

# Nationalist Memory Narratives and the Politics of History in Ukraine since the 1990s

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## Abstract

This essay focuses on analyzing the history of the evolution of the nationalist memory narrative in recent memory politics in Ukraine. It observes the political rehabilitation of the radical nationalist movement and its leaders and organizations, followed by public recognition and glorification, and the evolution of this memory narrative since the beginning of the 1990s from local memory to the centerpiece of the state politics of memory. This article examines the memorialization and commemoration of the nationalist movement at regional and national levels (sites of memory, memorial dates, renaming of topographical objects, movies, TV series, etc.), policies aimed at the promotion of the nationalist historical myth, political controversies, roles of major actors, public debates on these issues, societal responses, and international disputes.

**Keywords:** Post-Communism; Ukraine; nationalism; collective memory; memory politics

The history of the emergence and spread of the nationalist narrative of memory in Ukraine fits into the broader context of the rise of nationalism and populism on the European continent over the past two decades. The Ukrainian case is crucial and essential because the spread of the nationalist memory narrative and the introduction of its elements into Ukrainian state historical policy became the basis of ideological and political manipulation that formed the base of the justification for Russia's aggression against Ukraine under the slogan of "denazification."

The principal argument of this essay is summarized as follows: After the Second World War, Ukrainian nationalist émigré organizations constructed a story of their movement in the form of cultural memory and a coherent historical narrative. At the end of the 1980s, during *perestroika*, they exported this narrative to Soviet Ukraine. Here, mainly in Western Ukraine, it merged with the local communicative memory preserved by the members of the nationalist movement and their relatives. It then evolved from local memory and cult into popular cultural memory and recently reached the status of the official historical narrative supported by the state.

Nationalist organizations and their proxies were principal actors in this process. National-Democrat, right-conservative, and populist parties provided political support to this narrative in the combat against Communists and the Party of Regions. In a broader context, promoting the nationalist narrative of the past was part of a competition between national and Soviet-nostalgic narratives of memory.

In the 1990s, the nationalist narrative of memory was a local phenomenon. In the 2000s, it became a part of the national landscape of memory. After 2014, the nationalist version of the past became an integral part of the national heroic myth aimed at mobilizing against Russian aggression. Originating at the grassroots level, it became a tool for top-down state politics imposed on society. It

developed into one of the core elements of state memory politics in 2015–2019, within the decommunization, de-russification, and post-colonial agenda.

### The Ukrainian Nationalist Memory Narrative: Main Features

By nationalist memory narrative, I refer to the segment of cultural memory that refers to the past of nationalist organizations – the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), and their leaders. These organizations and persons have belonged to the far-right segment of the political landscape since the 1920s. In the 1920s and the 1930s, they collaborated first with Weimar, then with Nazi Germany, and then with Italian fascists, professing political totalitarianism, single-party dictatorship, corporate state, and xenophobia. From 1939 to 1941, the OUN split into two parts. One, the OUN-b, was headed by Stepan Bandera, who stopped cooperating with the Nazis in July 1941 and renewed it in 1944. Colonel Andrii Melnyk commanded OUN-m. This faction collaborated with the Nazis to end the Second World War. In 1943, the OUN-b created a partisan formation – the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) – aimed at combating Soviet and Polish partisans in the Volhynia and Eastern Galicia and protecting civilians from Nazi *Ostarbeiter* policy. Members of the OUN, who served in the auxiliary police and civil administration created by Germans, took part in exterminating Jews. In 1943, the UPA committed mass killings of Polish civilians (the Volhynian massacre). Since 1944, the OUN and UPA have combatted the Red Army and Soviet power, killing thousands of pro-Communist civilians in response to the massive terror of the Soviets. Thousands of OUN and UPA members fled to the West after the defeat of Germany and created a network of political, cultural, and non-governmental bodies to fight Communism. The OUN-b and its fraction, which emerged in 1954, were politically, financially, and technically supported by the CIA and MI-6 in this crusade. The OUN-controlled Ukrainian diaspora institutions and UPA combatant organizations became natural venues for constructing and preserving their heroic myth, which became the core of the nationalist memory narrative.

Nationalist anti-Soviet guerrilla in the Western part of Soviet Ukraine lasted from 1944 to the 1950s, resulting in massive bloodshed, severe mass repression, large-scale military operations, and deportations of civilians. The official Soviet discourse has treated Ukrainian nationalist organizations and their leaders exclusively as Nazi collaborators in the 1930s–1940s or servants of the world (American) imperialism in the 1950s–1980s. Thus, the nationalist memory narrative could exist only at the level of communicative memory in Western Ukraine.

The generic essentials of the nationalist memory narrative are simple. Ukrainian nationalist organizations (OUN, UPA, and their proxies) were the most persistent and committed fighters for the freedom of Ukraine. Their continuous fearless and uncompromising struggle resulted in a significant achievement: the independence of Ukraine in 1991. They bravely fought against Nazi and Soviet (Russian) totalitarian regimes during World War II (Vyatrovych, Zabily, Derevianyi, and Sodol 2011) Nationalist *chevaliers sans peur et sans reproche* sacrificed their lives on the altar of freedom and independence of Ukraine. Ukrainians should praise, respect, and commemorate them dutifully. Countless publications in contemporary nationalist media and party historiography have promoted these fundamentals in public discourse. Numerous *lieux de mémoire* in the Western Ukraine eternalize OUN and UPA deeds. Moreover, a special law adopted in 2015 enshrines this memory and declares “unlawful” any public disrespect towards it. The nationalist memory narrative has been successfully customized in school textbooks since the 2000s.

Not surprisingly, it neglects, ignores, or omits controversial aspects of the history and memory of the Ukrainian nationalist movement. For instance, it avoids discussions about the totalitarian and xenophobic nature of the OUN political program of the interwar period. It emphasizes the evolution of the nationalist movement towards “democracy and inclusion” since 1943 (forgetting that this evolution caused a bitter split within the OUN due to the stance of orthodox nationalists

headed by Stepan Bandera, who did not accept this evolution). This narrative relativizes the collaboration of the OUN with Nazis, presenting it as an unavoidable necessity. It refutes the involvement of the OUN members in the extermination of Jews. It silences the killings of civilian Ukrainians by OUN and UPA members or justifies these actions as necessary. Similarly, it minimizes the role of the OUN and UPA in anti-Polish ethnic cleansing in Volhynia, relativizes it as a part of the Polish- Ukrainian war (Vyatrovych 2011), and even justifies it as a Ukrainian response to the politics of the Polish state in the 1920s and the 1930s (Adamsky 2017).

Moreover, recently, in response to the accusations of collaboration in the Holocaust, some nationalist writers started to represent the OUN and UPA as devoted rescuers of Jews and as an internationalist movement.

### Actors: Promoters, Allies, and Opponents

Principal actors, who elaborate, disseminate, and promote the nationalist memory narrative in Ukraine, belong to the category of “memory warriors,” according to the typology proposed by political scientists (Bernhard and Kubik 2014). They profess a unified, single vision of the past, claiming historical truth. At the same time, promoters of this narrative perceive other views and approaches as false or opportunistic and treacherous to the nation.

Nationalist organizations form the nucleus of this group. At the beginning of the 1990s, the émigré OUN returned to Ukraine. The OUN-b remains a non-registered entity, preferring to create facade structures for political and cultural activities. They founded several facade bodies in Ukraine: the political party Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists (KUN 1992) with its youth wing, the Youth Nationalist Congress, and the Lviv Center for the Study of Liberation Movement (Ukrainian abbreviation: TsDVR). The latter represents itself as an “independent research organization”; however, the OUN-b party historian and leader call it “façade structure” (Lipovets’ky 2010; Romaniv 2012). TsDVR became prominent in promoting the OUN and UPA distilled heroic myth and whitewashing their historical image as fighters for independence, particularly after 2015, when the center’s core group established control over the Institute of National Remembrance (Ukrainian abbreviation: UINP).

The KUN persistently lobbied for the political rehabilitation of the OUN and UPA in the Ukrainian parliament in the 1990s–2000s. The All-Ukrainian Fellowship of Combatants of the OUN-UPA, the All-Ukrainian Association of Political Prisoners and Repressed, and Vasyl’ Stus Memorial cooperated with them as political allies or under the pretext of the transitional justice agenda (rehabilitation of former OUN members and UPA combatants as victims of political repression).

The OUN-m moved to Ukraine in 1993 and registered as a non-governmental organization. They are primarily preoccupied with popularizing the ideas and history of Ukrainian nationalism through publishing activities.

The All-Ukrainian Union Svoboda, established in 1994 as a Social-National Party of Ukraine and renamed in 2004, represents the most important and recognizable mainland nationalist organization. Its political program contains ideological fundamentals of the OUN-b based on ethnic nationalism. It considers historical memory issues fundamentals of nationalist civic education (VO Svoboda 2021). Svoboda members played an important role in street history politics – for instance, in vandalizing and dismantling the monuments of Lenin in 2013–2014 and popularizing the symbols of nationalist memory in public space during the Maidan revolution of 2014.

The paramilitary nationalist organization, Stepan Bandera Trident, reorganized in 2013–2014 into the Right Sector, became famous for its contribution to street politics. One of their most illustrious actions was blowing up the Stalin bust in Zaporizhzhia, erected by the local Communist Party of Ukraine office in 2011.

All nationalist parties and civil organizations were based mainly in Western Ukraine and had limited support in society. They would not reach influence at the national level without alliances

with their ideological kinfolks and right-conservative as well as populist parties. For instance, in the 1990s and the 2000s, they allied with National Democrats (Rukh, Republican Party, People's Party, et al.) in an attempted political rehabilitation of the OUN and UPA. In the 2000s, Svoboda and the KUN joined a coalition of national democrats, right-conservatives, populists, and liberals, "Nasha Ukraina," headed by Victor Yushchenko.

Populist, centrist, and right-conservative parties and movements have provided additional political resources to nationalists. The list includes Rukh and its ramifications, Bat`kivshyna, Radical Party, Blok Petra Poroshenko/Solidarnist', Samopomich, Udarny, and Narodnyi Front, all of which supported the politics promoting the nationalist memory narrative at the national level, mainly in the context of decommunization from 2015 to 2019. Except for Rukh and, to some extent, Samopomich, this support was utterly utilitarian. They used the issue for short-term political goals that were not a matter of ideological beliefs.

Two presidents of Ukraine, Victor Yushchenko (2005–2010) and Petro Poroshenko (2014–2019), personally supported the nationalist memory narrative for different reasons. Yushchenko believed that it would help him to promote the national identity project. Poroshenko used it to gain support from the far-right in his fight against Russian aggression. Both won the support of the nationalist and far-right groups and lost the support of a broader society.

Until 2014, the Ukrainian nationalist narrative competed with the Soviet, or Soviet-nostalgic memory, which was represented and mainly promoted by the Communists and smaller leftist parties (Communist Party of Ukraine, Progressive Socialists) and by the Party of Regions. They combatted nationalists for different reasons. Communists and their proxies continued the Soviet ideological legacy, presenting the OUN and the UPA as the worst enemies of Ukrainians: as Nazi collaborators. The Party of Regions has instrumentalized the Soviet-nostalgic narrative to maintain control over their territorial and social base, the Donbas and South-Eastern Ukraine. Cherishing the Soviet particularistic myth of Donbas and the industrial East as a nest of the tradition of labor glory and particular collectivist virtues, Donbas oligarchs ensured ideological control over human minds and resources. Accordingly, any anti-Soviet narratives (and nationalist ones were anti-Soviet by definition) challenged their power ambitions.

The struggle against nationalism, real or fictional, provided an additional resource for ideological and political mobilization in the case of necessity. In 2004–2010 and 2012–2013, the antinationalist schema was part of a broader power struggle. For instance, during the presidential election campaign of 2003–2004, the Party of Regions labeled Yushchenko and his allies as fascists, using the presence of right-wing organizations (such as Ukrainian National Self-Defense) among Yushchenko's supporters. Yushchenko's image in the Nazi-like uniform appeared on the billboards posted by the Party of regions in Donetsk during his 2003 presidential rally in the region (Ukrainska Pravda 2007) His politics of glorifying the OUN and the UPA from 2007 to 2010 only added to this image. In 2012–2013, the "anti-fascist" rhetoric was central to the government-backed orchestrated street actions against the opposition. The latter, apart from populists and centrist parties, included the right-wing Svoboda (BBC News 2013)

After 2014, both the Communist Party (effectively banned by the decommunization law) and the Party of Regions (which fractured into two new competing parties and lost a significant share of their supporters with part of the Donbas caught by Russia-backed separatists) lost their influence. Therefore, the primary political opponents of the nationalist memory narrative either disappeared or lost their capacity to oppose nationalists effectively.

### From Recognition to Rehabilitation

As noted above, the political and public rehabilitation of the OUN and UPA started in the last few years of the Soviet Union. In July 1990, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine approved the "Republican program of the research and improvement of teaching and propaganda of the History of Ukrainian SSR." The program listed the theme "OUN and UPA

during the Great Patriotic War” among the essential areas of study and popularization (Republican program 1990)

Meanwhile, in Galicia (Western Ukraine), National Democrats, headed by the Rukh, won the majority in the first multiparty elections in three regional councils. Immediately, they started a public campaign to rehabilitate the OUN and UPA. On June 30, 1991, the first mass meeting was held to celebrate the anniversary of the “Act of restoration of Ukrainian statehood” proclaimed by the OUN-b in Lviv in June 1941 under Nazi occupation. In July 1991, local authorities sanctioned monuments to Stepan Bandera and the chief commander of the UPA, Roman Shukhevych, in Drohobych (Lviv Oblast) and Krakivets (Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast). In October, a memorial cross to “OUN and UPA heroes” was erected in Ivano-Frankivsk. The museum of Bandera in Volia Zaderevatska and a mound dedicated to members of the OUN and UPA in Ternopil soon followed. In 1991–1992, Ukrainian schools received a trial textbook written according to new trends: with OUN and UPA in a new role

It presented a radically new (compared to Soviet times) approach to OUN-b and the UPA as fighters for the independence of Ukraine, however, mentioning other faction – OUN-m as Nazi collaborators (Koval, Kulchytsky, Kurnosov, Sarbey, 1991). Since then, the discursive strategy, representing Bandera OUN and the UPA exclusively as fighters for national liberation, has become dominant in school history programs and textbooks. However, this swing in perception and interpretation resulted from a general shift in public moods and aspirations rather than state bodies’ instructions. The authors of the textbooks were sensitive to the demands of time and public attitude (as they understood it). The nation-building agenda, together with the total official rejection of the traumatic Soviet past, required new myths and heroes.

Concurrently, nationalists and national-democrats launched a long-run national campaign for the historical and political rehabilitation of the OUN and UPA. The campaign initially started as a transitional justice enterprise; it focused primarily on the political and judicial rehabilitation of the OUN and UPA members repressed by the Soviet authorities. Then, the demands to assign them social status equal to the position of Soviet veterans came to the fore. In the first run, promoters of the idea tried to introduce changes to the existing Soviet-style laws: “On Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repressions in Ukraine” (1991) and “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of their Social Protection” (1993).

Based on the historical justice rhetoric, this campaign became a part of the broader political controversy between nationalists and national democrats on one side and communists (including Soviet veterans) and their allies on the other (Yurchuk 2017). In 1991, MPs from the Rukh and Republican Party failed to introduce a particular clause to the OUN and UPA in the law on the rehabilitation of victims of political repression. Moreover, the general provisions of this law made rehabilitation impossible to those who could somehow be involved in collaboration or blamed for treason against Motherland or committed war crimes (Zakon UkrSSR 1991)

The rehabilitation issue reemerged in 1992–1993 during debates on the law of the war veterans’ status. This time, the discussions took place in a different political context. The OUN and UPA issue became a topic of the state politics of memory, and a central theme in the combat between defenders of the Soviet-nostalgic narrative and those who tried to integrate the nationalist narrative into the official cultural memory of the Ukrainian state. The latter presented their efforts as reconciliation policies. They even tried to promote the idea of a common goal of the Soviets and Ukrainian nationalists in the fight against the Nazis.

As a result, the new law referenced UPA veterans who fought against the Nazis. To obtain social benefits for the war veterans, they had to match two conditions: they should not be accused of committing crimes against peace and humanity and be rehabilitated in compliance with the law of 1991 (Zakon Ukrainy 1993).. These conditions make rehabilitation extremely complicated, if possible.



The social status of the OUN and UPA veterans remained an unresolved issue. The KUN and Rukh members of parliament lobbied for the case, striving at least for official consent (Kucheruk 2012). In 1996, Verkhovna Rada established a temporary special commission “to facilitate the investigation of issues related to the examination of the activities of the OUN-UPA” (Postanova VRU 1996). The commission, composed proportionally of supporters of the political legitimization of OUN and UPA and their opponents (communists), ended in a fiasco: the deputies were not ready to “facilitate examination of issues.”

The confrontation between supporters and opponents of rehabilitation in parliament did not promise any solution, while the “demands of the public” had to be met. Thus, the government established another commission on the OUN UPA. Valerii Smolii, the Vice-Prime-Minister and the director of the Institute of the History of Ukraine, created a working group comprising mainly of the scholars of this institute. By the end of 1998, this group had received guidelines to develop an official opinion on the subject.

The group’s work continued for over seven years. In 2000, scholars submitted preliminary recommendations that immediately sparked discontent both among nationalists and communists (Myshlovska 2017). In 2001, the government stopped funding. However, the publication of the preliminary results of the group’s findings provoked further moves among the rehabilitation promoters. From 2001 to 2004, the Verkhovna Rada registered four law drafts and draft decrees to recognize the OUN and UPA as combatants (belligerent parties) of World War II.<sup>1</sup>

In 2005, after the “Orange Revolution,” the historians’ working group came out with their final verdict. The authors of the final report had different views on the OUN and the UPA. Nevertheless, the consolidated assessment presented by the head of the commission, Stanislav Kulchytsky, provided grounds for the political rehabilitation of these organizations. The report matched the present-day trends in the official politics of memory.

By this time, changes had already occurred in memory politics. Seven feature films and ten documentaries presenting OUN and UPA as self-sacrificing fighters for independence who fought for their ideas in a hopeless situation were released and streamed on TV and in cinema theaters.<sup>2</sup> The OUN and UPA, as heroes of the national liberation movement, became fixtures in Ukrainian school textbooks. Moreover, the textbook authors started to apply the term *Resistance movement*, referring to the OUN and UPA, putting Ukrainian nationalists into the context of the European Resistance (Zahorul’ko 2015).

On October 14, 2005, the Kyiv City Center witnessed the first street rally dedicated to the anniversary of the creation of the UPA; before that, such events only took place in the western regions. The march culminated in a physical clash between nationalists, represented by the Ukrainian National Assembly – Ukrainian National Self-Defense and leftists mobilized by the Progressive Socialist Party and Communists. In the following years, local authorities cautiously separated participants and opponents by assigning their rallies to different parts of the city center. From here on, marches and street events dedicated to the UPA became annual events in the capital (Burlakova 2013).

In 2005, Victor Yushchenko joined the ranks of nationalist memory narrative promoters. In the past, the president’s wife, Kateryna Yushchenko, was an activist for the Union of Ukrainian Youth, an organization created in 1946 by the OUN-b. During Yushchenko’s presidency, the OUN-b proxies obtained direct access to state politics of memory. The political rehabilitation of the OUN and the UPA, previously a business of political parties and groups with limited influence, reached the level of a state’s historical politics. The chief of the OUN-b, Stefan Romaniv (Australia), became a member of the presidential bodies established to commemorate the Great Famine of 1932–1933. The head of TsDVR, Volodymyr Viatrovych, became the head of the archival department of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) in 2009.

Yushchenko adopted a threefold strategy. First, he tried (unsuccessfully) to arrange a public reconciliation of Soviet and UPA veterans (Hrytsenko 2017). He perceived reconciliation as the first step toward normalizing the image of UPA combatants in public opinion. Yushchenko presented

them to society as fighters for Ukraine, who also, like Soviet veterans, combatted the Nazis. The first staged reconciliation act occurred on May 9, 2005, in an open space near the Museum of the Great Patriotic War – two veterans shook hands, blessed by the president personally. Yushchenko himself arranged a “wine and dine” for them. The same theatrical acts in the following anniversaries were also not convincing. Soviet veterans did not want to reconcile with those who “shot in their backs.” They stubbornly repeated Soviet formulae about Nazi turncoats. Moreover, they demanded revising school textbooks and labeling the OUN and UPA as Nazi collaborators (Kasianov 2022, 235–236).

Second, he attempted to enshrine a positive historical image of nationalists in commemorative state policies. In 2006, Yushchenko commanded the government to develop a “comprehensive study and objective coverage of the activities of the Ukrainian liberation movement” for 2006–2007. The program aimed at the “consolidation and progress of the Ukrainian nation, ensuring the historical justice for the participants of the Ukrainian liberation movement, the advancement of the process of national reconciliation and mutual understanding, and the recovery of national memory.” Judging by the text of the degree, the “Ukrainian liberation movement,” in Yushchenko’s eyes, was synonymous with the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, its predecessors, its military and political ramifications: the Ukrainian Military Organization, Ukrainian Insurgent Army, and Ukrainian Supreme Liberation Council (Prezydent Ukrainy 2006). The decree was published on October 14, the day celebrated by Ukrainian nationalist organizations as the anniversary of establishing the UPA.

In September 2008, the newly established (2006) Ukrainian Institute for National Remembrance (Ukrainian abbreviation: UINP), together with SBU and TsDVR, launched an exhibition: “UPA: The History of an Undefeated,” which traveled through Ukraine until May 2009, gathered thousands of fans in Western Ukraine, and provoked conflicts in the eastern and southern parts of the country (Yurchuk 2017, 123)

Third, he tried to accelerate the official recognition of OUN and UPA members as fighters for independence and to ensure the social benefits for the nationalist combatants at the state level. In January 2008, Yushchenko submitted the draft law “On the Legal Status of the Participants of the Struggle for the Independence of Ukraine in the 1920s–1990s.” (Proekt Zakonu Ukrainy 2008). This time, the list of fighters included, apart from OUN and UPA, their precursor, the Ukrainian Military Organization (UVO), the OUN military formation of 1938–1939 “Karpats’ka Sich,” and a quasi-parliamentary body – the Ukrainian Supreme Liberation Council (Ukrainian abbreviation: UHVR).

It was an unprecedented and determined attempt to elevate the nationalist memory narrative to the national level. Yushchenko submitted the draft law, counting on the advantageous majority in Verkhovna Rada. He pushed it through a special procedure as an urgent submission. In March 2008, his supporters tried to approve the draft law “in general.” However, the document was not included in the agenda of the plenary sessions due to the personal rivalry between Yushchenko and his former ally, Yulia Tymoshenko. In December 2008, it was dismissed by his opponents (Communists and the Party of Regions) and Yulia Tymoshenko’s party.<sup>3</sup> On a parallel track, his supporters in parliament in 2005–2009 submitted eight bills to give members of the OUN and the UPA the status of war veterans or the title of a belligerent. All projects were discarded during the preliminary submission stage.<sup>4</sup>

Defeated in the parliament, Yushchenko used the last available opportunity. In January 2010, he signed a decree: “On Honoring the Participants of the Struggle for the Independence of Ukraine in the 20th century” (Prezydent Ukrainy 2010).

At that time, his approach was more sophisticated. The list included other participants of the struggle for independence from 1917 to 1920, whose legacy and legitimacy did not provoke excessive passions: Central Rada, Ukrainian People’s Republic, Western Ukrainian People’s Republic, and the Ukrainian Hetman State. The presidential decree charged the government with preparing a new draft law on the legal status of participants in the struggle for independence. The government headed by Yulia Tymoshenko ignored this order.

In April 2010, Nataliya Vitrenko, the Party of Progressive Socialists leader, filed a lawsuit seeking to cancel Yushchenko's decree. The proceedings took three years, and the case trekked through three levels of the court system, causing the suspension of the decree's implementation. The final decision by the Supreme Administrative Court of Kyiv in February 2013 upheld this decree (Tyzhden 2013). However, this time, the government of the Party of Regions and Communists did not feel obliged to implement Yushchenko's decree.

Meanwhile, some local councils in Western Ukraine did not wait for changes in national legislation. Using their prerogatives and budgets, they introduced social benefits for OUN and UPA combatants (Portnov and Portnova 2010) that were somewhat symbolic in funding but crucial in a figurative political sense.

Apart from law-making activities, proponents of the nationalist narrative actively used all other venues to elevate it to the national level. Central figures of the nationalist Pantheon entered commemorative state politics. The National Bank issued memorial coins dedicated to Roman Shukhevych, Olena Teliha, and Oleh Olzhych (National Bank of Ukraine 2023). Yushchenko ordered special commemorative state events dedicated to these individuals (Hrytsenko 2017).

In 2007, he conferred the highest state award – the title of the Hero of Ukraine – to Roman Shukhevych, provoking strong discontent from Israel (not to mention Russia) and a relatively mild reaction from Poland. This decision expectedly caused a deluge of strong statements from the Communists and the Party of Regions about glorifying the “fascist collaborator” (Rudling 2016). Yushchenko decided to supplement the traditional nationalist Pantheon with new names in the same year. He ordered the government to commemorate Yaroslav and Yaroslava Stetsko, the chiefs of the OUN-b, in the 1950s and the 1990s. Their names had to decorate streets, avenues, squares, and educational institutions. The Ministry of Education had to provide “objective treatment in the curricula and new textbooks of the Ukrainian liberation movement and the input of Yaroslav and Yaroslava Stetsko to it” (Prezydent Ukrainy 2007).

Portraits of Roman Shukhevych and Stepan Bandera appeared on postage stamps and envelopes printed to honor their 100th anniversary by the State Postal Agency Ukrposhta in 2007 and 2009.

Bandera remained a central symbol and the most recognizable and valuable figure of the nationalist narrative. From 1990 to 2010, one hundred streets in Western Ukraine were renamed after him (Libiech and Myshlovska 2014). From 2005 to 2010, the local authorities in Western Ukraine erected seventeen Bandera monuments. On January 1, 2008, a torchlight procession devoted to his birthday took place in Kyiv, organized by Svoboda. The Kyiv authorities did not interfere. Since then, entertainment has become a tradition held annually.

In 2008, Bandera obtained third place during the national SMS voting on the television show “Great Ukrainians” (carried by Inter, Ukraine's most popular broadcaster), second only to prince Yaroslav the Wise and famous Soviet surgeon Nikolai Amosov (Inter 2008). Nationalists claimed Bandera took the top place and accused their opponents (Party of Regions) of forging the results by manipulatively mobilizing thousands of votes (modestly avoiding mentions of their self-mobilization). In December 2009, the Verkhovna Rada included Bandera's birthday in the official state commemorative dates list. On January 20, 2010, after epic failure at the presidential elections, Yushchenko banged the door and awarded Bandera the title of the Hero of Ukraine (ironically, this title was a replica of the Soviet top award: the Hero of the Soviet Union).

Opponents of the nationalist memory narrative did not waste time either. They counteracted legislative initiatives on the status of OUN and UPA veterans by blocking them in the parliament or upholding counterstrikes with legislative initiatives. In 2006–2007, Communists, supported by the Party of Regions, submitted four bills with the same title: “On the Status and Social Protection of the Citizens of Ukraine Who Suffered from the Actions of OUN and UPA in 1939–1941, in the Years of the Great Patriotic War and the Postwar Period.” In 2009, Communist MPs submitted a draft resolution on the “Day of Remembrance of Victims of the Terrorist Gangs of the OUN-UPA” (Proekt Zakonu Ukrainy 2006; Proekt Postanovy 2009).



In 2007, Simferopol's city authorities erected the monument "Shot in the Back," dedicated to the Ukrainians killed by the "nationalist executioners." The Kharkiv mayor, a member of the Party of Regions, planned to erect the same monument. In 2010, a statue dedicated to the OUN and the UPA victims was erected in Luhansk. The Party of Regions organized a moving exhibition titled "Volhynia Massacre: Polish and Jewish victims of the OUN-UPA," which toured Kyiv and the major cities of eastern and southern Ukraine (including Kharkiv, Luhansk, Odesa, and Sevastopol) from the spring to the fall of 2010.

In 2010, the Donetsk District Administrative Court dismissed Yushchenko's decrees, awarding the title of the Hero of Ukraine to Bandera and Shukhevych. The Party of Regions also attempted to revise the school curriculum and textbooks to minimize the presence of the OUN and the UPA, however, with no visible success (Kasianov 2022, 139–140).

The gradual expansion of the nationalist memory narrative beyond the borders of Western Ukraine in the 2000s turned into a triumphant march after the Euromaidan protests of November–December 2013 and the popular revolt of January–February 2014 called the Revolution of Dignity.

### From Rehabilitation to Glorification

The Revolution of Dignity, followed by Russia's annexation of Crimea, the war in the Donbas, and the loss of territories in the country's East, radically changed the balance of power in memory politics. The Party of Regions ceased to exist. The decommunization laws promulgated by nationalists in the spring of 2015 have effectively banned the Communist Party of Ukraine. The Soviet-nostalgic narrative lost institutional support while a significant portion of its supporters remained either in annexed Crimea or in the Russian- and separatist-controlled territories of Donbas. Moreover, as a centerpiece of historical policy in Russia, it has been discredited as pro-Russian and inimical to Ukraine.

Simultaneously, right-wing nationalists reached a high level of political significance. They were notable in violent confrontations with authorities during the Revolution of Dignity. Being at the center of the upheaval, they managed to influence the symbolism of these events. They (Svoboda) claim the authorship of the very term "Revolution of Dignity." KUN permanently displayed a huge portrait of Bandera on the Maidan. The OUN slogan "Glory to Ukraine – Glory to Heroes" became a motto of protesters losing original party affiliation. Nationalists successfully mobilized human resources to confront separatists in the East, especially at the beginning of the military confrontation. The OUN party's red and black flag, also losing its original ideological load, became a famous symbol of the revolt. It then moved to the frontlines in Donbas as a symbol of resistance to Russian aggression (Umland, Yurchuk 2017).

After the dramatic winter of 2013–2014, those who came to power gamely utilized the OUN and UPA historical mythology with its cult of military sacrifice, resistance, anti-Soviet and anti-Russian assertiveness, either for their political promotion or for ad hoc purposes or military and ideological mobilization of society. The Ukrainian nationalist memory narrative was in high demand among nationalists' political fellow travelers, who came to power on the protesters' shoulders.

Nationalists took influential positions in the state institutions responsible for the politics of memory. TsDVR functionaries played a vital role in the Institute of National Remembrance: Viatrovych became the head of the institute, and Alina Shpak, became his deputy. Several people from Svoboda media bodies also had jobs at the institute. Ihor Kulyk became director of the Archive of National Memory. All documents of "repressive bodies of a totalitarian regime" (ten ministries and committees) had to be transferred to this institution, making it a monopolist. Andrii Kohut became director of the SBU archive.

The government elevated the status of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory to the level of the executive power body, which was assigned to a broad range of functions and competencies.

Nationalists obtained different key positions in other important institutions. The deputy head of Svoboda, Oleksandr Sych served as a Deputy Prime-Minister on Humanitarian Issues from

February–December 2014. Valentyn Nalyvaichenko, the head of SBU in 2014–2015, having no direct affiliation with nationalist organizations, ensured the return of the TsDVR representative to the SBU archive. Bohdan Chervak, the head of the OUN-m, became the deputy head of the Committee on Television and Radio, the institution responsible for controlling the media content and publishing. Andriy Parubiy, the founder of Svoboda who changed his political affiliation for Yulia Tymoshenko's "Bat`kivshyna" party, became a parliament speaker. His close associate, Serhii Kvit, who in the past was a member of the leadership of KUN, became Minister of Education in the fall of 2014.

Moreover, nationalists have successfully promoted their agenda within the civil society community. For instance, TsDVR monopolized the "Politics of National Memory" segment in the broad and influential (in 2015–2019) NGO coalition "Reanimation Package of Reform" (RPR 2023b), generously financed by Western donors. From 2015 to 2020, the alliance received financial support of more than €1,5 mln, \$354,000, and UAH6,3 mln, mainly from European Commission, Swedish CIDA, and the USAID (RPR 2023a).

Representing itself to the broader public as a fighter against the totalitarian legacy in Ukraine, the TsDVR group used this venue to promote a nationalist narrative. Once in power, the promoters and supporters of the nationalist memory narrative streamed their activities in two directions. First, they focused on eliminating the Soviet-nostalgic memory from symbolic public spaces. Second, they concentrated on promoting the nationalist narrative in state ideology, the educational domain, and the public sphere. Notably, they relied on the political, organizational, and administrative experiences obtained during the presidency of Yushchenko and brought back all discursive strategies from this time. Finally, they secured political support from parties and blocs of the ruling coalition who were not supporters of nationalist ideology. In this case, Russian aggression paradoxically helped them.

Attitudes towards decommunization and promoting the nationalist narrative among nationalists' fellow travelers were purely instrumental: it was an occasion to advertise oneself as a true patriot. The coalition agreement (Fall 2014) contained particular references to the politics of memory written by the promoters of the nationalist memory narrative. They also received support from President Petro Poroshenko, for whom the instrumental use of the past was an essential part of political business. The speaker of the parliament, Andrii Parubiy, ensured quick and smooth procedural support (it took just 42 minutes to discuss and approve the decommunization laws package in the plenary session in April 2015).

The expertise department of Verkhovna Rada gave a negative assessment of all decommunization laws drafts and recommended refining them for further consideration and revision (e.g., urging compliance with the Constitution). However, all drafts were submitted to the parliament and approved by the coalition in the short run. As Vyatrovych mentioned later, passing them as quickly as possible was necessary, envisioning that the coalition could collapse soon (Vyatrovych 2015).

The memorial law package secured legal grounds for eliminating the Soviet-nostalgic narrative of memory and promoting the nationalist narrative.

The "Victory Day Law" (Zakon Ukrainy 2015a) efficiently removed the Soviet-nostalgic version of World War II from official discourse and affirmed the "European" version. The Soviet term "Great Patriotic War" disappeared from official discourse. The law on decommunization (Zakon Ukrainy 2015b) outlawed the public use of Communist and Nazi symbols. In fact, it was streamlined against the Soviet-nostalgic narrative. Moreover, it criminalized some forms of public display of these symbols, provoking critique from law specialists, liberal intellectuals (Open Letter 2015), and the Venice Commission (Venice Commission 2015) concerning the alleged limitation of academic freedom and freedom of speech. The law also excluded the Ukrainian "national communism" of the 1920s from the official memory narrative. The law prohibited Nazi symbols, but this part was purely ornamental and not implemented in practice. Not surprisingly, both the authors and the public referred to this bill as a decommunization law, but none have ever discussed its denazification content.

The law on access to the archives of repressive bodies of the totalitarian regime (Zakon Ukrainy 2015d), on the one hand, created prerequisites for unprecedented public access to the archives of security services. On the other hand, it has created possibilities for establishing control of one political group over these archives. The law ordered transferring of documents from ten archives of the “repressive bodies of the communist totalitarian regime” to the National Memory Archive, headed by the representative of TsDVR. Notably, all subsequent publications of the documents from the SBU archive (governed by a former TsDVR functionary) were published under TsDVR auspices. TsDVR received considerable funding for “institutional support” and digitalizing and publishing these documents from the newly established state body, the Ukrainian Cultural Fund (UCF). In 2020 alone, TsDVR received three grants from UCF for a total amount of 2,8 mln UAH.

In 2015–2018, nationalists and their fellow travelers finalized the legal and political status of the OUN and UPA. The law dedicated to participants in the national liberation struggle (Zakon Ukrainy 2015c) legitimized the nationalist narrative of the past. It equalized the OUN and the UPA with other organizations and movements that did not have a controversial reputation. The authors of the law took into account previous experiences. Being aware that the law dedicated exclusively to the OUN and UPA could cause, as before, excessive resistance, they compiled a long list of organizations that fought for independence in the 20th century, beginning with the Central Rada and ending with the Rukh. Thus, OUN, UPA, and their spinoffs were amalgamated into this list.

The law obliged both Ukrainian citizens and foreigners to honor the memory of the fighters for independence and declared public “manifestations of disrespect” unlawful. In January 2017, MP Yuriy Shukhevych (son of the UPA commander Roman Shukhevych) submitted a bill proposing to criminalize the denial of “the fact of the legitimacy” of the struggle for the independence of Ukraine in the 20th century (Proekt Zakonu Ukrainy 2017) with no further proceedings, however.

No less importantly, the law on the status of fighters for independence, apart from the final political rehabilitation of the OUN and UPA, created prerequisites for solving the issue of the social status of the nationalist combatants. It ensured changes in two other bills: one on rehabilitating the victims of political repression and another on the social guarantees of war veterans. The clause from the 1991 law on the rehabilitation of victims of political repression dedicated to those who were not subject to this procedure (those who committed crimes against humanity) disappeared (Zakon Ukrainy 2018a), and the very name of the law changed. From May 2018, its title was “Law on Rehabilitation of the Victims of Repressions of the Totalitarian Communist Regime of 1917–1991.” Thus, virtually all OUN and UPA veterans, repressed by the Soviets, even those who committed violence against civilians, gained the right to rehabilitation.

The law on the social status of veterans was amended with an article listing nationalist parties, organizations, and their military formations. Their members received the status of war veterans, social benefits, and privileges (Zakon Ukrainy 2018b)

Finally, another special law has changed the concept of political repression itself.

Persecution for actions such as sabotage, destruction, an explosion of railroads and other means of communication, arson, terrorist acts, espionage, armed invasion in Ukraine or the USSR, and similar actions committed for the sake of Ukrainian independence (particularly by those listed in the law on the legal status of fighters for independence) were qualified as political repression (Zakon Ukrainy 2018c). Andriy Parubiy, Yuriy Shukhevych, and MPs from allied parties submitted the law.

Judicial and political legitimization of the nationalist movement and its history, together with the domination of their representatives and sympathizers in the executive and legislature bodies responsible for the politics of memory, opened the doors for unlimited promotion and propaganda of the nationalist memory narrative and its further expansion beyond the place of origin, Western Ukraine.

The most notable recent development was promoting the cult of Bandera in Central Ukraine, Kyiv, and sometimes even in Southern Ukraine. Some critics and commentators even started discussing the “Banderization” of Ukraine. City toponyms dedicated to Bandera appeared in

Khmel'nytska, Zhytomyr's'ka, Kyiv's'ka, Cherkasska, Poltavska, Mykolaivs'ka regions, and in Kyiv (Gordon.ua 2017). The renaming of Moskovskii Prospekt in Kyiv in 2016 turned into a lengthy public debate and scandal, and the legal battle formally finished in April 2021 (the court approved the renaming). Memorial places dedicated to the chief of the OUN-b appeared in Cherkasy and Khmel'nytsky. Torchlight rallies on Bandera's birthday in Kyiv and other major cities in central Ukraine (January 1) became routine. A huge portrait of Bandera periodically appears on the façade of the Kyiv mayor's office (last time in January 2020, provoking diplomatic tension with Poland and Israel) and on administrative buildings in Western Ukraine. Recently, in October–November 2021, a flash mob “Bat'ko nash Bandera, Ukraina – maty” (“Bandera is our father, Ukraine is our mother”) took place on Instagram and Tik Tok, mostly among youngsters, and turned into massive hype (BBC News 2021).

Top governmental officials joined the popularization of Bandera. For example, Acting Minister of Health in 2016–2019 Uliana Suprun (a US citizen), speaking at the festival “Bandershtadt – 2017,” said that she mentally checks her actions on healthcare reform with Bandera's image, as if asking herself “what would Bandera do?” in this or that situation (Volyns'ki Novyny 2017)

In October 2017, the Minister of Infrastructure Volodymyr Omelian, on his Facebook page, shared his impressions of his visit to the homeland of Bandera (Staryi Uhryniv). Describing his success in road construction during his tenure as Minister, Omelyan said that for him,

all this time, the road to Staryi Uhryniv was always special. The road to Bandera. For the first time, I visited the place where the great leader was born [...] Crazy energy, the impression that this big family, which the Communist-Nazi Moloch mercilessly destroyed, still lives there, now comes from the corner of the house, gives communion and blessing. We are beginning to rebuild the road to Bandera. (Facebook, 2017)

The annual youth festival “Bandershtadt” in the Lutsk region, established in 2007 as a local event, became a popular event for Bandera fans from many areas of Ukraine, with a steadily growing number of participants until 2020, stopped by COVID-19 restrictions. In 2019, the festival had almost eleven thousand participants. Like many other activities driven by nationalists, the festival legitimizes nationalist ideas and history by placing their ideological content in a broad civic context. The festival covers a wide range of issues and activities, from musical events and concerts to popularizing environmental concerns and human rights issues (Bandershtadt 2019).

In the meantime, the OUN and UPA public cult developed in its way. The UINP declared 2017 “the year of the UPA” (75th anniversary) and proposed a program for popularizing the history of UPA at all levels of society, including schools. The official concept described the history of the UPA as a continuation of 1917 – the 1920s – and of the OUN struggle in the 1920s and the 1930s. The dissident movement of the 1960s and 70s and the “national-democratic renaissance of the 1980s” were likewise presented as continuing the UPA's struggle (UINP 2016).

In the same year, the Ukrainian producer released the state-funded feature film *Chervony*. The film shows (and lionizes) the story of a brave UPA soldier who led an uprising in a Stalinist-era camp.

In 2017, Ukrainian pop stars presented the “Anthem of the New Ukrainian Army,” a cover of the party hymn of the OUN from 1932. The presidential military guard and orchestra took part in the video clip shooting. The video gathered more than twelve million views on YouTube (2017). The military parade in Kyiv in 2018 started with this march; then, the piece became part of regular public performances in the army. During the 2019 presidential campaign, Poroshenko used this musical track for public appearances.

In 2018–2020, Svoboda and their allies undertook a new symbolic action on the Western and Central Ukraine local councils. Responding to the suggested changes to the Law on the Institute of National Remembrance in Poland (which described the OUN and UPA as criminal organizations), they lobbied for decisions about displaying the flag of the OUN on specific commemorative dates. At the end of January 2018, Lviv's regional council recommended that the revolutionary OUN flag

be displayed not only on administrative and communal buildings (the latter includes schools) but also on other real estate objects. Following the Lviv region, the Ternopil City Council adopted the same decision in early February 2018. In mid-February, deputies of the Ivano-Frankivsk City Council picked up this initiative, designating it two to three days per year (Kurs 2018). In mid-March, after a heated debate, the Lviv City Council made a similar decision.

Appropriation of the OUN and UPA symbols spread to Central and even Eastern Ukraine, wherever there were active Svoboda cells in local councils. In March 2018, the Zhytomyr Regional Council set days for displaying flags at official buildings – six dates per year (Кореспондент.net 2018). Khmelnytsky City and the regional councils also participated in the campaign (Khmel'nytsky City Council 2018). In May 2018, the Poltava City Council, the mayor's office, and the Sumy City Council were in the same boat. (Poltavshchyba, 2018; Ukrinform 2018). In 2021, the city of Bohodukhiv in the Kharkiv region followed this trend (Suspil'ne Novyny 2021). The selection of commemorative dates was similar everywhere. It referred mainly to the history of the OUN and the UPA (of course, everywhere in the western regions, the list included the birthday of Bandera). In Central Ukraine, the list of days was much shorter: October 14 (the Defender's Day and UPA day), the Day of Dignity and Freedom (November 21), dedicated to the Revolution of Dignity, and the Day of the Ukrainian Volunteer (March 14). Notably, in some regions, Svoboda changed the flag's name from the "revolutionary OUN" to the "flag of the struggle."

The changes in discourse followed these accomplishments. Supporters of the nationalist narrative no longer preferred associating themselves and their desired version of the past exclusively with the term "nationalism," which had negative connotations in Ukrainian intellectual and cultural tradition. The OUN, the UPA, and other nationalist organizations wished to brand themselves as constituents of the "national liberation movement," reserving "nationalism" for internal use. There was nothing new here: Nationalists had already performed this way before, but now they represented themselves as a leading force in the national liberation of Ukraine. Moreover, having skeletons in their closets (anti-Semitism, totalitarian ideology, collaboration with Nazis, ethnic cleansings, crimes against civilians), they symbolically ennobled themselves by equating the OUN and UPA with the dissidents of the 1960s and the 1980s, the Rukh of the end of the 1980s, and the Ukrainian cultural revival of the 1920s. This pattern made its way to the new generation of textbooks, primarily because of the efforts of the TsDVR-led UINP.

The activity of OUN and UPA during the Second World War was embedded into the attractive and noble European image of the "Resistance" – this is how the OUN and UPA began to be interpreted in school history textbooks in 2018, when the representatives of the UINP revised the school programs.<sup>5</sup> "Lessons of courage" (ironically, the name borrowed from the Soviet times) based on the heroic stories about UPA became a recurring event on October 14 in schools. President Poroshenko turned this symbolic date of the creation of the UPA (October 14) into the official Day of Defenders of Motherland, replacing the Soviet name and date of the event (February 23).

Therefore, the whitewashing discourse has become bare. The textbooks' stories of Righteous Among the Nations start with Greek Catholic abbess Olena Viter, followed by an apparent reference to her membership in OUN-b. In popular media, the organization with programmatic anti-Semitism turned into a body that arranged the "system of saving Jews." (Ukrinform 2021). The UPA appeared to be an international brotherhood of combatants fought exclusively against two totalitarian regimes, as an anti-Nazi force (Romaniuk 2020), and its anti-Polish activities, if ever mentioned, were deliberated on in terms of negationism and whataboutism.<sup>6</sup>

## Conclusions

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Ukraine witnessed a transformation of the local memory narrative, based on communicative memory (Assmann, 2008), into cultural memory and regional cult. This happened very quickly because the cultural memory of the OUN and UPA had already



been formed and imported to Ukraine by nationalist organizations of the Ukrainian diaspora in the USA, Canada, and Australia.

It took shape as a nationalist narrative of history and memory, which became a constituent part of a broader Ukrainian national narrative in the 1990s and the 2010s. During this evolution, the nationalist narrative of memory legitimized itself as the central and most important part of the history of the Ukrainian national liberation movement of the 20th century. The legal and political legitimization and promotion of the nationalist narrative took place under the slogans of “transitional justice” as a protracted rehabilitation process for victims of the “totalitarian regime.” In parallel, the creators and promoters of the nationalist narrative carried out public and moral elevation of both the constructed past of the nationalist movement and its ideology. It took place under the mantra of restoring the historical truth. It became a part of a broader process of revision of the past within the framework of coming to terms with a “totalitarian legacy,” where the OUN and UPA were presented as principal fighters against totalitarianism and as its victims.

The growth of a positive attitude toward the nationalist memory narrative followed this successful legitimization, which became glorification. Sociological data on changes in public attitudes toward the most iconic nationalist organizations, the OUN and UPA, shows some success. In the last decade, polls have shown growth in the public recognition of the OUN and UPA members as fighters for independence. The most significant increase in the share of recognition supporters occurred during 2014–2017, as well as in 2022.

Several factors may explain this growth.

The wording of the questionnaires deserves attention. Respondents were asked about their attitude toward recognizing the OUN and UPA as “participants of the struggle for independence.” There was no alternative to this formula. According to school history, learned for thirty years, these formations were fighters for independence. Moreover, special law enshrined this status as an official norm and prohibited public denial of its legality.

However, the main reason is probably Russia’s war with Ukraine. The occupation of the territories, particularly resistant to the nationalist narrative (Crimea and one-third of the Donbas in 2014, parts of Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions in 2022), played a significant role in decreasing the number and share of opponents of the nationalist narrative of memory. The maximum surge in the positive stance toward nationalist formations occurred in 2014–2017 and 2022 (see [table 1](#)) when many perceived the image of OUN and UPA in the context of Russia’s aggression as a response.

The expansion of the nationalist memory narrative from its home region to the rest of Ukraine occurred within the framework of intense decommunization of the symbolic space, thus creating favorable conditions for an anti-communist, anti-Soviet, and anti-Russian narrative, which were generic features of the nationalist version of the past.

Having strong state support, vociferous media accompaniment, and virtually no resistance from its disparate and demoralized political opponents, the nationalist narrative of memory seemed to have every chance to conquer the territory vacated by the Soviet-nostalgic narrative.

**Table 1.** Attitudes toward recognition of the members of OUN and UPA as fighters for independence, Ukraine

	2011/RG	2013/RG	2015/RG	2015/RC	2017/RG	2018/RG	2021/RC/DI	2022/RG
Positive	27	27	41	42	49	45	46	81
Negative	49	52	38	22	29	33	29	10
Hard to answer	24	20	21	21	23	23	16	10
I do not care	–	–	–	15	–	–	9	

Source: Rating Group (RG), 2011, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2022; Rozumkov Center/Democratic Initiatives (RC/DI), 2016, 2021.

The share of OUN and UPA supporters as fighters for independence increased sharply in the eastern and southern regions and less in central Ukraine, which was a real success (see table 2). However, the percentage of opponents of this historical-judicial qualification remained substantial in these regions, not to mention a large group of those who prefer not to express their attitude to this sensitive issue.

Notably, promoters of the nationalist narrative packed it into a broader liberation discourse, as happened with the slogan, flag, and anthem of the OUN in 2014–2018. Paradoxically, by concealing the totalitarian nature of the original OUN-b and fitting it into the general stream of the contemporary liberation agenda, the nationalists flattened their political identity. On the other hand, by cultivating the historical image of radical nationalists as eternal fighters, constantly sacrificing themselves, and extrapolating this image to modern nationalist organizations, they gained honor and respect for their past but not votes in the present. Their symbolic capital did not translate well into political achievements. Failure in elections followed great success in the rehabilitation and glorification of the past. Two candidates from nationalist parties in the wartime presidential elections of 2014 obtained 0.7% and 1.6% of the votes; in 2019, a single presidential candidate from nationalist parties got 1.6%. In the parliamentary elections of 2014, nationalists (Svoboda) managed six seats. In 2019 – one.

**Table 2.** Attitudes toward recognition of the members of OUN and UPA as fighters for independence, Regions

	Western Ukraine							
	2011/RG	2013/RG	2015/RG	2015/RC	2017/RG	2018/RG	2021/RC/DI	2022/RG
Positive	72	70	76	76	80	71	80	89
Negative	16	n/a	n/a	6	6	12	6	6
Hard to answer	12	n/a	n/a	11	14	17	6	5
I do not care			–	7			8	
Central Ukraine								
Positive	28	n/a	42	46	51	45	47	82
Negative	43	n/a	n/a	14	23	29	27	7
Hard to answer	29	n/a	n/a	26	26	27	18	1
I do not care			–	14			7	
Southern Ukraine								
Positive	6	6	27	20	30	30	20	73
Negative	73	n/a	n/a	24	46	46	43	15
Hard to answer	21	n/a	n/a	35	25	23	27	13
I do not care				20			10	
Eastern Ukraine								
Positive	10	6	23	27	19	26	24	72
Negative	55	n/a	n/a	40	53	52	47	20
Hard to answer	35	n/a	n/a	18	29	22	17	8

Source: Rating Group (RG) 2011, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2022; Rozumkov Center 2016; Demokratychni initsiatyvy (DI), Rozumkov Center (RC) 2021.

There were more significant side effects of this moderate success in the struggle for the nationalist vision of the past.

The elevation of the nationalist narrative of memory to the national level, which implied the identification of the Ukrainian nationalist movement with an entire nation (at least in ethnic terms), was reinforced by the desire of the nationalists to speak on behalf of all Ukrainians. These claims resulted in a situation in which the dark side of the past of the OUN and UPA, voluntarily or involuntarily, could be identified with an entire Ukrainian national narrative. If Ukrainian nationalists' past was recognized as a sacred instance dear to all Ukrainians, then the black deeds of OUN and UPA and responsibility thereof would also be the responsibility of Ukraine as a state and Ukrainians as a nation. It entailed considerable reputational risks and losses in other spheres of the state's memory policy.

Moreover, the representation of the Ukrainian nationalist movement exclusively within the glorification paradigm (which is natural for party-driven and mythologized trends) provided excellent opportunities for political opponents to undermine trust in the nationalist narrative and manipulate its excesses for the opposite ends. Claims for its omnipresence also suggested manipulative undertakings to represent all Ukrainians as inveterate nationalists or biased manipulators. Not surprisingly, Russian state-controlled media readily exploited nationalist happenings and festivals (such as annual Bandera torchlight marches or the worship of the SS Galizien Division) in the hybrid war against Ukraine. At the same time, top officials of Russia used it as a *casus belli* under the pretext of the so-called "denazification." Paradoxically, the nationalists' claim to speak on behalf of all of Ukraine coincided with Putin's desire to describe Ukraine as a domain of cave nationalism and Ukrainian nationalists as Nazis.

The triumphant symbolic affirmation of the nationalist memory narrative at the state level generated internal tension lines in the country (Wylegala 2017). It is not difficult to notice that these lines perfectly matched the boundaries of those regions, which were traditionally critical of this narrative and its symbolic representations. Perhaps there was no coincidence that Poroshenko and his party suffered a crushing defeat in these regions in the 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections. Many Ukrainians in the South East voted not so much for Zelensky as against Poroshenko. Of course, Poroshenko's excessive fascination with the nationalist narrative was not the main reason for his defeat, but it was undoubtedly an essential component of his failure.

It also created teething trouble in the foreign policy of remembrance (Umland, Yurchuk 2017). For example, appeals by top Ukrainian leaders to Israel to recognize the Holodomor as genocide are unlikely to be successful if the country glorifies organizations and individuals who collaborated with the Nazis and were directly or indirectly involved in the extermination of the Jews. Annual celebrations of Bandera's birthdays routinely provoked diplomatic demarches from the Israeli side. The protracted conflict with Poland, where some "heroes of the national liberation struggle" glorified by the Ukrainian state were officially recognized as genocide perpetrators, may serve as another example.

Promoters of the nationalist narrative of memory reached a peak of popularity and fame in times of unrest, crisis, and war. Puzzlingly, they might be thankful to someone they consider their eternal and worst enemy, Russia and the Russian ruling class. The annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas contributed significantly to the popularity of the heroic nationalist myth and, thus, the successful promotion of the nationalist memory narrative. However, it has reached the limits of influence.

The massive Russian invasion in February 2022 and the new phase of the war drew a line during this period. Ukraine is fighting against Russia, bringing together supporters and opponents of the nationalist narrative of memory and those indifferent to it. This war will form a new narrative of struggle and heroism that cannot be reduced to narrow-party mythology, and exclusive ethnic nationalism will probably have a more powerful unifying potential.

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## Notes

- 1 Calculated on <http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/>, using search words: OUN; UPA; recognition; rehabilitation (Accessed November 12, 2021.)
- 2 *Fil'my pro UPA*, <https://www.hurtom.com/portal/7849/фільми-про-УПА> (Accessed December 2, 2021.)
- 3 In June 2011, a clone of this draft law was submitted by the MP from Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc. Now the list of those who struggled for independence also included organizations and state formations from the 1917–1920 period and the Ukrainian Helsinki Union (Group) from the 1970s–1980s. See [http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4\\_1?pf3511=40664](http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_1?pf3511=40664). (Accessed December 27, 2021)
- 4 Calculated on: <http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/>, using search words: OUN; UPA; recognition; rehabilitation (Accessed December 23, 2021.)
- 5 See, for instance Polians'ky Pavlo, 2018, *World History. Grade 11. Standard level* [In Ukrainian.], Kyiv: Hramota, 2019: 216; and Mudryi Marian and Arkusha Olena. 2018. *History. Ukraine and the World. Grade 10. (Integrated Course). Standard Level* [In Ukrainian.] Kyiv: Heneza, 2018 : 252.
- 6 See O. Strukevych. 2018. *History of Ukraine, Grade 10. Standard Level* [In Ukrainian], Kyiv: Hramota, 2018 : 206.

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