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## Russia's War in Ukraine as the Russian Eurasian Empire Eve

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*The search for ways to end the war in Russia in Ukraine actualizes the issue of the causes of the war, the solution of which could create an objective basis for its end. The article is aimed at consideration of the Russia's war against Ukraine from the standpoint of Russia's intentions in the global context of Russia's relations with the countries of the West and from the standpoint of historical retrospect. On the basis of a qualitative analysis of the key texts of Putin and his closest circle, Russia's strategic goal to restore Russia's former greatness and build a third empire capable of winning the confrontation with Western civilization is discussed. A qualitative historical analysis was applied to a short overview of the cyclicity of Russian attempts at Western expansion and the role of Ukraine in them. Directed at the internal and external audience the leading Kremlin discourses for the support of Russia's aggressive aspirations are identified: a state-civilization and the concept of the «Russian World» for the first one and a multipolar world under the banner of neo-Marxist ideas and overcoming Western civilization as an «exploiter» for the second. The Russian war against Ukraine, accompanied by the ideas of the «Russian World» and neo-Marxist rhetoric, is positioned by Russia in the framework of «gathering originally Russian lands» and «returning one's own» from the one hand and a revolutionary protest of countries, «whose potential is developing», against Western civilization as «oppressors» and «exploiters» from the other. The Russian-Ukrainian war is considered as a logical stage of Putin's attempt to construct a modified Russian empire – Eurasian – and get revenge on the USA, which embodies the liberal values and legal practices of Western civilization.*

**Key words:** Russian-Ukrainian war, imperialism, «Russian world», multipolarity, neo-Marxism.

**Introduction.** Russia's war in Ukraine became a challenge to the after the World War II world order. Searching for optimal approaches to terminate the war lead us to investigation of its reasons more carefully [58]. The latter determines the need to look at the war from the standpoint of Russia's goals, its vision of itself and its place in the system of international relations.

Despite the fact that Russian politics and the transformation of Russia after the collapse of the USSR do not leave the academic agenda, a clear consensus scientific vision of post-Soviet Russia is still being developed [56; 87; 79; 57; 72; 99]. A wide range of issues related to the Russian Empire is considered in the format of academic periodicals, primarily by the authors of the Quarterly «Ab Imperio».

The authors often consider Russia as a part of the European civilizational space, examining the dialectic between the national and the imperial, the hybridity of the empire in terms of the form of state government and identity, its colonies, space, cultural influences, prospects for democratization, etc. In this context, one can find the definition of Russia as a «velvet empire» [56] and «subaltern empire» [80], which is the periphery of the European space and depends on it materially and normatively, and of the USSR, which is, «like a nation-state, an attempt to forge a modern anticolonial and non-imperial political identity» [57].

The «peripheral» approach to the interpretation of Russia, its definition as a hybrid empire with blurred boundaries of identities and relations of dominance and dependence, inscribes Russia into

the Eurocentric discourse and directs the discussion towards the legitimization of its post-Soviet imperial claims. In this context, the arguments by J. Burbank & M. von Hagen regarding «the usefulness, manipulability, and power of imperial structures and imperial political culture» [87, p. 2], «the organizing capacity of the empire state form» [87, p. 3], possibility of «reform the government, without having to reject all the qualities of an imperial state» [87, p. 15], and that «the contradictions of imperial existence are not necessarily an evil» [87, p. 15] are quite indicative. As well as the question raised by Laruelle about the possibility of considering «empire» as «a form of globalization and hybridity of identities, in tune with postmodern and postnational views» [75, p. 36]. Such an approach, emphasizing resistance to certain «discrimination» on the part of Western countries, brings the issue of modern war into the realm of Russia's defence of its own «sovereign» interests.

The latter fuels temptation for the identification of the empire as a heterogeneous and multicultural entity with the federation, despite striking differences in the creation and maintenance of the unity of such political structures, and on the other hand, creates risks for the transfer of responsibility for the modern Russian war against Ukraine from Russia to the countries of the West, which by their «ill-conceived» actions led to stopping Russia on the way of democratic transit and turning it into a hostage of Putin's regime. The post-colonial discourse regarding Russia enables further conclusions regarding «NATO expansion», «respect for Russia's sovereign interests», «legitimacy

of its participation in determining the world order», etc. In this sense, the proposal of Laruelle [75, p. 38] to compare Russia with the USA, which enslaved «African nations, conquering new territories by war, and buying some others» is quite eloquent.

The flip side of the discussion is attention to the post-nationalism and consideration of national states, primarily, as sovereign territorial entities that move against the general trends of the globalized world and try to replace the universalism of empires with national unity locked within national borders [75].

Leaving beyond parentheses the lack of evidence base, and appeals, mainly, to previously expressed, but not strictly confirmed opinions, it should be noted that all considerations regarding the UN as a «dominant institution», «imposition of Eurocentric norms», «hybridization of world history», «sense of regional identity», «subaltern empire», as well as an approach to the values of «liberty», «democracy», and «human rights» as manifestation of «the totalizing discourse of colonialism», remain relevant exactly until the moment, when the bomb-missiles attacks of the «subaltern empire» begin to deny such values and destroy the cities – Kharkiv, Mariupol, Kyiv, and Sumy, etc. – of the «sacred national space», that does not tend to join advantages of «civilizational universalism of the postcolonial empire».

The main drawback of such an approach is ignoring the aspect of human rights and freedoms, which is the basis of the national struggle and human existence. Security and freedom in the conditions of the existence of a nation-state, and not, as M. Laruelle believes, the idea of «the sacredness of the territory» [75, p. 35], motivate the oppressed community to fight for independence.

No matter how soft or hybrid an empire may be, it remains the embodiment of the relationship of dominance and subjugation, and all possible democratization will always end where the question of the independence of its colonies arises. Extrapolating this conclusion to Ukrainian realities, we get a well-known in Ukraine maxim about «Russian liberalism, which ends where the Ukrainian question begins». The maintenance of coercive relations towards subjugated peoples/communities eventually leads to a deep internal transformation of the country with the inevitable limitation of democratic rights and freedoms. In the modern Russian version – to Putinism [97]. At the same time, being an empire by its very nature, Russia does not drop off its democratic wrapper and uses the formed in the West ideas of herself as a «normal country» «without any isms» [56, p. 282] to promote her imperial interests. As Stent noticed, «although they asked the West to deal with Russia as a “normal” country, they also demanded that the outside world continue to treat Russia as a major power» [96, p. 83].

Russian propaganda offered the opinion that precisely the risk of Ukraine joining NATO as part

of the latter's expansion and the disrespect for Russia's sovereign interests shown in this way became one of the reasons for Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine [31; 77]. This thesis was further substantiated by a number of authors [78; 88; 95], who considered Ukraine as a pretext and theatre of confrontation between NATO and Russia [94], country, «contested between Russia and the West» [64], and a «NATO's expansion and Ukraine's intended NATO membership» – as «the main issues for the unfolding crisis in Ukraine» [95]. They emphasized the need to strengthen Ukraine's ability to solve defence issues, but questioned the perspective of the country's direct membership in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture [66]. In the discussions about the prospects of Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine, the attitude towards the country as an object of efforts and resources prevails. At the same time, narratives about «fatigue from Ukraine» are spreading in high-profile mass media publications [91; 89; 84; 61]. Against the background of the cautious position demonstrated by the West regarding the prospect of including Ukraine in the Western security architecture, Russia's readiness not just to compete, but to wage a full-scale war for the possibility of its absorption looks like an obsession [51; 68; 73; 100; 102], that needs additional explanation.

Supporting the thesis regarding the imperial nature of the Russian state, this work adds proofs to the perspective arguing Russia's imperial ambitions [58], continues the line of Timothy D. Snyder, Serhii Plokhyy, and Michael Khodarkovsky, who reveal modern Russian expansionism from the standpoint of historical retrospect, and considers Russia outside the European civilizational space (the European wrapper of socio-political behavioural practices is hardly more defining than their Asian essence – the traditions of paternalism and the dominance of the collective over the individual with complete disregard for human life and human rights), highlighting the modern policy of Russia in relation to Europe as an «other», which is not so much a subject of imitation as an object of expansion, rich booty, as in the times of Genghis Khan.

**The purpose of the study:** to consider the Russia's war against Ukraine from the standpoint of Russia's intentions in the global context of Russia's relations with the countries of the West and from the standpoint of historical retrospect, which led to the need for 1) revealing the Kremlin's vision of Russia in the globalized world, primarily in the system of Russia-Europe relations; 2) determining the role of Ukraine in Russian expansionist plans; 3) disclosure of the ideological basis of the war.

**Materials and Methods.** The study's conclusions are based on the analysis of the symbolic speeches of the leader of the Kremlin, his closest circle, and media materials. Following Mahfoud

and Khaldaoui [76], a qualitative research design was used as the basis of the analysis, which is based not on the quantity, but on the quality of the collected data, which are collected gradually and not all at once. The proposed approach does not require «a large sample size to ensure valid and reliable findings, but it is sufficient to have a small sample size of the corpus to meet the aims of the research» [76]. A qualitative historical analysis was applied to short overview of the cyclicity of Russian attempts at Western expansion and the role of Ukraine in them. According to Thies, «qualitative analyses are usually performed on a small number of cases, or perhaps even a single case» [98, p. 352] and might be applied to the study of international relations.

## Results and Discussion

### *Towards the New Empire*

Regarding modern Russian imperialism, let's start with Putin's well-known quote that the collapse of the USSR was «the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century» [83]. This thesis was voiced by the head of the Kremlin in 2005 in the Message to the Federal Assembly and testified to his personal attitude to the Russian state «after the USSR» not as a format that opens new opportunities for solving domestic problems and integrating the country into the civilized world, but as an embodiment of weaknesses of the Russian government [23].

Putin expressed his regret about the collapse of the USSR aloud at the official level afterward the Orange Revolution of 2004 in Kyiv that confirmed the former President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma's thesis that «Ukraine is not Russia» [12] and became a manifestation of the inability of the quasi-imperial format of the Commonwealth of Independent States to keep the post-Soviet countries in the orbit of Russian influence peacefully.

Since then, Russia began to make systematic efforts to strengthen its military potential and test the stability of the after the WWII world order. It is noteworthy that already in 2005, the first Russian-Chinese military exercises «Peaceful Mission – 2005» took place, the scenario of which provided for the assistance of the neighbors at the request of the authorities of the provisional state in connection with mass riots on ethnic grounds. Since 2006, for the first time after the collapse of the USSR, resources have been allocated for the long-term development of the Armed Forces [11] and in 2008, military reforms began, which lasted until 2020 (Serdyukov's reforms). In the same 2008 year, military aggression was carried out against Georgia. In 2009, the joint Russian-Belarusian operational-strategic military exercise «West – 2009» was held in Belarus, the task of which was to prepare the armed forces of Russia and Belarus to ensure strategic stability in the Eastern European region. It is noteworthy that in 2009, Russia published a series of books about the future war in Ukraine, which, in

particular, describe the war in Donbas, the advantages of air defense against aviation, the conduct of military operations by paramilitary groups («voluntarily discharged from the armed forces»), etc. On April 10, 2010, an aircraft carrying the leadership of Poland crashed near Smolensk under doubtful circumstances.

Along with that, Putin repeatedly emphasized the devastating consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union for Russia and specified not once that as a result of the collapse of the USSR, «millions of ethnic Russians at one point became residents of abroad» [65; 30; 36], making it clear that ethnic Russians remain in the sights of the Russian authorities and expanding in this way the potential sphere of responsibility of the Russian Federation beyond its official borders, which would later be fully manifested in the concept of protecting «ethnic Russians» and «Russian World» during the attack on Ukraine and the participation of the Russian Federation in modern military conflicts [38; 31]. The collapse of the USSR Putin defined «the collapse of historical Russia» [23; 30], that led to the state losing of 40% of its territory, production capacity, and population, as well as what «was worked on during thousand years» [30], which indirectly testified the Russian leader's understanding of the USSR as a Russian empire, and modern Russia as a successor of two previous empires.

Speaking about Russia, Putin opposes its monoethnic concept and emphasizes the vital need to keep within the state the various national components – along with their territories – that have been attached to it during the historical development of the empire [23]. Avoiding the term «empire», Putin consistently justifies the vital need for Russia to preserve the imperial format of a state, outlined by Doyle [55, p. 45].

The deep resentment of the Kremlin leadership for the loss of the «great country» caused the task of revising the results of the Cold War and restoration of former greatness [66; 59; 62; 90; 97; 95] or even revival of the empire [53; 63; 84; 80].

However, such a revision did not foresee the technical reconstruction of the USSR as a «Soviet-style Moscow-centered megastate on the European continent or even a Warsaw Pact-like formalization of Russian supremacy» [90, p. xiii]. Putin personally emphasized many times that this would be a mistake. Criticism by him and his close circle of certain decisions of the Bolsheviks, in particular, those related to the «creation» of Ukraine and the transfer of Crimea to it or the unification of Germany, the declaration of the right of the Union republics to leave the USSR, testify to the sincerity of the Kremlin leader this time. However, this does not mean that the Kremlin did not plan any reconstruction and revenge.

Today, we can talk about the construction of a new, grander concept – an integrated Eurasian space with

hegemon Russia (Russia-Eurasia), the contours of which are outlined not only by odious publications, but can be seen in Russian academic discourse [93; 42; 18; 101; 77; 44], in conceptual documents of the state [15], statements of Putin himself [1; 2; 40], as well as a close circle of his associates [43; 46; 5].

A theory that offers convenient arguments for justifying the need to build a great empire within Eurasian continent has become Eurasianism [99], which appeals to the Mongol experience of political consolidation of Eurasia, to the empire of Genghis Khan, «whose conquests and empire building provided Eurasia for the first time with a state tradition embracing the entire “continent”» [74, p. 8]. According to Khodarkovsky, «Russia continues to be an “Empire of the Steppe»: an empire that is bitter about losing in 1991 what it considers its territories, and is now trying to restore under the slogan of the Eurasian Union» [92].

Today, some ideas of the followers of Eurasianism acquire national resonance and pass on from the category of theoretical conclusions to the plane of Realpolitik. Thus, the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation in 2023 defines it a «state-civilization, a vast Eurasian and Euro-Pacific power» [15], and emphasizes the purpose of the «formation in the long term of an integrated economic and political space in Eurasia» [15]. This «integrated space in Eurasia» corresponds well with the mentioned state-civilization with flexible borders, which, according to Putin, «do not end anywhere» [2]. According to Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of the Russian Federation Security Council, every state has geographical and strategic borders, the latter of which depend on how strong and sovereign the state is, and how far it extends its power. Weak states' position is not considered [5]. According to the new world order being built by Russia, the main actor of international relations is not the state, but civilization, where only the civilizational/regional centre – in this case Russia – has sovereignty. In this context, «Ukraine and Belarus are perceived today as integral parts of the “Russian world”, which ... do not have the right to sovereignty in the European sense, which remains the exclusive prerogative of the civilizational core» [101, p. 235].

The new political formation – whether in the form of a union or a political and economic bloc – will not only provide for the possibility of Russia's political influence on the member states [80], but also its control over their economic space through «creation of a unique nationally-oriented international network class “razvitiye”[development], capable of self-organization based on the presentation of a value vertical of development and the creation of transcontinental development management schemes», including «a new form of international cooperation» and «manifestation of the Eurasian worldview» [43]. Such «nationally oriented»

economic networks, on the one hand, open access to technological innovations, and on the other hand, lead «national spaces beyond national territories» [50, p. 23].

A combination of political and economic factors lay the foundation for the creation of a new empire close to the vision of Hardt & Negri, as «a control apparatus that gradually includes the entire global space within its open and expanding borders. Empire manages mixed, hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies and multiple exchanges through the moderation of command networks» [59, p. 12].

Today Russia, neglecting the sovereign interests of countries and peoples, is already openly planning to «lead» and control the Eurasian zone [1; 7] or, according to the Kremlin's former «grey cardinal» Vladislav Surkov, the «Great North» [46], and «Europe could be a part of greater Eurasia» [1]. Former Secretary of the Russian Security Council Nikolai Patrushev expects that European countries will reconsider their policies towards Russia after the «collapse of the European Union» [8]. He also emphasizes the competitiveness of the economic model that emerged in the EU during the period of cooperation with Russia – a combination of cheap energy resources from Russia and advanced European technologies.

Speaking about the prospects for Europe, Patrushev summarizes: «The United States is in charge of Europe, ignoring the fact that the leading role on the continent was historically assigned to Russia. In the 19th century – the Russian Empire, in the 20th century – the Soviet Union. It will be so in the 21st century» [8].

He justified his conclusion with Mackinder's reasoning about the Heartland as the midst land, the place of which is occupied today by Russia and control over which means domination over the World Island – Eurasia and leads to global dominance [10].

Putin, in his turn emphasized that «a single humanitarian, economic space, ... ensuring the security of everyone who lives on this huge continent, from Lisbon to Vladivostok» has to be created in Eurasia in the future [1; 37]. Putin explained: «If we do this, we have a chance to take a worthy place in the future world. If we take a different path, we divide Europe, European values, European peoples; we engage in separatism, then we will all be insignificant, uninteresting players, and will have no influence. We will not be able to influence global development, or even our own» [33].

In this context, the Great Eurasia is considered as a «geopolitical representation of Russia» [3, p. 21], «from the United Kingdom to the United Arab Emirates, from Korea to Kyrgyzstan» [91, p. 27].

Among the key principles laid in the basis of such a single space Putin singled out the barrier-free

environment (no one should ever try to erect artificial barriers to people's communication); general security and the «free from bloc thinking and colonial approaches» world; «justice for all», in particular, universal access to the benefits of civilization, artificial restrictions should be considered an act of aggression [2].

The understanding of barrier-free concept unequivocally includes the desire for a free-trade zone [37]. However, the concept of barrier-freeness is not limited by the economic sphere and may be applied to humanitarian, political and military issues, which is confirmed by the words of Putin himself regarding the pilot Eurasian project – EurAsEC: Russia will contribute to the further integration in the political, economic, industrial, financial and technological spheres [32].

The other demand «to free the world from bloc thinking» is directed against NATO and may include the prospect of the withdrawal of a part of countries that hypothetically may not want to accept «foreign rules» and allow someone to «decide for others», or even the destruction of the block.

The next statement – access to the benefits of civilization – is key. It is the one that is supposed to give Russia a ticket into the 21st century. «Access to the benefits of civilization» also includes access to technology and investment, and Russia seeks to have guarantees of such access, including the possibility of using coercion to ensure it. If Russia managed to establish control over Europe as a part of the Eurasian region, European countries would play the role of a technological donor for Russia, which should in the future allow the latter to withstand competition with China and the United States.

In any case, today we have reason to talk about Russian plans for western expansion, the new Russian *Drang nach Western*.

#### ***Ukraine in Russia's Western Expansion: A Cornerstone or a Stumbling Block***

The first Moscow's attempts to advance borders to the West were implemented by the Muscovite tsars Ivan III and Ivan IV. For the Muscovite state, which was formed and strengthened under conditions of vassal dependence on the Golden Horde, the western expansion started after the collapse of the Horde with claims to former Rus' lands was a reproduction of the 200-year-old tradition of the Horde's political practice of domination and subjugation. The policy of intimidation of neighbours and competitors, reliance on military campaigns of «compulsion to submit», the right of «force and conquest, solidified by terror» [103, p. 18], collection of tribute and its partial appropriation as a source of one's own elevation, lasted for more than 200 years and determined the further recognizable trend of Russian policies towards neighbours. As well as the despotic face of the Russian government in relation to its people,

«patterned after the refined despotism of imperial China» [103, p. 18].

Ivan III (1462-1505) became the first who began to add «of all Rus'» to his title, emphasizing in this way the capture of Rus' territories. These changes looked organically in the general trend towards greatness that emerged after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. At the turn of the century, the idea of Moscow – «the Third Rome» was born in the Moscow Orthodox Church. According to the concept, Moscow was considered a spiritual centre of Orthodoxy and therefore the potential capital of the future empire.

Claiming to collect Rus' lands, in the 14th-16th centuries the Muscovite state waged numerous wars against the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, that included the majority of former Rus' lands along with Kyiv.

The political «stumbling block» on its way became the creation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569), composed of two states – the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Crown of Poland – and three peoples: Poles, Lithuanians, and Ukrainians. Subsequent victories over Muscovy – the Jan-Zapole Peace (1582), the Deulin Armistice (1618), and the Eternal Peace (1634) proved the effectiveness of the union as the first European coalition against Moscow aggression.

The change of the Ukrainian vector by Bohdan Khmelnytsky (1654) led to the incorporation of the part of the Ukrainian territories and population into the Muscovite state. The very next Great Northern War started by Muscovy in 1700 ended with its confident victory (1721) and the creation of the first Russian Empire in the same year. For the first time, Russia pushed its borders to the West and the entire previous balance of power in Europe was broken. Fifty years later, Russia's participated in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's first partition (1772). To the end of the 18th century the political map of Europe was redesigned, Polish, Lithuanian and Ukrainian peoples lost their statehood, their territories turned out under the occupation.

The event of global impact – the First World War led to the collapse of the Russian empire, the restoration of which by the Bolsheviks in the format of the USSR (1922) began again with the establishment of control over Ukraine (1921). It is noteworthy that the first front opened by Soviet Russia within two weeks after the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917 was the Ukrainian one against the pronounced after the destruction of the Russian Empire Ukrainian People's Republic.

The Bolsheviks' claims to the world revolution [67], the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and Stalin's seizure of European territories – primarily Ukrainian – at the beginning of the Second World War, the Soviet-Finnish War, proved the continuation of Russian policy of western expansion by the USSR. Among the consequences of the creation of the new Soviet empire was its capture of Central and Eastern

European countries into its own orbit of influence after the Second World War.

The collapse of the Soviet Union weakened the empire, but did not change its nature – the need for expansion [6; 33; 45; 47]. As historical experience shows, the current Russian attempt to expand the borders – state and influence – is a continuation of a series of previous ones, started by the Tsardom of Muscovy and continued by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. As Serhii Plokhly notices, «the end of the seventeenth century saw Muscovy's borders on the Dnipro River; by the end of the eighteenth century they were on the Niemen and the Dniester; the nineteenth century saw the incorporation of Warsaw and the entrance of Russian troops into Paris. In the mid-twentieth century, the Red Army took Berlin and Prague. Only the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the disintegration of the USSR in 1991 seemingly put an end to the westward expansion of Russia, whose western border partly retreated to the boundaries of pre-1654 Muscovy» [81, p. 251-252].

And as in previous times, Russia begins its open offensive to the West from Ukraine. A certain «declaration of intent» in this context was the recognition made two weeks before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine that «it is cramped, boring, inconvenient... and unthinkable for Russia to remain within the boundaries of an indecent peace» [47], in which it found itself after the collapse of the USSR.

#### ***The ideological basis of the war***

The civilizational basis of the new state entity is supposed to be formed by the value principles of the ideology of the «Russian World», common culture and history [71; 80]. According to Putin [23], Russia as a polyethnic civilization is held together by the Russian cultural core with the characteristic «service to chosen ideals and planetary goals», and «performs the civilizational service» [43].

In fact, «service to planetary goals» and «the civilizing mission» mean messianism – wrapped in different times in the rhetoric of salvation of the «people of Donbas», Ukrainians, Russia, Europe, and the whole world – which is a spiritual value [4, p. 21], a political characteristic [54] and the identity basis [14] of the «Russian World». Moreover, such salvation is seen in the imposition of Russian culture on others («Russian Armenians, Russian Azerbaijanis, Russian Germans, and Russian Tatars» [23]) and their subjugation to the Kremlin.

According to Putin, «the Russian World» unites everyone who feels a spiritual connection with the Russian Motherland, who considers themselves a native speaker of the Russian language, a carrier of Russian history and culture, regardless of even their national or religious affiliation [17]. In this regard, Ukraine is presented as a part of «the Russian World», and the war in Ukraine is positioned as the return of «own» and the salvation of Ukrainians as a part

of the Russians [1; 13] who came under the influence of a foreign civilization. The concept of «the Russian world» in this context opens up opportunities both for the mobilization of Russians to participate in the war as one aimed at protecting the identity foundations of Russia and for mobilizing compatriots abroad to support Russia. It is noteworthy that in 2023, the founding congress of the International Movement of Russophiles was held in Moscow [16], which is designed to become an instrument of pressure on European governments, in particular in the matter of lifting sanctions against the Putin regime.

If for the internal audience the external expansion takes place under the slogan of protecting and saving «the Russian World», their «own», then for the rest of the world – under the banner of the directed against the Western World tasks of building a «multipolar world» and restoring justice on a global scale [15; 28; 24; 29; 7].

«An obscure academic term» [50] «multipolar world» is used by the Kremlin as a theoretical rationale to deconstruct the existing after the WWII world order, which, due to adherence to the principles of the inviolability of borders and respect for the territorial integrity of states, restrains the «power» of countries that demonstrate, in Putin's words, «potential growth» [27]. First of all, Russia's [19].

Primarily, the idea of a «multipolar world» is aimed at weakening the positions of the so-called «collective West», which is accused of «establishing rules» [1; 26], efforts to obtain «unlimited power» [20], «power over the world» [1], and «ruling the entire planet» [21], colonialism [20; 2], «depersonalization, division, suppression and exploitation» [17], and «robbery of colonies over the centuries» [2; 28]. Preferring to avoid a comparison with the relevant historical experience of Russia, Putin compares the Western countries with vampires and warns that their «ball is ending» [35].

In such interpretations, Western countries, instead of providing «universal access to the benefits of civilization» [2], act as violators of the principles of equality and justice in the interpretation of John Rawls [86] and John Roemer [86], maintaining their dominant status by expenses of other nations. They are presented in Putin's narrative as the new «exploiters» who use power to appropriate profits from the public goods produced in the world.

On the contrary, despite its experience as a «prison of nations», modern chauvinist politics, and imperial aspirations, Russia is positioned as devoted to the idea of equality: «We proceed from the fact that all people are equal, all have the same rights» [9], «our general task is to make sure that all people are put in equal conditions» [22].

In the confrontation with Western countries, Russia is looking for allies and actively uses the discourse of «justice» [15; 24; 29; 25] and «equality» [2; 22],

appealing to the countries of the Arab world, South and Latin America, and, above all, to the countries of Africa [15], who may be interested in the idea of a global redistribution of the world's benefits, which is hidden under the wrapper of social justice [70]. Quite illustrative is Putin's argumentation: speaking about the allocation of \$150 billion by Western countries to support Ukraine, Putin, in particular, compares the sum with the amount of \$60 billion allocated in 2020-2021 for aid «to the poorest countries of the world, by the G7 countries» [20].

Speaking about «resistance» to «neo-colonialism», «exploitation», «those in power», demanding «more fair distribution of global goods», Russia, as a hundred years ago, uses revolutionary rhetoric, but elevates it to the global level. Today, Putin declares that «the West is not capable of single-handedly ruling humanity, but is desperately trying to do so, and most of the peoples of the world no longer want to put up with this. This is the main contradiction of the new era. In the words of a classic, the situation is to a certain extent revolutionary: the upper classes cannot, and the lower classes do not want to live like this, to use the words of a classic» [1].

In Putin's vision, Russia is supposed to play the role of the locomotive of the revolution in the reconstruction of the world: «We are now fighting for the freedom of not only Russia, but the whole world» [17]. A global level of Russia's responsibility – which means pretences for the world domination – was emphasized by the World Russian People's Council: «As the geopolitical centre of Eurasia ... Russia must regulate the balance of strategic interests and act as a bulwark of security and a fair world order in the new multipolar world» [13].

It is noteworthy that on February 26, 2024, in Moscow, under the auspices of the International Russophile Movement with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation, a Forum of Multipolarity was held, bringing together representatives of 130 countries of Asia, Europe, Africa, Latin and North America. One of the panels of the forum was «The West after hegemony. Is it possible to save European civilization?» [48], and in a message to the forum, the Kremlin leader predicted «fundamental changes» in Europe [34].

As we can see, neo-Marxist slogans of justice and equality are used today by Russia to justify the deconstruction of the post-war order and the implementation of the neo-colonial division of the world with «aggression of the strong and ruthless subjugation of the weak» [49], when «everyone will do what they want, can or as they please» [52].

**Conclusions.** Putin's aspirations are to divide the Western civilization, separate Europe from the United States, restore the greatness of Russia

and its influence «from Lisbon to Vladivostok», and create a based on the ideology of the «Russian World» new civilizational empire within Eurasian continent.

Taking into account the historical retrospect, the strategic goal of the Kremlin defined the task of absorbing Ukraine as its «cornerstone», «a lynchpin in Putin's strategy for Europe» [90, p. 140], «a pivotal state for the entire Eurasian project» [69, p. 462]. According to Putin, the war in Ukraine is «not a territorial conflict and not even the establishment of a regional geopolitical balance. The question is much broader and fundamental: we are talking about the principles on which the new world order will be based» [2]. So, the modern Russia's war against Ukraine is not aimed at preventing the expansion of NATO or providing Russia's security – this is the beginning of the expansion of Russia itself, Russian adjusted by the neo-Marxist rhetoric offensive on the countries of Western democracy and the creation of foundations for building a new civilizational empire in the flexible borders of the «Russian World». Based on the strategic goals of the war, it cannot be stopped by territorial concessions of Ukraine or even its full integration into Russia. In this case Ukraine will be a cornerstone of a new Russian empire again. Instead, Ukraine's inclusion in the European security architecture could significantly complicate the implementation of the Kremlin's ambitious plans and transformed Ukraine in a stumbling block for it.

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## Війна Росії в Україні як переддень Російської Євразійської імперії

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*Пошук шляхів припинення війни росії в Україні актуалізує питання про причини війни, вирішення яких могло б створити об'єктивне підґрунтя для її завершення. Стаття спрямована на розгляд війни росії проти України з позиції намірів росії в глобальному контексті відносин росії з країнами Заходу та з позиції історичної ретроспективи. На основі якісного аналізу ключових текстів Путіна та його найближчого оточення, публікацій в провідних російських медіа обґрунтовується стратегічна мета Кремля відновити колишню велич росії та побудувати третю російську імперію, здатну виграти протистояння із західною цивілізацією. Якісний історичний аналіз був застосований до короткого огляду циклічності російських спроб західної експансії та ролі України в них. Визначено спрямовані на внутрішню та зовнішню аудиторію провідні кремлівські дискурси на підтримку агресивних планів росії: держава-цивілізація та концепція «русского мира» внутрішньої аудиторії і багатополярний світ під прапором неомарксистських ідей і подолання західної цивілізації як «експлуататора» – для зовнішньої. Російська війна проти України, що супроводжується ідеями «русского мира» та неомарксистською риторикою, позиціонується росією в рамках «захисту російськомовних, які відчують свій зв'язок із росією», «збирання споконвічно руських земель» та «повернення свого», з одного боку, та революційного протесту країн, «потенціал яких розвивається», проти західної цивілізації як «гнобителів» і «експлуаторів» – з іншого. Російсько-українська війна розглядається як логічний етап спроби Путіна побудувати модифіковану Російську імперію – Євразійську – та здобути реванш над країнами західної демократії, насамперед США, які втілюють ліберальні цінності та правові практики західної цивілізації. Обґрунтовано, що виходячи зі стратегічних цілей війни, її неможливо зупинити ні територіальними поступками України, ні навіть шляхом її повної капітуляції та подальшої інтеграції до Росії. У цьому випадку Україна вчергове стане наріжним каменем нової російської імперії. Натомість входження України в європейську безпекову архітектуру могло б суттєво ускладнити реалізацію амбітних планів Кремля та перетворити Україну на камінь спотикання для агресивних планів росії.*

**Ключові слова:** російсько-українська війна, імперіалізм, «русский мир», багатополярність, неомарксизм.