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© Yulia Ivashko²

© Serhii Belinskyi³

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The War in Ukraine: Between the Past and the Future. Historical and Existential Aspect

The subject of the study is the country's common "project of the future" and its influence on foreign and domestic policy, as well as on the behavior strategy both for society and individual (on the example of the phenomenon of mass support for an aggressive war by the Russia's population). The purpose of the study is to identify the connections between the country's presence of a positive project for the future and its domestic and foreign policy. The objectives of the study are: to identify the challenges faced by modern society as a result of the active phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war; to conduct a comparative analysis of the post-Soviet development of Russia and Ukraine from the point of view of the presence of a "project of the future" for the country; to reveal the impact of the presence of a social "project of the future" on the formation of the strategy of individual and collective behavior.

The research methodology. The general scientific methods were used: the method of historical analysis, the method of cultural analysis (used to identify the reasons for the formation of an aggressive-obedient majority in Russian society), and the method of comparative analysis (used to trace the transformation of value orientations of Russian society in the post-Soviet period and to compare with the similar evolution of Ukrainian society).

The results of the study. A country's "project of the future" may be absent in principle (focusing society on short-term tasks), and if present, it may be positive (achievement of something) or negative (protection from something). Using the example of Russia, the danger of forming an unrealistic project of the future, which contradicts the current trends in the development of society and excessive fascination with the past, is shown. The example of Ukraine shows how a common vision of the country's future and ways of its development allows society to maintain unity, optimism and efficiency even in extreme circumstances.

Keywords: Russian-Ukrainian war, project of the future, behavior strategy.

Війна в Україні: між минулим і майбутнім. Історичний та екзистенційний аспект

У статті на прикладі феномену підтримки російським суспільством широкомасштабного вторгнення в Україну 24 лютого 2022 р. досліджується т.зв. «проект майбутнього» країни, його вплив на поведінку індивіда і суспільства в цілому. Мета дослідження – виявити зв'язки між наявністю в країні позитивного проекту майбутнього та її внутрішньою та зовнішньою політикою. Задачі дослідження: визначити виклики, які постали перед сучасним суспільством внаслідок

¹ Dr hab, prof. of UL, Vice-Dean for Extramural and Postgraduate Studies and International Relations of the Faculty of Philosophy and History of the University of Lodz, Poland. E-mail: aneta.pawlowska@uni.lodz.pl; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2847-4403>.

² Doctor of Architecture, Professor, Professor of the Department of Fundamentals of Architecture and Architectural Design, Faculty of Architecture, Kyiv National University of Construction and Architecture, Ukraine. E-mail: yulia-ivashko@ukr.net; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4525-9182>.

³ Press officer of the Knights of the Winter Campaign 28th separate mechanized brigade (Armed Forces of Ukraine), Ukraine. E-mail: serhii_belinskyi@meta.ua; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2359-2507>.

⁴ Ph.D., Associate Professor, Associate Professor of the Department of Architecture of Buildings and Design, Educational and Research Institute of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Land Management, National University "Yuri Kondratyuk Poltava Polytechnic", Ukraine. E-mail: metr5555@ukr.net; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4757-5218>.

док активної фази російсько-української війни; провести порівняльний аналіз пострадянського розвитку Росії та України з точки зору наявності у країни «проєкту майбутнього»; виявити вплив наявності соціального «проєкту майбутнього» на формування стратегії індивідуальної та колективної поведінки. Поставлені завдання дослідження зумовили вибір загальнонаукових методів – методу історичного аналізу, методу філософського аналізу та методу порівняльного аналізу.

До викликів сучасності, що з'явилися після 24 лютого 2022 р. можна віднести неготовність колективного Заходу до швидкої відповіді на агресивні дії Росії, що підважують усталений світоустрій, а також необхідність позбавлення двох небезпечних ілюзій: про остаточну перемогу ліберальних ідей в усьому світі й про особливу гуманність російського народу. Узагальнене порівняння розвитку Росії та України як незалежних держав після розпаду Радянського Союзу показало, що Росія обрала вектор славетного минулого (як виявилось, нерозривно пов'язаного із завоюваннями, колонізацією та геноцидом корінних народів) і орієнтувалася на нього, а Україна орієнтувалася на майбутнє. Оскільки суспільна візія майбутнього Росії суперечить тенденціям розвитку суспільства, закономірним є її зосередження на минулому. В той же час достатньо реалістичний проєкт майбутнього для України – європейська та євроатлантична інтеграція як запорука заможного і безпечного життя – не лише отримав суспільну підтримку але й забезпечив єдність, стійкість та життєздатність суспільства у складні воєнні часи.

Ключові слова: російсько-українська війна, проєкт майбутнього, поведінкова стратегія.

Formulation of scientific problem and its significance. The large-scale aggression of Russia against Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, not only caused a war, which in terms of intensity and cruelty is not inferior to the Second World War, but also significantly undermined the foundations of the established world order. It should also be noted that this war enjoys consistently high support from the population of the Russian Federation – 71.4% as of December 2022⁵ (although not all of those who support are ready to fight personally). Of course, such circumstances encourage a deeper study of the historical and existential aspect of this war.

Analysis of recent studies. In Ukraine, after the events of 2014, both reputable scientific institutions⁶ and individual researchers⁷ began to investigate the issue of historical and philosophical understanding of the causes of Russian aggression. The general reasons for the fact that in the 21st century attempts to conduct foreign policy using the means of the past century continue, are quite well formulated in the monograph by the National Institute of Strategic Studies: “The division of the world into two spaces continues to deepen, one of which modernizes more or less successfully and moves forward with great strides, while the other, where modern progress has not made significant achievements, reigns in poverty and backwardness. The divergence between them largely explains the polarization of the world system into a zone of relative peace, stability and prosperity and a zone of chaos, instability and economic stagnation. Actually, the existence of the last space feeds the models of political thinking inherent in the last century”⁸.

From this point of view, Russia's strategy becomes clear: to lead those who have fallen behind in progress, becoming the “leader of the losers”, and thus increasing its geopolitical weight.

It should be noted that among the attempts of Russian philosophers to analyze the reasons for this way of thinking (using the example of the annexation of Crimea and the creation of puppet pseudo-state formations in the territory of Luhansk and Donetsk regions) in 2014 – 2021, opuses such as by

⁵ Левада-Центр (2022), *Конфликт с Украиной: оценки декабря 2022 года* (23.12.2022), available at: <https://www.levada.ru/2022/12/23/konflikt-s-ukrainoj-otsenki-dekabrya-2022-goda/> (accessed 3 February 2023).

⁶ Гай-Нижник, П. П., Залізник, Л. Л., Краснодемська, І. Й., Фігурний, Ю. С., Чирков, О. А., Чупрій, Л. В. (2016), *Агресія Росії проти України: історичні передумови та сучасні виклики*, «МП Леся», Київ; Горбулін, В. П. (ред.) (2017), *Світова гібридна війна: український фронт*, Національний інститут стратегічних досліджень, Київ.

⁷ Ситник, О. (2017), Історичні витоки російсько-української війни 2014 – 2017 років, *Східноєвропейський історичний вісник*, Вип. 2, сс. 71-81.

⁸ Горбулін В. П. (ред.) (2017), *Світова гібридна війна ...*, с. 77.

A. Lestev⁹ prevailed, which, despite external sciolism, were an ordinary set of propagandistic stamps. Articles by employees of specialized institutes of the Russian Academy of Sciences are no exception¹⁰.

With the beginning of large-scale aggression, an interesting phenomenon is observed in Russian specialized journals: only researchers who are too late to worry about their scientific reputation continue to analyze the philosophical aspect of this war¹¹. Other publications are as far as possible from the current moment.

On the contrary, Ukrainian scientists quite actively try to analyze various aspects of the war¹².

An analysis of the Western politicians and philosophers' reaction to this war¹³, unfortunately, shows that a significant part of them either still have illusions about Russia's role or are simply Russian paid agents. The real disappointment of the year was the article by one of the most famous structuralist philosophers, 90-year-old Jürgen Habermas, published in April 2022, already after the revelation of Russian crimes in Bucha¹⁴, which is simply an apology for the then indecisive German government's policy and uncritical broadcasting of Russian propaganda narratives (for example, that a nuclear state cannot lose a war under any circumstances).

The conducted studies show quite clearly the reasons for the war, but do not answer the questions that once arose regarding the German people, and now arise regarding the citizens of Russia: how did it happen that the vast majority supports genocide and aggression?

The purpose of the study is to identify the connections between the country's presence of a positive project for the future and its domestic and foreign policy. **The objectives of the study are:**

- to identify the challenges faced by modern society as a result of the active phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war;
- to conduct a comparative analysis of the post-Soviet development of Russia and Ukraine from the point of view of the presence of a “project of the future” for the country;
- to reveal the impact of the presence of a social “project of the future” on the formation of the strategy of individual and collective behavior.

The research methodology. The set objectives of the research led to the choice of general scientific methods – the method of historical analysis, the method of cultural analysis, and the method of comparative analysis. Historical and cultural analysis were used to identify the reasons for the formation of an aggressive-obedient majority in Russian society (at the same time, the study of mass culture was widely used, as it adequately reflects the values of the people's majority). The method of comparative analysis was used, on the one hand, to trace the transformation of value orientations of Russian society in the post-Soviet period and on the other hand, to compare with the similar evolution of Ukrainian society.

⁹ Лестев, А. (2015), *Философия войны в контексте украинского кризиса*, Центр стратегических оценок и прогнозов (01.11.2015), available at: <http://csef.ru/ru/oborona-i-bezopasnost/348/filosofiya-vojny-v-kontekste-ukrainskogo-krizisa-6423> (accessed 10 February 2023).

¹⁰ Пуцаев, Ю. В. (2021), *Война на Украине и нищета философии современного русского консерватизма*, Русская истина. Сайт консервативной политической мысли (07.04), available at: <https://politconservatism.ru/articles/vojna-na-ukraine-i-nishheta-filosofii-sovremennogo-russkogo-konservatizma> (accessed 10 February 2023).

¹¹ Пуцаев, Ю. В. (2022), Конфликт на Украине и современная философия в России и вокруг нее. Часть четвертая, *Социальные и гуманитарные науки. Отечественная и зарубежная литература. Сер. 3, Философия: Реферативный журнал*, №3, сс. 96-112.

¹² *The Russian-Ukrainian war (2014–2022): historical, political, cultural-educational, religious, economic, and legal aspects : Scientific monograph* (2002), “Baltija Publishing”, Riga; Lossovskiy, I., Prykhodko, I. (2022), *Epistemological aspects of the Russia-Ukraine modern war*, National Institute of Strategic Studies (25.08.2022), available at: <https://niss.gov.ua/en/news/articles/epistemological-aspects-russia-ukraine-modern-war> (accessed 10 February 2023); Таміліна, Л. (2022), *Філософія війни та вторгнення Росії в Україну: чому росіяни погоджуються на вбивство українців*, available at: <https://www.liga.net/ua/politics/opinion/filosofiya-voynu-i-vtorjenie-rossii-v-ukrainu-pochemu-rossiyane-idut-na-ubiystvo-ukraintsev> (accessed 10 February 2023).

¹³ Delwaide, J. (2022), Ukraine as a Pawn: the Contentious Causes of Russia's War, *Krytyka*, (December), available at: <https://krytyka.com/en/articles/ukraine-as-a-pawn-the-contentious-causes-of-russias-war> (accessed 10 February 2023).

¹⁴ Habermas, J. (2022), Krieg und Empörung, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 28. April, available at: <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/projekte/artikel/kultur/das-dilemma-des-westens-juergen-habermas-zum-krieg-in-der-ukraine-e068321/?reduced=true> (accessed 10 February 2023).

1. Challenges faced by modern society as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war

The first challenge is the absolute unpreparedness of the so-called “civilized world” to immediately repel the aggressor, confusion, attempts to “solve” the problem by surrendering Ukraine – a surprising analogy with the Munich Betrayal of 1938 and attempts to appease Nazi Germany. NATO as a defense alliance proved to be incapable of a quick response to external challenges, and a split took place in its environment into three groups of countries – conditional “hawks”, “doves” and “ostriches” (preferred to pretend that nothing special was happening)¹⁵. One of the reasons for this the well-known Slovenian culturologist and social philosopher Slavoj Žižek sees in the political short-sightedness of Western leaders, who tend to compromise ideals in order to ensure the profits of corporations (as of April 2022): “Market values have also determined the contours of Russia’s war in Ukraine, whose president, Volodymyr Zelensky, appears to have had a crash course in how global capitalism and democracy really work. Since the start of the war, Europe has sent Russia almost \$40 billion in payments for oil and gas, prompting his observation that Western countries are more concerned about rising energy prices than Ukrainian lives”¹⁶. Researchers from KEKST CNC note: “In striking contrast to some Western policy-makers, whose concerns about further military escalation appear to hamstring more determined support, Ukrainians have not been intimidated by Russian threats. As devastating as the use of a tactical nuclear weapon against a city or on the battlefield would be, an overwhelming majority of Ukrainians say they would still refuse to surrender if it occurred”¹⁷.

The second challenge is the need to realize and reject two very dangerous illusions. The first of them is about that after the Cold War end the humanity finally realized the need for coexistence and commonwealth, and it will always be like this¹⁸. Unfortunately, Ukraine also had this illusion, voluntarily getting rid of nuclear weapons and not arming itself, spreading lies about “Slavic brotherhood”. At the cost of terrible sacrifices, Ukrainian society finally got rid of this illusion, and the so-called “collective West” is in process.

The second illusion concerns the so-called “great Russian culture”, which should automatically ensure the special humanism of the Russian people. Even now, there are still people (including, unfortunately, Pope Francis) who believe that the “great Russian people” are in no way involved in war crimes in Ukraine: “What strikes me – that’s why I use the word ‘tormented’ for Ukraine – is the cruelty, which is not of the Russian people, perhaps... because the Russian people are a great people. It is of the mercenaries, of the soldiers who go off to war as an adventure, mercenaries... I prefer to think of it this way because I have high esteem for the Russian people, for Russian humanism. Just think of Dostoevsky, who to this day inspires us, inspires Christians to think of Christianity”¹⁹. This illusion was irrevocably destroyed by carpet bombing of civilian objects in the cities of Ukraine, atrocities in Bucha, Irpen and Mariupol, mass murders of civilians. It is characteristic that precisely on April 3, 2002, after the discovery of numerous victims in Bucha, the website of one of the largest Russian state news agencies, RIA Novosti, published a programmatic article by a political technologist close to the Kremlin, who also positions himself as a philosopher, Timofey Sergeitsev, *What Russia Should Do*

¹⁵ Freedman, L. (2022), NATO has no choice but to support Ukraine. Our future security depends upon it, *The Sunday Times* (June 25), available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/nato-has-no-choice-but-to-support-kyiv-our-future-security-depends-upon-it-sndxq5j32> (accessed 10 February 2023).

¹⁶ Žižek, S. (2022), War in a World that Stands for Nothing, *Project Syndicate* (April 18, 2022), available at: <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/russia-ukraine-war-highlights-truths-about-global-capitalism-by-slavoj-zizek-2022-04?barrier=accesspay> (accessed 10 February 2023).

¹⁷ Munich Security Index. Appendix to the Munich Security Report 2023 With Additional Survey Results and Analysis. February 2023. Powered by KEKST CNC, p.21, available at: https://securityconference.org/assets/01_Bilder_Inhalte/03_Medien/02_Publikationen/2023/Munich_Security_Index_2023.pdf (accessed 10 February 2023).

¹⁸ Fukuyama, F. (1989), The End of History?, *The National Interest*, 1989, No. 16, pp. 3-18.

¹⁹ Vatican News (2022), *Pope Francis: Three world wars in one century: be pacifists!* (06 November 2022, 18:00), available at: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-11/pope-flight-three-wars-century-pacifist-interview-bahrain.html> (accessed 14 February 2023).

with Ukraine²⁰, aptly characterized by the Ukrainian Crisis Media Center as a “justification of genocide” and evidence of “Russia’s desire to destroy Ukrainians as a nation”²¹.

2. Historical analysis of the dangers of clinging to the past as a means of inhibiting progress

The authors of the study drew attention to a specific historical aspect, in particular to the danger of excessive fascination with the past – an innocent whim for an individual becomes dangerous if it spreads to society as a whole.

Often, a person, having reached a mature age, is acutely aware that all the best is already behind him, and ahead is a constant deterioration of health and inevitable death. Full awareness of one’s own mortality and the ability at the same time to live a full life, not overshadowed by the fear of death, during the entire period allotted by fate at all times was a non-trivial task for an individual. Practically all world religions try to reconcile a person with the fact that he will die someday, offering one or another form of the afterlife, while at the same time emphasizing the need to live the assigned life term with dignity and fullness and declaring suicide a sinful act. Materialist philosophers, starting with Diogenes of Sinope (4th century BC), also tried to create philosophical teachings that would help their followers live a full life, not overshadowed by the constant awareness of their own mortality.

However, the fear of death, especially among the elderly, can be used by politicians who promise to bring back the “good old days”. Of course, this does not help turn back time, but it creates the illusion of stopping it. You can’t get younger, but you can stop aging and postpone the inevitable death (even illusory) – isn’t this idea attractive to many? If social relations (at least outwardly) are the same as in your youth, if the songs you listened to in school are constantly playing on the radio, and the movies you grew up with are constantly playing on the television, can’t you imagine that time has stopped? And if the head of state hasn’t changed since you graduated from school, what’s wrong with that? This also helps to create the illusion of not aging, and also eliminates the need to constantly adapt to the developing and changing world around us.

No country is immune to the use of such illusions by populist politicians, which is clearly demonstrated by the history of the presidency of Donald Trump, who came to power using the slogan “Make America Great Again”, relying mainly on provincial America – less educated and wealthy, more conservative, on people that do not have time to adapt to constant development and do not want to develop together with the surrounding world.

From this point of view, it is useful to compare the development of Russia and Ukraine as independent states after the Soviet Union’s collapse.

Russia chose the vector of the glorious past (as it turned out, inextricably linked with the conquests, colonization and genocide of indigenous peoples) and focused on it, and Ukraine focused on the future (no matter how naive some aspects of the project of this future may seem from the point of view of today).

This was manifested even in such a frivolous genre as pop music: if in Russia in the 1990s they had time to release several episodes of the musical movie “Old Songs about the Main”, where the singers of that time sang old Soviet songs (it was traditionally broadcast on television on New Year’s Eve), the “Territory A” project was active in Ukraine at that time, which gave a path to life for dozens of new singers who performed completely modern songs. In the end, this made the Russian variety show not competitive at all, not only by world standards, but even in comparison with the Ukrainian one (that is why former Ukrainian pop stars, who are no longer interesting to anyone at home, enjoyed and continue to enjoy considerable popularity in Russia for a long time).

In recent decades in Russian literature in the fantasy genre, a separate subgenre of novels about so-called “time travelers” (in Russian – “popadantsy”) has developed and flourished. Such “time travelers” from modern times fall into the past and there try to improve and correct Russian history – from the times of Ivan the Terrible²², the Russian Empire²³ to the times of the Soviet Union²⁴, etc. From the

²⁰ Сергейцев, Т. (2022), *Что Россия должна сделать с Украиной?*, РИА Новости (03/04/2022), available at: <https://archive.is/78PuH#selection-3295.0-3295.36> (accessed 10 February 2023).

²¹ Ukraine Crisis Media Center (2022), *Justification of genocide: Russia has openly declared its desire to exterminate Ukrainians as a nation*, available at: <https://uacrisis.org/en/justification-of-genocide-russia-has-openly-declared-its-desire-to-exterminate-ukrainians-as-a-nation> (accessed 10 February 2023).

²² Злотников, Р. (2010), *Царь Федор. Еще один шанс*, Альфа-Книга, Москва.

²³ Назимов, К. (2021), *Охранитель. Мятёж в империи*. Альфа-книга, Москва.

innocent assumption “what would have happened if the historical development had gone differently?” this subgenre developed into a maniacal desire to remake history in such a way that Russia would become the most powerful, most advanced state that everyone would respect and fear.

Unfortunately, fascination with the past in Russia is not limited to pop culture. Russian President Putin seriously admires and tries to justify modern political decisions with the teachings of the Russian philosopher Ivan Ilyin (1883 – 1954) – one of the ideologues of Russian messianism and fascism, a critic of communism and the collective West²⁵. Russian philosophers, analyzing the period of the beginning of the so-called of a “special military operation” in Ukraine, substantiate Russia’s modern policy with the ideas of K.M. Leontiev (1831 – 1891) and M.Ya. Danilevskiy (1822 – 1885)²⁶.

Such fascination leads to the formation of a “time funnel”, which, constantly expanding, drags not only the country into the past, but also neighbouring ones. This is clearly visible on the example of Russia, which is gradually going through the stages of its history in reverse – first it was the Brezhnev’s Soviet Union with the cult of the Great Patriotic War and the “Immortal Regiment” actions, then it turned into “we can repeat” – an allusion to the Great Patriotic War, however, on foreign territory and under absurd slogans, the country is increasingly isolated from the civilized world and returns to the period of Stalinist terror in the 1930s – 1940s, and this process of reverse development continues. This “temporal funnel” drags neighbouring countries into itself: Ukraine found itself in the format of the Second World War, European countries – in the times of the Cold War, etc.

The reason for such backward development is in the essence of Russian “national project of the future”, which contradicts the trends of historical development – the idea of a large territorially and powerful (first of all in terms of military) state, which is respected and feared by other countries, dominates the post-Soviet space and can impose its will on weaker neighbours.

Any aggression against neighbours, if it ends in the seizure of foreign territories, or the brutal suppression of national liberation movements inside Russia (like during the second Russian-Chechen war), raises the rating of the Russian leadership to sky-high heights. The occupation of part of Georgia (Samachablo, or the so-called South Ossetia) in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the large-scale aggression against Ukraine in 2022 – all these actions led to a significant increase in the rating of the President and the leadership of the country as a whole²⁷. However, all empires (including Russia in its current form) disintegrate over time; so normal historical development for them is as dangerous as the onset of spring for a snowman.

Ukraine was able to create the “project of the future”, which has gradually gained more and more popularity since the beginning of the 2000s – European (and later – Euro-Atlantic) integration. In 2005, the new Ukrainian leadership, which came to power as a result of the so-called Orange Revolution, an indisputable priority set the course for the accelerated accession of Ukraine to the processes of European integration²⁸. In 2013, President Yanukovich’s attempt to change the vector of foreign policy orientation to a Eurasian (or more correctly to say – pro-Russian) caused mass protests – the so-called Euromaidan, which, after the brutal crackdown on November 30, 2013, grew into the Revolution of Dignity, led to a change in Ukraine’s leadership and a return to European integration. The Russian aggression of 2014, which actually marked the beginning of a low-intensity Russian-Ukrainian war, led to the growth of not only European integration, but also Euro-Atlantic sympathies of Ukrainians – support for the idea of Ukraine joining NATO increased significantly. The transition of the Russian-Ukrainian war from 02/24/2022 to the active phase led to the achievement of a national consensus on these issues: the vast majority of Ukrainians see their country as a future member of both

²⁴ Корольюк, М. (2014). *Снасти СССР. Инфльтрация*, Альфа-книга, Москва.

²⁵ Yarmolenko, O., Pyvovarov, S. (2022), *Putin often quotes the philosopher Ivan Ilyin and General Anton Denikin. They lived a century ago, both denied Ukraine’s independence and advocated dictatorial rule. And this is how they described*, Babel (6 April 2022), available at: <https://babel.ua/en/texts/77596-putin-often-quotes-the-philosopher-ivan-ilyin-and-general-anton-denikin-they-lived-a-century-ago-both-denied-ukraine-s-independence-and-advocated-dictatorial-rule-and-this-is-how-they-described> (accessed 18 February 2023).

²⁶ Пуцаев, Конфликт на Украине ..., сс. 96-97.

²⁷ FreeДом (2022), *Как менялся рейтинг Путина в течение 22 лет правления – данные независимых социологов России*, (08 ноября 2022 г), available at: <https://uatv.ua/kak-menyalsya-rejting-putina-v-techenie-22-let-pravleniya-dannye-nezavisimyh-sotsiologov-rossii/> (accessed 14 February 2023).

²⁸ Українська правда (2005), *Рибачук створить собі комітет і повісить всім установам прапор ЄС*, available at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2005/02/10/3006956/> (accessed 14 February 2023).

the EU and NATO. According to the results of the Twentieth National Survey in war conditions (January 14 – 16, 2023) 87% of respondents would support Ukraine's accession to the European Union in the event of a referendum (3% against, 8% would not vote). Support for joining NATO is the highest in the entire history of observations: 86% would support this initiative in a referendum, 3% would oppose it, and 8% would not vote. Support for joining the EU and NATO is almost unanimous among representatives of all macro-regions, age and wealth groups²⁹.

This position is not the result of lack of awareness or inflated expectations. During the year of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, Ukrainians managed to see both the EU and NATO from an unattractive side: this is the excessive caution of political leaders, and the lack of desire of the population of some countries to defend even their homeland in the event of aggression³⁰ (and not to fulfill the duty of an ally in relation to other NATO countries), and the principle of consensus in decision-making, which allows pro-Russian regimes (such as the Orbán's one in Hungary) to sabotage the introduction of sanctions against the aggressor.

Nevertheless, Ukrainians want to join the EU and NATO, and are ready to work together with the Baltic countries, Poland, the Czech Republic (and in the case of NATO, also with the USA and Great Britain) to increase their viability and ability to respond to external and internal challenges.

3. The influence of the existence of a social “project of the future” on the formation of a strategy of individual and collective behavior

Understanding the causes of the Russian-Ukrainian war is inextricably linked to the historical categories of the past and the future. The past is tied to the material, to be specific, to nostalgia for those times when the material situation was better, which gives rise to a subconscious desire to return to those times. The future – when it is planned according to an optimistic scenario – is always based on high ideals and a far-reaching goal. That is why the most fantastic ideas succeed. Idealism is calculated for the long term and is often disadvantageous from the point of view of immediate gain.

No matter how paradoxical it sounds, history knows many cases when attempts to implement an idea designed to improve the world or raise a country ended tragically: for example, the Bolsheviks wanted to build a new equitable society without exploiters, the Italian fascists wanted to achieve the greatness, power and prosperity of Italy, and members of the NSDAP dreamed of uniting the German people in one state, freeing them from what they believed to be humiliating Germany's obligations under the Treaty of Versailles, and freeing the German people from exploitation by plutocrats of non-national origins.

In the times of postmodernism, Europe and the world after World War II tried as soon as possible to move away from any high ideas and slogans of the era of modernism and focus on purely material problems. This became the basis of the philosophy of postmodernism, based on the maximum smoothing of contradictions and problematic issues and a certain moral relativism.

In this way, the main component of the project of the future – the ideological one – disappeared. The Islamic Revolution in Iran of 1978 – 1979, which swept away the relatively secular and pro-Western but corrupt and inefficient regime of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, was the first in a series of events that brought to power in many Islamic countries political forces based on a return to ideas of the past, since Western civilization could not offer them any idea as a basis for the project of the future.

The ideas of postmodernism gave a sense of stability, but they did not inspire, they did not have something worth dying for, because everything was transferred to the rank of material stability. At the same time, the topic of a prescribed project of the future was not raised at all, which would obviously require putting forward certain intangible ideas and slogans. According to the apt words of Slavoj Žižek, the postmodern world is “a World that Stands for Nothing”³¹. The conventional West lived in

²⁹ Sociological Group “Rating” (2023), *Twentieth National Poll. Foreign Policy Moods (January 14 – 16, 2023)*, available at: https://ratinggroup.ua/en/research/ukraine/dvadcyate_zagalnonac_onalne_opituvannya_zovni_shnopol_tichn_nastro_naselennya_14-16_s_chnya_2023.html (accessed 14 February 2023).

³⁰ Infopost (2022), *Від Польщі до Словаччини: чи готові сусіди України оборонятись від військової агресії (28 червня, 19:54)*, available at: <https://infopost.media/vid-polshhi-do-slovachchyny-chy-gotovi-susidy-ukrayiny-oboronyatys-vid-vijskovoyi-agresiyi/> (accessed 18 February 2023).

³¹ Žižek, *War in a World...*

the postmodern conditions actually before the war in Ukraine, which drew the line and ended this period.

The historical analysis of the war events in Ukraine allows us to analyze why this “temporal rollback” of society into the past is happening – from postmodernism after World War II to modernism of the 1920s – 1940s. Modernism provided a certain ideological basis, even if it turned into terrible tragedies and genocide, while postmodernism deliberately avoided any ideology. From this point of view, the civilized Western world “falls” from postmodernism to modernism in order to regain a solid ideological basis as the ability to form a new project of the future based on some system of ideas and values.

So, we can distinguish three possible varieties of the national “project of the future”:

– the presence of a positive project (which involves the achievement of goals that the vast majority of the population evaluates as good), and the degree of utopianness of such a project is not important for this classification;

– lack of any long-term “project of the future” in principle, focus on short-term goals, emphasizing the pluralism of goals, their different significance for different social groups;

– the presence of a negative project, which is not focused on achieving positive goals, but on fighting enemies (real or imagined), and the only thing offered to citizens is protection (imagined or real) from these enemies.

It should be emphasized that the concept of “project of the future” is not the same as mandatory state ideology (although it is often an element of it). Rather, it is what is usually called a “national idea”, that is, goals, values and allowed ways for its embodiment shared by the vast majority of social groups, regardless of political, religious and other beliefs. In a democratic society, the national idea simultaneously forms framework restrictions and a common goal for various political forces that replace each other in power.

The presence of a common “project of the future” in society is not self-worth. Society at certain moments of its development can be fascinated by destructive, anti-humane ideologies and by joint efforts very effectively push its own country to the abyss.

At the same time, a society where two “projects of the future” that are close in popularity coexist is doomed to slow down its development (however, this is better than a dynamic movement in the wrong direction), and each election represents the “last and decisive battle” between competing political parties.

The behavior strategy of an individual is closely related to the predominance of one of the three aforementioned types of “project of the future” in society.

The absence of a long-term nationwide positive “project of the future” also stimulates an individual to plan his life based on the achievement of short-term goals.

From this point of view, it is interesting to analyze the “project of the future” offered to the population of Russia by its leadership and pro-Kremlin propagandists.

Despite the cultivated nostalgia for the Soviet Union, modern Russia differs from it precisely in the absence of an optimistic “project of the future”. In the Soviet Union (at least in the post-Stalin period), even in children’s fantasy literature, the thesis about the superiority of socialism over capitalism³² and the happy life of a society in the future – a society based on the ideas of peace and brotherhood³³ – was introduced. Instead, in Russia, starting with the famous Munich speech of V.V. Putin in 2007, where he voiced Russia’s claim to the status of a superpower³⁴, the notes of messianism began to sound more and more strongly, creating the image of Russia as the only hope for the modern world. After the aggression against Ukraine in 2014, which was accompanied by relatively mild sanctions from the Western countries, the motif of a “besieged fortress” surrounded by enemies became louder and louder, and any problems inside the country were explained by the fact that this is a widespread phenomenon, and in things are much worse in foreign countries.

³² Носов, Н. (1965), *Незнайка на Луне*, Детская литература, Москва.

³³ Носов, Н. (1958), *Незнайка в Солнечном городе*, Детгиз, Москва.

³⁴ Путин, В. В. (2007), *Выступление на Мюнхенской конференции по вопросам политики безопасности, Мюнхен, 10 февраля 2007 г.*, available at: <http://special.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034> (accessed 14 February 2023).

The main scare for the Russian commoner was the chosen theme of sexual minorities (this was well adjusted to the prison etiquette spread in Russia, where sex is considered as a means of establishing social hierarchy in small groups). Exploiting two characteristic features of Russian public consciousness – homophobia and xenophobia, the countries of the West are portrayed as modern Sodom and Gomorrah, where zoophilia and pedophilia flourish, where gay Negroes and transgender Arabs (or vice versa) force ordinary citizens to commit sexual perversions right on city streets. Of course, such a “project of the future” can be characterized as negative. Without promising their fellow citizens any special benefits in the future, and recently demanding sacrifices – material and even human for the benefit of the state, the authors of these narratives instead promise Russians protection from gays, transgenders, juvenile justice, forced gender reassignment operations on young children, and similar mythical things. With the beginning of the “special operation in Ukraine” imaginary protection against the mythical bloodthirsty Ukrainian Banderites and Satanists, biological weapons in the form of mosquitoes, geese and other animals, as well as against non-existent Ukrainian nuclear weapons was added to this package.

This is a direct allusion to the ideas of Stalin’s time that the number of enemies will permanently increase: “As we move forward, towards socialism, the resistance of capitalist elements will increase, the class struggle will intensify”³⁵.

The widespread life strategy of the average Russian in such conditions can be tentatively called the “philosophy of the cynical sheep”. An ordinary sheep, when it is led to the slaughter, is under the illusion that everything will be fine and does not think about a quick end, instead, the so-called “cynical sheep” understands where it is being led, but takes comfort in the fact that it is bad, but around it is even worse, and does nothing to improve this situation. Today we observe something similar in Russia, where people, having access to various information, prefer not to use it for their own comfort, because understanding the truth is not always pleasant. The mass mobilization that began at the end of September 2022 made this metaphor much more literal: people meekly marching to the slaughter in a literal sense.

The heroization of criminals who joined the “Wagner” PMC, the extrajudicial executions practiced in this organization, the general semantic and stylistic content of the public speeches of the state leadership, starting with the President, which is more characteristic of petty criminals – all this collectively contributes to the introduction into the mass Russian consciousness short-term life strategies typical of the criminal world: “You shall die today, and I will die tomorrow”.

A paradoxical situation arises when society is informed, but chooses to live in illusions, which does not require a critical self-evaluation of either the past, the present, or the future. The lack of an ideal in the future leads to its search in the past, which begins to be idealized.

The importance of having a positive project for the future and its impact on the moral well-being of the nation are demonstrated by the results of sociological survey conducted on November 20 – 22, 2022³⁶. Despite the fact that 80% of respondents noted the deterioration of the economic situation in the country as a whole, more than 60% – the deterioration of the financial situation of their own family, about a third – the deterioration of their own health, more than 82% of the respondents believe that things in Ukraine are going in the right direction, only 7% – in the wrong one. Assessment of the direction of affairs development as correct dominates in all regions and age groups.

The absolute majority of respondents (97%) are confident that Ukraine will be able to repel Russia’s attack. Two thirds of respondents expect that the next year 2023 will be better than the previous one. 12% believe that the year will be the same, 16% – worse. Compared to last year’s study, the indicators are more optimistic. Also, almost 90% look to 2023 with optimism, only 6% – with pessimism.

Thus, Ukrainian society (perhaps somewhat unexpectedly both for itself and for foreign observers) demonstrates maturity, the ability to rank priorities, giving preference to a long-term strategy over a

³⁵ Сталин, И. В. (1949), *Полное собрание сочинений в 18 томах*, том 11, ОГИЗ (Объединение государственных книжно-журнальных издательств); Государственное издательство политической литературы, Москва, с. 171.

³⁶ Sociological Group “Rating” (2022), *Nineteenth National Survey. Results of the year. Expectations for the future (November 20-21, 2022)*, available at: https://ratinggroup.ua/en/research/ukraine/nineteenth_national_survey_results_of_the_year_expectations_for_the_future_november_20-21_2022.html (accessed 14 February 2023).

strategy of obtaining immediate benefits, quite significant emotional and psychological stability even in war conditions.

Conclusions. The conducted research showed that the reasons for Russia's aggression towards Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries (Georgia and Moldova) have deep roots in the Russian mass consciousness. The desired image of the future Russia – a powerful superpower that dominates the post-Soviet space – has no economic basis, so the only means of achieving a leading position in the world for Russia is left with the use of military force or the threat of its use. In fact, Russia remains an empire and seeks to pursue an imperial policy both in relation to the post-Soviet countries and to the ethnically non-Russian territories in its composition (which is more than 80% of its territory). This project of the country's future would look realistic for the 19th century, but not at all for the 21st. Hence the focus on the past instead of the future, attempts to revive outdated practices in foreign and domestic politics, and as a result, the formation of a de facto negative project of the future, where citizens are offered to exchange political rights and freedoms not even for welfare, but for their protection by the state from external and internal threats – mostly imaginary, not existing in the real world. In such a system, the predominant strategy of an individual's behavior becomes a short-term survival strategy – to get some benefits (or at least a temporary absence of troubles) here and now in exchange for giving up moral principles and values.

The principled rejection of the “project of the future” for the country, the focus on solving local problems of individual social groups make society vulnerable to external challenges, as we can see on the example of some Western countries.

At the same time, the presence of national interests and values that do not contradict the spirit of the times and the trends of historical development (that is, they can be implemented in the modern world) significantly increase the ability of both society as a whole and individual individuals to respond adequately to challenges, even to such as military aggression, which we see on the example of Ukraine. Western analysts were surprised not only by the sufficiently high level of organization and management of the Armed Forces of Ukraine itself, but also by society's ability to self-organize and the stability of state institutions in a critical situation.

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