2024] [author's trans]. The quoted phrase was not originally written by the author of the post, it has been actively disseminated on various websites since at least 2020.

Nevertheless, rather than 1 September, it was 22 June that gave rise to historical parallels: posts on that day appeared on five out of the seven pages covered in this study. The page of the OC “East” posted a simple banner – red poppies against a background of plaques with names from soldiers’ graves, and text overlay with the date’s denomination: “The Day of Mourning and Commemoration of the Victims of the War in Ukraine”.³¹ Reznichenko recalled the Ukrainian victims of WWII and drew parallels to the present: “Missiles are flying into Ukraine again, and again we are ruthlessly destroyed”.³² This comparison refers to the identification of Russia with Nazi Germany.

Zelenskyy’s page, first noting 22 June as a day to commemorate the victims of WWII, claims that events from the past are repeating themselves in the present: “On 24 February the occupiers came to our land”. The post is accompanied by photos that present the destruction and suffering of the population during the ongoing war.³³ In his daily address on the same day, Zelenskyy said: “Today there is no shortage of words that what Russia did on 24 February was the same as [what] the Nazis did on 22 June”.³⁴ Vilkul expresses a similar opinion, noting that “the two tragic dates will forever be a part of the history of our people”, meaning 22 June and 24 February.³⁵ The page of the Commander-in-Chief of the AFU also mentions the dates of the German

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- 31 Operativne komanduvannya “Skhid” (Operational Command “East”), “[Den skorboty i vshanuvannya]” (“[The Day of Mourning and Commemoration]”), Facebook post, 22 June 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/EastOC/posts/pfbidoXRAVQv499dANTSoCXxgSVnQojbuNckbWDTUjwEinh6EhFNNsd49bqTXp1a9HM1Bl> [accessed: 31.07.2024].
- 32 Valentyn Reznichenko, “U tsey den my zhaduyemo...” (“On this day we remember...”), Facebook post, 22 June 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/Valentyn.Reznichenko/posts/pfbidoWFLguUKzPnVxwBbjzYrGw6ioFFzxFaapFPEcYTUxmevuBxCRaU5cbZ8HkSPCmg3al> [accessed: 31.07.2024] [author’s trans.].
- 33 Volodymyr Zelenskyy, “Shchoroku 22 chervnya...” (“Every year on 22 June...”), Facebook post, 22 June 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/zelenskyy.official/posts/pfbidoTWz9Cqbt6mNTQ4vu8Cs6j4NfNp2EAwiatMcrFGkfd9QK9b42S2DbYxhj41iAaQztl> [accessed: 31.07.2024] [author’s trans.].
- 34 Volodymyr Zelenskyy, “Vid samoho ranku prodovzhiv...” (“Since the morning, I have continued...”), Facebook post, 22 June 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2814332868861296> [accessed: 27.02.2023] [author’s trans.]. A text version of the speech is available here: President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Official Website, “Zvilnyty nashu zemliu i pryty do peremohy – tse nasha natsionalna meta, nad realizatsiieiu yakoi maiemo pratsiuvaty shchodnia – zvernennia Prezydenta Ukrainy” (“To Liberate Our Land and Achieve Victory Is Our National Goal, Which We Must Work on Every Day – the President of Ukraine’s Address”), 23 June 2022, <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/zvilniti-nashu-zemlyu-i-prijiti-d-o-peremogi-ce-nasha-nacional-76001> [accessed: 31.07.2024].
- 35 Oleksandr Vilkul, “Dve tragicheskyye daty...” (“Two tragic dates...”), Facebook post, 22 June 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/OleksandrVilkul/posts/pfbidoHPKImdtufXVbkMfGg3kruKNT3bRXGujfyBypENFPXNybn7Pwur5PT5b8C9Wv9Nahl> [accessed: 31.07.2024] [author’s trans.].

and Russian attacks in March.³⁶ Drawing the same comparison on the following 9 May, Lukashuk wrote: "On 24 February, Ukraine's own Patriotic War began".³⁷

Bureaucratic circumstances partially explain the 'inattention' paid to 1 September as compared to the 'popularity' of 22 June. The September date is not recorded in the official calendar, while 22 June is the official date for the Day of Mourning and Commemoration of the Victims of War in Ukraine.³⁸ Unsurprisingly, as an official date, it has a higher value for officials and shapes their reaction. But the content of the posts also shows that 22 June 1941 is still perceived as the day that WWII began in Ukraine.

We Will Not Give Away the Victory of Our Grandfathers

In addition to the idea of the relationship between Ukraine's enemies during WWII and now, the idea of the relationship of the defenders – that is, the heredity of the Red Army frontline soldiers to modern Ukrainian fighters – is exploited in the contemporary context. Thus, on 20 March, the page of the Commander-in-Chief of the AFU posted a video with reconstructed scenes of the Red Army's battle against the Wehrmacht, which transformed into an image of today's Ukrainian Army at war.³⁹ An analogous video appeared on this page on 8 May.⁴⁰ On the same day, the page of the OC "East" posted a similar video. It begins with footage from Leonid Bykov's popular Soviet war movie *Only "Old Men" Are Going into Battle* (1973). The video presents the modern Russian Army as analogous to Nazi Germany's troops, while the fighters of the Red Army are combined with the representation of the modern AFU.⁴¹ Reznichenko's page presents the same idea in the form of a banner with the silhouettes of a Soviet soldier and a modern Ukrainian soldier against the backdrop of destruction taken from both wars and the slogan "We won then – we will win now".⁴²

36 Holovnokomanduvach ZS Ukrayiny / CinC AF of Ukraine, "Viyna. Viyna nikoly ne zminyuyetsya..." ("War. War never changes..."), Facebook post, 20 March 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=497146995321410> [accessed: 31.07.2024].

37 Lukashuk, "Sohodni my vidznachayemo 77-mu richnytsyu".

38 This is the commemorative date introduced by a decree of Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma on 17 November 2000. Obviously, after 24 February 2022, the date's name needed to be adjusted, as now the idea of 'war in Ukraine' does not automatically refer to the events of WWII.

39 Holovnokomanduvach ZS Ukrayiny, "Viyna. Viyna nikoly ne zminyuyetsya".

40 Holovnokomanduvach ZS Ukrayiny, "Nikoly znovu... Na zhal, tse ne tak".

41 Operatyvne komanduvannya "Skhid" (Operational Command "East"), "Sohodni v Ukrayini vidznachayut..." ("Today in Ukraine is being celebrated..."), Facebook post, 08 May 2022, <http://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=566804038083537> [accessed 31.07.2024].

42 Valentyn Reznichenko, "Buty ukrayintsem – tse buty vilnym..." ("To be Ukrainian means to be free..."), Facebook post, 09 May 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/Valentyn.Reznichenko>

It is quite telling that, although the participation of Ukrainians in other armies of the anti-Hitler coalition is mentioned,⁴³ this is not presented in any way.

Zelenskyy's posts also talk about the continuity of generations: "The deeds of grandfathers become the victories of grandchildren. The liberation of Ukraine from the Nazis [...] becomes a symbol: the result of our struggle will certainly be the liberation of our Ukraine!"⁴⁴ Vilkul expresses a similar idea: "Our grandfathers and great-grandfathers won. Now it is the turn of our generation to stand up for the country!"⁴⁵ On 22 February 2023, the Day of the Liberation of Kryvyi Rih from Nazi Invaders, he emphasised the same parallel: "our ancestors liberated Kryvyi Rih from the Nazi occupiers", and now "we, like our ancestors, are forced to fight, to liberate our Ukraine from another occupant".⁴⁶ Earlier, Vilkul mentioned a succession of not only soldiers but also partisans of the two wars. On September 22, Vilkul noted at a briefing:

Today is the Day of Partisan Glory in Ukraine. For the seventh month in our native Ukraine, a full-scale war unleashed by Russia has been going on, and once again, Ukrainian partisans, just like 80 years ago, are striking fear into the enemy.⁴⁷

It is noteworthy that there is no specification of which partisans were meant as predecessors of the present-day ones, given the existence of both nationalist and Soviet partisan formations during WWII. However, in general, this case is an interesting example of the direct incorporation of elements from the memory of the GPW into contemporary circumstances. Established by President Leonid Kuchma in 2001 "in support of the initiative of war veterans and with the aim of nationally honouring

o/posts/pfbidobUqU2PeyrQdCFTz98aukPeXhDjyQaZHmMEDwbFqNkfYqnZBxVHKkNVNdWzSY9qyLl [accessed 31.07.2024] [author's trans].

43 Holovnokomanduvach ZS Ukrayiny, "Nikoly znovu... Na zhal, tse ne tak".

44 Volodymyr Zelenskyy, "Zlo zavzhdy pochynaye odnakovo".

45 Oleksandr Vilkul, "Bryfnh nachalnyka viys'kovoyi administratsiyi Kryvoho Rohu O.Vilkula 28 10 22...". See also: Oleksandr Vilkul, "Rivno 78 rokiv tomu..." ("Exactly 78 years ago..."), Facebook post, 28 October 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/OleksandrVilkul/posts/pfbidoUuUGMZN5RyFEyFUuHtyRRjUfqGmdX13aKNBZpm8nmDj3S4yLZBfgGKrTcxhNyJSI> [accessed 31.07.2024].

46 Oleksandr Vilkul, "U tsey den 79 rokiv tomu..." ("On this day 79 years ago..."), Facebook post, 22 February 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/OleksandrVilkul/posts/pfbido29Mn78nhwXygzCWvQVRwsoWMWUuov7X8yHWkuaLosjCBtMW5981LbCkQtYpGuFTkXI> [accessed 31.07.2024] [author's trans].

47 Oleksandr Vilkul, "Bryfnh nachalnyka viyskovoyi administratsiyi Kryvoho Rohu O.Vilkula 22 09 22..." ("Briefing of the Head of the Military Administration of Kryvyi Rih O.Vilkul 22 09 22..."), Facebook post, 22 September 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=628544058975647> [accessed: 31.07.2024] [author's trans].

the feats of partisans and underground fighters during the Great Patriotic War",⁴⁸ the Day of Partisan Glory was a clear 'bow' to the leftist electorate with pro-Soviet sympathies. Since 2014, it has been almost forgotten. However, in 2022, extensive Ukrainian guerrilla activity in the Russian-occupied territories provided a new reason to resurrect this neglected holiday.

As seen from the discourse discussed above, there is a current self-identification with Ukrainian Red Army soldiers who resisted the Nazi invasion that began in 1941. It is organically combined with the identification of enemies in the ongoing and past war. In most of the analysed posts, the Second World War is perceived as 'our' war from the Soviet perspective, although this is not directly stated. At the same time, a direct correlation between modern Ukraine and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic does not follow. In the analysed discourses, Ukraine's participation in WWII is isolated from the Soviet context. For example, Lukashuk presents Ukraine as an independent participant in WWII: "The victory over Nazism was won by the anti-Hitler coalition, which included dozens of countries. Ukraine played a huge role in this victory".⁴⁹

Lukashuk's statement that Ukrainians "are once again forced to fight for their statehood, for the nation, once again forced to confront the aggressor" indicates that their motives are the same as those of their predecessors. Almost the same words appear in Zelenskyy's speech on 9 May:

We have never fought against anyone. We always fight for ourselves. For our freedom. For our independence. For the victory of our ancestors to be not in vain. They fought for freedom for us and won. We are fighting for our freedom, for freedom for our children, and therefore we will win.⁵⁰

48 Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, "Ukaz Prezydenta Ukrainy 'Pro Den partyzanskoy slavy'" ("A Decree of the President of Ukraine 'On the Day of Partisan Glory'"), 30 October 2001, <http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1020/2001#Text> [accessed: 31.07.2024] [author's trans.].

49 Lukashuk, "Sohodni my vidznachayemo 77-mu richnytsyu".

50 For an unclear reason, this address was not published on Volodymyr Zelenskyy's page, although it contains material similar to other days. Instead, it is available on other official Facebook pages, including the General Staff of the AFU, Heneralnyy shtab ZSU / General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, "Zvernennya Prezydenta Ukrainy Volodymyra Zelenskoho..." ("Address of the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy..."), Facebook post, 09 May 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1059693961283990> [accessed: 31.07.2024] [author's trans.]. For the text version of the speech, see: President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Official Website, "Zvernennya Prezydenta Ukrainy z nahody Dnia peremohy nad natsyzmom u Druhii svitovii viini" ("Address of the President of Ukraine on the Occasion of the Day of Victory over Nazism in World War II"), 09 May 2022, <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/zvernennya-prezidenta-ukrayini-z-nagodi-dnya-peremogi-nad-na-74925> [accessed: 27.02.2022]. See also: Zelenskyy, "Tsohorich my kazhemo 'Nikoly zнову' inakshe"; and Zelenskyy, "Zlo zavzhdy pochynaye odnakovo".

The post by the Commander-in-Chief of the AFU reads similarly: “Never again? We are again fighting for freedom”.⁵¹ At the same time, in all cases, the context excludes the possibility that they are referring to the independence aspirations of the Ukrainian nationalist underground.⁵²

Looking at the analysed posts, this continuity from the generation of winners in WWII also implies the inheritance of the previous generation's victory and status as winners. A common theme in officials' posts on the May commemorative dates is ‘protection of the victory’. For example, Zelenskyy's address on 9 May reads:

Today we celebrate the Day of Victory over Nazism and we will not give away a single piece of our history to anyone [...] We will not allow this victory to be annexed, we will not allow it to be appropriated.⁵³

At the same time, he speaks of denying or depriving modern Russia of this status: “And very soon there will be two Victory Days in Ukraine. And someone will have none”.⁵⁴ According to Zelenskyy, Russia has lost its WWII winner's status due to its actions being similar to those of Nazi Germany:

By such actions, the Russian Federation has lost any moral right to appeal to the legacy of the victory over Nazism because by its actions it de facto repeats Nazi atrocities and desecrates the memory of the deeds of veterans and participants of the Second World War.⁵⁵

Lukashuk's post is in the same vein:

The Russian Federation has erased the common victory in World War II. It is trying with all its might to ‘privatise’ this achievement, to put only itself on a pedestal. [...] Therefore, the Russian Federation should be deprived of the status of winner in World War II, because now their country is promoting Ruscism. Our

51 Holovnokomanduvach ZS Ukrayiny, “Never again?”.

52 I would like to note that references to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the nationalist movement do not at all appear in the posts of the selected pages. The UPA was not even mentioned on 14 October, except for one (rather unexpected) exception. Only Vilkul noted in his congratulatory post that this is not only the Day of Defenders of Ukraine, the Intercession of the Mother of God, and the Day of the Cossacks, but also the Day of the UPA. Oleksandr Vilkul, “Bryfinh nachalnyka viyskovoyi administratsiyi Kryvoho Rohu O.Vilkula 14 10 22...” (“Briefing of the Head of the Military Administration of Kryvyi Rih O.Vilkul 14 10 22...”), Facebook post, 14 October 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=443747554408624> [accessed: 31.07.2024].

53 Heneralnyy shtab ZSU, “Zvernennya Prezydenta Ukrayiny Volodymyra Zelenskoho”.

54 Ibid.

55 Heneralnyy shtab ZSU, “Peremohly natsyzm – peremozhemo i rashyzm!”.

task is not to give the Russians the common achievement of millions of citizens, not to let them appropriate this victory.⁵⁶

Meanwhile, Vilkul divides the inheritance between the two sides in this way:

We are the heirs of the victorious warriors.

And the children of those who are now coming to us 'izzaporebrika' [i.e., from Russia] and bombing peaceful Ukrainian cities will now become the heirs of the fascist occupiers. Forever.⁵⁷

He also speaks out against Russia's "appropriation" and "distortion" of the "Great Victory".⁵⁸

It is noteworthy that he does not specify what exactly "appropriating" the Great Victory or "depriving" Russia of its right to victory means. However, the context lets the reader infer that a possible Ukrainian refusal to present itself as the victorious party and celebrate Victory Day will mean allowing Russia to appropriate the victory. Therefore, when (rather sensationally, given his longstanding efforts to preserve the post-Soviet model of the memory of the Great Patriotic War) this year Vilkul called for the celebration of Victory Day on 8 May "together with Europe", he justified it with the need to have nothing in common with Russia. At the same time he claimed, "we have no right to allow the orcs [Russians] to steal and appropriate this great holiday for themselves", suggesting that this could occur were Ukraine to refuse to celebrate Victory Day altogether.⁵⁹

The rhetoric of these analysed posts reveals a simple, everyday level of the perception of history as if it were a material object. Accordingly, in this way of looking

56 Mykola Lukashuk, "Sohodni my vidznachayemo 77-mu richnytsyu".

57 Oleksandr Vilkul, "Imenno my – nasledniki voinov-pobediteley..." ("It is we who are the heirs of the victorious warriors..."), Facebook post, 07 March 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/OleksandrVilkul/posts/pfbid0NgRwWF1B2kizUmhAht8ETioK7Gu6HnX18HrHQ7LpCyXdSsARC4tnK4yeAGLhSbUMI> [accessed: 31.07.2024] [author's trans.]. I would like to note that this post is the only one in the selection where the 'dispute over Victory' is not tied to 8–9 May. The quoted text is accompanied by a photo of the Victory Monument in Kryvyi Rih, with the Soviet soldier on the pedestal now holding a Ukrainian flag. This modification of the monument is likely to have been the information trigger for the post.

58 Oleksandr Vilkul, "Vmeste s krivorozhanami..." ("Together with Kryvyi Rih residents..."), Facebook post, 06 May 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/OleksandrVilkul/posts/pfbid033zHrmDA7T9uy430E3BCKZHHPtJgweKKvpDVGLdnhPni8BpP2tE6kaQn2TUxjrhp5I> [accessed: 31.07.2024] [author's trans.].

59 Ibid.

at the world, there is only one Victory Day and it can be physically stolen – in whole or in part (“a single piece”⁶⁰).

Conclusions

In the context of the full-scale Russian invasion that began on 24 February 2022, Ukrainian officials actively use parallels with World War II in their appeals to citizens. However, these links are mostly one-sided. On the occasions of Second World War commemorative dates, connections to the present situation are made. Meanwhile, the current events are not described with references to the past war. The only exception in the latter case is war crimes: the Nazis’ atrocities are used as a kind of standard for the evaluation of contemporary Russian atrocities.

Appeals to WWII notwithstanding, the vision of the past that is called up is still based on the Soviet framework. We can see this in the perception of the year 1941 as the start of the war, as well as in the presentations of a genealogy of modern defenders of Ukraine who reach back to their grandfathers, the Red Army soldiers who fought the Nazis, and the importance of the victory over Nazism as their inheritance. However, this vision does not include pro-Soviet sentiments. The Soviet context of Ukraine’s participation in the events of WWII is completely ignored, while Ukrainian resistance to the Nazis is presented as an independent act, undertaken along with other allied nations. In this exploitation of the topic of WWII, there is a continuation of practices established during the period of Anti-Terrorist Operation in Eastern Ukraine (2014–2022), which was the first stage of the Russo–Ukrainian War. This analysis of the appeals to WWII history in official public communication shows us that the new narrative promoted by the UINP over the past nine years, which offers a radical break with the Soviet and post-Soviet vision of WWII, is still not fully accepted in Ukraine.

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60 Heneralnyy shtab ZSU, “Zvernennya Prezidenta Ukrayiny Volodymyra Zelenskoho”.

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