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Decommunization in Ukraine as a Public Policy and as a Cultural Phenomenon

Summary

In a narrow sense, decommunization is understood in Ukraine nowadays as the process of implementation of so-called ‘decommunization laws’ approved by Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian parliament) on April 9, 2015. These are the acts *On the Legal Status and Honouring the Memory of Fighters for Ukraine’s Independence in the Twentieth Century* (No. 314-VIII), *On Perpetuation of the Victory over Nazism in World War II of 1939-1945* (No. 315-VIII), *On Access to Archives of Repressive Agencies of the Totalitarian Communist Regime of 1917-1991* (No. 316-VIII), *On the Condemnation of the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Regimes, and Prohibition of Propaganda of Their Symbols* (No. 317-VIII).

However, the decommunization process has included not just measures taken by government agencies (notably by Ukrainian Institute of National Memory) to implement the four laws, but similar activities of local self-government bodies and civil society as well. Therefore, decommunization in broader sense usually means a longer and more multifaceted political, social and cultural process of undermining and even removal from public space and public conscience of political, ideological and partially cultural heritage of the Communist/Soviet period.

Similar processes took place in Central and Eastern Europe, including the Baltic countries, after 1989. They included abolition of one-party system, dismantling Communist monuments, lustration, other forms of so-called transitional justice, opening of secret police archives etc.

Since the collapse of the USSR and proclamation of Ukrainian independence, part of Ukrainian society and some of its political, cultural and academic elites tried to launch this process here, that is, do what our western neighbours have done before – officially condemn the crimes of the totalitarian regime, remove Communist monuments and place names, and hopefully implement a lustration. The rationales for this were roughly the following: peoples of Central and Eastern Europe decisively got rid of their Communist legacy, and this enabled them to successfully implement their political and economic reforms, and ultimately become part of united Europe.

Those who didn’t do so (such as Serbia under Milošević’s rule) have had numerous problems and have not made it into the European Union.

This book offers a study Ukrainian decommunization in both narrow and broader senses. Its first part contains a policy analysis of decommunization understood as a public policy process, according to the well-known methodology

of policy analysis that presupposes the following phases: delineation of the policy problem to be solved by implementation of the ‘decommunization laws’; a review of previous attempts at solving the problem; a comparison of possible alternative ways of solving it; finally, an evaluation of the chosen policy, its implementation and direct results, as well as its social, political and cultural consequences.

The policy problem meant to be solved by a decommunization policy has been manifold; beside the already mentioned general issue of Soviet legacy being a major obstacle to the nation’s democratic development, it included also:

- the problem of the society’s mixed attitude to the period of World War II, which arose after the disclosure of many ‘unpleasant’ facts about that period which undermined the Soviet mythology of ‘Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945’, and created a need for ‘writing a true history of the war’;

- the problem of the attitude to those who were fighting against Soviet regime, but did not gain official rehabilitation and recognition (in particular, members of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, who were labelled as ‘fascist henchmen’ and ‘traitors of Ukrainian people’ in Soviet times);

- the problem of free access to Soviet archival documents, primarily to the archives of former repressive agencies, for without such access it has been difficult to adequately solve the above historical problems;

- the issue of reconsidering (deconstructing) the legacy of so-called Ukrainian Soviet culture, parts of which are still considered as Ukrainian literary and artistic classics despite containing a lot of Soviet totalitarian propaganda and quite a few gross distortions of historical facts.

In public discussions of those problems, however, it was the most obvious aspects (Soviet monuments in public places, Soviet street names) that were usually pointed at and caused most irritation.

Several attempts at (or rather waves of) decommunization took place in Ukraine previously. The first wave started even before the collapse of the USSR, in 1990-91, and lasted until 1992, giving significant results in removing Soviet monuments and street names, but only in some regions (Western Ukraine, Kyiv, some other large cities). The idea of lustration and official condemnation of the Soviet totalitarian regime as a criminal one, though included in some draft laws during the 1990s, was never supported by the parliament.

A new wave of decommunization took place after the Orange Revolution, in 2007-2008, when President Viktor Yushchenko included official recognition of Holodomor as act of genocide among his memory policy priorities. Some of his Holodomor-commemorating decrees envisaged removal of monuments to Soviet leaders who participated in the organization of Holodomor. The criminal case against the organizers of Holodomor conducted in 2008-2009 by the SBU, and the following court conviction (January 13, 2010) should also be mentioned.

Practical implementation of Yushchenko’s decrees had rather limited success, though. According to regional reports submitted to the President, approx. 400 monuments to Soviet leaders (out of more than two thousand existing at that time) were removed. Still, President Yushchenko managed to achieve some successes in his memory policies, namely:

- legal recognition of Holodomor as an act of genocide of Ukrainian people, supported by a shift in people's attitudes (in 2009, majority of Ukrainians agreed that Holodomor was a genocide; this majority reached 80% by 2015);

- important changes in the society's culture of remembrance with regards to Ukrainian liberation movement, supported by the establishment of several museums and memorials to its major events and members (the memorial in Kruty, Museum of Ukrainian People's Republic and Museum of the 'Sixtiers' in Kyiv, official introduction of public commemorations on the Victims of the Holodomor Memorial Day etc).

- introduction of much easier access to archives of former Soviet repressive agencies, though for a brief period (until Yanukovich was elected president), which not only helped historians, but served as an important symbol of Yushchenko's 'more European' policy of remembrance.

There was a noticeable turn towards the Russo-Soviet mythology of the 'Great Patriotic War' in Viktor Yanukovich's government policy (manifested i. a. in the so-called *Law On the Victory Flag* of April 2011, in the building of new monuments to Soviet generals in the Park of Eternal Glory in Kyiv; the never-finished construction of a new memorial to so-called Koriukivka tragedy), as well as in the president's public denial that Holodomor was an act of genocide.

According to elemental logic of the increasing social and political polarization, Soviet historic legacy became strongly associated not just with the long gone times of USSR, but with Yanukovich presidency and with his Russian patrons. No wonder that, by the end of 2013, 'decommunization' was back in political and cultural agenda of Ukraine, at first on the grassroots level, in the form of so-called 'Leninfall'. After the Euro-Maidan, this policy tended to become mainstream.

The task of decommunization in 'all the domains of social life' was included in the coalition agreement between several 'revolutionary' factions of the newly elected Verkhovna Rada in autumn 2014, although only in the last two paragraphs of section 3 entitled *Cultural space, information policy and national memory*:

3.13. To ensure general access to archival documents, including archives of repressive agencies of the former USSR.

3.14. To cultivate the memory of the resistance to totalitarianism, the liberation movement and the human rights movement, recognition of persons and organizations that fought for the independence of Ukraine and for human rights; as well as to condemn the totalitarian communist regime at the official state level. To prohibit the communist, Nazi, fascist, anti-Ukrainian propaganda in any manifestations. To complete [the process of] decommunization of all the domains of social life'.

Apparently, some of the tasks here are worded in a broader and more radical way than in the 'decommunization laws' approved later. President Petro Poroshenko, speaking on the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Political Repressions (May 15, 2016) in Bykivnia, also outlined the problem to be solved through decommunization:

«A hybrid war starts with an ideological attack. Brutal military force is usually preceded by so-called *soft power*. Before shooting at bodies, they kill souls to make brains more liquified... We *have to complete the decommunization*, since that is a task of Ukrainian national security. By all measures needed, we are trying to protect contemporary world from the phenomena characteristic of totalitarian regimes, to save Ukrainians and all mankind from repetition of such tragedies. Decommunization is an important element of such a policy».

Here, the problems that decommunization was supposed to solve, go beyond historical memory, embracing not just national identity but also resistance to Russia's aggression. Political tools required for solving such a manifold issue could not be limited to conventional memory policy toolkit (history education, monuments, official commemorations, museums, support of literary and art works related to history topics). It seemed unavoidable that tools of conventional political struggle (i. a. decommunization-related restrictions in party politics and media) be used as well.

In early April 2015, three decommunization-related governmental draft laws and two draft laws authored by members of parliament were submitted to the Verkhovna Rada, then quickly examined and supported 'in general' by relevant committees (some amendments were suggested, though).

On April 9, the five drafts were considered by the session of Verkhovna Rada. After a brief discussion, four of the laws were approved (two authored by the government and two authored by radical MPs). The government-sponsored draft law on the status of participants of national liberation struggle was rejected in favour of the one authored by Yuriy Shukhevych, son of UPA commander.

Let us review the key provisions of the four laws.

Law No. 317-VIII *On the Condemnation of the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Regimes, and Prohibition of Propaganda of Their Symbols* acknowledges two totalitarian regimes, the Nazi and the Soviet ones, to be criminal and introduces legal responsibility for public propaganda of these regimes. The ban covers public denial or justification of the crimes of totalitarian regimes, as well as production and public use of their symbols, including public display of monuments to Soviet leaders, Soviet propaganda murals, names of streets, squares, towns etc, named back then in honour of Soviet leaders, heroes or revolutionary events.

The law envisages some exemptions from the propaganda ban, namely, monuments and place names 'related to the opposition and expulsion of the Nazi occupants from Ukraine or to development of Ukrainian science and culture' are exempt, so is the use of totalitarian symbols in academic publications, museum exhibitions, art works, private collections etc.

Final provisions of Law No. 317-VIII have set the actual 'decommunization timetable', in the form of deadlines by which 'totalitarian symbols' (monuments, place names) would have been removed from public space by local self-governments.

In practice, it turned out that a considerable number of towns and streets were named not after Soviet leaders, but after Bolshevik and Soviet activists of lower ranks, or after prominent foreign communists (not mentioned in the law).

The Institute of National Memory tried to solve this seemingly technical but in fact political problem by designing a recommended list of names of Soviet and Communist activists arguably 'subject to decommunization', and a list of 'totalitarian place names' to be changed. These lists have no legal force, since the Institute of National Memory does not have the function of introducing or interpreting legislation. The lists, however, were used in some regions and cities in making decisions about renaming of streets and/or towns (while some other cities openly ignored them).

Also, there has been a controversy between 'decommunizing' legal requirements and their practical implementation (in particular, removal of Soviet monuments), on the one hand, and the existing legal framework of protection of historic monuments (for many Soviet monuments, in particular those commemorating 'the Great Patriotic War', are still legally protected), on the other hand. Various aspects of this controversy, legal, artistic and ideological, as well as heated media debates on this matter, are discussed in the book.

Law No 314-VIII *On Legal Status and Honouring the Memory of Fighters for Ukraine's Independence in the Twentieth Century* (authored by Yuriy Shukhevych) provided official recognition by the state of several organizations and movements of Ukrainian national liberation, and even recognized the national liberation movement as the main subject in achieving national independence in 1991. The law contains a list of organizations and groups recognized as parts of the liberation movement, which is significantly longer than the list in Yushchenko's decree No 946/2009 *On Additional Activities Related to Recognition of the Ukrainian Liberation Movement of the 20th Century*. Unlike the rejected government-sponsored draft law, the law No. 314-VIII does not provide any formal criteria for granting the status of an independence fighter to a person, or any specific scheme of welfare protection for such fighters (this task was left for local self-government bodies).

The clause in this law that declared 'a denial of the legitimacy' of the struggle for independence illegal and envisaged responsibility for such a denial 'in line with applicable legislation', was strongly criticized by many as undemocratic and even absurd. Also criticized, especially in Poland, was the inclusion of OUN and UPA in the list of organizations that fought for independence. This was perceived as justification of the crimes committed by UPA members, notably in Volhynia in 1943-1944. It should be reminded, however, that it was precisely the demand for official recognition of armed struggle of UPA that provided the main rationale for this law.

Law No 315-VIII *On Perpetuation of the Victory over Nazism in World War II of 1939-1945* replaced the previous law *On Perpetuation of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945* (in particular, the controversial amendments known as the *Law on the Red Flag of Victory*). It marked a rejection by official Ukraine of Soviet mythical concept of the 'Great Patriotic War'; it also contained recognition of the fact that both totalitarian regimes committed numerous war crimes, crimes against humanity and acts of genocide in Ukraine during the war.

The law stressed the need for protection of all WW2 memorials (hereby broadening the definition of protected war memorial in comparison to 'memorials of the Great Patriotic War'), and exempted Soviet war memorials from the decommunization ban.

Commemorative and discursive changes in official remembrance of World War II envisaged by the Law No 315-VIII are noteworthy, too. In particular, it offers a broader concept of the war itself (unlike the 'Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945', World War II includes the period before June 1941 when Stalin's USSR was a de facto ally of Nazi Germany); an emphasis on the "Ukrainian dimension" of both the war effort and war atrocities), the broader legal definition of protected war memorials, the introduction of Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation on May, 8; new official commemoration practices and symbols for May 8 and May 9, for which existing post-Soviet war memorials still remain the most common sites; finally, the inclusion of Ukrainian nationalists' struggle for national independence in the general framework of commemorated historic events.

This law was criticized by some 'anti-nationalist' historians for allegedly trying to impose "the only right version" of historical events on the society, and containing the undemocratic clause about 'prevention of falsifications of history' (borrowed in fact from the previous law adopted back in 2000, and worded in such a way that this 'prevention' is not a legal requirement but a commemorative practice), and by pro-Russian opponents of the government who claimed that through this law, the authorities 'are trying to abolish the Victory Day'.

Law No. 316-VIII *On Access to Archives of Repressive Agencies of the Totalitarian Communist Regime of 1917-1991* guarantees free access to the mentioned archives. Such access is now secured by law, not merely by the government's goodwill, as was in 2005-2009. There is a long list of former Soviet repressive agencies, which includes not just KGB and its predecessors (Cheka, GPU, Smersh etc), but also Soviet prosecution agencies and so-called 'people's courts' because all these agencies "used measures and methods of state coercion and terror on individuals or groups for political, class, national, religious or other motives, and their activities were characterized by numerous violations of human rights".

Several discursive, regulatory and commemorative changes promoted by the 'decommunization laws' can be summarized as follows.

Key discursive changes in public remembrance policy:

- the Soviet and Nazi regimes condemned as criminal ones; the struggle for national independence of Ukraine acknowledged as legitimate and crucial for gaining independence in 1991;
- a new official discourse on World War II introduced, including new historical and political assessments of the war and its participants.

Key regulatory changes:

- 'propaganda of totalitarian regimes' and public use of their symbols is banned (with a number of exemptions), including monuments to Soviet leaders, Soviet names of streets, towns, cities etc;

- denial of legitimate character of the struggle for national independence of Ukraine became illegal, some kind of responsibility for ‘public disrespect’ of its participants was introduced;

- free access to the archives of former Soviet repressive agencies granted;
- removal of Soviet monuments and renaming of Soviet place names recognized as totalitarian propaganda was initiated and provided with a timetable.

Finally, new official commemorative practices:

- new commemorative rituals for events related to Ukrainian liberation movement and World War II and new commemorative symbols suggested;

- the range of state-protected monuments of World War II was expanded.

Also, it is useful to summarize key points of criticism of the ‘decommunization laws’ voiced by their opponents, either liberal or pro-communist, pro-European or pro-Russian, foreign or domestic:

- the prohibition of ‘totalitarian propaganda’ constitutes a violation of freedom of speech; it poses a threat to free academic discussion and, most importantly, to Ukraine’s relations with Europe and to its European perspective;

- the condemnation of Soviet regime as a criminal one allegedly means a prohibition of any positive assessment of achievements of Soviet period during which, according to some historians, “Ukraine became a modern nation” (as if ‘Soviet regime’ equals ‘Soviet period’, and there is no contradiction between totalitarianism and modernity);

- the recognition of OUN and UPA as legitimate freedom fighters damages the reputation of Ukrainian democracy, tries to impose a dominant, exclusive and nationalistic historical narrative on Ukrainian society thus providing a source for future conflicts;

- removal of Soviet monuments is a destruction of valuable heritage;

- rejection of the cult of ‘Great Patriotic War’ is a disrespect for venerable war veterans and their heroic exploits.

Further analysis of the decommunization as a policy requires a discussion of its possible alternatives. Among alternative approaches to solving the problem that caused the adoption of ‘decommunization laws’ to be examined here, some are determined by standard methods of public policy analysis (‘leave it as it is’ approach), while others, like the liberal alternative and the radical one, were in fact proposed by critics of the four laws, if sometimes in slightly different words.

The most obvious alternative is not to pass any decommunization legislation, thus leaving things as they were. In fact, much of the criticism voiced by liberal critics, came down to this. These critics, however, did not offer any forecast of the consequences of *not solving* the above problem in dire political circumstances of Ukraine after 2014, except something like ‘it will be better this way’.

Let’s imagine internal and external political consequences of the refusal of Ukrainian government to adopt decommunization legislation. In the first place, this would not mean absence of decommunization, but further continuation of rather elemental, uncontrollable process of ‘decommunization from below’ started by *Leninfall* in Winter 2013/2014. For Western and Central Ukraine this would not influence course of events seriously. In the East, on the other hand, where there is

quite a lot to ‘decommunize’ and where former Party of Regions members remained in control after local elections of 2015, an effective withdrawal of central government from leadership in decommunizing process would mean their perceived betrayal of democratic and patriotic groups in these regions. The polarization between the ‘decommunized’ majority of Ukraine and the still pro-Soviet minority in the East would not have been reduced, but made more graphic and dangerous. Finally, absence of long-expected official recognition of the UPA would have been perceived in the West of Ukraine in a similar way – as betrayal of post-revolutionary expectations.

Beside the inert alternative discussed above, some active ones were also suggested. There was what could be called a *liberal alternative*. Judging by the amendments to the ‘decommunization laws’, proposed by some of their liberal critics (Kateryna Dronova, Yegor Stadny, Oksana Shevel and others), the essence of this alternative can be described in a few points:

- undemocratic prohibition of propaganda of totalitarian regimes and their symbols should be dropped and replaced with a narrower and softer ban on targeted use of Soviet symbols ‘for the purpose of justification of crimes of Soviet regime’;

- OUN and UPA (‘ultranationalist movements of the wartime’, according to Andreas Umland) should be removed from the list of liberation organizations;

- the prohibition of ‘denying the legitimacy of the struggle for independence’ should also be dropped;

- the condemnation of Soviet regime as a criminal one is also undesirable, since there was no Nuremberg-type trial of its leaders; instead, something like a list of undisputable crimes of Soviet regime should be included in the law.

What will be the impact of these ‘mellowing corrections’ in the laws on the decommunization process? Some practical, logistic improvements would probably be achieved and some resources saved. For instance, government authorities and prosecutors would have no need to monitor the process of decommunization of public space (removal of Soviet monuments etc), because there would be virtually none. On the other hand, it would be necessary for prosecution to prove in court a clear criminal purpose of any public act of Soviet propaganda. Also, without criminal responsibility for a proved act of totalitarian propaganda, court decisions would have very little impact on political life.

Hence, a ‘liberally corrected decommunization’ would have either stopped altogether, or become slow, regionally fragmented and ultimately inefficient, similarly to its previous wave in 2008-2009. This would mean apparent political damage: betrayed hopes of millions of supporters of the post-revolutionary Ukrainian government in all parts of Ukraine, and virtually unrestrained activities of pro-Russian (and Russian) groups in Ukraine. Thus the ‘liberal correction’ of decommunization laws would weaken its effect substantially, and the problems to be solved through their implementation would have remained.

On the other hand, there would have been no negative reaction from the Polish Sejm, the Venice Commission, J.P. Himka, A.Umland and other alleged friends of Ukrainian democracy. As for the ‘threat to our European perspective’

(meaning EU membership for Ukraine), there seems to be no such perspective so far.

Another proposed policy, alternative at least in part, can be called *radical decommunization*. Since April 2015, various participants in decommunization-related discussions outlined at least two ways for its further radicalization. Mykola Riabchuk suggested transforming it into decolonization, since “Communism as a political ideology is not a threat for modern Ukraine any more, ...it is usually just a cover for Russian imperial hegemony”. Hence his conclusion: “In modern Ukraine, it would be dangerous to separate decommunization from de-russification”.

Riabchuk did not specify, however, how his de-colonization proposals could be transformed into legal provisions and implemented practically. Also, to defy the popularity (and hence the danger) of pro-Communist, left populist, anti-market views in contemporary impoverished Ukrainian society seems rather myopic. Although any decommunization in Ukraine is inevitably a kind of decolonization (and therefore a kind of de-russification), this doesn't mean that all Russian legacy in Ukraine equals imperialist (or Soviet totalitarian) one. Due to the fact that there are several millions ethnic Russians in Ukraine, a policy of ‘carpet de-russification’ would be counter-productive for Ukrainian national integrity.

Another direction of radicalization is suggested by those urging to remove not just monuments to Lenin and other Soviet leaders, but all Soviet monuments, including military memorials (except those with soldiers' graves perhaps). An example is the campaign for removing the ‘Memorial of Military Glory’ in Lviv built in 1976, with no soldiers' graves there. In legal terms, such a radicalization would mean amendment in the decommunization laws cancelling the exemption of war memorials from the requirement of removal from public places. The political and moral price to be paid for such a radicalization would be rather high, and the benefits from it rather localized (to Western Ukraine) and therefore doubtful.

Therefore, despite its shortcomings, the four ‘decommunization laws’ seem to be a better (or rather ‘the least worst’) policy option than any of the proposed alternatives. However, their practical implementation can be a different matter.

An evaluation of implementation of a public policy is usually done according to a set of standard criteria: political and organizational feasibility of the policy decision, its equity in the sense of considering the interests of key stakeholders; its effectiveness (whether its direct goals were achieved) and efficiency (comparison of its real costs and benefits).

To start with, the level of *political feasibility* of the decommunization, understood as successful adoption of the four laws and their rather successful enforcement by respective political decision-making institutions (Verkhovna Rada, regional councils and administrations, Institute of National Memory), can be evaluated as rather high, especially in comparison with previous attempts.

Organizational feasibility of implementing the approved laws, at the same time, has often been a problem, especially with decommunization of public spaces (renaming streets and towns, removing Soviet monuments). There were heated debates, political and legal controversies, sometimes formal investigations and court decisions, in many parts of Ukraine, but especially in the East and South. In

the long run, formal requirements of the decommunization laws with regards place names were met in almost all cases, but the resulting symbolic map of 'decommunized Ukraine' is heterogeneous and regionalized: in Central Ukraine, there are much more streets named after prominent Ukrainian personalities (featured in so-called national narrative), while in eastern and southern cities, politically neutral place names and names of local celebrities are more popular.

The implementation of the law on free access to archives of former Soviet repressive agencies was quite effective, in part because archival institutions had already had practical experience of disclosure of their collections in 2007-2009.

It should be acknowledged that the level of *equity*, that is, positive consideration of interests of all key stakeholders in the policy issue, was not and could not be very high in the case of decommunization. Might it have been different, when two key actors (pro-communist and pro-Russian forces in the political elite and in the society) were viewed as adversaries whom the laws were designed to de-legitimize, at least in part, hereby limiting their political and media opportunities, and discarding their symbolic capital? The interests of these actors, therefore, were consciously considered in a negative way, with the only exception of Soviet war veterans and likeminded people whose interests were partially included in the law on commemoration of the victory over Nazism in World War II.

The relatively well organized decommunization campaign of 2016-2017 resulted in a rather high *nominal effectiveness* of achieving its formal goals as delineated in the 'decommunization laws'. According to Institute of National Memory, by the end of 2017, more than 2.5 thousand Soviet monuments were removed, nearly a thousand cities, towns and villages were renamed, more than 50 thousand streets and squares were renamed as well.

From strategic point of view, Ukrainian decommunization is an unfinished project. There were some reports in Ukrainian media in April 2018 that the process of decommunization is successfully accomplished. Chairman of Ukrainian Institute of national memory Volodymyr Vyatrovych announced at the time that at least the decommunization of Ukraine's public space has been a success. However, if decommunization is understood as not merely a removal of old Soviet monuments but as getting rid of the whole Soviet symbolic legacy present in public space (not to mention collective conscience), then we must admit that such an operation is neither practically possible nor politically desirable in contemporary Ukraine because of its enormous socio-political price.

This is why the concrete goals of decommunization as defined in the four laws of April 9, 2015, were rather limited and therefore achievable both politically and practically. Culturally, the decommunization of 2015-2018 has not been an all-encompassing process of ideological and cultural 'purification' but rather an all-Ukrainian ritualized campaign of symbolic liberation from the burden of Soviet totalitarian past.

Part two of the book offers a cultural study of key aspects of Ukrainian decommunization in broader sense, that is, as a social and cultural process, although formally started by the introduction of 'decommunization laws', but not limited to their implementation. The methodological background for such a study

is provided by well-known cultural studies' approach that, according to Paul Du Gay, Stuart Hall and others, presumes a systemic analysis of five key aspects of a cultural phenomenon, namely, its production (creation), its consumption (reception), its regulation (by the state and other actors), its representations in culture (including narratives about it), and identities shaped or transformed by it.

Hence the 'decommunization laws' and practical activities aimed at their implementation are regarded and studied as a cultural product to be 'consumed' by various groups, both in Ukraine and abroad. The process of 'production' and 'consumption of decommunization' has manifested itself in the country's cultural space through several major narratives which describe, interpret and mythologize this process from various cultural and ideological positions and viewpoints.

In particular, the study shows that the processes of 'production', and especially of 'consumption' of decommunization are better understood not as a badly designed piece of state policy forcefully imposed on defenseless Ukrainian society, but as a product, or rather a set of products of complicated struggles, negotiations and compromises between various political and cultural actors.

An overview of dozens of articles, columns, interviews, political statements, art exhibitions and other 'texts of culture' related to the decommunization in Ukrainian and foreign media demonstrates that there seem to be four main groups of decommunization narratives, tentatively named: the 'purification of Ukraine' narrative (promoted mostly by politicians who initiated it), the regional, or decentralized narrative (it being a local version of the former, in which local patriotic activists, not Ukrainian government, are main protagonists), the oppositional narrative of 'Bandera-ization of Ukraine', and the liberal narrative (in which decommunization is presented as a mistake, a threat to democracy). Each of the narratives has its characteristic modes of emplotment (from epic romance to satire), its civilization perspective (pro-European or pro-Russian), its set of symbols and values (for some, it is national independence, for others, it is freedom of speech, for others still, it is Eastern Slavic brotherhood), its own heroes and villains. Unsurprisingly, those portrayed as heroes in affirmative narratives (that of 'purification', for instance) tend to become villains in negative narratives, the head of Ukrainian Institute of National Memory Volodymyr Viatrovych being the most prominent one, featuring in all narratives either as a hero or as the main villain.

The decommunization campaign has been accompanied by important changes in people's attitudes to some key historic events (the Holodomor, the armed struggle of UPA, the proclamation of national independence in 1991 etc).

It is hardly possible to establish, however, that these changes are direct results of the decommunization. Still, main tendencies in the transformation of so-called historical memory of contemporary Ukrainian society seem to go in the direction similar to one delineated in the 'decommunization laws'.