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THESIS

Title: **The Shadow of an Internationalist Warrior. How does Ukraine remember the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979-89?**

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Table of Contents

Annotation……3
Introduction……..……3

Chapter 1. From memory to policies……5
1.1 Memory and Social……..……..……5
1.2 Collective memory and shared reality……..……..6
1.3 Memory policymaking……..……8
1.4 The 1979-89 War as a case……..……..……11

Chapter 2. Ukrainian memory policies regarding the Soviet-Afghan war, 1979-89…….13
2.1 Decommunisation as a cornerstone of Ukrainian Memory Policy……..……13
2.2 The Dawn of Ukrainian Independence and Veterans of the Afghanistan War…….16
2.3 Ukrainian memory policies regarding the war in Afghanistan, 1991 - 2025……...19

Chapter 3. Discussion……..……..……..……..……..……...24
3.1 Impunity and crime.……..……..……..……..……..……...24
3.2 Policy recommendations……..……..……..……..……..……26

Bibliography ……..……..……..……..……..……27
Annexes……..……..……..……..……..……..…38

Annotation

The study aims to reveal the gaps and nature of the memory policy regarding the veterans of the Soviet-Afghan war of 1979-89 in Ukraine. The study employs a mixed-methods approach with an emphasis on qualitative methodology. Following the theoretical framework of collective memory, its impact on group identities and the attempts of states to shape and influence their formation and transformation through the tools of memory policies, we analyse the transformation of the official memorial discourse. The paper analyses in detail the essence of Ukrainian memory policies, the influence of the decommunisation paradigm, and the impact on the memory entrepreneurs. Finally, it contains specific policy recommendations regarding possible changes to this public policy within particular state institutions.

Key words: official memory policy, Soviet-Afghan war, Ukraine, decommunisation, collective memory.

Introduction

The Soviet-Afghan war has remained an under-researched topic in terms of memory policies until recent years. Of the three republics of the former Soviet Union with the highest ratio of the war veterans to the population, Russia and Belarus are already integrated into the academic discussion regarding the memory policies of the war (Snegovaya, Kimmage, & McGlynn, 2023; McGlynn, 2023; Ackermann, 2017; Hoge, 2017), and the case of Ukraine is just entering this path (as Glew, 2021). However, the war is most of all on the margins in Ukraine itself, where it has not been rethought for years. In its 2014 invasion of Ukraine, Russia framed it also through the cliché of "internationalist warriors" (Matsyshyna, 2018), which was traditionally associated with the aggressive practices of the Soviet Union, especially the 1979-89 war in Afghanistan. At the same time, significant numbers of Ukrainian veterans of Afghanistan have fought to defend Ukraine since the first days of the invasion in 2014 and till now (Ukrinform, 2022). This draws the focus back to the silent experience of the past and the need to understand how the state can deal with it. Since the beginning of decommunisation, there has been no research that has sought to examine the broader framework of official memory policies regarding this war in Ukraine and analyse the impact of decommunisation paradigms on it. Accordingly, the paper aims to close the gap in the analysis of Ukraine's memory policies on the war in Afghanistan, to contribute to the decommunisation discussion and to build a bridge from memory policy theory to actionable policy recommendations for Ukraine's memory policies on the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

Research design - exploratory. This design was chosen due to the need to conduct in-depth research on the case of such a policy in the context of Ukraine. The design allows for the collection and interpretation of as many sources as possible to gain an understanding of the

processes behind them. The methodology that enables us to address the problem is mixed methods (Given, 2008) with a focus on qualitative methodology, especially discourse-historical method (Titscher et al., 2000), case study (Mills et al., 2010), source critique, philosophical (Smith, 2000), CDA and narrative semiotics (Titscher et al., 2000). Such methods were chosen to work with legislation, scientific literature, media narratives, archival data, policies, and visual materials to understand the contexts of functioning and observe the processes evolving. This approach allowed for an in-depth examination of the narratives behind them and an exploration of the interconnections. As a result of the analysis, policy recommendations are then developed.

Hypothesis: Ukraine continues to reproduce within the official commemoration practices the common post-Soviet narrative on the memory policy of the 1979-89 Afghanistan war. The dependent variable is the memory policy on the Soviet-Afghan war of 1979-89 in the official Ukrainian discourse. The independent variable is the dynamics of attitudes towards 1979-89 veterans and the role of veterans in shaping memory policy regarding the war.

Structure. The paper is organised into three chapters and annexes. Chapter 1 presents the theoretical framework, which combines the topics of collective memory, group identity, and state attempts to influence them through memory policies. Chapter 2 analyses the current memory policies of Ukraine regarding the 1979-89 war, incorporating the decommunisation perspective. Chapter 3 is devoted to discussion and policy recommendations. The annexes provide a brief background that allows the described processes to be placed in a broader context.

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Chapter 1. From memory to policies

1.1 Memory and Social

"As we acquire a memory, we learn what it is that we have to remember" (Poole, 2008).

We seek a structure in the world around us and social approval of our way of understanding the world (Stern & Ondish, 2017). Memory functions as a "switchboard which organises experience both prospectively and retrospectively" through the socio-cultural component, including a person's access to a set of social schemes that influence the very formation of experience and an individual apparatus for selecting and processing facts into schemes that will determine the logic of the following steps (Erll, 2016).

Memory transmits responsibilities and obligations to the present to act in a particular way (Poole, 2008). Indeed, some duties could be perceived as a "burden", but groups accept them to open access to a better being than the alternatives (ibid). Memory is a mechanism that allows social structures to be reproduced (Assmann, 2008). It is impossible to imagine a community without this social glue, which legitimises the existing order of things through images of the past (Connerton, 1989). "The burdening chain of memory has become a fundamental condition of human life, because human beings have lost their guidance by natural instincts and are forced to replace instincts with a self-created cultural framework of orientation" (Rüsen, 2008). Memory leaves traces behind (Martin & Deutscher, 1966) of the experience of others that could endure in bodies and be transmitted through practices to later generations (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1994) or be sensed through collective bodies (Łukianow & Wells, 2024). Memory brings people into groups, remaining in their bodies as practices while simultaneously creating collective imagined bodies (Anderson, 2006).

Social is "a field of embodied, materially interwoven practices centrally organised around shared practical understandings", where "activity is embodied and that nexuses of practices are mediated by artifacts, hybrids, and natural objects" (Schatzki, 2001). Also, social is "a range of possibilities of movements and potential connections between individuals" (Gensburger & Lefranc, 2020). According to this understanding of the social as the scope of potential actions of individuals, it became clear that memory, as a part of the social realm, "depends on the way in which this social matrix evolves according to laws that are neither a matter of pure chance nor pure reproduction" (Gensburger & Lefranc, 2020).

Throughout the study, we frame social systems as "ongoing, self-reproducing arrays of shared practices" (Barnes, 2001), and our objective is to find and describe the logic behind practices (Swidler, 2001). We consider that the logic can be traced out through an analysis of social interactions, through which "narratives emerge as meaning-making articulations that both shape and are shaped by sites, agents and events. As such, they are constitutive of individual and collective identities" (Mannergren et al., 2024).

We learn what we must remember through the community's collective memory, which establishes ways of interpreting and responding to events (Poole, 2008). Memory "enables us to form an awareness of selfhood (identity), both on the personal and on the collective level" (Assmann, 2008). From the social level, "memory is a matter of communication and social interaction" (ibid). We cannot take our memory practices outside the social realm, existing in it as the boundary of interpreting the world when even "Family life… is imbricated in a collective imaginary shaped by a shared archive of stories and images, by public fantasies and projections" (Hirsch, 2019).

1.2 Collective memory and shared reality

"Control of the future demands control over the past, and leads to greater contestation over which version of the past should prevail" (Stone, 2012).

We are interested in collective memory as a way of transmitting and re-creating a group's collective identity through commemoration ceremonies and rituals (Assmann & Livingstone, 2006). For these purposes, groups use external symbols "because groups … do not 'have' a memory tend to 'make' themselves one by means of things meant as reminders such as monuments, museums, libraries, archives, and other mnemonic institutions" (Assmann, 2008). So, we frame collective memory as "a set of representations of the past that are constructed by a given social group … through a process of invention, appropriation, and selection, and which have bearings on relationships of power within society" (Stone, 2012).

The collective memory of a group is an essential part of shaping and maintaining the shared reality of a community (Hirst & Coman, 2018). Collective memory is about constant changes, as "the file of memory is never closed; it can always be reopened and reconstructed in new acts of remembering" (Assmann & Shortt, 2012). Although individuals are now involved in various collective memories through participation in different social groups, roles and systems, "there are always frames that relate memory to specific horizons of time and identity" (Assmann, 2008). Through "multiple memberships, the individual becomes an intersection of (or, to use Halbwachs's term, a 'viewpoint on') various collective identities" (Erll, 2016). A wide range of such social engagements does not diminish the value of each membership and its symbolic codes; however, it adds to the variability of interpretations.

In the social context, experience and memory can be used synonymously (ibid), especially highlighting the impact on individual deeds. Such experience-memory may not necessarily be personally lived through. Such cases could be termed a postmemory. "Postmemory" is the memory of the 'generation after' of the transmitted experience through "stories, images and behaviours" narrated and assimilated so powerfully that they have become memories for the next generation (Hirsch, 2019). In this way, we could trace the connection between

individual experience and the group's experience, which is transmitted as memories and becomes part of the individual "self".

We model ourselves, our behaviour and attitudes when we engage in social interactions "by imitating our role models, their behavior, and the implicit norms that they reveal" (Gensburger & Lefranc, 2020). Memories, as identities, do not exist in a vacuum and must constantly be re-created through symbolic group practices. One of the most essential practices within the group identity re-creation is the reproduction of acts of public commemoration in specific places. Within the study, we will refer to them as sites of memory, "places where historical remembrance happens" (Winter, 2010). Such spaces visualise the moral message by appealing to a shared sense of the past (ibid). "Constructing sites of memory is a universal social act", as well as their gradual replacement" (ibid) - they are always an ongoing process to simultaneously transmit-create collective visions of the present through the past.

Such places are in line with Halbwachs' observations that collective memory tends to unfold "within a spatial framework … each group cuts up space in order to compose, either definitively or in accordance with a set method, a fixed framework within which to enclose and retrieve its remembrances", which gives group members a sense of continuity in the face of constant change in the less stable categories around them (Halbwachs, 1950). Shortly, we could see the spatial part as a changeability with visual constancy that leaves traces in space. Here, space acts as a "kind of emanation of social processes"; it materialises the meanings and values of social groups, acting as their tangible carrier. (Kabrońska, 2017). Also, it could "capture the spatial and material dimensions of memory politics" (Mannergren et al., 2024).

Except for experiences within institutions designed around the requirement to memorise something (such as school or university), in general, "we recall information incidentally" (Echterhoff & Kopietz, 2017). However, this 'coincidence' is not entirely accidental. It is mainly rooted in certain aspects of the code-narrative of a collective memory that could indirectly shape citizens' conduct by creating templates of reactions to specific events, which tends to exclude distinct political imaginaries from the discourse (Antweiler, 2024). This is how we understand the concept of historical memory as a part of the broader collective memory. The "choice of how to remember the past necessarily involves value judgements" (Prutsch, 2015).

Historical memory generally intends to instrumentalise a chosen vision of interpreting the past to achieve the purpose within the target audience, with an appropriate frame of topics and narratives that will be relevant to this group through political (positional) and cultural (semiotic) strategies (Kubik & Bernhard, 2014). Collective memory constantly transforms, and history "is always made in the present" (ibid). Collective memory is always intertwined with selectivity in remembering, which is generally accompanied by collective selective

forgetting (Hirst & Coman, 2018). When the social frame changes, new topics become memories and previous ones are forgotten (Assmann, 2015; Assmann, 2008).

We are focusing on what is remembered at the level of state memory policies rather than on the opposition (Nora, 1989) between academic research (history) and the living memory of groups about an event (memory). Using the metaphor of memory research as an hourglass, where the upper half corresponds to the macro level (cultural-socio-political context), the narrow passage between them is the meso level (family memory), and the opposite part is individual memory (Cordonnier et al., 2022), we are interested in the macro level in the selected case studies. We believe official commemorations and policies influence grassroots memories and frame discussions, so we narrow our research to them. In particular, we are interested in the institutionalised dimension (Liahusha, 2024) of official memory. So, the study will focus on the official and institutionalised components of collective memories by analysing memory policies and contexts. We wonder how a government, in the case of a vexed issue of collective memory, such as the Soviet Union's war in Afghanistan, constructs a memory policy and how it could be enhanced.

1.3 Memory policymaking

"History is a social resource: the ways it is written, what is remembered, what is forgotten, and what is distorted, help to construct cultural and national identities" (McGlynn, 2023).

"The 'memory boom' refers to a development in which, over the last few decades, the prominence and significance of memory has risen within both the academy and society" (Simine, 2013). The 'memory boom' of the last decades has led to fundamental changes in approaches to memory management (ibid), which have become a noteworthy part of policymaking. Depending on the actors, memory can be used as 1) state politics of memory - "judicial-political administration of past events" by institutions to form a specific identity; as well as 2) a strategy that can be used by groups of players (as NGOs and international organisations), that are "usually strive for the recognition and visibility of collective processes of underground remembrance", which undermines the first type of discourse and the corresponding social order (ibid). Namely, the state dimension is at the core of our thesis, as it sets the framework for the discussion.

In this work, we understand commemoration as **"**a political process, as certain memories (and not others) are spun into a coherent story, which legitimises and de-legitimises certain actions" (Selimovic, 2013). Commemoration requires repetition, time, and even more - publicity and visibility, anchoring and reinforcing it as a norm (Swidler, 2001). The commemoration could also be interpreted as a demand of victims (at least some of them) to recognise past crimes that society has met (Mannergren et al., 2024; Lundy, 2024).

We use the term "memory entrepreneurs" to refer to "individuals and organizations that create and seize opportunities to shape collective memory—in revising historical content", simultaneously creating and promoting it (Autry, 2017). Conventionally, they could be categorised into those who 1) "create shared references" and 2) "those who strive to have them respected". (Gensburger & Lefranc, 2020). Their activities are limited by 1) the existing cultural repertoire, the break or significant change in interpretation of which is risky, and 2) the national boundaries of a particular repertoire, which usually appears as an alien outside of them (Kubik & Bernhard, 2014). Commemorating foundational events for states is an immensely "fertile ground" for them (ibid).

We use the terms "memory politics" and "memory policy" to distinguish between the fundamental processes within memory management. We use "memory politics" to emphasise the power struggle dimension of policies and "memory policy" when we focus on decisions and the cultural context of the decisions. Memory politics is always about selectivity in linking individual events into a narrative; it is never neutral and is intertwined with the context of creation and functioning (Rufer, 2012). We recognise that both concepts are closely intertwined. We chose to limit the paper to the policy level because it reduces biases while analysing the rapidly transforming political processes of the present and can be translated into solutions for implementation.

The violence of the past has the power to "shape present-day political outcomes, including political attitudes and behaviors, identities, as well as inter-personal, inter-group, and political trust" (Bakke et al., 2024). National narratives are frequently shaped around the collective memory of violent events, influencing the repertoire of acceptable options for future actions (ibid). Therefore, memory policies tend to cope with events involving systematic acts of collective violence, which often leave a noticeable imprint on collective memory and, thereby, collective identity, including cases of voluntary silencing or state censorship.

The origins of modern European memory policies can be traced back to the memorialisation of the victims of the First World War (Gensburger & Lefranc, 2020). However, the changes became widespread and institutionalised only in the 1970s. It was a time when the goal became to educate not only patriotism but also a certain 'tolerance' and to give voice to "minorities and victims" (ibid). In essence, they aimed to start a comprehensive work with collective historical traumas through the tools of policies. These processes overlap with the general trend of presenting memory from the perspective of the victim or "victim-centred memory culture .. with victimhood narratives replacing triumphalist stories of victors or resisters" (Bekus, 2022), which can pose a danger to a holistic understanding of the context (Gensburger & Lefranc, 2020).

The following are common to modern memory policies (Gensburger & Lefranc, 2020):

1) the desire to evoke a strong emotion - "They want the past to be discussed" (ibid).
2) targeting individuals rather than groups. Both from the perspective of storytelling through exceptional cases (mainly - a particular victim) and by designing for the individual recipient rather than a particular group.
3) creating a space for dialogue between professionals in the field of memory as knowledge to develop a "dialogue of truths".
4) commemorative activities (ibid).
5) "The political crimes that are the object of memory policies are rarely subject to legal proceedings" (Gensburger & Lefranc, 2020).

The basic assumption of the majority of the memory policies is: 1) by learning the 'lessons' of the past, individuals will get 2) knowledge that will 3) influence their future behaviour, namely, will not do and discourage others from harmful actions that caused the emergence of the memory policy (ibid). Although the researchers believe that "the hypothesis that 'forgetting means being condemned to repeat' is more a political argument than a psychological principle" (ibid), such policies are being implemented further. They are often strengthened/carried out by adopting special laws that attempt to re-define the status quo. Such laws are generally called memory laws.

We conceptualise memory laws as memory policies written in legal language. They similarly aim to change behaviour, just through different incentives. "Memory laws' enshrine state-approved interpretations of crucial historical events and promote certain narratives about the past" (Council of Europe, 2018). More broadly, they could be described as: "laws or resolutions adopted by national or supranational institutions, which govern the interpretation of historical events" (Ledoux, 2022). These laws in the 1980s replaced the "policy of forgetting" that had remained in force since the end of the Second World War and set precedents for "judicialisation and a memorialisation of the past classed as criminal" (ibid). What these laws in Europe have in common is 1) a shift in narrative from debt to heroes to the memorialisation of civilian victims, 2) an attempt to pacify nation-states and cultivate democratic values through such laws, and 3) a bigger purpose to create a common European identity through memory (ibid) or a "culture of remembrance", where the national memory component will be combined with "embracing common European principles and values" (Prutsch, 2015).

In 2017, such laws were implemented in more than 20 European countries, as well as in Israel and Rwanda (Koposov, 2017). This study will be concerned with the "Western" world, where most of these laws, including Ukrainian ones, operate. Such memory laws may be divided into Western European-North American and Eastern-Central European groups (ibid). The first group emerged as a result of post-Cold War political consensus; their design is mainly determined by the "Holocaust-and-heritage paradigm", here the emphasis is on the Holocaust "embodies the notion of state repentance for the crimes of the past" and a distinctive dedication to heritage "allows the creation of a more positive attitude toward

the national past" (ibid). The second group is characterised by the continuing challenges of dealing with the aftermath of communism and struggles to restore national narratives after the collapse of the Soviet empire (ibid; Prutsch, 2015; Dujisin, 2021; Merewether, 2021; Ryabenko & Kohut, 2017; Kołodziejczyk & Huigen, 2023) with the strengthening of the securitisation dimension, i.e. explanations of "the control over the national historical narrative as a matter of national sovereignty" (Zhurzhenko, 2022).

Memory policies do not exist in a vacuum (McGlynn & Đureinović, 2022). In response to existing policies, their implementers can choose a wide range of reactions, from mutual reinforcement in the logic of the memory alliance to the forceful resolution of contradictions (see Bekus, 2022). We introduce memory war and diplomacy concepts to distinguish between these multi-vector processes.

We understand memory/mnemonic war as "a set of political technologies that involve manipulating the mechanisms of memorization and oblivion … in order to mobilise potential electorate in support of mass political actions" (Motenko, n.d.). Practices and technologies here include the whole spectrum, from those permitted by law to the most aggressive solutions, such as falsification of primary sources or forced settlement (ibid). For memory wars, it is essential to have 'the conflict over competing visions of the past' (McGlynn & Đureinović, 2022), for instance, in Russian wars of memory regarding the Second World War (Sikora, 2020). Within them, Moscow attempted to impose a vision of the Soviet army's activities in Europe as liberation rather than occupation for more than 50 years, which "allows Moscow to whitewash its past crimes, while continuing to stand on a moral pedestal" (ibid).

We conceptualise memory diplomacy as "a form of public diplomacy in which states or political groups try to improve relations and reputations by exporting commemorative practices and historical narratives and by allying their own historical narratives with those of another country" (McGlynn, 2023). Memory diplomacy can be combined with memory wars through creation "a mnemonic coalition within a memory war" (ibid). Memory diplomacy implies, if not an equal exchange of narratives, then at least "mutual two-way engagement" (ibid). The primary aspiration for such efforts is to find/create "agreed narratives of the past" (ibid). For memory diplomacy to work, both sides must perceive memory engagement as a mutual arrangement where it is possible to combine foreign narratives with their own, and there is a willingness to engage in a broad exchange, including commemorative practices (ibid). The following sections will examine how these concepts could help to understand Ukrainian memory policies regarding the 1979-89 Soviet war in Afghanistan.

1.4 The 1979-89 War as a case

Eastern Europe, as a region, is one of the most striking cases of the challenges and attempts to find solutions to a list of collective traumas. Even in the last century alone, the systematic nature of large-scale violence (occupations, wars, repressions, massacres, famines, revolutions) raises a list of complex questions about how to respond to the challenges of a difficult past (Wylegała, 2017). What will be the most traumatic experience of the 20th century for the region, which is supposed to be reflected as not so far in time, had a systematic violent nature, lasted for decades, and will unite Ukraine, Poland, Belarus, Estonia, Hungary, Moldova, Latvia, and several other geographically close countries? The answer is likely the Soviet occupation (Besemeres, 2016; Applebaum, 2012; Hoptner, 1954; Bunce, 1985).

As discussed above, memory policies are created mainly in response to widespread, systematic violence cases. The last major crime of the Soviet Union in the second half of the 20th century, both by time frames as the most prolonged military conflict of the USSR (Behrends, 2015) and casualties (Nawroz & Grau, 1996), was the occupation of Afghanistan. As a result of the 10-year war, more than a million Afghans were killed, 5.5 million became refugees, and 2 million were internally displaced (ibid). According to the population data for 1979 (World Bank, 2025), which is the beginning of the invasion, more than 50% of the country's inhabitants became refugees or internally displaced persons, and approximately 1/13 were killed. By destroying entire populated areas, the Soviet Union sought to eliminate the social, religious, cultural and economic life of the whole country to control the state through the infamously unpopular communist party - PDPA (Kamrany, 1986; Hashimy, 2024; Formoli, 1995).

The military defeat in Afghanistan is considered to be one of the essential factors that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union due to its complex impact on the legitimacy and perception of the basic Soviet structures (such as the Communist Party and Read army), their conflict, and the emergence of new forms of political participation (Reuveny & Prakash, 1999). After the withdrawal in 1989 of Soviet troops, the loyal government managed to hold out until 1992, when it was overthrown (Kadykało, 2015). For additional information (the historical context, analysis of decisions, and war results), please see Annexes.

As a result of the 1989 withdrawal, hundreds of thousands of soviet soldiers returned to a rapidly collapsing country. They "return home without the benefits of parades or popular acclaim" (CIA, 1988) and were: "unwanted, useless, not only for the authorities but also for the whole society" (Kadykało, 2015). In 1991, the Soviet Union dissolved, and the national independent states were formed, and they coped with the memory policies in different ways. Considering the theory described above, it is expected that due to the duration of almost 10 years (the longest war for the Soviet Union), the large number of Soviet soldiers (from 650,000 to one million), the closeness in time, and the impact, including the weakening of the entire Soviet Union, this war should be a noticeable topic for reflection within the national canons of memory of the countries from which most combatants came.

The majority of over 650,000 Soviet veterans of the war in Afghanistan (Kamrany, 1986; Nawroz & Grau, 1996; Braithwaite, 2022) came from three former republics - Ukraine, Russia and Belarus - 160,000 (President of Ukraine, 2020), 500,000 (McVicker, 2018) and 30,000 (TASS, 2024), respectively. It is important to put this data in context, so we will analyse what percentage of the total population of these countries is represented by the group of Afghanistan veterans. For the analysis, we chose 2015 as the beginning of institutionalised decommunisation in Ukraine and examined the population of the countries (World Bank, 2025). For 2015, the situation was: Ukraine - 0.349% (of the total population), Russia - 0.346% and Belarus - 0.317%. A visualisation of the data is available in the Annexes. Given the relatively close percentage of the total population, it becomes easier to understand why these countries are chosen as cases for analysis regarding the 1979-89 War memory policies.

It is important to note that the memory policies of the war in Afghanistan for all three countries are intertwined with the topic of the Second World War. It has been a space for merging memory policy and politics for decades. "In all three countries, memories of the war have been central in post-Soviet identity making; yet they demonstrate very different trajectories of nation-building and memory regimes" (Fedor et al., 2017). Since 2005, the memory policies of Belarus and Russia regarding the war in Afghanistan have already incorporated it into the myth of the Great Patriotic War, which is the cornerstone of their identity (ibid), thereby turning veterans of the 1979-89 war into heirs of "victory" and Afghan veterans' organisations into pillars of the ruling regimes (Snegovaya, Kimmage, & McGlynn, 2023; McGlynn, 2023; Ackermann, 2017; Hoge, 2017).

The literature on the memory policies of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan is well-examined for Russia and Belarus. We provide an overview of this debate in the Annexes. But what about Ukrainian memory policies and the 1979-89 war? Few (as Glew, 2021) articles focused on sites of memory without moving to the level of policies, with no analysis of the impact of decolonisation processes and minimal references to actual decommunisation practices.

Chapter 2. Ukrainian memory policies regarding the Soviet-Afghan war, 1979-89

2.1 Decommunisation as a cornerstone of Ukrainian Memory Policy

"Imaginaries are the result of all types of social intersections and relations of power over time. Memory policies translate part of those imaginaries into a specific discourse, while sometimes also trying to modify them" (Vázquez-Liñán, 2017).

Decommunisation is the main memory policy for modern Ukraine. It is understood as a process of reclaiming national history, preserving the memory of totalitarianism and its

victims (especially the Soviet one), and restoring the memory of the censored or distorted, which is intended to expand to as many areas as possible and lead to changes and re-awareness of values in society (RPR, 2025; RPR, n.d.; UINR, n.d.). The policy aims to reveal the hidden for discussion and reconsideration, making it valuable even at the process level (Vodotyka, 2017). Decommunisation in Ukraine is realised less through revising historiographical narratives, cultural canons, and, more frequently, through topographical renaming and purification of symbolic spaces (Hundorova, 2024; Shlipchenko, 2017). Since 2015, the policy implementation has led to more than 50,000 renamed streets, thousands of toponyms and the dismantling of more than 2,000 totalitarian monuments (UINR, 2016; UINR, 2020; Transparency International Ukraine, 2023).

The policy aligns with the Charter 1 framework of memory policies in East-Central Europe, aiming to overcome the legacies of the USSR and protect national narratives, which may lead to the spring of new civic identities. The post-1989 radical regime change in Eastern Europe led, among other things, to the "reformulation of collective identities and the introduction or reinvigoration of the principles of legitimizing power" (Kubik & Bernhard, 2014). The sprouts of decommunisation can be found since Ukraine regained its independence (Merewether, 2021). Already in 1991, 14 stations of the Kyiv subway were renamed, and the monument to the October Revolution on Maidan Nezalezhnosti was dismantled (UINR, 2020). Leonid Kravchuk's presidency marks the beginning of the movement towards nation-building and nationalisation of history (Törnquist-Plewa & Yurchuk, 2017; Kravchenko, 2015).

Simultaneously, a struggle between two narratives is crystallising, where "one post-Soviet, strongly influenced by the Soviet-era Russocentric and procommunist interpretation of the past, the other ethnonational, with strong anticommunist and often anti-Russian overtones rooted in the nationalist resistance to Soviet rule during and after World War II" (Plokhy, 2017). In other words, these are narratives of "the post-Soviet territorial one, and the anti-Soviet pro-independence one" (Stryjek & Konieczna-Sałamatin, 2021) between which balanced to maintain the status quo (Kravchenko, 2015). Due to the nature of the elites, the lack of fundamental revisions of the USSR's heritage within state policies, and closeness to Russia and its influence, Ukraine has long remained lost in the transition of the post-Soviet era, symbolically preserving the norms, values, and pantheon of the Soviet Union (ibid).

After the sporadic decommunisation of Leonid Kravchuk and the balancing acts of Leonid Kuchma, as a consequence of the Orange Revolution 2004, Viktor Yushchenko actively implemented new memory policies in Ukraine (UINR, 2020). This included the recognition of the Holodomor as a genocide of the Ukrainians, as well as the shift in perceptions of the Second World War and the role of the UPA insurgents in history (ibid). That was the first systematic effort to re-evaluate Soviet heritage at the state level (Törnquist-Plewa & Yurchuk, 2017). Following these memory policies, researchers have noted the rise of a sustainable link between politics and memory in Ukraine with a strong regional context

(Plokhy, 2017). In the 2010s, decommunisation policies fell to the margins, which seems to be explained by the views of President Viktor Yanukovych and his winning coalition, attempting to form an eclectic identity similar to the presidency of Leonid Kuchma, whose political culture is sometimes compared to Brezhnev's (Kravchenko, 2015).

"In the course of the 1990s, close to 2,000 Lenin monuments had been demolished in the Western regions of Galicia and Volhynia. The process continued into the next decade, spilling over into the Center. In those two macro-regions more than 1,200 statues were removed in the 2000s. Compared to those figures, the Leninfall, which accounted for about 550 statues, was a rather modest development" (Plokhy, 2017). The fall of the Soviet idols here marks the victory of the national narrative over the communist-Soviet one, with growing public support for the condemnation of communist crimes (ibid). Therefore, decommunisation began extensively in the western part of Ukraine in the 1990s, gradually spreading to the central part in the 2000s, and after 2014, it became a new order (Glew, 2021).

As a result of the "Euromaidan victory and by Russia's aggression" (Shevel, 2016), decommunisation returned to the centre of public policymaking. In its contemporary version, the first stage of non-institutionalised decommunisation could be framed as a 'Lenninfall' as a spontaneous process of mass, grassroots initiatives to demolish monuments associated with the Soviet Union's legacy in Ukraine (Rozenas & Vlasenko, 2022). The rapid vanishing of various Lenins from public spaces "indicated the weakening power status of the Soviet legacy parties" (ibid). After 2014, under the presidency of Petro Poroshenko, Ukrainian memory policy abandoned the balancing act between post-Soviet and anti-Soviet narratives and chose the latter (Stryjek & Konieczna-Sałamatin, 2021). "The Eurorevolution implied the true end of the Soviet system and the beginning of genuine Ukrainian sovereignty" (Törnquist-Plewa & Yurchuk, 2017), and the acuteness of the rejection of the Soviet as opposed to the national was only exacerbated by Russia's war against Ukraine, which ended the existence of the post-Soviet space (Hundorova, 2024). Indeed, Ukrainian debates around the Soviet heritage cannot be separated from the wars of memory with Russia (Koposov, 2017), particularly because of Russia's war against Ukraine's national project (Bekus, 2022).

Decommunisation as a state memory policy was criticised from the first days of its existence by media, political parties, academics, and foreign states, with simultaneous challenges in gaining support among the population (ibid, Zhurzhenko, 2022; Hyde, 2015; Pain, 2016; Törnquist-Plewa & Yurchuk, 2017; Razumkov Centre, 2016). Essentially, each player created a decommunisation concept and evaluated it depending on their political preferences (ibid), leading to the most obscure interpretations (Hrytsenko, 2020). However, the step-by-step adoption, publicity, involvement of actors from multiple fields, an active policy of revealing USSR crimes, and the context of war with the primary guardian of the Soviet legacy have significantly influenced the perception of decommunisation (Oliinyk,

2017). We can consider this to be one of the consequences of the identity transformation in Ukraine. Sociological surveys captured a gradual process of identity change among Ukrainian citizens between 2005 and 2016 when a national identity gained ground over local and regional identities, and support for decommunisation slowly strengthened (Razumkov Centre, 2016).

The year of the ultimate turning point was 2022 when the positive perception of the collapse of the Soviet Union increased to 67% of all respondents; 59% of respondents supported the condemnation of the USSR as a totalitarian regime, and 57% supported the idea of renaming the toponyms associated with Russia, the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire (DIF, 2022). Decommunisation has become a policy with significant support among the majority of Ukrainian society, intellectuals, and political parties, and it has been steadily implemented since 2015.

In 2019, the Constitutional Court of Ukraine finally put an end to the debate on the legality of decommunisation from the perspective of Ukrainian legislation by recognising it as constitutional Law № 317-VIII, which caused perhaps the most controversies with the equating and banning of symbols of the communist and Nazi regimes (Constitutional Court of Ukraine, 2019). In addition to the inhumane nature of the regime itself, the judges mentioned in the verdict the aggressive wars it had waged, but without specifying details (ibid). Therefore, the judge's separate opinion added to this verdict is especially interesting, detailing the practice (Kolisnyk, 2019). Among the others, the judge also mentioned the 1979 war in the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (ibid).

In this section, we outline decommunisation as the primary memory policy in post-2014 Ukraine, which sets the framework for understanding other memory policies. In section 2.3, we will examine how it influences-frames-intersects the official memory policy of the Afghan-Soviet war in Ukraine in practice.

2.2 The Dawn of Ukrainian Independence and Veterans of the Afghanistan War

"Collective traumas … can mark new beginnings for political life when new discourses and new identities are formed" (Budrytė, 2020).

Based on extracts from the archives, the late Soviet policies regarding the 1979-89 War veterns were characterised by (Central State Archive of Public Organisations and Ukrainics, n.d.):

1) involvement of veterans of the war in Afghanistan in propaganda (the so-called ideological and political education) in the USSR.

2) the policy of priority housing provision. This category, along with World War II veterans, was the best provided with housing, but it still had a waiting list of years, including families who had been waiting in line for 10 years in 1990.
3) social benefits package: admission to higher education institutions, treatment in health centres, and other state-paid benefits.
4) the later discussion in Perestroika newspapers about the formal attitude towards veterans of 1979-89 and the growing critical assessment of the war.
5) The problem of veterans' awareness of their rights and benefits and the lack of active commemoration of the dead.
6) lack of support for veterans after their return, which leads to their involvement in illegal activities (ibid).

Afghan veterans aspired to receive equal legislative recognition and rights in the USSR as veterans of the Second World War, with the subsequent development of an expanded legislative framework for their needs (Ostrovyk, 2021). In addition to benefits and social packages, the late Soviet Union tried to include active Afghan veterans in party activities, possibly to exploit the potential of the concept of military brotherhood between nations that developed during the 1979-89 war (Levchuk, 2016). Among other things, this was implemented through the election of the representatives as delegates to the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR, as in the case of Chervonopyskyi, who would later become the head of the largest Ukrainian organisation of Afghanistan veterans - the Ukrainian Union of Afghanistan Veterans (UUAV) in 1990 and has been leading it unchanged since then (ibid).

Ukraine inherited from the USSR the challenge of veterans of the 1979-89 war, their organisations, and the practices of cooperation with them. What characterises the memory policy regarding the war is that Afghans have been and remain the main initiators and implementers of it, from the installation of monuments in Ukraine since 1989 to their organisations, such as UUAV, which dates back to 1987, and the Chernihiv City Club of Afghanistan Veterans (Matsyshyna, 2018). In mid-1989, there were at least 200 Afghanistan veterans' associations in Ukraine (Ablazov, 2019). However, only the UUAV has since the 1990s become a single national organisation that owns numerous businesses, runs hospitals, has its own newspaper, and influences the construction of numerous monuments (Chervonopyskyi, 2006; National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting, 2023). For the 2016, the organisation had 140000 members (Ablazov, 2019). The goals of the organisation are defined as: 1) comprehensive social protection of veterans and families of the fallen; 2) memorialisation of the fallen; and 3) educational work with youth (Ablazov, 2019).

Between 1992 and 2022, about 45,000 Ukrainian soldiers participated in 36 peacekeeping operations around the world, 55 of whom were killed (General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, 2021; Ponomarenko, 2022; Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, n.d.). For comparison,

in 1979-89, about 160,000 Ukrainians (President of Ukraine, 2020) took part in the war in Afghanistan as part of the Soviet occupation army, of whom about 3,000 were killed and 5,000 were invalided out (UINR, 2024c). Until 2014, participants of the 1979-89 war were the largest group of veterans in Ukraine, and their main organisation, UUAV played a key role in developing veterans' policy in Ukraine and its active lobbying at the state level (Brus & Pashkina, 2024). For veterans of this war, a memorable medal was created to mark the 25th anniversary of the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan (President of Ukraine, 2014). On the eve of the Revolution of Dignity, President Viktor Yanukovych declared 2014 the Year of Participants in Combat Operations on the Territory of Other States to mark the 25th anniversary of the withdrawal from Afghanistan (President of Ukraine, 2013). The decision was not realised due to the general changes.

For decommunisation, we can identify a spectrum of stakeholders (Oliinyk, 2017) and, upon closer examination, distinguish between them a list of national and transnational memory entrepreneurs who gain certain benefits from their active involvement in the implementation, obstruction, or criticism of such policies. The same cannot be said about the topic of the memory of the war in Afghanistan, which remains shrouded in shadows. After performing the analysis, we have concluded that today, the UUAV remains the main, essentially the only, sustainable (over 25 years of institutionalised existence) and very powerful memory entrepreneur in this field.

Entire policies, decrees, resolutions and amendments to laws were created to suit its needs, which were directly influenced by the close relationship between the UUAV leadership and the state since 1991, which turned into privileges and benefits for the organisation's members (Levchuk, 2016; Levchuk, 2009; Ukrainian Union of Veterans of Afghanistan, 2017; Ablazov, 2019). President Leonid Kravchuk issued a decree designed exclusively to support the activities of UUAV (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1993). In the same year, they received unprecedented state support through a separate resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on assistance to the organisation, which included the allocation of 690 million carboranes for the organisation's enterprises for the year, the removal of part of the taxes for UUAV enterprises, an order to the Armed Forces to transfer a list of premises vacated after the reduction of the army for use by the organisation, the transfer of the 800-bed sanatorium in Yevpatoria and a military hospital to the management of the organisation, and support for the construction of a memorial to the fallen in Kyiv. However, due to violations of the organisation's enterprises (the number reached a hundred in 1990-93), some benefits, such as the abolition of income tax, were withdrawn in 1994, although most remained unchanged (Levchuk, 2009).

A few more facts that we believe stress the power of this memory entrepreneur and its involvement in the state processes. In 1992, the UUAV had its political party (Levchuk, 2016). The head of the organisation, who has remained unchanged since the organisation's foundation, was promoted to general in 1999 by the Kuchma, became a deputy of the

Verkhovna Rada in 2006, received an order in 2009 from Putin, and the highest state award - the Order of Hero of Ukraine in 2012 from Yanukovych (Levchuk, 2009; Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1999; Chesno, n.d.; Press-Service of the UUAV, 2009; President of Ukraine, 2012). Therefore, both the head of the organisation and the organisation as a whole have been successful in creating and using their symbolic capital.

After the Maidan, there were very few references to the organisation and the topic in general. However, in 2021, news emerged of a visit by members of the organisation to the Office of the President and meetings with numerous government officials (Office of the President of Ukraine, 2021). It seems that the visit was successful. In 2023, the Office appealed to the heads of regional administrations and the Kyiv City State Administration to celebrate 15 February as the Day of Honouring Participants in Combat Operations on the Territory of Other States (UUAV, 2023). There is a list of tasks, ranging from ensuring that veterans of Afghanistan who are currently volunteering or fighting against Russia appear in the media and are highlighted in stories to their involvement in military-patriotic education of young people and professional training of military units (ibid). The following deadline for reporting to the Office on the actions taken raises questions about the level of mandatory nature of the activities (ibid). In the context of the relationship between the UUAV and the state from the 1990s, the question of what they have offered in return to the authorities over the decades to receive such unprecedented support remains open and requires separate research.

It was also on the initiative of the UUAV that the 2004 Decree, supported by President Kuchma, was issued, which defined February 15 as the Day of Honoring Participants in Combat Operations on the Territory of Other States, which is dedicated to the day of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan (UUAV, 2017). It is also reflected in the document, although the organisation's name is not mentioned (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2004a). In short, Afghanistan veterans, through the UUAV organisation, have been integrated into Ukrainian political life since the first years of independence and have had an undeniable impact on a number of state policies towards them, including the dimension of memory.

2.3 Ukrainian memory policies regarding the war in Afghanistan, 1991 - 2025

"By narration time gains sense. Narratives transform the past into history; they combine experience and expectation—the two main time dimensions of human life" (Rüsen, 2008).

We will define the Ukrainian memory policy on the Soviet-Afghan war of 1979-89 by analysing 1) sites of memory and commemorative practices therein; 2) the impact of decommunisation on the memory policy, which will enable us to gain a holistic perspective on the symbolic field, commemorative practices, decommunisation influences and

narratives, so enable us to answer the question How does Ukraine remember the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979-89?

1) Sites of Memory & Commemoration

We consider the urban space as a structured memory system designed to enable outsiders to become community members (Shlipchenko, 2017). Re-evaluation of such a symbolic landscape presupposes debates and redefinition of the values that constitute the backbone of the city's spaces, so redefinition is a rewriting of how a community "imagines itself" and transmits it (ibid). One of the relatively predictable solutions to complement such a symbolic space is to create a site of memory to evoke a specific image in the collective memory. The goal is primarily achieved through erecting monuments around which public commemorations will be held at a given time.

Since 1991, Afghan veterans' organisations have been actively lobbying to construct as many memorials as possible (Glew, 2021). As a result, in 2014, the organisation's newspaper reported on the erection-existence of 457 monuments and 1274 memorial plaques in Ukraine; however, they had mentioned the facts of vandalism regarding the monuments in Kyiv, Lviv and Odesa regions (Tretij Tost, 2014), which may indicate an ambivalent perception of them. Each of the monuments manifests the consensus reached by the actors, even the location of which "is guided by the symbolic potency of different sites in the urban landscape and their availability", so all "locations of Afghan memorials are a result of often prolonged and emotionally charged negotiations between the veterans (the main interested party) and local authorities (who are responsible for issuing official permits for the use of public land)" (Glew, 2021). Space is limited, especially appropriate for memorialisation purposes. This has led to multiple cases of layering several events into a single memorial. Prevalent were cases of combining memorials to the Chornobyl nuclear disaster liquidators and the Afghan War (see Dumskaya, 2017; UUAV, n.d.), but this could also be combined with veterans of the ATO (Ratne Rayon, 2018). Through memorialisation, veterans often sought to get a tool to create a positive status for living veterans (Tartakovska & Rozhdestvenskaya, 2016).

Memorials to the Great Patriotic War have had a tremendous influence on Soviet-Afghan war memorials (Glew, 2021). That included the creation of these memorials alongside the first ones, where such positioning was a demand of veterans of the 1979-89 war and was occasionally communicated as creating a sense of continuity between Afghanistan veterans and the war that remained narratively dominant (ibid; Behrends, 2015). From the perspective of narratives, monuments could include simultaneously "mourning over the loss of their comrades, but they also wanted to emphasize that they were true to their military oath and did their best to obey orders, even though the war itself was unjustified … Such narratives were common for the post-Soviet commemoration of the Afghan war, which was characterized by emphasis on the ideas of duty, honour, and comradeship" (ibid).

Due to such policies, Ukrainian cities continued to recreate Soviet heritage for decades by "addressing the 'blank spots" in the collective memory and narratives of the previous regime, including through a lack of critical attitude to the numerous Soviet-Afgan war veterans' memorials (Kravchenko, 2015).

Regarding Afghan museum practices related to the 1979-89 war, the theme of losses often surfaced and was justified through the clichés of duty (international, to the homeland), which were subsequently dissolved into the concept of patriotism and then united under the concept of military brotherhood (Tartakovska & Rozhdestvenskaya, 2016). Afghan museums were notoriously attached to constructing a narrative of sacrifice for the sake of future generations, which addressed the problem of the inability to apply the classical repertoire of defending the fatherland to the 1979-89 war (ibid). Such frames tended to glorify the self-worth of the heroic deed while excluding it from the context of its performance, as well as blurring the relationship between the victim and the aggressor (ibid). In this way, veterans of the 1979-89 war became both the innocent victims of Soviet state policy and self-sacrificing heroes (ibid). Meanwhile, they tried to obtain public recognition of their symbolic inheritance of the sacredness associated with the post-Soviet image of veterans of the so-called Great Patriotic War (ibid). Such activities could be seen as an example of the "Layering strategy," which refers to "the combining or mixing of a commemoration of one event with the cultivation of memories of another event or events" (Kubik & Bernhard, 2014).

As a result of such layering practices, in 2018, the public imaginary in Ukraine could find a chain of heroes from World War II veterans to Afghanistan veterans and Chornobyl liquidators to those who died in the Anti-Terrorist Operation (Matsyshyna, 2018). This has raised severe concerns about the generalised image of heroism and the equal status of the fallen in such dissimilar contexts (ibid).

Since 2004, Ukraine has celebrated the Day of Honouring Participants in Combat Operations on the Territory of Other States on 15 February. This name refers to a day of commemorative practices of the 1979-89 war, in which the state keeps reproducing the "Afghan narrative. Usually, the day includes memorial ceremonies for the fallen, with the laying of flower compositions by representatives of different levels of government, together with representatives of Afghan veterans' organisations and clergy, at memorials dedicated to the Afghan war, requiem rallies, and meetings with combatants (Ukrinform, 2022; Ukrinform, 2018). An equally important practice is the "awarding to the date" of Afghan war veterans, which has been a common practice for years and presidents (see President of Ukraine, 2018; President of Ukraine, 2019, etc.) and even awards exclusively for members of the already mentioned UUAV (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2004b). Moreover, a prominent part of it is the laying of flowers by the President, who is the ultimate player in any policy in the Ukrainian context, at the Memorial Complex in memory of Ukrainian

soldiers fallen in Afghanistan near the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra in Kyiv. Often, it is accompanied by a speech.

2) *Decommunisation and the War*

Has there been a decommunisation shift in the memory policy of the Soviet-Afghan War, 1979-89? As outlined above, its first stage of clearing symbolic spaces and changing place names has been systematically implemented since 2015. According to the UINR's explanations of the decommunisation legislation, 93 names were recognised as such that the objects associated with them were subject to renaming/dismantling following the condemnation of the communist and Nazi totalitarian regimes (UINR, 2015). Among them are the 'Soldiers-Internationalists', a cliché used by the Soviet authorities for aggressive operations outside the USSR, including the invasions of Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Afghanistan in 1979 (ibid). The removal of such objects from public space was seen as part of overcoming the totalitarian past and refusing to glorify its pantheon through symbolic spaces (ibid). However, the implementation of decommunisation policies concerning the 1979-89 war was different. For this Soviet crime, decommunisation as a memory policy did not become a practice in Ukraine.

In light of the state's officially acknowledged interpretation of the Soviet War in Afghanistan (condemnation as a imperial war), monuments to "soldiers-internationalists" who implemented the Soviet Union's totalitarian policy abroad were part of Soviet myth-making and even contemporary Russian instrumentalisation during the war with Ukraine, expected not to be located in public Ukrainian spaces (UINR, 2022a; MCSCU, 2022). Only in cases of significant historical and artistic value should they have been transferred to museums, with the appropriate context provided to visitors within exhibitions (ibid). However, something has gone awry here, and even more monuments to this war are being erected to this day (Suspilne Ternopil, 2021; Encyclopedia of Nosivka, 2015; Ratne Rayon, 2018; Kyiv City State Administration, 2019; Synytska, 2023).

The most straightforward approach to noticing the mismatch between decommunisation theory and practice regarding this war is to open Google Maps and search for "soldiers-internationalists" (воїнів-інтернаціоналістів), a legally banned term from public spaces. As a result, a list of contemporary toponyms will be formed. For example, there will be a public park which is located in the Darnytskyi district of Kyiv. Even during the full-scale invasion, the attempt to rename it in honour of a volunteer who died in the current war with Russia was unsuccessful (Kyiv City Council, 2024). The only thing that changed in this park was that in 2024, an armoured vehicle, recognised as an example of Soviet militarism, was removed from its pedestal and transferred to the needs of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, with a promise to return it after the victory (Suspilne, 2024). Any shifts, if any, in the symbolic dimension of memory around this war are taking place in the same completely uncoherent way.

To refocus on the Soviet war in Afghanistan as an imperial instrument, the UINR organised a roundtable in 2024 (UINR, 2024b) on the Soviet-Afghan war. It is the sole event in years dedicated to an attempt at dialogue and rethinking the forgotten war (Our 30. Living History, 2021). The initiative led to emotional discussions with representatives of Afghan organisations (UINR, 2024e). The risk of being deprived of some benefits or/and symbolic capital evokes a hostile reaction and appeal to living memories (ibid). In this case, Afghan organisations act not only as memory entrepreneurs but also as gatekeepers, which "may prevent more meaningful change from happening as it might threaten their power base" (Mannergren et al., 2024). A consensus was reached to abandon the phrase "international debt" because of its use as a justification for an aggressive war on the territory of an independent state and its modern connotations, where Russia also applies the same cliché to its aggressions; to remove these phrase from memorial sites, while preserving the sites; and to rename streets with generic names after specific victims (UINR, 2024e). In essence, to distinguish between the aggressive policy of the USSR and the need to support and honour the community of Afghan war veterans (ibid). To summarise, the decommunisation of memory policies regarding the Afghanistan war has not yet occurred, and the first step (a single roundtable) is too vague to indicate the beginning of anything more than the prolongation of the status quo of early independence.

3) Ukrainian memory policy regarding the Soviet-Afghan war, 1979-89

- From the perspective of sites of memory, the numerous monuments and selected Afghan museums were significantly influenced by the traditions of Soviet memorialisation of the "Great Patriotic War" (location, narratives, compositions). The overall intention over the years has been to obtain a symbolic succession to the recognised veterans of the Great Patriotic War. Main narratives: heroism and/or mourning. Avoidance of debates on the assessment and re-evaluation of the war, its course and results, as well as the place of veterans as subjects in that violent past. Additionally, we observed the phenomenon of 'alliances' between different social groups, which often memorialise several events in a single object (most frequently, Afghanistan, Chornobyl, and the ATO) within a layering logic. Generally, it is all about the Soviet legacies that have not been rethought, so they persist over time through constant practice.

- The existence of a sustainable, influential, and close-to-government organisation for Afghanistan veterans - UUAV. Founded even before Ukraine's independence, it still acts as the primary memory entrepreneur in the field and potentially serves as a gatekeeper for the reconceptualisation of this war. The UUAV is a main creator of policies and interpretations in the domain, not to mention the grassroots but the coordinated erection of hundreds of memorials dedicated to Afghanistan and a defender of benefits for veterans of the 1979-89 era. The organisation creates

practices and contributes significantly to the state's policies, often more so than the state itself.

- Weak state agency to change the memory policy of this war. There is a lack of consistent implementation of the decommunisation paradigm even at the level of objects that should be renamed or dismantled under the existing law, not to mention any deeper discussions or decisions. There was only one roundtable discussion by UINR on the topic without any further steps.

- The public failure to discuss the war, from the censorship of the Soviet era to the gradual forgetting of early independence. The absence of critical and comprehensive analysis, national educational promotional campaigns, and academic research has contributed to the maintenance of the status quo. Hovewer, the general context of shifting identities after 2022, there was widespread support for the use of decolonisation rethinking to the war.

We conclude that Ukraine now remembers the post-Soviet myth of heroism-mourning, which functions in the space of existing memory sites, is supported and produced by the main memory entrepreneur (UUAV), fuelled by annual commercial practices involving top state officials, and has not passed the stage of critical analysis in society. This is likely due to 1) the presence of powerful gatekeepers, 2) the fallout from more prominent topics (World War II), 3) the lack of coordinated action in the field of memory of this war, 4) the combination of several "layering" events in one memorial. Given the changes in the context after 2014 and 2022, the perception of this war has shifted to an imperial war, which necessitates a more active process of official reevaluation at both the policy and practice levels by the state. Sociology indicates that society is ready to view this war as one of the subjects for deconstructing post-Soviet heroism as part of the decommunisation process. By 2024, 74.2% of respondents consider the Soviet-Afghan war to be an imperial war perpetrated by the communist regime against Afghans (UINR, 2024d).

Chapter 3. Discussion

3.1 Impunity and crime

"the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is a decisive caesura: it marks the beginning of an era of 'wild wars' in Eurasia … Irregular forces and indiscriminate violence have become standard tools of Russian warfare from Chechnya to the Donbass. One may argue that this development started with the invasion of Afghanistan" (Behrends, 2015).

Despite the desire for justice among the Afghan population (Refworld, 2005), the Soviet Union as a country, the high-ranking officials who ordered the killings, and their direct perpetrators were not held accountable for the crimes (Nader & Kerr, 2023). Moreover, they

were granted amnesty upon their return home at the level of the USSR (Postanovlenie VS SSSR, 1989).

The case of the absence of punishment for the Soviet Union or Russians at the international level can be explained by the following (however, it could be extended further):

- Lack of unity of the 'West' from the very beginning of the invasion (Dimitrakis, 2012).
- General indifference and blurred priorities of the international community and key stakeholders (Nader & Kerr, 2023; Gossman & Kouvo, 2013).
- Adopting policies focusing on short-term security rather than equity (ibid).
- Concealment or deliberate destruction of documentary evidence: Internal Soviet occupation documents were either destroyed or transported to Russia (ibid).
- Afghanistan's acceptance of the Rome Statute, which enables the ICC to investigate crimes, was only on May 1, 2003 (Human Rights Watch, 2017).
- Continuation of the civil war after the withdrawal of Soviet troops (Human Rights Watch, 1991; Formoli, 1995).
- The problem of the whole picture: Due to the absence or limited access to the territory of Afghanistan during the occupation, international organisations worked with fragmentary testimonies, mainly from refugees in other countries, which did not always provide the exact scale of the perpetrated crimes (Gossman & Kouvo, 2013).
- The intervention of US troops and related political processes may have prevented important reports of crimes from emerging and publication due to the USA's interests (Nader & Kerr, 2023).

We would like to assume that impunity in the total war against civilians in Afghanistan, as part of an imperial intervention that did not lead to any visible criminal prosecutions, made the choice to start a similar war in Chechnya in 1996 an easier decision for Russian elites. There are already reports from the Chechen case that provide a coherent picture of the following steps: "the impunity Russia has enjoyed for its violations of international law in Chechnya and Syria has paved the way for its violations in Ukraine (Reckoning Project, n.d.). Targeting an increase in civilian casualties is part of Russia's tactics, which have been tested in various conflicts with the active inaction of the international community (ibid; Texty, 2025a). Russia has evaded accountability for decades. The international community has failed to deter Russia from carrying-out further violations" (ibid).

We believe that Afghanistan was a testing ground that allowed Russia to build expectations of its impunity for starting new wars (Chechnya, Syria, Ukraine, Sakartvelo and so on) - "impunity enables repetition" (ibid). Even a Soviet-Russian general speaks about the similarity of the situation in Syria and Afghanistan in an interview, where he blames the Americans and someone's (without specifying who) wrong policy in the case of Afghanistan (Syria and Afghanistan, n.d.). Alternatively, an interview with another Russian veteran of

Afghanistan, the chairman of the Committee on International Warriors under the Council of Heads of Government of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), who believes that "the Soviet experience is what we have done in Syria now" and that it was the Afghan experience of warfare that helped to achieve their tasks. (Baltnews, 2019). That could be one of the possible answers to why today's Russia does not regret its invasion of Afghanistan and is not afraid to openly use force as part of its foreign policy (Kalinovsky & Radchenko, 2019; Behrends, 2015). Therefore, Ukraine, as well as other European countries, should take these facts into account when developing their own memory policies.

3.2 Policy recommendations

"History is meaningful and sense-bearing time. It combines past, present and future in a way that human beings can live in the tense intersection of remembered past and expected future. History is a process of reflecting the time order of human life, grounded on experience and moved by outlooks on the future" (Rüsen, 2008).

The main question that the state and society should ask themselves when working on the memory policy of the Soviet-Afghan war of 1979-89 is whether they are willing to allow the Soviet legacy of totalitarianism to remain in the symbolic field (sites of memory, narratives, commemorative practices) and to be reproduced in the practices we have seen in Chapter 2, thus leaving the door open for such practices to influence collective memory and identity, as we have shown in Chapter 1.

Taking into account the official memory policy described above and the vectors of its development in Ukraine (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2023), the following recommendations within the framework of public policy would seem appropriate:

- Provide grants for research on the 1979-89 war. Especially archival and sociological ones, to enable discussion from the position of Ukraine and about Ukraine rather than just the current view from "above and outside" (Kassymbekova, 2023; Eristavi, 2024; Ukrainian Institute, 2022).
- Promote the research findings as part of advocacy for the final condemnation of communism on an equal basis with Nazism (Sybiha, 2025), at least in Europe. To frame the 1979-89 war as another case to the list of USSR crimes.
- Consider the possibility at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs level to utilise this war within the framework of Ukraine's international politics (Gensburger & Lefranc, 2020). In other words, to use it as part of the repertoire of memory wars and memory diplomacy, especially in the context of working with the Global East and South.
- Create a digital register of toponyms and monuments (Oliinyk, 2017) that fall under the jurisdiction of the MCSCU. Only through the registry will it be possible to see the whole picture of the physical dimension of memory sites, from the actual number to the 'what' their narratives are about.

- Implement the 10 principles of memorialisation for this war as outlined by the UINR (Drobovych, 2024), which have garnered support within the military community (UINR, 2024a). We believe that it is particularly appropriate to implement these principles in terms of broad participation (from institutions to communities) and truthfulness, including the involvement of modern scientific research on the topic. This could solve the problem of 1) forgetting, 2) making it much more difficult for gatekeepers to maintain the post-Soviet status quo, which could 3) affect a shift in consensus and 4) open up new opportunities for more honest and just policies on this war. The main point is "the need to move from private memory to public memory, the conversion of the "noise" of complaints into an ethical-legal language liable to break the cycle of resentment and avoid victims becoming trapped in a closed identity" (Gensburger & Lefranc, 2020). There is no need to be afraid of conflicts because the silent status quo following a violent past is much worse (ibid).
- To take the results of the UINR 2024 roundtable (UINR, 2024e) as a draft for further action, i.e. to recognise a temporary consensus where war is condemned and veterans retain their benefits. This is somewhat similar to the policy framework of the Baltic States (Sildam, 2020; Strazdiņa, 2019). Maintaining benefits will minimise the resistance to changes, which should include changing the narrative from "glorification" to "victims of the imperial regime", with the need for public reassessment and negotiation of the collective trauma of the 1979-89 war.
- Review state funding to Afghan organisations, especially the UUAV, and make the state's relations with them transparent.
- Purify the public space from the cliché of the 'internationalist warrior', both due to the unwillingness to prolong Soviet memory policies and because of the modern connotations associated with this narrative (Matsyshyna, 2018).
- Review the practices associated with commemorating 15 February. Among other options, the exclusion or rethinking of 15 February as part of the Days of Remembrance could be done through the revision and long-awaited adoption of a framework law that would regulate the Remembrance days and holidays (RPR, 2025; RPR, n.d.).
- Multiply opportunities for social interactions and relationship building as much as possible during discussions on policy changes (Gensburger & Lefranc, 2020; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017).

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Annexes

Annex 1. The Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan 1979-89

"Afghanistan stands at the crossroads of ancient trade routes, it has always attracted the attention of neighbouring predators … while the invasions are often successful, the subsequent occupation of the country has never been equally so" (Braithwaite, 2022).

1.1 Historical background

Russian imperial interest in Afghanistan dates back to the mid-19th century, as part of the 'Great Game' with the British Empire (Janse, 2021). Until then, the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union gradually increased their influence in the region. The Soviet Union imposed its agenda in the region before the occupation of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA). Including the impact on the creation of the DRA Constitution through the sending of a drafting team from the Soviet Union (Postanovlenie Sekretariata TsK..., 1979), strengthening the capacity of Soviet propaganda through the reconstruction and extension of the printing house in Kabul (CPSU, 1979) and expanding the staff of the "Novosti" press agency (Postanovlenie Sekretariata TsK..., 1979). In addition, the constant presence of KGB and GRU units in Afghanistan (CPSU, 1979d) was notable, as they were not marked with insignia and numbered approximately 500 men on the eve of the invasion (Extract from CPSU…, 1979). The number does not even mention the groups of advisers in various fields.

Before the war in 1979, the Soviet Union dominated Afghan life: it provided millions of dollars of military aid, trained thousands of local soldiers, and tens of thousands of Afghans were educated and indoctrinated in the Soviet Union and its allies (Kamrany, 1986). In addition, the Soviet Union had a significant impact on Afghanistan's economy, which only grew from the beginning of the occupation: "Trade with the Soviet Union went from 7 percent in 1921 to over 70 percent in 1985 … created a dual economy that weakened the traditional sector, where more than 90 percent of the population lived and worked" (ibid).

The communists were not welcome before the 1979 invasion. Some of the explanations for this may be attacks on Islam (Braithwaite, 2022), which distinguished the USSR's policy

(Zapis′ besedy V. S. Safronchuka s K. Aminom, 1979) and the disconnect between the Marxist "mental maps" of the top Soviet leadership and the actual context (Savranskaya, 2021). The government of the DRA reproduced the practices of the Soviet Union under Lenin and Stalin: "The Bolsheviks did not shy away from harsh reprisals, starvation, and mass killings. They compensated the weakness of their rule in the countryside and in Central Asia through violent means … the regime in Kabul was willing to follow a similar course" (Behrends, 2015).

According to internal reports of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (CPSU, 1979), the DRA government in Afghanistan was not supported by the army, religious authorities or administrative organisations at any level. The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) as a party failed to gain mass support among any social strata and suffered a split within itself, which ultimately led to repressions. The report also supported the position not to send Soviet troops to Afghanistan, as had been decided earlier (ibid).

The DRA's communist government in 1979 faced problems in both the international and domestic arenas. In the international arena, relations with the United States, several Western countries, as well as Iran, Pakistan, and China, were deteriorating (Zapis′ besedy s vremennym poverennym..., 1979). In domestic politics, the situation was terrible. There was a war with several players, and the communist DRA government existed, in fact, solely due to constant and increasing support from the USSR. In this critical context, there were increasingly frequent requests from the Soviet side to send troops, as requested by DRA officials (CPSU, 1979).

1.2 Context of the USSR's decision to start the 1979 intervention

“...Then who, I ask him, supports you? Almost without hesitation, Comrade Taraki replies that almost no one supports them [...Кто же, спрашиваю я его тогда, поддерживает вас? Почти не задумываясь, т.Тараки отвечает, что почти никто не поддерживает]” (CPSU, 1979).

The Soviet leadership repeatedly reacted negatively to requests to send troops (Record of the conversation between L.I. Brezhnev and N.M. Taraki, 1979; Zapis′ besedy A. N. Kosygina..., 1979). This position of the top Soviet leadership was also based on numerous internal reports that opposed even a relatively limited military intervention with airborne troops (Vypiska iz protokola № 150..., 1979), which was justified due to a list of possible adverse effects, both domestic and international (Vypiska iz protokola № 152..., 1979). At the same time, large-scale assistance in terms of equipment, weapons, and money did not stop (ibid). Among the Central Committee of the Politburo, almost all expressed numerous objections to any military intervention due to a list of possible adverse effects, for example, that after the deployment of troops, the Soviet Union would fight a war against the people of Afghanistan (Gromyko, Brezhnev, Andropov), only Kosygin considered the possibility of

military intervention as a last resort (CPSU, 1979). That was the status quo until almost the last months before the occupation.

The likely trigger for the decision change was the growth of independence in Amin's politics, his efforts to find allies outside the Soviet Union, and the fear that the country would transit into the US sphere of influence, as seen in the logic of 'losing' Afghanistan (Andropov-Gromyko-Ustinov-Ponomarev Report, 1979). Concerning Amin, these reports brought to mind the killing of Taraki and the repression of his followers, but especially "smearing the Soviet Union and casting a shadow on the activities of Soviet personnel … efforts were made to mend relations with America as a part of the "more balanced foreign policy strategy" adopted by H. Amin (ibid). So around December 1979, plans began to be made: "Babrak and Sarwari, without changing their plans of opposition, have raised the question of possible assistance, in case of need, including military. We have two battalions stationed in Kabul and there is the capability of rendering such assistance" (Personal memorandum Andropov to Brezhnev, 1979).

So, the decision changed with lightning speed, despite all the previous reports that warned against such actions and even the positions of the Politburo members half a year earlier. So the occupation of Afghanistan started with the attack on the presidential palace and the assassination of Amin (Behrends, 2015) and "Babrak Karmal, who arrived with the Soviet forces, was made president". (Payind, 1989). The 1979 intervention amplified anti-Soviet trends, transforming the civil war into a "national liberation movement," and the resistance spread (Kamrany, 1986). Especially as a result of "saturation bombings and mass dislocations only stiffened the anti-Soviet insurgency and solidified resistance groups whose Islamic faith and Afghan tradition preaches salvation through jihad" (Payind, 1989).

1.3 The Occupation of Afghanistan, 1979-89

"On a percentage basis, the Soviet Union inflicted more suffering on Afghanistan than Germany inflicted on the Soviet Union during World War II" (Nawroz & Grau, 1996).

The Soviet Union established the Babrak Karmal regime in Afghanistan, which was even more loyal to Soviet advisers (Session of the CC CPSU Politburo, 1980). For this reason, the USSR became part of one of the most horrific wars of the second half of the 20th century. According to existing estimates, the total number of Soviet soldiers who took part in the war varied from 500,000 (CIA, 1988), 620,000 (Krivosheev, 1993), and 650,000 (Kamrany, 1986; Nawroz & Grau, 1996) to over 1,000,000 (Braithwaite, 2022). The Soviet Union spared no resources for the war: in financial terms alone, from 1984 to 1987, average daily expenditures rose from 4.3 million rubles per day to 14.7 million, and total annual spending rose from 1,578 million rubles per year to 5,374 million (Spravka o raskhodakh SSSR v Afganistane, 1988).

From the beginning of the invasion, most soldiers were conscripts, misinformed about the nature of the Soviet actions (Behrends, 2015). The objectives of the war constantly changed for the military, from "protect the PDPA regime" to "overthrow Amin and his regime", and resulted in "fighting the Afghan civil war for the PDPA" (Savranskaya, 2021). Constant changes led to significant systemic problems in the management and sustainability of the Soviet army itself: an indoctrination crisis, a significant increase in drug consumption among military personnel (up to 50%), low living standards, corruption, looting, discipline issues, and ethnic conflicts between personnel (Alexiev, 1988). That could be summarised with the statement, "Over the past eight years, the Soviet Army in Afghanistan has proved neither a well-disciplined nor a highly motivated force" (ibid).

The tactics of the war were also criticised in internal Soviet reports for their low effectiveness in waiting for results over the years, although they often led to civilian casualties and increased resistance (Dokladnaya zapiska…, 1981). The Soviet army institutionally failed to control the level of violence of its soldiers, and violence became a constant from the first days of the operation (Behrends, 2015). The absence of a well-established system of control and punishment gave rise to even greater violence (ibid). At some point, it reached the point where "Violence was also used as a means to communicate: burned villages or mutilated bodies conveyed a message" (ibid).

The reports of humanitarian organisations, primarily Human Rights Watch, can only partially convey the experience of Afghans and the scale of the disaster due to the inability to 'work on the ground' due to the ban imposed by the occupation authorities. They are forced to work only with secondary sources (refugees, journalists, scientists, deserters) and collect fragments of the general state of affairs through them. The most significant was the report "Tears, Blood and Cries. Human Rights in Afghanistan Since the Invasion 1979 - 1984" (Human Rights Watch, 1984), which resulted from efforts to consolidate the facts of war crimes from the beginning of the intervention until 1984. Of the approximately 210 pages of text, more than 190 are devoted to Soviet crimes. With a minimal interpretive part, this is a limitless list of war crimes: indiscriminate bombing, mass executions, killings at weddings and funerals, for fun, mining everything (including the corpses), destroying irrigation systems, systematic torture, political murders and so on (ibid). The following report described the same practices (Human Rights Watch, 1988). The only difference is that it becomes more detailed in its description of the insurgents' actions (ibid). Notably, all these reports refer to Soviet soldiers as "Russians" (ibid). Although the trend of large numbers as a result of colonial counterinsurgency warfare has been described in the context of the second half of the 20th century (Harinck, 2022), the case of the 1979-89 war in Afghanistan remains exceptional in terms of population casualties, duration and depth of humanitarian catastrophe (Bhutta, 2002; CSCE, 1981).

1.4 Communications about the War

Before the intervention, the USSR framed the ongoing war in Afghanistan as a struggle between the government and counter-revolutionary elements launching bandit attacks from Pakistan at a time when the 'working people' were supporting the DRA government (Zapis′ besedy s pervym sekretarem..., 1979). The Soviets communicated their activities in Afghanistan as compliance with interstate agreements, where other impressions arise from someone's distortion in the West, and all fears of Soviet interference are unfounded (Zapis′ besedy s vremennym poverennym..., 1979 a). Also, through controlled organisations, the CPSU had described the events in Afghanistan as a war against imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism and reactionary forces against the people and the DRA to weaken the position of the DRA's 'democratic leadership' (Predlozhenie v TsK KPSS..., 1979).

After the invasion, the narratives changed. For example, when talking to US President Carter, the Soviet coup in the capital, the assassination of the leader of a foreign state, and the deployment of troops to its territory were described as assistance against external aggression by sending "limited Soviet contingents" (Vypiska iz protokola No. 177..., 1979). According to the internal interpretation of the Politburo members, the crisis was caused by Amin's activities (assassination of Taraki, political repressions, communication with the United States, the right-wing Muslim opposition, spreading fabricated rumours about the Soviet Union), and to save the achievements of the April Revolution, was decided to send a contingent of the Soviet army to Afghanistan (On the events in Afghanistan from December 27 to 28, 1979).

In letters to the communist and labour parties allied with the PDPA, Amin had already been portrayed as a power-hungry nationalist who, through a conspiracy, attempted to become a dictator and initiated widespread terror, thereby threatening the outcomes of the revolution (Pismo TsK NDPA, 1980). Here, some unnamed 'patriotic and democratic forces in the party and the country' took over and overthrew Amin and his supporters to revive the Party and save the April Revolution (ibid). The appendix to this document shows that it was sent to Moscow for approval and revision and only then to allied organisations.

The case of communication to an internal Soviet audience is even more interesting: "From 1979 to 1986, the war was portrayed by the Soviet media and leadership as an 'international duty' and exercise in 'good neighbourliness" (Reuveny & Prakash, 1999). While it did not exist in the media during the early years of the war, its coverage later changed to build socialism through an internationalist mission, where "the cost of the war and especially the violence were hidden from the public. Soldiers returning from the battlefield were told to keep quiet, and those fallen returned in the infamous zinc caskets, and were delivered and buried late at night" (Behrends, 2015). The war officially did not exist until 1986, and Gorbachev's speech described the war as a "bleeding wound" (ibid). To explain what happened, it was framed for the world as the fulfilment of an 'international duty' (ibid).

Did the propaganda work? In this context, an interesting artefact from the Soviet archives is the translation of a Playboy article by an Afghan from Japan who illegally crosses the border into Afghanistan, calls the Soviet army an occupying force, and believes that the population will continue the holy war against the invaders (Embassy of the USSR in Japan, 1981). Generally, Western countries condemned the military intervention (Dimitrakis, 2012), but this propaganda likely had an impact on countries in the Soviet sphere - a topic that awaits further research.

Annex 2. Russian memory policies & Soviet-Afghan war

2.1 Russian Memory Policies

"The Kremlin does offer a futuristic vision in the form of restoration and nostalgic anticipation: the future will be better because it will look more like the past, and Russia will restore its pride and the good things that it lost" (Snegovaya, Kimmage, & McGlynn, 2023).

From the perspective of analysing primarily European memory policies, it is concluded that the state cannot directly manage memory, and the results of such policies are highly indirect (Gensburger & Lefranc, 2020). However, this sample for analysis does not consider cases such as Russia, where memory policies are managed directly, having no checks and balances and no connection to historical facts (McGlynn, 2023). Russia sees history as a resource for achieving influence and a tool for ensuring national security within the geopolitical struggle with the West (ibid). Such a historical discourse neither requires complex approaches nor 'ambiguous interpretations', only a very instrumentalist understanding of history and tradition with one single purpose - "Unity, unity and unity against the permanent threat (throughout the country's history) from enemies" (Vázquez-Liñán, 2017). Enemies, both internal and external, which pretend to put an end to 'Russian civilisation" (ibid). Accordingly, the modern Russian elite presents itself as the defender of this civilisation against the "Western imaginary" (ibid).

In general, to describe the Russian mnemonic community, it is suggested to use the narrative template 'Expulsion of Foreign Enemies', which provides an interpretive framework that heavily shapes the thinking and speaking of the members of this community" (Wertsch, 2012). Importantly, such a narrative, in its various forms, can nevertheless retain its influence on subsequent generations (Wertsch, 2002). Its structure is as follows:
1. "An 'initial situation' in which Russia is peaceful and not interfering with others.
2. Trouble, where a foreign enemy viciously attacks Russia without provocation.
3. Russia nearly loses everything in total defeat, as it suffers under the enemy's attempts to destroy it as a civilisation.
4. Through heroism and exceptionalism, against all odds, and acting alone, Russia triumphs and succeeds in expelling the foreign enemy" (Wertsch, 2012).

One of the most prominent instruments for consolidating memory politics in contemporary Russia's discourse is historical framing. "Historical framing can be defined as the media's framing of a contemporary event within an historical precedent: the media conflate a present-day and past episode. The basis of framing theory is that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning" (McGlynn, 2023).

The monuments boom visualises memory and its narratives in Russia today. Texty's editorial team studied 1163 monuments erected in Russia since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Texty, 2025b). It turned out that most of the new monuments in Russia are dedicated to the so-called 'Great Patriotic War' and the 'Special Military Operation' against Ukraine, 480 out of 1163 (41%), which are key to the state propaganda of modern Russia (ibid). In regions with non-Russian populations, a separate group of monuments depicts Russia's civilising role as an enlightener of the peoples it colonised (ibid). Unfortunately, this study did not mention monuments devoted to the war in Afghanistan. Perhaps they were included in a broader category dedicated to the wider Soviet period.

The core of the contemporary 'post-Soviet Russian identity', the establishment and dissemination of which is the primary goal of memory policies in Russia, is the "triumphalist narrative of the Great Patriotic War" (Snegovaya, Kimmage, & McGlynn, 2023). The starting point of the frame can be considered the Victory Day parade in Moscow in 2005, which turned the Soviet war frame of 1941-45 into an essential part of political discourse through an emotional response among Russians (ibid).

Since approximately 2008, there has been a shift in the way Russian elites perceive history, which has become a valuable resource (McGlynn, 2023). Partly in response to the debates surrounding history in other post-Soviet countries, the Historical Memory policy project was launched in 2009 (ibid). It developed trends towards falsifying history and propaganda to legitimise government activities. The next peak was in 2012, immediately after Putin's re-election as president, which was not entirely confident. From that moment on, history became an integral part of the political struggle, and the state began to actively promote its vision of history through special laws and regulations - history turned into a security issue (ibid).

In 2014, in the context of the annexation of Crimea and at the initial stage of the war in Ukraine, the narrative of others falsifying Russian history as a plot appeared in Russian political discourse (ibid). In the following years, these trends only multiplied: "If 2014 to 2015 saw the media and politicians brandish historical analogies with gleeful abandon, the years 2016 to 2017 witnessed the mass creation and expansion of ways for the public to engage with (approved) history, while the period 2018–21 ushered in a more sinister constriction of historical inquiry alongside the targeting of alternative narratives" (ibid). As a result, for 2021, the National Security Strategy (NSS) defined "the defence of historical

memory as a strategic priority for the nation's security and devotes a section to the defence of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values, culture and historical memory" (ibid).

Interestingly, compared to the Soviet desire to present its version of history based on, or with intention to, objective facts, this task has become insignificant for the Russian government (ibid.). The Kremlin has implemented a 'postmodern twist' in state memory policies, where the "head of Russian archives, was dismissed in 2015 for stating that Panfilov's story was a myth, the Culture Minister at the time, Vladimir Medinsky, responded by saying, "Some myths are truer than facts" (McGlynn, 2024). The focus on the past enables the regime to garner growing support while diverting attention from its systemic crimes and present-day problems (ibid).

History and memory become personalised, emotional, and multimedia to "bring history to life but not to set it free" (McGlynn, 2023). In crystallised form, the Kremlin's vision of the "master commemorative narrative supports three broad arguments: that Russia needs a strong state; that Russia has a special path of development; and that Russia is a messianic great power with something unique to offer the world" (ibid). This memory system is implemented through informal networks close to Putin and his circle and is not plainly codified (ibid). The status quo of collective memory is also affected by the active involvement of other, seemingly non-state actors, such as the Russian Orthodox Church, in state commemorative ceremonies and extensive cooperation with the government (ibid). This establishes a new formula for memory: "1. To oppose Russian policy is to challenge Russian memory or 'history'. 2. To challenge Russian memory is to endanger and/or reject Russian identity" (ibid).

To illustrate the implementation of memory policies and their features, it would be worthwhile to briefly describe the case of Yunarmiya as a children's military-patriotic organisation. It should be understood as "child-focused initiatives are aimed at propagating certain historical narratives and understandings of history, while closely intertwining them with a broader militarization of history and children as well" (McGlynn, 2023). It is built around the education of Russian interpretations of patriotism and historical memory (Yunarmiya, n.d.). Having emerged around 2016, they have steadily received increasing state funding each year for their activities, in line with Russia's investment in military-patriotic education of children (Alberts, 2020). According to their website, their activities have already reached over 1,750,000 children (Yunarmiya, n.d.). As part of the indoctrination, participants often communicate with Afghanistan veterans and participate in the public commemoration of events related to the Afghan war (a few cases: Kp.ru, 2023; NAASH, 2019; MediaBank Podmoskovya, 2025).

2.2 Russian Afghan veterans' organisations and memory policies

“Today, we are essentially the only cementing structure that represented the Soviet Union ... maybe we are the point that will someday allow the Soviet Union to be restored [Сегодня мы, по сути, единственная цементирующая структура, которая представляла Советский Союз … может, мы являемся той точкой, которая когда-то позволит восстановить Советский Союз]” (*Baltnews,* 2019).

Now, let us place the case of Afghan veterans' organisations as the primary means of representing war veterans in Russia on the broader canvas of Russian collective memory. According to an article by a researcher of Afghan organisations in Russia (Hoge, 2017), we can identify the following chronological phases in their existence, their objectives and narratives:

> *1980s*: The emergence of the first grassroots organisation. Mainly as non-institutionalised anti-war movements. They were created based on the logic of veterans' mutual support. The discussion about the intervention began with Gorbachev's official framing as a "bleeding wound" (McVicker, 2018).
>
> *1980-90:* The emergence of organisations with demands to the government, "since the war was not exactly considered a war and was considered a political embarrassment, veterans were not considered real veterans and were not provided the same benefits as veterans of more heroic wars" (Hoge, 2017). The organisations were united by:
> 1. "sense of victimisation";
> 2. "the feeling that they had been betrayed";
> 3. "the lack of recognition and benefits" (ibid).

"In February 1989, the 'Afgantsy' received the formal status of 'Warrior-Internationalists' The Act on veterans, revised in 1995, granted the 'Afgantsy' full status and the title of 'veterans" (Kadykało, 2015).

> *1990s*: deepening resentment, a sense of betrayed victimhood and unmet demands (Hoge, 2017). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, "a decade of historical amnesia for those who claimed to represent the afgantsy" (McVicker, 2018).

"In 1990 a social organization was established, the Russian Union of Veterans of Afghanistan … It has about 500,000 members and has 78 regional offices throughout Russia. Its task is to fight for improved conditions of veterans' lives, commemorating the fallen, the military-patriotic education of youth, the creation of clubs with the military-patriotic and sports profile, as well as youth ranger clubs" (ibid).

> *2000s:* Veterans of the 1979-89 war received significant state recognition and privileges. During this period, the traditional concept of heroism was actively

revived, and the perception of the invasion gradually shifted to a more positive one, still in the shadow of the 'Great Patriotic War' (Behrends, 2015).

The Russian government has reintroduced Afghanistan into the realm of memory policies through Putin's speeches since 2004 (Russian Historical Society, 2025). However, the year of the turning point was 2005: "If in 1985 the Soviet press likened 'wartime internationalists' to their fathers in the Great Patriotic War to mark the 40th anniversary of Victory Day, the stance was reinforced on 9 May 2005 to mark its 60th anniversary. Then, a public ceremony took place where "veterans of the Great Patriotic War handed over a symbolic Victory Banner to a veteran of a younger generation… commander of the 40th Army, General Viktor Ermakov" (Hoge, 2017). The gesture was followed four months later by the first movie based on the Soviet-Afghan War to be released in quite some time, The 9th Company (9 rota)" (McVicker, 2018). A narrative is emerging about the war in Afghanistan as a defence against al-Qaeda, drug trafficking and the threat of the West (ibid).

2010s: Afghan organisations are beginning to receive significant amounts of money; they are conducting 'military-patriotic education of youth', and the state recognises Afghans as heroes and role models. As a result, "In 2015, the head of the largest organisation for disabled Afghan veterans said in an interview that the "false historians" who do not agree that the war was about protecting Russia's southern border from a mix of westerners, drugs and terrorists should be "punished for fraud" (ibid).

2014 - 2025 (now): The organisation's Afghans in Russia are becoming significant players in supporting the war against Ukraine, from active public support to direct participation in military operations (McVicker, 2018; Hoge, 2017).

The modern narrative of the war in Afghanistan is often constructed around the thesis that the war's objectives were achieved, and there was no defeat (RIA Novosti, 2024). Such a paradigm avoids the question of what precisely the tasks were, who had set them, and what their results were. According to the Russian present-day paradigm, the objectives could be the following: to save the region from anarchy and to fight the drug trade (ibid), as well as to fight Al Qaeda and the threat from the West (McVicker, 2018), or even to support the government (DRA) and leave (Baltnews, 2019). Also, Russia has considered the unsuccessful US policy in Afghanistan and has tried to communicate the Soviet war as a victorious one since about 2018 (McGlynn, 2023). Afghan veterans' organisations are pleased to support and promote such an active campaign to include the occupation of Afghanistan in Russia's canon of memory, which is likely to lead to further increases in their privileges and opportunities (Hoge, 2017).

The practices of insertion of the 1979-89 occupation of Afghanistan in the discourse of memory include (Kadykało, 2015):

1) Celebration of the heroism and courage of Soviet soldiers.
2) Official commemoration of the fallen soldiers
3) Public commemoration of the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan.
4) Emphasise the West's failure to ensure the region's stability after the Soviet withdrawal.
5) Denial of the defeat (all tasks have been completed).
6) Denial of the systematic practice of violence and poor training of the troops.
7) The presence of this war in mass culture and discourse. Especially "The 9th Company" (9 рота) film, popular songs, TV series, memoirs, and books (ibid).

Notwithstanding such vague formulations, often with internal contradictions within each, this memory policy is effective. In 1991, over 89% of Russian respondents believed that it was unnecessary to invade the Soviet Union, while only 3% supported it (VCIOM, 2004). Thereafter, the number of invasion supporters steadily increased while the number of opponents dropped. For example, comparing the results of the 1999, 2009, and 2019 surveys, the number of respondents opposed to the invasion had fallen to 42%, while the number of supporters had risen to 31%. (VCIOM, 2009; VCIOM, 2019). Who are the respondents with the highest level of support for the need to intervene in Afghanistan? This category includes 18-24-year-olds (VCIOM, 2019), where 48% support the need for a war in Afghanistan (the average for all groups is 31%), and 19% oppose it (the average is 42%). Those who have lived within the framework of Putin's Afghanistan memory policies have a different picture of the invasion. As a result, since 2019, the Russian public's perception of the intervention has pivoted closer to viewing it as "a just and necessary move" (Luxmoore, 2019; Interfax.ru, 2018).

Annex 3. Belarusian Memory Policies & Soviet-Afghan war

3.1 Belarusian Memory Policies

Since independence, Belarus has lacked a coherent collective memory, instead having two narratives: the "Russo-centric" and the "Westernising" (Ioffe, 2022). "The Russo-centric" characterised by an interpretation of the country as "one prong in the three-pronged supranational East Slavic community; it pays crucial attention to the experiences of World War II", whereas "Westernising" is "emphasizes the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) as the proto-Belarusian state, which waged wars with Russia; and it stresses the need to overcome Belarus's colonial dependency" (ibid).

A significant part of the population inclined toward the first narrative, which "manifested itself in the 1995 referendum, when 83.3 percent of Belarusians voted for the return of Russian as the second official state language and 75.1 percent voted to replace the white-red-white national flag and coat of arms, which memorialized the GDL, with the red-green flag and a coat of arms reminiscent of Soviet Belarus's insignia" (ibid). However,

"Westernising" the narrative proved its resilience among a significantly narrower population segment. Hence, the regime occasionally made minor compromises to this memory narrative (ibid). Everything changed after 2022 when the regime chose not just the Russo-centric way but simply Russian.

The Putin regime in Russia and the Lukashenko regime in Belarus have long been closely aligned in terms of their governance approaches and nostalgia for the Soviet system (Massicot et al., 2024). The two countries were linked by their Soviet heritage and cooperation in numerous sectors (ibid). To avoid being annexed by Russia while maintaining Russian funding and support for the regime, Lukashenko had attempted to balance between the West and Russia, presenting a neutral image of the country (ibid). With the beginning of the Russian invasion in 2022, Belarus lost it and became isolated in the West (ibid). This decision could be seen as a return favour for the years of Russian support, especially after 2020, when the Lukashenko regime came perilously close to being overthrown after fraudulent presidential elections (Sullivan, 2022). The West did not support Lukashenko because of the "stolen election", so his regime lost the opportunity to balance, as it had earlier (ibid). Belarus has become a crucial logistical hub for the Russian invasion, enabling the movement of troops and equipment by railways, as well as the production of military-grade components and medical aid for the Russian forces (Ferris, 2023).

The Lukashenko regime has been strengthened by its involvement in the war; however, Belarus has become increasingly dependent on Russia and has lost much of its sovereignty (Astapenia, 2023). Today, we can already talk about the 'Quiet Conquest' and the annexation of Belarus in the logic of a 'brotherly nation' by Russia, which is already dominant now "over most if not all aspects of Belarusian governance" (Barros, 2025; Davis Center, 2024; Massicot et al., 2024). From the standpoint of memory policies, the same thing is happening from the perspective of sovereignty - the absorption of Belarusian narratives by the Russian one.

3.2 Belarusian Afghan veterans' organisations and memory policies

"Until 1991 the sacrifice of lives within the Soviet Union was legitimized as fulfilling a soldier's duty, indirectly framing the imperial dimension of the war" (Ackermann, 2017).

As in Russia, Afghanistan veterans' organisations emerged during the Gorbachev era and developed rapidly in the 1990s (Ackermann, 2017). The empire's dissolution in 1991 led to a revision of narratives of heroism. In the aftermath, two main approaches to localising Soviet narratives emerged, corresponding to the changes in the regime's policies in Belarus:

1. National sacrifice + christianity + suffering. The narrative of the early independence years had grassroots origins and was barely codified. It emerged due to

the impact of "Organisations such as the Association of Afghan Mothers managed in the early years of Belarusian independence to insert the Afghan experience into a narrative of national victimhood" (ibid).

2. Triumphalist, associated with the Great Victory. It combines elements of Christianity and sacrifice with Soviet aspects of heroism but under the state's control. Actively developed and established as the main after 2005 ('60th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War'), when the experience of Afghans is combined in the narrative with the veterans of the Second World War in the logic of the descendants of the great victory, who take on the characteristics attributed to the veterans of the so-called 'Great Patriotic War' (ibid).

Since the first years of independence in Belarus, a small group of Afghanistan veterans has joined the winning coalition (de Mesquita et al., 2002), Lukashenko's regime (Ackermann, 2017). Accordingly, the group's influence grew with each year of his rule. The influence and decisions of this small group of privileged veterans were quite peculiar, for instance, in the case of the construction of the Stalin Line memorial complex, which sparked debate in society due to the too-obvious whitewashing of Soviet history (Ackermann, 2017).

Chronologically, 2005 should be considered as the starting point of large-scale state control in the field of memory politics in Belarus (ibid). All the largest NGOs in the field, such as the "Belarusian Union of Veterans of the War in Afghanistan", are controlled by the state, while groups with alternative views are too small and have no means of influence (ibid). The process is remarkably comparable to the one described by Hoge in his article on the development of Afghan veterans' organisations in Russia (Hoge, 2017).

In fact, around 2005-2007, for both states, the Second World War became a resource for the political legitimation of the regimes and a state reference point for the broadest possible narrative construction (ibid). The process was two-way. From the perspective of Afghan veteran organisations, they have gained 1) discourse benefits through the de facto equation of veterans of the 'Great Patriotic War' with the corresponding public commemoration (recognition and respect) and 2) material benefits through the expansion of veterans' social benefits and the steady flow of funds into their organisations by the state. From the perspective of the states, they have acquired organisations with many thousands of members, which began to 1) actively and publicly support the ruling regime and 2) independently take the initiative to maintain the status quo, for example, through patriotic education in schools (Ackermann, 2017; Hoge, 2017).

As we pointed out above, the gradual annexation of Belarus has resulted in its memory policies being subsumed by Russia, which once again emphasises the inseparability of memory and politics. Let us examine the case of the Afghanistan War memory policy. To do so, let us compare the cases of crystallised versions of the narratives of Russia and Belarus

through memory sites (as frames for social situations) with the contemporary narratives of Lukashenko's speeches, which reveal the vision of the ruling regime.

From the perspective of memory sites: "The contrast between the memorial's initial Belarusian and the more recent Russian titles enacts this difference. The Belarusian version refers to the 'Memorial to those sons of the fatherland, who lost their life abroad' The Russian version, 'Island of Courage and Sorrow' (Ostrov Muzhestva i Skorbi), points to the Internationalist-Warriors, who stayed loyal to their military oath and fulfilled their military duty" (Ackermann, 2017). Russia - loyalty to the oath and military duty by internationalists, Belarus - children of the fatherland who died abroad. The praise of a loyal fighter versus a mother's grief for her son. The contrast between these cases shows the initial difference in the event assessments.

Finally, let us examine the speeches on 15 February to Afghanistan war veterans from the perspective of the President, who is de facto the only player in the policy of memory in Belarus. On the President of the Republic of Belarus' website, speeches from 2008, 2012-2015, and 2021-2025 are available. We analysed each speech according to the following criteria: 1) whether there is a mention of pain, loss, suffering, or grief, which Ackermann mentioned as an earlier narrative present in the Belarusian memory canon (Ackermann, 2017); 2) in how many paragraphs of the speech (in the logic of framing, as McGlynn, 2023); and 3) highlighting elements that are absent in other speeches. We did not count the introduction and conclusion as paragraphs; these speeches are very short, so a paragraph can often be a single sentence.

The 2008 speech (President of the Republic of Belarus, 2008) directly mentions grief in one paragraph. At the same time, the loss is mentioned implicitly in two more paragraphs, so up to three out of five (ibid). In the 2012 address, there is a direct quote about sorrow in one paragraph, and another is referred to indirectly, so it is up to two out of three paragraphs (President of the Republic of Belarus, 2012). In 2013, all three paragraphs of the text contained elements related to memory and mourning (President of the Republic of Belarus, 2013). Within the 2014 speech, one out of every three paragraphs is about grief (President of the Republic of Belarus, 2014). However, it continued an attempt to frame the war as an anti-terrorist operation (ibid). In 2015, one paragraph of three also mentions grief and pain (President of the Republic of Belarus, 2015). Thus, it also mentions resilience and courage and includes a thesis about continuing the combat traditions of veterans of the so-called 'Great Patriotic War' and gaining eternal glory (ibid). The 2021 address contains one paragraph, as the 2022 address (President of the Republic of Belarus, 2021; President of the Republic of Belarus, 2022). The only difference is that the latter is lengthier (4 paragraphs), repeatedly refers to the oath, security, and patriotism, and continues the repertoire with the 'Great Patriotic War' and Afghans as role models (ibid). Interestingly, even for 2022, there is no Russian narrative with drug trafficking, the terrorist threat has not been specified, and there was no attempt to explain the war as border protection.

The change is visible to the naked eye from 2023 when the regime had lost its flexibility after de facto joining the war on Russia's side. The 2023 speech had already had the clichés of courageous fulfilment of the oath, drug trafficking and international terrorism, which the Soviet military was ostensibly defending against (President of the Republic of Belarus, 2023). Nevertheless, a whole paragraph remained devoted to grief and lamenting for the dead (ibid). The 2024 speech contains one but a shorter part regarding grief (BELTA, 2024). However, even this mention leaves the impression of a military tone, with Soviet soldiers already allegedly defending their country's southern borders (yes, this statement is about Afghanistan), with an emphasis on duty and protection against international terrorism (ibid). This speech highlights their involvement in fostering patriotism and defending the state system (ibid). The 2025 speech no longer mentions sorrow; instead, it emphasises courage, heroism, patriotism, and the exemplary nature of their experiences as role models (President of the Republic of Belarus, 2025).

This could be written in numbers, where the first one is the number of paragraphs with a mention of pain-grief-loss, in brackets if there are implicit mentions and implicit references to pain-grief-loss (as a potential maximum amount of mentions), and after the punctuation mark (/) the total number of paragraphs (without introduction and conclusion):

2008 - 1 (3) / 5
2012 - 1 (2) / 3
2013 - 3 / 3
2014 - 1 / 3
2015 - 1 / 3
2021 - 1 / 3
2022 - 1 / 4
2023 - 1 / 5
2024 - 1 / 4
2025 - 0 / 3

With the dissolution of such a humble discursive unit as an element of grief in the Belarusian narrative of the Soviet war in Afghanistan, we could witness how the remnants of the sovereignty of the country's memory policies dissolve into the Russian memory narrative.

Annex 4. Non-condemnation of communism

The canon of memory in the Western academy and the corresponding state policies of remembrance of the Second World War (as well as the broader legacy of communist regimes) were significantly influenced by the French intellectual left, which stubbornly denied the reality of the criminal nature of the Soviet (Judt, 2024). We could assume that the

discourse had its legacy almost to the present day - decades passed without robust and universally acknowledged condemnation of communism, even at the academic level (Mälksoo, 2014). Only recent years have given hope for a change in the status quo, exceeding the national level.

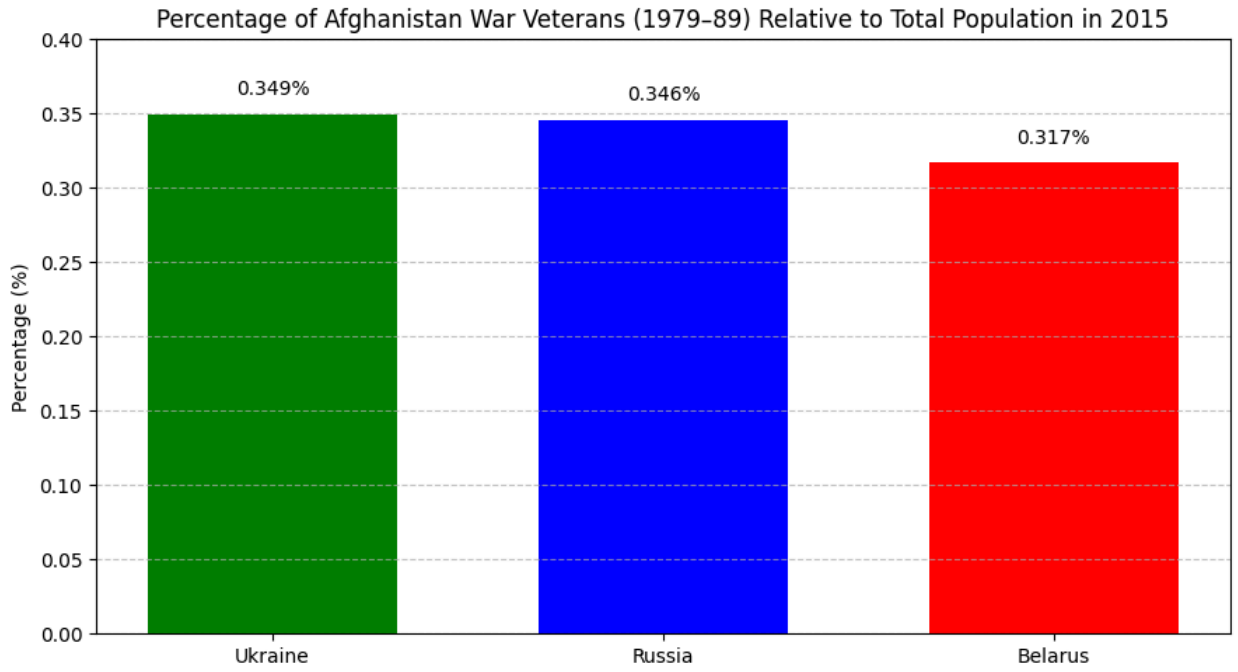
A number of PACE resolutions have triggered widespread debate in Europe. For example, these resolutions raised the issue of transforming mindsets and "recommends that member states dismantle the heritage of former communist totalitarian regimes" (PACE Resolution 1096, 1996), introduced into the discourse the massive human rights violations in totalitarian communist regimes and the lack of international investigations after their fall in Eastern Europe, in contrast to the Nazi investigations (PACE Resolution 1481, 2006); called for broad discussions and revisions of each nation's legacy of totalitarian regimes, especially in terms of memorials (PACE Resolution 1652, 2009).

However, the most striking was the European Parliament resolution of 19 September 2019, which opened a new chapter for Europe in overcoming the 'forgetting' of the crimes of communism and Nazism on an equal basis. Especially paragraphs 6 and 10, which: "Condemns all manifestations and propagation of totalitarian ideologies, such as Nazism and Stalinism, in the EU … Calls for a common culture of remembrance that rejects the crimes of fascist, Stalinist, and other totalitarian and authoritarian regimes of the past as a way of fostering resilience against modern threats to democracy" (European Parliament, 2019). At the same time, there are communist parties of varying strength and popularity in Europe (European Parliament, n.d.), which openly profess one of the ideologies directly related to the mass crimes of the 20th century. On the other hand, a group of proactive actors among the EU member states, especially the Baltic States and Poland, pushes forward previously marginalised narratives. For example, they introduce into the political discussion the need to recognise 100,000,000 victims of communism (European Parliament, 2023).

Since the Russian invasion in 2022, a broader and more intense debate has opened up concerning Russia's failure to condemn and permanent exploitation of the communist-imperial legacy in the wider context of the need to return to the assessment of the crimes of communism (Kallas et al., 2022). The process of reassessment is ongoing at the intersection between policy and politics. Currently, it has a clear tendency to reveal the crimes and condemn communism. While most of these discussions are still framed around the Second World War and its legacy, there is hope that the canon of European memory will expand to include the debate on forgotten crimes such as the occupation of Afghanistan in 1979-89. A recent column by seven European foreign ministers indicates that such hopes are not unfounded, pointing to the reopening of the debate: "Soviet crimes must be properly condemned, including those committed during the Soviet occupation of Europe after World War II" (Sybiha, 2025).

Annex 5. Table of the ratio of the total population of Ukraine, Russia and Belarus to the number of veterans of the Soviet-Afghan war, 1979-89

Sources: World Bank, 2025; President of Ukraine, 2020; McVicker, 2018; TASS, 2024.



Annex 6. The Decommunisations laws and the start of the discussion

Decommunisation laws are considered to be the following: №314-VIII, №315-VIII, № 316-VIII, № 317-VIII, which legally recognised the as a rightful struggle for Ukrainian independence and the organisations that carried it out in 20-th century; rejected the Soviet concept of the Great Patriotic War (1941-45) in favour of the Second World War (1939-45), and stated that May 9 should be replaced by May 8 as the Day of Remembrance and commemoration of this war; provided full access to the archives of Soviet repressive state authorities; condemned the Nazi and Communist regimes as totalitarian, banned their propaganda and symbols, demanded the dismantling of certain types of memorials and renaming the list of names associated with the Soviet rule markers. (Oliinyk, 2017; Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2015a; Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2015b; Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2015c; Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2015d). Among the latest laws that complement the list of memory laws in Ukraine is a Law of Ukraine №3005-IX, which introduces the dimension of condemnation of "Russian" as imperial and the need for further decolonisation of toponymies into the legislative discourse of memory policies in Ukraine (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2023). Indeed, decommunisation is increasingly placed in a broader decolonisation paradigm (Hundorova, 2024), which requires a separate study.

An exemplary case of discussions in 2015 that set the canvas for further assessments is the debate in the respected Ukrainian journal Krytyka, which offered the following positions on decommunisation:

1. The support due to the possibility of finally breaking with the communist experience, which would be beneficial for both freedom and justice (Motyl, 2015); the support due to security considerations, where Sovietness is seen as the reason for Yanukovych's successful revenge and the recruitment of support from part of the local population by Russia at the start of the 2014 war (Viatrovych, 2015).
2. The general support, but with the necessity to make particular amendments (Lunin, 2015); the support with the need to change the focus from symbols (and thus emotions) to specific practices and processes of the Soviet heritage (Hrudka, 2016).
3. The support of the intention, but not the implementation, is due to the lack of debates and voting on decommunisation laws as one single package (Haukhman, 2015).
4. The condemnation is due to the imposition of one ideology, violation of international conventions and negative impact on human rights (Coynash, 2015).
5. While recognising the criminal nature of Soviet rule, there is a need to acknowledge the period's complexity and heterogeneity and not make a "party congress" out of an assessment of this period (Portnov, 2015).