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World War II Monuments in Ukraine

Protection, Dismantling and Reuse since 2022

In May 2022, a heated round-table dedicated to the fate of Soviet monuments in Ukraine took place online in the Institute of National Remembrance¹, involving a number of culture experts and managers from across the country. In the middle of the full-scale Russian invasion, frequent air raid alerts and missile attacks on civilians, the debates were quite emotional. The speakers presented a broad range of possible approaches to the Soviet monuments, varying from introducing modest changes to their complete demolition or museumification. Some of them were highly meticulous artistic propositions, such as Yevheniia Moliar's idea of painting the Victory Monument in Chernivtsi² using Vantablack pigment ("the blackest black") in cooperation with the sculptor Anish Kapoor. Another suggestion was Nikita Kadan's idea of rethinking the Kyiv equestrian monument to Mykola Shchors, one of the Bolshevik leaders in 1918–1919, by removing his head and replacing it with a horse's head, thus highlighting the fact that the horse is the most important part of the monument, which has been highly praised by art historians as one of the best in its genre in Ukraine. Some of the speakers promoted partial demolition, in quite surprising forms at times, such as the suggestion to delete only figures symbolising Russians from a multigure monument, the Arch of the Friendship of Peoples in Kyiv³. Other ideas for modification were more conventional, such as World War II Museum director Yurii Savchuk's suggestion to erase the Soviet coat of arms from the shield of Kyiv's Rodina-Mat in Kyiv, a gigantic World War II "Motherland" monument (unveiled in 1981). The historian (currently serving on the frontlines) Ivan Patryliak argued for the complete demolition of all Soviet monuments, using the rhetoric of "weeding out Russian monumental heritage" (he referred to the notions of "Soviet" and "Russian" interchangeably): "We need to solve this issue once and for all, or our children will go to war as well". Finally,

the head of the Institute (and currently a soldier as well), Anton Drobovych, promoted the relocation of the monuments to special themed museums.

Writing this text more than a year later, the actual decisions taken about these particular monuments can be traced back to this discussion round. The cooperation with Anish Kapoor never took place as the monument in Chernivtsi was demolished in August 2022⁴, after public consultations with the local residents, and in spite of the fact that World War II monuments are exempt from the "decommunisation laws"⁵. All three monuments in Kyiv are still standing. The Shchors monument was stripped of its status as a protected monument (along with the monument to Pushkin) and finally demolished in December 2023⁶ (fig. 1). The Arch of Friendship was renamed the Arch of Freedom of the Ukrainian People in May 2022, and the sculptural composition is awaiting dismantling, including both the "Russian" and "Ukrainian" historical figures⁷. In August 2023, the Motherland monument in Kyiv lost its Soviet coat of arms, which will be replaced by the Ukrainian trident: a reappropriation of the late Soviet military cult for the purposes of the ongoing war⁸. Many other smaller monuments, especially standardised ones erected in the 1960s–1980s, were indeed demolished, but the specialised museums mentioned by Drobovych are nowhere in sight, and only a few local history museums have accepted dismantled monuments as artefacts for storage (and maybe for exhibiting someday in the future)⁹.

This round-table of May 2022 and its aftermath perfectly demonstrated also the panorama of different opinions across the Ukrainian society at large. The spectrum of opinions in the public discussion, as well as the divergence between people's intentions and the actual fates of the monuments, show several important tendencies in Ukrainian culture and politics as regards Soviet heritage after February 2022. First of all, the ongoing war has led to the "securitisation" of



Fig. 1: The Kyiv municipal press service chose this ironic photo (along with four others) to report the demolition of the equestrian monument to Mykola Shchors, 9 December 2023. Photo: Mykhailo Kryvolapov (KMDA – Ofitsiynyi kanal Telegram channel).

memory and activated the discourse of military glory embodied in the Soviet World War II monuments, and this discourse has been reused for the purpose of argumentation when remodelling, demolishing, or preserving and reinterpreting the monuments. It is worth mentioning that those who claim to represent the opinion of soldiers have attained more symbolic weight in the public discussions. Secondly, the ideas of remodelling, relocating and creatively reusing the monuments are still influential, but their demolition is becoming more popular, especially in the western regions of the country. Thirdly, the lack of capacity-building and financial support for the preservation of the dismantled monuments increasingly leads to the loss of their heritage value and poses a threat to their existence.

In this article, I offer an outline of the dynamics of memorial work in Ukrainian society around the notions of “decommunisation”, “decolonisation” and “de-Russification” in particular, concentrating on the monuments related to World War II. One of the most intriguing aspects of this discussion has been the attempt to borrow the rhetorical devices developed in other countries of the former socialist block (such as victimhood under two dictatorships) and use them in a very different historical context: Ukraine was clearly

a part of the Soviet political and military core at the time.

Decommunisation: Evolution of the Legal Framework and the Practice on the Ground

The first waves of dismantling Soviet monuments in Ukraine took place in the early 1990s, as in neighbouring countries in the former socialist block. These processes were led primarily by the local authorities and civic activists, and especially targeted the monuments devoted to the highest Soviet and Communist Party officials¹⁰. The monuments to fallen soldiers were preserved; moreover, many new monuments dedicated to Soviet soldiers were erected¹¹. Local authorities are obliged to take care of them, and there is a legal provision banning insults to World War II burials and monuments in the Criminal Code (2001). In 2009–2012 there were initiatives (specifically by Communist Party members) to introduce new laws against insulting World War II monuments¹². Modifications took place as well, especially in the west of Ukraine, where Christian symbols were added and inscriptions changed (mentions of e.g. “Ukrainian-German bourgeois nationalists” as “fascist collaborators” were quite often, but not always, deleted)¹³.



Fig. 2: Menorah Monument in Drobytsky Yar, Kharkiv, 17 April 2023, after being hit by Russian artillery (26 March 2022). Photo: Dmytro Hrebinnyk (Suspilne Kharkiv).

In 2015, the “decommunisation laws” started the official state policy of purging public spaces of communist symbols in Ukraine¹⁴. Importantly, several groups of Soviet monuments were excluded from this process, such as monuments connected with World War II (unless they represented the top officials of the party or state organs), and those dedicated to cultural and literary figures. Additionally, war memorials are protected by the law on honouring the victory over Nazism¹⁵. In some regions, especially in the east and south of Ukraine, these war monuments comprised the most numerous cultural heritage objects protected by the state¹⁶. State organs, such as the Ministry of Culture and the Institute of National Remembrance, traditionally present the memory of World War II, including monuments, as honouring the Allies’ victory over Nazism, in which Ukrainians played an important role¹⁷.

However, the central state policy is not decisive on the regional and local levels in Ukraine. In spite of the protected status, some of the World War II monuments were demolished already after 2014. Most notably, the large-scale Monument to the Military Glory of the Soviet Army in Lviv was re-interpreted as not being a monument dedicated to the war, but to the Soviet Army specifically, and was partially demolished in 2017, with sculptural figures relocated to the muni-

cipal Territory of Terror Museum¹⁸. What was initially celebrated as a rare case of preservation and museumification – as the figures are exhibited and form part of a guided tour, and have even travelled to an international exhibition – has also been severely criticised by some experts as an actual destruction of the monument, because the saved sculptures formed only a part of the dismantled memorial complex¹⁹.

After February 2022, military memorials in Ukraine acquired new, unexpectedly ambivalent, meanings, and not always negative. Their artistic or historical relevance grew because of their endangered status. In March 2022, the mayor of the city of Izium reported the destruction of the World War II memorial on Kremenetska Hill²⁰, which marked one of the major World War II battles in the east of Ukraine, reporting that the Russians had ruined it: “One of the steles fell down because of their bombardment. Fascists! We will not forget! We will not forgive!”²¹

Other World War II monuments hit – either intentionally or accidentally – by Russian attacks have been discussed as proof of the enemy’s barbarity. This is especially true in the case of Babyn Yar, the large-scale Holocaust site in Kyiv, hit by a Russian missile in March 2022, which became a subject of President Volodymyr Zelensky’s speech directed at Jews worldwide²², and is very frequently mentioned in

the media coverage of other monuments on the territory directly hit by the military actions²³. The same concerns Drobytsky Yar, a Holocaust site in Kharkiv (fig. 2), also hit by Russian artillery on 26 March 2022. The team responsible for the memorial took a decision to preserve the traces of destruction on the monument so as to be able to display this new tragic layer of history to visitors.

Especially bitter ironic comments have been made when Russian destruction has taken place next to the most generic symbols of Soviet victory in World War II – monuments in the form of T-34 tanks – as happened in Trostianets in the Sumy region, for instance²⁴. In some commentators' opinions, this tank (which survived both Nazi and Russian attacks) is a real symbol of resilience and hope for Ukraine²⁵.

At the same time, in regions which are not directly under fire, and which suffer rather from random attacks on strategic objects and critical infrastructure, the enhancement of World War II monuments' culturally valuable status does not occur. Today, these monuments are more often seen as problematic propaganda statements occupying very central places in down-town areas. In some cases, the monuments have been demolished or relocated since 2022, as part of substantial urban planning changes that intend to show that World War II does not occupy a central place in social memory any longer. It has been suggested that the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war should take that position.

The case of the same type of T-34 tank monument in the city centre of Zhytomyr is characteristic. Almost immediately after the start of the full-scale Russian invasion, on 1 March 2022, the municipal authorities tried to dismantle it (fig. 3), but because of technical difficulties they succeeded only on 5 May. The tank was relocated to the World War II Glory Memorial; the idea was not to erase it from memory completely, but to remove it from the city centre. Several locals voiced the opinion that such a central location should be occupied by new monuments to the heroes of the ongoing war, or, as one speaker suggested, by "a piece of the Russian warship"²⁶.

Even more problematic among the very visible memorials are World War II burial sites located in public urban spaces. At the time of writing, exhumations



Fig. 3: First (unsuccessful) attempt to demolish the T-34 tank monument in Zhytomyr, 1 March 2022. Photo: Viacheslav Ratynskiy (Urban Media Archive of the Center for Urban History, Lviv).

and relocations were taking place mostly in the Transcarpathia and Lviv regions, and only occasionally in other places²⁷. A closer look at who is actually buried there and why has sometimes led to unexpected discoveries. In the case of Vinnytsia, in spring 2023 it was revealed that the centrally located Glory Memorial (on European Square) in fact contained remnants of Chinese Bolshevik supporters who had died in 1918 and only a small number of bodies of World War II soldiers²⁸. This discovery guaranteed public support for the exhumation and relocation of the remnants, as well as for the demolition of the monument which represented figures of the Red Guard, the Budi-onny army, and a Soviet Army soldier²⁹. The figures are now stored in a branch of the local history museum, located in Hitler's former headquarters "Werwolf" in the Vinnytsia region³⁰. Importantly, the monument to the Heavenly Hundred (those who perished in the Maidan civil protests in 2014) and those who fell in the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) in 2014–2022, which stood next to the Glory Memorial, was simultaneously relocated to another central square, in order to make more substantial urban planning changes and disrupt the Soviet tradition of commemorations on that spot.

With the new mass-scale war, and numerous human losses, the changes in Ukrainian urban landscapes are also determined by the pressing need for cemetery plots. In Lviv, in spring 2023, the bodies of the Soviet Army and military security soldiers who were killed while taking the city from the Nazis in 1944, as well as in the repressive actions in the post-

war years, were excavated and removed from the Field of Mars, a memorial attached to the Lychakiv Cemetery, the oldest Lviv cemetery, which is protected as a heritage site. Rather than as a symbolic gesture, their graves were moved to provide space for new fallen soldiers³¹. By the fall of 2023, this plot was almost completely full of new graves of the defenders of Ukraine, while the bodies from World War II are still awaiting their final resting places, for the time being in a special municipal storage area.

All of these actions have taken place in spite of the law which formally exempts World War II monuments and burials from “decommunisation”. However, recent changes in legislation have made it easier to exclude objects from the list of protected monuments. These changes have also introduced several categories which add new dimensions to the discussion of World War II monuments. Most importantly, in June 2022, the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture set up a commission (with cultural professionals, such as historians and art historians, museum directors, publishers and writers, as its members) to work on the issues of de-Russification, decommunisation, and decolonisation³². This committee is to coordinate and consult on the actions of the local authorities on the relocation, alteration and demolition of monuments.

According to the explanations provided by the Ministry of Culture and the Institute of National Remembrance in summer 2022, World War II monuments are exempt from the decommunisation law of 2015³³. However, the legal possibility of demolishing such monuments exists on a case-by-case basis: an object can be stripped of its protected status as a cultural monument or relocated if the commission states that its cultural value has been lost and this is confirmed by the heritage protection organs at the appropriate level. In each case, the “public opinion, economic considerations, and possible cultural and artistic value of the objects”³⁴ must be taken into account. This opportunity is widely used by the proponents of monuments’ demolition on the local level.

The roles of the Institute of National Remembrance, the Ministry of Culture, and the latter’s decolonisation commission have been widely criticised. The Ministry does not react quickly to communities’ requests to strip monuments of protected status; in-

stead, it seems to intentionally protract the issuing of expert opinions on the value of still existing monuments. There is also a lack of transparency in their activities. For example, the commission does not include representatives of the interested public³⁵.

The new law of 5 April 2023 “On the Condemnation and Prohibition of Propaganda of Russian Imperial Policy in Ukraine and on the Decolonisation of Toponymy”³⁶ introduced such novel categories as “Russian imperial policy”, “Russification” and “Ukrainophobia”. Legally, Russian imperial policy is now defined as aimed at subjugation, exploitation and assimilation of the Ukrainian people, including before the current Russian empire even emerged: under Muscovy Tsardom, the Russian empire, the USSR and present-day Russia. The symbols of Russian imperial policy which need to be removed from the public space according to this law are flags, coats of arms, anthems, images, monuments, memorial signs and inscriptions dedicated to the ruling figures and personalities who supported, glorified and justified the imperial policy, and called for Russification or Ukrainophobia (it needs to be stressed that symbols located in museums and cemeteries, and works of literature, research or art are exempt). The responsibility for these removals is assigned to local authorities. In accordance with the decisions of local administrations, monuments situated on burial sites in public places can be relocated to cemeteries, some symbols can be deleted from them, and inscriptions can be corrected. If local authorities do not deal with imperial symbols within a year from the enacting of the law, however, the regional civil and military administration has the right to do so on their behalf.

In August 2023, the draft of another law devoted to the decommunisation of World War II monuments was submitted by Volodymyr Viatrovych, Member of Parliament from the Solidarity political party (led by former President Petro Poroshenko) and the former head of the Institute of National Remembrance (2014–2019). The logic of this initiative is to further decommunise and delete communist symbols and inscriptions from monuments, as well as to change the name “Great Patriotic War” (1941–1945) to “World War II” (1939–1945) in their inscriptions. According to the draft, this should apply only to monuments in public

spaces, and not at burial sites³⁷. This draft law is important because it attempts to generalise and legitimise a practice which has already been in effect.

Among the most notable cases was the replacement of some of the plaques of the Hero Cities Monument on Victory Avenue, in the Shuliavskiy district of Kyiv, in April 2022: the activists and territorial defence representatives, with support from the municipality, replaced plaques listing Russian and Belarusian “heroic cities” (Moscow, Stalingrad, Leningrad, Tula, Minsk and others) with the names Bucha, Irpin, Mariupol, Kherson, Kharkiv and others which had suffered severely from the Russian full-scale attack³⁸ (fig. 4, 5). Another notable case is the removal of the Soviet coat of arms in July 2023 from the gigantic Motherland statue, one of the prominent symbols of the Soviet commemoration of World War II, and claimed to be “the highest monumental structure in Europe” (102 meters)³⁹.

These changes provide testimony to how memories of World War II still make use of the past in a way that is relevant for coping with the ongoing war. Especially astonishing are some examples where private or family commemorations of recently fallen soldiers have been held at World War II memorial sites, such as the case of the 10-year-old son of a perished soldier who climbed to the top of the already mentioned Motherland statue in November 2023 to symbolically send a letter to his perished father from this amazingly high location⁴⁰.

Also the media coverage of 8 May celebrations reported on the widespread practice of visiting World War II memorials to commemorate both dead Soviet soldiers and soldiers fallen in the ongoing war with Russia. The commemorative speeches delivered on such occasions in 2022 made constant references to the ongoing war, the hope for Ukrainian victory and gratitude to the soldiers who were currently on the frontline. All this had a special flavour because of the Russian air raids and the air raid alerts that prevented most people from visiting the memorials or, indeed, any public places; in some cities commemorative events took place only in bomb shelters⁴¹.

Whereas in some regions, such as Poltava, altering World War II monuments seems to be an up-to-date initiative, and inscriptions on many plaques have

been changed to more neutral ones⁴², the new laws came rather late for some other regions: at least in the Lviv region, the fate of World War II monuments have already been sealed as the local activists have started a comprehensive demolition process in cooperation with the regional administration.



Fig. 4: Hero Cities Memorial in Kyiv before modifications, 22 March 2022. Photo: Alina Smutko (Urban Media Archive of the Center for Urban History).

Civic Activism: In Favour of and Against Soviet Heritage

“We have some enlightenment and a punitive expedition today”, stated Oleh Radyk, an advisor to the head of the Lviv Regional Administration and a member of the Regional Decommunisation and Decolonisation Commission, with a smile for journalists in Viazova in the Lviv region⁴³. Together with the technical team, he had come to demolish Soviet monuments. Very soon after that, a cement monument was knocked over and collapsed into pieces. Not all of the locals supported this “expedition”, however. “You are doing the same things as Putin does”, claimed one of the inhabitants⁴⁴. “What will they do with the bones?” worried another lady in a town near Lviv, Briukhovychi, when the same team came to demolish a local monument⁴⁵. The head of the Nyvytsi village county is still resisting the demolition of their World War II monument and asks if the heroes of today – such as the Heavenly Hundred or those who perished in the war with Russia – will also become unwanted at some point in the future⁴⁶.

Active efforts both for and against demolition are taking place in the Lviv region, which seems to be



Fig. 5: Hero Cities Memorial in Kyiv after modifications, 11 April 2022. Photo: Svitlana Kyrhan (Armia Inform).

quite unique in Ukraine: this is the first (and presently the only) region where regional administration took a decision to completely demolish all Soviet monuments. The local NGO Decommunisation of the Lviv Region (founded in 2014) initiated the creation of their own special decommunisation commission, affiliated with the regional military administration, as well as commissions on the district level (made up of local administrators, historians, activists, veterans and deputies). These commissions meet to compile lists of what is to be demolished and to work out the practical details, including visiting local communities and negotiating with local administrations.

On 20 September 2022, the Lviv Regional Administration took the decision to strip all of the World War II monuments of their protected status and demolish them⁴⁷. This plan is to be completely implemented by the end of 2023, and the demolition process has progressed at a shocking tempo: out of 306 identified monuments, in November 2023 there were only

around 40 still standing⁴⁸. Regarding monuments of national importance, the commission appealed to the Ministry of Culture to strip these objects of their status.

Whereas in other regions of Ukraine intentionally demolishing World War II monuments is rather rare, directed almost exclusively against monuments to the highest Soviet officials (e.g. the demolition of General Mykola Vatutin's monument in Kyiv, and General Georgii Zhukov's monument in Kharkiv), in the Lviv region modest monuments to unknown soldiers and sorrowful mothers in the villages have also been destroyed. Even there the demolition is quite selective, because it does not include monuments to figures who became part of the contemporary Ukrainian national canon (such as the many monuments to the national poets Taras Shevchenko and Ivan Franko). The same can be said about other "national" monuments, such as those dedicated to Holocaust victims (perceived as "Jewish").

Obviously, for the Lviv regional administration this action of mass demolition is also a tool to gain favour with the local population: many people support these actions. It has even been interpreted as a way to compete with the municipal administration of the city of Lviv, which has traditionally been oriented to protecting and promoting more liberal and inclusive heritage, an image that is beneficial for international cooperation and tourism – backbones of its local economy⁴⁹. It is important to mention that in the city of Lviv itself the Soviet World War II monuments are still in place (such as monuments to the heroic feats of medical workers and to the professors and students of the Polytechnic University in World War II). Only in November 2023, after decisions of the Ministry of Culture, were Soviet monuments demolished at the Hill of Glory in Lviv: one of the most important World War II memorials in Stalinist Ukraine (1952)⁵⁰. The sculptures were sent to the The Territory of Terror Memorial Museum.

In many small communities of the Lviv region, community leaders control the process and devote resources and time to demolishing or (rarely) relocating monuments to cemeteries. They do not receive any funds from the regional or state level, and use their own funds. This means they often lack expertise in judgement and methods. In most cases, sculptures are broken during relocation because of their poor quality and age, and the pieces are utilised for practical purposes: the metal parts are quite often sold for scrap, with the money donated for the benefit of the Ukrainian army, as happened, for example, with the huge World War II monument in Transcarpathia⁵¹.

In some cases, monument pieces have even been used to fill holes in old village roads. This is similar to the practices of the post-war decades when, for example, Jewish tombstones were used to pave roads or reused for the construction of new monuments⁵².

As for museumification, this process today depends totally on local activism and the good will of museums, and is not funded on the national or regional level. Even when monuments are preserved, they are usually kept in municipal offices or cramped museum storage areas, waiting for better times. There are three big open-air museums of Soviet heritage in Ukraine (two in the Sumy and Odesa regions, and one

in occupied Crimea) at the moment, and they were created in the 2010s through private initiatives⁵³.

On the national scale, the proponents of demolitions in different regions, similarly to Radyk, quoted above, are quite often political activists, as well as media figures. Among them are local historians, people with a special interest in the promotion of the Ukrainian language in the regions where Russian dominates, members of international NGOs, and volunteers in the Ukrainian army, many of them with previous experience in taking part in civil demonstrations, such as Euromaidan in 2013–2014. There are also right-wing activists, but they do not comprise the majority among heritage-related opinion leaders today. Back in 2014–2015, however, the rather small right-wing minority, or particular activists of e.g. Svoboda and the Azov Civil Corps, were the most active promoters of demolishing Lenin statues⁵⁴. In some cases, even urban activists – who are otherwise almost exclusively oriented towards preserving heritage – are engaged in demolition processes⁵⁵.

The spectrum of the activists' methods is quite diverse, including online petitions for renaming and demolishing monuments, but also participation in the actual community consultations, vandalism actions and helping local authorities to demolish monuments legally by offering materials or labour. For many activists, attacks on monuments are also a way to participate in the ongoing war with Russia from the rear, and to channel hatred and despair as the war stretches on and on. The rhetoric of a "second front" and a "cultural front" is widespread in the decommunisation discourse.

The presence of actual soldiers in activists' groups for demolitions is a powerful legitimising factor, as the social status and support for the military is huge. In the Lviv region, this is the case particularly with Anton Petrivskyi, an initiator of the decommunisation group attached to the regional administration and now a soldier, who is used as a symbol to legitimise the process in the media (fig. 6).

In Kharkiv, Kostiantyn Nemichev, a local civic activist, has played a similar role: in 2014–2022 he was engaged in several attempts to demolish Soviet General Georgii Zhukov's monument in Kharkiv (in both 2018 and 2019, local authorities restored the monument;



Fig. 6: Anton Petrivskiy, a soldier (in the lower row on the screen), is present online at a decommunisation working group meeting of the Lviv region, 29 December 2022. Last on the right (sitting) is Oleh Radyk. Source: Lviv Region Military Administration.

in 2022 it was demolished). Nemichev became the head of the “Kraken” special detachment headquarters and is fighting on the frontline⁵⁶. It seems that the (supposed) engagement of soldiers in demolitions is instrumentalised: it looks good in media reports to state that the demolitions of monuments in a particular village were carried out “by soldiers on vacation”⁵⁷.

Taking all of this into account, the opponents of the demolitions have a rather weak symbolic position in the public sphere. Moreover, their opinions are not always well articulated, and their actions include hidden resistance, sabotage and protraction. As a demolition activist from Kharkiv, Vadym Pozdniakov, stated about the Chernivtsi region: “If there is the political will, everything can be cleansed in half a year”, adding that “communities are very unwilling to respond to our appeals”⁵⁸. Radyk has a similarly superior attitude: “The decommunisation process goes so slowly primarily because of the laziness [*sic*] of the communities. This was not an urgent need, and they did not think about this. And there are those who do not understand the importance of demolitions”⁵⁹.

The “decommunisers” direct particular hatred against the “masking” strategies of those locals who paint Soviet monuments blue-and-yellow, add Virgin Mary statues or other Christian symbols next to the Soviet soldiers, or adapt memorial sites in other ways to their actual values and needs. All of this bottom-up resistance is perceived by the know-it-all “decommunisers” as cowardly mimicry, even though some

grass-roots practices successfully use World War II memorials to process the traumatic experiences of the ongoing war. In Chernivtsi, for example, the local media reported a woman kneeling next to a World War II monument, explaining it was a sign of gratitude to both the World War II soldiers and today’s defenders of Ukraine against the Russian invasion⁶⁰. As it turned out, even this kind of media report did not help to preserve the monument.

Among those “lazy” ones who do not want to demolish World War II monuments are often the descendants of fallen Soviet soldiers. The presence of the local people’s last names on the plaques attached to the monuments is a big problem, because it proves the rootedness of the monuments in the local community, and thus contradicts the statement about the Soviet soldiers as “occupiers” alien to the local context. Unlike the Baltic states and many other countries of the former socialist bloc, in Ukraine the whole male population was drafted into the Soviet army in 1941 and in 1943–1944, so every family had participants in the Soviet army. The proponents of demolitions try to present their opponents as descendants of the members of the repressive Soviet organs, or even as promoters of Soviet propaganda, in some cases quite violently bullying them⁶¹.

The official solution of the problem in the Lviv region is to separate the names and bones from the monuments: it is advised that the memorial plaques with the names be relocated to local museums (or, in some cases, cemeteries), while the bones from the collective graves be reburied in cemeteries⁶². In reality, the demolition of a monument very often takes place first, and the more constructive work of relocating the bones is postponed to an uncertain future. One of the arguments in favour of relocation is that actually the grave sites often contain remains of both fallen soldiers and members of repressive Soviet organs; in some cases the burials are even fake, as shown above, or contain only a small number of buried bodies not coinciding with the number recorded⁶³, making the matter much more complicated. In addition, as mentioned earlier, local communities do not often have the resources for this task, and they also lack specialists to estimate the artistic value, to propose possible ways of reusing or museumifying

the statues, or to conduct archaeological and forensic research.

Some Lviv region communities are more open to protecting World War II monuments though. In Drohobych, the monument to Hryhoriy Hevryk, a twice acknowledged hero of the Soviet Union (erected in 1970; fig. 7), was defended by the local city council due to its commemorating a local personality. They changed the inscription to: “Drohobych resident, hero of World War II”. To further complicate the picture, it turned out that before joining the Soviet army, Hevryk had been in the Waffen SS “Galizien” Division. Nevertheless, the media reported strong support for commemorating the fallen hero by his descendants, who are numerous in Drohobych⁶⁴. As legally there was no established basis for carrying out the demolition, illegal methods came into play: one night in August 2023, the monument was knocked off its pedestal and damaged⁶⁵.

The argument that the person the monuments depict is not an abstract Soviet soldier but “our” local is central in the public discussion. And that argument is what the proponents of decommunisation try to deny in their media discourses.

Discursive Frames: “Decolonisation” Mission

The words of Anton Petrivskyi reveal that the activists are trying to “enlighten” and educate not only village populations in their own native regions, but also the rest of the country, and even all of Eastern Europe:

*“Now all of Eastern Europe is watching us; they are waiting for us to become leaders in decolonisation, and they will start decolonisation processes in their countries in accordance with our example. For example, in the Baltic states, this process started after the full-scale war in Ukraine began.”*⁶⁶

However, a closer look reveals that how the monuments are dealt with seems in fact to borrow existing discursive frames from other states, such as the Baltic countries and Poland⁶⁷. For example, the proponents of demolition interpret the monuments as imperial or Russian symbols which mark conquered territory. The monuments are called “Russian soldiers”, “*van’ki*” and “*alyoshki*” (referring to common Russian male



Fig. 7: The monument to Hryhoriy Hevryk received a new plaque with the inscription: “Drohobych local Hryhoriy Hevryk, hero of World War II”. Source: Drohobych City Council.

names and the famous Alyosha monument in Bulgaria)⁶⁸. Another widely used frame is the concept of “double occupation”, also borrowed from other post-socialist countries. As Oleh Radyk stated, Soviet soldiers were “not fighters for Ukraine; they are victims of Stalin and Hitler [...]”. They should be commemorated at cemeteries [...]” Furthermore, their continuing presence in the Ukrainian public space should be seen as the “desecration of the memory of those who fought for Ukraine and did not survive”⁶⁹.

Therefore, art historians, preservationists and urban activists who argue for the protection of Soviet heritage very often emphasise the local origin and Ukrainian identity of the Soviet-era creators of memorials and sculptures. The discourse about their local uniqueness and the global value of Ukrainian modernism is more widespread in respect to architecture, but also occurs in discussions about monuments. However, this position is very vulnerable in the situation of the ongoing war with Russia. As the art historian and preservation activist Yevheniia Moliar stated:

*“I have personally defended this heritage for many years, but today I cannot even speak up against the demolition of a particular object. I understand how painful it is for the people, how strong the pressure is from the outside... While before we had to accept Soviet heritage as ‘ours’, now we need to reappropriate it and separate this art from Russianness.”*⁷⁰

Moliar very aptly claims that the Russian attack today

“concerns not only the physical space, but also history, culture and art, which are stamped with the Russian brand. This is a new challenge for us.”⁷¹ This differentiation between the notions of “Russian” and “Soviet” is largely missing in the public discourse of the demolishers of World War II monuments. The notions of “anticolonial”, “anti-Russian”, “against the great power” and “anti-Soviet” are used interchangeably by them. The discussion of the participation of Ukrainians in the Soviet system – either directly in acts of repression and other crimes, or more indirectly, via positive actions and social advances – is not widespread. The researcher Olena Betlii tried to differentiate between these various practices (decommunisation, decolonisation and de-Russification) in her article about the memorial policy in Kyiv⁷², but we must not forget that in practice these notions are often used interchangeably, without making distinctions.

This ahistorical teleology is reinforced by the legal discourse which, as described earlier, introduced notions such as “imperial Russian policy” and “Ukrainophobia”, which supposedly have continuity from the Middle Ages until today, without any nuanced understanding of more diverse historical experiences of engagement with the empire. Obviously, this is also a sign of the fruits of the Russian aggressive instrumentalisation of historical memory, which is an important factor in the Ukrainian discourse. Ukrainian activists constantly respond to what is happening in Russia and in the occupied territories with calls to immediately react and resist: “The enemy does not sleep.... he changes back the street names and puts the Lenins back up [...] we must work 10 times harder”⁷³.

Finally, one more teleological framework should be mentioned: that of the natural process of “complete cleansing” and the “ultimate death” of the Soviet heritage in Ukraine. Through the metaphor of a living organism going through its natural stages of birth, development, decay and finally death, public speakers propose a utopian vision of a better future: which will come after the complete dismantling of Soviet heritage. This complete dismantling, which is seen as a key feature in a positive future, is discursively intertwined with the complete victory of Ukraine over

Russia, an expectation which is very widespread among both elites and the general population. “This path goes from the deconstruction of the Soviet myth to the demolition of the monument”⁷⁴, stated the political activist Taras Rad on nationwide media, and this path seems to have no alternatives or branches. These nature metaphors are used by officials and cultural elites at the highest level. Minister of Culture Oleksandr Tkachenko, for example, talked about the “purge” and the necessity “to scrape off an abscess from the body”⁷⁵. Ivan Patryliak, the dean of the history department at the National Shevchenko University in Kyiv before 2022, and a soldier now, used the metaphor of “metastases” to describe the mass standardised production of the Soviet monuments when they were first erected, and expressions like “weeding out” to describe the removal of monuments from public space⁷⁶.

Conclusion

The social perception of World War II monuments has changed considerably since the full-scale invasion by Russia of Ukraine in 2022. Whereas in the areas which are directly under Russian attacks the monuments have clear value as “heritage at risk”, in the areas further away from the frontline, especially in the west of the country, there is a strong activist movement for the demolition of the monuments, which is in some cases supported by regional authorities (e.g. in the Lviv region).

The metaphorical language used in public discussions is often reminiscent of the discourses of other countries of East Central Europe, such as the Baltic states and Poland. However, the main factor is not their impact, but the continuing aggressive historical propaganda of Russia, which describes the victory in World War II as a Russian achievement exclusively and the nations of East Central Europe as “traitors” and “fascists”. In Ukraine, the importance of civic activism, e.g. mass volunteering for the army and the experience gained from such protests as Maidan in 2013–2014, are also important factors which facilitate the horizontal networks that can be used both in the struggle for and against Soviet heritage. Furthermore, the relevance of the Soviet past in family history, and

the equally large engagement of the population in the Soviet army during World War II are essential factors which strengthen the community networks of local residents and professional preservationists alike. Advocating for the important role of this heritage in a self-critical understanding of the past and a respectful approach towards the built environment is hence not an easy task in the current situation. But the preservation of this heritage would provide an opportunity for the creative reuse and rethinking of World War II monuments in the future.

A considerable part of this heritage is being lost in the actual war zones, but also in the intellectual struggle in other parts of Ukraine, which is seen by its participants as part of the frontline effort, a struggle in the rear against the enemy. In this situation, not only actions aimed at preserving monuments in situ are of critical importance, because quite often this heritage is indeed very much “unwanted”, but also any efforts aimed at documenting the discussions and actions, rescuing parts of removed or demolished monuments, archival research to reveal their local rootedness, and imagining a future museum and artistic projects which could give this heritage a second chance.

Endnotes

1. Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance, “Derusyfikatsia – dekomunizatsia – dekolonizatsia. Chastyina 2: Monumentalne mystetstvo” [Derussification – decommunisation – decolonization. Part 2: Monumental art], in: YouTube, 18.5.2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mhj71wYXVxY> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
2. Designed by the Ukrainian female sculptor Halyna Petrashevych and unveiled in 1946, this monument is a rare example of early post-war monumental art prized by art historians for its high quality.
3. See Hay-Nyzhnyk in: Derusyfikatsia 2022.
4. See Alla Podlesna, “U Chernivtsiakh prybraly pamiatnyk nevidomomu soldatu” [In Chernivtsi, they took away the monument to the unknown soldier], in: Suspilne Novini, 12.8.2022, <https://suspilne.media/270300-u-cernivcah-pribrali-pamiatnik-nevidomomu-soldatu-na-sobornij-ploshi/> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
5. See the “Law of Ukraine. On the Condemnation of the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Regimes, and Prohibition of Propaganda of Their Symbols”, in: Ukrainskii Institut Nazionalnoi Pamyati, [9.4.2015, English transl. 2.3.2020.] <https://uinp.gov.ua/dokumenty/normatyvno-pravovi-akty-rozrobieni-v-instyuti/zakony/law-of-ukraine-on-the-condemnation-of-the-communist-and-national-socialist-nazi-regimes-and-prohibition-of-propaganda-of-their-symbols;> “Roziasnennia MKIP ta UINP stosovno chynnykh protsedur demontazhu pamiatnykiv” [Explanations of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy and the Institute of National Remembrance about the current procedures of dismantling monuments], in: Ukrainskii Institut Nazionalnoi Pamyati, [June 2022.] <http://uinp.gov.ua/dekomunizaciya-ta-reabilitaciya/podolannya-naslidkiv-rusyfikaciyi-ta-totalitaryzmu-v-ukrayini/rozyasnennya-ministerstva-kultury-ta-informaciyoi-polityky-ukrayiny-ta-ukrayinskogo-institutu-nacionalnoyi-pamyati-stosovno-chynnyh-na-sogodni-procedur-demontazhu-pamyatnykiv-komunistychnym-i-rosiyskym-diyacham-ta-deyakyh-inshyh-aspektiv-ochyshchennya-gromadskogo> (both last accessed 18.12.2023).
6. “Uriad dozvolvy demontuvaty pamiatnyky Pushkinu, Shchorsu ta inshym rosiiskim ta radianskym diiacham” [The government allowed to dismantle the monuments to Pushkin, Shchors and other Russian and Soviet figures], in: Podrobnosti, 10.11.2023, <https://podrobnosti.ua/2484637-urjad-dozvoliv-demontuvati-pamiatniki-pushknu-schorsu-ta-nshim-rosjskim-ta-radjanskim-djacham.html>; Olena Ivashkiv and Roman Petrenko, “Pamiatnyk Shchorsu v Kyevi demontuvaly” [The monument to Shchors in Kyiv dismantled], in: Ukrainska pravda, 9.12.2023, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2023/12/9/7432334/> (both last accessed 18.12.2023).
7. Larysa Talan-Shevchenko, “Arka Druzhyby abo Svobody: istoria odnogo monumenta” [The Arch of Friendship and Freedom: The history of a monument], in: Royal Design, 27.6.2023, <https://royaldesign.ua/ru/arka-drujbi-abo-svobodi-storya-odnogo-monumenta.bXhtf/> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
8. Elsa Court, “Soviet Coat of Arms Removed from Kyiv’s Motherland Monument”, in: The Kyiv Independent, 1.8.2023, <https://kyivindependent.com/soviet-coat-of-arms-removed-from-kyivs-motherland-statue/> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
9. One of the most notable examples is this Lviv municipal museum: Olha Shveda, “Zberehty, a ne znyshchyty. Iaki pamiatnyky totalitaryzmu zberihae livvskii muzej ‘Terytoria teroru’” [To preserve, not to destroy: Which monuments of totalitarianism does the Lviv “Territory of Terror” Museum preserve], in: Suspilne, 26.11.2023, <https://suspilne.media/624783-zberegiti-a-ne-znisiti-aki-pamiatniki-totalitaryzmu-zberigae-livvskij-muzej-teritoria-teroru/>. Even in Kyiv there is no confirmed plan for any kind of museum of decommunised monuments, and the dismantled sculptures are stored on the land of the National Aviation Academy (Kateryna Novosvitnia, “Pytannia stvorennia parku radianskoi spadshchyny chy parku radianskoi okupatsii narazi diskusiiine, – Viktoria Mukha” [The issue of Soviet heritage park or park of Soviet occupation is debatable], in: Kyiv Vechirniy, 28.4.2023, <https://vechirniy.kyiv.ua/news/82077/> (both last accessed 18.12.2023).

10. On the demolition of Lenin monuments, see Oleksandra Gaidai, Kamiani! Gist. Lenin u Tsentralnii Ukraini [Stone guest: Lenin in central Ukraine], Kyiv 2018; “Povalennia pamiatnykiv Leninu v Ukraini (1990–2013)” [Dismantling Lenin monuments in Ukraine], in: Wikipedia, 17.12.2023, [https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Повалення_пам'яткив_Леніну_в_Україні_\(1990–2013\)/](https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Повалення_пам'яткив_Леніну_в_Україні_(1990–2013)/) (last accessed 18.12.2023).
11. See a brilliant comparative study of dealing with World War II monuments in the post-socialist countries, including Ukraine, in Mischa Gabowitsch, “What Has Happened to Soviet War Memorials since 1989/91? An Overview”, in: *Journal for Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Societies*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2021, pp. 185–222.
12. See the law “regarding the strengthening of criminal liability for the desecration or destruction of monuments erected in memory of those who fought against Nazism during World War II, Soviet liberators, participants of the partisan movement and underground, victims of Nazi persecution, as well as internationalist soldiers and peacekeepers” (“Kommentar. Proekt Zakonu Ukrainy ‘Pro vnesennya zmin do statti 297 Kryminalnoho kodeksu Ukrainy’” [Commentary: Draft law of Ukraine “On amendments to article 297 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine”], 12.12.2012, no. 1041, in: Liga 360, <https://ips.ligazakon.net/document/LGOSX00A>, last accessed 18.12.2023).
13. In 2014 the changing of inscriptions was initiated in the Volhynia region by former Ukrainian Insurgent Army participants and implemented by the local authorities: “Volyn chystytymut vid totalitarnykh symboliv” [Volyn will be cleansed of totalitarian symbols], in: *Volynski novyny. Pershe informatsiine agentstvo*, 19.9.2014, <https://www.volynnews.com/news/society/volyn-chystytymut-vid-totalitarnykh-symvoliv/> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
14. See the analysis of the post-Maidan situation in Georgiy Kasianov, “In Search of Lost Time? Decommunization in Ukraine, 2014–2020”, in: *Problems of Post-Communism*, 27.4.2023, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10758216.2023.2198135>; Denys Kutsenko, “Experience of Implementing Decommunization Laws in Eastern Ukraine: A Kharkiv Case”, in: *Journal of Geography, Politics and Society*, no. 3, 2020, pp. 55–64; Nikolay Kopolov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia*, Cambridge 2018; David Marples, “Decommunization, Memory Laws, and ‘Builders of Ukraine in the 20th Century’”, in: *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, no. 39, 2018, pp. 1–22; Oxana Shevel, “The Battle for Historical Memory in Postrevolutionary Ukraine”, in: *Current History*, no. 115 (783), 2016, pp. 258–263.
15. “Law of Ukraine. On Perpetuation of the Victory Over Nazism in World War II of 1939–1945”, in: *Ukrainskii Institut Nazionalnoi Pamyati*, [adopted 2015, transl. 4.2.2020,] <https://uinp.gov.ua/dokumenty/normatyvno-pravovi-akty-rozrobieni-v-instytutu/zakony/law-of-ukraine-on-perpetuation-of-the-victory-over-nazism-in-world-war-ii-of-1939-1945> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
16. See e.g. in the Kharkiv region: “Perelik pamiatok istorii ta monumentalnoho mystetstva Kharkivskoi oblasti” [List of historical and monumental art monuments of Kharkiv region], in: *Kharkiv Regional State Administration*, 30.11.2016, <https://kharkivoda.gov.ua/dostup-do-publichnoyi-informatsiyi/2488/2703/83717>; “Perelik pamiatok kulturnoi spadshchyny Sumskoi oblasti” [The list of cultural heritage monuments of Sumy region], in: *Diia*, 29.9.2021, <https://data.gov.ua/en/dataset/3358bdde-c5c9-4666-ba2b-155f27a23201> (both last accessed 18.12.2023).
17. See e.g. “Informatsiini materialy do dnia pamiati ta prymyrennia nad natsyzmom u Druhii svitovii viini” [Information materials dedicated to Remembrance and Reconciliation Day, and Day of the Victory over Nazism in World War II], in: *Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance*, 8.5.2020, <https://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/informaciyni-materialy-do-dnya-pamyati-ta-prymyrennia-ta-dnya-peremogy-nad-nacyzmozom-u-drugiy-svitoviy-viyni> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
18. See important aspects of its history and a discussion about demolition in Gabowitsch 2021, *What Has Happened...*, p. 210.
19. Moliar in: *Derusyfikatsia* 2022.
20. Dedicated in 1988, this memorial was authored by the architects Leonid Levin, Yurii Gradov and Vadym Lysenko, and the sculptors Natalia Afanasieva and Yakiv Susko.
21. “V Iziumi zruinuvaly Memorial Slavy zahybylykh u Druhii svitovii viini” [Memorial in Memory of Glory of the Fallen in World War II ruined in Izium], in: *Your Art*, 18.3.2022, <https://supportyourart.com/news/v-iziumi-zruinuvaly-memorial-slavy-zahybylyh-u-drugij-svitovij-viyni/> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
22. “‘Damn Them’: Zelensky Condemns Russian Attack on Holocaust Memorial”, in: *New York Post*, 2.3.2022, <https://nypost.com/2022/03/02/zelensky-condemns-attack-on-kyiv-holocaust-memorial-babi-yar/> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
23. See e.g. Oksana Ivanets, “Viina z mertvymy” [War with the dead], in: *Armia Inform*, 25.3.2022, <https://armyinform.com.ua/2022/03/25/viina-z-mertvymy-okupanty-znyshhuyut-memorialy-poleglym-u-drugij-svitovij-tam-pamyatnyky-zhertvam-fashyzmu/> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
24. Amos Chapple, “Pamiatnyk Druhii svitovii viini – tank T-34 u Trostiansi vyrishyly demontuvaty” [They decided to demolish the World War II monument – T-34 tank in Trostianets], in: *Radio Svoboda*, 9.5.2023, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/tank-trostryanets-vtorhnennya/32403254.html> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
25. Yulia Savva, “Tank T-34 u Trostiansi: vytrymav fashystiv i rashystiv” [T-34 tank in Trostianets: Survived the fascists and racists], in: *The Gard City*, 1.4.2022, <https://thegard.city/articles/203885/tank-t-34-trostryanec> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
26. “7 hodyn ta do 20 robotnykiv” [7 hours and up to 20 workers], in: *Zhitomyr Info*, 5.5.2022, https://www.zhitomir.info/news_207490.html (last accessed 18.12.2023). Reference to the famous expression “Russian warship, go fuck yourself”, which became a Ukrainian war meme.
27. See a review of exhumations and re-locations of World War II burials in different regions of Ukraine: Olesya Kotubey, “Ekshumatsia i perepohovannia zakhoronen radianskikh viiskovykh: chomu tse vidbuvaetsia v riznykh mistakh Ukrainy” [Exhumation and reburial of Soviet servicemen: Why does this take place in different cities of Ukraine], in: *Suspilne*, 26.9.2023, <https://suspilne.media/culture/577227-eksgumacia-j-perepohovanna-zahoronen-radanskih-vijskovih-comu-ce-vidbuvaetsia-v-riznih-mistah-ukraini/> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
28. Anna Harashchuk, “Kladovyshche na Evropeiskii ploshchi. Skilly liudei pokhovano v tsentri Vinnytsi, vstanovliat poshukovtsi” [Cemetery on European Square: How many people are buried in Vinnytsia downtown], in: *Vinnytsia Info*, 28.3.2023, <https://vinnitsa.info/article/kladovyshche-na-evropeysk-kiy-ploshchi-skil-ky-lyudey-pokhovano-v-tsentri-vinnytsi-vstanovlyat-poshukovtsi> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
29. See Museum of Vinnytsia, “Istoria Memorialu Slavy. Khto i chomu pokhovanyi na Memoriali Slavy?” [The history of Glory Memorial: Who and why are buried at the Glory Memorial?], in: *Museum of Vinnytsia YouTube channel*, 8.5.2022, <https://youtu.be/hQyVT9cf-To> (last accessed 18.12.2023). The sculpture of three soldiers by the sculptor Yakiv Kulenko and the architect Volodymyr Spuskaniuk was unveiled in 1977.
30. It is difficult to say if this is a reference to the equation of Nazi and Soviet crimes, or rather just for practical reasons (this museum branch has a lot of free space to host sculptures).
31. Yevhen Boyko, “Shcho vidbuvaetsia na Marsovomu Poli. Pytannia ta vidpovidi” [What is happening at the Field of Mars. Questions and answers], in: *Zakhid Net*, 1.4.2023, https://zaxid.net/shho-vidbuvaetsia-na-marsovomu-poli_n1560900 (last accessed 18.12.2023).
32. See the complete list of commission members: Ksenia Bilash, “MKIP oholosyv spysok chleniv Rady z derusyfikatsii” [Ministry of Culture and Information Policy announced the members of the Derussification Council], in: *Livyi Bereh*, 12.6.2022, https://lb.ua/culture/2022/06/12/519826_mkip_ogolosiv_sklad_ra_di_z.html (last accessed 18.12.2023).
33. *Roziadsennia MKIP...* 2022.
34. *Ibid.*
35. See Pozdniakov’s opinion in: “Dyskusia ‘Dekolonizatsiia v Ukraini: vlada vs hromada’” [Discussion ‘Decolonisation in Ukraine: Power vs. community’], in: *The Institute of National Remembrance YouTube channel*, 7.11.2023,

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HU5wVjGSsl4> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
36. "Zakon Ukrainy pro zasudzhennia ta zaboronu propagandy rosiiskoi imperskoi polityky v Ukraini i dekolonizatsiu toponomii" [Law of Ukraine on the condemnation and prohibition of propaganda of the Russian imperial policy in Ukraine and the decolonisation of toponymy], in: Holos Ukrainy, 21.3.2023, <http://www.golos.com.ua/documents/z-3005-ix.pdf> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
 37. Ruslan Harashchenko, "Radi rekomenduiut ukhvalyty zakon pro dekomunizatsiu pamiatnykiv Druhoi svitovoi viiny" [The Council received a recommendation to pass a law on World War II monuments], in: Ukraine World News, 16.8.2023, <https://uworld.news/news/radi-rekomenduiut-ukhvalyty-zakon-pro-1004649.html> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
 38. "Na radianskii alei mist-heroiv u Kyevi zniamo komunistychnu symvoliku" [The communist symbols demolished on the Soviet Alley of Hero Cities], in: Istorychna Pravda, 11.4.2022, <https://www.istpravda.com.ua/short/2022/04/11/161182/> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
 39. Erected in 1981 by the sculptor Vasyl Borodai and a team of engineers, researchers and technical workers. On the decommunisation of the shield, see "Ukraine Replaces Soviet Symbol on Motherland Monument in Kyiv", in: The Guardian, 6.8.2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/06/ukraine-replaces-soviet-symbol-on-motherland-monument-in-kyiv> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
 40. Darya Gerasymchuk, [No title], in: Facebook, 13.11.2023, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02Jo53H7XavLYzMgazPkXjcEEcJeQrRerEvAfwZiw3th1utJcCdkfxhedDFpW7vNkl&id=100072443376686 (last accessed 18.12.2023).
 41. Oksana Ivanets, "U frontovomu Kharkovi vidznachyly den pamiati ta prymyrennia" [In Kharkiv, next to the frontline, the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation was commemorated], in: Armia Inform, 8.5.2022, <https://armyinform.com.ua/2022/05/08/u-frontovomu-harkovi-vidznachyly-den-pamyati-ta-prymyrennia/> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
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 43. [Mariana P'ietsukh et al.], "'U nas – prosvitnytsko-karalna ekspedytisia'. Operatsiia – dekolonizatsiia" ["This Is an educational and punitive expedition": Operation – decolonisation], in: Hromadske YouTube channel, 13.7.2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFVZfJng7YU> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
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 45. Ibid.
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 48. Dyskusia 2023.
 49. Diana Vonnak, "Heritage Preservation and the Transforming State in Lviv: A Changing Professional Field", PhD thesis, Durham University, 2020.
 50. The Hill of Glory was one of the few memorials unveiled under Stalin, and was made with huge funding from the central state budget to commemorate the new postwar state border and successful annexation of western Ukraine (formerly a part of Poland). Architects Andriy Natalchenko, Genrykh Shvetsko-Vinetskyi and Ivan Persikov, and sculptors Mykhailo Lysenko and Vasyl Forostetskyi.
 51. "Demontazh pamiatnyka radianskomu soldatu v Uzhgorodi" [Dismantling Soviet soldier monument in Uzhgorod], in: Suspilne Uzhgorod YouTube channel, 9.11.2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjFRq7BKpSE> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
 52. Michael Nosonovsky, "Old Jewish Cemeteries in Ukraine: History, Monuments, Epitaphs", in: Euro-Asian Jewish Yearbook, no. 5768, 2007/2008, p. 243.
 53. On the Sumy region open air museum, see Illia Denysenko, "Muzei 'Park radianskoho periodu u Spadshchanskomu lisi'" ["Park of the Soviet Period" Museum in Spadshchansky woods], in: Derzhavnyi istoryko-kulturnyi zapovidnyk u misti Putyvl, [2019], <http://putivl-zapovidnyk.pp.ua/naukovtsju/muzej-park-radjanskogo-periodu-u-spadschanskomu-lisi.php>. On the Odesa region museum in Frumushyka-Nova, see Yevhen Rudenko, "Stalin, Lenin, brynza" [Stalin, Lenin, sheep milk cheese], in: Ukrainska pravda, 9.8.2019, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2019/08/9/7223127/>. On the Crimean case, see "Pidvodnyi sovok (fotogalereia)" [Underground sovok (photogallery)], in: Radio Svoboda, 2.10.2016, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/soviet-statues-underwater-off-crimea-peninsula/28027278.html> (all last accessed 18.12.2023).
 54. Gaidai 2018, Kamiany Gist.
 55. See the charity foundation "Solomianski kotyky" ("Kittens of Solomianka") acting for demolitions of monuments: "U Kyevi zaklykaly demontuvaty pamiatnyk Pushkinu" [Dismantling of Pushkin monument requested in Kyiv], in: Detektor media, 24.10.2023, <https://detector.media/infospace/article/218485/2023-10-24-ukyievi-zaklykaly-demontuvaty-pamyatnyk-pushkinu/> (last accessed 18.12.2023).
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Abstract

The article concerns the different ways of dealing with World War II monuments in Ukraine since the start of Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Reevaluation, changing inscriptions, relocation, demolition and museumification have all developed around the notions of decommunisation, decolonisation, and de-Russification, in spite of the fact that World War II monuments are exempt from the "decommunisation laws". The regions directly affected by warfare today

demonstrate a more protective approach to World War II heritage as it is under threat of immediate destruction by the Russians. There is also a tendency to reinterpret these monuments in the light of the ongoing war with Russia and to use them for commemorations of the fallen in both wars. In other regions of the country, there are initiatives to change inscriptions and/or relocate the monuments from public space to cemeteries, but they concern only a small number of the monuments. The Lviv region in the west of Ukraine demonstrates a special pattern: the regional administration in concert with civic activists have effectively demolished almost all Soviet World War II monuments, in spite of resistance by, or lack of active support from, the local communities. Many civic activists and veterans are involved in the monuments' demolitions. Rhetorically, the use of notions of "Soviet occupation" and the marking of Soviet monuments as "Russian" is widespread, as in other countries of Eastern and Central Europe.

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