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Verification of nationality and rehabilitation in Upper Silesia as a point of reference for Donbas

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Abstract

In Poland, the region where the phenomenon of multiculturalism is most strongly represented is Upper Silesia. Upper Silesia, its historical hosts, have been confronted with German, Polish and Czech nationalism since the mid-21st century. Initially, they were forced to determine their ethnic affiliation, then, due to the change of borders, they were forced to move to one or the other side of the newly established Polish-German border in 1922. After 1945, they were subjected to strong repression, deportation to forced labor camps, forced displacement, degrading verification of nationality, and then they were confronted with the Polish population who came to Upper Silesia. Most often, the Poles who arrived were hostile to the Upper Silesians. The aim of this article is to answer the question whether the experiences of integration of the indigenous population of Upper Silesia into the social, cultural, economic and political structures of the Polish state after World War II can be related to a similar process that will take place after the end of hostilities in the eastern regions of the Ukrainian state. . The starting point is the thesis that the Upper Silesian experience of the rehabilitation and citizenship verification procedures should serve as a warning against the mistakes made in Upper Silesia rather than as a useful reference point.

Keywords: national rehabilitation, refugees, regionalism, regional identity, socio-cultural integration

Проверка гражданства и реабилитация в Верхней Силезии как ориентир для Донбасса

Аннотация

В Польше регионом, где феномен мультикультурализма наиболее сильно представлен, является Верхняя Силезия. Верхнесилезцы, его исторические жители, с середины 21 века столкнулись с немецким, польским и чешским национализмом. Первоначально они были вынуждены определить свою этническую принадлежность, затем, в связи с изменением границ, вынуждены были переходить то в одну, то в другую сторону вновь созданной в 1922 г. польско-германской границы. После 1945 г. они подверглись сильным репрессиям, депортациям в исправительно-трудовые лагеря, вынужденным переселениям, унижительной проверке национальности, а затем столкнулись с прибывшим в Верхнюю Силезию польским населением. Чаще всего прибывшие поляки относились к верхнесилезцам враждебно. Целью данной статьи является ответ на вопрос, может ли опыт интеграции коренного населения Верхней Силезии в социальные, культурные, экономические и политические структуры польского государства после Второй мировой войны быть отнесен к аналогичному процессу, который займет место после окончания боевых действий в восточных районах Украинского государства. Исходным пунктом является тезис о том, что Верхнесилезский опыт процедуры реабилитации и проверки гражданства должен служить предостережением от ошибок, допущенных в Верхней Силезии, а не полезным ориентиром.

Ключевые слова: национальная реабилитация, беженцы, регионализм, региональная идентичность, социокультурная интеграция

Introduction

Whenever wars take place in areas with complex ethnic and national structures, the issue of the population's loyalty to the authorities of the invaded state and their attitudes toward the occupying authorities arises. In the case of Ukraine, this problem concerns nearly 20 percent of its territory. At present, it pertains to the entire Crimean Peninsula, parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions (which were seized by separatists supported by the Russian army in 2014) and parts of the Zaporizhia and Kherson regions

captured in the first phase of the full-scale war, which began on February 24, 2022. Given the scarcity of Ukrainian scholarly data on the behaviour of Ukrainian citizens in the Russian-occupied territories, this paper will address only basic data on the ethnic composition of Donbas and the course of the discussion on the concept of Ukrainian national identity. These factors will undoubtedly have a bearing on the premises of the procedures for verification of nationality and rehabilitation, similar to those applied in Poland after World War II in Upper Silesia. At this point, it should be indicated that the historic Donbas includes the Ukrainian regions of Luhansk and Donetsk and the Russian region of Rostov.

In Poland, a corresponding problem arose during World War II, particularly in Upper Silesia, which was divided into two parts, Polish and German, in the interwar period. Both parts were inhabited by a population described by the German authorities as ‘das Schwebendes Volkstum,’ or people of undetermined national identification. The Upper Silesians who were loyal to the Polish state referred to them using a derogatory name, ‘Chachary’ (Chalasiński, 1935, p. 223). They were an indigenous population of Upper Silesia who faced three nationalisms at the turn of the 20th century, namely German, Polish and Czech nationalism (Trosiak, 2016). As a consequence, many Upper Silesians avoided making clear declarations of their national identity. In addition, at the time, Upper Silesia sought to create a separate political entity, ‘Freie Stadt Oberschlesien’ (Hauser, 1991, pp. 105–106). Such aspirations produced a lack of trust regarding the loyalty of this population to the authorities of the respective states Upper Silesia found itself in after the partition carried out in 1922.

In 1939–1945, the occupying German authorities exerted nationalistic pressure on the inhabitants of Polish Upper Silesia. It involved the creation of a German National List (Deutsche Volksliste – DVL), where representatives of the Silesian native population were entered. Getting registered on the list was often the only way to avoid repression for actively pursuing the integration into Poland of the part of Upper Silesia which constituted the Polish Silesian province after 1922. In contrast, the indigenous population of Upper Silesia which remained within the borders of Germany, was targeted in two ways. Using various instruments, which ranged from raising the standard of living, through the implementation of many infrastructural investments

improving the quality of life of local population, German authorities tried to bring the 'Wasserpöckchen',¹ who had opted 'for Poland' during a plebiscite, to the German side. Another measure involved repressions against those who engaged in Polish organizations, as well as discouraging parents from sending their children to schools for the Polish minority. As a result, right before the outbreak of World War II, pro-Polish activity was practically non-existent in Regierungsbezirk Oppeln (Opole District).

After the war ended, in order to reverse the effects of this policy, the Polish authorities verified and rehabilitated the native population with respect to their nationality. The verification procedure concerned the indigenous population living in pre-war German Upper Silesia. Its outcome determined whether they would be allowed to remain in their homeland, having been verified. Nationality rehabilitation, on the other hand, referred to those citizens of the Polish state, who had signed or been registered on the German Volksliste.

The purpose of this article is to answer the question of whether the integration of the native population of Upper Silesia into the social, cultural, economic and political structures of the Polish state after World War II can be applied to a similar process that will take place after the end of hostilities in the area of the eastern oblasts of the Ukrainian state.

The starting point is the proposition that the Upper Silesian experience of engagement in the process of nationality rehabilitation and verification should be seen as a lesson, rather than an example to be followed. However, not wishing to present an overly critical assessment of the actions taken by the organizers of those processes, we might better ask whether it was possible to carry them out without harming either the people concerned or the demographic interests of the Polish state under the conditions at the time. It should be borne in mind that almost every Polish family fell victim to war and occupation, while Poland lost about 6 million citizens in their wake. In addition, the border shift meant that, in 1945, many Polish citizens

¹ Initially, the term was used by German authorities with reference to the indigenous population of Lower and Upper Silesia speaking a language called 'Wasserpöckchen', which German linguists treated as a Silesian dialect of Polish. Since 1989, Upper Silesian regionalist circles have been trying for the Silesian dialect, or 'godka' (parlance) to be recognized as a regional language, but these endeavors have been fruitless so far.

of Ukrainian, Belarusian and Lithuanian descent found themselves outside Poland. Moreover, with Poland having come under the influence of the Soviet Union, many Poles who had been deported as forced labour to Germany during the war, or who had been evacuated from the Soviet Union with the Anders Army, chose not to return to Poland. As a consequence, the population of the Republic of Poland fell from 34.8 million in 1938 to 23.9 million in 1946. It is obvious that the authorities were aware that such a huge loss would have a demographic and economic consequences, and they sought to verify the nationality and rehabilitate as many people as possible who could be identified as 'Polish natives.'

In all likelihood, it can be assumed that the Ukrainian state will face similar problems once the hostilities end. According to mid-2022 estimates, nearly 2.2 million Ukrainian citizens of Russian origin are war refugees, who have either left for or have been evacuated to the Russian Federation (Soroka, 2022, p. 156). It can be assumed that only a small proportion will choose to return to their homeland after the end of the war.

German National List – the Volksliste

From the very beginning, the German authorities occupying the territories incorporated into the Third Reich pursued a policy aimed at breaking Polish resistance and persuading the Polish population to accept their current circumstances. One element of this policy involved a German National List, or Volksliste. Upon seizing the Polish part of Upper Silesia on September 4, 1939, the German authorities immediately set about resolving the national status of the population of the newly created Katowice region. The instrument used was the German Volksliste, which consisted of four categories. The first group (Volksdeutscher) included Polish citizens who had been active as Germans in Poland before the war. The second group (Deutschstämmige) was made up of people who retained their German nationality but refrained from displaying it in an ostentatious manner. People in these categories were treated as Germans. Among the third group (Eigedeutsche) there were those who were partially Polonized, Poles with German ancestors, or Polish spouses of Germans. The fourth group (Rückgedeutsche) comprised Polonized people of German descent who had been involved in Polish socio-political

and cultural organizations that did not act against the German minority in Poland. The German authorities treated persons assigned to this group as renegades.

Out of the total population of about 1.1 million inhabiting the 'Prussian part' of the Silesian province (Serafin, 1996, p. 81), more than one million (Błaszczak-Waławik, Błasiak, Nawrocki, 1990, p. 65) were on the German National List. They accounted for ca. 90 percent of the total population of the Silesian province. Persons who were banned from registering on the Volksliste were mainly Poles who found themselves in the Silesian province after 1922, and Upper Silesians involved in official Polish structures from 1922 to 1939 (officials, teachers, insurgents). The authorities decided to forcibly deport most of them to the General Government (Bahlcke, Gawarecki, Kaczmarek, 2011, p. 260), while some were deported to concentration camps. Out of the total population of 605,972 in the 'Austrian part' of the Silesian province, almost 280,000 (Błaszczak-Waławik, Błasiak, Nawrocki, 1990, p. 65) people were registered on the Volksliste, which accounted for 46 percent of the population of this part of the Silesian province. In the entire, enlarged Upper Silesian province, only 30,000 people did not apply to be registered on the Volksliste. Out of all the residents of the 'Prussian' and 'Austrian' parts of Upper Silesia, almost 75 percent of the native inhabitants of the Polish Silesian province signed the Volksliste. The third group from the Volksliste was most numerous, and included Upper Silesians who, according to the criteria of the list, retained their German nationality in Poland, but did not demonstrate it, and those who were not aware of their Germanness. The latter group was likely to have included Upper Silesians who were indifferent towards their own nationality. Undoubtedly, these results of registration reflected the efforts of the German authorities, who were anxious to involve Upper Silesian industry in production for the ongoing war as soon as possible. A prolonged process addressing the question of the nationality of Upper Silesians would undoubtedly not have served this purpose.

It is certainly worth noting here that Bishop Stanisław Adamski from Katowice recommended all Upper Silesians to enrol in Volksliste in order to protect themselves from repression by the German authorities, as well as from reprisals by their German neighbours for their activities against the German minority in the period from 1922 to 1939. Władysław Oszelda endeavoured

to defend Upper Silesians, and explain why so many of them signed the list. “The German army’s remarkable victories and the Polish government’s miserable policy blunders were episodes that deepened the crisis in Silesia. At that time, Bishop Adamski from Katowice, recognizing hopelessness of the situation and the rampant terror that intensified with each passing day, decided to address the Polish government in London, suggesting that in order to protect their biological existence, the Silesian people should put on the protective mask of the ‘Volksliste,’ which would allow them to survive a period when they were threatened with physical annihilation. During this period, the capacity for collective actions in Silesian society had decreased drastically, and the authority structures responsible for making decisions had ceased to operate effectively. Under these conditions, the Polish people in Silesia concentrated all their efforts on diminishing uncertainty when making decisions, whether within individual families or neighbourhood communities, where family and neighbourhood-family councils, weighed the pros and cons before making decisions – often desperate – to protect their life and property from the annihilation brought by... firmly insisting on [their] formal Polishness” (Oszelda, 1948, p. 504).

The impact of the process of nationality verification and rehabilitation after World War II on nationality relations in Upper Silesia²

On July 2, 1945, Aleksander Zawadzki, the then governor of Silesia, issued an order prohibiting the German population from residing in the pre-war Silesian province. The same rule applied to Lower Silesia. The remaining German population was to be deported from Silesia. Nationality verification was carried out in that part of Upper Silesia that had been in Germany before the war. It was carried out under the slogan: ‘We do not want a single German on our soil and we will not give up a single Polish soul to the Germans.’ Residents of the Silesian province who had signed the Volksliste were subjected to rehabilitation procedures. Underlying both these measures

² This part of the article is based on the subchapter entitled *Niemiecka lista narodowościowa na Górnym Śląsku (Volkslista)*, a part of the monograph by Trosiak, 2016.

was the conviction that the indigenous population was a Germanized Slavic people of Polish descent who had retained a varying sense of belonging to the Polish national community.

Nationality rehabilitation

The first legal act, namely the Decree of November 4, 1944 on protective measures against traitors to the nation, (hereafter: Decree) did not take into account the different categories of those registered on the Volksliste, subjecting all of them to severe punishment (Janusz, 2005, p. 55). The activists of the Polish Western Union, who knew the realities of the lands where Poles and Germans lived side by side, stressed this, and argued that the Decree provisions should not be applied in the areas incorporated into the Third Reich during the war. The pressure from the occupation authorities in these territories was so immense that some persons could not resist it without exposing themselves and their family members to repression. This did not apply to those citizens of Poland who were actively involved in the activities of the German minority in the interwar period, and who assisted the German authorities in persecuting the Polish population during the occupation. As concerns the German minority, from the end of the war until 1989, they were referred to as a 'fifth column,' which was synonymous with treason. The situation was different for Polish citizens in the General Government, where people who registered on the German National List opted for more or less open collaboration with the occupation authorities. They were treated as traitors by the underground Polish government. In many cases, this resulted in the courts of the underground state adjudicating various forms of punishment, including the death penalty.

Over time, the attitude toward 'Volksdeutsche' changed. There were several reasons for this. Primarily, the legal regulations in force were far from perfect; secondly, the situation in Poland was normalizing; and thirdly, as the displacement of the German population advanced, the difficulties it caused were becoming increasingly apparent. Poland experienced a deficiency in its labour force and skilled workers capable of operating the technical and social infrastructure in the Western Territories. All this enforced a more tolerant outlook on the loyalty of those under German occupation to the Polish state. By a decree of June 28, 1946, the state introduced a new procedure.

Henceforth, the mere signing of the Volksliste was no longer to be punished; instead, the deliberate abandonment of one's nationality, or their voluntary registration on the German National List, was prosecuted.

Nationality verification

Concurrently with the rehabilitation campaign, a process of nationality verification was conducted. This concerned the native populations of that part of Upper Silesia, parts of Pomerania, and Warmia and Masuria that had been part of the Third Reich before September 1, 1939. Verification was based on the proficiency of the Polish language, the Polish nature of the individual's spiritual and material culture, and the extent to which national awareness had been preserved by them. These criteria allowed three groups to be distinguished. The first group included members and activists of the Union of Poles in Germany and other organizations bringing together Polish citizens in the Third Reich. According to the authors of verification criteria, this part of the population fully retained their Polish national awareness. This group was estimated at 531,000 people. The second group included people who spoke a language other than German on a daily basis and had other features indicating their Polishness, but who did not reveal their national identity. This group was estimated at ca. 375,000 people. The third group accounted for people who did not speak Polish,³ but had Polish ancestors and Polish surnames. The size of this group was not determined, due to the fact that it included many people who had been completely germanised. It has to be observed that these criteria were strikingly similar to those used by the German authorities when they introduced the Volksliste in the occupied territories.

The right to Polish citizenship was granted to all persons who before January 1, 1945, permanently resided in the Recovered Territories, proved their Polish nationality before the verification commission, and whose Polish nationality was acknowledged on that basis. In addition, they were required to pledge allegiance⁴ (Urban, 1994, pp. 68–69). Fulfilling this last condition

³ The languages in question are Kashubian and the Warmian, Mazurian and Silesian dialects, which at the time were all unambiguously considered as varieties of Polish.

⁴ The pledge read as follows: "Upon the defeat of the Third Reich, I would like to accept Poland as my homeland. I ask the Polish authorities to forgive me and admit me into the

was difficult and humiliating in the opinion of those required to make this pledge (Pollok, 1998, pp. 107–128) since it involved their admitting the performance of acts they most often had not committed. There were also other reasons why persons subjected to the nationality verification procedure avoided pledging their allegiance. They feared that they would suffer repressions should the Germans return, and that making the pledge could result in their forced resettlement further east.

Nationality verification in Silesia is deemed to have been completed in the second half of 1949. It resulted in 863,000 people having been positively verified, including 848,000 in Upper Silesia and 15,000 in Lower Silesia. The number of positively verified Upper Silesians accounted for almost 90 percent of those who were subject to the verification procedure (Misztal, 1984, p. 159).

The consolidated social and political presence of the Polish state, and the often negative experiences of Upper Silesians related to this presence, resulted in many unverified natives who managed to avoid displacement, evading all unambiguous declarations of nationality and leaving their options open, an attitude which turned out to be rational in the context of their later decisions to leave Poland. At present, it is difficult to unequivocally determine how many Upper Silesians residing in the western part of the region refused to accept Polish citizenship, and especially how many of those verified did so for opportunistic motives. An answer to this question is indirectly provided by how quickly the organizational structures of the German minority were established in Upper Silesia after 1989, and the emergence of an aspiration of Upper Silesians to be recognized as an ethnic or national community, distinct from the Polish nation.

Why don't Upper Silesians want to be Poles?

When asked about the reasons for Upper Silesians being reticent about declaring their Polishness, a contemporary researcher investigating the identity

family of the great Polish nation. I promise to be a faithful and obedient citizen of the Republic of Poland and to sever all ties with Germany forever, to thoroughly suppress my sentiments for Germanness, to bring up my children in the spirit of Polishness and to instill in them love for Poland – the homeland of my ancestors.”

of the inhabitants of this region, Maria Szymeja answers: “It is not the Silesians who are renegades and traitors to the Polish nation. It is the Polish nation and Polish society that did not live up to the expectations that the Silesians had of them” (Szymeja, 2000, p. 239); and adds seventeen years later “a lot has changed in Silesia, young Silesians have become capable of fighting for their dignity and recognition. However, Polish domination is not yielding” (Szymeja, 2017, p. 266).

The question to be asked in relation to these observations is to what extent the Upper Silesian experience can be useful when formulating policies for verifying the nationality and rehabilitating Ukrainian citizens who, after 2014, found themselves in a situation similar to that of Upper Silesians after the outbreak of World War II, especially since the results of both processes, aimed at integrating the native population of Upper Silesia into the social, cultural, political structures of the Polish state, were quite limited.

Ethnic composition of the population in Donbas

Initially, it is essential to note the significant disparity between Upper Silesia and the Donbas region of Ukraine. It concerns the ethnic and national differentiation of the two regions. The formation processes of the ethnic composition of Donbas, outlined below, have created a highly compound patchwork of peoples in the region. The industrial region’s population composition was shaped by individuals resettling from various ethnic origins. In addition to Ukrainians and Russians, there were Jews, Greeks, Belarussians, Germans, Vlachs, Serbs, Bulgarians, Tatars, Hungarians, Poles and representatives of many other ethnic and national groups. They have all contributed to forming the mindset of Donbas population. It may be expected that the modernization of Donbas will provoke intense disputes among various nationalist currents, which will likely result in the emergence of a regional (ethnic) identity for the people of the region. In fact, the population became increasingly homogenous, which did not produce nationalist tendencies before 1991, but sparked the emergence of an industrial society and culture. Meanwhile, The industrial profile of Upper Silesia was shaped considerably by intraregional migration, in contrast to other regions. In spite of the complicated ethnic makeup of the two districts, German and Polish nationalisms

collided in Upper Silesia following 1922. Donbas in turn, witnessed the confrontation of the Russian and Ukrainian nationalisms after 1991.

A census conducted in the Donbas area in 1926, showed that the population of the region amounted to ca. 3 million, with 64 percent Ukrainian, 26 percent Russian, 3 percent Greek, and 2 percent German. However, these figures were undoubtedly a result of the 'ukrainianization' of the region in the 1920s. The goal was to distinguish *between* 'Russian' Ukrainians and those who opted for the creation of an independent Ukrainian state during the Revolution. Throughout the Soviet period, Donbas was a heavily industrialized region where cities developed. Founded initially around a steel mill, the settlement of Yuzovka, with a population of about 200, grew to 5,000 after ten years; by the end of the 19th century, it was a city of 30,000 (Wyborcza). After the Revolution, in 1924, Yuzovka was renamed Stalino, which had a population of 500,000 before the outbreak of the German-Russian war. In 1961, the city was renamed again, becoming Donetsk. Today, the city has a population of ca. 900,000. In the area of what was at that time Prussian Upper Silesia, Katowice and other cities experienced comparable development.⁵ However, most relevant here is the fact that the cities of both Donbas and Upper Silesia underwent similar processes when it comes to their respective development as measured by population growth. In search of better living conditions, the surrounding rural populations moved to the cities, and became russified in Donbas and germanised in Upper Silesia. The Upper Silesian population continued to be either germanized or polonized after 1922 and then it either became polonized, or left for Germany after 1945.

The author of a monograph on the history of Donbas, as seen from the perspective of determining the identity of the residents of this leading industrial region, Marta Studenna-Skrukwa, cites data from 2001, when the first and, so far, only census was conducted during the period of independence. She states that

in 2001, Russians accounted for 38.2 percent of the population in Donetsk region (43.6 percent in 1989), while in the Lugansk region for 39 percent (44.8

⁵ A further similarity between Katowice and Donetsk is the fact that Katowice was renamed Stalinogród from 1953 to 1956.

percent in 1989). Another very important indicator is the percentage of people of Ukrainian nationality who recognized Russian as their mother tongue – in the Donetsk region it was as high as 58.7 percent, while in the Luhansk region – 49.4 percent. This data leads to a conclusion [that] (...): it is not feasible to make a clear distinction between Ukrainian and Russian cultural factors in Ukrainian society, and especially among the Donbas population. It would be extremely difficult (if at all possible) to determine how many Russian-speaking Ukrainians feel more Ukrainian and how many of them feel more Russian. This means that separatism could be potentially interesting also for Ukrainians who are part of the Russian-speaking community and interact with Russians on a daily basis, who would strongly oppose having to negate or reject certain elements of their own identity (Studenna-Skrucka, pp. 236–237).

In the 1990s, the regions in Poland, and other countries of the former communist bloc that strongly relied on heavy industry, experienced the results of the processes of social and economic transformation, facing unprecedented phenomena, such as the emergence of structural unemployment, impoverishment of entire social groups, and a lost sense of social security which socialist states had provided to their citizens, albeit at a low level compared to Western countries. In the wake of these changes, plants were closed down, leaving thousands of miners and steelworkers with a sense of injustice, leading to their contesting the changes. At that time, the stereotype of the demanding miner emerged in central and western Ukraine, who was a burden for Ukraine, which was in the midst of transformation of various dimensions of its social, economic, political and cultural life at the time. The essence of this change was supposed to be gaining economic and political independence from the Russian Federation and pivoting toward closer cooperation with the West. As in other former communist bloc states, these changes are described as ‘ostalgia,’ or a longing for social security. In Donbas, such attitudes were embodied by the ‘Soviet man.’ This term signified persons who advocated Russia, usually had problems with their own identity, and when asked whether they were Russian or Ukrainian, they would respond saying that they were ‘from Donbas.’ Friendliness towards Russia is greatest in the small towns surrounding declining mining hubs. Similar questions asked after 1989 in Upper Silesia were often answered by saying: ‘I’m an Upper Silesian.’

Marta Studenna-Skrukwa stresses that, after 1991, different visions of how an independent Ukrainian state should function emerged in Ukraine. She argues that it was not the successful actions of Ukrainian nationalists that led to the emergence of an independent Ukraine, but rather favourable circumstances. Therefore, Ukrainian politicians were faced with the task of developing a concept of Ukrainian national identity. Two projects for Ukrainianness emerged, constructed in Galicia and Donbas, respectively. They were radically different.

Even a cursory examination of the Galician and Donbas projects makes it possible to realize how contradictory they are and to what extent they correspond to two different interpretations of the Ukrainian history (...). The essential premise of the Donbas project is the formation of a modern Ukrainian nation on the principle of citizenship. In this context, political and economic ties are of greater importance in the process of forming an all-Ukrainian community, while ethnic and cultural ties belong more to the private sphere. (...) The Galician project for Ukraine is virtually the literal opposite of the Donbas version. It is founded on the assumption that a modern Ukrainian nation will rely on the ethnic principle, resulting in a clear and legally effective division into a dominant titular ethnos and national minorities. In this model, ethno-cultural ties strongly correlate with political ties. This project openly expresses the need to break away from the Russian and Soviet past and the need for derussification (Studenna-Skrukwa, p. 77).

In December 2016, the Zentrum fur Osteuropa und Internationalen Studien conducted a survey on both sides of the border that was created after Russia annexed part of Donbas in 2014, which showed that respondents clearly disliked the West.⁶ Nearly three-quarters of them were against

⁶ Nevertheless, the outcomes of surveys taken in areas of conflict should be handled with the utmost care, particularly when they touch upon these disputes. In addition, it should be noted that trust in the institutions that survey public opinion is limited in the post-Soviet area. In the case of this particular research, it is noteworthy that respondents from the separatist-controlled Donbas area were interviewed by telephone. Therefore, they can be assumed to have had a greater sense of anonymity, which usually translates into greater candor in their answers. In contrast, respondents from the Ukrainian Donbas area were interviewed in

Ukraine's accession to the European Union and to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. When asked what the status of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions should be, clear differences could be seen on both sides of the Donbas border (i.e. demarcation line) that was created in 2014. A special status for Donbas within Ukraine was supported by 26 percent of respondents from the 'Ukrainian Donbas' and 35 percent from the 'separatist-controlled Donbas.' The answer that Donbas should be the part of Ukraine was indicated by 65 percent of respondents from the 'Ukrainian Donbas' and 20 percent of respondents from across the border. The answer that Donbas should become an integral part of Russia was chosen by 5 percent of those asked on the Ukrainian side and 11 percent on the separatist-controlled side. Only 2 percent of respondents in the 'Ukrainian Donbas' and 33 percent of respondents across the 'border' accepted a solution whereby Donbas would have a special status in Russia. The most important conclusion to be drawn from these results is that residents of the separatist-controlled Donbas do not reject the option whereby this part of the region could remain within the borders of Ukraine. Fifty-five percent of respondents opted for this scenario (Gwendolyn Sasse, 2017). All that remains to be negotiated are the conditions that would allow them to accept Donbas remaining within the borders of the Ukrainian state.

People of Donbas

To address the topic of the article, identifying what socio-cultural features characterize Russian-speaking Ukrainians seems essential. What kind of attitudes and unsatisfied needs do they voice? Finding answers to these questions is significant, as they constitute the most numerous group in eastern Ukraine.

This is where the similarities to the situation of German-speaking Upper Silesians after 1945 are likely to be the greatest. Polish authorities committed the most mistakes and injustices against this part of the Upper Silesian

person. This tends to negatively affect the quality of the empirical material, as respondents may fear that their answers could be used against them. Polish sociologists studying the issues of national identity in Upper Silesians after World War II faced a similar problem.

population, which is why they distanced themselves from Polish culture. The most typical form of this distancing was their leaving their Heimats, which had failed to have become their 'private homelands'.

Having analysed the formation of ethnic and civic identity in Ukraine after 1991, Stephen Shulman argues that the modern Ukrainian state is a field of competition between two versions of ethnic identity. Shulman names the first version to be ethnic Ukrainian national identity, which relies on the conviction that both Ukrainian culture and Ukrainian language should be the dominant factors integrating society in Ukraine. The other version of ethnic identity in Ukraine is, in his opinion, the East Slavic national identity. It essentially relies on the concept whereby the Ukrainian nation is composed of two ethnic groups with two languages and cultures: Ukrainian and Russian, respectively, which due to their roots in a common history have unified (Shulman, 2004, p. 38).

According to Marta Studenna-Skrucka, the growing decentralization tendencies and the rise of regionalism in Donbas are "testimony to the failure – at least temporary – of the Ukrainian ruling class's project to create a political or civic nation in Ukraine" (Studenna-Skrucka, p. 277). This conclusion is strikingly consistent with the reasons identified for Upper Silesians distancing themselves from the Polish cultural offer by Maria Szmeja in 2000 and then reiterated in 2017.

Conclusions and warnings

Concluding the discussion so far, it should be said that between 1994 and 2004, 'Donetsker' was among the most popular self-identification categories in Donetsk. Galicia favored the broader categories, such as Ukrainian or *Zachidniak* [Westerner] more. The Donbas community's attachment to 'understanding homeland in regional terms' and the corresponding absence of the need to be part of a larger community may stem from their feeling that this need has never been fully satisfied. This is a typical phenomenon in border areas. At this point, it is worth recalling the similarity of Donbas and Upper Silesia, where the following responses were often given to questions about the homeland "[...] because we, Silesians, have always been the dumb ones. While in Germany, we were *Wasser Polaken*, and in Poland we were

not as respected as those who had arrived” (Łęcki, Wróblewski, p. 99–100). Similar sentiments are voiced in the Donbas region when questions are asked about the relationship between Donbas and Kiev.

This is particularly common in borderlands. Examples of a similar attitude were recorded by Józef Chałasiński in his research conducted in Upper Silesia in the mid-1930s, where he described a sense of Silesian distinctness that led to intensified separatist tendencies. This sense of Upper Silesian distinctness stemmed from the fact that their population in Poland did not feel to be either fully Polish or German. After the eastern part of Upper Silesia had been incorporated into the Polish state, its inhabitants had to define their attitude to their ever-present Germanness on the one hand, and define their place in Poland on the other. In the course of this process, the Polish state was too optimistic assuming that Upper Silesians would undergo a process of cultural-ethnic conversion from Germanness to Polishness en masse and quickly. This was not the case. One respondent in the study conducted by Józef Chałasiński, identified the reason for Upper Silesians distancing themselves from uncritically accepting the Polish cultural offer in the following manner:

Silesia is treated as if it was a colony (...), acquired against the will of its inhabitants, as if we had not wanted to join Poland. Officials are all strangers, there is no contact between common people and the officials whatsoever: the teaching staff are also mostly strangers, Silesia is treated as an external entity, those who come here consider us half-Poles. An Upper Silesian can hold no office; an Upper Silesian is known in advance to speak broken Polish. And we want to have our own people in offices and schools. And when they happen to give us a Silesian here, it is often one who is not respected by his own people (Chałasiński, p. 243).

While the author is aware that it is risky to simply transfer the experience of the residents of Upper Silesia after the Polish state entered their homelands in 1922 and 1945 to the Donbas area, some similarities can clearly be observed. The Ukrainian state has often had a similar attitude to its citizens from areas where the concept of ‘Russkiy mir’ has been retained, and become an increasingly attractive option for the ‘Soviet man.’ The result was that, after February 22, 2022, Russian soldiers, to their surprise, were not greeted

as liberators in western and central Ukraine. Similarly, Ukrainian soldiers who are reclaiming occupied lands are not always greeted with joy.

The challenge for the Ukrainian state is that referenda have been held in the Russian-occupied territories which involved officials of the Ukrainian state. Schools are functioning, with teachers who obtained teaching credentials from the Ukrainian state, as are hospitals, universities, courts, art and cultural institutions. Given the above, the Ukrainian authorities will need to verify the attitudes of their citizens during the occupation. This will undoubtedly involve both the verification of the nationality of those who, being citizens of the Ukrainian state, cooperated with the occupation authorities, as well as the rehabilitation of those who were forced to cooperate with the occupier. Taking into account all the differences, the experience in Upper Silesia may be used to create a legal and social framework for these procedures, or provide a safeguard against the mistakes that were made in Poland, harming many people. As a consequence, many of them chose to leave their 'private homelands.' The Upper Silesian regionalist community uses the term 'Upper Silesian tragedy' to describe these often traumatic events.

This is important, because many Ukrainian citizens who fear accountability for their cooperation and collaboration with the Russians, will probably take refuge in the Russian Federation. Even if some of them did not actively collaborate with the occupation authorities, they will be afraid of their Ukrainian neighbours who fled from the Russians, whose loved ones lost their lives as a result of the war and repression by the occupiers. It will be in the interest of the Ukrainian state to conduct verification of nationality and rehabilitation under a paraphrased version of the slogan for a similar process that took place in Upper Silesia in the 1940s: 'We don't want a single Russian on Ukrainian soil, but we won't give up a single Ukrainian soul to Russia.' As was the case in Poland, the reconstruction of the state after the war will require large human resources. As a result of migration processes before the war, and those triggered by Russia's assault on Ukraine, these resources will be in short supply. It should be borne in mind that many war refugees will choose not to return to the war-ravaged state, as in exile they are laying the foundations of a life for themselves and their family members in new places.

What can and should be done now, is to organize conferences bringing together Polish and Ukrainian scholars and authorities to develop the

assumptions behind the campaign of verification of nationality and rehabilitation. These meetings should also include representatives of Upper Silesian regionalists.

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