



ANALYTICAL REPORT

THE DESTRUCTION OF UKRAINIAN IDENTITY AS A STATE POLICY OF THE USSR AND RUSSIA:

An Analysis of Repressive Methods of Persecution
against Certain Groups of Ukrainians

Authors of the Report: Vladyslav Havrylov, Andrii Yakovliev, Maria Klymyk
Editors: Tetiana Katrychenko, Lyubov Smachylo, Stanislav Miroshnychenko
Layout: Lesia Spirina

This Report was made possible thanks to:

Andrii Kohut,
*PhD in History, Director of the Sectoral State
Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine*

Roman Podkur,
*Candidate of Historical Sciences, Senior Researcher
at the Department of the History of State Terror of
the Soviet Era at the Institute of History of Ukraine
of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine*

We thank everyone for the fruitful cooperation.

This analytical report was compiled with the support of the International Renaissance Foundation. It's content is the exclusive responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily reflect the views of the International Renaissance Foundation.

Summary. The Imposition of the Russian ideology of the “Russian world” as the dominant one, chauvinism, and harassment of the Ukrainian language are all practices actively used by the Russian Federation in its war against Ukraine, including against POWs and civilians. This practice is not new, it continues the policy of the Soviet regime, the communist leadership of the USSR and its special services towards the Ukrainian people¹.

From the first years of the establishment of Soviet power on Ukrainian territory, the special organs of the communist regime singled out certain groups of people for persecution and destruction: the Ukrainian political elite, the military, scientific and creative intelligentsia, and wealthy peasants. That is, all those representatives of the Ukrainian people who had the potential to resist the totalitarian regime and build their independent Ukrainian state.

Since the beginning of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine in 2014 and its full-scale invasion in 2022, the systematic persecution of certain groups of the Ukrainian people has acquired identical repressive features to those of the Soviet Union. Just like then, representatives of the Ukrainian authorities, civil society activists, civilians who oppose the occupation, and those who have undertaken to defend Ukraine from Russia's armed aggression, the members of the Ukrainian Defense Forces, have been targeted.

Russia's persecution manifests itself, in particular, in the unbearable conditions of detention of Ukrainian POWs and civilians in places of detention, where they are forced to accept the ideology of the “Russian world” and tortured for refusing to accept it. Russia is also using the judicial system against detained Ukrainians, illegally accusing them of “terrorist activity,” just as it did in the Soviet era.

The continuity of this process, which has been going on for nearly a century, demonstrates the common patterns of the USSR and modern Russia in destroying the Ukrainian people's identity and their potential to resist the policy of conquest. This Report analyzes the policies and tools used to impose Russian ideology and persecute certain groups of Ukrainians from the Soviet era to the present.

[1] **A concentration camp** is a specially equipped center for the mass forced imprisonment and detention of various categories of citizens: POWs and internees during the war; political prisoners in some authoritarian and totalitarian regimes out of court; persons deprived of their liberty on national, religious, racial, ideological, or any other grounds. In the USSR, the system of such camps was united into the GULAG (ГУЛАГ in the original language), the Main Directorate of Correctional Labor Camps, Labor Settlements, and Places of Detention.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Methodology and source base of the study	4
Source base of the study	4
List of abbreviations	5
Introduction	6
CONTEXT	
Occupation of the XX — XXI centuries	7
CHAPTER 1	
COMMUNIST SECRET SERVICES (NKVD-KGB)	
AS AN INSTRUMENT OF IMPOSING SOVIET TOTALITARIAN IDEOLOGY	8
1.1. Peculiarities of the ideological coercion of the totalitarian communist regime against Ukrainian national identity in the Soviet era	9
1.2. Forms and stages of persecution	10
1.3. Procedure for interrogating prisoners in detention centers in the Ukrainian SSR convicted under Articles 54-1 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR, "Counterrevolutionary Activity" and 54-1a, "Treason against the Motherland"	16
1.4. Historical and Legal Analysis of the persecution in Soviet Trials	19
CHAPTER 2	
MODERN PROPAGANDA OF RUSSIAN IDEOLOGY AND IMPOSING OF RUSSIAN CITIZENSHIP IN DETENTION CENTERS	20
2.1. Imposing of Russian literature and songs on POWs and civilian detainees in detention centers in the Russian Federation	21
2.2. Imposing Russian citizenship	23
2.3. Prejudice against the Ukrainian language	23
2.4. Psychological characteristics of the crime	23
2.5. Overview of current Russian trials against Ukrainian POWs	24
Description of persecution practices on the example of detainees cases.....	25
CONCLUSIONS	29
RECOMMENDATIONS	30

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The authors used a set of general and special scientific methods from the fields of legal and historical sciences to analyze the facts of the imposing of Russian ideology and the persecution of certain groups for refusing to accept it, which formed the **methodological basis of the study**.

For example, the **functional method of legal science** allowed us to reveal the content and forms of research tasks set to analyze in depth the policy of imposing Russian ideology on specific groups of Ukrainian society described in this Report; using the **method of induction**, we formulated conclusions and recommendations based on particular facts and evidence presented in the Report.

The historical methods for preparing this analytical Report include general historicism, specific historical methods, and

comparative historical methods. The method of historicism was used to analyze the peculiarities of the emergence of the policy of imposing Russian ideology and persecution of specific groups of Ukrainians from Soviet times to the present, including the historical characteristics of the stages of such a policy, the peculiarities of its implementation at each stage from the 1920s to the Russian aggression that began in 2014 and in February 2022 escalated into a full-scale war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine; the specific historical method allowed to analyze the causes and consequences of the forms and methods of imposing Russian and the comparative historical method was used to illustrate the differences and draw analogies at each stage of the policy of imposing Russian ideology and persecuting certain groups from the 1920s to the present.

SOURCE BASE OF THE STUDY

The source base of this work is divided into two blocks.

The first block

is related to the description of the Soviet period. For this purpose, the authors of the Report used official documents, orders, archival criminal cases, and rulings of Soviet courts and extraordinary extrajudicial investigation bodies stored in the Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine, the Sectoral State Archive of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, and published in special historical literature on the subject.

The second block

of the source base, necessary to highlight specific examples of the current policy of imposing Russian ideology, is based on 32 documented testimonies of POWs and civilian detainees who were held in detention facilities on the territory of the Russian Federation (RF) during the Russian-Ukrainian war, namely: Federal State Institution "Pre-trial Detention Center No. 1 of the Department of the Federal Penitentiary Service for the Kursk Region of the Russian Federation", Federal State Institution "Detention Center No. 2 of the Department of the Federal Penitentiary Service for the Voronezh Region of the Russian Federation", Federal State Institution "Correctional Colony No. 7 in the Vladimir Region of the Russian Federation", "Correctional Colony No. 9 of the Office of the Federal Penitentiary Service for the Voronezh Region of the Russian Federation, Federal State Institution Correctional Colony No. 1 of the Office of the Federal Penitentiary Service for the Tula Region of the Russian Federation, and Federal State Institution Pretrial Detention Center No. 2 of the Office of the Federal Penitentiary Service for the Bryansk Region. These interviews are available in the Media Initiative for Human Rights database.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS:

GubChK — Provincial Emergency Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage
(Russian: Губернская Чрезвычайная комиссия)

AFU — Armed Forces of Ukraine

KGB — Committee for State Security
(Russian: Комитет государственной безопасности)

Communist Party — Communist Party of the Soviet Union

MGB — Ministry of State Security
(Russian: Министерство государственной безопасности)

NKVD — People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs
(Russian: Народный комиссариат внутренних дел)

OUN — Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists

RF — Russian Federation

USSR — Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

OHCHR — Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

UMO — Ukrainian Military Organization

UPR — Ukrainian People's Republic

UIA — Ukrainian Insurgent Army

Ukrainian SSR — Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic

FSIN — Federal Penitentiary Service
(Russian: Федеральная служба исполнения наказаний)

Cheka — Emergency Commission, short for All-Russian Emergency Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage
(Russian: Чрезвычайная комиссия)

POW — Prisoner of war

INTRODUCTION

The imposing of the Russian ideology of the “Russian world”^[2] has all the hallmarks of a deliberate and systematic policy of the Russian government. To implement this policy, the Russian Federation creates a considerable amount of Russian propaganda in the media, distorts the course of historical events, questions the independence and autonomy of Ukrainian statehood, and promotes manipulative claims about the so-called “one people” — the Russian concept of the common origin of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples, which is widely spread in Russian academic literature.

At the same time, Russia is promoting restoring the USSR. Its President Vladimir Putin considers the collapse of the Soviet Union “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century.”^[3] Since the beginning of Russia's invasion and occupation of Ukrainian Crimea and parts of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions, and even more intensively after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Russian authorities and their special services have been repeating the criminal practices of the Soviet government in the occupied territories of Ukraine, trying to erase Ukrainian identity, destroy the Ukrainian elite, and permanently establish a totalitarian order. This is happening not only

through aggressive warfare, but also in Russia's attempts to change the identity of those Ukrainians who are defending their country, who opposed the Russian occupation, were captured and are now civilian detainees and POWs.

These criminal practices have their roots in the 1920s, when the Soviet secret services began to destroy Ukrainian identity and culture in the occupied Ukrainian territories. The political, scientific, and artistic elite, as well as the peasants who were killed in the crucible of mass repression, the Holodomor, Soviet camps, and in the confines of psychiatric hospitals where they were tortured, were targeted. Russia is doing the same thing now, as evidenced by Ukrainian soldiers and civilians returned from captivity. Thus, we see a deliberate state policy of destroying Ukrainian identity and imposing Russian ideology on those who resist it.

This Report was prepared to examine and demonstrate the extent of this policy and the systematic persecution of specific groups of Ukrainians defined as enemies by the Soviet and now Russian authorities. The Report is also a contribution of the MIHR to ensure the right to truth, justice and accountability.

The greatest
geopolitical catastrophe
of the twentieth century



[2] The “Russian World” ideology is a Russian propaganda ideology and political technology that is both a justification and a tool for Russia's aggressive interference in the internal affairs of post-Soviet countries. As a state ideology, it tries to postulate Russia's civilizational uniqueness. Russian philosopher P. Shchedrovitsky believes that the “Russian world” is a network structure of large and small communities that think and speak Russian. At the same time, he emphasizes that barely half of the population belonging to this concept lives in the territory covered by the administrative borders of the Russian Federation. Thus, this concept is one of the ideological grounds for justifying Russia's occupation of the territories of independent states, including Ukraine, which it considers part of the “Russian world.” Golovko V. Russian World. Encyclopedia of the History of Ukraine: Additional volume. Book 1: A-Z / Edited by V. A. Smolii (chairman) and others. National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. Institute of History of Ukraine. Kyiv, Naukova Dumka Publishing House, 2021. 773 p. http://www.history.org.ua/?termin=russkyj_myr

[3] Vladimir Putin: “The collapse of the USSR was the biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the century”. <https://regnum.ru/news/444083>

CONTEXT

OCCUPATION OF THE XX — XXI CENTURIES

The occupation of Ukraine, first by the Soviets and then by the Russians, has lasted for over a hundred years. It began in the final stages of the First World War⁴ in 1917–1918 and continued during the national liberation struggle of 1917–1921⁵, when several forces fought for the territory of modern Ukraine. The Ukrainian national forces were represented by the armies of the UPR⁶, the Ukrainian State⁷, and the Directory of the Ukrainian People's Republic⁸ armed forces. In particular, the Ukrainian People's Republic, which was proclaimed an independent and sovereign state on January 22, 1918, was internationally recognized and established diplomatic relations with more than twenty countries. Ukrainian national forces fought against the Bolshevik Red Army, the Russian White Movement, and the anarchist units of Nestor Makhno, seeking to establish Ukraine's independence.

In the late 1920s, Ukrainian national forces were defeated by the Bolsheviks, which allowed them first to establish Soviet rule in Ukraine and then begin to destroy their rivals, including representatives of the Ukrainian government, intelligentsia, and resistance movements such as the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. Later, in the 1960s and 1980s, the Soviet government began persecuting dissidents.

Decades have passed, but the Russian government, as the successor to the Soviet government, has not only preserved but also developed the practices of persecution of the communist era. We can see how, under the Soviet and current Russian occupation, groups of Ukrainians who

disagree with the occupation or participate in defensive actions to protect Ukrainian independence are being killed using state institutions of criminal prosecution.

In 2014, the Russian Federation committed an act of aggression by occupying the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea and certain parts of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions. The occupation led to the suspension of all Ukrainian authorities and Ukrainian legislation in the occupied territories. The occupation was carried out with the use of so-called pro-Russian activists trained, armed and controlled by the Russian Federation. The latter consisted of agents of the Russian special services, some of whom were redeployed to Ukraine.

Even though the Ukrainian authorities did not use armed forces to defend the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the occupation of parts of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions was met with armed resistance. On February 12, 2015, the Minsk agreements were signed to resolve the international armed conflict in eastern Ukraine. They fixed the contact line and the occupied territory. Localized clashes occurred periodically in the east, but Russia did not go beyond the demarcation line until it launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

Since then, the Russian occupation zone has expanded to include new areas of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions and Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Kharkiv Regions. Although Ukraine has retaken some of the occupied territories, Russia's military aggression continues.

[4] Reent O. The First World War and Ukraine. The First World War (the Great War). http://www.history.org.ua/?termin=Persha_svitova

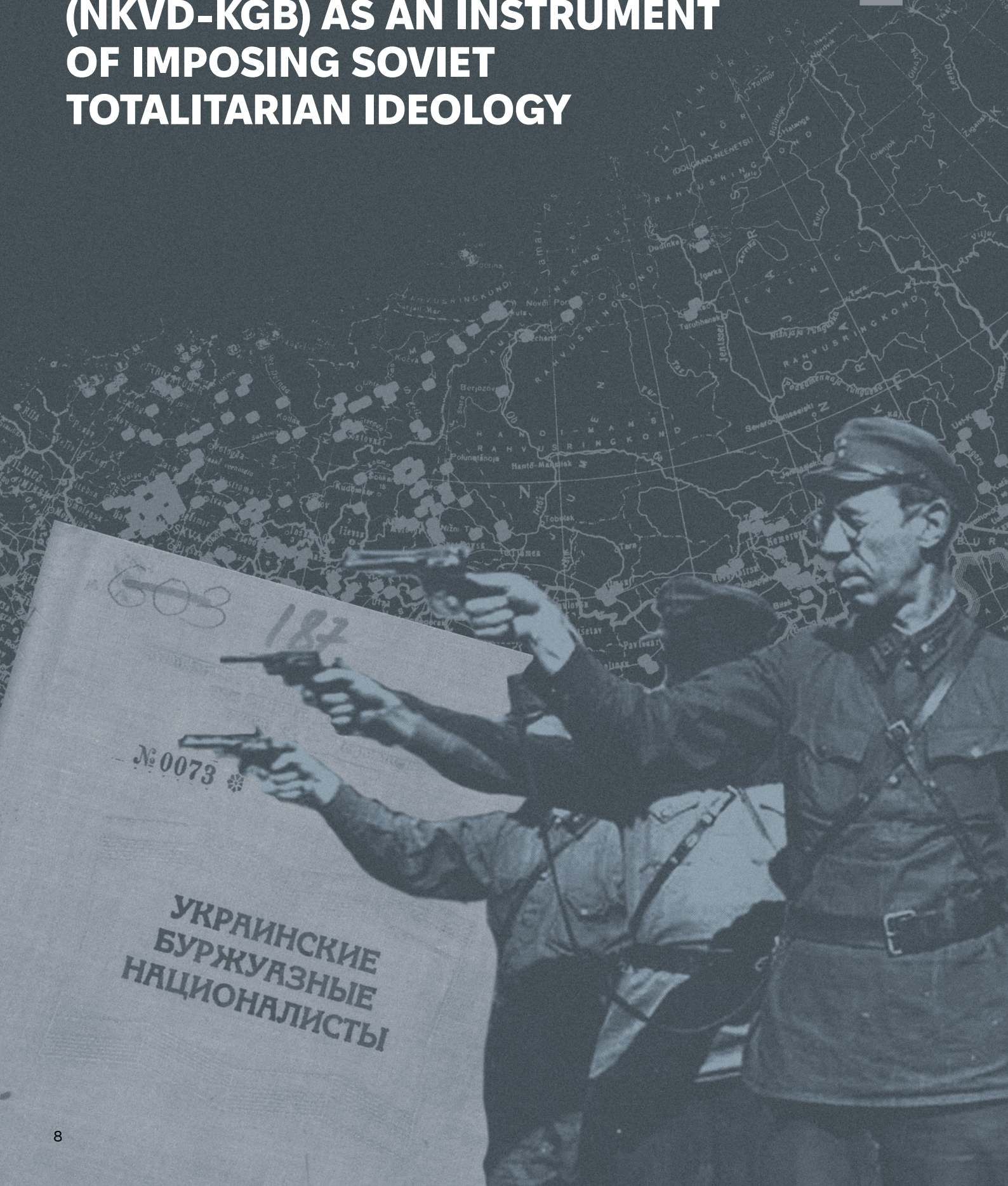
[5] Zhukovsky A. Liberation struggle of 1917–21. Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine. Editors: I. Dziuba, A. Zhukovsky, M. Zheleznyak [and others]. NAS of Ukraine, National Academy of Sciences. Kyiv, Institute of Encyclopedic Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 2005. <https://esu.com.ua/article-33971>

[6] Holubko V. Army of the Ukrainian People's Republic. Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine. Editors: I. Dziuba, A. Zhukovsky, M. Zheleznyak [and others]. NAS of Ukraine, National Academy of Sciences. Kyiv, Institute of Encyclopedic Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 2001. <https://esu.com.ua/article-43271>

[7] Buravchenkov A. Armed Forces of the Ukrainian State in 1918. Encyclopedia of the history of Ukraine: Vol. 3: E–Y. Ed. by V. A. Smoliy (chairman) and others. National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. Institute of History of Ukraine. Kyiv: Naukova Dumka Publishing House, 2005. 672 p. http://www.history.org.ua/?termin=Zbrojni_syly_Ukr_derzh_1918

[8] Shchus O. Directorate of the Ukrainian People's Republic. Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine. Editors: I. Dziuba, A. Zhukovsky, M. Zheleznyak [and others]; NAS of Ukraine, Scientific and Technical School. Kyiv, Institute of Encyclopedic Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 2007. <https://esu.com.ua/article-24360>

COMMUNIST SECRET SERVICES (NKVD-KGB) AS AN INSTRUMENT OF IMPOSING SOVIET TOTALITARIAN IDEOLOGY



1.1. PECULIARITIES OF THE IDEOLOGICAL COERCION OF THE TOTALITARIAN COMMUNIST REGIME AGAINST UKRAINIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE SOVIET ERA

The Soviet repressive system that operated on the territory of Ukraine for almost 70 years actively used systemic, coercive ideological influence⁹ on society, which the Communist Party implemented with the assistance of the repressive bodies of the Soviet Union. First, it was the NKVD, then the MGB and KGB. Over time, the methods of repression of these institutions changed. They gradually moved from torture during interrogations and in prisons to other practices: punitive psychiatry, blackmail, creating problems at work or in

educational institutions. It was the Soviet Union that created and institutionalized the Gulag,¹⁰ a system of labor camps and special labor settlements under the control of the secret services. The goal was to break a person's resistance, reformat their consciousness in the Soviet way, make it impossible for them to resist the communist system, and to kill those who failed. Prisoners were also systematically influenced through political lectures aimed at convincing prisoners of the correctness of communist dogma.

The communist regime

in Ukraine systematically searched for people who were classified as hostile and dangerous to the Soviet system. This was especially true of those representatives of Ukrainian society who were **grouped** by the Soviet secret services and the Communist Party:

1. Members of the government of the Ukrainian People's Republic, the Ukrainian State, the Directory, and other representatives of the Ukrainian authorities.
2. Intellectuals who supported the Ukrainian government.
3. Wealthy peasants defined as "kulaks".
4. Members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, the Ukrainian Military Organization, and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army.
5. Dissident movement classified by the Soviet authorities as "bourgeois nationalists".

To combat these groups, the Soviet regime used the following methods of repression:

- Criminal prosecution using the judicial system.
- Extrajudicial persecution.
- Forced displacement (deportation) and restrictions on the choice of their place of residence.
- Restriction of the right to engage in certain activities.
- Punitive psychiatry.

The current Russian authorities,

repeating Soviet practices, also systematically persecute certain defined groups of people who exercise armed and socio-political resistance to the occupation regime, namely:

1. Ukrainian military personnel.
2. Representatives of Ukrainian authorities in the occupied territories.
3. Public figures and activists of the resistance movement.
4. Citizens who publicly or privately speak out against the Russian occupation.

To combat these groups, the Russian authorities use the following repressive methods:

- The detention of POWs and civilian detainees in places where those convicted of criminal offenses are held and in other areas of detention of the Russian criminal justice system instead of in specially created camps for POWs.
- Human rights violations and humiliation in places of detention.
- Torture, propaganda and constant psychological pressure.
- Criminal persecution with the help of the judicial system for legitimate participation in hostilities.

In the first part of the Report, which characterizes the Soviet period, we will highlight the persecution of representatives of the Ukrainian state authorities, the Directory, the OUN, the UVO, the UIA, and dissidents as separate groups and draw parallels between such persecution and the present.

[9] Ideological coercion was an integral part of the Soviet communist state. It consisted of strict censorship and state control over the media and literature, and the criticism and dissemination of any alternative opinions about the communist regime was prohibited. Opposition, intellectuals, and leaders of national republics who showed independence were persecuted. At the same time, the USSR isolated its population from the influence of Western ideas, culture, literature, and art, which did not share socialist ideas and were considered hostile by the USSR.

[10] Shapoval Y. Gulag. Encyclopedia of the history of Ukraine: Vol. 2: G-D. Edited by V. A. Smolii (chairman) and others. National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. Institute of History of Ukraine. Kyiv, Naukova Dumka Publishing House, 2004. 688 p. <http://www.history.org.ua/?termin=Gulag>

1.2. FORMS AND STAGES OF PERSECUTION

The first period

of repression for ideological reasons in Soviet Ukraine was the persecution of representatives of the Ukrainian government — heads of ministries, generals in the government of the Ukrainian People's Republic and the Ukrainian State of Pavlo Skoropadsky, who, after the Bolsheviks seized Ukraine, were captured and subjected to criminal politically motivated persecution by communist punitive bodies.

Significantly, the communist government punished the mere fact of belonging to the Ukrainian government of the national liberation struggle (1917-1921)¹¹.

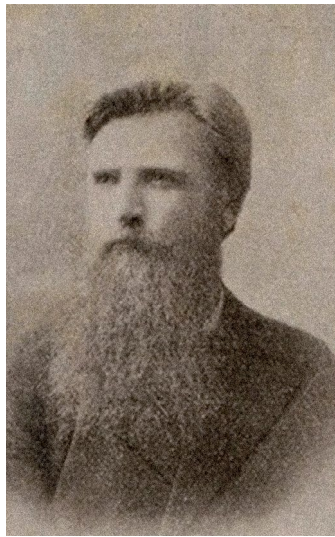
A striking example is the case of Volodymyr Naumenko, the Minister of Education in the government of the Ukrainian state. Only a day passed between his arrest and execution. The minister was arrested on July 7, 1919, and executed on July 8. The archives of the Security Service of Ukraine contain case No. 32 on charges of "counterrevolutionary activity" against Volodymyr Naumenko. The protocol of his interrogation states that he held a government position, i.e. was a minister in the Skoropadsky government. The Cheka passed a sentence of execution within 24 hours.

From the beginning of the establishment of Soviet power in Ukraine, one of the most illustrative victims was Petro Klymovych¹², who served as Minister of Finance from April 5 to 30, 1918. He was arrested on May 30, 1920, in Odesa, accused of participating in the counterrevolution. Two weeks later, on June 14, 1920, the Odesa GubChK decided to execute Klymovych on charges of counterrevolution and confiscate his property¹³.

ВЫШІЙШКА
из протокола заседания коллегии О. Г. Ч. К.
От 1920 г. *Apr 20 40*

№ дела	С л у ш а л и	П о с т а н о в и л и
2575	КЛИМОВИЧ Петр Титович	Пред, явленное обвинение министр финансов при Гетманской власти, а в настоящее время служил в Спешном обществе, имел связь с атаманом Струком, Пиллюровския возвания, состоял членом "ПРОСВИТЫ" председателем Реды при Гетмане, обвиняется в контрреволюции.

С подлинным верно:
секретарь Президиума *Сергей...*



← Petro Klymovych, 1906.¹⁴

← Excerpt from the minutes of an undated board meeting of the Odesa GubChK (probably dated June 14, 1920) with a resolution to execute P. Klymovych¹⁵.

[11] Liberation struggle of 1917-21. Encyclopedic article. Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine. <http://surl.li/pagdox>
[12] Dmytrienko M. Klymovych Petro Tytovych [Electronic resource]. Encyclopedia of the history of Ukraine: Vol. 4: Ka-Kom / Ed. by V. A. Smolii (chairman) and others. National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. Institute of History of Ukraine. Kyiv, Publishing house "Naukova Dumka", 2007. 528 p. http://www.history.org.ua/?termin=Klymovych_P
[13] Woe to the vanquished. Repressed Ministers of the Ukrainian Revolution. Kyiv, 2018. P. 10 — 11.
[14] Hai-Nyzhnyk P. Petro Klymovych (1855-1920) was the last Minister of Finance of the Government of the Central Rada of the Ukrainian People's Republic (1918). Gilea, 2022. Issue 9 (176). P. 60 — 73. https://hai-nyzhnyk.in.ua/doc/2022doc_klymovych.php
[15] Excerpt from the minutes of an undated meeting of the board of the Odesa Commissariat of the State National Committee (probably dated June 14, 1920) with a resolution to execute P. Klymovych. AUSBU (Odesa). F. 4 (P). Case 27008. V. 1. Electronic archive of the UVR. <http://avr.org.ua/viewDoc/26472>

The systematic approach to the destruction of the Ukrainian political elite of that time can be traced in the crimes of modern Russia, which kills Ukrainian politicians in the occupied territories. For example, in November 2024¹⁶ the body of Yevhen Matvieiev, the mayor of Dniprorudne, Zaporizhzhia Region, who had been held captive by the Russians for 2 years and 8 months, was returned to Ukraine from Russia. According to law enforcement officials, the body showed signs of violent death, indicating that Yevhen Matvieiev, who had a pro-Ukrainian position and did not resign his position under Russian occupation, had been tortured¹⁷.

Another example is the story of the death of Oleksiy Vynnychenko, the head of the village of Hrebenyivka in Sumy region. In March 2022, during the occupation of the town, the man was detained by the Russian military because he was a representative of the Ukrainian government and held a clear pro-Ukrainian position. For a long time, his family was convinced that Oleksiy Vynnychenko was in captivity. However, two years later, his body was returned to Ukraine¹⁸. The body also showed signs of torture¹⁹.



↑ Yevhen Matvieiev, Mayor of Dniprorudne.
Photo: Zaporizhzhia Regional State Administration²⁰



↑ Oleksiy Vynnychenko, head of the village of Hrebenyivka.
Photo: debaty.sumy.ua²¹

[16] Prosecutor's Office: Dniprorudne mayor died in Russian captivity more than six months ago. Radio Liberty.

<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-matveyev-dniprorudne-zahybel-rozsliduvannya/33234687.html>

[17] Volodymyr Pyrih. The mayor of Dniprorudne, Yevhen Matvieiev, was killed in Russian captivity.

<https://hromadske.radio/news/2024/12/04/mer-dniprorudnoho-yevheniy-matvieiev-zahynuv-u-rosiyskomu-poloni>

[18] Oleksiy Vynnychenko, the head of the village of Hrebenyivka, who was in Russian captivity, was buried in Sumy region.

<https://suspilne.media/sumy/799731-na-sumsini-pohovali-starostu-sela-grebenikivka-oleksia-vinnichenka-akij-perebuvav-u-rosiyskomu-poloni>

[19] Oleksiy Vynnychenko. Memorial of heroes. https://www.instagram.com/memorial.of.heroes/p/DEe_OaMpJNF

[20] The mayor of Dniprorudne, Yevhen Matvieiev, was killed in Russian captivity.

<https://hromadske.radio/news/2024/12/04/mer-dniprorudnoho-yevheniy-matvieiev-zahynuv-u-rosiyskomu-poloni>

[21] The head of the village of Hrebenyivka was returned from captivity dead. <https://debaty.sumy.ua/news/starostu-sela-grebenikivka-povernuli-z-polonu-mertvim>

The second period

of ideological pressure was the Great Terror of 1937-1938, during which Stalin's secret services organized mass repressions that killed Ukrainian intellectuals, artists, and clergy.

The Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance notes that during the Great Terror, historians estimate that 198,918 people were sentenced to death on the territory of the Ukrainian SSR, about two-thirds of whom were executed.

The rest were sent to prisons and camps (other punishments covered less than 1%, and only 0.3% were released)²².

Among the instruments of Terror used by the Soviet repressive system were the **NKVD Troikas**, extraordinary extrajudicial bodies²³, created to try criminal cases, mainly on political grounds, quickly. They became an important tool of mass repression in Ukraine in the 1930s and 1950s. Troikas were formed from representatives of the NKVD, party bodies, and the prosecutor's office. Special instructions regulated their activities, allowing them to pass sentences without proper investigation. In 1937, as repressive policies intensified, the composition of the Troikas was changed and they were given expanded powers, including the right to pass death sentences²⁴. Many of these verdicts were based on fabricated evidence

and tortured confessions. The Troikas operated on the principle of swift justice, when cases were considered in minutes without proper interrogation or the possibility of appealing the verdict²⁵. The NKVD Troikas became a symbol of the Soviet government's lawlessness and terror against the Ukrainian people. The consequences were tragic for millions of people who fell victim to political repression aimed at destroying any opposition to the communist regime and controlling society.

The Soviet leadership tried not only to destroy ideological opponents, but also to enshrine this criminal process in official documents. **For example, on August 5, 1937, the Resolution of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) of July 2, 1937, P 51/94 "On Anti-Soviet Elements"**²⁶ came into force. It was substantiated by NKVD People's Commissar Nikolai Yezhov and edited by Joseph Stalin. Among others, this decree mentions "kulaks," i.e. wealthy peasants, in particular from Ukraine, who had already been deported to Siberia and Northern Kazakhstan by Soviet punitive authorities in 1930-1931, having been deprived of their property and effectively destroyed their entire lives²⁷.

The following document legitimized the beginning of the Great Terror: **the operational order of the NKVD of the USSR No. 00447 "On the Repression of Former Kulaks, Criminals and Other Anti-Soviet Elements" of July 30, 1937, approved by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU on July 31, 1937**²⁸. The available NKVD documents (correspondence, telegrams, etc.) show that mass repressions were prepared in advance, and orders and resolutions only formalized them.

The Terror was ruthless against the intelligentsia as the bearers of Ukrainian identity. In historiography, that time is called the period of the **Executed Renaissance**²⁹. This term fully reflects the tragedy of the destruction of an entire generation of Ukrainian artists and scientists. The crime culminated on November 3, 1937, when 265 imprisoned representatives of the Ukrainian intelligentsia were shot in the Solovki special camp³⁰.

Les Kurbas, Mykola Kulish, Valerian Pidmohylny, and others became victims of Stalin's political repression of Ukrainian identity during the Great Terror. Over the next year, the flywheel of repression gained momentum, resulting in the deaths of many more Ukrainian cultural figures, including Hnat Khotkevych³¹.

[22] The Great Terror. Anniversary of the tragedy. Ukrainian Institute of National Memory.

<https://uinp.gov.ua/informaciyni-materialy/vchytelyam/metodychni-rekomendaciyi/velykyy-teror-rokovyny-tragediyi#:~:text=https://esu.com.ua/article-70877>

[23] Extraordinary extrajudicial bodies. Encyclopedic article. Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine. <https://esu.com.ua/article-70877>

[24] Soviet repression and Ukraine. How people were turned into biomass. <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/blog-history-48325865>

[25] Vedeneiev D. Extraordinary extrajudicial bodies. Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine. Edited by I. Dziuba, A. Zhukovsky, M. Zheleznyak [and others]; NAS of Ukraine, National Academy of Sciences. Kyiv, Institute of Encyclopedic Research of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 2020. <https://esu.com.ua/article-70877>

[26] Decision of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks (b) No. P51/94 of July 2, 1937.94. On anti-Soviet elements. <http://memorial.krsk.ru/DOKUMENT/USSR/370730.htm>

[27] Havrylov Vladyslav. Deportations of Ukrainians in the 1930s. The policy of dekulakization. <https://deportation.org.ua/deportations-of-ukrainians-in-the-1930s-the-policy-of-dekulakization>

Форма № 21а/УССО

ОБ ИЗБРАНИИ МЕРЫ ПРЕСЕЧЕНИЯ По делу № 132

ПОСТАНОВЛЕНИЕ

г. Харьков 193 4 г. я, Уполномоченный 2 Отд СПО
УГБ Харьк. облупр. НКВД УССР, рассмотрев материал по обви-
 нению гр. ПИДМОГИЛЬНОГО Валериана Петровича
1901 г. рождения, б/п
 в преступлениях, предусмотренных ст. ст. 54-8 УК и
 выразившихся в том, что он ПИДМОГИЛЬНИЙ В.П. принимал
 (краткое изложение установленных фактов—обвинения) участие в ра-
боте террористической организации, ставившей сво-
ей целью организацию террора против руководителей
партии
 нашел, что (привести мотивы избрания меры пресечения)
он, находясь на свободе, мог попытаться выпол-
нить свои намерения

На основании изложенного и руководствуясь ст. 143, 145 и 156
 УПК УССР,—

ПОСТАНОВИЛ:

1) Избрать мерой пресечения способов уклониться от суда и
 следствия по отношению к обвиняемому ПИДМОГИЛЬНОМУ Валериан-
у Петровичу содержание под стражей в спец-
корпусе № 1.

2) Настоящее постановление, в порядке ст. 144 УПК УССР и при-
 каза ОГПУ и Прокурора Союза от 16/V-33 г. №1/065, представить
 для санкции Военному Прокурору.

СПЕР Уполномоченный 2 ОТД СПО /ВОРОН/
 /ГОБЛИ/
 Согласен: Нач. СПО
 Согласен: Нач. ХОБ НКВД /НАГАСОВ/

↑ Decision on the choice of a preventive measure for Valerian Pidmohylny³²



[28] Valerii Vasyliiev. Operational Order No. 00447 of the NKVD of the USSR and its Implementation in the Ukrainian SSR: Problems of Scientific Research. History of Ukraine: little-known names, events, facts. 2008. p. 116–137. http://resource.history.org.ua/publ/histname_2008_35_116

[29] The House of the Word, Khvylovyi, and the Executed Revival in the Stories of Vira Ageieva. <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/articles/cp44vregnzro>

[30] On November 3, 1937, 265 imprisoned representatives of the Ukrainian intelligentsia were shot on Solovki. "The terrible truth grows in the mind when it touches the conscience. It's strange that the worst things for some reason happen on the nights before November 6," notes Yevhen Sverstiuk. Radio Liberty. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/909479.html>

[31] Ibid.

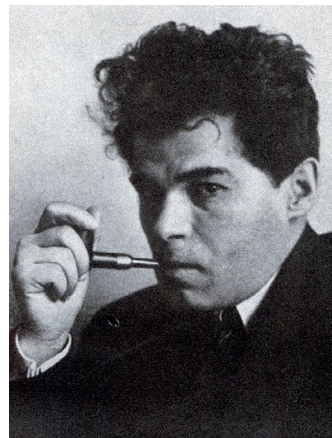
[32] Resolution on the choice of a preventive measure for Valerian Pidmohylnyi. SBU GDA. Ф. 6. Case file 36546. Т. 11. Electronic archive of the OIA. <http://avr.org.ua/viewDoc/28151>

Some burial sites of Soviet terror victims have survived to this day, including the Karelian Sandarmokh tract, where 1111 prisoners of the Solovetsky stage were killed between October 27 and November 4, 1937³³.

Another symbol of Stalin's terror is Bykivnia, a neighborhood in Kyiv located on its northeastern outskirts in the Desnianskyi district. Historians estimate that between 50 and 100 thousand people of different nationalities are buried there. The share of Ukrainians among them is about 49%, which indicates mass repressions against the Ukrainian intelligentsia and national elite between 1937 and 1941³⁴. Many Ukrainian writers and artists were shot in Bykivnia. Among them were Mykhail Semenko, a poet and one of the representatives of the Ukrainian avant-garde; Mike Johansen, a poet, novelist, and translator known for his works on Ukrainian culture; Veronika Cherniakhivska, a Ukrainian poet and novelist; and Mykhailo Boychuk, a painter and founder of Boychukism, an essential movement in Ukrainian painting. These people became victims of repression because they were a symbol of Ukrainian national identity and culture³⁵.

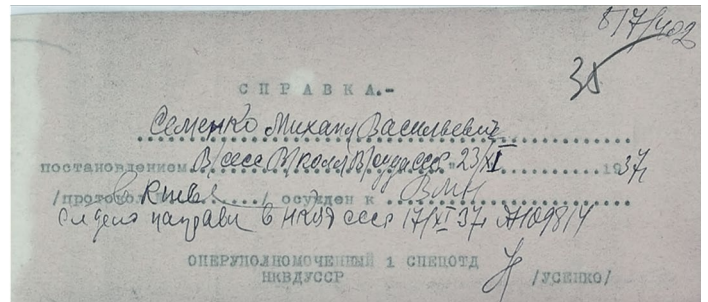
Russians continue to kill Ukrainian cultural figures even now. Among the victims is the children's writer Volodymyr Vakulenko, who disappeared in the village of Kapytolivka near Izyum during the occupation of Kharkiv Region. On March 23, 2022, Vakulenko's home was searched, his books were seized, and Volodymyr and his teenage son were taken away. The writer was beaten and released after several hours of interrogation. The next day, on March 24, the same military officers took him away again³⁸. Olena, Volodymyr's mother, found out where the kidnappers lived, went to the occupiers' military commandant's office and asked them to release her son: "What do you need him for? Well, he is a Ukrainian, so we are all Ukrainians." They promised that her son would be home the next evening: "We are not Nazis." However, Volodymyr Vakulenko did not show up the following evening or later³⁹. After Ukrainian troops liberated Izyum, mass graves were discovered in the town. The local funeral service buried the people and kept a journal with information about the dead. As Suspilne journalists found out, the journal listed the writer as number 319⁴⁰. After exhumation and examination, two bullets, probably from a Makarov pistol, were found in Vakulenko's body.

Another form of persecution in the Soviet period was the trials of Ukrainian nationalists.



← Mykhail Semenko, Ukrainian futurist poet. He was executed in 1937³⁶

Certificate of sentencing Mykhail Semenko to capital punishment (execution)³⁷
↓



↓ Writer Volodymyr Vakulenko⁴¹



[33] Iryna Shtogrin. No statute of limitations. Who, how and whom was shot in Sandarmokh. Radio Liberty. <https://radiosvoboda.org/a/29582023.html>

[34] Vladlen Marayev. Bykivnia: Who was shot by the NKVD? <https://uain.press/blogs/1488874-602609>

[35] The Day of Commemoration of the Victims of Political Repression: The Bykivnia Tragedy and the Role of the Sixties in Uncovering the Crimes of the Soviet Regime. <https://mezha.net/ua/bukvy/den-vshanuvannia-zhertv-politychnykh-represii-tragedii-a-bykivni-ta-rol-shistdesiatnykiv-u-rozkrytti-zlochynu-radianskoho-rezhymu>

[36] Lyubov Yakymchuk: Mykhail Semenko: From Futurism to Terrorism. <https://webcitation.org/6EAulVAX?url=http://litakcent.com/2012/12/27/myhail-semenko-vid-futuryzmu-do-teroryzmu>

[37] Certificate with the decision to sentence Mykhailo Semenko to capital punishment (execution). SSU GDA. F. 6. Case file 44961. V. 2. Electronic archive of the OIA.

www.avr.org.ua/viewDoc/28862

[38] A book by Volodymyr Vakulenko, who was killed by Russians during the occupation of Izyum region, was presented in Kharkiv.

<https://detector.media/infospace/article/216152/2023-08-29-u-kharkovi-prezentuvaty-knygu-volodymyra-vakulenska-yakogo-rosiiany-vbyly-pid-chas-okupatsii-izyumshchyny>

[39] Russian prison or grave #319: what is known about the disappearance of writer Vakulenko.

<https://suspilne.media/295368-rosijska-turma-ci-mogila-no319-so-vidomo-pro-zniknenna-pismennika-vakulenska>

[40] Kateryna Lykhohlyad. Writer Volodymyr Vakulenko was killed during the occupation — investigation and DNA results.

<https://suspilne.media/327144-pismennika-volodimira-vakulenska-vbili-pid-cas-okupacii-rozsliduvanna-i-rezultat-dnk>

[41] Volodymyr Vakulenko. 2020. Maria Lysytska-Beskorsa — My own work. Photo: Wikipedia.org. Вакуленко Володимир Володимирович—Вікіпедія

The Trial of the 59 is a case in point: a closed and politically motivated trial of 59 Ukrainians that took place in the Lviv NKVD building from January 15 to 18, 1941. They were accused of involvement in the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, espionage, and preparing an armed uprising against the Soviet government⁴². The defendants included 37 men and 22 women aged 15 to 30⁴³. Most of the convicts pleaded not guilty and stated that they remained irreconcilable enemies of the Soviet regime.

The trial was preceded by an investigation that lasted more than four months, and the prisoners were humiliated and tortured. The courtroom was closed, and the public and relatives were prohibited. We know, for example, about the conditions of detention of the defendants: damp cells, overcrowding, systemic malnutrition, which led to exacerbation and emergence of diseases. For instance, Ivan Maksymiv's long-healed ulcer worsened, Kost' Berezovsky developed typhoid fever, which he first contracted in a Polish concentration camp, and Olena Matla developed eczema on her skin due to poor nutrition. The prisoners were interrogated chiefly at night, while they were forbidden to sleep during the day. The prisoners were tortured in the offices of the investigators. The evidence is Mykhailo Pakuliak's "sincere confession" written with a trembling hand, which does not look like the calligraphic handwriting of a lawyer with a university degree. Later, at the so-called trial, Pakulyak recanted this confession⁴⁴.

Eventually, all the defendants were found guilty under paragraphs 2 and 11 of Article 54 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR⁴⁵. Forty-two people were sentenced to death, including 11 women. A panel of the USSR Supreme Court later reviewed the verdicts. As a result, 19 people were executed, 24 received 10 years in prison, 15 received 4 to 8 years, and one convict was deported abroad⁴⁶.

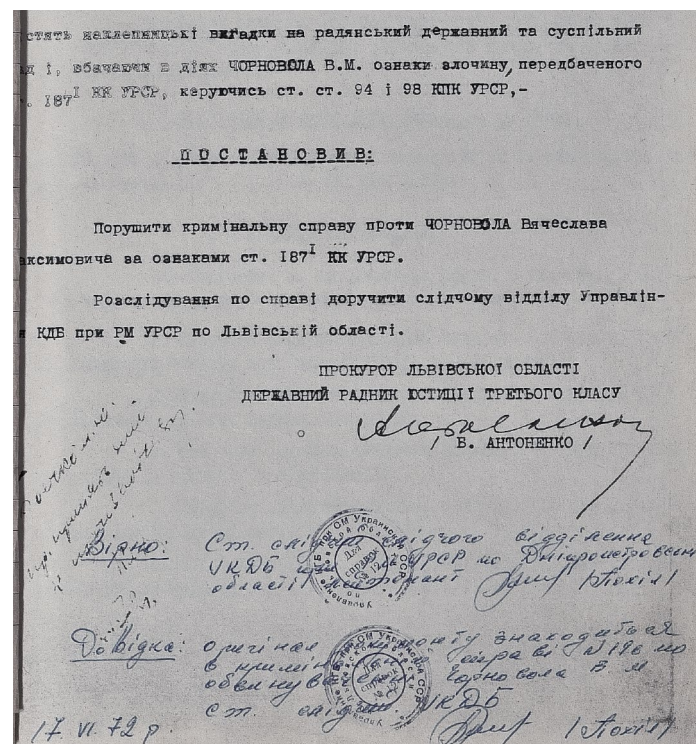
Similar practices of persecuting groups of people who participated in military and military-political resistance to the occupation regime can be traced in current Russian trials of members of the formerly volunteer, nowadays Ukrainian Defense Forces units Azov, Aidar, Donbas, and others. As of February 2025, several trials are ongoing in the Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don⁴⁷, both group and individual.

The third period

of repression against Ukrainian identity during the Soviet era was the period of Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev's rule. Then the methods of oppression became more sophisticated, and the Soviet authorities began to widely use punitive psychiatry⁴⁸, the policy of compromising information, dismissal from work, inability to work in large cities, etc.

There were also changes in the articles accusing people of belonging to the Ukrainian resistance, particularly those members of the Ukrainian intelligentsia who opposed the communist totalitarian regime in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s and 1970s and were called the Sixties. Probably for the first time in Ukraine, Article 187-1 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR (dissemination of deliberately false fabrications that defame the Soviet state and social system) was used on August 3, 1967, against Viacheslav Chornovil for his collection of materials about the **repressed Sixties, Trouble from the Mind (Portraits of Twenty "Criminals")**⁴⁹. In the collection, the author says that the Soviet Union is a prison of nations, and its concentration camps are replenished with new prisoners based on political beliefs⁵⁰. On November 15, 1967, the Lviv Regional Court sentenced Viacheslav Chornovil to three years in a strict regime camp for this book⁵¹. Later, following an appeal, the sentence was reduced. The very article of the Criminal Code under which Chornovil was convicted became invalid on April 14, 1989, immediately after the resolution of the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR. According to the Ukrainian SSR Law **"On the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repression in Ukraine" of April 17, 1991**, all those convicted under this article were rehabilitated regardless of the factual basis of the accusation.

↓ Resolution to initiate criminal proceedings against Viacheslav Chornovil⁵²



[42] Memoirs of an unidentified person about the "Trial 59" in Lviv for January 15-18, 1941. ACDVR. F. 11. T. 30. <http://avr.org.ua/viewDoc/23934>

[43] Sviatoslav Lipovetsky. Trial of the 59. <https://mnk.org.ua/novini/protses-59-ti>

[44] Ihor Derevianyi. The Trial of the 59. 70 years ago, the NKVD sentenced several dozen young men and women to death. <https://www.istpravda.com.ua/columns/2010/12/14/8912>

[45] Ibid

[46] Halyna Tereshchuk. Political "Trial of the 59": 19 young Ukrainians were shot dead. What happened 80 years ago?

<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/politychnyy-protses-59-oun/31047390.html>

[47] Guilty because I am a patriot. How are prisoners of war and Ukrainian citizens tried in Russia? <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/sud-rf-vyskovopolonenykh-ukrayiny/33059269.html>

[48] Punitive psychiatry and its victims. How dissidents were dealt with in the era of "developed socialism".

<https://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/karalna-psyhiatriya-ta-yiyi-zhertvy-yak-rozpravlyalysya-z-dysydentamy-v-dobu-rozvyynenogo-socializmu>

[49] Article 187-1 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR (analogous to Article 190-1 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR); Dissemination of deliberately false fabrications defaming the Soviet state and social system. <https://museum.khpg.org/1162803977>

[50] Trouble from the Mind (portraits of twenty "criminals"): a collection of materials / compiled by Viacheslav Chornovil. Paris: First Ukrainian edition in France, 1967. 335 c.

<http://irbis-nbuv.gov.ua/ulib/item/UKR0002990>

[51] Based on criminal cases of the KGB of the Ukrainian SSR. Vyacheslav Chornovil: The Era of Struggle for the Ukrainian State. <https://www.chesno.org/t/29/chornovil.html>

[52] Resolution to initiate criminal proceedings against Viacheslav Chornovil. AUSBU (Lviv). Ф. 5. Case file 32157. Vol. 1. Electronic archive of the OIA. <https://avr.org.ua/viewDoc/29603>

1.3. PROCEDURE FOR INTERROGATING PRISONERS IN DETENTION CENTERS IN THE UKRAINIAN SSR CONVICTED UNDER ARTICLES 54-1 OF THE CRIMINAL CODE OF THE UKRAINIAN SSR, "COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY ACTIVITY" AND 54-1A, "TREASON AGAINST THE MOTHERLAND."

When analyzing the interrogation procedures in the detention centers of the Ukrainian SSR for those who were classified as "bourgeois nationalists"⁵³ by Marxist-Leninist ideologies of the Soviet period, it should be explained that this accusation was politically biased. The term "bourgeois nationalism" was used in Soviet ideology to refer to any expressed Ukrainian patriotic belief that, according to the Soviet authorities, did not correspond to communist principles and should be persecuted. In Ukraine, this accusation was often applied to Ukrainian nationalists who were considered enemies of the Soviet regime. The main figures to whom this label was applied were representatives of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, members of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, and Ukrainian intellectuals who advocated the development of Ukrainian culture and independence.

Article 54 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR was introduced in 1927 regarding counterrevolutionary activity. Still, it was transformed from a general rule into a detailed legal instrument of the repressive system on July 20, 1934. The article provided for liability for "counterrevolutionary activity" and "treason against the Motherland."

The repressive flywheel accelerated after Nikolai Yezhov took office as People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the USSR. The resolutions of the February-March 1937 plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) demanded that the punitive authorities immediately expand the scale of repression. Numerous operational orders, directives, and circulars sent to local state security apparatuses instructed them to repress various segments of the population on class and national grounds, for belonging to non-Bolshevik parties, movements, etc. Territorial departments received quantitative indicators of planned arrests. Due to the short timeframe for implementing the instructions, the inquiry process was simplified as much as possible. The procedure for conducting the investigation was determined by the fourth section of operational order No. 00447 of July 30, 1937, which consisted of only two paragraphs and replaced the entire Criminal Procedure Code of the Ukrainian SSR⁵⁴.

Interrogations of prisoners, and sometimes those convicted of "counterrevolutionary activities" and classified as "bourgeois nationalists," were subjected to ill-treatment that bore signs of torture. Such practices against convicts

were used to put pressure on individuals to betray their comrades in resistance to the Soviet regime. At the same time, the communist secret services tried to break the will and physical capacity for further resistance. It is known from historical sources that the Soviet secret services tortured during interrogations, exerted psychological pressure, and interrogations lasted 5-6 hours⁵⁵.

The conditions of detention were inadequate: prisoners did not receive enough food to maintain their weight, proper medical care, and communication with relatives was limited.

The NKVD regional offices improved the conveyor system of torture, an invention of Soviet repressive bodies. During interrogations, the arrested were beaten by members of special teams, forced to stand in a "rack" or sit on the edge of a chair without changing their posture; forced to look at a powerful electric lamp with a mirror shade for several hours; and forbidden to go to the toilet. During an internal investigation into numerous violations of such interrogations, one witness said that in 1937-1938, "everyone beat the arrested, the whole department, all departments, the whole NKVD department"⁵⁶.

In his novel *The Garden of Gethsemane*, Ivan Bahrianyi, describing in detail the course of his first interrogation at the Kharkiv Regional Department of the NKVD, determined that a "small conveyor belt" is enough to disassemble the soul of every ordinary person. From 1937 to 1938, the small conveyor was turned into a large one. Oleksandr Vaisberg, a former employee of the Ukrainian Institute of Physics and Technology, whose separate chapter of prison memoirs was entitled "The Big Conveyor," considered its use the main means of physical influence.

The defendant remained interrogated for twenty-four hours, while the interrogators changed every four hours. According to Weisberg's recollections, the physical abuse was intensified by selective swearing with commands such as "kneel before the Soviet authorities, you fascist dog!"⁵⁷

[53] Gerasymchuk O. Bourgeois nationalism. Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine. Edited by I. Dziuba, A. Zhukovsky, M. Zheleznyak [and others]; NAS of Ukraine, National Academy of Sciences. Kyiv, Institute of Encyclopedic Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 2004. <https://esu.com.ua/article-38057>
[54] Ihor Shuiskyi. The use of methods of moral and physical influence on the suspects by the state security agencies of the Ukrainian SSR during the "Great Terror" in Ukraine. Soviet state security agencies in Ukraine (1918 — 1991): history, structure, functions: Materials of the round table, December 19, 2013, Kyiv / Edited by O. Bazhan, R. Podkur. Kyiv, Institute of History of Ukraine of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 2014. C.219. https://www.reabit.org.ua/files/store/Krug_Stil_VCHK_19.12.2013.pdf

[55] Halyna Tereshchuk. Political "Trial of the 59": 19 young Ukrainians were shot dead. What happened 80 years ago? <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/politychnyy-protses-59-oun/31047390.html>

[56] GDA SSU, Kharkiv, fn. 017787, p. 203.
[57] Ibid 30.

According to the UN, more than 95% of Ukrainian POWs are tortured while in Russian captivity.

Similar torture practices are used in modern Russian prisons against Ukrainian POWs. According to the UN, more than 95% of Ukrainian POWs are tortured while in Russian captivity⁵⁸. The head of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, Danielle Bell, said that Ukrainian POWs are tortured from the first interrogation, using beatings with metal rods and sticks, as well as electric shocks⁵⁹. There are also reports of beatings with rubber truncheons, forced and excessive physical exertion, including squatting in the cell, sleep deprivation, and humiliation. In many cases, torture is carried out with the use of stun guns, military telephones (tapiks), truncheons, plastic pipes, wooden hammers, guns, pliers, knives, and sometimes dogs are set to attack POWs. OHCHR assessed these acts of violence as intentionally causing severe pain and suffering to the victims⁶⁰. Here are the memories of a former POW: *"They force prisoners to strip completely, throwing their clothes on the floor. They put them in a star position. They beat me with their hands and feet until I was semi-conscious, using a belt or a board"*⁶¹.

As a result of two mandates, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Violations in Ukraine has documented the systematic practice of torture by the Russian authorities both in Ukraine and in the Russian Federation, presenting its findings on the torture of POWs, which is classified as a war crime, in a report dated March 15, 2024⁶². The Commission found consistency in the evidence of torture of civilian and POWs, including common elements in documented cases where detainees in various places of detention are regularly tortured using typical methods and instruments aimed at causing unbearable pain and humiliation. The evidence gathered demonstrates coordination and division of efforts between different institutions, and new information points to a hierarchy of services involved, awareness of the authorities and a general climate of impunity, which may indicate that torture is carried out as part of a deliberate policy and qualifies as a crime against humanity, and the Commission recommends further investigations (see paragraph 81 of the report).

Having examined the three main periods of repression against Ukrainian identity, we will now focus on the methods used by the Soviet regime to suppress Ukrainian resistance. One of the most brutal of these methods was punitive psychiatry, which was especially actively used in the third period of repression.

The Soviet authorities deliberately used psychiatry to avoid open trials of dissidents by sending them to psychiatric hospitals for indefinite periods. Declaring dissenters mentally ill was one of the ways the Soviet authorities ignored uncomfortable questions from the international community about political prisoners and their conditions of detention. The most common diagnoses given to the victims were: essential-paranoid personality development and slow-moving schizophrenia. The latter diagnosis allowed ideological dissent to be viewed as a symptom of a severe mental disorder.

Those who were placed in a psychiatric clinic were "treated" with powerful drugs that undermined the physical and mental health of the prisoners. One of these drugs was haloperidol, which caused akathisia, an unpleasant feeling of internal motor restlessness, the need to constantly move or change position, which manifests itself in the inability to sit still for a long time in one position. As a punishment, sulfur injections were also given, after which the temperature rose, the injection site hurt, and the person could not walk or lie down. Patients of these clinics, some of whom were political prisoners, lived in terrible conditions and endured constant abuse and violence⁶³.



[58] UN report: Ukrainian prisoners of war are tortured and ill-treated at all stages of captivity in Russia.

<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-oon-viyskovopoloneni-katuvannya-rf/33143214.html>

[59] UN Mission in Ukraine: 95% of Ukrainian prisoners of war are being tortured in Russia

<https://www.holosameryky.com/a/ukrayinskykh-viyskovopolonenykh-katuyut-v-rosiyi-danielle-bell/7734930.html>

[60] Treatment of POWs and update on the human rights situation in Ukraine. 1 June to 31 August 2024.

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/ukraine/2024/Ukraine-OHCHR-40th-periodic-report.pdf>

[61] Interviews with survivors conducted by the Media Initiative for Human Rights.

[62] Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine | 15 March 2024

<https://ukraine.un.org/en/263422-ukraine-un-commission-concerned-continuing-patterns-violations-human-rights-and>

[63] To Watch and Punish: The Practice of Punitive Psychiatry Against Dissidents. <https://chytomo.com/karalna-medycyna>

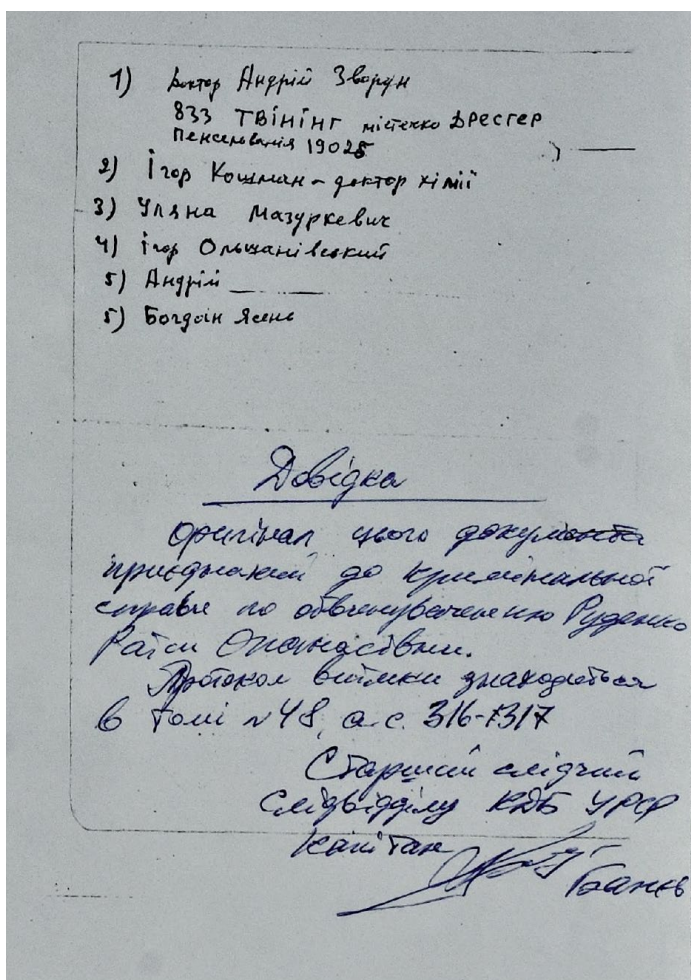
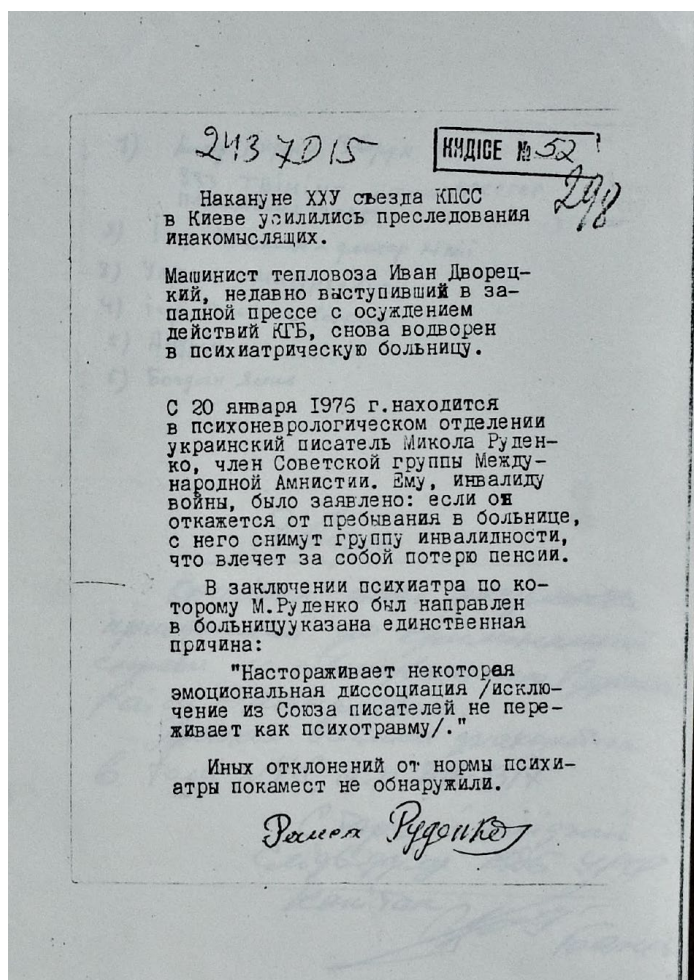
The memoirs of Raisa Rudenko⁶⁴, the wife of Mykola Rudenko⁶⁵, Hero of Ukraine, a well-known Ukrainian writer, dissident, long-term political prisoner of Soviet prisons and concentration camps, and one of the founders of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group, are now available. Raisa Rudenko recalls the forced psychiatry that was used against her husband to declare him incapacitated and make it impossible for him to continue to resist and fight for human rights in the Ukrainian SSR.

The political abuse of psychiatry in the USSR was repeatedly exposed at the congresses of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA) in Mexico City (1971), Honolulu (1977), Vienna (1983), and Athens (1989)⁶⁶.

Russia is still using psychological pressure on Ukrainian POWs. There are cases of prisoners going crazy and losing their sense of real time. Just like in Soviet times, all this is used as a punitive method to break the spirit of resistance and morally destroy a person.

Raisa Rudenko's note on the forced psychiatric treatment of her husband Mykola Rudenko⁶⁷

↓



[64] Ovsienko V. Rudenko Raisa Opanasivna. Dissident movement in Ukraine. <https://museum.khpg.org/1201780354>

[65] Mykola Rudenko was born in 1920. Ukrainian Institute of National Memory.

<https://uin.gov.ua/istorichnyy-kalendar/gruden/19/1920-narodyvsya-mykola-rudenko>

[66] Ougrin D, Gluzman S, Dratcu L. Psychiatry in post-communist Ukraine: dismantling the past, paving the way for the future. The Psychiatrist.

[67] Raisa Rudenko's note on forced psychiatric treatment, in particular of her husband, Mykola Rudenko. SSU GDA. ph. 6. Case file 76055. T. 17. Electronic archive of the Ukrainian Liberation Movement. <https://avr.org.ua/viewDoc/27567>

1.4. HISTORICAL AND LEGAL ANALYSIS OF THE PERSECUTION IN SOVIET TRIALS

The trials of Ukrainians who were convicted as carriers of Ukrainian identity can be divided into stages:

- The first executions (1918-1919);
- The establishment of Soviet power on the territory of Ukraine (1919-1924);
- The beginning of the 1930s;
- The era of the Great Terror (1937-1938);
- Later Soviet periods, which mostly did not involve executions, but used prolonged deprivation and/or restriction of liberty in inhumane conditions and were accompanied by severe, long-term interference with the human psyche.

The following criminal justice tools are available to us for analysis:

- The Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR as amended in 1927;
- The Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR as amended in 1944;
- The Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR as amended in 1960.

During the first period, mass executions of Ukrainians took place without a sham trial. This was the time of the civil war and the establishment of Soviet rule in Ukraine. The next period was characterized by the gradual establishment

of Soviet power and the beginning of the formation of a system of repression against Ukrainians. In the early 1930s, “dekulakization” began, which led to mass deportations and the destruction of wealthy peasants.

Consolidating Soviet power in Ukraine in the 1930s led to increased repression. Decisions to execute were made more frequently. It was followed by the Great Terror of 1937-1938, during which the institutionalization of Troikas, extrajudicial bodies that handed down death sentences, took place. Here is what the Troikas decided in Kyiv:

1. The highest form of punishment, i.e. authorization of execution.
2. Correctional labor camps were used for those who were found guilty of a crime, but their punishment did not include execution.
3. Notable settlements were an additional punishment after serving time in the camps.

In 1960-1980, there was a decrease in the number of death sentences, with priority given to convictions with sentences served in prison and the use of punitive psychiatry.

Relevant articles of criminal laws that were used as instruments of persecution policy:

The table reflects the evolution of the Soviet system of political repression in Ukraine from the brutal measures of the Stalinist era to more sophisticated forms of persecution in the late Soviet period and the gradual curtailment of repressive policies at the end of the USSR.

The period	Main articles of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR	Characteristics of repression	Punishment
1927 — 1953	54-1 — 54-14, 54-10	The most brutal repressions, mass executions, accusations of “counterrevolutionary activity”	Execution with confiscation of property
1953 — 1961	54-1 — 54-14, 54-10	Weakening of repressions, beginning of rehabilitation, reduction of the number of convicts	From 6 months to execution
1961 — 1966	62	Replacement of the previous articles, the primary tool to combat dissent	6 months — 7 years in prison + exile for up to 5 years
1966 — 1989	62, 187-1	Differentiation of punishments, introduction of an article on “slander of the Soviet system”	Art. 62: 6 months — 10 years in prison + exile; Art. 187-1: up to 3 years in prison or correctional labor
1989 — 1991	62 (amended)	Softening of wording, gradual cessation of political repression	Mitigated sentences, rehabilitation of convicts

MODERN PROPAGANDA OF RUSSIAN IDEOLOGY AND IMPOSING OF RUSSIAN CITIZENSHIP IN DETENTION CENTERS



2

2.1. IMPOSING OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE AND SONGS ON POWS AND CIVILIAN DETAINEES IN DETENTION CENTERS IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

After the beginning of Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine in 2014, more than a thousand Ukrainian military and civilians were captured by the armed groups of the "L DPR." They were held in specially created places in the temporarily occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions. A striking example is the "Izolyatsia" torture chamber. After the full-scale invasion in 2022, the number of captured military and civilian detainees increased significantly: as of February 2025, according to various estimates, we can talk about several thousand⁶⁸.

All of them were and are being held by Russia not in special camps for POWs in accordance with the Geneva Conventions, but in places of detention — pre-trial detention centers and prisons. According to the testimonies of victims analyzed by the MIHR, Russian ideology and elements of Russian identity are systematically imposed on Ukrainian POWs and civilian detainees, as well as the cultural component expressed in Russian pseudo-patriotic songs and poems, propaganda literature, and a constant emphasis on the connection with the Soviet past. In the detention centers, the staff of Russian colonies constantly impose on Ukrainians the idea of a common history and culture, demonstrate the superiority of their history over Ukrainian history, unreasonably call them Nazis and fascists, and do all this aggressively and torture them. Analyzing interviews with POWs and civilian detainees returned from Russian captivity, a picture emerges of transparent criminal practices committed by staff of detention facilities in the Russian Federation: imposing Russian ideology to prevent future resistance by prisoners and civilian detainees against Russian aggression. As well as the erasure of Ukrainian identity, forcing the recognition of the Russian Federation as a leading country, its superiority to the rest of the post-Soviet countries.

"Why did you go to war?" is the most popular question heard by Ukrainian soldiers in captivity. In the first months after the start of the full-scale invasion, Russian soldiers were surprised that the propaganda they heard on their TV screens was the opposite of what they encountered in Ukraine. The people they had come to "liberate" and the Ukrainian army, "which did not exist," were resisting together. The "one nation" that needed to be saved did not want to be liberated.

"They were promised they would be met here with flowers and St. George's ribbons. But people resisted. So when they locked us in a barn, military and civilians, they mocked and

beat us all. Just for fun, because we "did not meet their expectations," says Witness 1⁶⁹.

Witness 2 recalls being beaten with a rubber truncheon and a stun gun, being called a fascist and told: "Our grandfathers fought together. What are you doing? You are going against us, but we are brothers"⁷⁰. In this way, they tried to prove that Ukrainians and Russians are not two different peoples, but one Russian people, of which Ukrainians are an integral part, and they were going to "re-educate" them for the fact that Ukraine made its own choice and wants to build its independent state without Russia and its influence.

Representatives of the so-called "DPR" army have repeatedly accused the captured Ukrainian soldiers of crimes against the "civilian population of Donbas," claiming that they were traitors. In April-May 2022, about three thousand defenders of Mariupol were taken prisoner, most of them from Mykolaiv and Donetsk Regions, and most of them lived in Mariupol. Russia accused the Ukrainian POWs of allegedly occupying the territory of the so-called "DPR" rather than defending their land. For example, Witness 3 said: "The Russian military asked me why I did not want to stay in the "DPR". They were interested in what I was doing in Mariupol if I had a Mykolaiv residence permit. They believed that we were the ones who occupied this territory. At the same time, the "DPR" members said that it was their land and we had ruined everything for them"⁷¹.

Ukrainian prisoners in captivity constantly heard from representatives of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation or guards of the Federal Penitentiary Service about "one nation." They convinced the prisoners that a "special military operation" was being conducted only because "Ukrainians had lost their way," separated from Russia and wanted to live separately.

From the interviews conducted by the MIHR, there are cases of killing of POWs in detention centers. Witnesses say that any manifestation of respect for a fallen comrade was severely punished in such cases. "When the body of the deceased prisoner was taken out, everyone else knelt. That's when the head of the colony came in, and he didn't pay any attention to us until someone shouted: "Heroes don't die! Glory to Ukraine!". We responded: "Glory to the heroes!". Of course, neither the boss nor the choppers liked it. They took us outside, lined us up, and began to "rock" (physically exhaust and beat us) like never before," says Witness 4⁷².

[68] Thousands of civilians captured by Russia are in a "legal black hole".

<https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-world/3857018-tisaci-zahoplenih-rosieu-civilnih-u-pravovij-cornij-diri.html>

[69] Witness 1. From the materials of the Media Initiative for Human Rights.

[70] Witness 2. From the materials of the Media Initiative for Human Rights.

[71] Witness 3. From the materials of the Media Initiative for Human Rights.

[72] Witness 4. From the materials of the Media Initiative for Human Rights.

The guards and representatives of the Russian penitentiary system and investigative bodies in general are constantly indoctrinating prisoners, trying to convince them that life was better in the USSR, that it was a successful model of joint existence, and that they should return to a common state and citizenship. After that, the staff of the Russian detention centers proceed to impose Russian citizenship. This is done to prevent prisoners from returning to military service in the Ukrainian Armed Forces and to complicate their return to Ukraine. Prisoners are also tortured.

Employees of the Federal Penitentiary Service demonstrate the supremacy and unquestioning power of the Russian Federation over Ukrainian POWs, rejecting respect for their citizenship, rights, and Ukrainian patriotic position. They are trying to break them by forcing them to sing the Russian anthem, in the words of which Russia appears as a “great” country.

Forcing them to learn and perform the Russian anthem and Russian military patriotic songs, as well as imposing Russian ideology, is a common practice applied to both military and civilians who are held together in the same conditions.

Colony staff force prisoners to sing the Russian national anthem dozens and sometimes hundreds of times daily and recite songs and poems by heart. For refusal or “improper performance,” prisoners are beaten with rubber batons and stun guns.

For example, Witness 5⁷³, who was held in Russian captivity in Detention Center No. 1 in the Kursk Region, recalls how he and other prisoners were forced to sing the Russian national anthem and other songs every half hour during their imprisonment: “We stayed in the cell for almost a month. They sang the Russian anthem 30 times a day.”

Many of the songs that Ukrainian prisoners are forced to learn glorify Russia for its participation in wars, which is done to oppress prisoners. Witness 7 tells about his stay in SIZO No. 2 in Borisoglebsk, Voronezh Region of the Russian Federation. There, Ukrainians were forced to stand and listen to the Russian anthem and Soviet songs “Victory Day” and “Katyusha”: “We probably sang the Russian anthem 100 times a day. At the same time, we were being beaten, and the detention center staff called us fascists, Banderites, and Nazis.”⁷⁴.

Another former detainee, Witness 6, said the following: “We learned other Russian songs, such as “Uncle Vova, we are with you” or “Victory Day”. Each guard had their playlist. On one floor, there was a purely DPR song “God is behind us, Donbas is behind us”, and on the other floor, “Oh, Mom, Something is falling like dandelions” about Russian paratroopers⁷⁵.”

The Russian overseers have a particular hatred for the members of the 12th Azov Special Forces Brigade. This is recalled by Witness 8, who served in the unit and ended up in Russian captivity. He says that the supervisors were instructed to look for patriotic tattoos on the bodies of the prisoners: “The first thing they checked was tattoos. If they didn't understand their meaning, if you couldn't explain them, if they were runes or, God forbid, nationalist symbols, they would immediately beat you. Some of them tried to cut off the skin where there were tattoos alive⁷⁶.”

When asked why the Azovs were treated this way, Witness 8 answers: “They are twisted by propaganda. At my trial, the prosecutor showed a fake video of Azov dismembering children and eating them. I said to them: “Are you serious?⁷⁷” The witness also talks about the Russian books they were forced to read in prison. It says that Ukraine never existed, and all the lands are Russian, they should return to Russia. Prisoners were forced to learn and recite by heart books about Putin and quotes from Sobchak, the former mayor of St. Petersburg. In the testimony of Witness 9, there is a mention of Russian news broadcasts, as well as Russian propaganda imposing a “correct” vision of the events of the “special military operation.” “The news said that we (Ukrainians) were sitting without gas, water, hiding in basements, and then the Russian army came. The Azovs didn't let us out of the basements, they were shooting from the houses, looting. People seemed to be trying to leave, but the Ukrainian army was shooting at the cars. But when Russian troops came in, gas appeared, and Russian soldiers gave their rations to the people, they are heroes and liberators⁷⁸.” Witness 9 also recalls the methods used by the guards in the detention center: “They used a spiked hammer. They could set dogs on me. During interrogations, they put psychological pressure, threatened to cut my ears with a blade⁷⁹.”

Recognizing the nature of these criminal practices, it seems logical that the Russians set out to first destroy or break Ukrainian prisoners psychologically, ruin their physical health, and then impose Russian citizenship on them.

[73] Witness 5. From the materials of the Media Initiative for Human Rights.
[74] Witness 7. From the materials of the Media Initiative for Human Rights.
[75] Witness 6. From the materials of the Media Initiative for Human Rights.
[76] Witness 8. From the materials of the Media Initiative for Human Rights.
[77] Ibid 67.
[78] Witness 9. From the materials of the Media Initiative for Human Rights.
[79] Ibid 69.

2.2. IMPOSING RUSSIAN CITIZENSHIP

One of the essential elements of imposing Russian ideology and a way to destroy Ukrainian identity is to impose Russian citizenship on POWs and civilian detainees. For example, research by the Media Initiative for Human Rights emphasizes that Ukrainian soldiers captured by Russia are forced to refuse to be exchanged and go over to the enemy. Most prisoners, despite the abuse, do not agree to cooperate with the aggressor, but some cannot stand the torture and agree to take Russian citizenship, mostly civilians⁸⁰.

The story of Witness 10 is essential in this context, as he says: *"We were offered Russian citizenship. Some of us agreed.*

There was a civilian cell, and, as far as I understood, a significant number wanted to gain Russian citizenship. They thought, perhaps, that this would free them. But nothing changed for them, they just took them out into the corridor and beat them very badly, and at that time they forced us to sing songs. We could hear them screaming."

Employees of SIZO No. 2 in Novozybkiv (Bryansk Region, Russia) also said that if the prisoners took Russian citizenship, they would be transferred to a lighter regime. However, after that, according to Witness 10, they continued to be beaten as before⁸¹.

2.3. PREJUDICE AGAINST THE UKRAINIAN LANGUAGE

POWs and civilian detainees were forbidden to speak Ukrainian. Those who forgot Russian words and used Ukrainian ones were subjected to physical force. Employees of colonies and isolation centers ridiculed the Ukrainian language.

Witness 11 recalls⁸²: *"I am from western Ukraine but can speak Russian. When I babbled, I could forget and speak Ukrainian. Once, during an inspection, our window opened and we had to ask permission to close it. I said: "Citizen chief, do you have permission to open it?" He said: "Speak". I: "Do you mind closing the window, because we have..." And at*

that moment, I spoke Ukrainian instead of Russian. Then he didn't listen to me anymore and said he would remind me of the Russian language, hinting that I would be beaten."

Another example is the story of Witness 12, who recalls: *"I was in a cell where all the guys were from Lviv. They could not speak Russian. I am from Kherson Region, so it was not a problem for me. They didn't mock me for not knowing the language, for getting lost when we sang songs. But then I was told one thing: "You learned it, now they have to learn it too. And if one of them doesn't, you will be responsible."*

2.4. PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CRIME

Ukrainian POWs and civilian detainees are subjected to psychological abuse, which has profound consequences for their health and overall well-being. Prolonged exposure to violence and stress leads to the development of mental disorders. Prisoners can have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety disorders.

Witness 13 recounts a case where one of the prisoners went insane during an extended stay in a punishment cell and constant abuse. He also recalls that after his return from captivity, when he was in conditional security, he experienced significant mental effects: *"At first, it seemed that I quickly got used to the new conditions, but on the other hand, I could not*

*be in the same room with anyone, even my wife, so I slept in a separate room for some time"*⁸³.

Witness 14 said that during his detention he also saw a prisoner of war who went crazy: *"He just went crazy, playing with a towel, urinating and refusing to eat. He already had anorexia"*⁸⁴.

The conditions of detention are characterized by severe social isolation. Prisoners are not allowed to communicate with each other, which increases the feeling of hopelessness and helplessness. The guards' control is absolute: any attempts to protest or ask questions are punished with physical force⁸⁵.

[80] Klymyk M. Long Road Home. How Ukrainian prisoners of war are forced to refuse exchange and take Russian citizenship.

<https://mipl.org.ua/dovga-doroga-dodomu-yak-ukrayinskyh-vijskovopolonenyh-zmushuyut-vidmovlyatysya-vid-obminu-i-braty-rosijske-gromadyanstvo/>

[81] Witness 10. From the materials of the Media Initiative for Human Rights.

[82] Witness 11. From the materials of the Media Initiative for Human Rights.

[83] Witness 13. From the materials of the Media Initiative for Human Rights.

[84] Witness 14. From the materials of the Media Initiative for Human Rights.

[85] In Russian captivity: what happens to Ukrainian military behind the walls of Russian prisons. Analytics by the Media Initiative for Human Rights.

<https://mipl.org.ua/v-rosijskomu-poloni-shho-vidbuvayetsya-z-ukrayinskymy-vijskovymy-za-stinamy-rosijskyh-tyurem>

Witness 15 describes the impact of physical torture on her psychological state:

"Every day, they beat us twice with electricity, truncheons, and kicks. On Thursday, there was a bathhouse, so we were also electrocuted naked and wet. Then they started to beat us inhumanly. Our legs swelled and we could not walk. They took us for interrogation and beat us again. The investigator's office was near my cell, I heard all the screams during interrogations. It was psychologically very stressful. Every day someone was

beaten, every day someone was screaming. Dogs were set on our walks. The most challenging thing was to sing "Victory Day" non-stop from breakfast to lunch. And sometimes one song from when we got up until we went to bed^[86]".

Thus, the psychological impact on Ukrainian POWs in Russian prisons has serious consequences for their psycho-emotional state. Systematic physical and psychological violence, social isolation, and control lead to long-term consequences for their mental health, which cannot be fully restored.

2.5. OVERVIEW OF CURRENT RUSSIAN TRIALS AGAINST UKRAINIAN POWS

On August 2, 2022, the Russian Supreme Court recognized the then Azov Regiment as a terrorist organization^[87], promoting the narrative of Ukrainian soldiers as "neo-Nazis." Since then, a new wave of persecution of Azov captives has begun, marked by the massive initiation of criminal cases against them on terrorism charges and trials. The characteristic features of these processes are pressure on the defendants, torture of them to incriminate themselves, and refusal to exercise procedural rights.

According to Russian law, a defendant can choose one of three ways to consider a case: a unique (simplified) procedure, a trial by a single judge, or a three-judge panel. The simplified procedure imposed by the Russian prosecutor's

office on Ukrainian POWs involves the defendant pleading guilty, agreeing to the testimony given during the pre-trial investigation, and refusing to ask additional questions. This is an informal agreement with the investigation at the trial stage, whereby the investigation gets a compliant defendant and the defendant is promised a reduction in torture or the hope of an exchange. In this case, the process only has judicial trappings, but it is not, in fact, a trial.

The imitation of justice in these cases is systemic. The adversarial procedure is not used, judges do not change their behavior in assessing the prosecution's evidence, testimony is not verified during direct and cross-examining witnesses, etc.



[86] Witness 15. From the materials of the Media Initiative for Human Rights.

[87] In Russia, the Azov regiment was recognized as a terrorist organization.

<https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/3541993-u-rosii-polk-azov-viznali-teroristicnou-organizacieu.html>

DESCRIPTION OF PERSECUTION PRACTICES ON THE EXAMPLE OF PRISONER CASES

In this section, we will demonstrate how Russia, ignoring the norms of International Humanitarian Law on the privilege of combatant and the principle of *Lex specialis*, qualifies the lawful participation of Ukrainian servicemen in hostilities as “terrorist activity” and prosecutes them in the criminal justice system.

In Russia, inclusion in the list of terrorist organizations was based on decisions made by the Supreme Court. This process is based on the proposal of the Prosecutor General's Office and involves a collegial decision of the Supreme Court judges. Once an organization is included in the list, its activities on the territory of the Russian Federation are prohibited, and membership or participation in its work becomes criminalized.

When initiating cases against Ukrainian POWs, Russia is guided by such “terrorist articles”:

- Art. 205.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation — assistance to terrorist activities;
- Art. 205.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation — public calls for terrorist activities, public justification of terrorism or propaganda of terrorism;
- Art. 205.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation — training to conduct terrorist activities;
- Art. 205.4 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation — organization of a terrorist community and participation in it;
- Art. 205.5 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation — organization of a terrorist organization and participation in the activities of such an organization.

The case of soldier Oleksandr Maksymchuk⁸⁸, who initially agreed to a simplified procedure for considering his case, and during the trial refused to recant and reported torture in the Taganrog detention center, is illustrative. However, this did not change either the judge's behavior or the punishment. On December 5, 2024, Maksymchuk was found guilty of carrying out terrorist activities under Part 2 of Article 205 of the Russian Criminal Code — public calls for terrorist activities, public justification of terrorism, or propaganda of terrorism. The Southern District Military Court judge, Yuriy Gubarev, heard the case. The judge ignored Maksymchuk's request to recuse his assigned defense counsel, who has friendly relations with the prosecutor.

The captured Azov soldier was sentenced to 20 years in prison with a sentence to be served in a strict regime penal colony. The verdict states that Oleksandr Maksymchuk was engaged in terrorism. However, the Russian judges knew for sure (and this is stated in the verdict) that Azov was part of the National Guard of Ukraine, meaning that Maksymchuk had the status of a legal combatant and, according to the laws and customs of war, had every right to participate in hostilities.

In reaching its verdict, the court relied on prosecution witnesses — other Ukrainian POWs. However, their testimony cannot be trusted because investigators torture witnesses. This is how a witness interviewed by the MIHR, a former prisoner of war, describes it: *“This is a factory for obtaining confessions. No one cares who you are or what you did, they will write everything for you. And it turns out that you are either a war criminal or a terrorist, but not a prisoner of war. People were taken from each cell to the first floor every day. My turn came too. They brought me to a room. They said: “You’ve already been surrendered, we know everything, tell us everything”. They started beating me.*

— *“You don't want to talk,” they shout. But there is nothing to say. They took me to the torture chamber. It's a special room, maybe more than one, next to the investigators' offices. They threw me on the floor, held me from above, and discharged a stun gun on me. I was lying on the floor, being beaten and shouted at:*
— *“Tell me!”*
— *“What?”*
— *“The crimes!”*
— *“I've already told you everything!”*
— *“Tell me again,” they ordered and continued to beat me. I started to make up stories. But I was careful not to get lost in the details. They began to beat me less. And then they threw me into a cell. After a while, they took me out of the cell again and beat me with a truncheon:*
— *“Do you remember what you said? Have you forgotten anything, do you want me to remind you?”*
— *“No, I haven't forgotten anything.”*
— *“You will say that you fired at a tank with a machine gun and killed a civilian.”*
— *“Okay.”*

The man was taken to an office on the first floor. There was an investigator from Rostov. *“I had seen his face before. He gave me a chocolate bar and a cigarette and said: “That's it, relax, no one is going to touch you, tell me what happened.” I told my version, as if I had killed a civilian. I signed the papers, I don't know which ones, the top with the investigation data was covered with a hand. Everyone there gives the necessary “confessions,” the witness says. “They are looking for approaches to everyone”⁸⁸.”*

The verdict against Oleksandr Maksymchuk states that the defendant confirmed his participation in the Azov battalion between October 1, 2015 and May 20, 2022, including his training, but did not admit guilt, explaining that the battalion members were engaged in the defense of the territorial integrity and constitutional order of Ukraine, not terrorist activities, and that the training was conducted for the same purpose. Despite this, Russian judges, in violation of international humanitarian law, continue to try Azov soldiers for their mere affiliation with the battalion, calling it a terrorist organization.

This practice demonstrates the systematic use of the Russian legal system as an instrument of political repression in the occupied territories.

[88] Katrychenko T. Testimony under Torture: How Confessions of Terrorism are Extracted in Taganrog.
<https://mipl.org.ua/svidchennya-pid-katuvannyamy-yak-u-taganrozi-vybyvayut-ziznannya-u-teroryzmi>

HERE ARE A FEW MORE CASES OF PERSECUTION OF UKRAINIAN POWS THAT THE MIHR ANALYZED DURING THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT:



Case of Individual A

Article: Part 2 of Article 205.4 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

Charges: participation in a terrorist community through service in Aidar.

The sentence was passed on September 03, 2024:
5.5 years in prison.

The plot. According to the prosecution, from July 2014 to January 2015, Individual A "took part in the activities of a terrorist community" — the 24th separate assault battalion "Aidar" in Luhansk Region. "Promoted activities aimed at forcible change of the constitutional order, destabilization of the situation in the 'LPR', persecution of civilians for political and national reasons as part of punitive operations, 'tacitly approved and wished to implement' the tasks assigned to it. According to the investigation, a person did not report her participation in the battalion's activities to law enforcement agencies, which further indicates the presence of criminal intent," the 'verdict' reads. The last word from Individual A: *"I don't even know what to say. I plead guilty in full, and I am ready to take responsibility. Please do not punish me too much. It's hard to talk".*

Comment. In this case, the accusation refers to resistance to the occupation forces of the so-called "LPR" as part of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, as the 24th separate assault battalion "Aidar" is one of the units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The accusation of persecuting civilians for political and ethnic reasons as part of punitive operations has not been substantiated. Instead, the terror of the civilian population, which is a consequence of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, is being blamed by Russia on the Armed Forces of Ukraine. This is evidenced by the methods and means of warfare used by the Russian Federation and the state of settlements after their occupation.



Case of Individual B

Article: Part 2 of Article 205.4 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

Charges: participation in a terrorist community, clause "a" part 3 Article 222 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation — illegal possession and carrying of firearms and ammunition.

The sentence was passed on December 14, 2023:
8 years in prison.

The plot. The Rostov Region Prosecutor's Office published a release: "The court found that in 2015, Individual B, while living in the city of Dnipro, voluntarily joined the ranks of the Dnipro-1 terrorist community. The said group took an active part in hostilities aimed at forcing Donbas residents to abandon their decision on self-determination. In the spring of 2022, having been mobilized on the territory of Ukraine, the defendants arrived to fight in the city of Rubizhne of the Luhansk People's Republic. At the same time, they were carrying firearms and ammunition, which they used during combat duties. The Armed Forces of the Russian Federation stopped their illegal activities."

Commentary. In this case, participation in the Dnipro-1 battalion, which is a unit of the Special Police Department, is equated with the involvement in a terrorist organization.



Case of Individual C

Article: Part 2 of Article 205.5, Article 205.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

Charges: participation in the activities of a terrorist organization and training to carry out terrorist activities.

The verdict was passed on May 03, 2024, and **the sentence** was: **18 years in prison.**

The plot. According to Russian investigators, on July 17, 2023, Individual C arrived at the Azov recruitment center, where a person voluntarily agreed to participate in its activities. After that, according to the case file, a person was trained under the general military training program, where a person "acquired knowledge, practical skills and abilities during physical and psychological training, as well as learned the rules for handling weapons, explosive devices and explosives." Subsequently, Individual C "being in combat positions located in the territory of the DPR and LPR, ensured the organization's activities, acting as a driver of the engineering positioning unit of the engineer platoon of the special purpose battalion".

Commentary. In this case, Individual C was convicted for his participation in the Azov Brigade, which at the time was a special police battalion of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine.



Case of Individual D

Article: Part 2 of Article 208; Article 205.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

Charges: participation in an armed group that is not part of a foreign army and acts against the interests of the Russian Federation, as well as training in terrorist activities. Due to his Russian passport, Individual D was charged as a Russian citizen who committed a crime abroad under Article 12(1) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

The verdict was passed on June 20, 2023, and **the sentence** was: **16 years in prison.**

The plot. In fact, Individual D was accused of having undergone military training and serving in the Aidar battalion. No other charges were brought against him. The investigation alleges that Individual D joined Aidar in January 2015, "sharing right-wing radical views based on Russophobia and the idea of Ukrainian nationalism". A person was given weapons and ammunition and sent to a training unit at a training ground in the Lviv Region. The investigation interpreted this training in military affairs — handling weapons, combat tactics, and medical care — as training in terrorist activities.

According to the investigation, after the training, Individual D was appointed as a private of a security unit of the Aidar battalion in a village in the Luhansk Region. In February 2015, she was transferred to a machine gun platoon in Lysychansk.

Comment. In this case, as in others, service in the Aidar volunteer battalion, which is subordinated to the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, is recognized as service in a terrorist organization.

After analyzing these and other similar cases, the authors of the Report **identified patterns of Russian behavior:**

1. **Creates a national legal framework for the persecution of certain groups of the Ukrainian military.** To do this, Russia includes units of the Ukrainian Defense Forces in the list of terrorist organizations and prosecutes them under domestic criminal law on terrorism.
2. **Criminalizes the legitimate military activities of the Ukrainian Defense Forces** by designating their former volunteer battalions as terrorist organizations.
3. **Systematically violates international humanitarian law** by ignoring the status of POWs and prosecuting Ukrainian soldiers for participating in lawful hostilities.
4. **Ignores the context of the armed conflict and violates the *Lex specialis* principle** by interpreting lawful participation in hostilities as a criminal offense.
5. **Resorts to politically motivated persecution of Ukrainian soldiers who have been captured.**
6. **Imposes highly harsh punishments, forcing the military to admit non-existent guilt.**

.....

Thus, to charge the Ukrainian military with facilitating, participating in or carrying out terrorist activities, a Russian investigator only needs to establish that the accused belongs to a terrorist organization banned in Russia. Since the list of organizations includes units of the Ukrainian Defense Forces, this approach of Russia demonstrates its deliberate disregard for international humanitarian law and its intent to illegally try Ukrainian citizens who are legally involved in the defense of Ukraine.

CONCLUSIONS



The destruction of Ukrainian statehood and its bearers was a systematic government policy of the Soviet Union, implemented through the repressive methods of the special services. With the beginning of Russia's current military occupation of part of Ukraine, the Soviet practice of persecuting certain groups of the Ukrainian people has resumed.

The Russian Federation has targeted those who oppose the occupation, all carriers of Ukrainian identity without exception, who peacefully or with arms in hand resist the physical, cultural and spiritual destruction of Ukraine. These people, following the worst repressive Soviet practices, are being labeled extremists and terrorists by modern Russia. All this is done without regard to the actual activities of a person, but only because of their affiliation with a persecuted group. Moreover, Russia's law enforcement and judicial authorities enroll units of the Ukrainian Defense Forces in the ranks of terrorist organizations, thereby grossly violating International Humanitarian Law.

As in Soviet times, Ukrainians are not persecuted for committing ordinary criminal or war crimes, but for belonging (often unofficially) to a conventional pro-Ukrainian group, for having a Ukrainian identity, or for participating in defensive combat operations as part of

legitimate military units. This policy has signs of systematic, large-scale and political motivation, which may indicate that Russia has committed a crime against humanity.

The continuity of the persecution practices of the Soviet NKVD and KGB can be seen in the methods and tools used by today's Russian special services and penitentiary system. The physical and mental consequences of such practices are long-lasting and lead to severe health disorders of their victims.

The Russian authorities are actively using the judicial system as a tool of repression against groups of Ukrainians, in flagrant violation of international humanitarian and human rights law. Russian trials of Ukrainian POWs and civilians have nothing to do with justice.

Russia's persecution policy poses a serious threat not only to Ukraine, but also to the international legal order and human rights in general. Therefore, the international community must end these criminal practices and bring the perpetrators justice. This requires strengthening international advocacy and engaging the legal community in developing practical tools to protect victims of persecution in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war and establish justice.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the study, we offer recommendations for protecting the rights of Ukrainian citizens and countering Russia's policy of destroying Ukrainian identity:

TO THE STATE AUTHORITIES OF UKRAINE:

- 1.** Ensure the rehabilitation of victims of torture and ill-treatment after their return from Russian captivity.
 - 2.** Inform the international community about the politically motivated persecution of POWs and the population of the occupied territories organized by the Russian Federation under the guise of fighting terrorist activities and about Russia's violation of the right to a fair trial, which constitutes a war crime.
 - 3.** Organize a campaign to delegitimize Russian politically motivated convictions of Ukrainian POWs and residents of the occupied territories.
 - 4.** Inform the Embassies of as many countries as possible about Russia's illegal persecution of Ukrainian citizens to prevent the enforcement of Russian sentences and extradition measures against POWs and persecuted residents of the occupied territories on issues related to the armed conflict abroad.
-

UKRAINIAN INVESTIGATIVE AUTHORITIES:

- 1.** Apply the principles of criminal liability of military commanders and civilian superiors when investigating the facts of large-scale and systematic politically motivated persecution of POWs and civilians from the occupied territories illegally detained in places of detention.
 - 2.** Engage psychological experts to assess the consequences of psychological violence against prisoners.
 - 3.** Engage specialized human rights organizations that work on the issue of civilian detention and the conditions of detention of POWs.
 - 4.** Prepare materials for possible international prosecution of those responsible for Russia's systematic violations of the rights of Ukrainian POWs and civilian detainees.
-

INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS:

- 1.** Establish international monitoring of the conditions of detention of Ukrainian POWs and civilian detainees in places where the Russian Federation holds them.
- 2.** Conduct information campaigns to raise awareness of the international community about violations of the rights of Ukrainian POWs in Russia.
- 3.** Advocate for additional sanctions against those involved in Russia's violations of the rights of POWs and civilian detainees.
- 4.** Provide expert and legal support to Ukraine for filing lawsuits in international courts regarding Russia's violations of the rights of Ukrainian POWs and civilian detainees.
- 5.** Develop recommendations for third-country governments to increase diplomatic pressure on Russia to ensure that the rights of Ukrainian POWs and civilian detainees are respected.

UKRAINIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS:

- 1.** Systematize the documentation and collection of evidence of violations of the rights of Ukrainian POWs and civilian detainees in Russian detention facilities.
 - 2.** Conduct information campaigns to raise awareness of Ukrainian society and the international community about violations of the rights of POWs in Russia.
 - 3.** Cooperate with international human rights organizations to increase pressure on Russia to respect the rights of Ukrainian POWs and civilian detainees.
 - 4.** Organize training programs for lawyers and human rights activists on the specifics of protecting the rights of POWs in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war.
 - 5.** Promote the creation of a support network for families of prisoners and missing persons.
-

TO THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

- 1.** Conduct academic research at the international level, organize conferences and panel discussions to identify parallels between the repressive practices of the Soviet regime and the actions of the Russian authorities to impose ideology and erase Ukrainian identity, as well as persecute certain groups of people.
 - 2.** Publish scholarly monographs and specialized issues of academic journals that will comprehensively cover the topic of the imposing of Russian ideology and the persecution of groups of people by totalitarian regimes.
-

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

- 1.** Publish materials and investigative journalism about the conditions of detention of POWs and civilian detainees in Russian prisons.
- 2.** Tell the stories of those released from Russian captivity about the conditions of detention, torture, and the imposing of Russian ideology to share this information as widely as possible at the international level.



The Media Initiative for Human Rights (MIHR) is a Ukrainian NGO that combines journalism and human rights advocacy to expose Russia's war crimes in Ukraine and respond to human rights violations related to Russian aggression. MIHR investigates war crimes, torture, enforced disappearances, and violations of civilian and military rights in the context of war. The organisation also documents other human rights violations, monitors war-related trials, prepares analyses and recommendations, and engages in national and international advocacy to achieve justice and ensure human rights and freedoms.

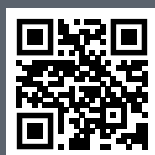
More information about the activities of the Media Initiative for Human Rights:



mipl.org.ua



[MediaInitiative
forHumanRights](https://www.facebook.com/MediaInitiativeforHumanRights)



[@mihr_ua](https://twitter.com/mihr_ua)



[mipl.org.ua](https://www.instagram.com/mipl.org.ua)



[mihr-ua](https://www.linkedin.com/company/mihr-ua)



INTERNATIONAL
RENAISSANCE
FOUNDATION

The International Renaissance Foundation is one of the largest charitable foundations in Ukraine. Since 1990 we have been helping to develop an open society based on democratic values in Ukraine. During its activity, the Foundation has supported about 20 thousand projects. The funding amounted to over \$ 350 million.



www.irf.ua



[www.fb.com/irf.ukraine](https://www.facebook.com/irf.ukraine)