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## **EURASIANISM, NEO-EURASIANISM AND ANTI-UKRAINIANISM IN THE NARRATIVES OF MODERN RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA<sup>1</sup>**

### **Eurasianism, Neo-Eurasianism and Anti-Ukrainianism in the Narratives of Modern Russian Propaganda**

This article explores the issues of information warfare during the Russian aggression in Ukraine. The information warfare against Ukraine involves a wide range of methods and techniques aimed at destabilising society, introducing appropriate changes in the public consciousness and legitimising aggression. The purpose of this article is to analyse the main narratives of Russian ideological doctrine and propaganda in the context of their significance for Ukraine. The work focuses on three main aspects: (1) the ideas of the Eurasian doctrine; (2) the main postulates of neo-Eurasianism; and (3) the narratives of modern Russian propaganda that are being promoted in relation to Ukraine. The study shows that there is a link between the Eurasian doctrine of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, neo-Eurasianism and modern propaganda that determines the changes taking place in Russian narratives.

Keywords: Eurasianism, neo-Eurasianism, propaganda, narrative, information war.

### INTRODUCTION

Since 24 February 2022, the Russian-Ukrainian war, which began in February 2014 as a conflict localised in certain regions, has taken

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<sup>1</sup> Publikacja finansowana w ramach programu Ministra Edukacji i Nauki pod nazwą „DIALOG” w latach 2019–2022. This paper was written thanks to the Program in Support of Displaced Ukrainian Scholars organized jointly by the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAS) and the National Academy of Sciences of the United States (NAS).

on the character of a full-scale military invasion, becoming the most intense confrontation in Europe since the Russian-Chechen wars. If at first, the aggression was hybrid, because Russia hid the invasion and its military presence, disguising it as local 'separatism,' now the armed violence is open, it has acquired the highest degree of intensity, and covers the entire territory of Ukraine.

At all stages, the conflict was accompanied by an information struggle, which is undergoing another escalation stage in 2022. The Russian information space reflects numerous narratives formulated in the past centuries, which today are experiencing a kind of 'revival'. These narratives are purposefully reproduced in the mass consciousness of Russians and play an ideological, motivational, legitimating, and mobilising role. To understand the course of the information war, the essence of disinformation and manipulative techniques used through Russian propaganda, it is important to analyse the content of modern propaganda discourse, and the sources of its formation.

The purpose of this article is to identify the main narratives of Russian propaganda in their connection with the ideological doctrines of the past, in particular, Eurasianism as a nationalist doctrine, the ideas of which form the basis of modern Russian state ideology. The research methodology was based on historical and comparative approaches, methods of discourse analysis and narrative analysis. The source base of the study is the works of the ideologists of Eurasianism and neo-Eurasianism, textual and visual content of online media and social networks, as well as scientific publications.

## THE IMPERIAL NARRATIVE AND THE 'UKRAINIAN ISSUE' THROUGH THE PRISM OF EURASIANISM

Ukraine has always been an important spot in Russia's geopolitics. Whereas, starting from the time of the Tsardom of Moscow (the Muscovite kingdom), the development of the Russian state followed the logic of imperial expansion, the Ukrainian lands – having fallen into the orbit of its foreign policy encroachments, due to various historical, cultural, religious, and political reasons – were firmly entrenched in this orbit. Researchers have repeatedly stressed the importance of Ukraine for Russian geopolitics and self-identification. For instance, Zbigniew Brzezinski calls the loss of Ukraine '*a vital geopolitical setback for the Russian state*', which forced Russians to rethink their political and

ethnic affiliation and '*drastically limited Russia's geostrategic options*', effectively closing the European path to it<sup>2</sup>.

In this regard, Vera Tolz noted that '*... the most difficult thing for Russians was to survive the loss of Ukraine. This loss caused, not so much geopolitical, as the most acute psychological and ideological problems. Russians had to answer the question, what is Russia without Kyiv, the centre of Kyivan Rus, which Russians consider to be 'the first Russian state'*'<sup>3</sup>.

Therefore, without Ukraine, Russia has effectively lost the right to the inheritance of Kyivan Rus; its narrative of '*thousand-year-old history*', and claims to messianism, have become meaningless.

In our opinion, the principles of Russia's imperial geopolitics have been most consistently formulated within the framework of the Eurasianism doctrine. Although the sources of these ideas were laid earlier, particularly in the political philosophy of Slavophiles and Panslavists (I. Aksakov, K. Aksakov, M. Danilevsky, and so on), Eurasianism as a holistic geopolitical doctrine was formed in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its fundamental ideas, set out in the works of Nikolay Trubetskoy and Pyotr Savitsky, developed by other members of the Eurasianism movement, are of interest today, given their pivotal role in constructing modern Russian ideological and propaganda policy, designed to explain and legitimise geopolitical encroachments of the Russian state. Let's look into the main narratives most relevant to our current propaganda discourse.

#### THE ORIGINALITY AND UNIQUENESS OF RUSSIAN CIVILISATION

According to this narrative, Russia is neither a European nor an Asian state. It is a unique, integral, cultural-civilisational and geopolitical unit. The uniqueness of Russia is the product of a synthesis of three components: the primary Slavic substrate; the Byzantine tradition, of which the Russian Orthodox Church is a descendant; and the Asian state-building influence. Although Russians – the Great Russians – as the most numerous branch of the Eastern Slavs, play the role of the '*titular nation*' in Russia, N. Trubetskoy considered the eastern, Asian peoples to be the main state element. The idea of Russia as

<sup>2</sup> Z. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, 'BasicBooks', New York 1997, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in: Д. Ранкур-Лаферьер, *Россия и русские глазами американского психоаналитика: В поисках национальной идентичности*, 'Ладомир', Москва 2003, p. 26.

a legacy of Genghis Khan's empire, not of Kyivan Rus, as an Asian, not a European state, is formulated quite clearly in his works, and is one of the fundamental thoughts.

In his work *A Look at Russian History Not from the West, but from the East*, Trubetskoy writes, *'In a historical perspective, that modern state which can be called both Russia and the USSR (it's not a matter of the name) is part of the great Mongolian monarchy founded by Genghis Khan'*<sup>4</sup>.

Trubetskoy calls the non-Slavic peoples, who constitute the most important element of Russian society, Turanians. By this name, he means a wide community of Finno-Ugric, Turkic, Mongol, Manchurian, Samoyedic, and other peoples. The connection between Turanians and Russians is so strong that over time, in the process of *'Russification of Turanians'* and *'Turanisation of Russians'* there was assimilation and *'organic merger'*, resulting in the formation of a *'single whole'* Slavic-Turanian Russian national type<sup>5</sup>. At the same time, it is difficult for Trubetskoy to say with whom – Turanians or other Slavs – the Great Russians have a stronger connection, because *'The Russian national character is quite different from both the Finno-Ugric and the Turkic; however, at the same time it is decisively different from the national character of other Slavs. A number of features that the Russian people especially appreciate in themselves have no equivalent in the Slavic moral character'*<sup>6</sup>.

The idea of the uniqueness of Russia as a civilisational formation was also promoted by P. Savitsky, who wrote that *'Russia has much more grounds to be called a 'Middle Kingdom' than China'*<sup>7</sup>. This feature is the basis of its cultural and civilisational identity. Russia is neither a part of Europe nor a continuation of Asia, but an independent, holistic, closed *'world in itself'*, a special spiritual, historical and geopolitical reality, which is a synthesis of the *'European Forest and the Asian Steppe'*<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Н. Трубецкой, *Взгляд на русскую историю не с Запада, а с Востока*, in: Н. Трубецкой, *Наследие Чингисхана*, 'Аграф', Москва 1999, p. 225.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 269–270.

<sup>6</sup> Н. Трубецкой, *Верхи и низы русской культуры*, in: Н. Трубецкой, *История. Культура. Язык*, сост. В. М. Живова, 'Прогресс', Москва 1995, p. 248.

<sup>7</sup> П. Савицкий, *Географические и геополитические основы евразийства*, in: *Основы евразийства*, сост. Н. Агамалян и др., 'Арктогея-Центр', Москва 2002, p. 297.

<sup>8</sup> Л. Ивашов, *Геополитика Русской цивилизации*, Институт русской цивилизации, Москва 2015, p. 276.

## RUSSIA AS A STRONGHOLD OF ORTHODOXY

The ideologeme *'Moscow is the third Rome'*, which has become widespread since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, is fully reflected in the ideas of the Eurasianists. It is the Tsardom of Moscow (later Russia), and not Kyivan Rus, that is regarded as the citadel of Orthodoxy. This narrative had several consequences. Firstly, in this way, the cultural and spiritual heritage of Kyivan Rus is appropriated, and the ideological cliché *'Holy Rus'* is used in relation to Russia, and not to Kyiv. Secondly, given the spread of Orthodox fundamentalism and intolerance towards followers of other religions<sup>9</sup> (including adherents of other Christian denominations), the foundations for the sacralisation of Russia, as a sacred source of the 'correct' faith, were laid, and its mission is to carry this faith to other peoples. Thirdly, an equal sign was put between the concepts of 'Russian' and 'Orthodox', which Trubetskoy directly writes about, laying the Orthodox faith at the basis of Russian identity<sup>10</sup> (an approach widely used before). This thesis imperatively combines two different foundations of collective identity – religious and ethnic – into one whole, which contributes to the distortion of the foundations of identification. After all, belonging to the Orthodox confession automatically draws a person into the sphere of influence of the Russian cultural tradition, and ascribes a certain ethnic, namely Russian, identity.

This approach opens up wide opportunities for manipulation. After all, any Orthodox community is conceived as part of the *'Russian world'*. Today, Russian propaganda is actively replicating the idea of protecting 'compatriots' abroad (by which they mean the Russian-speaking population). This narrative is similar to the previous one. In this case, any Russian-speaking groups, regardless of their place of residence, citizenship, or ethnicity, are subject to 'protection', which can be interpreted as a basis for intervention.

THE IMPERIAL NARRATIVE AND THE IDEA OF BRINGING RUSSIAN  
LANDS TOGETHER

The imperial narrative is the main point in understanding Russia's historical and contemporary geopolitical path. Having embarked on

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<sup>9</sup> This is evidenced by numerous historical and modern examples, in particular, the Jewish pogroms (attacks) in Russia, the spread of nationalist organizations such as 'Memory Society' (Pamiat), 'the Black Hundreds'.

<sup>10</sup> Н. Трубецкой, *Взгляд на русскую историю не с Запада, а с Востока...*, p. 256.

the path of expansion in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and having officially obtained imperial status under Peter I, Russia has been implementing the imperial programme throughout its existence. This programme was embodied in the policy of 'bringing Russian lands together'. G. Hosking, the author of *Russia: People and Empire 1552–1917*, considers the empire 'the key narrative of Russian history'<sup>11</sup>.

In the manner of theories of violence, popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Trubetsky emphasised expansion as a factor in the formation of the Tsardom of Moscow. He directly notes that 'the Muscovite state arose thanks to the Tatar yoke', and became powerful 'only after the conquest of Kazan, Astrakhan and Siberia', and 'the Russian tsar was the heir of the Mongol khan'<sup>12</sup>.

The essentially imperial idea of the 'Russian world' (or 'Eurasian world') appears in the writings of Savitsky. It is a cultural and geopolitical space, the nature of which is 'minimally favourable for all sorts of 'separatism' whether political, cultural, or economic'<sup>13</sup>. According to Savitsky, the 'Russian world' is a civilisational phenomenon, which is characterised by geographical, cultural, linguistic, historical, and so on peculiarities. This leads to a specific self-identification of the subjects of this community, because the representatives of the 'Russian world' perceive themselves as neither part of Europe nor Asia, and must be aware of their unique – Eurasian – nature<sup>14</sup>. During the Russian-Ukrainian war, the newly 'discovered' doctrine of the 'Russian world' became one of the main propaganda narratives.

Thus, the orientation towards expansion was historically laid down in the development of the Russian state. The geopolitical path of Russia demonstrates a constant tendency to increase territories, to keep political influence over many peoples, as evidenced by the long history of wars of conquest. At the same time, as D. Rancour-Laferriere notes, the statement about the 'humanity' and 'peacefulness' of the 'collection of lands' was typical, which, in his own words, was actually 'a convenient euphemism for violence'<sup>15</sup>. Today, during Russia's war

<sup>11</sup> Cited in: С. Беккер, *Россия и концепт империи*, in: *Новая имперская история постсоветского пространства: Сборник статей*, под ред. И.В. Герасимова и др., Центр исследований национализма и империи, Казань 2004, p. 67.

<sup>12</sup> Н. Трубецкой, *О туранском элементе в русской культуре*, in: Н. Трубецкой, *История. Культура. Язык...*, p. 157.

<sup>13</sup> П. Савицкий, *Географические и геополитические основы евразийства...*, p. 302.

<sup>14</sup> П. Савицкий, *Евразийство как исторический замысел*, in: *Основы евразийства...*, p. 282.

<sup>15</sup> Д. Ранкур-Лаферрьер, *Россия и русские глазами американского психоаналитика: В поисках национальной идентичности...*, p. 74, 75.

in Ukraine, we are witnessing a similar situation of covering up aggression with 'peace-loving' slogans.

To what extent is it still possible and justified to 'bring lands together?' According to the logic of the Eurasian paradigm, given the Slavic-Asian nature of the Eurasian civilisation, the identification of Russians with the entire Orthodox and Russian-speaking population, as well as claims to the status of descendants of the Mongol empire, the answer is obvious: until the complete absorption of all the respective communities in all these spheres. After all, at different historical times, the Russian Empire included lands from the Far East to Finland and Poland. And the words of Russian President V. Putin that '*Russia's borders end nowhere*' are a vivid example of the promotion of the imperial narrative today<sup>16</sup>.

#### RUSSIAN MESSIANISM

Since, in Eurasianists' writings, Russia is portrayed as a unique civilisation, its role in the world is also one of a kind. Russia is called upon to lead both the Slavic and Asian peoples, and play an integrating creative role. For the most part, this leading mission is taken on by the Great Russians, since it is they who have the most Turanian, that is, state-building features.

Claims of the messianism of Russia-Eurasia are caused by its 'uniqueness' and 'universalism', which is an encroachment on the universal character of Russian culture. Savitsky quotes Ya. Bromberg, who hopes Russia has been chosen as a messiah, and '*in the face of a spiritually impoverishing and perishing humanity, has taken upon itself the painful hardships of the universal calling...*'<sup>17</sup>. Trubetskoy writes about the historical mission of Russia, '*the state uniter of Eurasia ...*'<sup>18</sup>. An important component of this mission is '*the liberation of the world from the power of the Romano-Germanic predators*'<sup>19</sup>.

Therefore, Russia's mission has civilisational, geopolitical, cultural, spiritual and religious, and even sacred dimensions. It has to take the Slavic, Finno-Ugric and Asian peoples out from under the yoke of Western civilisation, and to further lead them to be

<sup>16</sup> Путин: граница России нигде не заканчивается, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7PROOFzFqA> [access: 11 July 2022].

<sup>17</sup> П. Савицкий, *В борьбе за евразийство*, б. и., Париж 1931, р. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Н. Трубецкой, *Взгляд на русскую историю не с Запада, а с Востока...*, р. 262.

<sup>19</sup> Н. Трубецкой, *Русская проблема*, in: Н. Трубецкой, *История. Культура. Язык...*, р. 302.

a pillar of the Orthodox world, a bearer of true values, as opposed to distorted Western culture. At the same time, the mission of uniting and liberating the peoples of Russia rests with ethnic Russians. The scale of this messianism is impressive. In this regard, the words of A. Dugin, a modern ultra-right neo-Eurasianist, about the calling of Russia-Eurasia to be '*a stronghold and lever of the planetary struggle of mankind against the universal planetary Romano-Germanic yoke*' are rather indicative<sup>20</sup>.

DENIAL OF THE EUROPEAN PATH OF RUSSIA,  
OPPOSITION OF RUSSIA TO EUROPE

Although the Eurasianists promote the idea of the uniqueness of Russian civilisation, at the same time they emphasise its kinship with Asia. These theses are combined with the postulate of opposition and antagonism between Russia and Europe. European culture is seen as inferior and decadent. Trubetskoy equates European cosmopolitanism with chauvinism, because, according to him, pan-European cosmopolitanism is in fact Romano-Germanic chauvinism<sup>21</sup>. He also defines European politics as imperialist and colonial.

One of the gravest consequences of the Europeanisation of Russia is the destruction of national unity. The consequences of the 'Romano-Germanic yoke' for Russia-Eurasia were so terrible that Europeanisation was proclaimed '*an absolute evil for any non-Romano-Germanic people*'. Therefore, the '*nightmare of the inevitability of overall Europeanisation*' must be fought with all our might<sup>22</sup>. In this context, Trubetskoy views the reforms initiated by Peter I, and the subsequent history of Tsarist Russia, negatively, as a period of '*anti-national monarchy*' when the old Moscow 'Great Russian' culture died<sup>23</sup>.

Why does the spread of Romano-Germanic culture bring about the decline of non-Romano-Germanic peoples? Because, according to Trubetskoy, '*the hidden dream of every European is the complete depersonalisation of all the peoples of the globe*'. Furthermore '*... the planting of a 'universal' (that is, Romano-Germanic) culture throughout*

<sup>20</sup> А. Дугин, *Преодоление Запада (предисловие)*, in: Н. Трубецкой, *Наследие Чингисхана...*, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Н. Трубецкой, *Европа и человечество*, in: Н. Трубецкой, *Наследие Чингисхана...*, p. 35.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 85.

<sup>23</sup> Трубецкой, *Взгляд на русскую историю не с Запада, а с Востока...*, p. 243.

*the world will turn all the peoples of the world into Europeans of the second and third grade, and natural Europeans, Romance, Germanic, and Anglo-Saxon peoples will remain first-grade Europeans... And this will put the Europeans in a dominant position over the whole world... This is the ultimate goal of the imperialism of European civilisation...<sup>24</sup>.*

Savitsky also presents Western cultural influence as a clearly negative factor. After all, the traditions of the political and cultural life of Russia-Eurasia in the 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries ‘at times, were obscured by deliberate ‘Westernism’, which demanded that Russians feel like ‘Europeans’ (which they really were not)...Such an interpretation did not lead Russia to anything but disasters... By now, this concept has been fully overcome in the Russian mind...<sup>25</sup>.

DENYING THAT THE STATEHOOD OF KYIVAN RUS  
AND UKRAINE IS FULL-FLEDGED AND VITAL

Reflecting on the greatness and ‘civilisational mission’ of the Tsardom of Moscow, the Eurasianists simultaneously deny the political and cultural significance of the Kyivan State, despite its historical primacy and considerable political influence. Trubetsky levels out the historical weight of the Kyiv heritage:

No powerful state could develop from Kyivan Rus, and the idea that the later Russian state is a continuation of Kyivan Rus is fundamentally wrong. Kyivan Rus could neither expand its territory nor increase its internal state power.... Kyivan Rus could only decompose and break up into small principalities... deprived of any higher idea of statehood<sup>26</sup>.

In his opinion, with the decline of the Kyiv state, the ‘civilisation centre’ moved to the Tsardom of Moscow, and Ukrainian culture became a variant of the all-Russian culture. Since then, Ukraine itself has been a region of Russia-Eurasia, and the Little Russians have been ‘one of the individuations of the Russian people’ along with the Great Russians and Belarusians.

Trubetsky sees the reason for the political and state ‘failure’ of the Little Russians in the weakness of the Turanian element. On the other hand, the Great Russians, who were more exposed to the Turanian

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 281.

<sup>25</sup> П. Савицкий, *Географические и геополитические основы евразийства...*, p. 303.

<sup>26</sup> Н. Трубецкой, *Взгляд на русскую историю не с Запада, а с Востока...*, p. 224.

influence, are distinguished by their pronounced ability to build a state on a *'large scale'*<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, the European nature of the ancient Kyivan State, as well as the lesser influence of the Asian (Turanian) factor (primarily the Yoke of the Horde) on the Little Russians, are considered by Trubetskoy as a vice and a sign of weakness.

Since Russia-Eurasia swallowed up the Ukrainian and Belarusian lands, its most important task has been to defend these border territories from the West (especially from Poland, the *'outpost of Europe in the East'*). The lands of Ukraine were already perceived as important strategic territories. At the same time, Ukraine has always been a problem for Moscow. After all, according to Trubetskoy, the national self-consciousness of the Western Ukrainian intelligentsia was *'mutilated by centuries of inclusion into the spirit of Catholicism and by Polish slavery and...the atmosphere of provincial separatist national struggle...'*<sup>28</sup>.

So, on the one hand, the historical significance of the Kyivan State was frankly lessened, and, on the other hand, at the same time, there was the appropriation by Russia of the heritage of Kyivan Rus. This made it possible to manipulate historical reality, and assert and popularise the mythology of the 'thousand-year-old history' of Russia.

#### THE CONCEPT OF IDEOCRACY AS AN APOLOGY FOR TOTALITARIANISM

One of the most important aspects of Eurasianism is the concept of ideocracy. Ideocracy can be interpreted as a form of political regime that has much in common with a totalitarian system. It must come to replace democracy, and eventually reign throughout the world. Trubetskoy himself described ideocracy as follows:

The ideocratic state has its own system of beliefs, its own idea-ruler (the carrier of which is the ruling stratum united in a single state-ideological organisation) and, because of this, must by all means actively organise all aspects of life and lead them. It cannot allow the interference in its political, economic, and cultural life, of any uncontrolled and irresponsible factors that are not subordinate to it, primarily private capital...<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Н. Трубецкой, *О туранском элементе в русской культуре...*, p. 159.

<sup>28</sup> Н. Трубецкой, *К украинской проблеме*, in: Н. Трубецкой, *История. Культура. Язык...*, p. 378–379.

<sup>29</sup> Н. Трубецкой, *Об идее-правительнице идеократического государства*, in: Н. Трубецкой, *История. Культура. Язык...*, p. 438.

Savitsky also interprets ideocracy as a new form of the state system, the sense of which is to profess and serve a certain idea, and which best corresponds to the very essence of Russia-Eurasia<sup>30</sup>.

True ideocracy should not be based on class, national or universal interests. The very whole, on which the ideocratic regime is built, and for the sake of which each individual must sacrifice personal or family interests, is a multinational community, 'a set of peoples' inhabiting a 'self-sufficient (autarkic) place of development' and connected, not by any ethnic group or race, but by 'a common historical destiny', cultural and spiritual kinship, and a single state system<sup>31</sup>.

Thus, ideocracy is characterised by the unity of the worldview, the presence of a general idea, collectivism, sacrifice, 'constant engagement', 'continuity of place development', autarky, planned economy, and state regulation of 'culture and civilisation'<sup>32</sup>.

## NEO-EURASIANISM AND MODERN RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA NARRATIVES

The ideas of the Eurasian doctrine were further developed (for example, in the works of L. Gumilyov, A. Panarin, V. Pashchenko, and others). Today, these ideas are also developed within the framework of the so-called neo-Eurasianism, and claim to be the official Russian ideology. Within this doctrine, the theme of Ukraine as one of the key subjects of the Russian 'zone of privileged interests' occupies a due place.

We find it relevant to illustrate the essence of neo-Eurasianism, and its connection with modern propaganda, with the example of the 'fundamentalist ideology' of Aleksandr Dugin<sup>33</sup>, an ex-professor at the Lomonosov Moscow State University, the leader of the far-right organisation International Eurasian Movement, the ideologist of the 'Russian world.' Dugin's neo-Eurasianism is a hybrid ideology that combines traditional ideas from Slavophilism and Eurasianism, classical geopolitics, totalitarian, national Bolshevik, Orthodox, extremist, anti-liberal and even occult-mystical ideas.

<sup>30</sup> П. Савицкий, *Евразийство как исторический замысел...*, p. 288.

<sup>31</sup> Н. Трубецкой, *Об идее-правительнице идеократического государства...*, p. 441.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>33</sup> This is exactly how Yu. Akhromeeva, a Russian researcher, characterises his philosophy, see Ю. Ахромеева, *Неоевразийство и традиционализм как примеры фундаменталистской идеологии*, 'Омский научный вестник' 2008, nr 5 (72), p. 108–111.

Dugin reproduces **imperial and messianic narratives** about Russia-Eurasia as a multinational empire, uniting Slavic and Orthodox peoples with others, the core of which is the 'Russian beginning' ('...Russia has always been an Empire. And it must become one again. Empire is good.')<sup>34</sup> At the same time, if compared to his ideological predecessors, Dugin reduces the interpretation of Russia's civilisational mission to a simple confrontation with the West<sup>35</sup>. Just as a stronghold of the 'non-Western' world, Russia is '... the only guarantor of the territorial integrity of all post-Soviet countries .... If Russia does not want to be a guarantor...then their territorial integrity will be violated.'<sup>36</sup>

By analogy with the imperative of German geopolitics about the 'expansion of living space', Russia-Eurasia can only happen due to the constant increment of territories at any cost ('It's better to have a tyrant and a cruel paranoid [as a sovereign], but the lands will grow, and the state will flourish.'<sup>37</sup>) Only in this way Russia can carry out its universal mission and preserve statehood. Dugin calls territorial expansion 'the Russian spring' and opposition to it is perceived as an existential threat.

The idea of opposition of Russia to Europe is transformed into an imperative of **total opposition to the 'collective West'**. The classical geopolitical antagonism of Tellurocracy and Thalassocracy takes on an obsessive form. Even the interpretation of Russian identity is negative, because this identity manifests itself through the opposition to the West, that is, it is not self-sufficient<sup>38</sup>. Europe is stationed as a centre of moral and spiritual decay. And yet, the absolute evils are the USA, NATO, and liberal ideology<sup>39</sup>. Dugin resorts to manipulation (or projection) by calling liberalism 'liberal totalitarianism' and

<sup>34</sup> А. Дугин, Тезисы младоевразийства, 'ВКонтакте': [the social network], <https://bit.ly/3xHvf90> [access: 11 July 2022].

<sup>35</sup> А. Дугин, Цивилизация Россия: Юго-Восток или смерть, 'Евразия: информационно-аналитический портал', <http://evrazia.org/article/2497> [access: 11 July 2022].

<sup>36</sup> А. Дугин, Я много раз говорил одну важную для Азербайджана вещь... [I have said one important thing for Azerbaijan many times...], 'ВКонтакте': [the social network], <https://bit.ly/3OrwFv8> [access: 11 July 2022].

<sup>37</sup> А. Дугин, Спрашивают в сообщениях про приращения при Николае II... [They ask in messages about increments under Nicholas II...], 'ВКонтакте': [the social network], <https://bit.ly/3tR7NFg> [access: 11 July 2022].

<sup>38</sup> А. Дугин, Цивилизация Россия: Юго-Восток или смерть...

<sup>39</sup> А. Дугин, Снова и снова: главный враг США, НАТО и либеральная идеология... [Again and again: the main enemy of the USA, NATO and liberal ideology...], 'ВКонтакте': [the social network], <https://bit.ly/3xGHfaO> [access: 11 July 2022].

calling liberals fascists<sup>40</sup>. Anti-liberal rhetoric is also strengthened by homophobia (*'Every liberal is a Conchita Wurst.'*<sup>41</sup>)

*Aggressive anti-liberal rhetoric is combined with a **totalitarian narrative**.* Dugin has many references to the concept of ideocracy. He argues that *'in Russia, identity has always been based on a grandiose idea...,'* which the liberals take away, thus committing *'spiritual genocide'*, for which they should get *'a blow back'*<sup>42</sup>. His concept of the *'State in Depth'* is also rather interesting. It means the unity of the state and society, in which the individual dissolves, and the highest value for this unity is a sole ideology, standing *'higher than law, and higher than the population'*<sup>43</sup>.

Dugin's views are characterised by extreme **anti-Ukrainianism**, the aggravation of which probably occurred against the backdrop of the events of the Revolution of Dignity. He takes the Ukrainian issue very personally, and this is eloquently indicated by the title of his book *Ukraine: My War*<sup>44</sup> (in the title of which you can also see an allusion to the famous work of Hitler). The beginning of the war in 2014 is seen in the context of the *'sacrificial awakening'* of Russia, which came to the defence of the Russian-speaking Orthodox population from rampant *'Nazism and liberalism'*. The denial of the Ukrainian state's right to exist (*'...Ukraine has no right to continue to exist within any borders'*<sup>45</sup>) is accompanied by calls for a full-scale invasion of its territory (*'It is clear that everything will end with the military control of Russian troops over the ENTIRE territory of Ukraine.'*)<sup>46</sup>

Fake news about the spread in Kyiv of the *'Thelema, liberal-satanic and Atlanticist sect,'* associated with the Russian opposition,

<sup>40</sup> А. Дугин, *Либеральный тоталитаризм*, «Международное евразийское движение»: [website], <http://www.med.org.ru/article/3637> [access: 11 July 2022].

<sup>41</sup> А. Дугин, *Каждый либерал – это Кончита Вурст* [Every liberal is Conchita Wurst], ВКонтакте: [the social network], <https://bit.ly/3b3T8zN> [access: 11 July 2022].

<sup>42</sup> А. Дугин, *У России всегда идентичность была основана на грандиозной идее...* [Russia has always had its identity based on a grand idea...], ВКонтакте: [the social network], <https://bit.ly/3п7wUj6> [access: 11 July 2022].

<sup>43</sup> А. Дугин, *Государство вглубь*, Международное евразийское движение: [website], <http://med.org.ru/article/4703> [access: 11 July 2022].

<sup>44</sup> А. Дугин, *Украина. Моя война. Геополитический дневник*, <https://www.ksiegarniarosyjska.pl/biografie-wspomnienia/9593-aleksandr-dugin-ukraina-moja-wojna-geopoliticeskij-dniewnik.html> [access: 11 July 2022].

<sup>45</sup> А. Дугин, *Я думаю, Украина не имеет право существовать далее ни в каких границах...* [I think, Ukraine has no right to continue to exist within any borders...], ВКонтакте: [the social network], <https://bit.ly/3НМуUX9> [access: 11 July 2022].

<sup>46</sup> А. Дугин, *Совершенно очевидно, что все закончится военным контролем российских войск над ВСЕЙ территорией Украины...* [It is quite obvious that everything will end with the military control of the Russian troops over the ALL territory of Ukraine...], ВКонтакте: [the social network], <https://bit.ly/3ObCPj0> [access: 11 July 2022].

and numerous offences against Ukrainian national forces (such as 'Ukro-fascists', 'neo-Nazis', 'junta', 'Banderists', 'puppets of the West', 'possessed', and so on) are also symptomatic.<sup>47</sup> Naturally, Russian aggression is seen as a holy war for '*Orthodoxy, for Faith, for our spiritual religious freedom*' between supporters of spiritually pure Russia and minions of '*anti-Christ sodomite Europe*'<sup>48</sup>.

In general, Dugin's views are characterised by extreme **irrationalism**, expressed, for example, in reflections on Putin's '*solar and lunar*' incarnation<sup>49</sup>, or calls for the return of '*absolutely everything*', abstract '*sources*' and '*spiritual braces*'<sup>50</sup>. However, the xenophobia that permeates neo-Eurasianism is irrational in itself, because it is based on the fear of the 'other', the fear of losing oneself, especially when one's own identity has no content, and is a simulacrum.

Dugin's ideas should not be seen outside of general propaganda content. He, as the 'mouthpiece of the Kremlin', broadcasts narratives that are part of official propaganda. In particular, this concerns the totalitarian idea, which has long been present in Russian political discourse. Indicative, for example, are the words of Sergei Shoigu back in 1999, and analysed by A. Altunyan, a Russian researcher. In his speech, Shoigu gradually moves from, at first glance, the liberal thesis about the priority of Individual needs, to a completely statist, even totalitarian, message about the unity of then individual interests (this time with a lowercase letter) and the state, and, instead of the principle of political struggle, declares a 'dictatorship of common sense':

<sup>47</sup> Fakes about occult neo-Nazi sects is in demand by Russian propaganda now too. See for example: Н. Радулова, *Азов – главная дьявольская секта Украины*, Livejournal, <https://radulova.livejournal.com/4127215.html> [access: 11 July 2022]; *Кровавая секта с лицензией на убийство: войну на Украине начал не Запад*, [https://tsargrad.tv/investigations/krovavaja-sekta-s-licenziej-na-ubijstvo-voynu-na-ukraine-nachal-ne-zapad\\_531635](https://tsargrad.tv/investigations/krovavaja-sekta-s-licenziej-na-ubijstvo-voynu-na-ukraine-nachal-ne-zapad_531635) [access: 11 July 2022].

<sup>48</sup> А. Дугин, *В свете убийств в Пасхальную Ночь я думаю просто необходимо создавать в Новороссии Отряды Православной Самообороны...* [In light of the murders on Easter Night, I think it is simply necessary to create Orthodox Self-Defense Detachments in Novorossia...], ВКонтакте: [the social network], <https://bit.ly/3ObPltC> [access: 11 July 2022].

<sup>49</sup> А. Дугин, *Есть два Путина: солярный и лунарный...* [There are two Putins: solar and lunar...], ВКонтакте: [the social network], <https://bit.ly/3Nbd1lM> [access: 11 July 2022].

<sup>50</sup> See, for example: А. Дугин, *Мы все, абсолютно все, вернем назад!* [We everything, absolutely everything, will return back!..], ВКонтакте: [the social network], <https://bit.ly/3OtgTj9> [access: 11 July 2022]; or parodic drawings by Vasya Lozhkin on this topic: В. Ложкин, *Вернем все назад!*, [https://gdb.rferl.org/2201D18A-A23D-445D-ABF7-1E2FF21E422E\\_w1597\\_n\\_r0\\_st\\_s.jpg](https://gdb.rferl.org/2201D18A-A23D-445D-ABF7-1E2FF21E422E_w1597_n_r0_st_s.jpg) [access: 11 July 2022].

We will work based primarily on the needs of the Individual. Understanding that Individual and Society, Individual and the State are a single whole.... We are going to the elections with one main goal — to achieve the unity of interests of an individual and the Russian State.

...It is impossible to overcome the crisis until all political forces stop pulling the blanket over themselves .... 'Unity' is not a political party. This is an association of sane people ...Unity with those who stand for the only just dictatorship in the world – the 'dictatorship of common sense'<sup>51</sup>.

The core component of modern Russian propaganda is the exploitation of ***the image of the enemy***, the constant nourishment of which causes and provokes an apology for the militarism of violence. Aggressive attacks are aimed at the subjects that, in the mass consciousness of Russians, personify today's 'collective West,' that is, primarily the United States, NATO, and Ukraine. Since the overthrow of the Yanukovich regime, the deployment of militaristic rhetoric has occurred in waves. The first peak of its escalation occurred in 2014, the second one is associated with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The general trend was to portray Russia as a powerful and warlike state, capable of resisting its enemies (primarily Western countries) and ready to inflict a preventive blow. Appropriate visual content is used to enhance the effect. In particular, images of a formidable bear, Russian (or Soviet) tanks in Europe and the USA, armed women in Russian national clothes, and so on are exploited<sup>52</sup>.

Propaganda of violence and militarism is actively developed by Russian politicians, propagandists, and even the church. For instance, in 2014, Zhirinovskiy unexpectedly named all the Slavic peoples who '*trampled our lands with fascist Germany*' the main enemies of Russia<sup>53</sup>. In 2015, he also rejoiced at the terrorist attacks in Europe<sup>54</sup>. The numerous threats of the Kremlin's leading propagandists

<sup>51</sup> С. Шойгу, *Взгляд на будущее России. Как вывести страну из зоны чрезвычайной ситуации*, in: А. Алтунян, *Анализ политических текстов: Учебное пособие*, 'Университетская книга', 'Логос', Москва 2006, p. 52–53, 55–56, 373–378.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example: *Зря вы его разбудили*, LiveJournal, <https://enigma-vita.livejournal.com/201001.html> [access: 13 July 2022]; *Европа напугана возможным ответом России на украинские события*, <https://www.weacom.ru/news/russia/society/148311> [access: 13 July 2022]; *Militaristic pictures*, LiveJournal, [https://ic.pics.livejournal.com/kaysyn/66034472/34114/34114\\_2000.jpg](https://ic.pics.livejournal.com/kaysyn/66034472/34114/34114_2000.jpg) [access: 13 July 2022]; А. Дугин, profile post ВКонтakte, [https://vk.com/photo18631635\\_330026518?rev=1](https://vk.com/photo18631635_330026518?rev=1) [access: 13 July 2022]; А. Дугин, profile post 'ВКонтakte', [https://vk.com/photo18631635\\_324136542](https://vk.com/photo18631635_324136542) [access: 13 July 2022].

<sup>53</sup> See, *Не называйте славян 'братскими народами'... Владимир Жириновский*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=blusfKP9bdo> [access: 13 July 2022].

<sup>54</sup> *Жириновский: Росії вигідні теракти в Європі*, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2016/03/23/7102997/> [access: 13 July 2022].

V. Solovyov and D. Kiselev are widely known; for example, there were those regarding Ukraine as ‘an intermediate stage in ensuring the strategic security of the Russian Federation’, Russia’s ability to turn the United States into radioactive ash and put ‘the barrel of a gun to a US screech’<sup>55</sup>. From the beginning of the war, in his sermons, Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church openly supported (‘blessed’) Russian aggression in Ukraine<sup>56</sup>.

Since 2014, the Russian information field has been imbued with the **anti-Ukrainian theme** at all levels, from official television channels to comments and discussions on social networks. For a long time, Ukraine has been the main topic in the Russian mass media. Among the main narratives is the obsessive denial of Ukraine’s right to its own statehood and sovereignty, the perception of Ukrainians as ‘little brothers’, and part of the Russian people, who ‘unexpectedly’ took the side of the ‘enemy’ West, the replication of the image of Ukraine as a threat to Russia and a ‘puppet’ of NATO, and so on. Part of the anti-Ukrainian propaganda is the narrative about ‘**protecting the Russian-speaking population**’ from the ‘arbitrariness of the *Bandera* authorities’, which became one of the fake informational grounds for the Russian invasion.

Today there are also many examples of distortion of Ukrainian history. Thus, the term ‘Kyivan Rus’ is being removed from school history textbooks, and replaced with an indefinite simplification of ‘Rus’<sup>57</sup>. And Putin’s speech on the occasion of the recognition of the so-called ‘Luhansk People’s Republic’ and ‘Donetsk People’s Republic’ (LDNR) on 01 February 2022 was the culmination of an ‘alternative interpretation’ of history in favour of geopolitical encroachments. Particularly notorious is his thesis about ‘Ukraine named after Vladimir Ilyich Lenin’, who is ‘its author and architect’ and which, in turn, is thus a product of ‘Bolshevik politics’. In the same speech,

<sup>55</sup> See, for example; *Пропагандист Соловьев заявил, что Россия не остановится на войне в Украине*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrknf242m9I> [access: 13 July 2022]; *Россия может превратить США в радиоактивный пепел. Дмитрий Киселёв*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TA9mVLomYo8> [access: 13 July 2022]; ‘*Поставим пистолет к виску США*’: *Киселев предупредил Запад по Украине*, <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2021/12/20/postavim-pistolet-k-visku-ssha-kiselev-predupredil-zapad-po-ukraine.html> [access: 13 July 2022].

<sup>56</sup> *Риторика патриарха Кирилла. Разбор проповедей*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2awytV2mzo> [access: 13 July 2022].

<sup>57</sup> *Росія знову переписує історію: в підручниках для школярів прибирають згадку про Київську Русь*, ‘ТСН’, <https://tsn.ua/svit/rosiya-znovu-perepisuye-istoriyu-v-pidruchnikah-dlya-shkolyariv-pribirayut-zgadku-pro-kiyivsku-rus-foto-2067517.html> [access: 13 July 2022].

we see other widespread narratives and manipulations, in particular the presentation of Ukraine as an *'integral part'* of Russian *'history, culture and spiritual space'*, the identification of the concepts 'Russian' and 'Orthodox,' etc<sup>58</sup>.

Part of the anti-Ukrainian discourse is ***the myth about the split of Ukraine***, which was actively exploited, not only by Russian propaganda, but also in Ukrainian public politics. In Ukraine, it was disseminated by some political forces, such as the Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine, the Communist Party of Ukraine, the Union of Left Forces, the Party of Regions, and others, using it as a political technology in order to gain voices of the electorate in certain regions, and to promote pro-Russian narrative. Also, in the early 1990s, S. Huntington contributed to the popularisation of the idea of a split, presenting in his well-known work, *The Clash of Civilisations*, a simplified model of Ukraine as a country split between two civilisations<sup>59</sup>. However, as you know, his predictions about the future development of Ukraine did not come true (in particular, regarding the low probability of an open conflict between Russia and Ukraine).

In its recent history, Ukraine has experienced at least three significant crises associated with elections or mass protests (in 1994, 2004, and 2013-2014), which were positioned by certain political forces as electoral, geopolitical, or even civilisational 'splits', even though the boundaries of electoral or political demarcations were quite far from *'the line of civilisational clash'* defined by Huntington. Besides, the topic of the 'Ukrainian split' was actively spread in Russian political and media discourse. In this context, we should mention, for example, the infamous 'map' of the Russian propagandist, Timofey Sergeytsev, where the inhabitants of different Ukrainian regions are divided into three grades, and other similar 'projects'<sup>60</sup>.

<sup>58</sup> *Обращение Путина к россиянам от 21 февраля 2022 года*, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828> [access: 13 July 2022].

<sup>59</sup> S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World*, 'Simon & Schuster', New York 1996.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example: *Автором плана уничтожения украинской нации оказался политтехнолог Януковича, который в 2004 году делил Украину на три сорта*, <https://bit.ly/3c4BLiR> [access: 13 July 2022]; *В Раде заявили о возможности уменьшения Украины из-за её соседей*, <https://cont.ws/@sam8807/1320140> [access: 13 July 2022]; *Раскол Украины: кто пишет сценарий?*, <https://domik.ua/novosti/raskol-ukrainy-kto-pishet-scenarij-n215973.html> [access: 13 July 2022]; А. Дугин, 'Украина и "Западения"... [Ukraine and Zapadeniya], 'ВКонтакте': [the social network], [https://vk.com/duginag?w=wall18631635\\_2455](https://vk.com/duginag?w=wall18631635_2455) [access: 13 July 2022]; *Раскол Украины на две части неизбежен*, [The split of Ukraine into two parts is inevitable],

However, the split narrative acquired its most devastating consequences in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. It was the basis for the unrealised **Novorossiya project**, which was a variant of the division of the territory of Ukraine. 'Novorossiya' is the old imperial name for the southern Ukrainian lands and the Kuban. The new meaning of this concept was the designation of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine, with a large part of the Russian-speaking population (Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kirovohrad, Luhansk, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Kharkiv, Kherson regions and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea), in which it was planned to create of a quasi-state entity of the same name. In 2014, a massive information campaign to substantiate the cultural and historical ownership of these regions by Russia began. The narrative was actively promoted by Russian and pro-Russian Ukrainian politicians, and the media, including at the level of the President of the Russian Federation<sup>61</sup>. And although, in connection with Russia's unsuccessful attempts to expand the zone of occupation beyond parts of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, already in 2015, the media wrote about the closure of the 'Novorossiya project', Russian propaganda continues to exploit this ideologeme even now<sup>62</sup>.

Simultaneously with the information promotion of the project on social networks and the media, official publications aimed at substantiating the same idea appeared. For instance, in the book *History of Novorossiya*, published by the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the authors state that 'Novorossiya', despite the predominantly Ukrainian population, has always been part of Russia, and not Ukraine, in the cultural, historical, and mental sense:

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news.info/raskol-ukrainy-na-dve-chasti-neizbezhen-roman-bessmertnyj/ [access: 13 July 2022]; *Раскол Украины приведет к образованию Речи Посполитой*, <https://rg.ru/2004/12/17/ukraina-raskol.html> [access: 13 July 2022]; *Володин констатировал распад Украины...*, *Новости Новороссии*, 'ВКонтакте': [the social network], [https://vk.com/novnews?w=wall-50332460\\_3020978](https://vk.com/novnews?w=wall-50332460_3020978) [access: 13 July 2022].

<sup>61</sup> See, for example: *Сводки от ополчения Новороссии*, 'ВКонтакте': [the social network], [https://vk.com/strelkov\\_info](https://vk.com/strelkov_info) [access: 13 July 2022]; *Новороссия*: [website], <https://bit.ly/3z1QC6E> [access: 13 July 2022]; А. Дугин, *Две Украины – вопрос времени...*, 'ВКонтакте': [the social network], <https://bit.ly/3P3Cuj6> [access: 13 July 2022]; *Путин про Новороссию*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXr-oLbT8Qc> [access: 13 July 2022].

<sup>62</sup> *Проект 'Новороссия' закрыт*, [https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2015/05/19\\_a\\_6694441.shtml](https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2015/05/19_a_6694441.shtml) [access: 13 July 2022]; *Какие регионы экс-Украины готовы присоединиться к ДНР-ЛНР и, впоследствии, к России?*, *Сводки от ополчения Новороссии*, 'ВКонтакте': [the social network], [https://vk.com/strelkov\\_info?w=wall-57424472\\_345641](https://vk.com/strelkov_info?w=wall-57424472_345641) [access: 13 July 2022]; А. Дугин, *Слои Новороссии...*, 'ВКонтакте': [the social network], [https://vk.com/duginag?w=wall18631635\\_10145](https://vk.com/duginag?w=wall18631635_10145) [access: 13 July 2022].

From the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Little Russian ethnic component in Novorossiia turned out to be the most numerous..., [however] the national-cultural picture of the region was created, not by the mechanical ratio of the number of certain ethnic groups, but by factors of a different nature. Russian statehood, Russian culture, and the Russian language became that natural background, that state in which the population of Novorossiia – a region whose very name emphasised its inseparable unity with all of Russia – lived<sup>63</sup>.

**The anti-Semitic narratives** produced by Russian propaganda about Ukraine were controversial but proved to be stable. Often they were presented as ‘conspiracy’ theories, and spread at the level of rumours. The content of these narratives has changed over time. For instance, in 2014, the narrative about the ‘Zionist conspiracy’ (‘Khazar conspiracy’) of the Ukrainian elite (‘Jew Banderists’/’Zhido-Banderists’) was spread to seize power, with the support, and in the interests of, the United States (the main ‘Jewish-Masonic state’ (‘Zhido-Masonic state’). This hybrid and paradoxical meme consisted of completely opposite elements. It connected Masons and Jews with the ‘Banderists,’ who, in Russian propaganda and mass consciousness, were associated with the Nazis. The components of this ‘story’ were tales about the Jewish origin of the then President of Ukraine, P. Poroshenko (and his seemingly ‘real’ Jewish surname), distributed at the level of the ‘yellow’ press, comments on social networks, and rumours<sup>64</sup>.

However, anti-Semitic rhetoric changed prior to the full-scale invasion. Now the main idea was that the Ukrainian Nazis who seized power are anti-Semites, and anti-Jewish sentiments are rapidly growing in Ukraine (at the same time, information about the Jewish origin of the current President of Ukraine, V. Zelenskyy, is ignored). The narrative about the Nazis in Ukraine was heard before, but was used in a more limited way, for example, in relation to some volunteer battalions, government officials (‘Jewish Banderists junta’/’Zhido-Banderists junta’), and so on. However, now this myth has taken on truly menacing proportions, because in the end it resulted in the idea of **denazification of Ukraine**.

<sup>63</sup> *История Новороссии: монография*, ред. В. Захаров, ‘Центр гуманитарных инициатив’, Москва 2018, p. 743.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example: ‘Жидобандеровцы’ на марше. Двойные стандарты украинского нацизма, <https://ukraina.ru/opinion/20190109/1022284784.html> [access: 13 July 2022]; *Петр Вальцман (Порошенко): неофициальная биография*, <https://windowsuser.livejournal.com/950059.html> [access: 13 July 2022].

So, over time, there has been a change in the grand narrative of Russian propaganda. In 2014, the propaganda campaign was based on the theses about a *'split Ukraine'*, *'Russia's mission to protect the Russian-speaking population'*, *'a puppet Ukrainian government'* and *'the Novorossiia project'*. But on the eve, and at the beginning, of the full-scale invasion in 2022, the content of propaganda has changed. Its main content is based on the theses about the Nazi government in Ukraine, which is carrying out *'genocide of the population of Donbas'* and, together with the *'collective West'*, poses a real threat to the existence and sovereignty of Russia. This is the basis for the *'demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine'* (which constituted a new meaning for the Russian 'mission') and a pretext for war<sup>65</sup>.

The publication of an article by Russian propagandist T. Sergeytsev, in April 2022, with the demonstrative title *What Russia Should Do with Ukraine* is evidence that the Kremlin's official propaganda rhetoric has become even more irrational and destructive. In essence, the article is a call for the genocide of Ukrainians. After all, the narrative about the *'Nazi government in Ukraine'* was replaced by the narrative about the *'bad Ukrainian people'* who *'supported and indulged the Nazi government'*. This actually freed the hands of the Russian aggressor, allowing the destruction of the civilian population. The myth of the *'genocide in Donbas'* has also changed to the myth of the *'genocide of the Russian people.'* And since Ukrainian society was now *'guilty,'* its total *'denazification'* should cover more than one generation. Ukraine as a state (and even the name – Ukraine – itself) is also subject to liquidation as *'the West's instrument for the destruction of Russia'*, which for some reason *'unlike Georgia and the Baltic countries, is impossible as a national state'*<sup>66</sup>. It is also necessary to destroy Ukrainian culture as an *'artificial anti-Russian construction'*. Ukraine's desire for independence and European integration is declared a *'disguise for Nazism'*. The author resorts to numerous manipulations, in particular, putting an equal sign between the concepts of 'Ukrainian' and 'Nazi'. Consequently, *'debanderisation'* is no longer enough for *'denazification'*. Now *'denazification'* means *'de-Ukrainisation'* as the complete eradication of everything Ukrainian.

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<sup>65</sup> Текст обращения президента России Владимира Путина, 'РИА Новости', <https://ria.ru/20220224/obraschenie-1774658619.html> [access: 13 July 2022].

<sup>66</sup> Т. Сергейцев, *Что Россия должна сделать с Украиной*, 'РИА Новости', <https://ria.ru/20220403/ukraina-1781469605.html> [access: 13 July 2022].

## CONCLUSIONS

An important component of Russian aggression in Ukraine is the information war, one of the tasks of which is the promotion of relevant narratives, in order to influence the minds of people. The source of these narratives is the ideological doctrine supported at the state level. Its weighty foundation is the Eurasian doctrine, from which it draws a number of important ideas. The key among them are imperial and messianic narratives close to each other, the significance of which for Russia is decisive because they play a state-building, geopolitical, spiritual, and cultural function. The essence of these narratives comes down to the formation of the image of Russia as a unique civilisation that has spiritual advantages over the West.

It is in the context of the imperial setting that the role of Ukraine in Russian geopolitics, including Russian aggression, which has become a direct consequence of its practical implementation, should be considered. According to this mindset, Ukraine is presented as part of a Eurasian civilisation that has no legal or moral grounds to choose its own path. At the same time, the problem of Ukraine, for Russia, is part of the general problem of opposing the last Western civilisation, which is perceived as an existential threat. Such a position can be seen as a search for one's own national identity by antithesis. And the constant emphasis by the Eurasianists on the uniqueness of Russia-Eurasia testifies to an attempt to fill the void of their own collective perception, which existed (or exists) in the place where there should have been an integrally formed identity. According to the logic of the imperial narrative and expansionism, these searches take place, not in the direction of the formation of a constructive national-state idea, but because of universal messianic claims that have destructive consequences. Such rigid obsessive antagonism naturally gives rise to militarism and propaganda of violence.

Modern Russian ideology and propaganda are not limited to reproducing the ideas of classical Eurasianism. This can be seen in the example of a movement positioned as neo-Eurasianism – a reactionary ultra-right doctrine aimed at justifying geopolitical expansionist claims. Neo-Eurasianism appears as a hybrid, bizarre mixture of opposing myths, mythologemes, and narratives, ranging from nostalgia for the Soviet past to Orthodox fundamentalism, from outright fascism to slogans about 'brotherly Slavic peoples'.

All these eclectic and contradictory ideas are reproduced in propaganda, resulting in the introduction into the mass consciousness of an alternative picture of the world, a distorted reality based on numerous fakes and simulacra. At the same time, the Russian propaganda grand narrative in relation to Ukraine is not static and changes over time. In 2014, after the idea of 'brotherly peoples' and 'good neighbours' was rejected, it was replaced by a narrative about a 'bad illegitimate Ukrainian government' carrying out genocide of the Russian-speaking population. However, later it evolved into the justification of the genocide of the Ukrainian people, and the complete denial of their identity. Unfortunately, this is more and more reminiscent of a totalitarian dystopia, where the consciousness of people is in an illusory reality formed by propaganda that, in their eyes, can justify any crime, up to the massacre of the population of a neighbouring state.

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