



The Ukrainian Question in russian Foreign Policy:¹ A Commentary on M. Kovalevsky's Article "Russian Political Directions Towards the Ukrainian Question" (1927)

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Abstract

This paper offers a commentary on M. Kovalevsky's article "Rosyjskie kierunki polityczne wobec zagadnienia ukraińskiego" [Russian Political Directions Towards the Ukrainian Question], published in *Sprawy Narodowościowe* in 1927. Kovalevsky reveals how Ukrainian identity was denied by the soviet regime, how Ukrainian culture was marginalised or used as a tool to destabilise the region, and how the country's resources were exploited by the totalitarian state. The present paper traces parallels with contemporary russian rhetoric and actions, showing how historical narratives are weaponised to justify the ongoing

1 The author deliberately uses lowercase in words and phrases such as "putin", "russia", "russian", "bolshhevik", "soviet" and "russian empire" to express solidarity with Ukrainian academics working under russian missile and drone attacks in Ukraine.

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russian aggression. Drawing on Kovalevsky's insights, the author illustrates how culture became a colonial tool, mirroring broader imperial practices, and how Ukraine's emancipation remains central to regional stability and postcolonial resistance.

Keywords: russian imperialism; soviet national policy; cultural colonialism; bolshevik Ukrainisation; russian foreign policy; Ukrainian identity; Eastern Europe

The russo-Ukrainian war, which began with the annexation of Crimea and the invasion of eastern territories in 2014, followed by the full-scale invasion in February 2022, is a manifestation of the imperialistic approach that russia has maintained towards Ukraine for centuries. The former empire and later soviet state not only exploited Ukraine economically but also distorted and appropriated its culture and carried genocidal campaigns against its people. russian president putin, in his essay "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" (12 July 2021), summarises the core principles of russian propaganda concerning Ukraine – underlining the notion of so-called shared origins and historical unity. He claims that russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians all descend from Kyivan Rus', disregarding the historical fact that it is Ukraine that is a direct successor of the glorious medieval kingdom. putin argues that the three nations are one, and they are historically intertwined and destined to share a common future. A year before the annexation of Crimea, in Kyiv, at the conference called *Orthodox Slavic Values: The Foundation of Ukraine's Civilizational Choice*, he stated as follows:

Let me say again that we will respect whatever choice our Ukrainian partners, friends and brothers make. The question is only one of how we go about agreeing on working together under absolutely equal, transparent and clear conditions. (Putin, 2013)

In the passage quoted above, there is a clear indication of "brothers" and agreement on "working together" under "clear conditions", which, according to putin, should be on russian terms. In his essay "On the Historical Unity", he claims that Ukraine is a creation of the twentieth century, and that all the attempts to break free from russia are a foreign interference aiming to spread discord among the closely related nations, which must always be together under russian rule. He questions the "legitimacy of Ukraine's borders", which, according to him, came as a result of foreign intervention. Finally, he criticises any national sentiments of Ukrainians about building their own state, seeing it as a form of aggression towards russia and russians. Instead, he calls for reconciliation and the restoration of unity (Putin, 2021) – his long-lasting dream, which even intensified after the fall of the USSR (Düben, 2023). To add to the complexity of this misconception, putin reduces the status of the Ukrainian language to that of a russian dialect. According to this logic, the works of Ukrainian writers belong to russian cultural heritage (Putin, 2021), which amounts to cultural appropriation, a practice that has been the case for centuries.

The content of putin's essay is not surprising for Ukrainians, since it reflects russia's long-established attitude towards Ukraine. European elites were concerned about russo-Ukrainian cohesion even in the previous centuries, because they were certain that the trajectory of this relation would be decisive for the stability of Eastern Europe and would shape russian foreign policy. russia's position towards Ukraine has always been, and still is, an imperialistic one.

The russian approach is perfectly captured in an article by M. Kovalevsky, a Ukrainian historian and publicist who specialised in nationality issues and ethnic policies in the soviet union, with a particular focus on Ukraine. He was associated with the Ukrainian Commission and the Commission for Scientific Research of the Eastern Territories. The latter was a body within the framework of the Institute for the Study of National Affairs in Warsaw, which was active in 1921–1939 and was involved in minority and nationality policy research (Grott, 2013, pp. 12–13, 49). In 1927, Kovalevsky published an article entitled “Rosyjskie kierunki polityczne wobec zagadnienia ukraińskiego” [Russian Political Directions Towards the Ukrainian Question], which appeared in the journal *Sprawy Narodowościowe* [Nationality Affairs] (Kowalewskyj, 1927).

In his article, Kovalevsky underlines that from the very beginning of the bolshevik revolution in russia, European states were concerned about the Eastern question, as it was not clear how the so-called “third russia” would evolve. It was already certain that there was a huge discrepancy between European and russian political and cultural values. As the former empire transformed into a new one, it was quite apparent that this process was also dependent on the subjugated nations and ethnic groups (Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 23). The elements that really mattered in this case were culture, traditions, economic diversity and state organisation. The cohesion of these nations and ethnic groups, as well as their aspirations for emancipation from russia, would also depend on russia's transformation in the future. What was also clear was that russia would always prioritise its economic interest. Thus, the economic development of Eastern Europe would be dependent on these factors, in particular on any potential emancipation movements within this new version of russia (Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 23).

Taking into consideration the above, Kovalevsky examines Ukrainian-russian relations with great precision, since he believes that the Ukrainian question is of key importance for Eastern Europe, and that it will determine how the region will develop in the future (Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 24). According to the author, in tsarist russia, the Ukrainian question was seen as less important: from the russian perspective, a small group of intellectuals fought for a limited cultural autonomy, and it was rather unlikely that it would transform into a bigger national movement. In other words, the Ukrainian question was seen as limited to the ethno-cultural level (Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 24). This is the main reason why Kovalevsky does not write extensively on this period. However, it is worth noting that the russian empire consistently repressed any attempt of a movement for Ukrainian identity.

The complex russo-Ukrainian relations began when Ukrainian Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky pledged his loyalty to russian tsar Aleksei Romanov in Pereiaslav on 8 January 1654 (Plokhyy, 2015, p. 104). An interesting fact in this context is that, during the negotiation process, the tsar required a translator to communicate with Khmelnytsky and the Cossacks, which clearly indicates that we are dealing with a distinct ethnic group and culture (Plokhyy, 2015, p. 104).

When in 1721 tsar Peter I proclaimed himself emperor, the gradual "brain drain" and destruction of Ukrainian culture began (Mick, 2023). Paradoxically, theologians from Kyiv played a main role in the modernisation of the russian Orthodox Church and in the formulation of Peter the Great's ideology, which later stressed the inseparable unity of the two nations (Snyder, 2003, pp. 122–132). When Cossacks joined the Great Northern War on the side of the Swedish army under Charles XII, and were defeated by Peter I at the Battle of Poltava, the emperor decided to destroy the Zaporizhian Sich as a potential military power which could bring a threat to russia in the future. This goal was achieved by Catherine II in 1775; later on, in 1783, she abolished Ukrainian courts and turned Cossack regiments into regular russian military formations (Rudnytsky & Himka, 1981, p. 245).

According to the russian census of 1897, 44% of the registered population declared themselves great russians, based on their native language being russian; 18% were referred to as little russians, whom russian elites identified as Ukrainians. The Ukrainian language was defined as a little russian dialect and portrayed as a distorted version of the russian language (Kappeler et al., 1990). Language, as one of the major carriers of identity, was regarded by national elites as crucial to preserve. Therefore, Ukrainian elites sought to revive the Ukrainian spirit through the support and development of literature (Düben, 2023). To prevent national awakening, the official reaction from russia came swiftly: the Ukrainian language was banned from print, theatrical performances, teaching and writing through the Ems Decree (1876). Earlier, the Valuev Circular (1863) had declared that the Ukrainian language had never existed and would never exist, effectively eliminating it from the education system. This policy continued into the following century. Between 1905 and 1912, the Ministry of Education closed Ukrainian cultural institutions and forbade the promotion of Ukrainian studies within the empire.

Kovalevsky emphasises that, over time, the situation and the attitudes of the ruling elites have changed. Ukrainians elected 50 deputies to the State Duma (the first elections were held in 1905), where they formed their parliamentary club to advocate for a broader political autonomy (Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 24). In his view, it was a turning point when the Ukrainian question became part of the political agenda in russia; notably, russian society criticised Ukrainian aspirations for autonomy and considered them in terms of separatism (Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 24). To compare this to the present-day russian attitude towards the Ukrainian question, it is worth quoting an interview with Ukrainian writer Yurii Andrukhovych, where he recalls his studies at the Maxim Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow in the 1990s:

But there is a country where Ukraine constantly appears in the front pages of all the newspapers and in the news – radio and TV. It is Russia. Ukraine really is a big deal for Russia. Russia will bend over backwards to bring Ukraine back into line, to turn it back from the path towards Europe, because in the end, so they think, it is the heart of Holy Rus'. I simply cannot understand how the heart and sanctity can be treated like this. The average Russian might get to know that the Maidan was organised by Swedes, Poles, Lithuanians in revenge for the defeat in the Battle of Poltava they had suffered in the times of Peter I. (Smoleński & Andruchowycz, 2014, pp. 135–136)²

In the same interview, Andruchovych also recalls one of his professors, a Pushkin scholar who liked to talk about history in his classes. One day, talking about Peter I, the professor stressed that the emperor had not actually done much in comparison to his father, Aleksei Mikhailovich, who was known as the “quiet tsar” (Smoleński & Andruchowycz, 2014, p. 146). It was the same Aleksei Romanov who signed the Pereiaslav treaty with Khmelnytsky in 1654, tying Ukraine’s ruling elite to the russian sphere of influence. In this context, Andruchovych also notes that “the professor spoke bluntly about Ukraine as a conquered, appropriated country. [...] He explained that Russia did it for our own good, sacrificed itself, because it took us under its wing” (Smoleński & Andruchowycz, 2014, p. 146).

These passages reveal a routine attitude of russia towards Ukraine as something acquired centuries ago; and things have to stay that way according to russia. From this perspective, Ukraine has no right to break free from its “eastern brother” and the orbit of russian influence, because any attempt to do so is regarded as a direct threat to the former empire and current russian state. Unfortunately, it correlates with the other ideas presented by Kovalevsky. He mentions the famous ideologist of russian liberalism Petr Struve, one of the leaders of the Constitutional Democratic Party in russia, who discussed his position on the Ukrainian question in his polemical articles published in 1911–1912. Even though the Constitutional Democrats were prepared to accommodate the autonomy aspirations of Poles and Finns, Struve argued that Ukraine and Belarus must still belong to the russian camp. This way of thinking stressed the role of culture rather than ethnicity. He compared russia to Great Britain and the United States as an empire in the making, where all national groups were to be united by culture – namely russian culture (Plokhly, 2017, p. 166). Analysing the goals of the Ukrainian movement, Struve concluded that Ukrainian autonomy would have catastrophic consequences for russia and therefore urged the government to fight this movement without hesitation and with great determination (Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 24).

Kovalevsky continues that it came as no surprise that, in 1910, Stolypin issued a circular to local authorities in which he condemned the Ukrainian movement as alien and separatist. He introduced repressive measures against individuals who conducted any suspicious and national-oriented activities. These measures were supported by russian society and politicians. In the context of the current russo-Ukrainian war, it is not only

² This and all subsequent quotations from publications which appeared in Polish or Ukrainian were translated by the author of this article.

russian politicians but also members of russian political opposition who share similar ideas. On 10 April 2025, the opposition figure and former political prisoner Vladimir Kara-Murza spoke in the French Parliament. When responding to a question from Senator Claude Mahuret about possible revolutionary sentiments in the republics of the russian federation, Kara-Murza quoted his human rights colleague, who explained why the russian Ministry of Defence recruits so many members of national minorities:

And she told me that there is another reason why the Russian Ministry of Defence enlists so many members of national minorities – as it turns out, it is psychologically very difficult for Russians to kill Ukrainians. Because we are the same. These are very close people, as everyone knows. We have almost the same language, the same religion, centuries of shared history. But if it is someone from another culture, supposedly it's easier. That's what this colleague told me yesterday. I had never thought about it before. I had assumed the reasons were primarily economic. But when I heard what she said, I started to think about it too... (Stetsenko, 2025)

What we can see here is the idea of “almost the same language” and “sharing the same religion and history”, which shows that the views of russian opposition were shaped by the russian cultural environment.

Coming back to Kovalevsky's article, he goes on to mention Vasillii Maklakov (an adviser to Pavel Miliukov, one of the leaders of the Constitutional Democratic Party), who insinuated in the Duma that the Ukrainian movement was created and supported by the Germans. Some politicians claimed that it was a Polish plot (Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 24). Whenever Ukraine decides to part from russia – in economic, political, social and cultural terms – there is always a foreign power to blame, a power that aims to break the alleged “eternal unity of the two nations”. Today, putin's regime justifies its actions in Ukraine by blaming external influences (Applebaum, 2024), and claiming that it is NATO that is responsible for the russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February, since NATO's potential enlargement would bring insecurity and pose a direct threat to russia (Person & McFaul, 2022).

When President Donald Trump blamed Joe Biden for the russia-Ukraine war (CNN-News 18, 2025), the russian Intelligence Service put on its website a telling cartoon, suggesting that America and russia fight “Eurofascism” together (16 April 2025). The cartoon draws alleged parallels with World War II, when the US and USSR were fighting Nazi Germany. It depicts russian and American bayonets smashing a swastika-shaped beast, its claws dripping with blood. The head of the beast is that of the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen; the beast bears the EU flag. There are several soviet posters from 1944 showing American, soviet and British bayonets aimed at a German soldier, which could have served as a prototype for the cartoon in question (Ostapenko, 2025).³ Today, however, Britain demands that russia should face tribunal for “the crime of aggression” against Ukraine

³ For soviet posters from 1944 see: *Was there propaganda in WW2 that depicted US and Soviet Union as allies?* (n.d.).

(Diver, 2025; Stacey, 2025). The European Union keeps the sanctions against Russia and demands that it must be held accountable for the crimes it inflicted upon Ukrainian people in the genocidal war against Ukraine.

Returning to Kovalevsky, he argues that the Russian leftist parties did not substantially challenge the liberal perspective on the Ukrainian question. From the ideological standpoint, according to Marks, capitalist development builds a new social reality. Therefore, the more the process of capital concentration intensified, the more firmly Ukrainian demands for autonomy were rejected (Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 25). After the revolution of 1917, the Ukrainian question became acute again. Kovalevsky underlines that the Russian Provisional Government, headed by Prince Lvov, was unable to carry out Struve's advice to suppress Ukrainian aspirations for a separate state. The plan was to subordinate Ukrainian culture, which was seen as a potential source of national revival. Given its strategic interests in Ukraine, Russia was unwilling to permit its separation. According to Kovalevsky, in May 1917, the Provisional Government proposed an autonomy statute to a delegation of the Ukrainian Central Rada (Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 25). As planned, the autonomous Ukrainian government was to take over the administration of the Poltava, Chernihiv, Kyiv and Podolia provinces in return for the Kharkiv, Katerynoslav and Kherson provinces, which would be outside its jurisdiction for a simple reason: their natural resources (such as coal and iron ore); the Black Sea coast was to remain under Russian government. In this way, Ukraine's riches would be still controlled by Russia, which would secure its dominant position in Eastern Europe (Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 25). However, Kovalevsky confuses several facts: in reality, in May 1917, the Provisional Government refused to acknowledge the autonomy of the Ukrainian Central Rada. The events he describes refer to the Temporary Instruction to the General Secretariat, issued on 7 August 1917, when Prince Lvov was not the head of the Provisional Government anymore (Myl'ko, 2016, pp. 301–302).

Ukrainians were forced to accept the stagnation of the country's economic development and its resulting consequences – a lack of prosperity and a total dependence on Russian economic policy. Ukraine was forced to switch to a mostly agrarian national economy. In that precise period, it was easy to declare that Ukrainian culture is inferior to Russian and label it as peasant, a classic colonial practice of dealing with the subjugated (Hagen, 2015–2016).

On 22 January 1918, Ukraine's independence was proclaimed in Kyiv. On the same day next year, the Act of Unification was signed between the Ukrainian People's Republic (UNR) and the West Ukrainian People's Republic (ZUNR), creating one political entity (Solonyna, 2016). Thus, 22 January became a symbolic date for the Ukrainian freedom movement, and it is commemorated as the Day of Unity. On 21 January 1990, in commemoration of the Act of Unification, Ukrainian dissidents Bohdan and Mykhailo Horyn' organised a special event: a 600-km-long human chain extending from Lviv to Kyiv – an act of protest against the communist regime and support for independence, which Ukraine declared in 1991 (Trehubova, 2018).

On 22 January 2014, one of the first victims who became known as the Heavenly Hundred was killed by the Yanukovych regime; the protests in Kyiv's Independence Square started when the president backed out of the Association Agreement with the European Union and leaned towards russia's Eurasian integration efforts.

In his article, Kovalevsky predicts that the problem of russo-Ukrainian relations will continue due to the imperialistic appetites of the conqueror. Although there were some cultural concessions, such as allowing Ukrainian as the language of instruction in certain schools, it was a small price for the economic advantage russia gained in exchange. In this model, Ukraine remained a source of russian economic strength, securing its supremacy in Central Europe.

The occupation of Ukraine by the bolshevik government did not bring a solution to the Ukrainian question. Kovalevsky underlines that the geographical position of Ukraine and the freedom-oriented aspirations of its people meant that the bolsheviks had to adopt the right strategy to keep it from revolt (Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 26). Communism as an ideology appeared contradictory to many Ukrainians. For this reason, they attempted to resist the imposed regime at various levels. In June 1923, during the 12th Party Congress, the communist party adopted a resolution proclaiming the "fight against Russian chauvinism" (Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 26). Party leaders were convinced that Ukrainians had to be won over to the soviet cause. They therefore sought to achieve this through language policy, allowing the use of Ukrainian as a means of spreading communist propaganda (Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 26). This approach was intended to counter the influence of Ukrainian elites advocating the Ukrainian cause and independence. At the same time, the regime fostered social divisions between Ukrainian-speaking intellectuals and the proletariat. The latter, more closely aligned with soviet structures and often russian-speaking, were considered more likely to support the communist party. Consequently, Ukrainian-speaking elites who openly opposed the party were declared enemies of the regime (Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 26).

During the conference of communist youth associations in June 1925, Volodymyr Zatonsky (the minister of education of the soviet Ukrainian government, who had earlier served as a personal secretary to Lenin (Ploky, 2017)), talked about how to gain the support of common people for the party and its agenda. He stressed that, in order to avoid the opposite reaction, there should be no forceful attempts to subjugate the masses. Instead, as he argued, the bolsheviks need to appeal to the soul of the people: "That is why we need Ukrainian culture, a culture that would be proletarian in content and Ukrainian in form. Ukrainian culture must be used as a tool of the proletariat" (as cited in Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 27). This move was motivated by economic benefits from the subjugation of Ukraine. Kovalevsky provides the statistics of Ukrainian contribution in raw materials and agricultural products in 1926. As can be seen, Ukraine constituted the greater part of russian economic potential at the time, contributing 52% of russia's surplus in grain production, 80% of its sugar, 80% of its coal, 75% of its manganese, and 65% of its iron (Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 27). Despite certain cultural concessions, the party did not intend

to go further as it wanted to prevent any Ukrainian identity-building process, which could foster a new emancipation movement. However, despite these efforts, the emancipation movement still continued.

Communist authorities repressed and killed thousands of Ukrainian writers and activists who fought for a separate national identity and opposed the version of “new human” introduced by the party (Ahejewa, 2023, p. 38). In 1997, mass graves were discovered in Sandarmokh forest in the Republic of Karelia, a place where members of more than 58 nationalities were shot and buried by NKVD over a 14-month period in 1937 and 1938. Among the victims were the Ukrainian writers, poets and culture industry workers who were in some way associated with the building called *Slovo* (“Word”) in Kharkiv, constructed by communists in the 1920s to accommodate Ukrainian cultural activists in one place, a “project” that would make it easier to control them. The Ukrainian cultural figures who were repressed and killed in that period became known as the “Executed Renaissance” (Hryn, 2004–2005).

Kovalevsky notes that culture became an “ethnographical tool”, and that precisely the same tool was used by European countries “in wild or semi-wild colonies” (Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 27). He refers several times to ideas that were to become central to post-colonial theory, which was developed much later. In 1994, Edward W. Said would write in his *Culture and Imperialism* as follows:

Territory and possessions are at stake, geography and power. [...] At some very basic level, imperialism means thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, [...] that is lived on and owned by others. For all kinds of reasons, it attracts some people and often involves untold misery for others. (Said, 1994, p. 7)

Kovalevsky refers to an article by Mykhailo Hrushevsky, published in the journal *Ukraina* [Ukraine] in 1926, stressing that the aim of bolshevik Ukrainisation was to fix for eternity the subordinate position of Ukraine as it had been during the tsarist period. Ukrainian culture was defined as provincial in comparison to state-level russian culture. This move was to ensure the superiority of russian language, literature, history and art as mandatory and dominant subjects in school education for the subjugated nations. russian culture was to serve as “a window on Europe”, through which global culture was to reach Ukraine in its distorted, politicised version (Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 28). Ninety-seven years after the publication of Hrushevsky’s article, Ukrainian writer Viktoria Amelina wrote in her essay for *The Guardian* about her early childhood, when she was submerged in russian culture, even though she lived in western Ukraine; she attended a russian-speaking school and extra-curricular activities conducted in russian: “There was an entire system in place that aimed to make me believe that Moscow, not Kyiv, was the centre of my universe” (Amelina, 2023). Amelina died as a result of a russian missile attack on Kramatorsk in the summer of 2023. She became one of the many Ukrainian writers killed by russia – as if the fate of the “Executed Renaissance” was repeating.

To prevent the development of a national idea of independent Ukraine, the bolsheviks repressed even the smallest attempts of a Ukrainian national revival movement. According to Kovalevsky, they faced a dilemma: either the Ukrainian movement would break free from communist control and overthrow communism in Ukraine, or they would have to execute rigorous control in every part of the country (Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 29). During the First Congress of the Third International, the bolsheviks declared that the Ukrainian question was one of the most important national issues in Central Europe because it could help to start a proletarian revolution in the neighbouring countries such as Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia (Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 29). In this utilitarian approach, the aim was to seize control of the Ukrainian movement – to bind Ukrainians with the communist movement through distorted Ukrainian culture, rigorously controlled by the bolsheviks. In addition, Ukrainian activities in the neighbouring countries would destabilise them from within and thus weaken their resistance (Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 29). This would also stir tensions among the nations of Central Europe. To some extent, they still persist today.

The last point of Kovalevsky's article refers to russian émigré liberals, who also wanted Ukraine to remain subordinate to russia (Kowalewskyj, 1927, pp. 29–30). We are coming back to the question of the so-called unity of the two nations, voices by Miliukov, Struve, Keren-sky and Maklakov. Kovalevsky quotes one of the russian émigrés – Aleksandr Yablonovsky:

We must say it loud and clear to the independence activists who dream of stretching the Ukrainian *sharovary* from the Carpathians to the Caucasus: if you want to take the Black Sea from Russia – take it, but you will have to do it by force. (as cited in Kowalewskyj, 1927, p. 29)

There are two aspects in this quotation which need to be considered. Firstly – the notion of *sharovary*, for a long time known as Cossack trousers (in red or blue), which were a typical attribute in depictions of Ukrainians. However, Ukrainians never wore *sharovary*, but rather dressed like other Europeans. The negative imagery had its explanation – it was the period when russian emperors tried to detach Ukrainian people from the historical legacy which they shared with their European neighbours. This was a deliberate move designed to show that Ukraine does not belong to Europe. The fact that Ukrainians took part in the Great Northern War hand in hand with Swedes, Poles and Lithuanians was just one of the many examples confirming that Ukraine is part of European history – and that fact was just one of the many that russia wanted to erase. russia constantly and persistently insisted that Ukrainians are inferior, weak and uneducated. This image was disseminated not only in russia and Ukraine but also abroad, wherever it was possible. Additionally, there was the entrenched shameful image of Ukrainian “peasantness” (Myrosh, 2025), where Ukrainians were presented as mostly common folk of rural descent, uneducated, primitive, and indulging in alcohol. Ukrainian people are trying to liberate themselves from this distorted representation. The notion of *sharovarshchyna* is a complex one and requires thorough deconstruction in terms of decolonial methodology (Demchuk, 2022).

Yablonovsky also refers to the Black Sea and Crimea. According to the peace treaty signed at Jassy in 1791, the Ottoman Empire recognised Russian control over the entire southern Ukraine, Crimea, and the Kuban region across the Strait of Kerch (Plokhyy, 2015, p. 140). In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea and invaded the eastern territories of Ukraine. It is yet another proof that Russia had an imperialistic approach towards the Ukrainian question for many centuries, and that this attitude continues to this day.

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Kwestia ukraińska w rosyjskiej polityce zagranicznej. Komentarz do artykułu M. Kowalewskiego *Rosyjskie kierunki polityczne wobec zagadnienia ukraińskiego (1927)*

Abstrakt

Niniejsza praca jest komentarzem do artykułu M. Kowalewskiego *Rosyjskie kierunki polityczne wobec zagadnienia ukraińskiego*, który ukazał się w „Sprawach Narodowościowych” w 1927 roku. Kowalewski pokazuje, jak radziecki reżim negował tożsamość ukraińską, w jaki sposób ukraińska kultura była marginalizowana bądź wykorzystywana jako narzędzie destabilizacji regionu oraz jak totalitarne państwo eksploatowało zasoby kraju. Autorka niniejszego artykułu odnajduje paralele ze współczesną retoryką i działaniami rosyjskiej, wskazując, w jaki sposób historyczne narracje są wykorzystywane dla uzasadnienia trwającej agresji na Ukrainę. Odwołując się do spostrzeżeń Kowalewskiego, pokazuje, jak kultura stała się narzędziem kolonializmu, odzwierciedlającym szersze praktyki imperialne, zauważając przy tym, że emancypacja Ukrainy pozostaje kluczowa dla stabilności i postkolonialnego oporu w regionie.

Słowa kluczowe: rosyjski imperializm; radziecka polityka narodowościowa; kolonializm kulturowy; bolszewicka ukraïnizacja; rosyjska polityka zagraniczna; tożsamość ukraińska; Europa Wschodnia

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