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## INTRODUCTION

In 2022, following the escalation of Russian aggression against Ukraine, a Center for Ukrainian Studies was established at the Study of Eastern Europe at the University of Warsaw on the initiative of SEW director Jan Malicki. A group of Ukrainian researchers – historians and political scientists who thus became employees of SEW UW without abandoning their previous academic affiliations – were included in its work. This group included prominent and experienced Ukrainian scholars and outstanding researchers of the younger generation who had already been associated with the University of Warsaw. Since the beginning of the 2022/2023 academic year, the honor and pleasure of coordinating the work of this noble body fell to the undersigned. The CSU-affiliated scholars have joined the university's teaching process by conducting two university-wide lecture series on Ukrainian topics – „Ukraine – the Birth of a Nation” and „Ukraine 2022.” In the 2023/2024 academic year, this program was supplemented by another cycle – „Cities of Ukraine.” In addition to the lecture activity, the CSU's participants were involved in organizing scientific conferences devoted to Eastern studies. They conducted their own research projects, the results of which are enclosed in this publication. We are convinced that it will begin a new series of SEW publications, as part of the *Bibliotheca Europae Orientalis* series and will be published regularly, summarizing further research initiatives of the Center's participants.

Our first volume opens with an article by Vladyslav Verstiuk discussing the activities of the Ukrainian Central Council from its inception on March 20, 1917 (an old-style date) to the adoption by the UCR on November 20, 1917, of the so-called Third Universal, which proclaimed the establishment of an independent state, the Ukrainian People's Republic (URL). The Author organizes the available knowledge of the UCR's activities and places the history of its first eight months in the context of the policy of the Provisional Government formed after the March Revolution in Russia seeking to preserve the unity of the empire but forced to make compromises with the Kiev center of power. He recalls the Council's achievements, i.e., the so-called First Universal (June 23, 1917), which in-

voked the principle „we will make our own lives” and proclaimed Ukrainian autonomy within the Russian Federation, and the Second Universal (July 16, 1917), which confirmed Ukraine’s autonomous status and was the result of a compromise with the Provisional Government. Verstiuk emphasizes the importance of Ukrainian reactions to the Bolshevik coup in Petrograd, the mood leading to resistance to the expanding reach of the communist regime’s influence, which resulted in the Third Universal and the proclamation of the URL covering a vast territory, similar in size to the borders of today’s Ukraine. Although the Third Universal still mentioned ties with the federal Russian state, the Author posits that the declaration was tantamount to „the rebirth of Ukrainian statehood in the 20th century,” ultimately confirmed by the Fourth Universal of January 22, 1918. Verstiuk cites the history of the UCR’s functioning as a convincing argument refuting today’s claims of Russian propaganda, questioning the historical existence of a separate Ukrainian state and nation and treating Ukrainian territory as part of the „eternal triune” Russia.

Another article by Yuri Shapoval tackles the issue of the vitality of the idea of Ukraine’s separateness during the Soviet era. It includes a portrait of Petr Shelest, the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine from 1963 to 1972. The Author accurately reconstructs the biographical feature of his hero and cites many opinions about him left by activists contemporary to Shelest and later historians. He focuses on an attempt to define Shelest’s attitude to Ukrainian and, in particular, Cossack traditions and the position of the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU) on the question of the extent of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic’s subjectivity in relation to the Moscow center. Yuriy Shapoval is reticent about the „myth” of Shelest’s „Ukrainian patriotism.” However, he admits that in his actions and statements, as well as in the texts he produced, there are clear signs of respect for Ukrainian and Cossack traditions and even a specific identification with them. The Author sees his protagonist as a high-party official interested in working at the republican level rather than in a Moscow career, pursuing goals related to the local dimension of political and economic activities. He points out that Shelest’s eventual „weaning” in 1972 was prepared by principled criticism of his book *Our Soviet Ukraine*, which was accused of „limiting the possibilities for criticism of anti-historical tendencies,” which in Soviet newspeak meant excessive respect for pre-revolutionary traditions. Shapoval emphasizes that Shelest believed in „divided loyalty” and „Ukrainian identity” while supporting Soviet unity. No doubt, he is right to call for further research into the events of the „Shelest era,” which, in our opinion, may clarify to what extent the attitude of the „national communists” similar to those of the first secretary sustained the Ukrai-

nians' sense of separateness, and to what extent it exposed them to the melting of „Cossack” traditions in the ideological conglomerate of the state of the „popular masses of towns and villages.”

The third of the articles of a historical nature – Oleksandr Shevchenko's text on Bohdan Osadchuk – is a kind of „transition” to the political logic part of the volume. The Author recalls the main theses of his hero's journalism, focusing on Osadchuk's conviction that the shape of mutual relations between Poles and Ukrainians is of fundamental importance for the future of these nations and their states. In this context, he recalls, among other things, the prominent publicist's critical assessment of President Viktor Yushchenko's decision to apotheosize the achievements of Stepan Bandera, which, according to Osadchuk, resulted from a misunderstanding of the essence of political processes in Central and Eastern Europe and the importance of friendly Polish-Ukrainian relations for the future of the two neighboring states. Shevchenko also devotes much attention to his protagonist's reaction to Poland's accession to the „Schengen zone,” which, according to Osadchuk, was supposed to create an undesirable barrier to developing interpersonal contacts between Poles and Ukrainians. Recalling Osadchuk's theses, which go „against the grain” of the prevailing political science trends in Ukraine and Poland, is of vital importance in today's situation of Polish-Ukrainian dialogue and makes one reflect on the timeless thesis of the importance of relations between the two neighboring nations, bound by numerous historical ties, for their future.

In the political science section of the volume, we first come across the text of Olga Brysylovska discussing the issue of Ukraine's integration into the EU, observing first of all the changes in the attitude of Ukrainians on the one hand and politicians of EU countries on the other towards Ukraine's future membership. Considering the course of the evolution of Ukrainians' attitudes towards the EU, the Author uses the concept of „Ukrainian strategic culture,” recognizing that the shape it traditionally forms is conducive to accepting EU leadership. Noting this undoubtedly accurate remark, however, the volume editor must distance himself from one of the accompanying statements. The Author's opinion that „a characteristic feature of Ukrainians was that, despite their traditional affiliation with the Polish or Russian empires, Ukrainians never strategically defined Poles or Russians as enemies.” an inaccurate diagnosis was used, defining the „Polish state” of the early modern „Polish empire” era. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, a multicultural state based on a social contract with a weak central authority and strong, largely autonomous local governments, was never an empire and did not recognize itself as such. Turning from the order of this discrepancy, one has to give credit for Brusylovska's consideration of the infor-

mation about the gradual change in the stance of Ukrainian society toward the prospect of European integration. As the Author points out, the idea needed to be faster to gain support, which only in 2010 exceeded 50% of respondents in opinion polls and fell again three years later to 45.8%. On the European side, there needed to be more readiness to set a clear membership perspective for Ukraine for many years. The Author recognizes the importance of the EU's Joint Strategy for Ukraine, adopted in 1999, as a recognition of Ukraine's „European” ambitions, but also reminds us that we had to wait until 2022 and the effective Defense of Ukraine against Russian full-scale aggression for concrete results. This positive shift in EU sentiment gives the Author grounds for an optimistic conclusion on the future of Ukraine's European integration and the statement that „we are witnessing the emergence of a new concept of the EU's foreign policy and a shift from „strategic partnership” to „strategic confrontation” with Russia.” Let us hope this trend proves to be sustainable.

The following two articles subject the actions of modern Ukrainian diplomacy to detailed analysis in the face of the challenges posed by Russian aggression and ongoing hostilities. Iryna Matiash's article focuses on a description of the activities of current Ukrainian First Lady Olena Zelenska but also includes an exhaustive discussion of the literature on „public diplomacy” as well as a historical introduction to the topic referring to examples of the activities of First Ladies active in the twentieth-century history of Ukraine and Poland – Maria Hrushevskaya, Olha Petlura, Maria Wojciechowska, Aleksandra Pilsudska, and Michalina Moscicki. Discussing Olena Zelenska's activities, the Author describes the First Lady's involvement in social and humanitarian projects but also highlights her activity in the field of cultural diplomacy, in particular concerning the promotion of the Ukrainian language abroad. She recalls Olena Zelenska's patronage given to the extremely important project of developing AND launching audio guides in Ukrainian for museums from 25 countries around Europe, America, and Central Asia. She discusses the proceedings of the First Ladies' Summit held in Kyiv on August 23, 2021, attended by ten spouses of heads of state from around the world. However, she devoted most of her attention to Olena Zelenska's public diplomacy activities after the escalation of Russian aggression against Ukraine, i.e., in March 2022. She has presented numerous initiatives that have contributed to disseminating knowledge about Ukraine worldwide and deconstructing the influence of the Russian historical narrative, which questions the separateness of Ukrainians from Russians and the existence of millennia-old traditions of Ukrainian statehood. The Author cites facts about the joint initiatives of the first ladies of Ukraine and Poland, as well as the activity of Agata Kornhauser-Duda in organizing support and humanitarian aid for Ukraine at-

tacked by the Russian aggressor. She concludes with the thesis that with their activities, „Agata Kornhauser-Duda and Olena Zelenska changed the perception of the role of presidential wives in the development of public diplomacy.”

The article by Olga Bohorodetska, comprehensively presents Ukrainian theoretical achievements in the creation of the concept of Ukrainian „cultural diplomacy” in the post-1991 period and describes the process of implementation of the adopted assumptions in the practice of state foreign policy. It emphasizes the importance of the state institution established to carry out such tasks, namely the Ukrainian Institute, established in 2019. He discusses this institution’s program of activities contained in the Strategy of the Ukrainian Institute for 2020–2024. He also exposes the importance of activities undertaken by non-governmental actors involved in Ukrainian cultural diplomacy, especially the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation, the Ukrainian Institute of America, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, and the Ukrainian Cultural Centre in Israel. The Author reports with special attention placed on the activities of Ukrainian cultural diplomacy undertaken after the escalation of Russian aggression in 2022. She points out the barriers emerging at that time that hindered the conduct of practical activities, most notably the significant reduction in funding opportunities for cultural programs and initiatives, but also new „opportunities for Ukrainian cultural diplomacy to make an impact and build bridges between Ukraine and the rest of the world.” The material presented by Olga Bohorodetska proves that Ukraine is taking up the challenge of raising awareness of Ukrainian culture and history among international audiences and can successfully promote awareness of these issues worldwide.

The final article can be treated as a kind of punch line to the entire volume. In this text Mykola Ryabchuk reveals the difficulties faced by Ukraine’s integration with the West, resulting from Russia’s successful spread of Imperial knowledge over an unusually long period, the application of which led to the undermining of the subjectivity of subjugated nations. The Author points out that the foundation of this way of thinking about Eastern European history was Moscow’s seizure of the essentially separate tradition of Kievan Rus’ as its own and the making of a semantic manipulation that renamed Eurasian Muscovy into the European „Russia.” Riabchuk briefly describes the process of Ukrainians extracting themselves from the identity trap of „Rus’ mir,” which, however, went unnoticed by Russians ignoring signals such as the „Orange Revolution” and the „Revolution of Dignity” that were treated as a Western conspiracy aimed against Russia. In doing so, the Author points to the peculiar success of imperial knowledge in the West, the adoption by Western political and academic elites of the Moscow point of view, and the treatment of enslaved nations in the empire and later in the USSR

as „naturally” subordinate to Russia. This has led to the treatment of Ukrainians as a „nowhere nation,” of which numerous and emphatic examples relating to prominent representatives of academic spheres and prominent politicians are presented in the article. One critical statement by the Author: „The prevailing academic discourse has served to assure the Russian government of its impunity and emboldened its aggressive and violent political course.” It was not until the escalation of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022 that Western elites realized the need to make fundamental changes in understanding the structure of historical developments in Eastern Europe, abandon imperial knowledge as the basis of narratives about the region, and see that the nations hitherto considered „unhistorical” once conquered by Russia are total participants both historically and in the present. However, the vast majority of these changes are still ahead of us. Riabchuk believes they should be part of the „decolonization” of the Western European way of doing social science research and creating a political narrative. However, he sees many potential difficulties, first and foremost, regarding the effective deconstruction of the habits of thought associated with post-imperial and post-colonial stereotypes persisting in the West. The Author also warns that Russia will be determined to defend imperial knowledge, for removing Ukraine from Moscow’s narrative „creates a huge black hole, a bleeding wound at the very center of Russian imperial identity and imperial imaginary.” However, he sees an opportunity for Western academia to overcome the pro-Moscow burden by opening up to contacts with social science researchers from Ukraine and other countries in the Eastern European region.

The articles collected in the presented volume touch on various topics, but they are united in facing the arch-important and complex challenge of disseminating knowledge about the deep traditions of Ukrainian statehood and independence and overcoming the stereotypes associated with the long-standing and, unfortunately, quite effective propagation in the world of the Russian imperial discourse, which questions the existence of Ukraine and the Ukrainian nation as a separate social, political and cultural entity. Mykola Riabchuk’s article is particularly devoted to this issue, but all the published texts, in their way, constitute the realization of the task outlined above. Vladyslav Verstiuk’s study recalls the struggle of Ukrainians for independence, undertaken in the era of the collapse of the Russian empire at the end of World War I. Yuriy Shapoval’s text does not allow us to forget that even during Soviet enslavement, the idea of Ukrainian separateness was not completely forgotten and influenced even prominent Communist activists. Oleksandr Shevchenko, talking about the views of Bohdan Osadchuk, in turn, refers to the strategic importance of Ukrainian-Polish relations, treated as an alternative to dependence on Russia, providing

a bridge to Ukraine's positioning in the Western world. In her text, Olga Brusylowska shows the perspective of European integration for Ukraine, leading to the destruction of the „Russkiy mir” paradigm. Finally, articles by Irina Matiash and Olga Bohorodetska show the activities of the Ukrainian public and the cultural diplomacy that serve the same purpose. The entire volume makes a compelling case for the thesis that Ukraine has made the ultimate choice of civilizational development and is moving forward as part of the Western European cultural circle. There are, arguably, still unbroken relics of post-colonial dependence – other Central and Eastern European countries are not entirely free of them either – but a „critical mass” of the variety has already been reached.