



The Ideological and Ontological Causes of Russia's War on Ukraine. West versus East; Tyranny versus Democracy



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Abstract: The article deals with the causes of Russia's war on Ukraine, which is based on political and geopolitical interests, economic and military strategies, ambitions of individual political leaders, and mentality factors. The ontological basis of the war is the historically formed fundamental difference between the spiritual world, mentality traits of Ukrainians and Russians, which formed under the influence of a particular culture, with its ethnic, value and worldview coordinates, and under the influence of ideologies that determined the features of social and political life at different historical times. A strong spiritual system is created in the social and cultural space of the state, which preserves its values from generation to generation in the culture, forming a stable mentality and enduring attitudes. Their conceptual comprehension expands the context of cause-and-effect connections, helps to understand the situation more deeply and to choose optimal effective mechanisms for gradually successfully resolving the complex geopolitical situation that threatens the whole world.

Keywords: Russia's war on Ukraine; European civilization; Asian civilization; mentality; democratic values; authoritarianism; totalitarianism.

Introduction

*Wherever the Ukrainians recover
territory, they save lives, and re-establish
the principle that people have a right
not to be tortured, deported,
and murdered.*

Timothy Snyder

The topic of this study is actualized by Russia's full-scale military aggression against Ukraine, which began in February 2022. However, Russia's war against Ukrainian statehood and the Ukrainian nation in its various forms started four centuries ago. The military confrontation in eastern Ukraine has been taking place since 2014, 9 years now.

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On 24th February 2022 a full-scale war began for all Ukrainians, with massive bombing, seizure and occupation of territory, and numerous casualties among both military and civilians. This is not a war for resources and expansion of territory (although this component is also important). This is a brutal ideological colonial war, a genocide of the Ukrainian people (Snyder 2022), who have chosen a path of development based on democratic values and integration into the community of European countries.

The current situation in Ukraine is extremely complex and difficult to put into words. Ukrainians are fighting for their lives, the lives of their families and friends, for their homeland and for justice. The tremendous and courageous military resistance, the heroic struggle of Ukrainians, as well as the assistance provided by volunteers, are all impressive. At the same time, the bitter statistics of tens of thousands of dead, wounded soldiers and civilians, killed and abducted children are also striking. Medieval barbarism in the 21st century in the geographical center of Europe continues. Russia's war and destruction of a peaceful country, threats to attack European countries and use nuclear weapons are unacceptable: this is tyranny against democratic values.

The world has overlooked Russian fascism, underestimated its scale, imperial ambitions and capabilities, and failed to respond appropriately to Russia's seizure of part of Georgia in 2008, and part of Eastern Ukraine and the Crimean peninsula in 2014. It is obvious that Russia's wars are illegal, but the rule of law is currently not protecting itself. And so we have a real threat of the war spreading further into Europe, as well as the threat of war in Asia (China and Taiwan). Today, the issue of Ukraine and assistance in the fight against the aggressor have united political forces and societies across Europe. Military and humanitarian aid, tough sanctions and maximum isolation of Russia are extremely necessary. Public awareness of the situation and active civic engagement are equally important. The world should know more about Ukraine and Russia, about the causes of Russia's war on Ukraine, to realize the possible consequences, and to stop Russian-style tyranny and fascism. The basis of the international order is that one country cannot intrude into another and annex its territory, as Russia is doing.

The defeat of Putin's authoritarianism gives a chance for freedom and security, for protection and strengthening of the system of values and international law, which are a valuable heritage of the entire history of humanity, providing guarantees of stability of the world order and preservation of life on Earth.

The purpose of the following study is to analyze the ideological and ontological basis of Russia's war with Ukraine. How is it possible that thousands are killing, and millions of Russians are supporting it? And how do the statements such as 'Ukrainians, Russians, and Belarusians are one brotherly nation' and the total hatred of Russians for Ukrainians, the desire to humiliate, subjugate and destroy, correlate with each other? It is impossible to understand Russia's actions from a rational standpoint. The ideology of the 'Russian world' ('Russkiy mir') and the imperial ambitions of the Russian authorities do not recognize the existence of Ukraine as a self-sufficient state that has chosen an

independent path and a course toward European integration. Russia continues to kill, destroy, rob, rape, kidnap and deport the Ukrainian children to its territory. Russian mass media produce fake news on a daily basis, invent new justifications for their massive crimes, mislead the world and their own society, and wait for Ukraine's allies to 'get tired of helping' Ukraine.

We see the root causes of Russia's war on Ukraine and its support by Russian society in the difference in the mentality of Ukrainian and Russian peoples, who are implementing different civilizational projects: Ukrainians – European; Russians – Asian. Therefore, we focus on the peculiarities of the formation and content of the ontological and axiological components of the spiritual world of these two nations.

1. Was the War a Surprise?

If we are talking about the full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022, then 'yes' and 'no' at the same time. 'No' for the Ukrainian military, who have been fighting and defending their country since the military invasion of Eastern Ukraine in 2014. This led to the occupation of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, the annexation of the Crimean peninsula, followed by their looting and destruction, destabilization of economic and cultural life, physical extermination of anti-Russian civilians and influential public figures. Since 2014, the Ukrainian army has been strengthening, the military has been hardened in battles, people have been dying, and volunteers have been helping all along. The world did not react appropriately, so Putin and his entourage interpreted this as 'you can go on like this'.

A 'yes' for the majority of Ukrainians. Although this is not the first time in history that Ukrainians were subjected to genocide by Russia. We also remember Russia's invasions of Afghanistan, Georgia, Syria, and other countries. However, millions of Ukrainian's could not believe that their peaceful homeland could be bombed, destroyed, raped and pillaged by Russia in full view of the whole world.

2. What Preceded the War?

Russia's war against Ukraine has been going on for four centuries in various forms: seizure of territories, Russification, repression, extermination of a layer of intellectuals (executions, imprisonment, deportations to Siberia and Central Asia, etc.), suppression of peasant resistance and dispossession (Russian authorities killed more than 10 million Ukrainian peasants through man-made famines), ideological propaganda, rewriting history, etc.

Humiliating Ukrainians, Belarusians and other colonized peoples, brutally suppressing their resistance, Russia has been building its own empire throughout its existence, rewriting history with impunity and creating narratives favorable to it, in particular, 'the Ukrainian people does not exist,' 'Kyivan Rus is the ancestral home of the

Russian, not the Ukrainian people', and many others.

3. A Brief Historical Overview

The Ukrainian lands became dependent on Russia in the second half of the seventeenth century, when the Cossack Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky concluded a military and political alliance between two states – the Hetmanate (Ukraine) and the Moscow Kingdom (Russia). In fact, the Hetmanate was placed under the protectorate of the Moscow Kingdom, while preserving the basic rights and freedoms of the Zaporizhzhian Army. However, the original agreement was broken, and the promised rights were quickly canceled: The Hetmanate was transformed into a severely limited administrative autonomy without the right to foreign policy relations, and this effectively began the Moscow occupation of Ukraine. Ukrainians' attempts to gain independence during the period of weakening of the dominant empires were brutally suppressed. In 1922, the Bolsheviks proclaimed that Ukrainian lands would become part of the USSR, and in 1939, the Soviet government occupied western Ukraine. Ukraine gained its independence in 1991 due to the collapse of the USSR, and since then Russia has launched a powerful information war against Ukraine – an avalanche of propaganda and manipulation, distortion of facts, the main purpose of which is to destabilize the socio-political situation in Ukraine, to bring it back into Russia's sphere of influence, and to prevent its integration into the European space and joining NATO (as its neighbor Poland managed to do).

During the Revolution of Dignity (November 2013 – February 2014), when Ukrainians defended the European direction of their country's development and overthrew the pro-Russian government, under fire from Russian snipers in the center of Kyiv, Russia brazenly invaded Ukraine, violating the Budapest Memorandum (a 1994 agreement under which Ukraine gave up nuclear weapons in exchange for security guarantees from the United States, Britain and Russia), and occupied part of Ukraine's territory. Then the hybrid phase of the war began: a combination of military operations (undeclared, under the guise of local separatist movements sponsored by Moscow) and information warfare. The Ukrainian state could not fully develop in such conditions. Unfortunately, the international community and Ukrainian diplomacy failed to stop the aggressor and resolve the local armed conflict. On the contrary, in 2022 Russia launched an aggressive full-scale war in Ukraine.

4. Why Does Russia Need Ukraine?

Russia's war on Ukraine is based on Russia's aggressive policy and imperial ambitions, on civilizational confrontation – a clash between European and Asian values, interests, and development prospects. The situation is significantly complicated by Russia's unwillingness to recognize and practice international law and its total rejection

of democratic values of the Western world due to its dominance in global politics and economics.

Russian politicians and a significant part of their electorate (especially imperialists) see the Western world (the United States and European countries) as their enemies. Ukraine, which has chosen the Western vector of development, is perceived not as an independent subject of international law, but as part of the "Moscow-Orthodox civilizational project" that is alien and largely hostile to the Ukrainian statehood (Smolii & Yas 2022, 13; Pirozhkov & Khamitov 2016). Supporters of the 'Russkiy mir' idea consider the collapse of the USSR to be the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century and refuse to accept the deconstruction of the cult of the Russian people, which has long been imposed on Ukrainians (as well as Belarusians). Appealing to the 'betrayal' of the so called 'common cause' by Ukrainians, they cannot accept the fact that the neighboring people had the courage and will to separate from the imperial Russian people, and do not support "the great cause of confrontation, fear and hatred of the West" (Kalakura, Rafalsky & Yuriy 2017, 487).

The part of Russian society is still devoted to the idea of messianism, imperial stereotypes and nostalgia for the 'great powerful Russia', the anti-Western worldview and anti-Americanism, hence the previous Soviet confrontational psychology has not been rethought (Shulga 2006). Therefore, Russia's pressure on the former Soviet republics is a desire for 're-colonization'. After all, if there is an independent Ukraine and Belarus, there is no Russian Empire.

That is why pro-Russian forces are waging an information and violent war against Ukraine:

- spreading disinformation, manipulating public consciousness, imposing ideas aimed at restoring Ukraine's colonial status, forming images of bloody Ukrainian nationalists, and the inferiority of the Ukrainian people (Kornieiev, Ryabichev & Glushkova 2022);
- waging a full-scale war as a so called 'liberator' country, but in fact it is an aggressor that kills and tortures military personnel and civilians, kidnapping children in the process, and destroying towns and villages that it cannot capture and conquer.

The ideology of the 'Russkiy mir' is anti-Ukrainian, anti-European, destructive and disruptive by nature, and brings stagnation and decline, destroyed human lives (a vivid example is Abkhazia, Transnistria, Crimea, and separatist entities uncontrolled by the Ukrainian state – so called 'Donetsk People's Republic' and 'Luhansk People's Republic').

For centuries, Russia's existence and the formation of its cult of a 'mighty empire' (although it is a parasitic state by nature) has been achieved through aggressive expansion, rewriting its own history and appropriating others' (primarily Ukrainian)

history, physical extermination of intellectuals, suppression of opposition sentiments, and information brainwashing of societies. We agree with M. Bykova that it is quite plausible that another important reason for the senseless and brutal attack on Ukraine and the sharp deterioration of the situation inside Russia is Putin's desire to grab, maintain and advance his own power (Bykova 2022, 442).

At a time when European countries, along with the rest of the civilized world, are investing resources in the development of science and technology, education, culture and tourism, Russia is building up its military armament, physically destroying the opposition, continuing aggression wars and threatening to use nuclear weapons.

5. Ukraine and Russia: Differences in the Spiritual Universe, Mentality Opposites

Analyzing the history of Ukrainian-Russian relations, we must recognize that the Ukrainian, Russian, Belarusian peoples have quite a lot in common, including peculiarities of worldview, cultural traditions, dominant Orthodox faith, and linguistic similarities. The explanation is, first of all, the historical experience of close neighbourship and being part of the same state and political entities in the past (Kyivan Rus, The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Moscow Kingdom, the Russian Empire, the USSR).

However, the historical fate of each nation had its own significant differences, and thus its own distinctive unique culture. The mentality of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples and their fundamental ontological values are completely different. This refutes the claim that Ukrainians and Russians are one nation, no matter how actively this idea is promoted by supporters of the 'Russkiy mir'.

Since mentality is a kind of cultural and genetic code of civilization, a comparative analysis of mentalities allows us to find out which civilization is closer to Ukrainians – Western or Eastern. We define mentality as an integral feature of peoples (social community) that is formed throughout the history of its existence and reflects the peculiarities of the spiritual world: a way of feeling and thinking, peculiarities of world perception, patterns of behavioral reactions, and fundamental values (conscious and latent) (Hordiichuk 2021, 78–79). Mentality is a generalized national character that is objectively expressed in values, folk customs and traditions, art, social and political life, etc. In times of crisis, mental traits are activated, and their latent features become visible and influential.

The cradle of Ukrainian history was formed by the powerful state of Kyivan Rus (the medieval Eastern European feudal monarchical state with its capital in Kyiv that existed between the 9th and 9th century), and the Galicia-Volhynia principality (12th and 14th centuries). These state entities had rich cultural heritage and traditions, as well as strong ties with European countries, but due to destructive nomadic attacks, Mongol invasions, and internal power disputes, they were weakened and absorbed by more powerful

neighboring countries.

The formation of Russians was carried out through integration with ugro-finnish and turkic sub-ethnic groups (Baskakov 1979; Gumilev 1992; Hutsalo 2007; Kalakura, Rafalsky & Yuriy 2017, etc.), and this is manifested in the features of the Russian mentality, culture, political traditions, and patterns of social life.

The Ukrainian elite 'gravitated' to Europe (the representatives of wealthier Ukrainian families received European education and professional skills, married European representatives, and thus joined European civilization and adopted values and attitudes, best practices, etc.). In contrast, Russians dissociated themselves from the West, demonstrating an openly negative attitude towards the European world, which led to the emergence of an 'anti-Western' trend in Russian society (Eurasianism, 'Slavophilism', and recently – the neo-Eurasianism). Those who deny the European roots and intentions of Ukrainians to take their rightful place in the group of European democratic states and seek to 'fit' Ukraine exclusively into the Eurasian space, deliberately support Ukrainophobic sentiments and the desire to consolidate Ukraine's colonial status (Kozlovets' 2009, 519–520).

The four centuries of Ukraine's being a part of the Russian Empire accumulated a deep layer of forgeries and falsifications. Many ideological myths were created (about Russia being the 'big brother', the 'common cradle' of the three brotherly peoples, the fundamental 'primacy' of Russia in all spheres of life, etc.), which almost completely hid the true historical content of Ukrainian (and Russian) history, culture, and spirituality (Bychko 1997, 322).

Russian historians, rewriting history at the behest of the Moscow tsars, assigned Ukraine the role of a younger brother of the Great Russian people, who aspires to be one with them. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Ukrainian historian, public and political figure M. Hrushevsky proved the separateness and originality of Ukrainian history since the times of Kyivan Rus and the Galicia-Volhynia principality. He argued that there is a huge historical, cultural and spiritual boundary between the Ukrainian and Moscow (Russian) people, and profound differences that only people blinded by centuries of Russian propaganda cannot see. The Ukrainian nation has historically gravitated toward Western culture, with the dominance of the value of man and his freedom (based on agricultural Slavic tribes), although they have Eastern oriental influences; the Russian people, although somewhat Europeanized, have an oriental spirit with a pronounced Asian influence that does not attach value to individual human life (based on nomadic Ugro-Finnish tribes) (Hrushevsky 1991, 141–144).

For centuries, the Russian state (the Grand Principality of Moscow, the Moscow Kingdom, the Russian Empire, Soviet Russia, the Russian Federation) built a special world with its own principles, which was opposed to Western civilization and universal Orthodoxy. The metaphysical project of Russian society cannot be reduced to either Orthodoxy or Pan-Slavism, although these worldviews are quite significant. The conditions

of its formation are, first of all, the huge extent of its territory, the long Mongol–Tatar yoke, a specific system of government organization, and the actual absence of the institution of civil society – and thus of its representative structures, etc. (Halapsis 2008, 221–227).

One of the first scientific studies aimed at a comprehensive comparative analysis of Ukrainians and Russians is the work of the prominent Ukrainian historian, ethnographer, public and political figure M. Kostomarov, entitled *Two Russian Nationalities*. In this historical and ethno-psychological study, based on a comprehensive analysis of the historical, religious and ethnopolitical factors of the formation and development of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples, Kostomarov substantiated significant differences in the fundamental worldview and peculiarities of all spheres of life, and thus distinguished between the two nations. Among the main features of Ukrainians, Kostomarov singled out deep religiosity, a desire for democracy, the value of freedom, the prevalence of individualism over community. In particular, he noted that “the South Russian tribe was characterized by the preference for personal freedom, the Great Russian tribe by the preference for community” (Kostomarov 2012, 46); Russians value the generality (God and the king) over the individual, while Ukrainians value the individual more than the generality (Kostomarov cf., 62). In Kostomarov’s scientific research, we also find information that the name of the South Russian people was stolen from them: “Catherine II by her decree gave the Moscow people the name of Russian and forbade them to use their ancient name – Muscovites” (Kostomarov 2012, 16).

C. Plochy, a Ukrainian historian specialising in Eastern European history who has built a career in the United States, in his thorough study of the origins of Slavic nations and pre-modern identities in Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus, argued that a separate model of Moscow identity was formed in the 15th and 16th centuries, based on the ideas of loyalty to the tsar and Moscow Orthodoxy as the only true religion (Plochy 2015, 391). All three East Slavic states developed separate national identities (Plochy cf., 396).

A number of scholars have written about the fundamental differences between Ukrainians and Russians, among them we highlight the works of P. Shtepa and E. Hutsalo. The Ukrainian historian and publicist, public figure in exile P. Shtepa argues that Russians (Muscovites) have nothing in common with Ukrainians and Slavs in general, neither physically nor spiritually, because the former are Asians, and Ukrainians are Europeans (Shtepa 2008, 27). The researcher points out the following features of the Russian mentality:

- historically formed nomadic character, which is manifested in the inability to run an efficient economy, because due to constant movements, the great-grandfathers of Russians did not need to build long-term premises, equip them and decorate them;
- idleness, laziness, inability to work creatively;
- distrust (‘Muscovites do not trust anyone’), because during the centuries there

was an obligation to denounce the enemies of the tsar, emperor, dictator, etc., and without a well-organized system of denunciation, without systematic protection and rewarding of traitors, Russians would not have been able to conquer and hold other nations for a long time;

- strength is the only argument that “Muscovites understand and respect” (Shtepa 2008, 28–37).

The Ukrainian writer and journalist E. Hutsalo, in his eloquently titled *The Mentality of the Horde*, comprehends the historical development of the Russian Empire as an Asian despotism whose people are deprived of both the concepts and aspirations to build a Western-style constitutional state. Moreover, by enslaving Ukraine and imposing its own order, the empire interrupted the prospects for Ukraine's democratic development, which were laid down in historical traditions dating back to the elements of democracy in Kyivan Rus. The researcher examines the relationship between the Ukrainian and Russian peoples in the context of the opposition of two types of civilizations: settled, agricultural, on the one hand, and nomadic, invasive, on the other. Having spread over a vast space, accustomed to robbery and living off the labor of others, the conquering nation destroys the established economic system of the enslaved peoples, their customs, culture, identity, and mentality, which is organically integrated into the environment. The scholar calls on Ukrainians to make every effort not to be drawn into the Eurasian space (Hutsalo 2015, 45).

Shtepa's conclusions are confirmed by the current war unleashed by Russia on Ukrainian territories, which has again “proved to everyone and to itself that Russia cannot be trusted” (Shtepa 2008, 59), The “Russian army, Russian weapons inevitably lead to Russian colonization” (cf., 21), including robbery, rape, torture, mass murder, destruction and decline.

The contemporary Ukrainian philosopher S. Datsyuk in his speech at the international conference “The War of Identities: Russia vs. the West” (November 2015), summarized many years of research on the features of the Russian mentality, identified and substantiated its main features:

1. Avoidance of responsibility, delegation it to others – to the collective, community, state, God, anyone but oneself, which is evidence of the Russians' tendency to various forms of collective subordination and dependence (imperial, church, Soviet-ideological, media, etc.). Such subordination can be called a modern form of slavery, the domination of the state over society.

2. The primacy of the general (collective) over the personal and individual. This feature is closely related to the previous one. Collective paternalism in Russia generates loyalty and obedience. Such collectivism is created and unprecedentedly managed

by the state through coercion, propaganda, information zombification, elimination and destruction of the opposition. The foundation of Russia's solidarity is hatred of the West, of 'ungrateful' Ukrainians, Georgians, and other external 'enemies', which successfully diverts attention from a number of internal problems. Instead, Ukrainians are characterized by individualism and free, positive, non-state solidarity.

3. In the choice between reason and feelings, Russians overwhelmingly choose feelings (emotional impulse, quite often emotional breakdown). This trait affects life 'according to the mood': sometimes under the influence of sadness, sometimes of boundless fun. It also leads to an inability to discipline and the world-famous 'eternal Russian mess', situations of emergency even in systematic processes.

4. The desire to live by the truth and justice is more pronounced than the striving for freedom. In this point, S. Datsyuk turns to the analysis of the traumas of Russia, especially of the twentieth century (related to the 1917 revolution, World War II, Stalinist repressions, the Khrushchev thaw, Brezhnev's stagnation, Gorbachev's collapse of the USSR, etc.), which 'poisoned the Russian soul'. A century ago, Russians sincerely believed in world justice, but now they believe in 'justice for Russia' and terrify the whole world with their anger, aggression, and chauvinistic sentiments (Datsyuk 2014).

5. Legitimization of theft, bribery and deception. Manipulations, elevated to the rank of official policy, are perhaps the most destructive factor in Russian society. In Ukrainian-Russian relations, the amount of lies, distortions of facts, and the use of dirty manipulative technologies is overwhelming (the violation of Ukrainian-Russian agreements, the events of the occupation of Crimea and the hybrid war, total manipulation through the official media: 'there are no Russian troops on the territory of Ukraine', 'civilians are being shelled by [Ukrainian] Banderites and the Right Sector', Ukrainian patriots are traitors, fascists, Nazis, etc.). This raises the following question: Is it possible to negotiate with Russia if it is constantly lying to the world? Moreover, it does not even want to distinguish truth from lies. And this reality is in dissonance with another feature of the Russian mentality: namely the desire for justice and truth. Therefore, the Russian state, through its imperial policy and impunity, oppresses the 'Russian soul', destroys its mystery and creates a riddle that "terrifies the whole world, but above all, the peoples neighboring Russia and thinking people in Russia" (Datsyuk 2015).

The Russian mentality has historically been shaped by a number of factors. Among them the most important are: geographical location and natural environment (changed as a result of wars of conquest, dynamic migration, a new religion: Orthodox Christianity, influence of Islam), historical events, the neighborhood of Turkic tribes (the mixing of Slavs peaceful, hospitable, gentle Slavs with Turks and Ugro-Finnish groups provoked a tendency to melancholy, depression, and cruelty), the community way of life (paternalism, which 'turns a blind eye' to corruption, bribery, and theft). And while the Western world has a threefold division of the universe (the divine world, the demonic world, and the

human world) and its inhabitants maintain an active life position: changing their reality in accordance with their desires and aspirations. The Russian concept of the universe is dual: either divine or demonic, hence the contradictory temperament of Russians, full of extremes and sharp reactions, and their focus on maximalism (creating an ideal world of wars, revolutions, the 'Russkiy mir', or complete self-absorption and asceticism).

Instead of acting and changing reality like Europeans, Russians would rather complain about their enemies, feel offended and insulted, resort to asceticism or alcoholism (Kalakura, Rafalsky & Yuriy 2017, 522). It seems that the mentality that has been formed in a strong correlation with the Orthodox religion is unprepared for a market economy. Although Russia has huge natural resources, its people (with the exception of oligarchic clans) live poorer than Europeans.

Confirmation of these features of the Russian spiritual world is found in the works of Russian researchers (Berdyaev 2000; Kozlov 2013; Prokhorov & Sternin 2006; Rozov 2010; Yurevich & Ushakov 2009, and others), as well as calls to recognize their weaknesses and work together to change them. For example, in the 20th century, the Russian philosopher of Ukrainian origin N. Berdyaev noted in his work *The Russian Idea* that the typical 'Russian soul' is full of simplicity, directness, without tricks; it is not characterized by affectation, pathos, aristocratic pride. It is a soul that easily falls and sins, then repents and painfully realizes its lowliness before God. It has a special, not Western, religiously based desire for salvation by the whole nation. All of this remains in the depths of the Russian people, who do not know how to manifest themselves in a 'good way'. The Russian soul has so little tautness, spiritual organization, personality hardening; it does not reach upward, has nothing gothic in its soul, waits for God to organize and arrange life; it strives for the absolute and does not accept anything relative (Berdyaev 2000, 363–364).

Compared to the Russian soul, the Polish soul, according to Berdyaev's observations, is aristocratic and idealistic, with a strong sense of dignity (associated with a chivalric culture that is unknown to Russia) and excessive pride, has a lack of simplicity and directness. Instead, the Russian man is proud of his humility (Berdyaev cf.). Russian national thought is nourished by the sense of Russia's divine election, which goes back to the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome, through Slavophilism to F. Dostoevsky, V. Solovyov, and to the modern neo-slavophiles.

M. Berdyaev defined the secret of the Russian soul in contradictions, the essence of which he presented in rhetorical questions: How did the most stateless people manage to create such a huge and powerful state? Why do the most anarchic people so meekly obey the omnipresent bureaucracy? Why does a free spirit not want a free life, not want to be a courageous builder, but instead have a feminine nature, be passive and submissive in state affairs, always waiting for a groom, husband, ruler? Antinomianism runs like a red thread through all of Russian existence. The Russian idea found its expression in the idea of messianism, where Russia's calling is to play a reconciling and unifying role.

However, even the call to liberate other peoples later turned into their excessive further oppression, which led to hostility and distrust of Russia around the world (Berdyayev 2000, 228–233). In addition, Russians, “saving Europe from Napoleon and Hitler, and the entire planet from the oppression of capitalism”, began to overestimate their self-esteem, attributing to themselves a certain special and significant role in history, and thus messianism became a kind of religious and political narcissism (Rachin 2011, 34). It is paradoxical that even today those who cannot improve life in their own country seek to save all of humanity and teach it to live a ‘highly spiritual’ life, while in fact killing, robbing, and raping. For the Russian people, an individual has never been the creator of history or even their own destiny; their life has always been determined by external factors and influences: God, church, state, science, faith, economy, etc., but not by the individual themselves (Rachin 2011, 35). Instead, Ukrainians, Poles and other European peoples are characterized by freedom-lovingness, independence and individualism.

Berdyayev sees Russia’s positive outcome in the disclosure of its courageous, personal, formative beginning, the mastery of its own national element, and the immanent awakening of active consciousness (Berdyayev 2000, 239).

The modern Russian scholars Y. Prokhorov and I. Sternin, analyzing the communicative behavior of Russians, have identified the features of mentality that directly or indirectly influence it: conciliarity (collectivism of being and consciousness, priority of common interests over personal ones); sincerity of social relations and interactions at all possible levels (humanity, gentleness, kindness, tendency to forgive and forget offenses); passive-observational thinking (non-interference, inertia such as ‘until thunder strikes, a man will not cross himself’, ‘initiative is punishable’, etc.; the statement ‘time is money’ is foreign to the majority of Russians); historical patience and unpretentiousness (‘everything will work out’, ‘everything is for the best’, ‘Christ endured and we should also’, ‘endure and love’, etc., and hence the traditional Russian nihilism, the quick transition from rebellion to obedience); household impulsiveness, emotionality; recklessness; dislike of the average (tendency to extremes); evasion of law and rules (legal nihilism); need for ideals; desire for justice; the secondary importance of material things (‘do not have a hundred rubles, but have a hundred friends’, ‘happiness is not in money’, ‘there will be food’, etc.); hope for a centralized solution to all problems (shifting responsibility for one’s fate to external forces: the king, president, leader, God: ‘everything is God’s will’); belief in the possibility of quick and easy solutions to problems, etc. (Prokhorov & Sternin 2006, 55–68).

The Russian philosopher M. Rozov noted in his works that among the negative features (shortcomings) of the Russian mentality, as a rule, the most notable are disunity, low level of discipline and self-discipline without subordination and coercion, legal nihilism and paternalistic subject culture, maximalism and ‘rushing from one extreme to another’. According to Rozov, less common, but quite pronounced in Russian society, are the tendency to serfdom, subservience, lowliness, violence, hypocrisy, intolerance of others, and chauvinism. Positive mental traits include adaptability, ingenuity, receptivity

to new things, resistance to poverty, patience, warmth and care for loved ones, a sense of duty, a strong desire for justice and a righteous meaningful life, serving high ideals and the Motherland unselfishly, up to the point of self-denial (Rozov 2010, 70).

Other Russian researchers have also noted the internal contradictions and multidirectionality of the value orientations and attitudes of the Russian mentality and its main features. For example, the Doctor of Psychology M. Kozlov generally reveals and substantiates a similar set of features of the Russian mentality, and considers total negativism, mutual distrust and the habit of 'living by feelings' to be the most problematic feature. He calls for changing the position of the 'Victim', which is characteristic of the Russian mentality, to the 'Author' (Kozlov 2013).

Historically, the narrative has been formed that only a strong state power combined with service to a great idea can ensure the existence of the Russian people as an ethnic group, which inspires and allows them to endure difficult material conditions, as well as lack of proper rights and freedoms. Religion also had a significant impact. The Russian authorities reinforced this sentiment by massively exterminating the social strata of intellectuals, entrepreneurs, scientists, etc. in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, who were oriented toward liberal values. The promotion and imposition of communal and later corporate values, their primacy over individual values, became possible due to the peculiarities of the socio-economic system and policy of the USSR, in particular, the state (national) and corporate and collective farm forms of ownership.

Lacking the traditions of a strong state, Ukrainian society professes democratic traditions, is freedom-loving, and is more active than Russian society. As mentioned earlier, individualism is a characteristic feature of the Ukrainian mentality, similar to the European one. Another very noticeable feature is the hard work of Ukrainians and Europeans, as opposed to the Russian love of 'freebies' and hopes for 'maybe' ('maybe everything will work out', 'maybe everything will be fine', etc.).

An important component of the Russian socio-cultural identity is the one-person rule, the indivisibility and mono-subjectivity of power, which traditionally has sacred legitimization and popular support.

Our conclusions can be confirmed by a comparative analysis of the axiological components of the Ukrainian and Russian mental structures, which are historically formed, enshrined in the spiritual and legal fields by systems of values and preferences, social orientations, dominant models of social behavior, typical reactions to external and internal stimuli, etc.

Prior to the full-scale invasion, sociological surveys showed that universalism, kindness, conformity, and security dominated the value spectrum of Ukrainians. Wealth and stimulation had the lowest scores. Independence, hedonism, and achievement remained at an average level. In terms of age distribution, the younger group is the most skewed toward hedonism, autonomy, and stimulation. Young and middle-aged people also agree on the recognition of achievements. The elderly, on the other hand, are more

inclined to traditionalism. The group of 16–24 year olds stood out as the most open to change and eager to assert themselves (*Pokolinnya nezalezhnosti* 2021).

According to a study conducted in Ukraine in September 2022, the largest percentage of respondents consider human life to be the highest value (92% of respondents). More than 80% of respondents consider freedoms and human rights, mutual assistance and trust to be the highest. Social harmony is considered the highest value by 71% of respondents. Opinions were most divided on the value of “Following orders from the leadership” – 37% agree with this thesis, 41% disagree, and 22% were unable to give a definite answer (*Mihratsiya ta sotsial'no-politychni nastroyi* 2022, 63).

In Russia, under conditions of authoritarianism and lack of freedom of speech, objective sociological research involving the publication of real public opinion is currently impossible. In this context, the 2023 proposals of the Russian Ministry of Culture are of interest. The following values are defined as traditional, as ‘moral guidelines’ that are ‘passed down from generation to generation and ensure civic unity’. As if in a parallel reality to the current situation in the country and the brutal wars, the following values are declared: value of life, dignity, rights and freedoms, high moral ideals, humanism, mercy, mutual respect, etc. Among the values atypical for democratic societies are collectivism, absolute rejection of ‘egoism’, the primacy of the state over the individual. The Russian Ministry of Culture sees the main threats of ‘destructive ideologies’ in “the activities of extremist and terrorist organizations, the actions of the United States and its allies, and transnational corporations” (*Mynkul't sostavyl perechen'* 2022).

6. Discussion

In the spiritual plane, the fundamental questions are: “What is the consolidating force of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples? What values can be considered as solidarities?”

Historically formed values are an axiological component of mentality; they are represented in cultural achievements, in everyday life, and are the basis of social and political life. At the official level in Russia, such values are considered to be “Orthodoxy – Autocracy – Nationality.”

There were no such officially declared values at the national level in Ukraine. The political slogan of P. Poroshenko’s 2019 presidential election campaign was an attempt to form a value compass that would consolidate Ukrainian society: “Army. Language. Faith.” The next President of Ukraine V. Zelensky, and his political team, and a large part of Ukrainian society initially underestimated these values, did not consider them fundamental. But now they are the basis of the government’s public policy (Dorosh 2023). After Russia’s full-scale invasion, at a time of heroic resistance and significant losses, these symbolic concepts have taken on a crucial meaning:

- *Army*: the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) is the pride and power of the Ukrainian people, who did not allow Russia's plans to seize Ukraine in a few days to be realized and continue to fight for the liberation of Ukrainian territories.

- *Language*: after centuries of bans and Russification, manipulation of the language issue since independence (on the one hand, part of society claims 'it makes no difference what language you speak', the other part confidently denies 'language matters'), the Ukrainian language exists like its people. More and more Russian-speaking Ukrainians are switching to Ukrainian, at least to have nothing common with the occupiers and murderers.

- *Faith*: strengthening the institution of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, hyperbolizing the religious dominance of the spiritual component of Ukrainian society in a difficult time of ontological trials.

Ukrainians are united by a common goal to win the war and drive the occupiers out from their territory; return prisoners of war, refugees and abducted children; to rebuild Ukraine and live on their God-given land. Today it is important to add at least three more words to this triad: "Army. Language. Faith. Victory. Restoration. Welfare". Together, they are important markers and fundamental principles of domestic and foreign policy, to which other important components are added.

Conclusions

Russia's war against Ukraine is a tragedy and genocide of the Ukrainian people. One of its factors was Russia's imperial ambitions, non-recognition of Ukraine as an independent state that has chosen the European vector of development. Such profound transformations of the consciousness of Russian society took place under the ideological influence of the ruling authorities in the conditions of totalitarian and authoritarian political regimes with regular use of propaganda and manipulation, intimidation, and physical destruction of the opposition. The ontological basis of the war is the historically formed fundamental difference between the Ukrainian and Russian mentalities due to their belonging to different civilizations, which is reflected in worldview features, values, priorities, patterns of psycho-behavioral reactions, etc.

The myth of the spiritual closeness and brotherhood of the Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian peoples is a tool for propaganda and imposing the interests of pro-Russian forces. Living under a totalitarian and authoritarian regime, as well as the physical extermination of the intelligentsia and opposition, have shaped the Russians' minds to be submissive, and has elevated the general (collective) over the individual.

Ukrainians, like other European nations, are committed to democratic values and freedoms, and are strongly characterised by individualism, peacefulness and tolerance.

The highest value is human life. The institution of the president, who is perceived as a king and God by Russians, is alien to Ukrainians. Democratic elections and the decentralization reform have become a significant achievement of Ukraine since its independence. The peculiarity of Ukrainian existence is a combination of lyricism and emotionality with a courageous zeal to defend their values and freedoms, even at the cost of their own lives.

Russia's expectations that its massive attacks on Ukraine, fear, panic from bombing and shelling of civilians, and damage to energy infrastructure (resulting in prolonged blackouts in cities and towns), would divide and weaken Ukrainian society did not materialize. Instead, the archetype of the courageous, indomitable Ukrainian Cossack, who goes into battle to defend his family and homeland, was activated (Hordiichuk 2018, 17). The ability to bring about national consolidation and to mount a desperate struggle are latent features of the Ukrainian mentality that are activated in difficult times, driving people's revolutions (the Revolution on Granite 1990, the Orange Revolution 2004, the Revolution of Dignity 2013-2014, and today the basis of the military resistance), and today they are the basis of military and spiritual resistance for the sake of survival, victory, and the right to build a happy future on their historical territories in accordance with international law, based on fundamental Ukrainian values that are in line with European ones.

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