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Israeli-Ukrainian Relations after ‘the Euromaidan Revolution’ – the Holocaust and the New Ukrainian Identity in the Context of the European Aspirations of Ukraine

Abstract: The Euromaidan revolution totally reoriented Ukraine’s policy in both internal and external dimensions. The new Ukrainian authorities facing Russian aggression and domestic instability started to build a new national identity in order to consolidate social cohesion. Due to the fact that Kiev’s new historical narrative glorifies the Ukrainian nationalists from the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) who contributed to the Holocaust of Jews and committed mass murders on the representatives of other nationalities, such a policy may be a serious obstacle in the context of Ukraine’s external relations. The present article investigates particularly Israeli-Ukrainian relations after the Euromaidan revolution. The article analyses the impact of the new Ukrainian identity on bilateral relations as well as attempting to answer whether or not it may influence Kiev’s cooperation with the European Union. The article contains a brief description of the new identity building process in the post-Euromaidan Ukraine with special consideration of those elements of it, which are related to “Ukrainian Nationalism”.

Keywords: *European Union; Ukraine; Israel; Euromaidan; national identity; Ukrainian Nationalism; historical narrative; Holocaust; OUN; UPA*

Introduction¹

On the 21st of November 2013 Victor Yanukovich, then the president of Ukraine, withdrew from the Association Agreement with the European Union which led to the biggest mass protests in Ukraine since the “Orange Revolution” 2004. The so-called “Euromaidan

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revolution” had an evolutionary character with its pro-European and anti-governmental phases. As a result of the revolutionary events, Yanukovych’s regime was overthrown and social unrest spread over the whole of Ukraine. Due to the active involvement of the Russian Federation but also some western support towards demonstration, what was to be an internal issue of Ukraine evolved into one of the biggest crises in Europe since the fall of the Iron Curtain.

While the pro-European protesters have never trusted leaders of the Ukrainian opposition, the overlapping crisis became a chance for the most radical organizations and political parties to extend their political influence. In fact, these forces determined crucial events of the revolution, being the driving force behind the most violent clashes between the “Berkut” and the regular militia. In the context of the subject matter of this article, it is more than worth mentioning that these organizations i.e. “Pravy Sektor” (Right Sector) or “All-Ukrainian Union Svoboda” (Freedom) invoked the heritage of “Ukrainian Nationalism”². Their involvement was used by Russian propaganda to describe the Euromaidan revolution as the “fascist coup d’état” (see e.g. Shekhovtsov & Umland 2014; Ishchenko 2016; Bornio 2016). As a result of the Yanukovych overthrow, new pro-Western political elites came to power in Kiev. Despite its pro-European orientation, the new Ukrainian government initiated a process of historical narrative in order to build the whole-Ukrainian national identity that also included the heritage of “Ukrainian Nationalism”. It should be emphasized, however, that the Ukrainian nationalist movements from the XXth century were not the only constituents of such a narrative³.

In the face of Russian aggression, the new authorities in Kiev desperately sought for historical heroes who have fought against their eastern enemy. Among others, Ukrainian nationalists from Stepan Bandera’s faction of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN-b) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) became objects of this narrative⁴.

² The term “Ukrainian Nationalism” used in this article, refers to the ideological fascist movement represented mainly by the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. Its main ideologists/activists were among others Dmytro Dontsov, Mykhaylo Kolodzinsky, Yaroslav Stetsko, Stepan Bandera, Roman Shukhevych. “Ukrainian Nationalism” is often described in a literature as an “integral nationalism” or “ustashism” (from the Croatian Ustasa). More about the classification of the “Ukrainian Nationalism” in: Himka 2010; Rudling 2011; Rossoliński-Liebe 2014; Zaitsev 2015.

³ The process of national identity building refers also to the Holodomor victims (great famine in Ukraine 1932–1933), so-called Nebesna Sotnya (“Heavenly Hundred”, people killed during “Euromaidan”), Ukrainian state organizations from the interwar period, Ukrainian poets and others.

⁴ One should note however that Russian aggression and the later conflict in Donbas was not the only cause of such a narrative. Ukraine needed social cohesion in general. It is possible that through such activities the new government also tried to appease radical forces and politicians who were demanding glorification of their heroes. Furthermore, “Ukrainian Nationalism” is a vital cult especially in the Western part of the country. It is also worthy of mention that the state-sponsored glorification of the “Ukrainian Nationalism” was re-initiated in 2014, while there have already been such activities during Victor Yushchenko’s presidency.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that the members of above-mentioned organizations were fighting against the Red Army, they were followers of the fascist ideology in one (see e.g. Himka 2010; Rudling 2011, Rossoliński-Liebe 2014). During the Second World War, Ukrainian nationalists were actively involved in the Holocaust of the Jews as well as committing genocide⁵ on mostly Polish civilians (see e.g. Zięba 2016; Brandon & Lower 2008; Motyka 2016; Snyder 2004).

The present article deals with the issue of Israeli-Ukrainian relations after the Euro-maidan revolution. However, presentation of the whole scope of these relations is not the purpose of this article. Instead this research focuses only on these aspects of the bilateral relations that are linked to the very specific component of the new Ukrainian identity, namely, Ukrainian fascists organizations and their members who were involved in the Holocaust of the Jews. The analysis was conducted in the broader perspective of the European aspirations of Ukraine. In other words the research question is as follows: Might the new Ukrainian identity based on the legacy of the fascist movements responsible for crimes on Jews suspend Kiev's cooperation with the EU, and how important in this context is Israel or its wider Jewish community? Due to the great significance of Ukraine for the geopolitical architecture of Europe as well as its security system, the author of this article considers that the research problem is of great importance.

Hypothesis and the outline of analysis

The present research is based on two complementary assumptions. The first argues that after the Euromaidan revolution a new Ukrainian identity, which invokes to the legacy of "Ukrainian Nationalism" is being built. While the second argues that the new Ukrainian identity may suspend the process of integrating Ukraine with the European Union. The above mentioned hypothesis could be supplemented by the statement that Israel is a key actor in this matter. In the course of the analysis initiatives by the Ukrainian authorities, which relate to the subject matter were selected and examined. Then the efforts of the authorities were confronted with the social attitudes (secondary analysis of the poll results) and analysed in the broader context of European aspirations of Ukraine as well as its bilateral relations with Israel.

"Ukrainian Nationalism" and the historical narrative in the post-Euromaidan Ukraine

After the Euromaidan revolution, new Ukrainian authorities have begun to conduct its historical narrative referring to the OUN and the UPA in various dimensions – some of them are included hereunder to portray the general scope of the issue. As was mentioned above

⁵ Mass crime committed by the Ukrainian nationalists is described variously by different authors, some use the term "ethnic cleansing" or even "genocidal ethnic cleansing".

the whole process was to create a whole-Ukrainian identity that consolidates Ukrainian society and makes it more coherent. To include Ukrainian nationalists in such an identity the new administration has begun the process of their glorification, carried on in many levels including rhetorical, legal and symbolical activities. It must be emphasised that the myth of "Ukrainian Nationalism" refers mostly to the independence struggle, with its anti-Soviet resistance at its core. Especially, criminal acts of the OUN and the UPA's history remain unacknowledged. Concealment of the historical facts, however, is also a way of their falsification. Moreover, some Ukrainian politicians and officials openly deny the contribution of the OUN and the UPA to the Holocaust as well as contradicting any organised character of mass murder of Poles (see e.g. Cohen 2016a; Cohen 2016b; Rudling 2011; Rudling 2013; Motyka 2012). Additionally, one should bear in mind, however, that mythologisation and heroisation of the OUN and the UPA is a part of larger project that aims at de-communisation of the Ukraine.

The historical narrative, which refers to the "Ukrainian Nationalism", is being conducted on the level of rhetoric. Ukrainian politicians, including those of the highest rank, often call the OUN and the UPA members as heroes and fighters for freedom. In September 2014 during a Petro Poroshenko press conference, he was asked about his position on whether the UPA soldiers deserved recognition and he stated that now is the right time. Later on, via Twitter, Poroshenko acknowledged that "*the UPA soldiers [were] an example of heroism and patriotism to Ukraine*" (Poroshenko 2014). Such declarations frequently recurred later. For example on the 14th of October 2017 Poroshenko said "Today [...] on Ukraine Defender Day and the holiday of the Protection of the Blessed Virgin, we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the creation of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, an army that was truly national from the first days of its creation to the end of the struggle against the inmates of their native lands, since it was fully formed and supported by the local population" (Ukrinform 2017). During his speech on that day, the Ukrainian president noted that "*feats of the UPA heroes inspire current Ukrainian defenders*" which may confirm that cult of "Ukrainian Nationalism" is used as a means of the army's mobilisation in the context of the ongoing crisis in Donbas. Moreover, the President emphasised the UPA contribution to the independence struggle and even cited the oath of the formation. Poroshenko also referred to Polish-Ukrainian relations and made a short comment on "*hard pages of [Ukrainian] history*" (Poroshenko 2017), which clearly suggests that he was aware of the ambiguous character of the UPA's activities.

Despite the rhetoric, Ukrainian authorities carried out several other initiatives of both legal and symbolic character that glorifies Ukrainian nationalists. In 2014 the Defender of Ukraine Day was established and its celebration was designated for the 14th of October, which is a religious holiday *Pokrova* within the Eastern Orthodox tradition as well as the Day of Ukrainian Cossackdom. However, most importantly, the 14th of October is also perceived by some radical movements in Ukraine as the day of creation of the UPA. The above mentioned statements by Petro Poroshenko announced on the Defender of Ukraine

Day proves that this fact is not without significance. Thus one should interpret this initiative as partly glorifying the UPA especially in the context of current political reality. It is also worthy of mention that one of the greatest supporters of such an idea was the Svoboda party (Bureychak & Petrenko 2015, p.19–20), which annually organizes marches on 14th of October to commemorate the UPA⁶.

On 9 April 2015 – shortly after the early parliamentary elections in Ukraine which took place on 26 October 2014 – Verkhovna Rada, which is the Ukrainian parliament, passed a series of “de-communization” laws, one of which recognized the OUN and the UPA members as “fighters for Ukrainian independence”, as well as acknowledging their grades and distinctions. Moreover, according to the established law those who deny “the legality of the struggle for Ukraine’s independence in the twentieth century” could be penalized, which could prevent the critical reflection on “Ukrainian Nationalism” (Olszański 2015a; Portnov 2017, p. 352; Hyde 2015; Himka 2015). The initiator of the bill was Yuriy Shukhevych, radical politician⁷, long-term political prisoner and son of the UPA commander and German-Nazi collaborator Roman Shukhevych.

Not only the nationalistic organisations as a whole were an object of glorification but also their prominent members, who are their icons. On the 5th of March 2015 Ukrainian MPs commemorated Roman Shukhevych with a minute’s silence. Due to the activity of local authorities, many of the streets in Ukrainian cities are named after Ukrainian nationalists such as the just mentioned Shukhevych or the greatest icon of the movement, Stepan Bandera⁸. Especially in Western Ukraine, one may find a large number of monuments or tablets that commemorate and glorify Ukrainian nationalists (Dolinsky 2017). Each year on January the 1st (the birthdate of Bandera) modern nationalists organise marches in memory of their “national hero.”

In March 2014 Volodymyr Viatrovych was nominated to be the Director of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance (UINP), which in fact made him responsible for the historical narrative of the Ukraine (more in: Olszański 2017). Volodymyr Viatrovych is well known from his enthusiastic attitude towards “Ukrainian Nationalism”. There have been plenty of publications which are critical of his methodological approach and the fact that he is whitewashing Ukrainian history (see e.g. Rudling 2011; Cohen 2016b; Motyka 2012). The new director of the UINP pays special attention to the Jews who – as he is trying to prove – were members of the OUN or the UPA. Such a narrative is to whitewash any anti-

⁶ One should bear in mind, however that the date of 14th of October is a myth or a kind of propaganda, in terms of UPA foundation. Later on, the date was merged with the anniversary of Stepan Bandera’s assassination, as well as was used as a false claim that the UPA have been struggling against both Germany and Soviet Russia. See e.g. (P.A. Rudling 2011).

⁷ Y. Shukhevych was the leader of UNA-UNSO (Ukrainian National Assembly – Ukrainian People’s Self-Defence). More about this political organisation in e.g. (A. Umland, A. Shekhovtsov 2014).

⁸ It should be noted, however, that the streets were named after nationalists even before Euromaidan.

Semitic character of these organizations as well as to falsify any crime they committed on Jews. In November 2017 American historian Jared McBride published an article in which he de-mythologised the “legend of Leiba Dobrovski” introduced by Viatrovych as a Jew who was fighting in the UPA troops. As McBride explains Dobrovski was forced to cooperate with the UPA, rather than volunteer and as well was hiding his Jewish roots (McBride 2017). As Tadeusz Olszański argues, the historical narrative significantly changed under Viatrovych (Olszański 2015b), and both potential and political independence of the UINP is relatively high. What is more, Olszański also noted that the UINP administration “*clearly does not care about the possibility of a deterioration of relations with Poland or Israel, nor [...] with the European Union*” (Olszański 2017, p. 51).

Considering the above-mentioned activities that in some way glorify “Ukrainian Nationalism” it is justifiable to state that the cult of “Ukrainian Nationalism” seems to be very vital – especially on the political level. In terms of whole-Ukrainian identity, however, it is essential to investigate whether such a policy has any impact on society’s attitude. Due to the fact that the historical memory in post-Soviet Ukraine consisted of two antagonistic narratives – nationalistic in western Ukraine and post-Soviet in eastern Ukraine – a heroisation of the OUN and the UPA could be a serious obstacle for new authorities (see e.g. Portnov 2017). What seems to be interesting, despite the glorification of the OUN and the UPA, the merits of Ukrainians who were fighting in the Red Army were not marginalised nor ignored. These two antagonistic narratives differ from each other in the context of “Ukrainian Nationalism” perception. What is more, a perception of the involvement of Ukrainian nationalist organizations in the mass crimes is relatively low among Ukrainian society in general – especially in the Western part of Ukraine where the OUN and the UPA were the most active. For example, a majority of people in Volhynia and Galicia deny or declare that they are not aware of the commitment of the OUN and the UPA to the mass murders in the 1940s (Katchanovski 2015, p. 224–225).

There is no doubt that the Euromaidan revolution significantly reshaped social moods in Ukraine, also in terms of society’s attitude towards nationalism. According to the results of a series of surveys that have been conducted by the “Rating Group Ukraine” since April 2010, Ukrainians’ attitude toward “Ukrainian Nationalism” has significantly evolved. While in the period of 2010–2014 the majority of the population were opposed to the idea of acknowledgement of the OUN and the UPA as freedom fighters, there was a breakthrough in June 2014. Since mid-2014, a number of those who acknowledge Ukrainian nationalists as freedom fighters began to increase. In September 2015, the number of supporters of this idea outnumbered its opponents. In September 2017, 49% of respondents supported the acknowledgement of the OUN and the UPA as freedom fighters while only 29% opposed the idea (Rating 2017). In the period of 2014–2016, the number of those who wanted the prohibition of nationalism has decreased from the level of 40% to the level of 35%. Also, social attitude towards Stepan Bandera became more positive since 2012 (Rating 2016). The evolution of the social attitude began in 2014, thus one may state that the historical narrative

carried out by new authorities is one of the causes. Nonetheless, significant evolution of the Ukrainian national identity was registered both on the level of the political activities of elites and social attitudes.

It should be clearly indicated that the OUN and UPA were rather local movements, capable of operating in only a few regions and as well they were not supported by all Ukrainians. However, since the Ukrainian state began to conduct its historical narrative on the basis of these organizations, it became responsible for the fact that the outside world, increasingly, equate Ukrainians with "Banderites"⁹. In terms of this, the propaganda conducted by the new Ukrainian elites is non-negligible. Thus, the Ukrainian state will not be responsible for the OUN and UPA crimes, but for promoting their legacy, and for falsifying the historical record – if such policy continued. Consequently, the Ukraine should be aware of possible difficulties in relations with Poland, Israel, USA and other states as well as international organisations.

The Israeli-Ukrainian relations and the European aspirations of Ukraine in the context of the new Ukrainian identity.

Euromaidan was a real breakthrough for Ukraine not only in terms of its national identity but also in terms of its geopolitical orientation. Mass protests that brought new pro-Western elites to power, together with Russian aggression, forced Ukraine to follow the European path of development. Although no one expects full integration of Ukraine with the EU in the nearest future, a national identity built on the basis of fascist movements may be a serious obstacle for Ukraine in its European course. Or, what is perhaps more important, may effectively hinder western assistance to Ukraine especially in the context of Russian aggression. Additionally, the importance of the USA in this matter should be emphasised, and the risk of conflict between Jewish and Ukrainian diasporas in North America should be recognised.

Poland is one of the countries that is the most concerned about the new Ukrainian identity, which results from the suffering of many Polish civilians murdered by Ukrainian nationalists but also from the geopolitical importance of Ukraine to Poland¹⁰. However, due to the fact that the Holocaust of Jews is one of the most important constituents of the European memory (see e.g. Kucia 2016; Levy & Sznajder 2002), the issue of the new Ukrainian identity goes beyond just Polish-Ukrainian relations, and there is no doubt that

⁹ Bandera followers.

¹⁰ Great importance of geopolitical position of Ukraine to the national security of Poland, that originates in the so-called Giedroyc doctrine, was one of the main causes of the lack of open criticism by Polish governments over the glorification of "Ukrainian Nationalism". This strategy was changed only in 2016. Moreover, it should be emphasized that the Ukrainian crisis intensified Russian efforts to use historical conflicts (e.g. Polish-Ukrainian) in its strategy of decreasing of international support to the Ukraine.

Israel is a key actor in this matter. In the same time, the genocide of Poles committed by Ukrainian nationalists remains rather unknown for most Europeans. Thus, every voice criticising the new Ukrainian identity – especially those of Israeli officials – may influence European public opinion as well as European political elites, and in some aspects could be more influential than a Polish one.

The assumption that the new Ukrainian identity may hinder EU-Ukraine cooperation is not without cause. On the 22nd of January 2010, the then outgoing president Viktor Yushchenko awarded Stepan Bandera the title of Hero of Ukraine¹¹, which caused not only a Polish and an Israeli reaction but also a European one. One month later the European Parliament passed a resolution which criticised Ukraine for the acknowledgement of Stepan Bandera as a national hero. The resolution stated that the EP “deeply deplores the decision by the outgoing President of Ukraine, Viktor Yushchenko, to posthumously award Stepan Bandera, a leader of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) which collaborated with Nazi Germany, the title of ‘National Hero of Ukraine’; hopes, in this regard, that the new Ukrainian leadership will reconsider such decisions and will maintain its commitment to European values” (European Parliament 2010). Despite the fact that Yushchenko’s successor openly criticised the former president’s initiative it was the court, not Yanukovych who finally cancelled the decree. The case was crucial, however, because it has shown that the Ukrainian historical narrative is not without impact on cooperation with the EU.

Furthermore, according to the legal framework of the EU even just one member state is able to hinder or block cooperation with a third state. Ukraine experienced it in April 2016, when the Dutch rejected in a referendum the approval of the EU Association Agreement with Ukraine. Obviously the decision of the Dutchmen was not a result of their dissatisfaction with the Ukrainian glorification of fascist movements, however, this event unveiled the mechanism that may effectively hinder further cooperation of any state with the EU¹². In this context, it is worth citing Polish politicians of the highest rank who make future EU-Ukraine cooperation dependent on the historical issues. Jarosław Kaczyński, leader of the ruling party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice), stated that Poland “*cannot accept the fact that over last few years Ukraine has created a personality cult around people who carried out genocide against Polish people*”. “*I have told it very clearly to President Poroshenko – he continued – that they will not come into Europe with Bandera*” (Baranowska 2017). In July 2017, the then Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Witold Waszczykowski forewarned Ukraine in the same way. “*Our message is very clear: You will not be let into EU with Bandera. [...] Before Kiev will stand in front of the gateway to Europe, asking for membership, we will demand all issues to be cleaned. We will be as firm as Greece is in the case of Macedonia*” (Waszczykowski 2017).

¹¹ Earlier in 2007 Yushchenko glorified Roman Shukhevych in the same way.

¹² This is also the case of Greece and Macedonia dispute.

After the Euromaidan revolution, two events dominated Israeli-Ukrainian diplomatic relations the most and both were related to the activity of these states in the United Nations. In 2014 the Israeli Minister did not support the U.N. resolution that called all states and international organisations to not recognise Russia's annexation of Crimea. Israel's representative did not vote against the resolution, however, but instead of this simply did not attend the voting of the U.N. General Assembly¹³. In regard to the Russian engagement in the Middle East – especially its operations in Syria – as well as the relatively frequent Russo-Israeli talks on regional security, it is obvious that Israel needs to balance between Kiev and Moscow. Additionally, Israeli authorities have to take into account the U.S.' position and its rivalry with the Russian Federation over Ukraine. Thus, U.S. State Department Spokesperson Jen Psaki announced that Washington was “*surprised that Israel did not join the vast majority of countries that voted to support Ukraine's territorial integrity*” (Jerusalem Post 2014). One may deduce that Washington was not only surprised but also dissatisfied, even if Psaki declared that the issue was not of “*major concern*” (Jerusalem Post 2014; Ravid 2014). What seems to be interesting is that the Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin expressed forbearance to Israel's position in this matter due to its relevance to Israel's security – as he stated (Frantzman 2017).

In 2016 the second issue of significant relevance to Israeli-Ukrainian relations appeared. Namely, in December the Ukrainian representative at the U.N. Security Council voted against Israeli settlements in Jerusalem, which caused indignation in Israel as well as resulted in a diplomatic scandal. In direct response to this activity of Kiev, Benjamin Netanyahu cancelled the visit of Ukrainian Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman to Israel, which took place only after six months of strained relations. Again the Crimean annexation and the war in Donbas were the main causes of the event's development. Since the Russian aggression in Ukraine, Kiev constantly uses an argument of “international law violation” in order to accuse Moscow of illegal actions, to internationalise the conflict and to maintain a right to the uncontrolled territories which used to be under Kiev's governance. Therefore, it would be extremely inconsistent if Kiev had changed the narrative and voted in favour of Israel. As the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs argued, Ukraine “*has consistently stood for the respect of international law by everyone and everywhere, since, in our own case, we have experienced the tragic consequences that result from its violation*” (Homon 2016).

Nevertheless, from the perspective raised in this article issue, two other events are crucial. The first is a visit of the president of Ukraine to Israel and the second is a visit of his Israeli counterpart to Ukraine – which is even more important. Petro Poroshenko visited Israel in December 2015. In the course of the visit the Ukrainian president made a series of bilateral meetings with politicians and religious leaders as well as visiting the Yad Vashem Memorial. As a first Ukrainian president, Poroshenko gave a speech in Knesset, which made his visit

¹³ Israel was one of the 24 countries that did not attend to the voting over the Resolution 68/262 “Territorial Integrity of Ukraine”.

kind of special, especially from the Ukrainian perspective. During his speech, Poroshenko spoke about centuries-old Ukrainian-Jewish relations and made a series of comparisons that make Israel and Ukraine alike. Poroshenko explained the special closeness of Ukrainians and Israelis by arguing that both societies experienced “unimaginable tragedies” like the Holocaust and the Holodomor. The Ukrainian president also mentioned over two-and-a-half thousand Ukrainians who were recognized by Yad Vashem as the Righteous Among the Nations and reminded that in 2016 Ukrainian authorities would organise an official ceremony commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Baby Yar massacre. He also referred to the contemporary international issues with special emphasis to the Russian aggressive policy (Poroshenko 2015). Furthermore, in his speech, Poroshenko gave a statement of great relevance to the subject matter of this article. *At the same time, we also need to remember the negative episodes of our history, when collaborators, who could be found, unfortunately, in almost all European countries that had been occupied by the Nazis, were helping those monsters in bringing about the so-called “Final Solution of the Jewish Question.” As soon as Ukraine regained its independence, its leadership apologized for the crimes that had been committed by some Ukrainians during the years of the Holocaust. Naturally, I share this stance [...] and I’m doing it in the Parliament of the Jewish state, as I stand before the children and grandchildren of Holocaust victims, the people who have survived through this horrible tragedy of the Jewish people, and before all citizens of your country. The crimes of the collaborators are knocking not only at your hearts but also at ours. We cannot let them be forgotten* – Petro Poroshenko said. (Poroshenko 2015).

Such a statement by the Ukrainian president clearly suggests that he is fully aware of the contribution of Ukrainian collaborators to the Holocaust. In his speech, however, Poroshenko did not mention the fact that Jews were also murdered in organised way by the Ukrainian organisations like the OUN and the UPA. The narrative of local collaborators who *could be found in almost all occupied by the Nazis countries* significantly marginalises the problem responsibility of the Ukrainian nationalists. In fact, the OUN and the UPA were not a part of official apparatus of the Ukrainian state – which anyway did not exist at that time – thus Kiev is not legally responsible for its genocidal activities. However, their myth is an important component of the new Ukrainian identity and historical narrative, which is being built under Poroshenko and with his contribution, which in turn puts Kiev in a difficult position. In fact, a policy of glorification of the OUN and the UPA is incoherent with the acts of apology and statements like that cited above. One should bear in mind, however, that Poroshenko’s statements were dependent on political situation of Ukraine that seeks internal stability and faces the “propaganda war”. Thus, Ukraine’s relations with partners seems to be even more complicated.

Israel’s president Reuven Rivlin visited Ukraine in September 2016. While visiting the country he met Ukrainian politicians and leaders of Jewish organizations as well paying tribute to the victims of the Holodomor. One could notice a kind of symmetry in the

Poroshenko and Rivlin visits. Israel's president like his counterpart before him also had an opportunity to give a speech during a special plenary of the Ukrainian Parliament as part of a day of commemorations for the 75th anniversary of the Babi Yar Massacre. During his speech, Rivlin recalled the dark pages of Ukrainian history and due to the fact that he directly blamed the OUN for the Holocaust, the speech is essential for this analysis. "*Many of the collaborators were Ukrainian, among the most notorious the members of the OUN who carried out pogroms and massacres against the Jews and in many cases handed them over to the Germans*" – Rivlin said (Rivlin 2016). The Israeli president not only blamed the Ukrainian nationalists for mass crimes but also gave a very suggestive message to the members of the Verkhovna Rada by saying that "*The valley [Babi Yar] saw two horrific sins. The first sin, was the sin of murder and destruction. The second sin was the sin of concealment and destruction of the memory. The second sin was no less systematic or relentless than the first – it was as comprehensive as the massacre itself. [...] No interest can ever justify silence, apathy, or hesitation in the face of anti-Semites. And national leaders who support anti-Semitic, racist, or neo-Nazi ideas will not be welcomed as friends among the family of nations*" (Rivlin 2016). By saying this Israel's President decisively emphasised his lack of acceptance of the current historical narrative of Ukraine. Moreover, he clearly suggested that such a narrative may be destructive in terms of international relations and may result in international ostracism. The statement by the highest ranked Israeli politician may have a great impact on international public opinion. Especially when the issue refers to the Holocaust, a neo-fascism or anti-Semitism.

Reuven Rivlin's speech was widely commented on by the Ukrainian politicians/elites who were disagreeing with the points that Israeli president made on the OUN's contribution to the Holocaust. In direct reaction to this Volodymyr Viatrovych stated that the OUN contribution to the Holocaust is a Soviet myth that is now being repeated by Rivlin (Viatrovych 2016). Such a commentary was actually a denial of Ukrainian nationalists responsibility for mass murders of Jews and a kind of criminal offense, punishable according to the Ukrainian "de-communisation law". Member of the Ukrainian Parliament and leader of the Radical Party, Oleh Lyashko, even demanded that Israel apologise for the statements made by president Rivlin (Lyashko 2016).

Additionally, it is worth making a short note that also the Ukrainian and global Jewish communities, as well as other groups interested in this matter were afraid of the consequences of the new Ukrainian narrative. In April 2015, 70 scholars and experts on Ukraine wrote an open letter to the president of Ukraine and the chairman of the Ukrainian Parliament to reject the legal acts of the 9th of April 2015, described above, that were partly glorifying the OUN and the UPA (Marples 2015). In April 2017, Eduard Dolinsky, the director of the Ukrainian Jewish Committee wrote an article for the New York Times in which he accused the government of links with far-right movements. He also enumerated anti-Semitic acts of vandalism. Dolinsky pointed out that the Babi Yar's commemorative memorial was vandalized nine times in 2015 and 2016 and stated that "the climate of anti-Semitism can

be found elsewhere” (Dolinsky 2017). All those events, comments, letters, speeches have a great impact on international opinion. There is no doubt that the voice of Israeli politicians is especially influential and may strengthen criticism of Ukraine. Nothing may enlighten problem better than a brief look at the titles in the most prominent news agencies (see e.g. Cohen 2016b; Cohen 2016a; Milne 2014; Dolinsky 2017; Liphshiz 2016).

Conclusions

After the Euromaidan revolution, the Ukrainian government redefined the historical narrative in order to create a new whole-Ukrainian identity. For various reasons this new identity is to be based also on the legacy of the ”Ukrainian Nationalism” movements. The historical narrative conducted by the Ukrainian authorities significantly reshaped social attitudes towards the cult of ”Ukrainian Nationalism” which is becoming more and more popular. Since Kiev has chosen to cooperate with the West, every act that glorifies fascist units responsible for mass crimes seems to be a great obstacle for Ukraine. It is not certain that such a policy will hinder Ukraine’s cooperation with the EU and the West or will limit their assistance to Kiev; however, some indicators of such a scenario have already appeared. Due to the fact that the the OUN and the UPA contributed to the Holocaust, Israeli-Ukrainian relations are strongly related to this matter. The process of the building of a new Ukrainian identity was not without impact on the bilateral relations, as appeared the most during Reuven Rivlin’s speech in the Ukrainian Parliament. Since the Holocaust is an important element of the European memory every statement that criticises the new historical narrative of Kiev may have a great impact on public opinion in European countries.

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