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The political path of independent Ukraine from the national-state revival to its place in the modern historical process

Abstract. The relevance of the stated research subject is conditioned upon the fact that at the beginning of 2022, Ukraine faced new challenges that threaten its sovereignty and territorial integrity and are related to Russia's armed aggression. The full-scale invasion is frequently justified by Russian politicians as a "fall from grace" and a historical misunderstanding. However, there are hundreds of facts that confirm the thesis that Ukrainian statehood is the result of the centuries-long struggle of the Ukrainian people for independence from the empire. The purpose of this research is to analyse the political path of Ukraine from the period of national and state revival to the present stage of historical development. To address the tasks set, the author used a range of general scientific and special research methods, including historical and genetic, political and legal analysis, and comparative and institutional analysis. The results obtained in the course of the study should be considered as the identification of the main stages of the establishment of Ukrainian statehood and the analysis of the events that established and strengthened Ukraine's independence. In addition, the author identifies the reasons for the strengthening of national-democratic movements and ideas during the Ukrainian Revolution in the late 1980s and in independent Ukraine, explains the content of national revival processes in different historical periods, and analyses the prospects for the development of the state against the backdrop of the war with Russia. The materials of this study can be used in research and applied fields, and to explore the issues of Ukrainian state-building, nation-state building in the context of independence and transformation of political institutions

Keywords: sovereignty; armed aggression; full-scale war; People's Movement of Ukraine; political institution; state building; democratisation

Introduction

In 1991, Ukraine gained independence after the adoption of a series of documents proclaiming its state sovereignty. The legitimacy of these steps was confirmed by the All-Ukrainian referendum, in which more than 90% of residents voted in favour of independence (Filipenko, 2019). However, Ukraine's independence is not an "accident," as Russian propaganda claims, but the result of the efforts of many generations of Ukrainians.

M. Gorbachev's "perestroika" gave impetus to the processes that had previously restrained repression. In 1987, under pressure from the international community, the Soviet authorities released Ukrainian dissidents from detention who joined the national liberation movement. Therewith, cultural and political NGOs emerged, such as the "Memorial" Society, the Union of Independent Ukrainian Youth, the Taras Shevchenko Ukrainian Language

Society, the "Green World" Association, etc., which united active Ukrainians around them (Danylenko, 2019). In addition, in early 1989, the People's Movement of Ukraine for Perestroika was established. The organisation presented a programme for a comprehensive reform of the country's socio-political and economic life (Polishchuk, 2019). Democratic transformations in public life contributed to the transformation of national consciousness, the search for truth, and the revival of cultural heritage. It marked the beginning of the development of Ukrainian statehood, which continues to this day.

However, in early 2022, Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty were threatened by Russia's full-scale invasion, which posed new challenges to society. This fact determines the relevance of the stated subject of the research.

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In this research, the author for the first time comprehensively examines the main stages of Ukraine's development, considering the new circumstances related to the armed aggression of the Russian Federation (RF). In Western European and Ukrainian historiography, there are many works devoted to the establishment of statehood in Ukraine. In particular, V. Smolii considers the modern period of the country's history as a process of implementing the Ukrainian dream (Smolii, 2016). The author identifies such components as statehood, democracy, and welfare. The study examines Ukraine's progress in each of these components in the first decades of independence and demonstrates how they are affected by global trends. Researcher H. Chechelnytska considers Ukraine's declaration of independence as a solution to the dialectical contradiction between the objective need to establish a state, due to the actual level of development of the nation, and the impossibility of establishing it in the conditions of the USSR (Chechelnytska, 2021).

V. Skomorovskyy pays attention to the role of the policy of "perestroika" in the democratisation of public life in the last years of the USSR (Skomorovskyy, 2013). The author states the fact that the lack of a clear concept of reforms and contradictions in the party nomenclature resulted in crises in all spheres of public life, which eventually caused the collapse of the Soviet empire.

Scholar V. Baran highlights the main stages of the Ukrainian people's struggle for independence and the establishment of their state in 1917-1991. According to the author, the establishment of modern Ukraine is a continuation of the ancient nation-building tradition that was initiated by the people in the times of Kievan Rus and the Galicia-Volhynia principality and maintained by them over the centuries. However, the researcher attributes the rise of the national liberation movement to the collapse of the Romanov monarchy in the Russian Empire and the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917-1921 (Baran, 2019).

The researcher H. Shinar substantiates the existence of Ukrainian state sovereignty in contrast to the statements of the Russian authorities about its absence (Shinar, 2022). He notes that this is how the Russian Federation justifies the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale war. In addition, J. Mearsheimer mentions Ukraine as part of the war with Russia (Mearsheimer, 2014). The author emphasises that the Russian authorities still consider the countries of the former USSR to be their sphere of influence and are ready to occupy neighbouring states if they orient toward the West, as happened with Georgia and Ukraine.

The purpose of the research is to explore and analyse the main stages of Ukraine's political path from the moment of national revival to the present. The object of the research is the political path of Ukraine from the period of the beginning of the establishment of its statehood to the present day.

Materials and Methods

To solve these tasks, the author used an entire range of general scientific methods – analogy, analysis, specification, synthesis, and abstraction. In addition, special research methods were used, such as structural and functional, comparative, systemic, historical and genetic, socio-psychological, institutional, etc.

Thus, the historical and genetic methods became the foundation for exploring the processes of establishment and development of the national idea that unites Ukrainians. Particular attention was devoted to the period of national and state revival during the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917-1921. In addition, this method allowed the formulation of the preconditions, causes, and consequences of the intensification of national democratic movements in the Ukrainian territories during "perestroika" in the second half of the 1980s.

The structural-functional method allowed examining the internal factors that stood in the way of the Ukrainian nation's proclamation of its state in different historical periods and determining the role of social groups in state-building processes at the time of the people's realisation of their own identity.

The comparative method allowed identifying common and distinctive features of the national liberation movement in the Ukrainian lands in the first half of the 20th century, during the period of "perestroika" in the USSR from the mid-1980s, and in the first decade of Ukraine's independence under the presidencies of Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma.

The method of political and legal analysis became the foundation for the study of regulations related to the establishment of Ukrainian statehood, international treaties, and other documents that allowed Ukraine to secede from the USSR and proclaim itself an independent state. In particular, the Declaration of State Sovereignty, the Act of Independence of Ukraine, and the Laws "On Citizenship of Ukraine" and "On the State Border" were examined.

Using the institutional method, the author managed to analyse the process of establishing new political institutions in Ukraine in the context of the transition from a totalitarian to a democratic form of government and to examine the characteristic features of nation-state building since the early 2000s under the presidencies of Viktor Yushchenko, Viktor Yanukovich, and Petro Poroshenko.

The socio-psychological method allowed exploring the motives of citizens' participation in protest events in different historical periods and examining their specific features during the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917-1921, the Revolution on Granite, the Orange Revolution, and the Revolution of Dignity, and describing the impact of each of them on the development of state-building processes and the establishment of democratic institutions in the Ukrainian lands.

Using the forecasting method, the author describes the prospects for Ukraine's establishment as an influential European state against the backdrop of Russian aggression assesses the role of the sixth President V. Zelenskyy in consolidating the nation, and characterises the most likely ways of the country's development in the next two to three years in the context of rapprochement with the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance. The author used the systematic method to comprehend the role of civil society in the state-building processes in Ukraine at the beginning of the 21st century. In particular, special attention was devoted to large-scale protest actions, when most of the most important state-building impulses in the country came not from the state to civil society, but vice versa.

Results

State-building Processes in 1917-1921 and the Ukrainian Struggle for Independence

The Ukrainian people have come a long way in fighting for their right to independence. The development of Ukraine in its modern form is considered by scholars to be a continuation of the ancient state-building tradition that began in the Middle Ages and was followed by generations of Ukrainians for many centuries (Vasylenko, 2021).

However, it was at the beginning of the 20th century that events occurred that can be considered the period of development of a modern political nation and the revival of Ukrainian statehood. It is about the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917-1921. The collapse of the Romanov monarchy contributed to the intensification of the national liberation movement in the Naddniprians. In March 1917, intellectuals under the leadership of the historian M. Hrushevsky established the Ukrainian Central Rada (UCR) (Honcharenko, 2017).

In June, the UCR adopted the First Universal, which proclaimed Ukraine's autonomy within the Russian empire (First Universal of..., 1917). However, most representatives of the Ukrainian elite of that period held autonomist views. But, over time, they increasingly took the position of Ukraine's independence.

The overthrow of the Provisional Government in the fall of 1917 and the Bolsheviks' rise to power in the former Russian empire prompted the UCR to adopt the Third Universal, which proclaimed the Ukrainian People's Republic (UPR) (The Third Universal..., 1917). And the Bolshevik troops' attack against the UPR accelerated the adoption of the Fourth Universal, which became the final stage of the national liberation struggle of that period and proclaimed Ukraine independent (Fourth Universal of..., 1918).

In April 1918, the UPR was replaced by the Ukrainian state of P. Skoropadskyi in a coup. The Hetmanate implemented several important reforms designed to develop Ukrainian national identity. It contributed to the fact that the Ukrainian state was recognised by almost 20 countries. However, P. Skoropadskyi was unable to resist the UPR Directorate and abdicated in December 1918.

Therewith, during the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the establishment of the Western Ukrainian People's Republic (WUPR) with its centre in Lviv, headed by E. Petrushevych, was proclaimed in the western Ukrainian lands. In January 1919, the Act of Unification of the UPR and WUPR was signed in Kyiv, which was the culmination of the national liberation struggle and embodied the unity of Ukraine. However, in practice, the unification of the two parts of the state has not been achieved. The Bolshevik offensive in Naddniprianshchyna and the Polish offensive in the WUPR resulted in the loss of Ukraine's statehood for more than 70 years (Tymchenko..., 2018).

Thus, in the first half of the 20th century, complex state-building processes unfolded on the Ukrainian lands, which testified to the presence of a national consciousness among the Ukrainian people and demonstrated their desire for independence. But during the revolutionary events, there was a constant internal political struggle in the Ukrainian lands. Each of the political parties tried

to establish a state based on its principles and dogmas. Therewith, the Ukrainian Revolution became a point of no return on the path to independence, which resulted in the restoration of statehood in 1991.

Prerequisites for the Declaration of Independence of Ukraine

As part of the USSR, Ukraine remained economically, politically, and ideologically dependent on Moscow for 70 years. Ukrainians were deprived of their fundamental rights and freedoms and decent living conditions. And the Soviet regime considered the slightest manifestation of national consciousness to be a manifestation of so-called bourgeois nationalism and brutally suppressed it by the punitive authorities.

Notable changes occurred only with the coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev, who tried to satisfy the population's demand for socio-economic and political reforms. These events were called "perestroika." The reforms resulted in the collapse of the USSR and the independence of its member states (Skomorovskyy, 2013).

In April 1985, Gorbachev announced the introduction of a policy of transparency. Due to this, citizens overcame stereotypes and dogmas of the old way of thinking and began to receive objective information about the situation in the country. A few years later, the ban on importing literature from abroad was lifted and some of the archives were declassified. As a result, glasnost became an important factor in social development and contributed to the politicisation of the population (Danylenko, 2019).

In Ukraine, the communist leadership paid lip service to reforms, but in reality, did everything to hinder these processes. The first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU Central Committee), V. Shcherbytskyi, remained loyal to the communist ideology and became one of Gorbachev's opponents (Plochy..., 2015).

Another impetus for the intensification of the socio-political movement in Ukraine was the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant (Chernobyl NPP) in 1986. The republic's leadership, under pressure from Moscow, suppressed the fact of the disaster and its true consequences. Nevertheless, the truth about the environmental disaster in the centre of Europe reached the pages of newspapers and magazines. But this event turned from an environmental factor in public life into a political one. As noted by academician V. Smolii, the Chernobyl accident became a reason to criticise the communist regime and introduced a component of "perestroika" such as the initiative from below, which proved effective in establishing a multi-party system and citizen participation in protests (Smolii..., 2016).

Chernobyl launched a massive environmental movement in Ukraine: journalists, scientists, writers, and activists called for environmental protection and prosecution of those who designed and built dubious facilities, of which there were hundreds across the country. Similar slogans were frequently used in political life during "perestroika," and the environmental movement became an integral part of the Ukrainian struggle for independence (Marples..., 1988).

In general, glasnost resulted in accelerated self-organisation of citizens. They were transformed from an object of management into a subject of the political process. An important step in this area was the release of dissidents and political prisoners from detention (Danylenko, 2019). At the end of 1987, M. Horyn and V. Chornovil were released from prison, and in 1989 – L. Lukyanenko. One of the founders of the Ukrainian Helsinki Union (UHU), M. Rudenko, returned from exile.

Citizens' permission to associate resulted in the emergence of a large number of national liberation organisations. Under the influence of these associations, communist stereotypes were overcome, and discourse was conducted on current issues of Ukraine's historical past. Progressive-minded Ukrainians declared their willingness to participate in the renewal of society and the solution to the most pressing social problems. Every year, the scope of what was permissible in public discussion expanded to include previously taboo subjects. In particular, the truth about the Ukrainian Revolution, the Holodomor of 1932–1933, collectivisation, Stalinist repression, and the activities of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) began to be discovered.

In the context of liberalisation, the creative intelligentsia establishes the People's Movement of Ukraine (PMU) for Perestroika. The organisation united representatives of different groups and political opinions. In the spring of 1989, branches of the People's Movement began to emerge in different regions of the country (Bazhan..., 2010). In the fall of the same year, Kyiv hosted the founding congress of the PMU, which included nearly 280,000 people at the time. The delegates proposed the idea of transforming the USSR into a union of sovereign states based on a new treaty.

However, the People's Movement defined its main purpose as the restoration of Ukraine's independence through parliamentary means and the construction of a democratic state that would ensure the comprehensive development of the Ukrainian nation and the national and cultural needs of all ethnic groups. In October 1990, the Second All-Ukrainian Assembly of the PMU was held in Kyiv. The documents adopted at these meetings demonstrated a change in political orientation. The movement refused to support the course of perestroika and became an opposition to the Communist Party. In addition, the phrase "for perestroika" was removed from the organisation's name (Polishchuk, 2019).

The self-organisation of democratic political forces spoke both to the growth of their authority and to a gradual change in the balance of power in the political processes occurring in Ukraine at the time.

State-building Processes in the First Years of Ukraine's Independence

In 1989, for the first time, certain elements of people's power were allowed during the elections of people's deputies of the USSR. However, the situation changed dramatically in Ukraine during the elections to the Verkhovna Rada (VR) and local councils that occurred in the spring of 1990. Namely, representatives of non-governmental organisations not affiliated with the Communist Party could run for deputy.

Although the representatives of the democratic forces lost these elections in terms of numbers, they won an unconditional victory by potential (Teptyk..., 2019). Of the 422 elected members of the VR, 111 belonged to the Democratic bloc. For the first time in history, an opposition was established in the parliament, the People's Council, headed by theoretical physicist and public figure I. Yukhnovsky, and the leader of the Communist majority, the "Group 239," O. Moroz, was elected leader of the Socialists.

Despite the CPU's majority, the newly elected Verkhovna Rada begins the process of restoring Ukraine's independence. As a result, on July 16, 1990, the deputies adopted the Declaration on State Sovereignty of the Ukrainian SSR (Declaration on State..., 1990). According to the document, Ukraine was to develop based on the exercise of the nation's right to self-determination.

In addition, the Declaration of State Sovereignty proclaimed the country's economic independence, defined its intentions to establish its armed forces, state security agencies, banking, customs, and tax systems, and claimed the right to a share in the foreign exchange fund and the USSR gold reserves. In addition, it acknowledged Ukraine's independence in addressing issues of education, science, and culture (Omarova..., 2015).

The document adopted by the Verkhovna Rada did not receive the status of a constitutional act. The Communist majority refused to comply with the demand of the democratic forces to vote for it. An important point in the Declaration was that the principles contained therein would be used to conclude a new union treaty. As a result, the Ukrainian SSR remained part of the Soviet empire, thus the world did not acknowledge its independence.

Therewith, according to the constitutions of the USSR and the Ukrainian SSR, only the people of Ukraine, who had all the power, had the right to decide on independence in a referendum. Provisions of international law obliged the Verkhovna Rada to arrange a republican referendum, but it was not held. In the fall of 1990, the parliamentary opposition accused the government of the Ukrainian SSR of not adhering to the Declaration of State Sovereignty and not creating conditions for reforming the country and demanded the resignation of Parliament Speaker L. Kravchuk, Chairman of the Council of Ministers V. Masol, and the refusal to sign a new union treaty. These demands were supported by Ukrainian students, who organised various political events designed to liberalise public life.

The most notable action was the student hunger strike in October 1990 in the centre of Kyiv. This event has gone into history as the Revolution on Granite, and 157 students from 24 cities of Ukraine participated in it. The participants demanded that the Union Treaty not be signed, that re-elections to the Verkhovna Rada be held, that Ukrainians serve only in the Ukrainian SSR, and that the Communist Party's property be nationalised. The Revolution on Granite demonstrated the high activity of the Ukrainian youth movement. The action was organised entirely by students and was unprecedented in Europe at the time. The authorities did not dare to disperse and arrest the protesters, as they saw that they had support among Kyiv residents (Student Maidan..., 2022).

In addition, the struggle between the two centres of power in Moscow – the “democrats” led by Boris Yeltsin, who came to power in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), and the union centre led by Mikhail Gorbachev – contributed to the weakening of the Soviet system and facilitated the struggle of the republics for independence. In addition, there was no agreement among the republics’ leaders on what the new union treaty should be.

The deepening economic crisis, which was exacerbated by the communist nomenklatura’s opposition to real reforms, caused chaos in all spheres of public life. Therefore, some representatives of the ruling elite insisted on returning to the old course. On August 19, 1991, they attempted a coup d’état in the USSR. Communist conservatives created the State Committee of Emergency Situation (SCES), which was supposed to assume power and preserve the existing regime (Danylenko, 2019). The plans of the rebels were not implemented and only strengthened the democratisation process throughout the country. And on August 24, the Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian SSR adopted the Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine (The Act of Declaration..., 1991). Similar documents were approved by the parliaments of other republics, and the USSR virtually disappeared from the political map of the world.

On December 1, a referendum was held in which 90% of citizens supported the Act of Independence of Ukraine. On the same day, the country held presidential elections. L. Kravchuk won the first round with more than 60% of the vote, while his main opponent, V. Chornovil, received only 23% (Bohdalov..., 2019).

After that, hundreds of laws were passed that laid the groundwork for the transformation of the Ukrainian SSR into an independent state. By the end of the year, the laws “On Citizenship of Ukraine” and “On the State Border” (Law on Citizenship..., 1991; The Law of Ukraine..., 1991) came into force.

In 1992, the national anthem, national flag, and coat of arms were approved. Considerable attention was devoted to the development of its armed forces by reorganising existing structures. In the early 1990s, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was particularly active, expanding its network of embassies around the world. Much attention was devoted to establishing relations with the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO).

Therewith, the country was gripped by a deep economic crisis, accompanied by miners’ strikes and hyperinflation. It forced Kravchuk to resign, and the Verkhovna Rada called early presidential elections for 1994. Leonid Kuchma, who had served as prime minister since October 1992, won the election. During his rule, the country adopted a constitution, approved the text of the national anthem, introduced a new national currency, and began structural reforms in the tax area and privatisation (Rudych, 2018). Kuchma ran for office with slogans about rapprochement with Russia, but after winning, he radically changed his position. The head of state implemented a multi-vector policy: he was establishing relations with Russia, but, therewith, moving Ukraine toward EU and NATO membership.

In 1999, Leonid Kuchma was elected president for a second term. He based his campaign on opposing the

return of the “red threat” and called peace his main achievement. Therewith, his reforms were not completed, and the privatisation of large enterprises was conducted in favour of persons associated with the president (Presidential elections in Ukraine..., 2000).

National-State Building in Ukraine at the Beginning of the 21st Century

In September 2000, well-known journalist Gongadze disappeared in Kyiv. A few days later, O. Moroz, a politician opposed to Kuchma, said from the rostrum of the Verkhovna Rada that he had recorded with evidence that the president was involved in the abduction and murder of the journalist. This event was called the “cassette scandal” in Ukrainian history. It marked the beginning of an indefinite campaign “Ukraine without Kuchma”. The protesters demanded the resignation of the head of state, Interior Minister Yuriy Kravchenko, the head of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), Leonid Derkach, and the Prosecutor General, Mykola Potabenko. The protests lasted until April 2001. Under public pressure, Kuchma was forced to release Kravchenko and Derkach. Therewith, administrative pressure intensified in the country, and censorship was restored. In connection with the “cassette scandal,” Leonid Kuchma was isolated. In addition, relations with the Russian leadership did not develop, primarily due to the conflict over the island of Tuzla (Annexation of Tuzla..., 2021).

Thus, Kuchma’s tenure as head of state is a kind of process of restoring the command and control system, on the one hand, and rhetoric about commitment to the values of democracy, on the other (Rudych, 2018).

Viktor Yushchenko became the third president of Ukraine. In 1999–2001, he served as prime minister, but despite GDP growth and increased budget revenues, he was dismissed. After that, Yushchenko established a bloc of parties called “Our Ukraine” and won the parliamentary elections with it, developing the largest faction in the Verkhovna Rada.

In 2004, Viktor Yushchenko ran as a self-nominated candidate for the presidential election. His main opponent was the government candidate, Viktor Yanukovich. This presidential campaign was characterised by pressure on Viktor Yushchenko from administrative resources. Therefore, his main strategy was to communicate personally with voters, and for this purpose, a tour of Ukrainian regions was organised (Yakovleva..., 2018). At the height of the election campaign, Viktor Yushchenko was poisoned. The result was a distortion of the politician’s face. However, a thorough investigation of the crime was not conducted even after he was elected head of state.

According to the results of the first round, Yushchenko and Yanukovich received 39.9% and 39.26% of the vote, respectively (Rudych, 2018). The second round of voting occurred on November 21. According to international experts, the elections were held in violation of the law, and with interference in the electronic vote-counting system of the Central Election Commission (CEC). Against this backdrop, an indefinite protest called the Orange Revolution begins in the centre of Kyiv.

The facts of falsification of the results of the second round of elections were proved in the Supreme Court of

Ukraine and a second vote was scheduled for December 26. At that time, Yushchenko won almost 52% of the vote, while Yanukovych received 44.2% (Rudych, 2018).

During Viktor Yushchenko's presidency, a new version of the Constitution came into effect, which weakened the powers of the president and strengthened the role of the Verkhovna Rada. In addition, he is remembered for his confrontation with Prime Ministers Viktor Yanukovych and Yulia Tymoshenko, whom he submitted for approval to the Verkhovna Rada.

However, the humanitarian policy of Viktor Yushchenko deserves the most attention: it was aimed at strengthening national identity and developing respect in society for national and religious traditions and cultural heritage.

The foreign policy of the third president was centred on the West. He tried to get an Action Plan for membership in the North Atlantic Alliance and was one step away from it in 2008. In addition, the head of state initiated negotiations on replacing the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU with a new cooperation format – the Association Agreement with the EU, which would provide for a visa-free regime (Political results of..., 2010). Yushchenko's openly pro-Western policy caused constant disputes with the Russian leadership, which resulted in two crises when Moscow restricted gas supplies to Ukraine.

Therewith, the third president did nothing to unite democratic forces around him and overcome the country's division into East and West. Public conflicts between Viktor Yushchenko and Yulia Tymoshenko undermined the international image of Ukraine gained by the Orange Revolution and brought Viktor Yanukovych to power in 2010. Back in 2006, he managed to win the parliamentary elections and form a coalition that included the Party of Regions (PR), the Socialist Party of Ukraine (SPU), and the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU) (Denisenko, 2021).

In the first round of the 2010 presidential election, 35.32% of voters voted for Yanukovych and 25.05% for Tymoshenko. In the second round, 48.95% of voters cast their ballots for him against 45.47% in favour (Voting results for Ukraine, 2010).

In the first years of his term, the fourth president tried to rely on various elite groups. Thus, positions in the executive branch were held by representatives both of the Party of Regions and other political forces, including the former "orange camp" (Rudych, 2018).

In addition, most of the basic elements of Ukraine's national policy have not changed. One of them was the course of integration into the EU. Therewith, Yanukovych was implementing a policy of deepening relations with Russia and increasing the status of the Russian language. The first was realised through the signing of the so-called Kharkiv Agreements, which extended the Agreement on the Status and Conditions of the Russian Black Sea Fleet's Stay in Ukraine for 25 years in exchange for a reduction in gas prices.

Yanukovych's "language commitments" to the voters were implemented in 2012 by adopting the scandalous Law of Ukraine "On the Principles of National Language Policy" (Law of Ukraine..., 2012). These two decisions of the fourth president caused tension in society and contributed to the destruction of the informal consensus, as

evidenced by the growth of protest activity. In addition, repressions against political opponents contributed to this. In particular, Yulia Lutsenko and Yulia Tymoshenko were imprisoned in trumped-up criminal cases.

Despite the above-mentioned trends in the socio-political life of the state, V. Yanukovych and the government of Mykola Azarov consistently worked on the formal component of the Association Agreement with the EU. The international document was scheduled to be signed during the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit. However, on November 21, 2013, the Cabinet of Ministers issued a decree that stated that it would refuse association with the EU and resume active dialogue with Russia and other post-Soviet countries (Azarov refused the..., 2013).

It triggered mass protests across Ukraine, which eventually resulted in Yanukovych's flight to Russia in February 2014. These events entered modern Ukrainian history as Euromaidan and the Revolution of Dignity.

The Revolution of Dignity was one of the key moments of Ukrainian state-building and the post-Maidan period

The first protests began on the evening of November 21 in Kyiv on Independence Square. The reaction of the authorities was predictable – police and internal affairs units were deployed to the centre of the Ukrainian capital. However, this did not stop the protesters; tent cities were established in major cities of the country and organisational structures of mass protest were developed.

The key moment was the events of the night of November 30, when Berkut officers beat protesters who were then on Independence Square, allegedly to free up space for the Christmas tree. It caused great indignation in Ukrainian society and became an impetus for further actions. These events stimulated an increase in the number of protesters and contributed to a change in the protesters' demands. Currently, they are calling both for a return to the EU integration course and the resignation of the Interior Ministry officials involved in the Maidan beatings (Golovko *et al.*, 2016).

On December 1, more than 500,000 people came to Kyiv to protest against police brutality. They established a new tent city and occupied the buildings of the Kyiv City State Administration (KCSA) and the House of Trade Unions. After that, a kind of positional confrontation between protesters and law enforcement officers began in the centre of the capital.

Moreover, in early December, representatives of the parliamentary opposition, represented by A. Yatsenyuk, O. Tiahnybok, and V. Klitschko, initiate negotiations with V. Yanukovych. L. Kravchuk, L. Kuchma, and V. Yushchenko were to play the role of conditional arbitrators. However, these negotiations did not bring any visible results and were only an imitation of a dialogue.

On January 16, the Verkhovna Rada adopts the so-called "dictatorial laws" (The dictatorial laws..., 2018). They were adopted in flagrant violation of the regulations and legislative procedure. These regulations were adopted without using the Rada system and without discussion, and their texts were made public only after the vote. The laws essentially restricted the rights of citizens, gave law

enforcement agencies greater discretion in punishing protesters, and intended to criminalise the systemic opposition and civic activists.

As a result, these actions of the authorities led to the radicalisation of the protest. These circumstances did not force Yanukovich to make concessions, but, on the contrary, to once again use force against Protestants. From February 18 to February 22, a confrontation between security forces and protesters occurred in the centre of the Ukrainian capital. They resulted in more than 80 deaths and 660 injuries.

The killing of civilians forced representatives of the Verkhovna Rada to express support for the protesters, disown the president, and begin to develop an opposition to him. A radical breakthrough occurred on February 21, when the Verkhovna Rada was supposed to adopt the "Agreement on settlement of the crisis in Ukraine" (Agreement on settlement..., 2014). The document contained provisions on returning to the 2004 Constitution, developing a coalition government, and holding early presidential elections by the end of 2014.

At midnight, it became known that Yanukovich flew from Kyiv to Kharkiv, where he planned to participate in a "congress of deputies of all levels from the southeastern regions of Ukraine, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, and Sevastopol." It was supposed to be an event at which he was planning to announce the establishment of a new state. However, according to various sources, due to the threat of protests in Kharkiv, Yanukovich first went to Crimea and then flew to Rostov-on-Don (Koshkina..., 2015).

On the morning of February 22, members of the Verkhovna Rada elected O. Turchynov as the new Speaker of the Parliament by a majority vote (the previous Speaker, V. Rybak, resigned). The Verkhovna Rada began to function in the face of Yanukovich's failure to sign the law restoring the 2004 Constitution, as provided for in the "Agreement on the Settlement of the Crisis in Ukraine," and the inability to establish the President's whereabouts as of the morning.

In this regard, the parliament enacted the previous version of the Constitution, which established a parliamentary-presidential form of government, and adopted a resolution "On Taking Political Responsibility for the Situation in Ukraine." The next day, the deputies elected the Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada Oleksandr Turchynov as acting president of Ukraine. In addition, it was announced that early presidential elections would be held on May 25, 2014.

P. Poroshenko became the fifth president of Ukraine, winning 54.7% of the vote in the first round (Extraordinary Elections..., 2014). However, at that time, Russia had already annexed Crimea and unleashed an armed conflict in Luhansk and Donetsk regions, occupying a significant part of these regions. Therefore, the newly elected president had to reform both the economic, political, and social spheres of public life, repel the aggressor and liberate the occupied territories.

Currently, public opinion does not have an unambiguous attitude to Poroshenko's rule. His critics mention his promises to end the war in a matter of hours, the signing of the Minsk agreements, numerous corruption scandals, and his cooperation with Medvedchuk. The fifth

president's supporters highlight the strengthening of the state's defence capabilities, the signing of the Association and Free Trade Agreement with the EU, the introduction of a visa-free regime, the establishment of new anti-corruption bodies, the launch of the ProZorro e-trading system, and the receipt of the Tomos (Gains and losses..., 2019). Despite his achievements, P. Poroshenko failed to win the 2019 presidential election. In the second round, V. Zelensky won with more than 73% of the vote. While less than 25% voted for P. Poroshenko (Presidential elections-2019..., 2019).

At the beginning of his presidency, V. Zelenskyy managed to gain a high level of trust from citizens and ample opportunities to implement his promises. The results of the early parliamentary elections allowed the President's team to monopolise control over the legislative and executive branches of government. However, this did not result in greater synergy in the interaction between them. And since 2022, the main task of the president has been to repel Russian aggression and de-occupy the territory, and everything else has become secondary (Zelenskyi's rate..., 2023). However, notably, this stage of Ukrainian history is part of a longer transformation period, the comprehension of which is still to come.

Prospects for Ukraine's establishment as an influential European state against the backdrop of Russian aggression

In the more than 30 years since its official declaration of independence, Ukraine has been going through a difficult path of becoming an independent democratic state. It is the path of both covert and overt ideological struggle between Ukraine and the empire of which the country was a part for centuries.

All this time, Kyiv's steps toward integration with the EU and NATO have been hampered by both conservative political forces within the country and Russia's attempts to draw Ukraine into the orbit of its sphere of influence. The year 2014 was a turning point when citizens in mass protests declared their reluctance to see pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich as head of state and demonstrated their readiness to be part of a united Europe both territorially and by values.

The annexation of Crimea, the outbreak of the war in Donbas, and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine have finally severed all ties with the aggressor country and given citizens confidence in the rightness of their European choice. In addition, Ukraine is liberating its territories from Russian occupation and rebuilding its Armed Forces and defence industry to NATO standards (Ukraine on the way..., 2022).

In addition, the year 2022 can be considered decisive in establishing Ukraine as an independent and influential state. On the one hand, there is a full-scale war with Russia, and on the other hand, the entire civilized world is uniting around Ukraine and helping to fight aggression (Bollfrass & Herzog, 2022). Therewith, the state received EU candidate status and submitted an official application for NATO membership in response to Russia's annexation of four Ukrainian regions. These actions of the authorities once again demonstrated Ukraine's desire to be part of the Western world.

Discussion

For many years, the subject of the establishment of Ukrainian statehood has been mainly the focus of domestic researchers. However, the processes currently occurring in the country are of scientific interest, including to American, European, and Asian scholars.

M. Shkilnyk emphasises the state-building processes on Ukrainian lands during the Ukrainian Revolution (Shkilnyk, 2016). The scholar demonstrates his vision of those events, analyses them, and tries to identify the reasons for the defeat of the national liberation struggle in the early 20th century. The main ones, in his opinion, are the discrediting of the Ukrainian idea by P. Skoropadsky, who, under the guise of the Ukrainian state, intended to restore the “united and indivisible” Russian empire, and the inconsistency of the UCR's actions in implementing socio-economic policy, establishing the state apparatus and ensuring order and legality.

A fundamental work on the subject of Ukrainian state-building is the work of V. Danylenko (Danylenko, 2019). The author examines various aspects of the implementation of the policy of “perestroika” in Ukraine. He pays particular attention to the socio-economic conditions of the Declaration of independence and the reasons for the growth of political activity of citizens in the second half of the 1980s.

In addition, the scholar notes that “perestroika” was the logical conclusion of the previous stages of historical development. First of all, according to V. Danylenko, it is genetically connected with the revolutionary events of 1917–1921. However, the revival of the Ukrainian state in 1991 occurred in difficult conditions of struggle against conservative and reactionary forces that tried to preserve the existing system and the colonial position of Ukraine. But all segments of society wanted radical transformations, which is why it was possible. Therewith, the author does not consider the state-building processes that occurred in Ukraine at the beginning of the 21st century and are still ongoing.

It is impossible to analyse the problems of Ukraine's political path without assessing the situation with Russian aggression and the annexation of Ukrainian territories. In particular, E. Lichterman sees Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 as a threat to security in the entire Europe (Lichterman, 2022). According to the scholar, the occupation of Ukrainian territories and the attempt to overthrow the legitimate government there is an international crime and should be condemned at all levels.

The author refutes the Russian aggressor's thesis that in 2014, after Yanukovich fled, nationalists who posed a threat to Ukrainians in Crimea and parts of Luhansk and Donetsk regions, which have long been under occupation, captured power in Ukraine. He proposes to conclude the Russian-Ukrainian war to preserve peace on the European continent and to develop a new disarmament programme to prevent similar conflicts in the future.

In their work, scholars P. Gai-Nyzhnyk, L. Zaliziak, I. Krasnodemska, Y. Figurnyi, O. Chirkov, and L. Chupriy examine Ukraine's political path, based on the historical origins and parallels of Russian aggression, considering

the events of the Russian empire and the establishment of the Bolshevik totalitarian regime (Gai-Nyzhnyk *et al.*, 2016). The authors analyse the Kremlin's actions at the present stage as an aggressor state, paying attention to strengthening Ukraine's defence capabilities as an integral part of preserving its statehood and territorial integrity.

They explain Russia's invasion by the fact that Ukraine has always been at the intersection of global geopolitical interests, and therefore has now become the focus of significant changes on a global scale and has become one of the “hot spots” on the Eurasian continent. Thus, according to the authors, the national security of Ukraine should be considered as the content and purpose of national policy.

Therefore, without developing a rational national security policy and ensuring its implementation, it is impossible to solve the problems of state-building, establish an effective mechanism of social protection of the population and stabilise political processes. Therewith, the authors do not pay attention to the issue of international security in the context of Ukraine's aspirations and the authorities' implementation of concrete steps towards membership in the North Atlantic Alliance.

The impact of the Revolution of Dignity on the processes of state-building in Ukraine is explored by A. Terzyan (Terzyan., 2020). The researcher tries to determine the significance of the Euromaidan events for the political transformation of the country and the consolidation of various social groups. The author argues that the events on Independence Square demonstrate the crisis of the post-Soviet political model based on repressive rule and are a manifestation of the antagonism between the European aspirations of Ukrainians and the Russian vision of a common neighbourhood.

F. Baranovskyi, in his work, comprehends the influence of civil society in Ukraine on the process of integration into the EU and NATO (Baranovskyi, 2017). The researcher emphasises that the European and Euro-Atlantic future of countries depends on the work of politicians and diplomats, and the entire society. Therefore, constant co-operation in this area between public authorities and civic activists is necessary. It is important to acknowledge the convergence of interests of state institutions and the public in achieving strategic purposes.

In addition, the author notes that the experience of European countries has demonstrated that the processes of integration into the EU and NATO go hand in hand with democratisation and economic growth.

A group of researchers V. Golovko, V. Danylenko, S. Kulchytskyi, O. Maiboroda, V. Smoliy, L. Yakubova, and S. Yanishevskyi offers a new perspective on the recent history of Ukraine (Golovko *et al.*, 2016). Scholars consider this period in the context of the activity of the Ukrainian people, which culminated in the Revolution on Granite, the Orange Revolution, and Euromaidan. In their opinion, each of these events became a powerful impetus for the development of the state.

In addition, the researchers concluded that the experience of state building in Ukraine has demonstrated the existence of several fundamental concepts that determine its leading trend. It is about three components – power, de-

mocracy, and welfare. The trend in the socio-political development of the state in recent decades has demonstrated that the historical process unfolded in a three-dimensional space: state – people – elites. And currently, there is no room for polemics – to be or not to be independent of Ukraine. The only relevant question is what kind of country it should become and how to make the authorities in it more effective and the political regime more democratic.

Thus, Ukrainian and foreign scholars consider mainly separate stages of the establishment and development of Ukrainian statehood. And in this work, the author, for the first time, attempted to comprehensively describe the main events of Ukraine's political path from the moment the nation became aware of its own identity, the declaration of independence, to the present stage.

Conclusions

The analysis of Ukraine's political path from the national revival to its place in the modern historical process has resulted in the following conclusions.

For the Ukrainian people, the establishment of national statehood was quite difficult and took a long time in the context of external expansion and internal political struggle. Ukrainians realised their identity during the revolutionary events of 1917-1921, and the Declaration of Independence came only 70 years later. However, despite all the difficulties, Ukraine has managed to establish itself in the global political arena.

Since the Declaration of Independence, Ukraine has been undergoing democratic transformation, which continues to this day. For more than 30 years, the state emblem, anthem, and flag have been legally approved,

important laws and the Constitution have been adopted, the national currency has been introduced, and the geopolitical vector has been chosen. Therewith, the political path of the country during this period can be described as a time of contradictions between the words of senior state officials and their actual activities, and the lack of will to implement radical reforms in various spheres of public life.

In 2013-2014, during the Revolution of Dignity, society declared its desire for the European path of development and demonstrated its willingness to fight for it as a right of choice. In turn, Russia, having lost the opportunity to use Ukraine for its geopolitical interests, resorted to military aggression and questioned Ukraine's sovereignty. Russia annexed Crimea, parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and launched a full-scale invasion in February 2022. However, Ukrainians have preserved their statehood, stopped the aggressor, who had a significant advantage in resources, and continue to move towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

The prospect of further research on this subject is a detailed consideration of the different stages of Ukraine's political path. In addition, this research work can become a starting point for assessing the prospects for the development of the state in the context of post-war reconstruction and its establishment as a new centre of economic growth in Europe.

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Conflict of interest

None.

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Політичний шлях незалежної України від національно-державного відродження до її місця в сучасному історичному процесі

Анотація. Актуальність заявленої тематики наукового дослідження зумовлюється тим, що на початку 2022 року Україна зіткнулася з новими викликами, які загрожують її суверенітету і територіальній цілісності та пов'язані зі збройною агресією росії. Повномасштабне вторгнення російський політикум часто обґрунтовує тим, що незалежність України «впала з неба» і є історичним непорозумінням. Однак існують сотні фактів, які підтверджують тезу, що українська державність – це результат віковичної боротьби українського народу за самостійність від імперії. Метою даної науково-дослідної роботи є аналіз політичного шляху України від періоду національно-державного відродження до сучасного етапу історичного розвитку. Для вирішення поставлених задач автором було застосовано комплекс загальнонаукових та спеціальних методів дослідження, серед яких історико-генетичний, політико-правового аналізу, порівняльний та інституціональний. Результатами, які були отримані в ході дослідження, слід вважати визначення головних етапів становлення української державності та аналіз подій, які сформували і зміцнили незалежність України. Також автором були сформульовані причини посилення національно-демократичних рухів та ідей в період Української революції, наприкінці 80-х років ХХ століття і в незалежній Україні, розкритий зміст процесів національного відродження в різні історичні періоди і проаналізовані перспективи розвитку держави на тлі війни з росією. Матеріали даного наукового дослідження можуть використовуватися у науково-дослідницькій та прикладній сферах, а також для вивчення проблематики українського державотворення, національно-державного будівництва в умовах незалежності та трансформації політичних інститутів

Ключові слова: суверенітет; збройна агресія; повномасштабна війна; Народний рух України; політичний інститут; розбудова держави; демократизація