

Towards Forgetting: Russia's Account of the Stalinist Repression Before and After the Ukraine Crisis

by Ekaterina V. Klimentko

Russia's and Ukraine's common and contested past(s) became fundamental in the development of the Ukraine crisis. Not only did the complicated history of Russia-Ukraine relations become a fertile ground for the crisis to break out. Russia's and Ukraine's shared and disputed past(s) appeared crucial during the crisis itself: it played a key role in the attempts of Russian political elites to legitimise and to consolidate the society's support for Russia's annexation of Crimea and its military intervention in Eastern Ukraine. The fact that World War II became particularly important in this respect is widely acknowledged. However, what about the other pages of Russia's and Ukraine's (Soviet) past(s)? Were they also reconceptualised during the Ukraine crisis and employed in order to legitimise Russia's involvement? Trying to answer these questions, this article focuses on Stalinist repression, and on the specific ("official") memory of it, as was forged in Russia before the armed conflict in Ukraine broke out and as it developed during the evolution of the conflict. Questioning the concept of re-Stalinisation which is often used to analyse the memory of the repression in contemporary Russia, this article argues that in the wake of the Ukraine crisis – much like in the run-up to it – Russia is moving towards forgetting the repression. The pursuit of (national) unity – at the expense of memory of the repression – remains characteristic for Russia's "official" account of Stalinism.

Keywords: Collective Memory, Memory of Stalinism, re-Stalinisation, Contemporary Russia, Ukraine Crisis.

Introduction

Whether conceived as the (finally reached) turning point in the post-Soviet transformation of the Russian national idea,¹ as the first (and hardly expected) step in the latter's permutation towards still unknown outcomes,² or as the logical (and not-at-all-sudden) result of the two decades of this idea's gradual evolvement³ – Russia's annexation of Crimea and its further involvement in the war in the Donbass region are profoundly intertwined with the problem of the Russian nation. Building a national community of Russians – either in civic (*rossiyskaya natsiya*) or in ethnic (*russkaya natsiya*) terms – is at the heart of the Crimean, and, more generally, the Ukrainian "problem". It is hardly surprising, hence, that Russia's and Ukraine's common and contested past(s) became fundamental in the development of the Ukraine crisis. Not only did the complicated history of Russia-Ukraine relations (as well as that of Ukraine itself⁴) become a fertile ground for the crisis to break out. Conflicting interpretations of this history turned into a major source

of controversy between the two countries in the run-up to the crisis.⁵ In the same vein, Russia's and Ukraine's shared and disputed past(s) appeared crucial during the crisis itself: it played a key role in the attempts of Russian political elites to legitimise and to consolidate the society's support for Russia's annexation of Crimea and its military intervention in Eastern Ukraine.⁶

The Great Patriotic War – the term commonly used in Russia to refer to World War II – was particularly important in this respect:⁷ as direct references to Nazism were used by the Russian media to frame the events in Ukraine, insurgent fighters in Donbass portrayed themselves as heirs of the just cause of their forefathers who fought against the Nazis. However, what about the other pages of Russia's and Ukraine's (Soviet) past(s)? Were they also reconceptualised during the Ukraine crisis and employed in order to legitimise Russia's involvement? Trying to answer this question, this article will focus on Stalinist repression, and on the specific memory of it as was forged in Russia before and after the armed conflict in Ukraine broke out. Unlike many scholars of Russia who claim that re-Stalinisation is a consequence of Russia's involvement in the Ukraine crisis,⁸ I argue that the latter did not affect the “official” conceptualisation (i.e. the one (re)produced by Russia's incumbent elites) of the Stalinist repression. Not questioning the fact that Russia's and Ukraine's “official” conceptualisations of Stalinism are profoundly different and constitute an important source of controversy between the two countries,⁹ I, nonetheless, suggest that the “official” memory in Russia in the wake of the Ukraine crisis – much like in Russia in the run-up to it – is far from being re-Stalinised. Rather, Russia is moving towards forgetting the repression: the pursuit of (national) unity – at the expense of memory of the repression – remains characteristic for Russia's “official” account of Stalinism.

Although Stalinism has many faces, the concept of ‘re-Stalinisation’ implies a consistent and coherent policy aimed at the absolution and justification of the repression.¹⁰ Indeed, grassroots re-Stalinisers are not inexistent in present-day Russia. However, the “official” conceptualisation of the repression is best grasped not with the concept of “re-Stalinisation”, but with that of “forgetting”. Performed in the name of political reconciliation and national cohesion, this (rather specific) type of forgetting combines superficial ritualisation of memory of the repression with absence of contemplation about what is being (formally and nominally) remembered. Reducible to neither re-, nor de-Stalinisation, this (problematic, indeed) forgetting is informed by the notion that controversies triggered by remembering can be too acute. It (i.e. the forgetting) is, thus, inspired by an unwillingness to either justify, or to condemn the repression, and aimed at reaching (and preserving) inner peace and tranquillity.

Analysing the “official” conceptualisation of the repression in Russia before and after the Ukraine crisis, this article demonstrates how the desire to forget in the name of unity shaped (and continues to shape) the “official” memory of the repres-

sion in contemporary Russia. As a result, this memory, being pushed to the margins of both “official” historical narrative and public debates on history, remains unspoken, undiscovered, and unexplored.

State Legitimacy and National Memory: Some Theoretical Considerations

Why is the “nation” the dominant form of political imagination of modernity? Is it because nationalism is a

*surrogate religion which allows to overcome the sense of futility engendered by the removal of any vision of an existence after death, by linking individuals to persisting communities whose generations form indissoluble links in a chain of memories and identities?*¹¹

Or is it because national states’ political elites possess greater access to, and control over resources that allow for building communities which, in turn, legitimate their “monopoly on administrative control”?¹² Whatever the answer is, it is hardly surprising that in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, incumbent elites of its successor states took up the challenge of nation-building. Fifteen nations had to be imagined¹³ as the political communities legitimising the existence of fifteen newly-independent states. And since time – along with space – is crucial for national imaginings,¹⁴ fifteen national histories, allowing for building nations as “communities of destiny”¹⁵ had to be narrated. Post-Soviet Russia, thus, became but another case in point, when its incumbent elites began their attempts to use the country’s past for political purposes in the present: building a national community on which the legitimacy of the new Russian state and its leaders could be based.

Since the past is “an analytical tool for coping with constant change”,¹⁶ it is of little wonder that during Russia’s painful post-Soviet transformation, the need for a coherent and consistent account of the country’s past became acute. At the same time, developing such an account was no easy task. This was particularly true for Russia’s (terrifying) 20th century with its revolutions, a civil war and two world wars, political repression, mass deportations and organised famine. Nonetheless, Russia’s incumbent leaders have attempted to employ these “difficult pages” of the country’s past for their own political ends; the Great Patriotic War and Stalinist repression became most notably used (and abused) in this respect.

Breaking with the “Difficult Past”: Memory of the Repression under Gorbachev and Yeltsin

During *Perestroika*, the memory of the Stalinist repression was turned into a political instrument in the hands of the country’s leaders. Mikhail Gorbachev and his team – just like Nikita Khrushchev decades earlier – used the uncovering of the

darkest pages of the Soviet past to legitimise the reforms that they were launching.¹⁷ Although they did not question the legacy of the Revolution but rather represented their actions as “renewals of October”,¹⁸ the reformists within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) employed their break with the horrors of the Soviet past to consolidate public support for their endeavours and to shore up their personal authority. Crucial in this respect were the rehabilitation of the victims of political repression¹⁹ and the acknowledgement of the Katyn massacre.²⁰

In a very similar vein, remembering Stalinist repression was crucial for Boris Yeltsin. He underpinned the legitimacy of the state he was the first president of, as well as his personal legitimacy, by emphasising the fundamental break of the present regime with the Soviet past.²¹ While the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 was interpreted as the nation’s founding event, and those who promoted it were represented as its founding fathers, Yeltsin’s strategy of nation building came to be based on Russia’s “democratic choice”. The latter included also divorcing with the (totalitarian) Soviet past in its entirety: since everything Soviet was represented negatively, and the term Soviet itself turned pejorative, close attention was paid to the so-called “blank spots” of the Soviet past. Sustaining the initiatives launched during Perestroika, Yeltsin went on with rehabilitating the victims of political repression²² and taking the responsibility for Katyn.²³ Further, the Memorial Day for the Victims of Political Repression, to be celebrated annually on 30 October, was introduced into Russia’s national calendar in 1991.²⁴ Finally, under Yeltsin, the Soviet archives were opened and numerous documents concerning the history of the repression were made public.²⁵ All in all, recognising oneself as responsible for the crimes committed during the Soviet rule – and at the same time acknowledging oneself as victims of those crimes – were the two strategies deployed in the 1990s by Russia’s incumbent elites in order to conceptualise Stalinist repression. This conceptualisation was to help forge the national community of Russians, hence bolstering the legitimacy of the “new Russia” and the personal legitimacy of its leaders.²⁶

Nonetheless, Yeltsin’s break with the Soviet past, despite being his key ideological strategy throughout the political struggles of the 1990s,²⁷ remained rather superficial:²⁸ neither the commemoration of the victims of the Soviet regime, nor the persecution of those responsible for this regime’s crimes were addressed. In fact, the exploration of the horrors of the Soviet past peaked before 1991 and died down in the wake of the Soviet collapse.²⁹ When explaining why the incumbent elites of newly independent Russia did not decide for a more profound de-Stalinisation, some scholars stress their (somewhat naïve) non-ideological – or even anti-ideological – attitude, which resulted in their unwillingness to develop a politically usable narrative of the country’s (Soviet) past. Thus, in the words of Kathleen Smith³⁰ “Democrats believed [...] that they neither needed to nor ought to use state resources in promoting a politicised version of the past”. However, I suggest that

this kind of naïveté of Russia's incumbent leaders is highly unlikely: having spent their formative years in the deeply ideological socio-cultural environment of the Soviet Union, and having experienced the overwhelming power of ideology, they hardly did not realise its importance. The reasons behind the superficiality of the post-Soviet divorce with the Soviet past (as well as the general neglect of ideology, characteristic for this period), I suggest, lie elsewhere. Notably, this superficiality was based on the fact that exploring and condemning the old crimes of totalitarianism (much like proclaiming new democratic values) was but a political instrument in the hands of Russia's incumbent leaders. An instrument that was handy in the wake of the Soviet collapse, but (apparently) lost its usefulness soon afterwards. Whichever of the aforementioned explanations is accurate, the attempts to divorce with the Soviet past and to denounce its darkest pages (including the Stalinist repression) were abandoned by the end of the 1990s. Russia moved ahead – leaving its unexplored, undiscussed and unmourned past behind.

Russia's inconsistent and incomplete efforts to de-Sovietise were followed by a powerful backlash that began with Vladimir Putin coming to power. His first presidential term opened with the introduction of the new (but at the same time very old) anthem of the Russian Federation. The music was composed in 1938 by Aleksandr Aleksandrov, as the "Anthem of the Bolshevik Party", and had been the melody of the Soviet Union's anthem for decades. The lyrics were written by Sergei Mikhalkov, the lyricist of both of the two versions of the anthem of the USSR. Such was Vladimir Putin's first step towards establishing continuity with (and conducting a positive re-evaluation of) the Soviet past.

The memory of the Great Patriotic War became crucial in this regard: conceived as the nation's founding event,³¹ it was glorified and heroised. Much like under the Soviet Union,³² in Putin's Russia, the memory of the war was used by the incumbent elites to construct the national identity,³³ as well as to bolster the legitimacy of the political regime³⁴ and the authority of its leader.³⁵ It is no surprise that within this – glorified and heroised – historical narrative centred around the memory of the war, the memory of repression could hardly find its place. According to some commentators,³⁶ the rebirth of the cult of war in the beginning of the 2000s resulted in a downplaying of the significance of the repression: the latter was normalised and rendered peripheral. To account for this development, the concept of re-Stalinisation became particularly widely used.³⁷

However, does this concept allow for an accurate description of the changes in how the period of repression is conceptualised by Russia's incumbent elites? If re-Stalinisation implies a consistent and coherent policy aimed at the absolution and justification of the repression, is contemporary Russia, in fact, facing it?

Trying to answer these questions, I will examine the indicators that are usually referred to when the concept of "re-Stalinisation" is invoked, namely the content of the school history textbooks and that of the public addresses of the state's top

officials.

Memory of the Repression in the 2000s: re-Stalinisation, indeed?

The battle for – and against – reframing the Stalinist past was first held on the grounds of public education. Centred on the attempts to represent the repression as necessary for intense modernisation and Joseph Stalin as its “efficient manager”, this battle’s key issue was reflected in a controversy about history school textbooks. Vladimir Putin was the one who – suggesting an elaboration of a “positive” and “constructive” account of Russia’s past – called historians to arms. On 27 November 2003, during a meeting with history teachers held at the Russian State Library, he said that history school textbooks are to “evoke in the younger generation a sense of pride for their country”.³⁸ The president’s call was heard, as exemplified in the cases of the history school textbook *Otechestvennaya istoriya* for 10th and 11th-grade students by Igor Dolutskiy,³⁹ and, most importantly, in the writings of a team of authors headed by Nikita Zagladin,⁴⁰ and of a group of historians under the leadership of Aleksandr Filippov and Aleksandr Danilov.⁴¹ In those writings the repression was framed as necessary for the country’s rapid industrialisation and modernisation, and hence (partially) legitimate. Thus, the patriotic interpretation of the Soviet past was created.

Later on, a new issue related to public education emerged: that of “a single history school textbook”. In 2013, Vladimir Putin, claiming that history school textbooks should not contain “inconsistencies and dittologies”,⁴² delegated the elaboration of a concept of such a textbook to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Russian Historical Society, and the Russian Military-Historical Society.⁴³ Due to fierce public criticism, the idea of a single history school textbook was rejected; the historical-cultural standard for history school textbooks was introduced instead. The first draft of this standard was published on 1 July 2013.⁴⁴ After intense public debates organised by the Ministry of Education and Science of Russia (which were far from futile, as the authors of the standard took criticism expressed during these debates seriously) the “Concept of the New Teaching and Methodological Materials on Russian History”, of which the historical-cultural standard became a part, appeared in October 2013.⁴⁵ From then on, history textbooks to be used in Russia’s schools were to comply with these materials. However, what exactly were these textbooks supposed to comply with?

The materials demonstrated the urge to create a historical narrative that would balance out past tragedies and losses on the one hand, and triumphs and victories on the other; a narrative that would not provoke a too heated debate or too acute conflict. Leaving no room for straightforward opinions and rough judgements (no matter what the nature of these opinions and judgements were), this was a narrative that anyone should be able to agree with, at least to a certain extent. Conse-

quently, the Stalinist repression – although accounted for rather accurately – was by no means a topic pivotal for this narrative. Just like many other “difficult questions” in Russia’s history, that of the repression was avoided whenever possible; if inevitable, vague and equivocal answers were given to it. All in all, the materials did not provide a critical evaluation of the Soviet era; at the same time, they were far from being apologetic about Stalinism.⁴⁶ Moreover, the materials seemed to be targeted less at eliminating differences in the manners that the repression (or the Soviet past in general) was portrayed in history school textbooks, than at developing a uniform (and politically acceptable) way to explain to pupils the relations between the regions of the Russian Federation on the one hand, and the federal centre on the other; the relations that constitute the subject matter of the so-called “regional component” of these textbooks. It appears that it was this “regional component” that alarmed those who, first, called for writing a “single history school textbook”, and then spoke in favour of the new teaching and methodological materials; establishing federal control over what is told in this component – more precisely, about the circumstances of “unification” of Russia’s many colonies with Russia proper – was likely to be their true concern.⁴⁷

In a nutshell, the afore-described developments hardly allow for claiming re-Stalinisation of school education in Russia of the 2000s. Rather, we witnessed the blurring out of the very issue of Stalinist repression from the school teaching in history. The repression was no longer central (nor even particularly important) for the historical narrative of the Soviet past that was being disseminated in Russia’s public schools. This historical narrative was constructed in such a way as to neither justify the repression nor to condemn it, but to offer a “safe” interpretation of the Soviet past. The interpretation that would be consistent with the incumbent elites’ efforts aimed at promoting (symbolic) unity of the Russian society. Memory of the repression – being conflict-provoking – was hardly handy for attaining this aim, hence the attempts to erase it.

If the history school teaching in Russia was far from being re-Stalinised, what about the official political discourse? In other words, what was the conceptualisation of the repression that was (re)produced by Russia’s incumbent leaders in the 2000s? To answer this question, I will turn to the analysis of public addresses delivered by two presidents of Russia – Vladimir Putin and Dmitriy Medvedev – in which the issue of the Stalinist repression was discussed.

First of all, it is necessary to stress that there is not much to analyse: both Putin and Medvedev rarely made public statements about the Stalinist repression. Thus, over his 18 years in power and despite his famous interest in Russian history in general, Vladimir Putin referred to the issue of the repression no more than a few times. He has never pronounced the need to condemn (much less to punish) those responsible for the repression; however, at the same time, he has never justified them either. On 30 October 2007, visiting the memorial site in Butovo together-

er with Patriarch Aleksii II,⁴⁸ Vladimir Putin addressed the journalists. His short speech is worth being quoted in its entirety:

Such tragedies have been repeated in the history of humankind more than once; and it always happened when – attractive at first sight, but shallow in fact – ideals were placed higher than the basic value – the value of human life, higher than human rights and freedoms. In our country, this is a particular tragedy because its scale is colossal. Hundreds of thousands, millions of people were exterminated, sent into camps, shot, martyred. Moreover, these were mostly people with their own opinion, people who were not afraid to voice it, the most efficient people, the elite of the nation. And of course, we have been enduring this tragedy for years, until today. And a lot needs to be done so that it is never forgotten, so that we always remember this tragedy. But this memory is needed not for its own sake. This memory is needed so that we understand: for the development of the country, for the choice of the most efficient ways of solving the problems that the country faces today, will face tomorrow, political disputes and battles, clashes of opinions are of course needed. But so that this process is not destructive, so that it is constructive – these disputes, this political battle, should not be held outside the limits of the cultural, educational space. And, preserving the memory of the tragedies of the past, we have to lean upon what is best in our people. And we have to unite our efforts for the evolution of the country. We have everything for it.⁴⁹

What is the essence of this – emblematic, indeed – speech? That the repression is a tragedy – among many other tragedies of the same kind. That, although this tragedy led to great many people losing their lives, no one, neither the state authorities nor the nation itself, is responsible for it. That the memory of this past tragedy should be perpetuated, so that unity of the nation is secured in the present. Finally, that this national unity is necessary to move forward, towards a greater and brighter future. In this – strangely optimistic – address, nothing was said about the need to work through the country's tragic past, much less – about what this working through should look like. In fact, the address seemed to be more about the nation's future than it was about its past, delivered by someone who is committed to looking forward instead of turning back.

Two years later, on 30 October 2009, Dmitriy Medvedev, then the President of Russia, addressed the nation in his video blog. He stated:

[...] I am positive that it is as important to remember national tragedies as it is to remember victories. [...] I am positive that no development of the country, no success or ambitions may be achieved at the price of human sorrow and losses. Nothing can be valued higher than the life of a human being. And there is no justification for repressions. [...] It is also true that the crimes of Stalin cannot derogate the heroism of the people who won the Great Patriotic War. Who turned our country into a great industrial power. Who raised our industry, science, culture on a high level [...]⁵⁰

Medvedev's address to the nation – much like the one Putin gave to the journalists – may be nothing like Willy Brandt's kneeling down at the memorial of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the gesture of humility that expressed commitment to face the past in its entirety, a confession of guilt, and a plea for forgiveness. Nonetheless, Putin's and Medvedev's addresses, both delivered on the occasion of the Memorial Day for the Victims of Political Repression in 2007 and in 2009 respectively, were in no way acquitting Stalinism. Nor were they apologetic of Stalin himself. Rather, in their addresses, Russia's two presidents (re)produced an account of the Stalinist past that was strikingly similar to the one developed in the teaching and methodological materials discussed above; the one where triumphs compensated for tragedies and victories countervailed losses. Both Putin and Medvedev tried to reconcile condemning the repression with praising the historical period during which it took place, and execrating the crime with glorifying the nation that committed it. What both seek to achieve when accounting for the repression was balance; the latter, in turn, was to secure the nation's unity. Hence the lack of straightforward opinions and explicit judgments in their statements. However, balancing out the (Soviet) past can hardly be deemed re-Stalinising the present.

If it is not re-Stalinisation, what term best describes how the memory of the repression was represented in the official political discourse in the 2000s? To answer this question, it is necessary to pay attention not only to what Russia's incumbent leaders said or did, but also to what they did not do and say. What is particularly instructive, thus, is that the record in Dmitrii Medvedev's video blog from 30 October 2007 remained the only somewhat official address to the nation delivered by a president of the Russian Federation on the Memorial Day for the Victims of Political Repression until 2017.⁵¹ Vladimir Putin's visit to Butovo in 2009 was, until recently,⁵² the only time that Russia's top figure paid his respect to the victims of the repression on the day specifically dedicated to their memory. Moreover, no official state ceremonies aimed at commemorating the repression were held on the Memorial Day for the Victims of Political Repression. In the same vein, official commemorative practices dedicated to the repression and its victims were virtually nonexistent. As for those initiated by civil society, such as the Return of the Names ritual,⁵³ the state's top-ranking officials never took part in them.

The words not said and the gestures not made by Russia's incumbent leaders all throughout the 2000s were telling in their own way. What they indicated, however, was not the commitment to re-Stalinise Russia, but the urge to forget (about) Stalinism. The repression was no longer the issue around which the (national) historical narrative was centred. The memory of it, hardly handy for either forging the community of Russians, or legitimising Russia's political regime and its leader, was being replaced with forgetting. This, however, was a very specific type of forgetting: the "prescriptive" one, that is performed in the name of political reconciliation and national cohesion.⁵⁴ By 2014, silence came to surround the (memory of)

repression. Did anything change after the Ukraine crisis erupted?

Memory of the Repression after the Ukraine Crisis: Change or Continuity?

Turned into a battlefield, history and memory became central for the Ukraine crisis. In the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea and its involvement in the war in the Donbass region, Vladimir Putin, tellingly, claimed history to be "the first line of the ideological front".⁵⁵ The memory of the Great Patriotic War grew into the deadliest of the weapons used on this front. However, was the repression in a similar way instrumentalised for political purposes? And if it was, can the term 're-Stalinisation' be employed to account for this instrumentalisation?

One of the latest and most important developments in the "official" memory of the repression became visible on 15 August 2015. At that moment, the Concept of the State Policy to Perpetuate the Memory of Victims of Political Repression was approved by the Government of the Russian Federation.⁵⁶ The Standing Committee for Historical Memory headed by Sergei Karaganov, who was a member of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights since 2011, took active part in the elaboration of the Concept. According to the authors of the Concept, the perpetuation of the memory of victims of the repression is to result in an "[...] enforcement of unanimity of cultural space as the prerequisite for the preservation of state integrity of Russia[...]".⁵⁷ To reach this goal, the following measures should be taken: facilitating access to archives; establishing memory infrastructure and using it as a resource for development; elaborating and implementing educational programs; performing scientific research; identifying sites of mass graves of the victims of political repression; creating databases and a multimedia book of remembrance. At the same time, the Concept neither discusses the compensation of harm and losses to the victims of the repression, nor the prosecution of those responsible for them.

The history of the document dates back to 2011, when members of the afore-mentioned Standing Committee for Historical Memory presented a draft of the "Programme for Perpetuating the Memory of Victims of the Totalitarian Regime and on National Reconciliation"⁵⁸ to Dmitrii Medvedev (who was at that time President of the Russian Federation). It was stated in the draft that "the full recognition of the Russian catastrophe of the 20th century, of the victims and the consequences of the totalitarian regime that reigned on the territory of the USSR during the biggest part of the century" is "one of the most important ways of overcoming the mutual alienation between population and elite". Among the aims of the Programme were mentioned: "[...]the modernisation of the consciousness of the Russian society through the avowal of the tragedy of its people, the termination of the civil war initiated in 1917, enforcement of unifying tendencies on the territory of the former USSR and, possibly, in the post-Soviet space". It was stated in the draft

that the Programme should be targeted at “honouring and perpetuating the memory of the victims of the regime ‘but not at accusing’ those of our predecessors who committed genocide, destruction of faith and moral”. The draft of the Programme that was rejected in 2011 as well as the Concept that was approved four years later both focussed on the issues of unity, reconciliation and cohesion. It was for this triple purpose that the two documents emphasised the necessity of remembering the repression and commemorating their victims.

On 30 September 2015, a little over one month after the Concept of the State Policy to Perpetuate the Memory of Victims of Political Repression was approved, Vladimir Putin took the decision to establish a monument to the victims of political repression in Moscow.⁵⁹ The Wall of Grief – such is the monument’s title – was designed by Georgiy Frangulyan. Situated at the intersection of the Garden Ring Road [*Sadovoye Kol'tso*] and the Sakharov Prospect, the monument was unveiled on 30 October 2017. Vladimir Putin – along with Patriarch Kirill, the mayor of Moscow Sergey Sobyenin, and many others – took part in the inauguration ceremony. Putin delivered a short speech, saying that:

[...] It is our duty to not let it slip into oblivion. Remembrance itself, clarity and unambiguity of the position, assessment with regard to these dark events serve as a powerful warning against their recurrence. [...] We and our descendants must remember the tragedy of repression, the reasons that caused it. But that does not mean to call for settling scores. We should not push the society towards the dangerous line of confrontation yet again. Now, it is important for all of us to base ourselves upon the values of trust and stability. It is only on this foundation that we can tackle the challenges that the society, and the country – Russia that is one for us all – face.⁶⁰

The words pronounced by Vladimir Putin on 30 October 2017 at the monument to the victims of the repression are strikingly similar to those he said ten years earlier in Butovo. The term that grasps best the essence of both addresses is that of reconciliation. However, as he presents it, this is reconciliation with the crime that was committed but has never been properly defined, and of which the perpetrators have not been named, or, even less, punished. All this reconciliation does is to pay superficial respect to the victims, only to turn away from them. It is a reconciliation that is achieved not through remembering the past but, rather, through forgetting it.

Instead of a Conclusion: National Unity and Forgetting the Repression

The reconciliation trope has been omnipresent in the debates surrounding the Stalinist repression since the Yeltsin era. In 1996, nearly simultaneously with the initiation of public debates on the so-called “national idea”, Boris Yeltsin introduced a new national holiday, the Day of Cohesion and Reconciliation.⁶¹ Substituting for

the most important holiday of the Soviet epoch, which marked the Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution (7 November), the Day of Cohesion and Reconciliation was to “prevent confrontation in the future” and to pursue “unity and consolidation of the Russian society”.⁶²

The urge to reconcile is paramount in the way the repression has been conceptualised in Russia, both before and after the Ukraine crisis. The idea of cohesion has been uniting nearly everyone who took part in the debates surrounding the repression and its memory: those who attempt to whitewash Stalinism, and those who seek to condemn it. While the former claim that national cohesion is only attainable on the basis of the memory of common victories, the latter stress that the memory of common tragedies is vital for it.

Reconciling the nation and establishing national cohesion remain central for the “official” memory of the repression in contemporary Russia, the memory that is forged for one purpose only: to secure “national unity”.⁶³ Since neither a profound de-Stalinisation, nor a coherent re-Stalinisation are compatible with securing such a national unity,⁶⁴ the memory of the repression is pushed to the fringes of the “official” historical narrative which Russia’s incumbent elites construct, like a bricolage, around the idea of the state.⁶⁵ Being superficially ritualised, the memory of the repression is by no means erased completely in post-Crimean Russia. But it is hardly an issue that public debates revolve around. Nor is it central for the “official” historical narrative that emerged in Russia in the wake of the Ukraine crisis. Forgetting the repression is the price that the nation pays for its much-aspired national unity. What is being achieved, though, is the shallow comfort of a nation whose unity is ephemeral and, even more importantly, highly unstable.

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Endnotes

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- 2 Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, eds., *Russia Before and After Crimea: Nationalism and Identity, 2010-2017* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).
- 3 Ted Hopf, "'Crimea Is Ours': A Discursive History", *International Relations* 30, no. 2 (2016), 227–55.
- 4 John-Paul Himka, "The History behind the Regional Conflict in Ukraine", *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 16, no. 1 (2015), 129–36. 2015 regarding Ukraine's history. According to the laws, Communism and Nazism are to be viewed as equally evil in Ukraine. The author mentions a letter that 70 Ukrainian and foreign academics wrote to Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and Parliament Chairman Volodymyr Hroysman protesting this action as a violation of freedom of speech. The article cites statistics that show Ukraine had more than 15 million extra deaths than past periods from 1914 to 1948; 6.5 million of these are attributed to the Nazis and 7.5 million to the Soviets. The author explores how these laws also help to allow the history of Ukrainian nationalism to be told free of the influence of Soviet and neo-Soviet narratives." ; "author": [{"dropping-particle": "", "family": "Himka", "given": "John-Paul", "non-dropping-particle": "", "parse-names": false, "suffix": ""}], "container-title": "Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History", "id": "ITEM-1", "issue": "1", "issued": {"date-parts": [{"2015"}]}, "page": "129-136", "title": "The History behind the Regional Conflict in Ukraine", "type": "article-journal", "volume": "16", "uris": [{"http://www.mendeley.com/documents/?uuid=e96ca003-c18d-4f65-a69d-23bb5374fb54"}], "mendeley": {"formattedCitation": "John-Paul Himka, \"The History behind the Regional Conflict in Ukraine,\" <i>Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History</i> 16, no. 1 (2015)"}5 Andreas Kappeler, "Ukraine and Russia: Legacies of the Imperial Past and Competing Memories", *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 5, no. 2 (2014), 107–15. It is important to note, however, that irreconcilable visions of national history that had been developed by competing political actors in post-Soviet Ukraine itself played a no less important a role in the unfolding of the Ukraine crisis. See Georgiy Kasianov, "How a War for the Past Becomes a War in the Present", *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 16, no. 1 (2015), 149–55.6 Joanna Szostek and Stephen Hutchings, "Dominant Narratives in Russian Political and Media Discourse during the Ukraine Crisis", in *Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives*, ed. Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilcewska and Richard Sakwa (Bristol: E-International Relations Publishing, 2015). Tellingly, historical references were numerous in Vladimir Putin's "Crimean speech" – the address he delivered on 18 March 2014, in the wake of the annexation. See Vladimir Putin, "Obrazheniye Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsiy 18 Marta 2014 Goda [Address of the President of the Russian Federation, March 18 2014]", Kremlin.ru, 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>. For a thorough analysis of the speech see Edwin Bacon, "Putin's Crimea Speech, 18 March 2014: Russia's Changing Public Political Narrative", *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 1 no. 1 (2015), 13–36.7 Julie Fedor, Simon Lewis, and Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "Introduction: War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus", in *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*, ed. Julie Fedor et al. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 1–17.8 Thus, Taras Kuzio links re-Stalinisation, cult of the Great Patriotic War, anti-Ukrainian nationalism and anti-Western xenophobia and claims that it is their parallel development that informs Russia's politics towards Ukraine, including the former's intervening in (or the provoking of) the conflict in the Eastern part of the latter. See Taras Kuzio, "Soviet and Russian Anti-(Ukrainian) Nationalism and Re-Stalinization", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 49, no. 1 (2016), 87-99. Soviet and Russian continuity in the denigration of 'Ukrainian nationalism' that goes back as far as the early 18th century. The article focuses on the Soviet and post-Soviet eras by showing how the growth of Russian</div><div data-bbox="81 921 377 941" data-label="Page-Footer"><p>Euxeinos, Vol. 10, No. 29 / 2020</p></div><div data-bbox="881 921 918 940" data-label="Page-Footer"><p>76</p></div>

nationalism, 'conservative values' and anti(Ukrainian

- 9 Taras Kuzio, "Stalinism and Russian and Ukrainian National Identities", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 50 no. 4 (2017), 289–302.
- 10 The concept of 're-Stalinisation' can be (and often is) employed in a much broader sense to indicate: failure to compensate substantially to victims of the repression; refusal to name, condemn or punish perpetrators; deficiency (or inadequacy) of state-sponsored efforts aimed at perpetuating the memory of (victims of) the repression; inability (or reluctance) of the state to place the issue of the repression at the centre of the political agenda; lack of public interest in the history of the repression. However, if used in such a manner, 're-Stalinisation' turns into a term that indicates everything and nothing at the same time. Furthermore, it becomes open to being used in political, rather than scholarly, contexts for making partisan rather than analytical statements. Hence, in this article I narrow down the meaning of the concept of 're-Stalinisation' and use it to refer to outright absolution and justification of the repression.
- 11 Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Malden, MA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1986), 176.
- 12 Jonathan Boyarin, ed., *Remapping Memory: The Politics of TimeSpace* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 16.
- 13 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991).
- 14 Ana Maria Alonso, "The Effects of Truth: Re-Presentations of the Past and the Imagining of Community", *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1, no. 1 (1988), 33–57.
- 15 Otto Bauer, "The Nation", in *Mapping the Nation*, ed. Gopal Balakrishnan (London and New York: Verso, 1996), 51–52.
- 16 Eric J. Hobsbawm, "The Social Function of the Past: Some Questions", *Past & Present*, no. 55 (1972), 11.
- 17 Thomas Sherlock, *Historical Narratives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia: Destroying the Settled Past, Creating an Uncertain Future* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 29–47.
- 18 Frederick C. Corney, "What Is to Be Done with Soviet Russia? The Politics of Proscription and Possibility", *Journal of Policy History* 21, no. 3 (2009), 275.
- 19 On 16 January 1989 the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR "On Additional Measures for Restoration of Justice Regarding Victims of the Repression Occurring in the 1930s and 40s and the Beginning of the 1950s" was enacted (available at <http://base.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc;base=ESU;n=1714>, accessed 10 August 2018). On 14 November 1989 the Declaration of the Supreme Council of the USSR "On Recognising as Illegal and Criminal the Repressive Acts Against Nationalities Subjected to Forced Relocation and Enforcement of their Rights" was passed (available at <http://base.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc;base=ESU;n=1687>, accessed 10 August 2018). Finally, on 13 August 1990, the Decree of the President of the USSR "On the Restoration of the Rights of all Victims of Political Repression of the 1920s through the 1950s" was signed by Mikhail Gorbachev (available at <http://base.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc;base=ESU;n=3475>, accessed 10 August 2018).
- 20 On 14 April 1990, the *Izvestiya* newspaper published a report by the TASS information agency stating that Lavrentiy Beriya and Vsevolod Merkulov were directly responsible for the crimes committed in the Katyn forest; 'deep regret' for these crimes was expressed in the report. See "Zayavlenie TASS", *Izvestiya*, 104, 14 April 1990, p. 4. On the very same day, Mikhail Gorbachev passed the lists of the Polish officers imprisoned in the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) camps in 1939–40 to the President of Poland, Wojciech Jaruzelski. The most important documents concerning the Katyn tragedy, however, remained classified until 1992.

- 21 Kathleen E. Smith, *Mythmaking in the New Russia: Politics and Memory during the Yeltsin Era* (Cornell University Press, 2002).
- 22 On 26 April 1991, Boris Yeltsin, then the Chairman of the Supreme Council of the RSFSR, introduced the Law of the RSFSR no. 1107-1 “On the Rehabilitation of the Repressed Nationalities” (available at <http://base.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc;base=LAW;n=4434>, accessed 10 August 2018). Less than half a year later, on 18 October 1991, the Law no. 1761-1 “On Rehabilitation of the Victims of Political Repression” was signed (available at <http://base.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc;base=LAW;n=194954>, accessed 10 August 2018).
- 23 On 14 October 1992, Boris Yeltsin handed over the so-called ‘Classified File no. 1’ to the President of Poland Lech Wałęsa. This file contained the regulation of the Politburo of the CK VKPb (Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks) to execute 147 000 Polish prisoners of war and 11 000 Polish prisoners. Uttering the words ‘forgive us’ during his official visit to Poland in 1993, Yeltsin laid down a wreath at the monument to the victims of Katyn in Warsaw. For detailed accounts of the Katyn case, see, for instance, Andrzej Przewoźnik and Natalia S. Lebedeva, “The Katyn Massacre: The Process Of Revealing the Truth and Commemorating the Victims”, in *White Spots—Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918–2008*, ed. Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatoly V. Torkunov (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburg Press, 2015), 211–68; David Satter, *It Was a Long Time Ago, and It Never Happened Anyway: Russia and the Communist Past* (Yale University Press, 2012); Inessa Yazhborovskaya, “The Katyn Case: History and Articulation of Official Discourse in Russia”, in *Totalitarian Societies and Democratic Transition: Essays in Memory of Victor Zaslavsky*, ed. Piffer Tommaso and Zubok Vladislav (Budapest and New York, NY: Central European University Press, 2017), 205–30.
- 24 Postanovleniye Verkhovnogo Soveta RSFSR ot 18.10.1991 no. 1763/1-1 “Ob ustanovleniy dnya pamyati zhertv politicheskikh repressiy”. Available at <http://base.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc;base=LAW;n=119358>, accessed 10 August 2018.
- 25 On 23 June 1992 Yeltsin signed the Decree no. 658 (available at <http://base.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc;base=EXP;n=223368>, accessed 10 August 2018) removing the secrecy labels from the documents that had become the basis for mass political repression: legislation, decisions of governmental and party agencies and bodies, protocols of the proceedings of non-judicial organs, information on the number of repressed, and other materials were declassified.
- 26 I have analysed these strategies in greater detail elsewhere. See Ekaterina V. Klimenko, “The Politics of Oblivion and the Practices of Remembrance: Repressions, Collective Memory and Nation-Building in Post-Soviet Russia”, in *Historical Memory of Central and East European Communism*, ed. Agnieszka Mrozik and Stanislav Holubec (New York and London: Routledge, 2018), 141–62.
- 27 Alexei Miller, “The Communist Past in Post-Communist Russia”, in *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes in Europe: Legacies and Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jerzy W. Borejsza, Klaus Ziemer, and Magdalena Hulas (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006), 516–24.
- 28 Anatoly M. Khazanov, “Whom to Mourn and Whom to Forget? (Re)Constructing Collective Memory in Contemporary Russia”, in *Perpetrators, Accomplices and Victims in Twentieth-Century Politics: Reckoning with the Past*, ed. Anatoly M. Khazanov and Stanley Payne (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 132–49.
- 29 Kathleen E. Smith, *Mythmaking in the New Russia: Politics and Memory during the Yeltsin Era* (Cornell University Press, 2002).
- 30 “Whither Anti-Stalinism?”, *Ab Imperio*, no. 4 (2004), 436.
- 31 Nikolai E. Kuposov, *Pamiat' Strogogo Rezhima: Istoriya i Politika v Rossii [Memory of a Strict Regime: History and Politics in Russia]* (Moscow: Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye, 2011).
- 32 Nina Tumarkin, *The Living And The Dead: The Rise And Fall Of The Cult Of World War II In Russia*

(Basic Books, 1994).

- 33 Nina Tumarkin, “The Great Patriotic War as Myth and Memory”, *European Review* 11, no. 04 (2003), 595–611.
- 34 Ivan Kurilla, “The Symbolic Politics of the Putin Administration”, in *Identities and Politics During the Putin Presidency: The Discursive Foundations of Russia’s Stability*, ed. Philipp Casula and Jeronim Perovic (Stuttgart: ibidem Press, 2014), 269–83.
- 35 Elisabeth A. Wood, “Performing Memory: Vladimir Putin and the Celebration of WWII in Russia”, *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 38 (2011), 172–200.
- 36 Dina Khapaeva, “Historical Memory in Post-Soviet Gothic Society”, *Social Research* 76, no. 1 (2009), 359–94; Taras Kuzio, “Soviet and Russian Anti-(Ukrainian) Nationalism and Re-Stalinization”; Todd H. Nelson, “History as Ideology: The Portrayal of Stalinism and the Great Patriotic War in Contemporary Russian High School Textbooks”, *Post-Soviet Affairs* 31, no. 1 (2015), 37–65. Soviet and Russian continuity in the denigration of ‘Ukrainian nationalism’ that goes back as far as the early 18th century. The article focuses on the Soviet and post-Soviet eras by showing how the growth of Russian nationalism, ‘conservative values’ and anti(Ukrainian
- 37 See, for instance, Dina Khapaeva, “Triumphant Memory of the Perpetrators: Putin’s Politics of Re-Stalinization”, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 49, no. 1 (2016), 61-73.
- 38 ‘Prezident Vladimir Putin v khode vstrechi s uchenymi-istorikami v Rossiiskoy gosudarstvennoy biblioteke’, *Kremlin Official Website*. Available at <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/29821>, accessed 10 March 2018.
- 39 The textbook was famous for its innovative approach to studying history: its core principle was that of providing students with facts and documents, offering them the opportunity to analyse these facts and documents critically and develop their own understanding (and evaluation) of various historical events. The same approach – based on asking questions rather than giving answers – was employed by Dolutskii when he dealt with the history of repression. In December 2003, the label ‘Recommended by the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation’ was removed from the textbook. See ‘Minobrazovaniya rekomendovalo shkolan bol’she ne ispol’zovat’ uchebnik istorii s kritikoy Putina’, *NEWSru.com*, 28 November 2003. Available at <https://www.newsru.com/russia/28nov2003/history.html>, accessed 3 November 2018.
- 40 Their “*Istoriya Otechestva. XX vek*” for the 9th grade won the contest for creating a new school textbook on Russian history announced by the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation. In this school textbook the repression was represented for the first time as necessary for rapid industrialisation and modernisation of the country.
- 41 Established in 2006, the group succeeded in creating a number of school textbooks and teaching aids. All of them further developed the interpretation of the repression suggested by Zagladin and his colleagues. For a thorough analysis of Filippov’s textbooks, see David Brandenberger, “A New Short Course? A.V. Filippov and the Russian State’s Search for a ‘Usable Past,’” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10, no. 4 (2009), 825–33; David Wedgwood Benn, “The Teaching of History in Present-Day Russia”, *Europe-Asia Studies* 62, no. 1 (2010), 173–77.
- 42 ‘Zasedaniye soveta po mezhnatsional’nym otnosheniyam 19 fevralya 2013 goda’, *Kremlin Official Website*. Available at <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17536>, accessed 2 July 2018.
- 43 “Perechen’ poruchenii po itogam zasedaniya Soveta po mezhnatsional’nym otnosheniyam. Pr-541, p.5. Srok ispolneniya – 1 noyabria 2013 goda”, *Kremlin Official Website*. Available at <http://kremlin.ru/acts/assignments/orders/17889>, accessed 10 July 2018.
- 44 “Proekt istoriko-kul’turnogo standarta”, *Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation’s Official Website*. Available at <https://минобрнауки.рф/документы/3483>, accessed 4 November 2018.
- 45 “Kontsepsiya novogo uchebno-metodicheskogo kompleksa po Otechestvennoy istorii”, *Rossiyskoye*

istoricheskoye obshchestvo. Available at <https://historyrussia.org/proekty/kontseptsiya-novogo-uchebno-metodicheskogo-kompleksa-po-otechestvennoj-istorii.html>, accessed 4 November 2018.

- 46 Thomas Sherlock, "Russian Politics and the Soviet Past: Reassessing Stalin and Stalinism under Vladimir Putin", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 49, no. 1 (March 2016), 45–59.
- 47 Alexey Miller, "Rol' ekspertnykh soobshestv v politike pamyati v Rossii [The role of expert communities in the memory politics in Russia]", *Politeia*, no. 4 (71) (2013), 124.
- 48 Butovo Firing Ground, located near Moscow, was the site of mass executions during the Great Terror; between 8 August 1937 and 19 October 1938, over 20,000 people were shot and buried here.
- 49 Interestingly, the official web-portal of the Russian president, Kremlin.ru, gives only short information about Vladimir Putin's visit to Butovo (available at <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/43147>, accessed 10 August 2018). The video of Putin's address, however, is available on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvZED1PfoJc>, accessed 10 August 2018.
- 50 'Pamyat' o natsional'nykh tragediyakh tak zhe svyashchenna, kak pamyat' o pobedakh', *Kremlin Official Website*. Available HTTP: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/5862>, accessed 13 February 2016.
- 51 When, on 30 October, Vladimir Putin partook in the inauguration ceremony of the memorial to the victims of political repression in Moscow. The memorial itself, as well as the ceremony of its inauguration, will be discussed later in this article.
- 52 See footnote above.
- 53 The "Return of the Names" is held annually on 29 October. Organised by the *Memorial* society, it takes place in Moscow, Saint Petersburg and other Russian cities.
- 54 Paul Connerton, "Seven Types of Forgetting", *Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008), 59–71.
- 55 The President expressed this idea on 5 November 2014, during the meeting with young historians held in the Museum of Modern History of Russia in Moscow. See: 'Vstrecha s molodymi uchenymi i prepodavatelyami istorii 05 noyabria 2014 goda', *Kremlin Official Website*. Available at <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46951>, accessed 3 March 2018.
- 56 "Ruling of the Government of the Russian Federation № 1561-p", 15 August 2015. Available at <http://government.ru/media/files/AR59E5d7yB9LddoPH2RSIhQpSCQDERdP.pdf>, accessed 15 August 2018.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 "Predlozheniya ob uchrezhdenii obshchenatsional'noy gosudarstvenno-obshchestvennoy programmy 'Ob uvekovechenii pamyati zhertv totalitarnogo rezhima i natsional'nom primireнии'", *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 7 April 2011. Available at <http://rg.ru/2011/04/07/totalitarizm-site.html>, accessed 10 August 2018.
- 59 "Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoy Federatsii ot 30 sentiabria 2015 goda № 487 'O vozvedenii memoriala zhertvam politicheskikh repressii'", *Official Web-Portal of Legal Information*. Available at <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201509300028>, accessed 10 August 2018.
- 60 "Otkrytie memoriala pamiati zhertv politicheskikh repressii 'Stena skorbi'", *Kremlin Official Website*, 30 October 2017. Available at <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55948>, accessed 10 August 2018.
- 61 "Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoy Federatsii ot 07.11.1996 № 1537 'O dne soglasiya i primireniya'", *Official Kremlin Website*. Available at <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/10231>, accessed 13 August 2018.
- 62 Interestingly, the rhetoric of reconciliation was brought to the center of history-related public debates in 2017, the year of the centennial anniversary of the Russian Revolution(s); Olga Malinova, "The

Embarrassing Centenary: Reinterpretation of the 1917 Revolution in the Official Historical Narrative of Post-Soviet Russia (1991–2017)”, *Nationalities Papers* 46, no. 2 (2018), 272–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2017.1386639>.

- 63 An obsession with the issue of national unity is characteristic for Putin’s Russia. Tellingly, the national holiday central for the symbolic policy of contemporary Russia is the Day of People’s Unity. First introduced in 2005, in the beginning of Vladimir Putin’s second presidential term, the holiday is celebrated annually on 4 November.
- 64 Emblematic in this respect are the words of the Russian Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinskiy, who, in his interview to *Novaya Gazeta*, said: “I would not say anything straightforward about Stalin at the moment, but, in any case, I would never support the establishment of the state monument to Stalin. I think, this will strongly divide the nation. This is always bad, and now, since 2014, since Crimea, this is especially bad [...] It is impossible to erect monuments to Stalin, and not because this is bad or very bad, but because it divides the nation”. See *Novaya Gazeta*, №141, 16 December 2016. Available at <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2016/12/15/70908-vladimir-medinskiy-mogu-rasskazat-i-vsyu-pravdu-i-vsyu-nepravdu>, accessed 18 August 2018.
- 65 Sherlock, “Russian Politics and the Soviet Past: Reassessing Stalin and Stalinism under Vladimir Putin”.