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## The myth of Stepan Bandera

Before beginning to discuss the current public perception of Stepan Bandera and his activities, and analysing whether we are dealing with a kind of mythologisation of the historical hero and of the OUN-UPA, we must accept a certain limitation of the very concept of “myth”, which is common to all social sciences and interpreted in various contexts, and constitutes “an inexhaustible pool of problems for the humanities” (Niżnik 1978: 163). According to Jerzy Topolski, a myth can be sacralised, diverge from science, and yet function within it. It can also be interpreted as “writing history in the spirit of progress set on a chronological axis”, or “evaluating events and processes according to later standards” (Topolski 1999: 204–207). Consequently, it is quite difficult to provide a precise and universally accepted definition of the term, which for the purpose of this article will be narrowed down to one aspect of the definition given by the *Dictionary of the Polish Language*, according to which it is “a false opinion about someone or something accepted without proof” (Słownik 2023). It is not rare that people have a false image of a historical figure and their importance for a nation or a specific social group.

An example of such dualism in assessment is provided undoubtedly by the attitudes held towards Stepan Bandera, whom Poles often consider to be respected by all Ukrainians, although Ukrainians themselves are more often than not of a different opinion. Merely typing the phrase “who is the hero of Ukraine?” in Polish (kto jest bohaterem Ukrainy?) and in Ukrainian (хто є героєм України?) into a popular Internet search engine yields interesting results. If in both cases we ignore the Wikipedia pages titled “Category: Heroes of Ukraine” and “Heroes of Ukraine” in the respective languages, which discuss the topic in general terms (but differ significantly from each other), then among the snippets of the first nine Polish-language search results, eight contain references to Bandera, the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) or the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). These words are not to be found in

the Ukrainian-language search results, although after reviewing the articles it appears that Bandera's name is among those who were, or are today, officially recognised as Ukraine's national heroes. This kind of search can hardly be regarded as meeting the criteria of a scholarly study, but at the same time it shows how important it is to consider whether we can say today that Stepan Bandera is a hero for Ukrainians, whether he is viewed as a charismatic leader who took the nation towards independence, or whether this way of perceiving him is perhaps a myth that has gained particular popularity outside Ukraine, especially in Poland, but also in Russia.

To address these questions, it is necessary to put forth and verify the following research hypotheses:

In the eyes of the Ukrainian general public, Stepan Bandera is not a leader or an outstanding historical hero, and opinions about him are regionally diverse.

Bandera is not a person who can gain popularity in a country supporting democratic standards, and Ukrainian politicians distance themselves from him.

Bandera's popularity is a myth that has become part of historical politics. His life and activities are used as a symbol of opposition to Russia that is becoming increasingly common in Ukraine.

In attempting to verify these hypotheses, the following research questions were asked: What is the attitude of Ukrainian citizens towards Stepan Bandera? Did significant political and social events in Ukraine, such as the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity, change the views of Ukrainians and make nationalist sentiments more radical? Is Stepan Bandera seen as a hero by Ukrainians, or was he made a hero by politicians? What are the present-day sympathies and antipathies of Poles and Ukrainians towards each other? Might the "Bandera cult" negatively influence Ukraine's image in the international arena, and if so, how?

In search of answers to these questions, the results of public opinion surveys in Ukraine and Poland were analysed using a comparative method. This enables us to outline how Bandera and nationalist circles are viewed by the citizens of both countries. Since current events are not without significance for such an analysis, selected events from recent history which significantly influenced Polish-Ukrainian relations have been taken into account.

The problem of the reception and interpretation of the Bandera myth is an extremely broad one, and it is impossible to discuss all of its aspects in a single scholarly article. Therefore, for the purpose of this discussion, the main focus is on the analysis of attitudes and opinions of Poles and Ukrainians in the twenty-first century, with a particular emphasis on the years following the Rev-

olution of Dignity, and in full awareness that this is only a part of this complex issue. At the same time, this is an area that is still insufficiently emphasised in academic, political, social and journalistic discourse.

### Sympathies in percentages

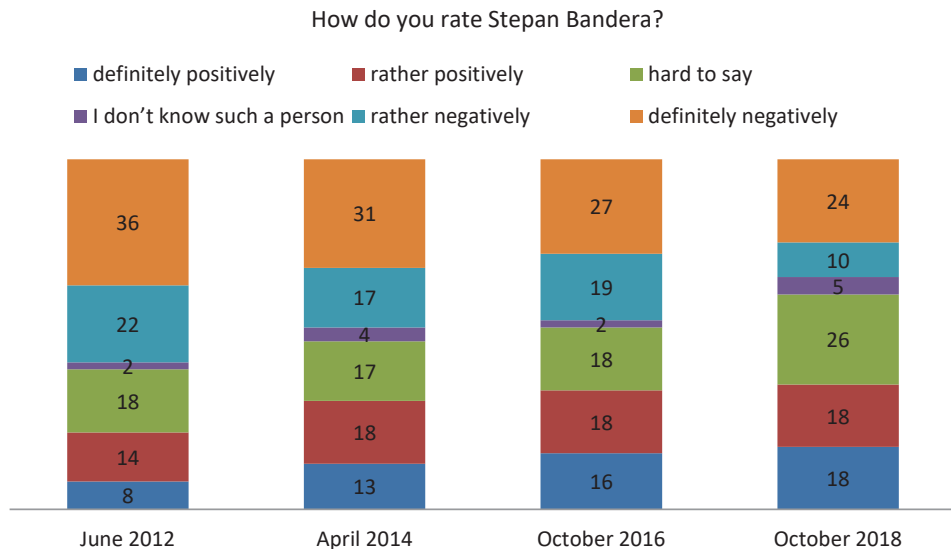
Over the years, issues related to historical politics have become one of the key components in Polish–Ukrainian relations. As Ukraine’s European integration project, which Poland has been promoting in the international arena for many years, was relegated to the background, support for Ukraine’s democratic development and building of a civil society has become less publicised. Instead, events dating back to the first half of the twentieth century have been recalled in political and media discourse. At the same time, it is impossible to agree on common views on historical issues, a phenomenon which Professor Oleksandr Zinchenko described as “asymmetry of memory” (Зінченко, 2017), a symbol of which is undoubtedly Stepan Bandera. However, we must ask the question whether in this case the asymmetry is as significant as it might seem. The results of public opinion polls indicate that the view of Bandera as a hero is not shared by everyone, and the opinions of some Ukrainians are decidedly negative. In 2016, attitudes towards Bandera among Donbas residents were as negative as those towards Stalin – in both cases, 22.5% of respondents expressed a negative opinion about the person in question. Interestingly enough, former presidents Viktor Yushchenko (21.8%) and Viktor Yanukovich (20.4%) received only slightly fewer negative votes. It should be noted that nationally, the latter was considered an “anti-hero” by 51% of those surveyed, 9 percentage points ahead of Stalin (42% negative votes) (Загальнонаціональна та регіональна ідентичність, p. 7), which was probably indicative of the still extremely emotional attitude towards the former president, overthrown during the protests at the turn of 2013 and 2014.

Between 2012 and 2018, the percentage of those who held a positive opinion of Bandera increased from 24% to 36%, but still represented a minority of Ukrainians. At the same time, the percentage of those who did not have a clear opinion increased from 18% to 26%, which may have resulted from a fear of taking sides in the public debate on the subject, which still aroused considerable controversy (see Figure 1). In general, rural residents (41% as opposed to 32% of urban residents) and young people aged 18–35 (41%) expressed positive views about Stepan Bandera, while 34% of respondents aged 36–50 and 31% of those over 51 rated him positively. It should be emphasised that after 2014,

citizens of Russian-occupied Crimea and parts of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, where the armed conflict was still ongoing, were excluded from the survey, which made it impossible to give an exact comparison of Ukrainians' views over the years. It cannot be ruled out that the national percentage of those hostile to Bandera may have increased due to the opinions of residents of the eastern regions or Crimea, who were already critical of this figure, as shown in earlier surveys (Соціологічна група "Рейтинг", 2018: 25).

Figure 1

After: Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» (2018), Динаміка ставлення до Голодомору 1932-33 рр., листопад 2018



[http://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg\\_files/rg\\_golodomor\\_112018\\_press.pdf](http://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg_files/rg_golodomor_112018_press.pdf) (accessed: 14 April 2021), p. 25.

The survey results should be compared with research on Ukrainians' opinions about "heroes of all time". Back in 1999 "during the presidential campaign, Kuchma and his people" created a calendar of Ukrainian heroes which presented a "historical pantheon", but Stepan Bandera was not among those chosen (Chruślińska, 2009: 289). In 2015, 8.25% of those surveyed considered Bandera one of the most important historical figures in Ukraine, giving him seventh place among the 100 people listed. The top three were Taras Shevchenko (62.9%), Bohdan Khmelnytsky (23.5%) and Lesia Ukrainka (19%). The first three places were held by the same people as in 2012, whereas Bandera's pop-

ularity had almost doubled in that time (from 4.3%), causing him to move up from ninth position (Соціологічна група «Рейтинг», 2015: 5–6; Соціологічна група «Рейтинг», 2012: 7).

Table 1

After: Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» (2015), *Найвидатніші українці, травень 2015*

Percentage of people regarding S. Bandera as one of the three most outstanding Ukrainians of all time, by region of residence in 2012 and 2015						
	West	Centre	North	South (in 2015 excluding Crimea)	East	Donbas
May 2012	16	1	1	1	2	2
May 2015	26	5	5	1	3	3

[http://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg\\_files/rg\\_top\\_ukry\\_052015.pdf](http://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg_files/rg_top_ukry_052015.pdf) (accessed 11 April 2021), p. 8; Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» (2012), *Народний ТОП, Видатні українці усіх часів, травень 2012*, [http://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg\\_files/rg\\_top\\_ukrainian\\_052012.pdf](http://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg_files/rg_top_ukrainian_052012.pdf) (accessed 11 April 2021), p. 7.

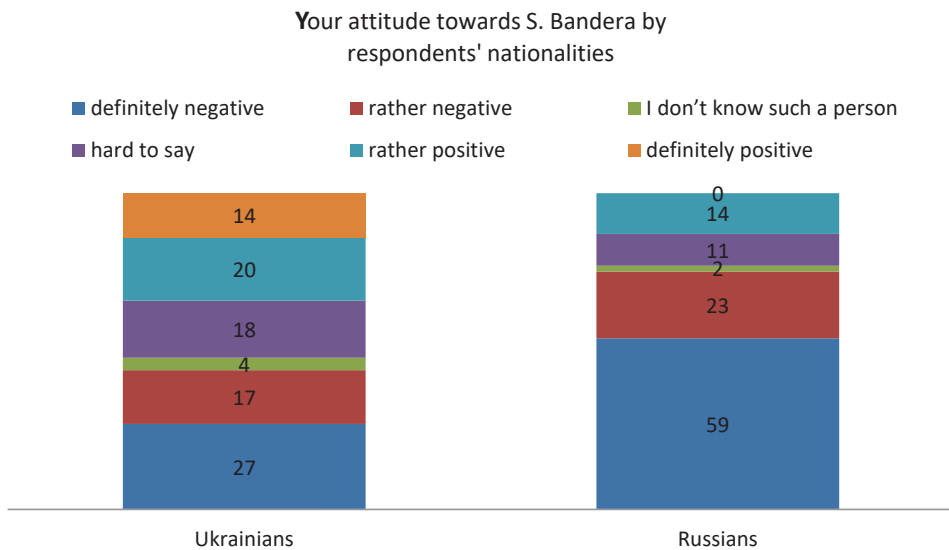
In the central regions and the north of the country, a small yet significant increase in sympathy can be noticed compared with the situation back in 2012, which may have been influenced by the Revolution of Dignity, after which some Ukrainians began to believe that being a “Banderite” was tantamount to a declaration of anti-Russianism. Such attitudes were far removed from any reflection on Bandera’s place in historiography or assessment of his activity. They were a response to a threat to the state’s security and territorial integrity, and a kind of rebellion against politicians associated with Viktor Yanukovich and the Party of Regions, who were still in power, and whose pro-Kremlin connections were known to everyone.

The results of the study conducted in May 2014 point to very similar views among Ukrainians. At that time, Bandera was viewed positively mostly by those Ukrainians who did not feel nostalgic for the Soviet Union – in that group 51% of responses were positive and 30% negative. The proportions were different among those who did feel nostalgic for the USSR – in this group Bandera was assessed positively by only 8% of respondents, and as many as 76% rated him clearly negatively. In the first group, only Stalin (87%) and Vladimir Putin (94%) had a higher number of negative opinions. At the same time, it is interesting to note that supporters of the Russian president were those who were most critical of Bandera (only 2% declared a positive attitude towards him), while those who rated him positively were the least fond of Putin (1%)

(Соціологічна група «Рейтинг», 2014: 9–10). We can surmise that, to some extent, these likes and dislikes were reflective of a broader trend, which is the identification of Russia with the Soviet Union by some citizens, and thus the equating of good relations with Russia with a return to the times of mythical Soviet prosperity. This echoes a certain nostalgia, but also shows a lack of understanding of the political, economic and social situation. Finally, it is also the result of propaganda creating a polarised vision of the world in which Ukraine is at one extreme and Russia at the other, where, for those who are pro-Russian, the former country is symbolised by the “evil” Bandera and the latter by the “good” Putin (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

*After: Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» (2014), Ностальгія за СРСР та ставлення до окремих постатей*



[http://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg\\_files/rg\\_historical\\_ua\\_052014.pdf](http://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg_files/rg_historical_ua_052014.pdf) (accessed 11 April 2021), pp. 9–10.

The results of the research conducted between 22 and 29 April 2021 by the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation and the Razumkov Centre point to similar percentages of respondents (32%) who said that they feel positively about Bandera and who feel negatively about him. Residents of Russian-occupied Crimea and parts of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions were not included in the survey, and taking this into account, it was concluded that the

negative attitude towards Bandera prevails in the southern and eastern regions (54% and 48%, respectively). At the same time, in both regions, Bandera is perceived as a positive figure by 11% of respondents. Ukrainians living in the western part of the country were much more sympathetic towards him (71%) (День, 2021). It can be clearly seen that as the years have passed it is still hard to talk about an unambiguous image of this historical figure, and Ukrainian citizens are divided on how he should be assessed. Consequently, neither important events in domestic politics, such as the change of president, nor Russian aggression, nor (as can be assumed) Ukrainian historical policy, had a significant impact on public opinions at that time.

Marek Wojnar emphasises that between 2014 and 2019, the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (UIPN) “pursued a policy of remembrance towards Stepan Bandera” consisting in organising conferences and exhibitions, preparing educational materials and providing recommendations for schools, but he also points out that among the conferences “organised by the UIPN, only one was related to Stepan Bandera: the symposium *Ukrainian liberation movement of the 1920s–1950s: the idea of statehood and its implementation* held on 29–30 June 2016”. A “one-minute video” about Bandera was posted on YouTube, and although the Institute perpetuated “nationalist myths” using a board game and a book titled *War and Myth. The Unknown Second World War 1939–1945* (Wojnar 2020: 198–199), it seems that there were no large-scale projects promoting Bandera. The president of the UIPN, Volodymyr Viatrovych, himself said that “Bandera has become a specific indicator of Ukrainianness. If a politician is not ready to stand up for Bandera streets in Ukraine, then I’m sure that these are politicians who are not ready to defend Ukrainian national interests at a time when we will have to face major Russian attacks” (*Бандера перетворився*, 2019). At the same time, however, he objected to naming streets after Bandera as he considered this to be a reduplication of the “Soviet experience with Lenin” (*Володимир В’ятрович*). This inconsistency may reflect not so much an incoherent or uncritical approach to the historical figure, but rather a desire to preserve the right to one’s own interpretation of history. “Not only do we have the right to heroes that our neighbours may not like, but undoubtedly also to judge our own ones as we like” Viatrovych said, adding that “there is something about Bandera that can be admired and something worthy of condemnation. However, this should be done on the basis of one’s own opinion, and not because his biography irritates people in Russia, Poland, Israel or elsewhere” (*Володимир В’ятрович. Про рівень*, 2021).

On the other hand, in the report on the operations of the UIPN for 2020, signed by Anton Drobovych, Viatrovych’s successor as the organisation’s pres-

ident, there is only one mention of Bandera, referring to a public discussion about him organised by the Central Interregional Department of the Institute and the Vinnytsia Regional Youth Centre “Kvadrat” on 12 October (*Публічний*, 2020). Therefore, Bandera may appear not to have been a figure to whom special attention was paid, even by the UIPN, a fact which was reflected in public opinions about him.

The situation changed after 24 February 2022, when Russia started a full-scale war in Ukraine. On 5–12 August 2022, when Ukrainians were asked whether, in their opinion, Stepan Bandera’s activity should be rated positively or rather negatively, as many as 49.6% of those asked selected the first answer. Only 11.1% of the Ukrainians surveyed were critical of him, while 19.4% felt that Bandera and his activity could be viewed as both positive and negative, 18.1% had no opinion on the matter, and only 1.8% of respondents had not heard of him. Therefore, compared with 2021, the share of respondents who held a favourable opinion about Bandera’s activity had increased by 19%, while the share of respondents who assessed his activity negatively had decreased by 21%.

Consistently critical opinions prevailed among residents of the southern regions (the Odesa and Mykolaiv regions), where as many as 9% of those questioned did not even know who Stepan Bandera was. Supporters of the former USSR were also reluctant to think of him positively (32% of people in this group expressed a critical attitude). On the other hand, when respondents’ language is considered, the number of Russian-speaking respondents having a positive attitude towards this historical figure (29%) was larger than the number being of the opposite opinion (20%) (*Як трансформується*, 2022).

In spite of Kremlin propaganda which persistently calls Ukrainians “Banderites”, Bandera has become a symbol of the struggle against Russian aggression, and yet he still evokes negative associations not only in Russia, but also in Poland. Also in the latter, certain circles hostile to Ukraine and, above all, critical of the aid provided to war refugees overuse the term “Banderism”, which for them encompasses not only all the harm done to Poles by Ukrainians, but also contemporary alleged threats, such as influencing the results of Polish elections, taking jobs, or obtaining priority treatment from the health service. Similar views are expressed in online discussions, characterised by a false sense of anonymity which, in turn, causes users to express less balanced opinions. The opinions voiced by Internet users largely result from disinformation spread by pro-Russian sources with a vested interest in fuelling the Polish–Ukrainian conflict and creating a negative image of the refugees.

In spite of what has just been said, but mainly due to having to face the Russian invader, Ukrainians better understood the meaning of the struggle



that the Ukrainian Insurgent Army had waged against Soviet troops, and their attitudes to Bandera became more favourable than had been the case before 2022. A figure who divided Ukrainian society is now more often appreciated as a personification of resistance, although the wartime heroes were primarily the soldiers and ordinary people who fought for freedom every day.

### Bandera in the Maidan

The protests sparked by the Ukrainian government's rejection of the Association Agreement with the European Union, which took place at the turn of 2013 and 2014, were not only pro-European and anti-presidential, but also, to a large extent, anti-Russian. On the other hand, the pro-Russian media portrayed the Maidan and the overthrow of Viktor Yanukovich as a conspiracy of "Banderist" far-right circles. Their symbol was the Svoboda party (BO Свобода), which was already criticised by the Polish side in 2019 for, among other things, organising demonstrations in front of Polish diplomatic missions in Ukraine, during which they protested against the "forced Polonisation of Ukrainians between the fifteenth and twentieth century" and glorified Bandera and the OUN-UPA (AMSZ2010a).

During the Maidan, this group was said to recognise Bandera as its icon, as evidenced by a torchlight procession of several thousand people organised on 1 January 2014 in Kyiv to commemorate the 105th anniversary of Bandera's birth. The march was led by Svoboda leader Oleh Tiahnybok and MPs Andriy Ilyenko and Ihor Miroshnychenko (alongside clergymen and a girl carrying a portrait of the "hero"). The following year, Miroshnychenko became head of Svoboda in the Sumy region. He also gained attention for taking Bandera's portrait to the headquarters of the International Association Football Federation (FIFA). Although the organisers of the Maidan shunned such actions (Ильенко и Мирошниченко 2013; Москвичова 2014; Тисячі людей 2014; Заяц 2014), they resulted in publications such as "Евромайдан имени Степана Бандеры. От демократии к диктатуре" (*Neonazis & Euromaidan: From Democracy to Dictatorship*) by Stanislav Byshok and Alexey Kochetkov<sup>1</sup> (Бышок, Кочетков,

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<sup>1</sup> This publication was prepared by the Public Diplomacy foundation, which was "established in 2010 with the purpose of normalising and harmonising inter-ethnic, inter-religious and inter-state relations both within and beyond the post-Soviet space", and uses the ".su" Internet domain, designated for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The publication is available at: <https://www.publicdiplomacy.su/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Stani-slav-Byishok-Alexey-Kochetkov-Evromaydan-imeni-Stepana-Banderyi.-Ot-demokratii-k-diktature-2014.pdf>

2014), where links between the demonstrations and “Banderism” were alluded to in the original title.

Much as this kind of message reinforces the stereotype of a nationalist Ukraine, Ukrainians themselves did not express approval of Svoboda in the 2007 elections, when the party won only 0.76% of the vote (Центральна Виборча Комісія, 2008: 480), or in the 2019 elections (2.15% of the vote) (Центральна Виборча Комісія, 2020). Similarly, the party did not gain much support in the 2010 presidential election – Oleh Tyahnybok won 1.43% of votes (Центральна Виборча Комісія, 2010). Four years later, he received only 210,476 votes, 1.16% of the total (Центральна Виборча Комісія, 2016: 248, 299).

Importantly, it was pointed out in Ukraine that Svoboda, which was accused of extreme nationalism by Russians, was linked not only to the Kremlin, but also to the Party of Regions, against which the “nationalists” were protesting in the Maidan. Moscow was said to sponsor the group’s activities through, among others, oligarchs such as Dmytro Firtash, years ago an active supporter of the Yanukovich regime (“Свободу” фінансувала 2014; Починок 2015; “Свобода” фігурує 2016; Давиденко 2017; У США 2020). Without verifying (as there is no reliable evidence) the validity of such claims, it should be noted that the increasing popularity of far-right groups or exaggeration of the importance of nationalist circles in Ukraine is undoubtedly in Russia’s interest. Portraying Ukrainians as radicals, xenophobes or antisemites reduces public confidence in the state, affects its position in the international arena, and has a direct impact on bilateral relations.

Even if it is assumed that, when resorting to the black-and-red symbolism, Ukrainians are manifesting not so much nationalism understood as an ideology based on hatred of other nations, but rather an attachment to their own country which is closer to patriotism, the advertising of this phenomenon – combined with the lack of reliable commentary – reinforces the impression of Ukraine as a stronghold of radicalism. This fact has been eagerly picked up by the media, and the ongoing war in eastern Ukraine has been conducive to the presentation of such topics. One of these was the actions taken on the eastern front by the Azov regiment, which was presented, among others, by Polish right-wing websites as nationalist (Łuniewski 2019; Parafinowicz 2019). Given the sensational headlines carried by reports on the subject, publications describing Azov as a victim of Russia’s “black PR” did not get much attention (Wyrwał 2020). Therefore, the struggle to defend Ukraine’s territorial integrity, which has been continuing since 2014, is seen by some circles as a manifestation of Kyiv’s aggressive policy, not worthy of the support of the international community.

## Bandera – Ukraine’s hero or Yushchenko’s hero?

According to Wieslaw Romanowski, the Polish view of Stepan Bandera, especially in circles associated with eastern borderland organisations, is based on “the borderland model of this figure, (...) on the Volhynian narrative, on belief in the exceptionally vile Ukrainian national character”, which, in the light of historical facts, does not withstand criticism, since “the Volhynian Massacre has its roots in Polish–Ukrainian history” (Romanowski 2016: 10). As has already been noted, the belief that attitudes towards Bandera can be analysed at the level of Ukraine as a whole is a far-fetched idea. The strong regionalisation of historical memory means that Bandera’s popularity is greater in the western regions of Ukraine, and what is more, for many years the proximity of the border and more frequent contacts between Poles and Ukrainians of this region, combined with a lack of knowledge about the country as a whole, more often than not resulted in the belief that Bandera was approved of by all Ukrainians.

Additionally, actions undertaken by the authorities contributed to the development of such views; for example, the title “Hero of Ukraine” was awarded to Roman Shukhevych on 12 October 2007 and to Stepan Bandera on 22 January 2010 by Viktor Yushchenko (Указ № 965/2007; Указ № 46/2010). In a sense, this decision was taken to meet a demand made by deputies of the Lviv Regional Council, who had already appealed to the president on this issue on 22 September 2009, claiming that “all Ukrainians expected this title to be awarded on the centenary of Stepan Bandera, celebrated on 1 January 2009”<sup>2</sup> (Степану Бандері 2009). At the same time, a discussion ensued on the legitimacy of awarding such a title to controversial figures who are not approved of by the general public, and Timothy Snyder remarked that the practice itself, introduced by a decree of President Leonid Kuchma in 1998, dated back to Soviet times and, as such, should not be observed in an independent country (Снайдер 2010: 218; Указ № 944/98; Указ № 1114/2002).

The awarding of the title “Hero of Ukraine” to Stepan Bandera sparked a strong response on the Polish side, and, as Polish MP Sylwester Pawłowski wrote, “posthumous honours for Bandera” aroused “concerns on the Polish side of the border among people whose families suffered cruelty at the hands of Ukrainian nationalists during and immediately after the Second World War” (AMSZ2010). The Opole Voivodeship Assembly adopted a resolution con-

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<sup>2</sup> The deputies also wanted OUN and UPA soldiers to be recognised as fighters for Ukraine’s independence, wished Ukrainian Army Day to be celebrated as a public holiday on October 14, and voted for the foundation of the Order of Stepan Bandera.

demning the honouring of the perpetrators of genocide in the Eastern Borderlands of the Second Polish Republic by Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko. It also appealed to the Polish authorities to take action to have the Ukrainian decree annulled (AMSZ2010d). The Koszalin branch of the Society of Lovers of Lviv and South-Eastern Borderlands expressed its strong opposition to the decree, mentioning among the ideologues of the Volhynian Massacre not only Bandera and Shukhevych, but also Dmytro Dontsov and Klym Savura, to whose memory "President Yushchenko's Ukraine has erected monuments, built squares and streets". At the same time, the Polish authorities were criticised for "turning a blind eye" to these actions "in the name of strategic partnership", which was seen as an "approval of falsifying history" (AMSZ2010b). This is an extremely serious allegation, because it is not the first time that the Polish government has been accused of excessive leniency towards Ukraine, which might have influenced the shape of Poland's eastern policy, primarily by weakening it thanks to politicians who were guided in their decision-making more by the desire to please their electorate than by political pragmatism.

The position of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs was much more balanced, as it viewed this problem "in the spirit of the resolution of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland of 15 July 2009, in which the actions of the OUN/UPA were recognised as mass murders of the nature of ethnic cleansing and having genocidal features" (M.P. 2009 No. 47, item 684). In a note to the Ukrainian foreign ministry, which was a response to Ukraine's decision to give Bandera the controversial title and posthumously award him the Order of the State, it was emphasised that the so-called "sense of historical injustice" cannot be a justification for the murder of Polish people treated as a symbol of the nation to which the injustice was attributed. It was recalled that neither Poles nor a united Europe could support the construction of a national identity based on the nationalist traditions of the OUN and UPA, and a protest was expressed against Svoboda's pickets in front of Polish diplomatic and consular missions, whose participants glorified Bandera and nationalist organisations. Simultaneously, it was emphasised that these groups were not of significant importance. The award of the title to Bandera brought objections from Ukrainians themselves, and in November 2009, Minister Radosław Sikorski and his counterpart Petro Poroshenko set up the Polish-Ukrainian Partnership Forum, whose task was, among other things, to open a debate on the painful events in the common history of the two states. Dialogue was considered the only means that would lead to reconciliation between the two nations and the creation of "an objective picture of the tragedy that took place in Volhynia". Moreover, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs suspected that Yushchenko's decision might have

been part of his election campaign and a result of internal disputes in Ukraine (AMSZ2010c). This view seemed to be distant from the opinion expressed in 2008 that “President Yushchenko is pursuing a historical policy aimed at glorifying UPA units” (AMSZ2008), and one might get the impression that the ministry had significantly toned down its assessment of the situation in Ukraine.

It was not only Poles who took a critical stance on this controversial issue. The Simon Wiesenthal Centre (*Wiesenthal* 2010) also protested against the award of the title to Bandera. Yushchenko failed to unite his own people and received a mere 5.45% of the vote in the subsequent presidential election, despite choosing to hold it on Unity Day (Центральна Виборча Комісія, 2010). As early as January 2010, the Verkhovna Rada of Crimea put forward a motion to strip Bandera of the title of Hero of Ukraine (*Крим вимагає* 2010), and mentions of the possibility of such a move were already being made in March 2010. In 2011, the matter was finally resolved when the Supreme Administrative Court ruled that the award of the title of Hero of Ukraine to Stepan Bandera was unlawful, and moreover stated that he had never been a Ukrainian citizen. Pursuant to a presidential decree, the title was taken away from both Bandera and Shukhevych, which was perhaps one of the most pro-European moves made by Yanukovich (*Янукович заявив* 2010; *Януковичу Бандера* 2011; *Рішенням* 2011; *Суд залишив* 2011; *У Бандери Героя* 2011; *У Бандери забрали* 2011; *ВАСУ* 2011). This act was supported by 53% of citizens, while 28% opposed it and 19% had no opinion on the matter. The greatest percentage of enthusiasts of Bandera’s “degradation” (83%) was found in Donbas, and throughout the country such enthusiasts were mainly supporters of the Party of Regions (28%), which sided with Russia, the Communist Party of Ukraine (24%) or the pro-Yanukovich Lytvyn Bloc (21%). In the western regions, the percentage of those supporting the court’s decision amounted to only 15%, while as many as 73% of those surveyed were against it. There, however, only 3%, most of whom were voters of Our Ukraine (52%) and Svoboda (57%), were ready to demonstrate in opposition to such political actions (Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» 2010: 21–23).

It should be emphasised that Ukrainians also objected to certain Polish decisions, and the mere fact that they did not agree to heroise Bandera was not tantamount to recognising the Polish point of view on historical issues. A resolution of the Polish Sejm of 15 July 2009 on the tragic fate of Poles in the Eastern Borderlands (M.P. 2009 No. 47, item 684) was condemned by the Lviv Regional Council, and its deputies sent a statement on this matter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kyiv and the Ukrainian Embassy in Warsaw. They concluded that the statement regarding the Eastern Borderlands included in

the document was a manifestation of “territorial claims against Ukraine” and that the references to “mass murder and ethnic cleansing with signs of genocide” were untrue and should be changed. Ukrainians also responded to the Polish entry ban imposed on a bicycle rally “in the footsteps of Bandera”, which began on 1 August 2009 and was supposed to lead through Poland and end in Munich (*Депутати Львівщини звернулись* 2009; Poland has a claim 2009). The idea of this project was viewed negatively in Poland, while for Ukrainians it was a way to honour the memory of the man identified with the struggle for a free, non-Soviet Ukraine. It was difficult to find a common platform for discussion of the matter, but it was also impossible to assume that Poles would unanimously accept the image of Bandera as a fighter for a free Ukraine, working with the US and British intelligence services after the war, a victim of the KGB. Even if no one denied these facts, they did not counterbalance the belief that this nationalist was personally responsible for the crimes committed against Poles.

At that time, the Polish side watched with growing concern “the increase in nationalist sentiments, which led to the glorification of extreme organisations such as the OUN and UPA and their leaders, and the often groundless accusations against the Polish authorities of a negative attitude towards Ukrainians”. Admittedly, it was acknowledged that each country has the right to its own historical memory; however, this should be as objective and rational as possible, taking into account “the sensitivity of other nations, especially those adopting a friendly stance”. It was emphasised that Poles perceived the OUN and UPA as having fascist tendencies, and the parliament’s resolution was intended “solely to preserve the objective historical truth about the Volhynian events” and not to worsen mutual relations, as “Polish–Ukrainian animosities only benefit third parties”. Poles and Ukrainians had already taken steps towards reconciliation across historical divisions, as evidenced, among others, by Aleksander Kwaśniewski’s and Leonid Kuchma’s statement “On reconciliation on the 60th anniversary of the tragic events in Volhynia”, joint ceremonies in Pavlivka (formerly Poryck) and Pawłokoma, and commemorations in Huta Pieniacka, but as the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted, these reconciliatory gestures were not always widely known among the public (AMSZ2009).

The choice of heroes and unique events in a country’s history is a right that every nation has at its disposal. However, what we sometimes fail to realise is that the Ukrainian assessment of events in their own history of the twentieth century and of the struggle for independence is similar to what the Poles have been through. The Red Army and Soviet partisans are now a dubious point of reference in Ukraine; similarly, in Poland, it would be difficult to imagine a cult

of the People's Army or Berling's army. In contrast, in 2019, the remembrance of the Home Army was recognised as a source of pride by 42% of Poles – down 3% compared with 2014 (CBOS, 2019: 9). If we consider Poles' attitudes towards Polish armed groups fighting against the communist authorities, these are also not unanimously positive. In 2017, 49% of respondents believed that the armed attacks against civilians carried out by these groups meant that they could not be called heroes, while 31% of those questioned in the same survey were of the opposite opinion. However, the respondents were quite equally split in their opinions on the impact of the armed underground struggle on the stabilisation of the post-war situation and the reconstruction of the country – 41% believed that it hindered these processes, and the same number held the opposite view (CBOS 2017: 9, 11).

In an ideal world, citizens would probably have access to detailed and objective information and, on that basis, form their own opinion about the past. In the current reality, however, national myths, in which there is usually no room to show the darker sides of certain heroes, prevail in the public space. This is the reason why Ukrainians are often reluctant to stress those threads in Bandera's biography that are important for Poles, nor do they feel obliged to acknowledge a direct link between him and the events in Volhynia. From the Polish perspective, this is viewed as distorting or whitewashing history, which is reflected in an inability to develop a good understanding of these issues and may perpetuate stereotypes shaping opinions about the neighbouring country, although in this case the past seems to be playing an ever declining role in the perception of this neighbouring country and nation.

In 2017, 10% of Ukrainians considered Poland to be an unfriendly country, while 81% expressed the opposite sentiment, and 9% had no opinion on the subject. At the same time, as many as 42% of those questioned believed that mutual relations had improved, compared with only 14% who said that they had deteriorated (Stryjek, Konieczna-Sałamatin, Zacharuk, 2017: 64). A year later, 29% of Poles assessed the relations between the two countries as good and 44% as neutral, while 13% described them as bad, of whom 47% blamed the Ukrainians for that state of affairs, 7% blamed their own country, and 40% said both sides were equally to blame. Whilst 60% of all respondents were convinced that the common past divided the two nations, 23% believed that, on the contrary, it united them. However, 64% of Poles believed in a chance of reconciliation between Poles and Ukrainians, compared with 21% who did not (ibid. 2–3).

Poles have shown a greater readiness for reconciliation since the Orange Revolution of 2004, when their knowledge about Ukraine increased thanks

to, among others, the involvement of Polish politicians in the Maidan events in Kyiv and extensive media coverage. However, a similar increase in positive sentiment has not been observed after Euromaidan and the Russian aggression against Ukraine, when one might have expected them to spark a wave of solidarity with a neighbouring nation whose security was threatened by Moscow, or to change the perception of Ukrainians, who would be seen through the prism of their aspirations to join the European Union. Nevertheless, between 2013 and 2018, the percentage of people expressing the view that it was possible to overcome the divisions did not change, which may give us some hope for the future (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

After: CBOS (2018), *Wołyń 1943 – pamięć przywracana*, Report on survey, no. 84/2018, June 2018



[https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2018/K\\_084\\_18.PDF](https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2018/K_084_18.PDF) (accessed 12 April 2021), p. 4.

The results of public opinion polls in Poland show that our positive attitude towards Ukrainians reached an unusually high level (43%) in 2021. The percentage of negative responses was low (26%), and compared with the record year of 1994 was down by 40 percentage points (CBOS 2021: 4–5). Bearing in mind that it is hard to talk about a positive breakthrough in bilateral cooperation or more active Polish eastern policy, such a change in attitude may have been influenced by the pandemic and a sense of shared tragedy, or a grow-



ing sense of solidarity in the face of Russian aggression. The role of Ukrainian economic migration cannot be neglected either, as it means that we now have a growing opportunity to establish personal relations with Ukrainians and no longer look at them as “Banderites”, but see them as neighbours, co-workers, or parents of our children’s friends.

The attitude of Poles towards Ukrainians has changed drastically since 24 February 2022. According to a study published in the *Nauka* quarterly, nearly six months after the start of this phase of the war, 94% of Poles would not mind having a Ukrainian person as a co-worker. A Ukrainian neighbour would be welcomed by 95% of respondents, and a similar percentage (92%) would accept them as a family member. Moreover, 54% of those asked considered Ukrainians similar to Poles, 23% very similar, and 4% identical. Only 17% thought of them as “different” (Поляки... 2022).

Ukrainians were also asked similar questions in September 2022 and, according to the answers provided, 73% of respondents had “begun to think better of Poles”, while 23% had not changed their opinion. Only 1% of those questioned had begun to think worse of them. These views were undoubtedly influenced by the aid and support provided to Ukraine by Poland. More than half of the survey participants (58%) were in favour of a rapprochement between the two nations (Маджумдар, 2022). Both surveys yielded extremely optimistic results, on the basis of which we can assume that there are grounds for building an understanding and partnership between the nations not so much on a political level as in terms of interpersonal relations. Moreover, when asked which of the neighbouring nations was the closest to them, 72% of Ukrainians indicated the Poles. The proportion of such responses was higher in those areas where relations between the two nations were affected by their common past – in Galicia, 91% of respondents considered Poles to be the closest to them, and, interestingly enough, in Kyiv and Podolia, but also Volhynia, as many as 81% of respondents were of the same opinion (Адамський, 2022). This clearly indicates that difficult historical relations do not influence the way Ukrainians view their neighbour today, and reveals a potential that the governments of both countries should exploit.

In 2003, Viktor Yushchenko wrote in a letter to Adam Michnik: “I am aware that without dealing with this terrible legacy, it is not possible to establish good neighbourly relations between our peoples and states. They must be underpinned by truth and reconciliation built on this truth. We must approach this process with a pure heart, be open to the opinion of the other side. Before you

start talking about the guilt of others, you have to confess your own. For me, the greatest burden is what my compatriots did to Poles – and they often did it in the name of patriotism” (Yushchenko 2003). When writing these words, the president may have overestimated the importance of the past and underestimated interpersonal relationships.

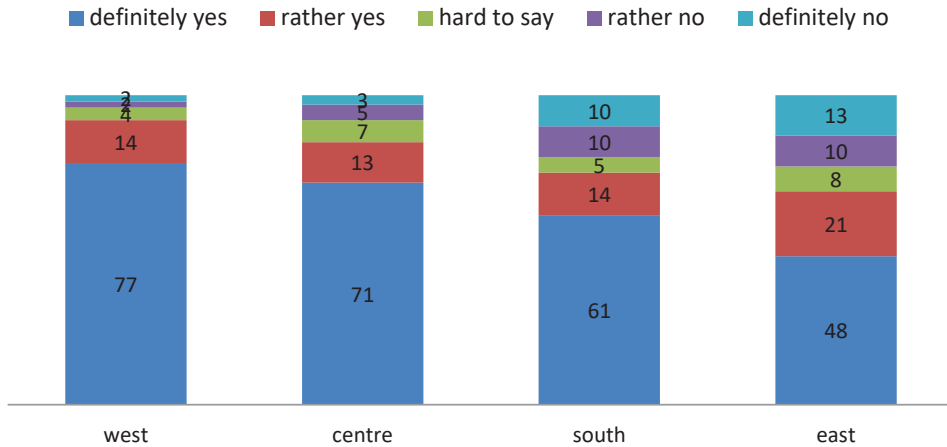
### **Patriotism**

In 2008, 88% of Poles considered themselves patriots (CBOS, 2021: 6), which was close to what Ukrainians thought about themselves. Between 2010 and 2019, the proportion of those Ukrainians who viewed themselves as patriots increased from 76% to 83%, with only a small difference between the west of the country, traditionally considered nationalist, and the east (86% to 80%). The figure was 85% for Ukrainians in the centre of the country, and 78% in the south. Considering the criterion of language, 87% of Ukrainian-speaking citizens saw themselves as patriots, compared with 84% of those who spoke both Ukrainian and Russian on a daily basis, and 73% of Russian-speaking citizens (Соціологічна група «РЕЙТИНГ», 2019: 9). From Kyiv’s point of view, these are undoubtedly promising results, proving that in Ukraine a sense of community and ties with the homeland are not dependent on issues such as linguistic identification, which are perceived abroad as weakening the Ukrainian nation. On the other hand, there are significant differences when it comes to the question of whether respondents favoured Ukraine’s independence. Positive answers prevailed in the western regions of Ukraine. In the whole country, 67% of respondents definitely favoured independence, while 15% answered “rather yes” (see Figure 4).

The war that has been continuing since February 2022 changed the views of Ukrainians on this issue. If a referendum on Ukraine’s independence had been held in August 2022, 87.5% of respondents would have voted in favour of independence, 3.2% would have been opposed, and 5.5% would not have participated; 3.9% did not state their opinion. At the same time, the years of the independent state were assessed positively by only 37.2% of those questioned, who believed that there were more positives than negatives during this time. In turn, 15.1% of Ukrainians assessed those years negatively, and 40.5% of respondents believed that good and bad experiences balanced each other out. Clearly, then, the desire to live in an independent country does not mean being uncritical of one’s country’s history and present-day situation (*День*, 2022).

Figure 4

Would you favour Ukraine's independence today (August 2019)?



[http://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg\\_files/rg\\_patriotyzm\\_082019.pdf](http://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg_files/rg_patriotyzm_082019.pdf) (accessed 11 April 2021), p. 9.

In contrast, over the years 2010–2019, the proportion of Ukrainians who would describe themselves as nationalists fell from 24% to 16% (see Figure 5). In 2019, 20% of residents in the west of the country declared themselves to be nationalists, while only 7% of those living in the south and 18% in the centre and in the east of Ukraine saw themselves as such (Соціологічна група «Рейтинг», 2019, p. 16).

The full-scale war unleashed by Russia has had an impact on Ukrainians' views on nationalism. When asked whether they would agree with the statement that Ukraine “needs healthy nationalism”, the majority of citizens answered that they would, with 51% of Russian-speaking respondents agreeing with the statement and 21% being of the opposite opinion. These figures can be compared with the answers given by Ukrainian-speaking citizens, for whom the results were 74% and 7%, respectively. A total of 67% of respondents agreed with the statement nationally. Interestingly, between 1991 and 2006, 48% of Ukrainians opted for “healthy nationalism”, and later the number began to increase. The Orange Revolution, the Revolution of Dignity, and then the occupation of Crimea and the armed conflict undoubtedly caused Ukrainians to re-evaluate their views in this matter (*Як трансформується* 2022).

In the name of patriotism, some Ukrainians pay attention to selected episodes from Bandera's biography. Some politicians and ideologists of right-wing groups see him as a powerful symbol of the struggle for Ukraine's independence, but even before 24 February 2022, most citizens did not accept this narra-

tive. Volodymyr Viatrovych noted that this often stemmed from the belief that it is hard to call a national hero a man who “did not directly participate in the liberation struggle”; the reason was that he was imprisoned by the Poles, then spent some time in a German camp, and after the Second World War remained in exile and could not influence the situation in Ukraine (В’ятрович). However, this seems to be a great oversimplification, as confirmed by the previously discussed sceptical attitude of Ukrainians towards nationalism, and therefore towards people identified with it.

Figure 5

After: Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» (2019), Динаміка патріотичних настроїв українців, Серпень 2019



[http://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg\\_files/rg\\_patriotyzm\\_082019.pdf](http://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg_files/rg_patriotyzm_082019.pdf) (accessed 11 April 2021), p. 15.

In turn, in Stanislav Bezushko’s view, since 2014 the definition of a patriot has become more important for Ukrainians than someone’s professional and personal qualities, but at the same time it has been devalued. “If you are a *patriot* it does not matter if you are a corrupt person, a cheat, or even a criminal.” For these people, the main task became the unreflective “protection of Bandera” and the national idea (Безушко, 2021), which would support the aim of building a new post-Maidan patriotism, based on myths and anti-Russian in its expression. This was manifested in undertakings such as the decision of the Lviv Regional Council, taken by a majority of votes on 15 March 2021, expressing support for the appeal to the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine to change the name of the Arena Lviv stadium to Stepan Bandera Arena Lviv. The reasoning stated that “naming the stadium after Stepan Bandera will be of key importance to shaping the national consciousness and will contribute to the patriotic education of young people”.

However, in Maksym Kozytskyi's opinion, it was an act of "banal provincialism" (Козицький, 2021).

Such a blurring of the message, which needs to be unambiguously positively associated with a historical hero so that it can fill a specific role, is undoubtedly welcomed by Ukraine's enemies, as it diminishes the power of the propaganda accompanying such a figure. At the same time, Bandera's growing "presence" in the public space means that Ukraine is critically assessed in the international arena. Suffice it to mention the outrage caused by naming the stadium in Ternopil after Roman Shukhevych, which led to the intervention of the Israeli and Polish ambassadors. Also, on 23 December 2020, the Ternopil Regional Council appealed to President Volodymyr Zelensky to return the title of Hero of Ukraine to Roman Shukhevych and Stepan Bandera. Justifying their request, the council urged Zelensky not to repeat the "mistakes of former Ukrainian presidents" and pointed to the "indomitable spirit in the service of the national idea, heroism and sacrifice in the struggle for an independent Ukrainian state" of both controversial figures (*Тернопільська облрада* 2020). On 17 February 2021, the Lviv Regional Council (*Депутати Львівщини закликали* 2021) also made such a request, which was negatively received by the Polish side. However, what from Warsaw's perspective is interpreted as an escalation of nationalist or far-right sentiments can also be seen as a kind of sabotage, resulting in the weakening of Ukraine's position.

Jarosław Hrycak believes that for Russia, making Bandera a hero is "a gift for its ideological war with Ukraine", and for Poles it is an argument to stop thinking of Kyiv as a strategic partner (Грицак 2010: 344). Vasyl Rasevych, on the other hand, emphasises the "long-standing experience" of Russian propaganda in portraying heroes as "collective embodiment", along with the creation of anti-heroes as representatives of the whole nation. In this case, Bandera, a controversial figure for Ukrainians as well, becomes their personification, and he is viewed as such by other countries, including Poland (Расевич, 2021). Bandera conjures up negative connotations that have an impact not only on the perception of Ukraine as such, but also on the assessment of the need to establish good mutual relations between Kyiv and Warsaw. Poles have on more than one occasion, especially in discussions held in the virtual space, expressed their indignation at the steps taken by Polish governments, which are pursuing, or have pursued, a policy aimed at the implementation of strategic partnership, and have supported Ukraine not only on its road to closer cooperation with the European Union and NATO, but also in challenging times for our neighbour. One of the measures criticised was the transfer of 303,500,000 zlotys to Ukraine in 2016 for development

cooperation (Zalas-Kamińska, Chmiel, 2020: 7). Citizens have responded to such reports by claiming that the government is stealing from them and investing the money to support hostile forces, while resentment is directed at the beneficiaries of aid. This discontent, especially in the case of politicians driven by populism rather than pragmatism, may bring a chill in relations between the two countries or cause them to be marginalised.

By conferring on someone the honourable title of national hero, a country takes on the burden of responsibility for everything that is associated with that figure, including the defending of their image. Diplomatic conflicts, scandals, and the tarnished reputation of a country considered to uphold nationalist values is the high price that Ukraine has to pay for the “Bandera cult”. At the same time, it is a price that benefits countries whose interest is to weaken Ukraine, such as Russia.

Bandera’s assassination by the KGB made him a victim of the Soviet Union and the communist regime. The fact that it was done in exile made him a martyr of the diaspora. Over the following years, his myth became so popular that Bandera’s political opponents joined the “Banderites” camp, and whether one knew his biography became a secondary, if not irrelevant, matter. Today, few people expect to find out what the truth about his life is, because Bandera is not so much a historical figure as a symbol: on the one hand, cementing certain Ukrainian circles, and on the other, perhaps more important, shaping Ukraine’s image in the world.

It is invariably in Poland’s interest to have a strong state as its neighbour to the east that might be a partner in restraining Russian imperial ambitions. In contrast, Moscow has consistently sought to destabilise the situation in Ukraine and to weaken it economically and politically. A strong Ukraine could definitively break free from Russian influence, and deny the legitimacy of Russia’s concepts of the near abroad or the *russkij mir* (Russian world), which are among the pillars of its foreign policy. The emancipation of the Orthodox Church was already a powerful failure for the Kremlin (Sawicz 2020: 151–186); the further step of building a strong democracy on the Dnieper, integrated with Western states, would be a disaster. Therefore, Bandera was and may still be viewed by Russians as a real blessing. Even if his cult is just a media product and has little to do with the opinion of Ukrainians at large, it effectively prevents certain political circles from engaging in rapprochement with a country that is considered a stronghold of aggressive nationalism.

### The real myth, or a few words of summary

Wiesław Romanowski says that after the Second World War, the Bandera myth in Russia was very regularly “dusted off” during Russian–Ukrainian tensions, whereas in Poland it resurfaced “on the margins of the Volhynia dispute – on the margins, because it was not in the mainstream of academic and public debate” until Bandera was posthumously awarded the title of hero (Romanowski 2016: 223). Also Jarosław Hrycak refers to this concept when talking about the Bandera monument in Lviv and calling it a monument to a myth (Грицак, 2008).

There is no doubt that historical memory in Ukraine is regionalised and it is impossible to recognise Bandera as a hero across the country, even if President Yushchenko tried to impose this. The current head of state, President Volodymyr Zelenski, avoids talking about Bandera. Even as a presidential candidate, he emphasised that Stepan Bandera is important only for a certain percentage of Ukrainians (Зеленський: Бандера 2019). Today, he believes that all those who have defended Ukraine are its heroes, adding that there is a thin line between a hero and an enemy (*Зеленський не відповів, 2020; Зеленський розповів, 2020; Зеленського запитали, 2020*).

His restrained attitude was most likely in line with the expectations of a large part of the population. In 2018, in the western regions of Ukraine, 52% of respondents felt that the central authorities paid too much attention to the past and not enough to current problems. In the eastern regions, 71% of those questioned were of the same opinion (Stryjek, Konieczna-Sałamatin, Otrishchenko 2018: 26). School (68%) was cited as a primary source of knowledge, with the reservation that trust in sources of knowledge in this field was limited – only one in four respondents declared that they trusted the publications of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (*ibid.* pp. 29–30). Also, 24% of the public had never visited any place of importance for the history of the state or region, and 38% had done so more than a year ago (*ibid.* p. 35) Oleksandr Zinchenko points out that between 2014 and 2016 no reference was made to Bandera in either presidential decrees or resolutions of the Verkhovna Rada, although at the same time 3.5% of all parliamentary documents referred to dates relevant to the OUN or the UPA. There are also no commemorative postage stamps or coins with Bandera’s image (Зінченко, 2017). In the face of these facts, it is somehow difficult to believe that a figure who often comes up in Polish debates on Ukrainian affairs is important to Ukrainians, or as important as Poles often believe him to be. It seems that the belief that Bandera is a cherished figure throughout the country points to a lack of sufficient knowledge of

Ukraine and Ukrainians, and Jarosław Kaczyński's words "you will not enter Europe with Bandera" were exaggerated (Donajski, 2017). In 2021, more than half of Ukrainians (58.8%) said that they would like to join the European Union (*Ставлення* 2021), but this does not mean that they will try to take Bandera with them. All the more so after becoming an EU candidate state, when 84% of citizens expressed their full support for the European Union, this being the highest rate of declared sympathy for international institutions.

According to Pavlo Podobyed, "Even when Ukraine regained independence, neither Petliura nor Bandera and Shukhevych became important symbols of national memory in our country [Ukraine]" (*Подобєд*, 2016). His opinion may indicate that Kyiv will search for other areas of memory that will unite the nation, as is the case today with the Great Famine. The official UIPN website, in the "Current Topics" category, provides information about the war with Russia currently taking place in eastern Ukraine (*Російсько*, 2019) and the 1917–1921 Ukrainian revolution (*Українська революція*, 2018), but neither of the publications is a recent one – they date from 2019 and 2018, respectively. This may indicate that reference to Bandera has not become a cornerstone of historical politics, although it is undoubtedly present in broadly defined discourse. To what extent, if at all, this situation will change after the war is difficult to predict today, but undoubtedly the policy of national remembrance has gained prominence in the eyes of Ukrainians. In December 2022, 80.2% of citizens considered it very important and only 11.2% said it was of minor importance (*Засудження*, 2022).

Dmytro Korchynsky says that "Being a nationalist in Lviv is ridiculous." Exaggerating and ridiculing today's version of the UPA myth, he recalls that its veterans, who, contrary to logic and nature, are growing in number year after year, say that they respected other nationalities, did not kill anyone and argue that the Ukrainian Insurgent Army cared about "the ecology of the Carpathians and fed the animals in the forest, while the Bolsheviks disturbed us". At the same time, Korchynsky does not deny the need for the existence of nationalism, but it cannot be xenophobic or aggressive, and must be aware of the diminishing role of states in the modern world. This is the reason why he believes that "You have to be an anarchist in Lviv." You have to be a Ukrainian bourgeois nationalist in Crimea, Donbas, Tyraspol, Moscow and Astana – any place where you can fight for an independent state and not support now outdated and undesirable ideas (*Корчинський*, 2008: 164–165). It can be assumed that this is an attitude close to many Ukrainian citizens, for whom the most important issue is the defence of their country's independence and territorial integrity, rather than a historical debate.



It seems necessary today to analyse the approach discussed above in order to understand what nationalism in Ukraine means and whether we are really dealing with such an extreme concept or rather with a “process of forming an official canon of Ukrainian history”, having all the characteristics of a “nationalisation of history”, which aims at “carrying out the tasks of belated creation of a nation and a nation state”, as Professor Leonid Zaskilniak believes (Zaskilniak, 2008: 34). This opinion seems to be one that accurately diagnoses the situation in Ukraine, and its recognition today is the key to developing an effective eastern policy and good Polish–Ukrainian relations, and to forming mutual relations that will be based not on myths, but on knowledge of who one’s neighbour is.

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**Keywords:** Stepan Bandera, nationalism, historical policy, Poland, Ukraine

## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of the article is to discuss the mythologisation of Stepan Bandera so as to make it known to a wider readership. Bandera is not a popular figure among Ukrainians nowadays, but he is used in shaping historical politics, which has a direct impact on Ukraine's foreign policy and relations with other countries. Applying the comparative method and the method of critical analysis, the following research hypotheses were examined: Stepan Bandera is not a leader or an outstanding historical hero in the eyes of all Ukrainians, and how he is assessed varies regionally; Bandera is not a figure who would gain popularity in a democratic state, and contemporary Ukrainian leaders distance themselves from him. Bandera's popularity is a myth that has shaped both Polish historical and foreign policy, but is also part of the interpretation of patriotism, understood as resistance to Russia, that is becoming increasingly common in Ukraine. The conclusion of the study is that historical memory in Ukraine is regionalised and Bandera cannot be considered a hero of the whole country, and the Ukrainian perception of nationalism diverges from the Polish view. As a specific symbol, he certainly does not play a major role in the social or political life of Ukraine, but rather serves to unite the nation around a common cause.*

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