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## ETHNONATIONAL POLICY OF THE USSR IN THE UKRAINIAN SSR (1923–1933) AND ITS IMPACT ON CONTEMPORARY INTERETHNIC RELATIONS

*This article attempts to analyze the nature of the Bolshevik national policy in the Ukrainian SSR from 1923 to 1933 and to demonstrate how Soviet ethnonational policy influenced the linguistic, cultural, and ethno-political situation in the Ukrainian SSR (hereafter Ukraine). For this reason, new sources are not introduced into scientific circulation. The study also seeks to examine the territorial and interethnic conflicts that arose due to the policies of indigenization, Russification, deportations, and border changes and to consider how this legacy affects society in contemporary Ukraine.*

*The research is based on macrohistorical and alternative approaches, which made it possible to identify new aspects of the «Ukrainization» process in the restructuring of society based on utopian ideas of building communism.*

*The main goal of the publication is to draw attention to unpredictable scenarios. In the early 1920s, the Bolshevik leadership of the USSR introduced the policy of «Ukrainization» with the aim of:*

- 1. Creating an impression in the global community of the remarkable development of Soviet republics.*
- 2. Finding common ground with the Ukrainian peasantry.*
- 3. Addressing growing social contradictions.*
- 4. Controlling the national revival process.*
- 5. Compensating for the loss of political influence.*

*However, in the 1930s, when the national revival extended beyond the command-administrative system, this policy was terminated. Repressions then intensified with renewed force.*

*The administrative redrawing of borders in the Soviet Union was an important part of its ethnonational policy, which had a significant impact on interethnic relations in post-Soviet countries. This redrawing was carried out for several reasons: to strengthen control over regions, to satisfy political or economic interests, and to achieve ideological goals. The redrawing of borders often led to ethnic and territorial conflicts that are still felt today. The Soviet authorities sometimes altered borders to increase their influence over certain territories or national minorities, integrating them into Soviet republics. This allowed the Kremlin to create greater «unity» within the USSR and suppress any nationalist movements.*

*For example, in Western Ukraine, during the formation of Soviet republics, administrative border changes influenced their political and social structure. Mass deportations, particularly of the Crimean Tatars, were carried out to prevent the concentration of certain national groups in a single area.*

*Consequences of Border Redrawing: Interethnic Conflicts – The redrawing of borders led to numerous territorial disputes between states that emerged after the collapse of the USSR. Classic examples include conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, Donbas, Crimea, and the Caucasus. Population Imbalance – Administrative boundaries often did not correspond to the actual ethnic composition of the population, leading to situations where certain ethnic groups became minorities in areas where they had previously been the majority. This caused social and political problems in the republics after they declared independence.*

*The redrawing of borders by the Soviet Union created complex ethno-political conditions for post-Soviet countries, which continue to influence contemporary interethnic relations, territorial conflicts, and political processes in these states.*

**Key words:** «indigenization», «Ukrainization», Ukrainian village, repressions of Soviet power, new economic policy.

**Statement of the problem.** In the current socio-political situation, which is shaped by many factors (both internal and, most importantly, external, particularly Russia's encroachments on the state sovereignty of our country), there arises an urgent need to reassess outdated stereotypes and to uncover suppressed or falsified issues and events of the 1920s – early 1930s in the context of the so-called “Ukrainization” in the Ukrainian SSR and in areas of compact Ukrainian settlement in other Soviet republics.

The period of communist dictatorship under Stalin's «ideal» proved to be a tragic era in Ukrainian history. It was a time of unprecedented ethnocide – its scale remains staggering, though we still lack a precise number of victims of this tragedy. Moreover, it was a time when the national elite, intellect, national consciousness, spiritual culture, and historical memory were subjected to humiliation and destruction. This was a period when the ruling Communist Party, under the guise of economic recovery following World War I and the civil wars, pursued a great-power imperial policy of denationalizing the Ukrainian people.

That is why this article examines “Ukrainization”, the Holodomors, repressions, deportations, the deliberate “mixing” of the population, and the imposition of the dominant Russian language as mandatory, not only in the context of the past but also in relation to the present. These very processes have shaped the modern Ukrainian informational, cultural, and political space.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** Recent studies dedicated to the period of the 1920s–early 1930s in Ukraine focus on a comprehensive analysis of Soviet policies, particularly Ukrainization, the Holodomor, repressions, deportations, and Russification. These works emphasize that despite the initial support for national revival, the Soviet regime quickly shifted to harsh repressive measures aimed at suppressing Ukrainian identity.

Most researchers note that this led to a new wave of Russification and repression against the Ukrainian intelligentsia. In particular, following the Holodomor of 1932–1933, mass arrests and persecution of cultural and scientific figures took place, significantly undermining national consciousness and Ukraine's cultural development. Modern foreign and domestic studies confirm that the Holodomor was a deliberately organized act of genocide against the Ukrainian people.

Overall, contemporary scholars highlight that Soviet policies in Ukraine during the 1920s – 1930s had catastrophic consequences for the Ukrainian

people, resulting in mass population losses, the destruction of national culture, and long-term effects on the development of Ukrainian identity. However, these studies do not draw direct parallels with the present.

**Task statement.** The purpose of this article is to analyze the origins of the Bolsheviks' national policy and to consider its impact on contemporary interethnic relations on the basis of already published historical research. Research objectives: to thoroughly analyze the nature and circumstances that determined the coercive nature of the Bolshevik national policy in the period from 1923 to 1933. To study the evolution of Ukrainianization processes, conducting a parallel study of measures aimed at suppressing any manifestations of national revival at the same time; to examine the main goals and strategies of the “Soviet Ukrainianization” policy and determine their impact on Ukrainian society; to analyze the differences and similarities between Ukrainianization and Russification in the context of their impact on the national consciousness and cultural landscape; to study the factors that contributed to the change in policy goals from Ukrainianization to Russification and their impact on socio-political processes in Ukraine during this period.

The study deeply incorporates the principles of macrohistorical analysis, covering a broad chronological and geographical context to understand the impact of the Bolshevik national policy on Ukrainian society. In particular, it takes into account global historical events that were determined by national and ideological trends of the era, as well as their impact on the process of Ukrainization. Particular attention is paid to the coordination of the process of “Ukrainization” with the concepts of utopian ideas of communism.

**Outline of the main material of the study.** The main positive outcome of the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–1921 was that it laid the foundation for the development of the Ukrainian language as the language of state administration. Although Ukrainian statehood did not maintain its independence at the time, its achievements became the basis for subsequent linguistic revivals in the 20th century. As I. Lysiak-Rudnytsky wrote, «It would be a mistake to speak of the defeat of the Ukrainian revolution. It did not achieve its ultimate goal, but it internally transformed Ukrainian society...» [13, p. 222].

That is why, when the Bolsheviks first seized power in Ukraine, they did not even want to hear about the Ukrainian language. Over time, however, due to the lack of popularity of Bolshevik ideology in Ukraine,

they changed their stance on the Ukrainian language. They realized that the establishment of Soviet rule in Ukraine was impossible without the involvement of the Ukrainian intelligentsia and peasantry. Therefore, throughout 1919, the Soviet leadership altered its tactics regarding the Ukrainian language in Ukraine. At that time, the People's Commissar for Nationalities, Joseph Stalin, emphasized that «the main thing now is not to lose control over Ukraine» [11, p. 65], and therefore, concessions were necessary.

Moreover, at that moment, the Bolsheviks faced the task of shaping a positive international image of the USSR as a state that upheld the right of nations to self-determination. This was precisely what the global community demanded from the USSR following the end of World War I. Without gaining the support of Ukrainians living outside the Soviet Union, this would have been impossible.

Due to these considerations, the Resolution «On Soviet Power on Ukraine» (the title of the resolution once again underscores the strategic direction of this policy) called for «turning the Ukrainian language into a tool of communist education for the working masses» [6, p. 13]. Thus, Ukrainization was to become a crucial element of Bolshevik policy.

That is why, in April 1923, the XII Congress of the RCP(b) proclaimed the policy of «korenevization» [19, p. 83]. The Ukrainian version of this policy went down in history under the name «Ukrainization». The very fact of using the term «Ukrainization of Ukraine» is quite paradoxical in the context of Ukrainian history, and even in history as a whole. It is hard to imagine equally absurd expressions, such as, for example, «Russification of Russia», «Polonization of Poland», or «Germanization of Germany»... [19, p. 89]. This concept in itself points to the Bolshevik government's attempt to justify its policy, which, before 1923, aimed at the denationalization of Ukrainians, stripping them of their historical memory, language, and culture. However, the official policy of «korenevization» was presented as a measure to promote the development of the languages and cultures of national minorities. In reality, its true goal was different – to strengthen Soviet power in national republics. Hence, the term «korenevization» itself comes from the Bolshevik goal to «root» themselves in the local environment [15, p. 99], which implied communicating with the population in its language and involving representatives of the indigenous nationalities in the party and state apparatus.

Despite this, at the beginning of the 1920s, the leadership of the Ukrainian SSR remained predominantly non-Ukrainian. Ukrainians made up

only 35% of the personnel in government bodies, and their share in leadership positions was even smaller. In the collegiums of the people's commissariats, Russians (47%) and Jews (26%) dominated, while Ukrainians made up only 12% [8].

However, the primary goal of the korenevization policy was not to increase the number of Ukrainians in the state apparatus but to strengthen the ruling party's influence in Ukraine. As a result, of the 3,702 responsible workers at the provincial, district, and regional levels, only 797 spoke Ukrainian. The situation at the republican level was even worse – only 20.1% of the officials were Ukrainians [8].

This dismal statistic was also acknowledged by one of the leading Bolshevik figures, Nikolai Bukharin. Speaking at the XII Congress of the RCP(b) in April 1923, he openly described the composition of the Communist Party organization in Ukraine as «Russian-Jewish» [1, p. 12]. These facts are especially striking when compared to the results of the 1926 census, which showed that 80% of Ukraine's population were Ukrainians, while representatives of other nationalities made up only 20% [12, p. 70].

On August 1, 1923, a decree titled «On Ensuring the Equality of Languages and Promoting the Development of Ukrainian Culture» was issued [33, p. 256]. According to this decree, the use of the Ukrainian language became mandatory at all levels of government administration. This meant that employees of party and Soviet institutions were required to learn Ukrainian and, most importantly, to use it extensively in their daily work (government documents, meetings, and official correspondence were also to be conducted in Ukrainian). However, the Red bureaucracy and officials of the CP(b)U openly boycotted these decrees and mocked them, thereby ridiculing the Ukrainian language. But were their actions solely motivated by their attitude toward the Ukrainian language? Probably not, as Moscow's «korenevization» policy also involved the purging («cleaning») of administrators. The softening of the language policy was intended to prompt active action from those who were not supporters of the communist ideological doctrines.

Professor Y. Shapoval, in his works, demonstrated how reports from the GPU viewed the «counter-revolutionary» role of the non-communist, pro-Soviet Ukrainian intelligentsia. It was seen as «counteraction to the policy of Ukrainization» [21, p. 77]. In particular, the professor Didusenko, mentioned in one of the GPU reports, emphasized: «Ukrainization is not being carried out sincerely. In words, it is Ukrainization, but in reality, it is Russification. All sectors of the

country are controlled by non-Ukrainian elements» [21, p. 233]. Additionally, at secret meetings, it was emphasized that representatives from the center, who would participate in «party work among more backward nations», must strictly maintain a tone of support and assistance to the national progressive elements in their communist and Soviet work, never allowing anything in their actions or speeches that would resemble asserting the right to impose or decide, or to simply manage, formally relying on the authority of the center [5, p. 152–153].

Thus, the Bolsheviks' national policy in the field of interethnic relations from the outset was overtly distorted, politicized, and class-ideologically driven. Therefore, the actual results of the «korenization» and «Ukrainization» policies turned out to be one-sided, short-lived, and had exclusively propagandistic aims.

What happened to Ukrainians outside the Ukrainian SSR at this time? On the territory of Russia (for example, Kuban, which was 60% Ukrainian at the time), the republic's government did not respond to the population's requests for «Ukrainization.» Although there were even several appeals to the central authorities to reunite Kuban with Ukraine. Since such appeals were not satisfied, uprisings began. Then, as a compromise, the «Ukrainization» of the Kuban and other regions of Russia with a compact Ukrainian population was allowed. Thus, the policy of «Ukrainization» applied by the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks in Ukraine and a number of other territories inhabited by Ukrainians, including the Kuban, seems to be a temporary measure aimed at strengthening the Bolshevik regime in the national margins. But it is precisely these Bolshevik actions that intensify the comprehensive study of the Ukrainian language, led by the Ukrainian University of Science and Technology. With the assistance of M. Skrypnyk, two important research centers were founded: The Institute of Linguistics and the Institute of Scientific Language. Also at this time, six volumes of the Russian-Ukrainian Dictionary were published under the editorship of A. Krymsky (a prominent Ukrainian polyglot linguist, historian, writer, and translator of Crimean Tatar origin). Y. Shevelev called this dictionary «one of the monumental monuments of the Ukrainian cultural revival of the 1920s» [22, p. 32]. The greatest advantage of this dictionary compared to the dictionaries of previous years can be seen in the fact that it recorded an already developed multifunctional literary language. In total, by 1929, about 30 different terminology dictionaries in Ukrainian had been published.

Thus, the result of this policy was that Ukrainian culture moved beyond the boundaries of ethnographic provincialism in the Russian Empire and began to develop as an independent culture, capable of fully expressing its creative potential. It also contributed to processes that were not part of the Bolshevik plans. For example, movements for the expansion of the republics' independence began. In particular, writer M. Khvylovy, between 1925 and 1927, initiated a literary debate about the ways of building Ukrainian culture and proposed freeing it from Russian influence, reorienting towards European traditions and spiritual achievements. He strongly expressed this in slogans such as «Away from Moscow,» «Give Europe,» and others. Moreover, M. Khvylovy began speaking about the competition between Ukrainian and Russian cultures, opposed the «Russian conductor,» put forward the theory of «national revival,» and called for «immediately siding with the active young Ukrainian society, which represents not only the peasant but also the worker, and thereby put an end forever to the counter-revolutionary idea of building Russian culture in Ukraine» [18, p. 576–621].

J. Stalin interpreted this as an attempt to push the party toward national rebirth. At the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s, the process of «Ukrainization» began to gradually wind down. «Ukrainization» was reclassified as «Petliurist» and «bourgeois-nationalist,» accompanied by a struggle against «Skrypnykism.» In 1929, a trial took place in the case of the «Union for the Liberation of Ukraine» – a fictitious organization fabricated by the UPRR's GPU to discredit the Ukrainian intellectual elite. 474 people were tried, mostly representatives of the Ukrainian intelligentsia. Fifteen individuals were sentenced to death, and 192 were sent to concentration camps. At the beginning of the 1930s, M. Skrypnyk also fell victim to repression. Initially, Skrypnyk was publicly criticized at party meetings. After one such meeting, at which he was once again accused of nationalism, M. Skrypnyk shot himself in his office (was it a suicide?). In 1933, M. Khvylovy also committed suicide, which raises many questions.

The world-renowned jurist and author of the term «genocide,» Raphael Lemkin, considered the liquidation of Ukraine's creative elite in the 1920s and 1930s to be part of a broader policy of extermination, specifically the Soviet genocide of Ukrainians. «The first blow was aimed at the intelligentsia – the brain of the nation, to paralyze the rest of the body» [23, p. 55]. Other steps of the genocide included the liquidation of the national church and the mass extermination through the 1932–1933 famine of the primary bearers

of Ukrainian national identity – the peasants. Thus, a spiritually and physically broken Ukraine was to become an integral part of the Soviet empire.

Interestingly, the «Ukrainization» policy was never formally revoked.

**Conclusions.** The policy of «Ukrainization» in the 1920s–1930s, though officially declared as a step toward the development of Ukrainian culture, was in reality part of a Bolshevik assimilation strategy aimed at subjugating Ukrainians and maintaining control over Ukraine. All efforts toward Ukrainization were superficial and short-lived, as most Soviet structures

remained Russian-speaking, leading to the dominance of the Russian language in the workplace.

The consequences of this policy had a catastrophic impact on national consciousness and the linguistic identity of Ukrainians, as it created a linguistic «mix» in which Russian became the primary language for career advancement, leaving Ukrainians bilingual. The long-term effects of Soviet policies, which prevented the full implementation of Ukrainization, are still felt today. A significant portion of Ukraine's population continues to use Russian, a direct result of Russia's prolonged linguistic and cultural dominance.

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### **Лапченко А.С. ЕТНОНАЦІОНАЛЬНА ПОЛІТИКА СРСР В УСРР (1923–1933 РР.) ТА ЇЇ ВПЛИВ НА СУЧАСНІ МІЖЕТНІЧНІ ВІДНОСИНИ**

У статті здійснено спробу проаналізувати характер національної політики більшовиків в 1923–1933 роки на території УСРР та показати, як етнонаціональна радянська політика позначилася на мовній, культурній та етнополітичній ситуації УСРР (далі в Україні). Саме тому до наукового обігу не вводяться нові джерела. Також здійснено спробу дослідити, які територіальні та міжетнічні суперечності виникли через політику коренізації, русифікації, депортацій і зміни кордонів та розглянуто, як ця спадщина впливає на суспільство в сучасній Україні. Дослідження ґрунтується на принципах макроісторичних та альтернативних підходів, що дозволило виявити нові аспекти процесу «українізації» у перебудові суспільства на основі утопічних ідей будівництва комунізму.

Основна мета публікації – привернути увагу до непередбачуваних сценаріїв. На початку 1920х рр. більшовицьке керівництво СРСР ввело політику «українізації» з метою:

1. Створення враження в глобальному співтоваристві про вражаючий розвиток радянських республік.
2. Знаходження спільної мови з українським селянством.
3. Розв'язання наростаючих суспільних протирічч.
4. Контролю процесу національного відродження.
5. Компенсації втрати політичного впливу.

Проте, у 1930-х роках, коли національне відродження вийшло за межі командно-адміністративної системи, цю політику припинили. А репресії розгорнулися з новою силою.

Адміністративне перекроювання кордонів у Радянському Союзі було важливою частиною етнонаціональної політики, що мало значний вплив на міжетнічні відносини в пострадянських країнах. Це перекроювання здійснювалося з кількох причин: для зміцнення контролю над регіонами, задоволення політичних чи економічних інтересів, а також для досягнення ідеологічних цілей. Перекроювання кордонів часто призводило до етнічних і територіальних суперечностей, які відчуваться і сьогодні. Радянська влада іноді змінювала кордони для того, щоб підсилити своє вплив на певні території або національні меншини, інтегруючи їх до складу радянських республік. Це дозволяло Кремлю створити більшу «єдність» СРСР і придушити будь-які націоналістичні рухи. Так у Західній Україні під час створення радянських республік було здійснено адміністративне перекроювання кордонів, що вплинуло на їхню політичну та соціальну структуру. Масові депортації, зокрема кримських татар, здійснювались з територій, з метою уникнення концентрації певних національних груп на одній території.

Наслідки перекроювання кордонів:

Міжетнічні конфлікти. Перекроювання кордонів призвело до численних територіальних суперечок між державами, які виникли після розпаду СРСР. Класичними прикладами є конфлікти в Нагірному Карабаху, Придністров'ї, Донбасі, Криму, а також на Кавказі.

Дисбаланс населення. Адміністративні межі часто не відповідали реальному етнічному складу населення, що призвело до того, що певні етнічні групи опинилися в меншості на території, де вони раніше були більшістю. Це зумовило соціальні й політичні проблеми в республіках після їхнього проголошення незалежними державами.

Перекроювання кордонів Радянським Союзом створило складні етнополітичні умови для пострадянських країн, які мають вплив на сучасні міжетнічні відносини, територіальні конфлікти та політичні процеси в цих державах.

**Ключові слова:** «коренізація», «українізація», українське село, репресії радянської влади, нова економічна політика.