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THE FAILURE OF THE “RUSSIAN SPRING” IN ZAPORIZHZHIA AS A MANIFESTATION OF DECOLONISATION AND RESISTANCE TO RUSSIAN NARRATIVES (MARCH–MAY 2014)

This article examines the failure of the so-called “Russian Spring” in Zaporizhzhia in March–May 2014 as a manifestation of local resistance to Russian imperial narratives and an important element in the processes of decolonisation of Ukrainian society. It analyses the political, social and informational factors that contributed to the failure of attempts to destabilise the situation in the city and implement a scenario similar to the events in Donbas. Particular attention is paid to the role of civil society, local activists, volunteer initiatives and pro-ukrainian mobilisations, which became key factors in containing pro-russian forces. The mechanisms for spreading Russian propaganda narratives about the so-called “Russian world”, the “protection of the Russian-speaking population” and the “federalisation” of Zaporizhzhia with the so-called pseudo-republics of the DNR/LNR are examined, as well as the forms of public counteraction to these discourses in the city’s information and public space. It is demonstrated that the active civic stance of residents, support for Ukraine’s territorial integrity, and the consolidation of local communities have become key factors in neutralising pro-Russian movements. The article also examines the failure of the so-called “Russian Spring” as part of a broader process of decolonisation, manifested in the rejection of imperial political and cultural models, the affirmation of Ukrainian identity, and the formation of new practices of civic solidarity. In this context, decolonisation is not merely a process of symbolic or cultural change, but a deeper transformation of public consciousness linked to overcoming the long-standing influence of Russian imperial and post-Soviet narratives. It is concluded that the events of spring 2014 in Zaporizhzhia served as an important example of successful social mobilisation and effective counteraction to russian narratives in the south-eastern region of Ukraine.

Keywords: decolonisation, “Russian Spring”, russian narratives, information warfare, civil society, Zaporizhzhia.

Statement of the problem. The events of spring 2014, related to attempts to implement the so-called “Russian Spring” project in the south-eastern regions of Ukraine, became an important challenge for Ukrainian statehood, regional stability and national identity. The Russian Federation actively used political, informational and propaganda tools to spread narratives about “Russian world”, “protection of the Russian-speaking population” and the need for “federalization” of Ukraine. In several cities, these processes led to the escalation of the conflict and armed confrontation, but in some regions, particularly in Zaporizhzhia, attempts at destabilisation were unsuccessful.

Despite the activity of pro-Russian forces and the presence of informational influence from Russia, the scenario of the so-called “Russian Spring” in Zaporizhzhia was not implemented. At the same time, the reasons for this failure and the mechanisms of public opposition to Russian narratives remain insufficiently researched in Ukrainian historiography. In this context, it is important to consider the events in Zaporizhzhia in March–May 2014 through the prism of decolonisation processes. It is about the gradual overcoming of imperial political and cultural narratives, which for a long time formed the idea of the south-eastern regions of Ukraine as part of the “Russian world”.

The analysis of the failure of the “Russian Spring” in Zaporizhzhia makes it possible to better understand the mechanisms of public opposition to Russian information expansion and the role of local communities in the processes of establishing Ukrainian civic identity.

Analysis of recent research and publications.

Today, there are few scientific publications devoted to the study of the issue of decolonization in the territory of Southern Ukraine, as well as in Zaporizhzhia. This creates a scientific gap that must be filled in order to fully understand the regional specificity of these historical events.

However, there are several scientific works that relay the all-Ukrainian nature of these phenomena. Among the works devoted to all-Ukrainian topics, the works of O. Bazhana [1], I. Grabovska, S. Grabovsky [3], M. Boychenko [2], etc. The regional aspect of the events of the Revolution of Dignity and its component Anti-Maidan, the subsequent events of the so-called “Russian Spring” were studied by G. Turchenko and S. Totska [9, 10].

The authors of Ewuoso C. [6], Tuck E. [7] consider the processes of decolonization at the international level and pay special attention to the course of these processes on the territory of Ukraine, in particular in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war and its active phase.

Task statement. In view of the above, the purpose of the article is to analyze the failure of the “Russian Spring in Zaporizhzhia in March” May 2014 and to study the mechanisms of public opposition to Russian narratives in the context of the processes of decolonization of the Ukrainian public and information space [8, p. 145–147].

Outline of the main material of the study. Presentation of the main material. After the events of the Revolution of Dignity and the escape of the President of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich, on February 22, 2014, early presidential elections were announced, which took place on May 25, 2014. According to their results, Petro Poroshenko won the first round. The election process took place in extremely difficult conditions, since at that time, open Russian aggression against Ukraine had already begun, which was manifested in the annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the escalation of the armed conflict in Donbas [10, p. 264].

Against the background of the all-Ukrainian political crisis and the beginning of Russian aggression in the south-eastern regions, the activities of pro-Russian organizations that tried to implement the scenario of the so-called “Russian Spring” intensified. One of the key elements of this scenario was the spread of

informational narratives about the “Russian world”, the need for “protection of the Russian-speaking population”, and the idea of creating a new political entity called “Novorossiya”. Such messages were actively spread through Russian media, social networks and pro-Russian political structures [4].

The events unfolding in the city of Zaporizhzhia in the spring of 2014 were a reflection of the general aggravation of the political situation in Ukraine. In March and April 2014, Anti-Maidan actions were held on Soborny Avenue, during which pro-Russian activists expressed support for the ideas of creating “Novorossiya” and called for the separation of the region from Ukraine. Motorcades with Russian flags moved through the streets of the city, which greatly increased tensions in society. Representatives of the former Zaporizhzhia Anti-Maidan gathered near the city government building, trying to demonstrate the presence of pro-Russian forces in the region [5].

At the same time, pro-Ukrainian forces were also active in the city. Already on March 2, 2014, a rally against the aggressive policy of the President of the Russian Federation, V. Putin. The action was held under the slogan “Putin away!” A characteristic feature of this rally was the absence of party symbols or flags of public organizations. The participants used exclusively the state flags of Ukraine, which testified to the consolidation of citizens around the idea of protecting state sovereignty. Posters appeared on the facade of the building of the Zaporizhzhia Regional State Administration with the inscriptions “Enemy – is not the Russian people, but dictator Putin”, “Ukrainians for peace”, “Ukraine is in danger”, “We love Ukraine!”, “Russia, stop maniac!” [4].

After the change of the central government, the process of updating the leadership on the ground began. Valery Baranov, the former mayor of Berdyansk, was appointed as the new head of the Zaporizhzhia Regional State Administration. On March 4, 2014, he met with Maidan activists, which caused a mixed reaction among the participants of the protest movement. In particular, public activist and well-known Zaporizhzhia anti-corruption fighter A. Shevchenko opposed this appointment, accusing V. Baranov of involvement in corruption schemes in previous years. The next day, March 5, 2014, during the “round table” in the regional state administration, he distributed a leaflet in which he criticized the political activities of the newly appointed head of the region and demanded his resignation [4].

On the same day, pro-Russian activists made an attempt to install the flag of the Russian Federation on the building of the Zaporizhzhia Regional State

Administration. In response to this, members of the People's Self-Defence were on high alert. A medical centre was even set up in the building of the regional council in case of possible clashes. Posters appeared on the facade of the administrative building with the inscriptions “No war”, “No lies”, “No Putin! Ukraine is one!”, “Shh! Speak Russian more quietly! Because Putin will hear and send troops in your direction for your own salvation!”, as well as a comparison of V's policy. Putin with the aggression of Nazi Germany in 1941: “22.06.1941 – Hitler = 01.03.2014 – Putin”, “Vova, why did you shave your moustache? (left – drawing of Hitler, right – Putin)” [5].

Civil self-organisation structures played a significant role in stabilizing the situation. People's Self-Defence of the city of Zaporizhzhia united mainly working citizens, students and representatives of various public organizations. They were on duty even at night, ensuring the protection of administrative buildings and public order [9, p. 140].

Mass pro-Ukrainian rallies became an important manifestation of civil mobilization. On March 16, 2014, a rally was held near the Zaporizhzhia Regional State Administration under the slogan “Ukraine is in danger! Our strength is in unity!”. Representatives of the “Women's Hundred” organized the symbolic “Ukrainian Circle”, during which they performed Ukrainian songs and dances in national dress. The action “We draw Ukraine” was held for children, which was aimed at demonstrating the peaceful nature of the protests [5].

One of the hardest moments of the confrontation was the events of April 13, 2014, which were called “egg Sunday”. That day, pro-Russian activists tried to hold a rally in the city centre, but were surrounded by representatives of Self-Defence, “Right Sector” and other pro-Ukrainian activists. For seven hours, the opposing sides remained separated by the border of law enforcement officers [5].

During the conflict, Euromaidan supporters pelted pro-Russian demonstrators with eggs and flour. The law enforcement officers tried to take the participants of the Anti-Maidan out by car bombs, but these attempts were accompanied by attacks on the transport, in particular, the cars were hit by headlights and brake lights, and one of the car bombs even caught fire as a result of a firecracker explosion. Later, a bus approached the scene, but it was also blocked, so it was not possible to evacuate people. The confrontation lasted until the evening, and even with the onset of darkness, the situation remained tense. These events were later called “egg Sunday” [4].

On April 16, 2014, a crowded pro-European rally was held on the Maidan near the Zaporizhzhia Regional State Administration building under the slogan “Cherry blossoms”. During the evening, its chairman I. Artyushenko emphasized that Ukrainians, including residents of Zaporizhzhia, must demonstrate that the city is an integral part of Ukraine, and efforts aimed at its protection are not in vain. Such words reflected the desire of the Zaporozhians to testify their support for Ukrainian statehood. To create an appropriate atmosphere, the head of the People's Council, O. Tkachenko, read Taras Shevchenko's poem “Cherry orchard near the house”. This work gave the event a special symbolic meaning, because it represents the peaceful and harmonious life of the Ukrainian people, which at that time was under threat [4, 5].

On April 27, 2014, another meeting was held, organized by pro-European youth under the leadership of I. Artyushenko, which took place under the slogan “We are for peace”. During his speech, he emphasized that manifestations of separatism in Zaporizhzhia will not have support, as the court decided to ban the holding of rallies of the organization “Slavyanskaya gvardiya”. Active participant of the Maidan and co-chairman of the Zaporizhzhia city organization of the All-Ukrainian Association “Svoboda”, T. Knysh, noted that the relatively calm situation in the city was the result of joint efforts of its residents and law enforcement agencies, which sided with the community. He also emphasized that the police need the support of society during this period, because their activities are aimed at protecting the interests of citizens [10, p. 273].

In May 2014, events related to the “Russian spring” in Zaporizhzhia took on a new informational colour. So, on May 4, 2014, there were reports on social networks that a certain “Novorossiysk” organization called “Blockada” allegedly introduced its own plastic “passports”. It was noted that these documents were to be received by members of the special battalion “Peremoha”, which was positioned as part of the Zaporizhzhya-Dnipropetrovsk resistance forces “Blockade”. According to widespread information, a group of Zaporozhian residents planned to travel to Crimea to obtain approximately one hundred such documents [5].

In April–May 2014, pro-Russian organizations operated in the region, in particular the so-called “South-Eastern Front”, which tried to mobilize Russian supporters in Zaporizhzhia. However, the activities of this structure did not receive significant support among the local population. The main part of

its participants were elderly people, and the number of active supporters of separatism was estimated at approximately 50–70 people. Law enforcement agencies and the Security Service of Ukraine took active measures to counter separatism. Numerous searches were conducted, in which weapons were seized, and persons suspected of sabotage activities were detained. According to the then head of the regional prosecutor's office, O. Shatskyi, by May 2014, law enforcement agencies managed to completely stabilize the situation in the region [5].

Note that attempts to implement the scenario of the so-called “Russian spring” in Zaporizhzhia were defeated. Plans to create the so-called “Zaporizhzhia People's Republic” were not implemented due to the lack of mass support among the population and active opposition from civil society. The events of spring 2014 became an important example of how the local community was able to resist Russian informational narratives and attempts to destabilize the region [4].

Including these processes can be considered as a manifestation of decolonization of social consciousness, in particular in the city of Zaporizhzhia. The refusal of the majority of citizens of Zaporizhzhia to support the ideas of the “Russian world” proved the gradual overcoming of imperial political and cultural narratives, which had spread for a long time in the information space of the region. Consolidation of citizens around Ukrainian statehood, active participation in public initiatives and protection of the city from separatist provocations became important elements of the formation of a new civic identity [4].

Conclusions. So, the events of March–May 2014 in Zaporizhzhia marked a significant stage in the formation of local resistance to Russian political and informational influence. During this period, against the backdrop of the events following the Revolution of Dignity and the onset of Russian aggression, processes of re-evaluating historical memory, identity and political orientations gained momentum in Ukraine. In Zaporizhzhia, these processes can be viewed as a manifestation of decolonisation.

One of the key factors in the decolonisation processes was the revitalisation of civil society. Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the start of attempts to implement the so-called “Russian Spring” scenario, pro-Russian forces organised rallies aimed at spreading the ideas of “federalization”, annexation to Russia, or the creation of pseudo-state entities modelled on those that emerged during the war in eastern Ukraine. However, in Zaporizhzhia, these attempts met with significant resistance from pro-Ukrainian activists, volunteers, veterans and local residents.

Decolonisation processes manifested themselves primarily in the city's symbolic space. The proliferation of Ukrainian symbols, mass patriotic rallies, demonstrations in support of Ukraine's territorial integrity and the organisation of self-defence groups contributed to the formation of a new civic solidarity. Ukrainian historical narratives linked to the Cossack heritage and traditions of the Zaporizhzhia region began to be voiced more actively in the public sphere, contrasting with the Russian imperial interpretation of the region's history.

Countering Russian propaganda played a significant role in the decolonisation process. Civic initiatives, journalists and activists were active in the city, refuting Russian narratives about the “oppression of the Russian-speaking population” or the “need to protect Russians”. Alternative information was disseminated through social media, the media and public campaigns, which helped foster a critical attitude towards Russian propaganda messages.

Another manifestation of decolonisation processes was the emergence of new practices of civic self-organisation. In Zaporizhzhia, volunteer and defence initiatives sprang up, supporting the Ukrainian military and assisting law enforcement agencies in maintaining order and countering pro-Russian provocations. These processes helped to strengthen local identity, based on support for Ukrainian statehood.

The events of the spring of 2014 in Zaporizhzhia witnessed a gradual break with the colonial paradigm, within which the region was positioned for a long time as part of the “Russian world and the sphere of cultural and political influence of Russia. The active position of local communities, resistance to pro-Russian mobilization practices and support for the state sovereignty of Ukraine became manifestations of the formation of a new civic identity.

The events of March–May 2014 showed that the residents of Zaporizhzhia actively defended the territorial integrity of Ukraine, demonstrating an unwillingness to succumb to pro-Russian influences. Massive pro-European rallies, vigils and mobilization of public organizations testified to a high level of civic activity and patriotism.

The refusal of citizens of Zaporizhzhia from pro-Russian ideas and the active support of Ukrainian symbols and cultural narratives testify to the process of decolonization, conscious distancing from Russian narratives and the restoration of their own national identity. The failure of pro-Russian actions in Zaporizhzhia, the lack of mass support for pro-Russian organizations and separatist initiatives, demonstrated that Russia's external influence could not change the political and cultural orientation of the city.

The failure of the “Russian Spring” in Zaporizhzhia can be interpreted as one of the practical manifestations of decolonization, which took place not only at the level of state policy, but also in the everyday practices of citizens, in the rethinking of historical memory, symbolic space and political loyalty. This process was accompa-

nied by the gradual displacement of Russian imperial narratives and the establishment of Ukrainian national and civil discourse in the public space of the region.

So, the events of spring 2014 in Zaporizhzhia became a symbol of opposition to imperial narratives and fakes in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

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Тоцька С.І., Бойко О.В. ПРОВАЛ «РУССКОЙ ВЕСНИ» У ЗАПОРІЖЖІ ЯК ПРОЯВ ДЕКОЛОНІЗАЦІЇ ТА ПРОТИДІЇ РОСІЙСЬКИМ НАРАТИВАМ (березень–травень 2014 р.)

У статті досліджується провал так званої «русской весни» у Запоріжжі в березні–травні 2014 р. як прояв локальної протидії російським імперським наративам та важливий елемент процесів деколонізації українського суспільства. Проаналізовано політичні, соціальні та інформаційні чинники, які вплинули на невдачу спроб дестабілізації ситуації в місті та реалізації сценарію, подібного до події на Донбасі. Особливу увагу приділено ролі громадянського суспільства, місцевих активістів, волонтерських ініціатив і проукраїнських мобілізацій, що стали ключовими факторами стримування проросійських сил. Розглянуто механізми поширення російських пропагандистських наративів про так званий «русский мир», «захист російськомовного населення» та «федералізацію» м. Запоріжжя з так званими псевдореспубліками ДНР/ЛНР, а також форми суспільної протидії цим дискурсам у міському інформаційному та публічному просторі. Показано, що активна громадянська позиція мешканців, підтримка територіальної цілісності України та консолідація місцевих спільнот стали важливими чинниками нейтралізації проросійських рухів. У статті також розглядається провал так званої «русской весни» як складова ширшого процесу деколонізації, що проявляється у відмові від імперських політичних та культурних моделей, утвердженні української ідентичності та формуванні нових практик громадянської солідарності. У цьому контексті деколонізація є не лише як процесом символічних чи культурних змін, а глибшою трансформацією суспільної свідомості, пов'язаною з подоланням тривалого впливу російських імперських і пострадянських наративів. Зроблено висновок, що події весни 2014 р. у Запоріжжі стали важливим прикладом успішної суспільної мобілізації та ефективної протидії російським наративам у південно-східному регіоні України.

Ключові слова: деколонізація, «русская весна», російські наративи, інформаційна війна, громадянське суспільство, Запоріжжя.

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