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A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF MODERN HISTORY OF UKRAINE
(review of the monograph: V. Holovko, L. Yakubova. Ukraine
and the Challenges of Post-totalitarian Transit (1990 – 2019) / NAS of Ukraine,
Institute of History of Ukraine. Kyiv: Akademperiodika, 2021. 592 p., 48 p. ill.)

НОВЕ ОСМИСЛЕННЯ СУЧАСНОЇ ІСТОРІЇ УКРАЇНИ
(рецензія на монографію: Головко В., Якубова Л. Україна і виклики
посттоталітарного транзиту (1990–2019) / НАН України, Ін-т історії України.
Київ: Академперіодика, 2021. 592 с., 48 с. іл.)

On the eve of Russia’s full-scale attack on the independent Ukrainian State, in the “Akademperiodyka” publishing house there was published a monograph covering three decades of Ukraine’s modern history. Its authors are the famous historians Volodymyr Holovko and Larysa Yakubova, who set the task of understanding contradictions of the post-Soviet transition from 1990 to 2019, in particular the phenomena of three modern Ukrainian revolutions, development of the “oliharchic republics”, subjectivization of Ukraine in the world through self-awareness of the European choice, semantic aspects of the modern Russian-Ukrainian war,

which began in 2014. The analysed monograph is divided into two parts and 14 chapters, and also contains an extensive afterword. The first part of “Ukraine is not Russia: Self-awareness and Formation (1990 – 2019)” contains a detailed information of Ukraine’s rhodium history since 1990. However, the authors begin the first chapter with an original retrospective of the communist ideas development in Europe and the world since the appearance of “Manifesto of the Communist Party” in 1848. The authors describe the political embodiment of the communist ideas by the Russian Bolsheviks in the Soviet Union they founded, which was eloquently called the “Red Titanic”. The historians claim that the painful process of the post-totalitarian transit began after the dismantling of the Party-Chekist vertical, and they state that the most effectively overcame it by countries that managed to conduct a full-scale lustration following fresh traces, and those where the consequences of the Soviet rule were the least destructive (p. 10).

The authors of the monograph analysed the processes of Ukraine’s sovereignty in the context of the society’s democratization, talk about the “Declaration of the State Sovereignty” on July 16, 1990, and therefore about “The Revolution on Granite”, which was organized on the example of the protest actions in Bulgaria. It should be also noted that the authors formulate the concept of “revolution from above” in 1991, referring to the attempted coup d’état in the USSR (on August 19 – 22) and the declaration of Ukraine’s independence on August 24. The historians believe that this “revolution from above” was initiated by “Declaration on State Sovereignty” and, ultimately, became possible owing to the situational union of the reformist wing of the Communist Party of Ukraine (national communists) and national democratic forces (p. 27). Hence, the political events of the second half of 1991, in particular the referendum on the independence and the first presidential elections in Ukraine on December 1, 1991, are carefully described.

In the following chapters of the first part, written by V. Holovko, chief focus is on legal foundations of the Ukrainian state existence and society in general, foreign policy challenges for the new state are outlined (in particular, Russia’s claims to the Crimea at the beginning of the 1990s, the conflict in Transnistria, aggravation of relations with Romania, etc.). The monograph also deals with the controversial issue of the nuclear disarmament. There are presented nuclear potential calculations of Ukraine at the end of 1991 (pp. 33 – 34). “The Budapest Memorandum” of 1994 was characterized, which was of a political rather than legal nature and did not contain mechanisms for ensuring security guarantees for Ukraine. Despite this, in the 1990s, this document became an effective tool for strengthening Ukraine’s position on the international arena, because it prevented its isolation (p. 40).

V. Holovko describes the attempts of ex-communists to carry out market reforms in the 1990s, analyses the constitutional process, electoral vicissitudes of 1994, 1998 – 1999, he writes about President Leonid Kuchma’s prevention of “leftist revenge” and “the end of socialist Ukraine” (removal of left-wing political forces from the leadership of the Verkhovna Rada and formation of a liberal parliamentary majority) in 2000. It should be noted that V. Holovko is a specialist researcher of the oligarchic groups’ activities in Ukraine. He published the monograph the “*Ukrainian Financial and Industrial Groups in Modernization Processes in 1991 – 2009*” (Kyiv, 2012). That is why, he analyses thoroughly the emergence of financial and industrial groups and their influence on the economic and political development of Ukraine. The historian introduces the concept of the “oligarchic republic” into historiographical discourse, but does not formulate a scientific definition of this concept, however, writes about two such “republics”: the first one – in 2000 – 2013, the second one – from 2014 to the present day.

The historian also covers the political crisis during L. Kuchma's second term of office, which is connected with the so-called "cassette scandal" (the tapes of Major M. Melnychenko). He keeps to the opinion that the illegal wiretapping in the President's office was organized by Yevhen Marchuk, who headed the National Security and Defense Council. The analysis of Viktor Yushchenko's government activities is somewhat specific, successes of which seems to have been conditioned by previous economic policy (in particular, the activities of V. Pustovoitenko's government).

Analysing the events of the Orange Revolution, V. Holovko emphasizes: "It was a strategic mistake of the pro-government forces that, engrossed in the struggle with the opposition, they crossed a fine line when the struggle with society itself began. Instead, the opposition forces managed to lead the mass protest effectively and keep it on a non-violent course. As a result, they gained support inside the country (from citizens and business circles) and outside – from of the collective West" (p. 104). The historian describes the "political turbulence" of 2004 – 2005 (the activities of Yulia Tymoshenko's government, the split in the "Orange Team", negatives of the reprivatization policy), and, thus, writes about the "white-blue revenge", i. e. the return to power of the Party of Regions and Viktor Yanukovich in 2006. Writing about the consequences of the 2007 Parliamentary elections, the historian notes that the political party projects turned into a kind of joint-stock companies, controlling stake of which was in the hands of the party leaders. In fact, ideologically devalued parties became a sham political superstructure of a corrupt economy, using bright social and information actions, imitating a political life and a political system (p. 133).

In an extremely interesting way, V. Holovko characterizes political and economic processes in Ukraine in 2005 – 2013 (for example, activities of the RosUkrEnrho company, the gas crises of 2008 – 2009 against the background of the global economic crisis), he writes about the state of culture and sports (in particular, "football interests" of the Ukrainian oliharchs), as well as the constitutional changes of 2005, 2010 and 2014. According to the historian, the period of Viktor Yushchenko's presidency was characterized by extreme ambiguity. At that time, the pressure of the state on society was significantly weakened, elections were held as democratically as possible, freedom of speech became a reality, business felt like a social force. At the same time, the change of faces in power did not mean the change in its essence: high democratic slogans covered the cynical struggle for power, the mass media disdained the principles of journalistic ethics openly, business tried to increase its positions by increasing its influence on the authorities (p. 163). In this explanatory vein, the author formulates regularities of the "post-revolutionary rollback" in V. Yanukovich's coming to power of in 2010.

According to V. Holovko, V. Yanukovich's victory in the Presidential elections in February of 2010 occurred not the least as a result of society and political elite "fatigue" caused by constant socio-political conflicts of the previous five years. The election of V. Yanukovich became a kind of a social and elite compromise. Apparently, President V. Yanukovich himself felt the compromise of his own political figure, in particular, in the first two and a half years of his term, he tried to rely on various elite groups on the condition that they recognize the leading role of the President and his party (p. 164). However, the researcher also describes the growth of the Russian influence, starting with the infamous "Kharkiv Agreements". V. Holovko also writes talks about the activities of a new political and economic force – the Yanukovich "Family".

The author's reflections on the geopolitical steps of Ukraine in 2014 are interesting. In detail he describes complex foreign political debates of the second half of 2013, related

to the issue of signing the association between Ukraine and the EU, Moscow's victory in influencing V. Yanukovich (already at that time the Russian President threatened Yanukovich with a full-scale war and annexation of the Crimea, Donbass, Kharkiv region and southern Ukrainian regions).

Chapter "Revolution of Dignity and Russia's Armed Aggression in 2014 – 2015" is written in 70 pages of the monograph (pp. 180–249), in which the historian describes the tragic events of the Ukrainian history, in particular, the mass shootings of demonstrators by law enforcement officers. In his opinion, the revolution stopped the authoritarian course and foreign policy reversal from European to Eurasian direction. The escape of V. Yanukovich and his removal from power meant that Ukraine finally leaves the orbit of the Russian influence. Thus, the researcher describes the complex processes associated with Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine, the occupation of the Crimea, Donbass, the battles of the Ukrainian army and volunteer battalions for the Ukrainian land, the downing of the Malaysian Boeing airliner by the Russian army, talks about the battles near Ilovaisk and Debaltseve, the signing of The Minsk 1 Agreement and The Minsk 2 Agreement. The author's description of the occupation regime in the Crimea after 2014 is extremely interesting (pp. 208–219). In general, the author shows successfully a large-scale failure of the "Russian world" ideology in Ukraine, the failure of the "Novorosia project".

In the monograph there is presented the concept of the "second oligarchic republic" in Ukraine after the Revolution of Dignity. V. Holovko notes that big capital representatives mostly supported political changes and advocated the territorial integrity of the country. The appointment of oligarchs: I. Kolomoiskyi and S. Taruta to the positions of heads of state administrations, and P. Poroshenko's victory in the Presidential elections, the owner of a large business, which was partly a compromise among the political and business elites, were indicative (p. 250). The researcher notes two effective reforms carried out after the Revolution of Dignity: 1) decentralization; 2) reform of internal affairs bodies system (p. 261). The introduction of lustration and decommunization policy became a notable factor in a social life of Ukraine.

Professor Larysa Yakubova analyses the search by the Ukrainian intellectual and political elites for a for the national building platform during the years of Ukraine's independence. Describing various discussions on this matter, the historian notes that the preference was on the side of the multi-ethnic state nation concept. However, she criticizes the ethno-national policy of the Ukrainian authorities, which was manifested even in the uncertainty of the legal thesaurus of the Ukrainian legislation: for example, in the Constitution of 1996, the concepts of the "Ukrainian people" (an ethnic model) and the "people of Ukraine" (a political model) are used interchangeably and without any logical sequences. The researcher also notes the shortcomings and strategic miscalculations when using the concept of "two Ukraines", which were based on S. Huntington's civilizational theory popular at the time. The metaphor of "two Ukraines" was picked up gladly and instrumentalized by the Ukrainian political community. The dichotomy of Ukraine was used in every election skillfully (p. 305).

We consider L. Yakubova's observation about the ethno-national policy in Ukraine to be valid: being engrossed in the administrative regulation of the ethno-national relations, the authorities did not take care of the humanitarian component of internal policy, which could become a powerful integrative factor of the nation- and state-building. The neglect of this part of the state-building process was obvious as compared to Russia, which used humanitarian expansion as a powerful tool to destabilize Ukraine and mobilize its own society negatively (p. 344).

The second part of the monograph “Euromria vs “*Russian World*”: Ukraine in the Era of Geopolitical Challenges” contains four chapters written by L. Yakubova. It’s true that they somewhat repeat V. Holovko’s chapters on Russia’s hybrid war against Ukraine, on the situation in the occupied Crimea. The opinion that you rarely hear from a historian is important: knowledge of the historical background is not so important for understanding modern problems of Ukraine, because it is not the generator of modern troubles. Actually, they are generated by the archaic thinking inherent in Russia’s ruling circles, and it is this that must be taken into account (p. 410).

In the chapter “Peninsula of Unfreedom”, L. Yakubova describes aspects of life in the Crimea that are little known in Ukraine. The researcher writes about massive violations of human rights, national and political problems of the Crimean Tatars, imitation of a public life in the Crimea according to the Soviet models, friction between the Crimean “elites” and the central government in Moscow, economic decline in all sectors and the Crimea’s financial dependence on the Russian budget. The researcher refutes the economic rationale for the construction of the Kerch bridge, which, in her opinion, was primarily a political project. The researcher also writes about destructive ethno-cultural practices in the Crimea, which make the cultural progress of the Crimean Tatars and the Ukrainians impossible. The closure of the Ukrainian schools, the Ukrainian faculties and departments at universities, persecution of the Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar languages, raising children in a militaristic anti-Ukrainian spirit is the reality of the occupied Crimea. The occupying power takes care of the formation of “places of memory” actively that are supposed to perpetuate the Russian imperial narrative.

No less analytical is the chapter on the issue of the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. L. Yakubova notes that the territory of the “DNR” turned into an experimental site for implementation of a number of contradictory ideological projects (left and right-wing radical directions) or realization of the dreams of someone’s misguided imagination: the NKVD and the MGB were among the first to appear here (p. 457). The researcher noticed large-scale social segregation in ORDLO, where a ruling class (civil servants) appeared. The economy of ORDLO is not able to provide basic needs for the population, the cost of living is increasing, not corresponding to the level of salaries and pensions of ordinary citizens of the “republics”. The fact is a complete dependence on funding from Russia. The pace of a cultural integration in the Russian-speaking space is increasing. A cynical manipulation of fears, prejudices and stereotypes, and ultimately banal ignorance, turned into a universal tool for a mental enslavement of the local population.

The final chapter “Nation-building under the Conditions of Hybrid War: Challenges, Losses, Gains” is not so much historical as political in nature. L. Yakubova delves into intellectual discourse, emphasizing problems and formulating tasks. Thus, she notes imperfection of the regulatory legal framework in the field of ensuring the rights of the national minorities, contradiction or lack of official interpretation of the basic concepts of the ethno-national policy (the “Ukrainian nation”, “title ethnos”, “nationality”, “indigenous peoples”, “ethnic group”, “ethnic community”, etc.) (pp. 491–492).

The historian emphasizes the need to develop a consensus model of the national idea, because imitation of ideas born at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries will not be successful, and globalization poses fundamentally new challenges and tasks for which Ukraine must seek and provide modern answers (p. 494). The researcher writes about education reforms and the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. She also mentions the religious issue, in particular she believes that the multi-church system

historically characteristic of Ukraine is capable of exerting a powerful stabilizing influence. L. Yakubova analyses the activities of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance critically, emphasizing that the policy of memory should be developed at a high professional level (pp. 513–514). The researcher also talks about the policy in the field of culture: in her opinion, both the government's attitude to culture, the instruments of influence on it, and the institutional system of this influence remain Soviet in essence and content (p. 529). We agree with L. Yakubova's statement that huge distance between the level of development of high culture and science and the level of an everyday culture of the broadest strata of the population and those samples of mass culture, which are guided by it, constitutes the main obstacle on the way of civilizational progress of Ukraine (p. 541).

In the afterword, L. Yakubova reflects on the issue of Ukraine's role under the conditions of "the long 20th century", analyses the influence of the Communo-Bolshevism on the Ukrainian state- and nation-building, shows the consequences of the genocidal policy of the Russian Communism not only in the demographic, but also in the mental dimension. The author notes the destructive influence of the Soviet social engineering, which still affects the Ukrainian society. According to L. Yakubova, the entire history of the Ukrainian nation is a history of finding adequate answers to challenges of a high geopolitical scale. This is a nation that survived, took place and is going into the future, being at the epicentre of a civilizational breakdown. The mission of the Ukrainian nation is to break free from the claws of the communist totalitarian past, to make a return to it impossible and to gain true freedom (p. 572). We will add that this mission consists in the final victory of Ukraine over the ideology and practice of "the Russian world".

In general, the reviewed monograph is a large-scale attempt by the Ukrainian intellectuals to understand the history of independent Ukraine in the context of global challenges. The monograph differs from previous monographs (for example, the work of H. Kasianov "Ukraine in 1991 – 2007. Outline of Modern History") in syntheses, a qualitatively higher level of the historical processes understanding, critical handling of mass sources, awareness of essential threats that Ukraine faces after thirty years of an independent state formation.

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