

Evolution of Ukrainian citizens' attitude towards the USSR and Russia in the context of the annexation of the Crimea and warfare in Donbas over the years 2014-2017

The author focuses on the evolution of Ukrainian citizens' attitude towards the historical heritage of the USSR and Russia. Qualitative stages describing the most crucial changes have been singled out. The author explicates the impact of the annexation of the Crimea and warfare in particular areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions on Ukrainian citizens' attitude towards Russia and the USSR's historical legacy. It has been specified that there is interchangeability/volatility in people's attitude and factors which precondition it have been determined.

Keywords: historical memory, national memory, citizen, public position, identity.

Еволюція ставлення громадян України до СРСР та Росії у контексті анексії Криму та війни на Донбасі 2014-2017 рр.

Розглянуто еволюцію ставлення громадян України до історичної спадщини СРСР та Росії. Виділено якісні етапи, коли відбулися найбільш помітні зміни. Окреслено вплив анексії Криму та військових дій в окремих районах Донецької та Луганської областей на ставлення громадян України до Росії та історичної спадщини СРСР. Зазначено змінність/волатильність у ставленні громадян та окреслено чинники, які це зумовлюють.

Ключові слова: історична пам'ять, національна пам'ять, громадянин, суспільна позиція, ідентичність.

Evolution of the Ukrainian citizens' attitude towards the USSR must be reviewed in the context of historical memory and its evolvement. The problem of historical memory takes a significant place not only in historical and psychological, but also in political sciences. We interpret historical memory as a totality of scientific and non-scientific beliefs of separate citizens, social groups and society in general as to the past/common past. A related notion, which has been actively put to use, is national memory. V. Soldatenko conceives it as: "a peculiar phenomenon of social conscience, a bulk of knowledge, images and value estimations of past events, selectively preserved by a nation, namely those events, which have crucial impact on its evolution, self-identification, state forming and civilizational achievements, which are consensually perceived in a society as the most significant ones for the future self-preservation, consolidated existence and

further constructive development”¹. Despite the difference between the mentioned notions, especially as to their bearers, hereinafter we will interpret them as identical.

Historical memory is characterized by a number of peculiarities, which should be taken into consideration in the process of its evaluation. Firstly, in spite of the fact that it is focused on the past, historical memory itself is a present attribute, influencing political actors' and citizens' political conscience and political behavior. Secondly, rather often it is an instrument for achieving political goals. This determined instrumental function is presupposed by a high level of sensitivity of evaluations, renderings and interpretations of the past for some people and social groups. Emotional component of perceiving the past can noticeably restrict rationality of social actors' political behavior and remarkably enhance their irrationality. In this case a representative example is ethnic political parties' experience in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as far back as existence of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1990-1991, which, to mobilize the voter base of their own ethnic group, turned to certain episodes of historical memory during the WWII period, what significantly influenced inter-ethnic hostilities and led to an acute inter-ethnic conflict.

Special attention should be paid to historical memory when it refers to a separated society, when there are regions with distinctive historical past, therefore with different heroes, evaluations of events and so forth. Such determined distinction/distinctions are capable of enhancement, achievement of synergetic effect under conditions of ascribing these differences due to voters' political orientation in various regions to competitive political parties. In this case not always we can speak of forming a corresponding social and political distinction, however we refer to a strong politicization of past. With this respect we agree with L. Nahorna's summing-up, that “consolidation of people over interpretation of past is possible only in stable social mediums with unidirectional values. Within riven, polarized societies, the scope of historical memory is a continuous zone of improvisations and conflicts connected with them”².

Determination of attitude towards the Soviet heritage presupposes comprehension of its peculiarities. Among them we automatically distinguish the existence of a large number of people, who were born and lived against the USSR background. For many of them this Soviet period is connected with personal attitude towards parents, family, childhood and youthfulness, active period of life. This should be complemented by age characteristics of these people, as a vast majority of them either have retired or are on the line to become pensioners. Retirement mainly presupposes a considerable change of their financial status for the worse and stimulates comparison of the past and present to the disfavor of the latter. Secondly, perception of the Soviet history has always been ideology-driven and not abstractly, but in correspondence with an established “Procrustean bed”, when a categorically positive evaluation of reality was established and a negative connotation of anything oppositional was outlined. Criteria of these

¹ Derzhavotvorchi ta tsyvilizatsiini zdobutky Ukrainskoho narodu: Natsionalna ta istorychna pamiat. – Iss.1. – K., 2011. – Pp.15-16.

² Nahorna L. Istorychna pamiat: teorii, dyskursy, refleksii. – K.: IPIEND im. I.F.Kurasa NAN Ukrainy, 2012. – P.16.

evaluations may be deduced as to various decisions and events after the October Revolution in 1917. To our mind, rather notable is the “Short Course on the All-Union Communist Party (B)”, which was published in 1938 and for a long time programmed “the only accurate” view of historical events and a wide complex of worldview issues. Under this approach and practice, any shift away from a positive evaluation of the Soviet experience, its criticism was interpreted as a betrayal and crime, which caused even criminal responsibility. Over the extended period in the history of an independent Ukraine, due to inertness or deliberate policy, the line of non-critical treatment of the Soviet heritage has been carried on with emphasis on special heroic outcomes/topics like: industrialization in late 20s-30s, victory in the Great Patriotic War in 1941-1945, post-war economic recovery, development of outer space, development of cities, social programs etc. Thirdly, the collapse of the USSR led to the fact, that Russia declared itself to be the continuator state of the USSR, and to some extent it referred to its historical heritage. Therefore, criticism of the Soviet past associated with criticism of the Russian Federation, and presupposed sensibility of official Russia to various pluralistic assessments of historical events, retreat from the officially supported version/versions.

A question of attitude to the USSR in Ukraine has its own context and, at the same time, its regional peculiarities. Firstly, there are time differences as to joining and acquiring “standard” Soviet characteristics by separate regions. Western Ukraine was annexed to the USSR/Ukrainian SSR as a result of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which divided Poland between the Third Reich and the USSR; in autumn 1939 Northern Bukovyna entered the USSR/Ukrainian SSR and in 1940 and 1945 Zakarpattia was annexed. Under these circumstances, handover of the Crimea in 1954 to Ukraine did not play any role, as the Soviet regime in the Crimea was established in the course of the civil war in late 20s of the 20th century. Introduction of the Soviet regime in these regions was accompanied by widespread repressions and various kinds of resistance, including an organized guerilla movement up to the 50s. This was the greatest distinction from other regions of Ukraine, where the Soviet regime had existed, from the October Revolution or the period of the civil war and any resistance was subdued during the pre-war period. Moreover, various representatives of the eastern Ukraine, very often acted like promoters of the Soviet regime and the “face”/representatives of the very regime in new regions/districts. Secondly, in Ukraine since the 50s nonconformist/dissident movement had been actively establishing and developing. In the 50s-60s appeared and acted such movements as: the Ukrainian Workers’ and Peasants’ Union (1959-1961), the United Liberation Party of Ukraine (1955-1958), the Ukrainian National Committee (1957-1962), the Ukrainian National Front (1964-1967) etc. In the 60s the Sixtiers’ movement was established, which was mainly represented by writers: Lina Kostenko (1930), Vasyl Symonenko (1935-1963), Ivan Drach (1936), Ivan Svitlychnyi (1929-1992), Yevhen Sverstiuk (1928-2014), Ivan Dziuba (1931). A bit later they were joined by: Vasyl Stus (1938-1985), Mykhailo Osadchyi (1936-1994), Ihor Kalynets (1939), Ivan Hel (1937-2011) and others. In the conceptual frame the ideas of national development and non-admission of

internationalization/Russification were defined in I. Dziuba's publications³. The abovementioned personalities and many others, who might not always fight in a classical way of opposition, and only in many cases publicly condemned/doubted some drawbacks, suffered terrible and successive prosecutions/arrests. Having signed the Helsinki Accords in 1975, the Ukrainian Helsinki Group was established in Kyiv in 1976 (in the USSR in total existed only 5 Helsinki Groups). From the beginning of transformational changes and the process of liberalization political prisoners were released and returned to Ukraine and became actively involved into civil processes. Former political prisoners/dissidents in concentration camps, jailhouses, exile had been "put through the mill" and returned die-hard communists. It found its representation in the activity of the People's Movement of Ukraine (Narodnyi Rukh Ukrainy), which was founded in 1989 in the form of a civil-political organization and at first declared its support to the basis and goals of transformation processes. However, at the 2nd All-Ukrainian Assembly in 1990 the Rukh's Program was supplemented with the requirement of achieving independence of Ukraine and it obtained anti-communist orientation. Thirdly, the universal phenomenon of the Soviet period was the process of ethnic regions Russification, which resulted in: deliberate migration policy, aimed at increasing the number of the Russians in the Soviet republics; overall spread/promotion of the Russian language in all spheres of social life; criticism/limitation of display of national life and support/promotion of internationalism on the basis of the Russian language "as a language of international communication". In accordance with the outcomes of the population census of 1959 in Ukraine lived 16,9% of the Russians, and according to the results of the population census in 1989 this number equaled 22,1%. Besides, all population in the Soviet Union was under constant and powerful propaganda influence and one of its directions was to form "new historical society" – the Soviet people. The rate of the "Soviet person phenomenon" extension is represented in A. Kolodii's publications, based on the outcomes of the sociologic survey, conducted in July 2000 by the Center for Social and Marketing Research "SOCIS" on request of the State Property Fund of Ukraine. The attention should be paid that the survey was conducted in 2000, i.e. under conditions when Ukraine have been independent for already nine years, and this gives grounds to suggest some kind of fall in a number of "Soviet people" among the population of Ukraine and some regions in comparison with the moment of independence proclamation in 1991.

³ Dziuba I.M. Internatsionalizm chy rusyfikatsiia? – K.: Vydavnyzhyi dim «KM Academia», 1998 – 276 p.

Table 1. Population with Soviet Identity in the Regions of Ukraine⁴

Region	Division of the "Soviet" according to the regions* (%)	Division of population according to the regions** (%)	Number of the "Soviet" in every region (%)
Eastern	27,52	13,69	25,17
South-Eastern	17,20	11,11	19,39
Crimea AR	15,48	6,86	28,25
Southern	8,85	8,49	13,04
North-Eastern	6,63	7,51	11,07
Central	5,90	11,08	6,67
Kyiv	5,65	7,26	9,75
Northern	4,42	8,25	6,72
North-Western	3,69	8,95	5,15
South-Western	3,19	8,28	4,83
Western	1,47	8,52	2,17
Total over Ukraine	100	100	12,52

*from the whole population in Ukraine;

**from its all population

Over the process of change of the attitude towards the USSR heritage we can single out several stages. Our periodization is based upon the presidential terms in Ukraine, as the presidential institution, despite the forms of government system, was and still is determinative in formation and functioning of political life/political process in Ukraine. The first stage covers the period from the declaration of independence and to the unscheduled presidential elections in 1994. A fruitless attempt of military takeover, conducted by an orthodox part of administration of the USSR communist party on August 19-22, 1991 became a catalyst for the USSR collapse. On August 24, 1991 the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted the Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine and almost simultaneously on August 30, 1991 the activity of the Communist Party of Ukraine was prohibited on the grounds of the state takeover charge (May 14, 1993 the Presidium of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine allowed people, who shared communistic ideas to create their own party organizations, what formed legal basis for renewal of the Communist Party of Ukraine in June). At this stage decommunization had rather inertial and spontaneous character. On the one hand, there was a possibility to speak/write publicly about any controversial moments/events in the history of Ukraine, which had been "closed" earlier. The process of an independent country formation on the basis of a former union republic presupposed national, individual comprehension of the historical past of the Ukrainian nation. Within the education system such subjects as history of the Communist Party of the Soviet

⁴ Antonina Kolodii. *Radianska identychnist ta ii nosii v nezalezhnii Ukraini* // Ukraine in Modern world. Social, ethnic and cultural aspects of globalization and Ukraine. Conference for Ukrainian alumni of scientific apprenticeship programs in the US. Participants' reports. – Kyiv: Stylos, 2002. – Pp. 36-55.

Union, basic concepts of Marxism-Leninism were abolished. In early 90s, in three regions, i.e. Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil nearly all names of cities, towns, villages, streets, institutions and etc., connected with the communist and Soviet history were renamed. However, in other regions of Ukraine such acts were not registered or those were individual cases (dismantling of the monument to the Great October Socialist Revolution in 1991 in Kyiv). On the other hand, as Andrew Wilson noticed an official ban of a communist party did not result in decommunization of the society. Moreover, weakness of national-democratic parties and support of national communists in voting for independence in August 1991, led to a “historical compromise of the right wing”, which meant that the majority of national-democratic parties agreed to leave former communists at different levels of the state apparatus in return of development of an independent country and refusal from its rebirth in another, new form of the USSR⁵. The second stage covers the term of L. Kuchma (July 19, 1994-January 25, 2005). A quite common characteristic/peculiarity was a multi-vector nature of his policy. During the first electoral campaign in 1994 the key message was the requirement for legislative settling of bilingualism (the Ukrainian and Russian languages were to have obtained an equal status) and the emphasis on the necessity of closer relations with Russia. During the second electoral campaign in 1999 L. Kuchma positioned himself as a pro-western candidate. He declared and made steps towards development of relations with the EU and NATO, took a strict stand, concerning Tuzla island issue and Russian invasion in 2003 and at the same time, under the conditions of deterioration in relations with the West, after the Cassette Scandal, supported movement of Ukraine towards the Single Economic Space with Russia and a range of other post-Soviet countries. Such ambiguity is disclosed in his symbolic work “Ukraine is not Russia”,⁶ where he, in a consistent manner, discusses about differences between the Ukrainians and Russians, divergences in views over cultural and historic past and mutual claims. In the book he emphasizes that Ukraine cannot be Russia. The third stage is marked by V. Yushchenko’s term (January 23, 2005 – February 25, 2010). In his activity V. Yushchenko dynamically referred to the history and culture of the Ukrainian nation. On Inauguration Day on January 22, 2005 he was also declared Hetman of Ukraine, what should underline the connection between modern Ukraine and the state forming period of the Cossack epoch. Thus, it should signify sustainability of state traditions. On November 28, 2006 the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine passed the Law “On Holodomor 1932-1933 in Ukraine”, in which Holodomor was recognized as an act of genocide against the Ukrainian people. In May 2009 the Central Investigation Department of the State Security Service of Ukraine took proceedings against officials, whose actions resulted in a genocide, which led to a mass destruction of people⁷. Legal proceedings were issued against the former

⁵ Wilson A. *Ukraińcy*. – Grupa Wydawnicza Bertelsmann Media. Fakty. – Warszawa, 2002. – S. 182-185.

⁶ Kuchma L. D. *Ukraina ne Rosiia*. – M.: Vremia, 2003.

⁷ According to the outcomes of the forensic scientific and demographic examination conducted by M. V. Ptukha Institute of Demography and Social Research of National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine as to November 30, 2009 as a result of the conducted genocide in Ukraine died 3 941 000 people.

higher government of the USSR and the Ukrainian SSR: J. Stalin, V. Molotov, L. Kahanovych, P. Postyshev, S. Kosior, V. Chubar, M. Khataevych and others. Conducted investigative activities and social discussions along with the analysis of certain facts and documents invited attention to the USSR's historical heritage of a quite wider period. Constant attention on the side of the head of the country V. Yushchneko and a number of state institutions towards the historical issues of Ukraine, especially within the context of relations with Russia, as V. Kravchenko believes, resulted into "...Ukrainian-Russian war of national mythologies, which dropped into diplomatic and even economic, since both sides gave not less attention to symbolic reality, than a social one⁸. However, all attempts of some radical national parties to initiate and adopt a state program of decommunization failed. Another stage covers the period when V. Yanukovych was the head of the state (February 25, 2010 – February 22, 2014). To some extent he tried to carry out L. Kuchma's "multi-vector" policy. During his presidency such tasks as: introduction of a visa-free regime and establishing a free-trade zone with the EU became of top-priority. He refused to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and North Ossetia despite Russia's claims and encouragement. At the same time without preliminary social discussions V. Yanukovych in 2010 signed with the President of the Russian Federation D. Medvedev a treatment concerning the status and conditions of the Black Sea Navy Fleet of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine, according to which the rent term was prolonged for 25 years till 2042. In November 2013, a week before the "Eastern Partnership" summit in Vilnius, where the Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement was to have been signed, M. Azarov government announced termination of preparations of signing the treaty. This decision caused a wave of protests, which eventually resulted in the Revolution of Dignity, which started another period of decommunization. The Russian Federation's financial, informational, consultative and organizational support to V. Yanukovych's regime presupposed verbal and symbolic resistance of protesters as to the Russian authorities. In the course of the Revolution of Dignity on December 8, 2013 Lenin monument was stricken down to the ground, which caused a chain reaction of destroying monuments to various Soviet party and State leaders (this process was called "Leninfall"). The subsequent events like: a runaway of all key actors, headed by V. Yanukovych to Russia; active anti-Euromaidan position of Russian top-officials and leading mass media; annexation of the Crimea and support of separatists groups in southern and eastern regions of Ukraine put on the agenda the issue of decommunization and re-evaluation of modern Russia's role towards Ukraine. On July 22, 2014 the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine voted for dissolution of the Communist faction and the following prohibition of the Communist Party of Ukraine. In March 2015, the Cabinet Ministers of Ukraine approved draft laws on decommunization: "On the Legal Status and Honoring of Fighters for Ukraine's Independence in the Twentieth Century", "On Remembering the Victory over Nazism in the Second World War 1939-1945", "On Access to the Archives of Repressive Bodies of the Communist Totalitarian

⁸ Kravchenko V. *Ukraina. Imperiia. Rosiia. Vybrani statti z modernoi istorii ta istoriohrafii.* – K., 2011. – Pp. 464-479.

Regime from 1917-1991” and “On Condemning the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes and Prohibiting Propaganda of their Symbols”. All laws were adopted by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on April 9 and on May 21, 2015 they came into force. In December 2015 District Administrative Court of Kyiv completed the lawsuit of the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine against the Communist Party of Ukraine and ruled to ban its activities. These statutory documents created a legal base for critical evaluation of the Soviet period in the history of Ukraine. Additional or even a crucial factor became annexation of the Crimea by the Russia Federation under the conditions of matter-of-fact military intervention over March 2014 and the Russian-Ukrainian war in the east of Ukraine, which was commenced in the middle of April 2014. These and other factors’ impact had great influence on the Ukrainian citizens’ attitude towards the USSR, what can be easily seen by reference to the data in Table 2.

Table 2. Do You Regret Now the Collapse of the USSR in 1991? (%)⁹

Opinion poll date	Yes	No	Difficult to answer
December 2010	46,0	36,0	18,0
March 2013	41,0	44,0	15,0
April 2014	33,0	49,0	18,0
September 2015	31,0	56,0	14,0
September 2016	35,0	50,0	15,0

Opinion polls were conducted in different years by the sociological group “Rating”. Undoubtedly, the final outcome is influenced by the absence of respondent from the Crimea in 2014, as well as respondents from the occupied parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions in 2015. The results testify that after the Revolution of Dignity people’s position has been characterized by higher volatility. If over the previous period (before the Revolution of Dignity) had been characterized by a gradual tendency to reduction of positive comprehension of the USSR, then the 2014 events led to an abrupt qualitative and quantitative change in people’s attitude. The lowest index was in 2015, when only 31 % of interviewed felt sorry for the collapse of the USSR. At the same time, the opinion poll conducted in 2016 registered another result – beginning of growth/“rollback”. What was it caused by? On the one hand still there is a factor of war. On the other hand, numerous social problems, which have not been solved, form a synthetic position “unrealized demands of the Maidan”, which determines wavering of the people’s position.

Within this context the regional correlation and dynamics of changes/evolution of attitude towards the USSR in main regions of Ukraine becomes of great interest, and the outcomes are represented in Table 3. It should be taken into account that even if the opinion poll was

⁹ Sociological group “Rating”: Dynamics of nostalgia for the USSR [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: http://ratinggroup.ua/research/Ukraine/dinamika_nostalgi_po_ssr.html

conducted by one and the same social agency, which used a single approach within two surveys under consideration, the content of regions differ.

Table 3. Regional Review of Dynamics Concerning the Question “Do You Regret Now the Collapse of the USSR in 1991?” (%)

Region	April 2014 ¹⁰	September 2015 ¹¹	September 2015 ¹²
Ukraine	33,0	31,0	35,0
Donbas	61,0	-	-
East	47,0	39,0	40,0
South	50,0	49,0	42,0
Center	31,0	25,0	39,0
North	16,0	-	-
West	8,0	12,0	18,0

We register influence of several tendencies in the course of the three years. Over 2014-2015 the tendency to reduction of nostalgia for the USSR predominated. The most sensitive it was for citizens in the East (reduced by 8%) and Center (6%). Whereas in the West of the country grew the tendency of compassion towards the USSR (4%). Over 2015-2016 differently-directed tendencies became even more prominent. In the South the movement for further reduction of nostalgia for the USSR preserved (reduction equaled 7%). However, in the rest regions of Ukraine was registered a growth of affection for the Soviet past. The biggest index was recorded in the Central part of Ukraine (growth of 14%) and of 6% percent raised positive attitude in western regions, achieving quite considerable index of 18%. Additional information is represented by the opinion poll conducted by Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS), concerning the dynamics of the Ukrainian citizens' attitude towards the Russian Federation (Table 5). In Table we can see a proportion of the respondents, who defined their attitude as “very well” and “rather well”.

Table 4. “What Is Your General Attitude Towards Russia?” (%)¹³

Date	05.2009	06.2010	11.2011	02.2012	02.2013	02.2014	05.2014	09.2014	02.2015	02.2016	12.2016
%	93,0	92,0	80,0	85,0	85,0	78,0	52,0	48,0	34,0	36,0	40,0

¹⁰ Sociological group “Rating”: Nostalgia for the USSR and attitude towards certain USSR personalities [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: http://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/nostalgia_po_ssr_i_otnoshenie_k_otdelnym_lichnostyam.html

¹¹ Sociological group “Rating”: Dynamics of nostalgia for the USSR [Electronic resource] – Access mode: http://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/dinamika_nostalgii_po_ssr.html

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Kyiv International Institute of Sociology: How have the Ukrainian population's attitude towards Russia and the Russian population's attitude towards Ukraine changed? [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: <http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=report&cid=608&page=2>

As the opinion poll data show, despite some volatility, the absolute majority of the Ukrainian people traditionally treated Russia rather well. Qualitative changes took place after annexation of the Crimea and commencement of hostilities in eastern part of Ukraine, what is proved by the data of May and September 2014. Fall in the level of positive attitude of the highest index (May 2009) in comparison with the lowest one (February 2015) equaled almost 3 times. However, over 2016 was formed a tendency, concerning gradual growth of positive attitudes towards Russia. The abovementioned tendency is quite unexpected and illogical. Stable invariables still are: annexation of the Crimea and permanent military actions in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, which are accompanied by deaths and injuries of soldiers and civilian population from the Ukrainian side. After the Revolution of Dignity the process of decommunization is actively spreading. After the change of the names of towns, villages, streets, enterprises and organizations decommunization spread over the holidays, when holidays, connected with the Soviet symbols must be excluded. Besides, the process of emancipation of the Russian language from the public space is actively pursuing as well as the policy of Ukrainization is being followed.

However, despite constant impact of the abovementioned factors the tendency of positive attitude towards the historical heritage of the USSR and Russia is growing. The first thing that comes to mind is an analogy of pendulum or recurrence of the situation which occurred after the Orange Revolution. At that time, great expectations, which had not been implemented in the sphere of social and economic reforms, under the condition of pursuing Ukrainization, led to revenge of the Party of Regions. Thus, uncertainty, partial character of reforms, preservation of a high level of corruption, while the level of the people's welfare is lowering, cause dissatisfaction with current authority and contribute to the search for a new political agent of change. Consequently, actions aimed at decommunization and Ukrainization are perceived as important, but they are not enough for solving a heap of existing problems. Moreover, absence of progress as to improvement of the social and economic situation forms a public position that in such a way authority is trying to avoid reforms, and not to admit a qualitative change of the situation. Under these conditions political dichotomy "authority - opposition" causes repetition of the situation, when disappointment in the outcomes of the accomplished work leads to voting against the political agents of authority, what consequently means voting for opposition which includes messages concerning improvement of relations with Russia and refusal from critical attitude towards the historical legacy of the USSR. Besides, we cannot but take into account the fact that for the part of people who are under the poverty line it is inherent to be nostalgic about the past, when they were young and life was better.

Danger of such tendency has a number of dimensions. Let us enumerate them without special gradation: due to the war conflict there is a categorical, close to dichotomy apprehension of the situation in the country, which is represented by a construction "friend or foe" with a comprehension of "foe" as almost an enemy; a large part of people have experienced a "school" of war and have working knowledge of using weapon, moreover they take up power

as an accepted instrument of solving problems. Both alternatives lead to radicalization of views and behavior. An additional factor is the absence of significant democratic actors/competitors within the ruling political majority.

Therefore, we may state that the Ukrainians' attitude towards the historical heritage of the USSR and contemporary Russia are closely interrelated. Over the period of its independence the Ukrainians' attitude towards the historical heritage of the USSR and its legal successor has undergone two stages. The first one starts with the declaration of independence and finishes with annexation of the Crimea in February 2014. This stage is characterized by a very cautious attitude of the national leadership and main political actors as to overestimation of the USSR historical heritage, taking into consideration the position of the Russian Federation (the exception was period of V. Yushchenko's presidency). At the same time the accent was made on forming a special view/approach and it was represented in a rather high level of nostalgia for the Soviet times and absolute predominance of positive attitude towards Russia. Annexation of the Crimea by the Russian Federation in February 2014 and provocation and subsequent military invasion of a part of Donetsk and Luhansk regions became crucial points and resulted in implementation of decommunization policy in Ukraine and qualitative changes of the majority Ukrainians' attitude towards Russia. However, this tendency was rather short, though it was marked by the lowest level of nostalgia for the USSR. The results of 2016 let us suppose that the new tendency, when the attitude towards Russia and the USSR becomes better, is being taken place. We may reckon that after the 2014-2015 shock there will be a "rollback" which will be represented in growth of positive attitude towards Russia and the USSR's historical heritage. We believe that the indices will not return to the 2010 level, but will register much higher level than it was in 2015 that will represent a peculiar "stable group". This index will be under the influence of the results or absence of the results from the reforms. Despite the characteristic of these two tendencies the year of 2014 became a crucial one, and to our point, it commenced a new stage in Ukrainian citizens' attitude towards the historical legacy of the USSR and Russia.