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# THE BURDEN OF THE PAST

## The Ukrainian–Polish conflict of 1943/44 in contemporary public, academic and political debates in Ukraine and Poland

**Georgiy Kasianov**

*This article deals with the current debate in Poland and Ukraine concerning the Ukrainian–Polish conflict of 1943/44 in the Volhynia-Polissia-Galicia region of contemporary Ukraine. Centuries of social conflict between the Ukrainian peasantry and Polish nobility, aggravated by ethnic and religious divisions, led to a bitter conflict in the age of nationalism and resulted in the Polish–Ukrainian war in western Ukraine in 1918/19, with the subsequent defeat and downfall of the western Ukrainian People's Republic. This conflict continued during the period of the Polish Second Republic in the 1920–1930s, and was marked by the insurrection of Ukrainian nationalist organizations against the 'Polish occupation'. This war culminated in terrible massacres of Polish and Ukrainian civilians in the years 1943/44 that left a legacy of enduring mutual prejudice and hatred, reinforced by historical stereotypes that evolved over centuries. During the period of communist rule, this conflict was considered taboo both in Ukraine and Poland, but this changed with the end of the communist era. The controversy reached its peak in 2003, when the conflict's 60th anniversary was commemorated. The political establishments of both countries became involved in heated debates that triggered public discussion in western Ukraine and Poland, affecting relations between the two states. The historical conflict thus took on inter-ethnic and inter-state dimensions.*

### **Background**

Over the past 10–15 years, a set of stock images, stereotypes and prejudices has become engrained in the social consciousness of both Ukraine and Poland, creating an image of the 'other' that affects relations between the two peoples and states.

This generalized image of the 'other' was shaped by several important factors. First, national history was actively revised in both countries throughout the 1990s. This process generated interest in historical wrongdoings and insults that the two neighbours had inflicted on each other in the course of nearly seven centuries. It also revived the national myths of the nineteenth century, when the image of the 'other' was formulated in terms of ethnic nationalism. The revival of these myths restored stereotypes developed in the literature of nineteenth-century Romanticism: on the Polish side, these were stereotypes of Ukrainians as wild and anarchic 'cutthroats' (most prominent in the novels of Henryk

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Sienkiewicz, which enjoyed popularity under every Polish regime) and, on the Ukrainian side, the image of the 'Liakh' as oppressor (here, the poetry of Taras Shevchenko is the most notable example).

In parallel, a complete revision of history and literature in the school curricula took place. Research in Poland and Ukraine shows that textbooks in current use include established negative stereotypes of Ukrainians and Poles, respectively. Sereda (2000) carried out a content analysis of four Polish and five Ukrainian history textbooks and found the following: in Polish textbooks, Ukrainians are mentioned a total of 112 times, of which 56 are in a neutral context, 38 as enemies in combat, and 12 times as a national minority; in Ukrainian history textbooks, Poles are mentioned neutrally 268 times, 49 times as enemies in combat, and 13 times as a national minority (p. 393). The well-known Ukrainian medievalist Natalia Yakovenko, having analysed 14 Ukrainian history textbooks published in 1997/98, states that negative stereotypes of Polish–Ukrainian relations go back to the Middle Ages and the early modern period. It emerges from these textbooks that 'Poland and Ukraine are basically distinct political, social and cultural organisms linked by nothing but hostility' (Iakovenko, 2002, p. 375).

Another factor that deserves attention is labour migration from Ukraine. Poland, with its higher standard of living, has attracted a considerable amount of labour migration from Ukraine, mainly from its western regions. Ukrainians are employed predominantly in low-status jobs that Poles consider undesirable, and at least half the Ukrainian 'guest workers' are employed illegally; Poles are therefore generally prejudiced against Ukrainian wage earners as individuals of lower social standing. The contacts between Ukrainians and Poles as a result of labour migration have done nothing to improve the typical image of Poles among Ukrainians. From 1992 to 2002, the index of national distance between Ukrainians and Poles rose from a relatively moderate 3.77 on the Bogardus scale to a rather high 5.01.<sup>1</sup>

It is also worth recalling that some of the lands still considered as part of Poland in Polish historical consciousness were ceded to the USSR (i.e. the Ukrainian SSR) after 1945 and inherited by independent Ukraine in 1991. Polish right-wing organizations continue to exploit this fact, not always in moderate fashion, exacerbating Polish public opinion. All these factors helped to create a psychological situation conducive to a genuine outburst of negative emotions in 2003, when Poland and Ukraine commemorated the 60th anniversary of the events in Volhynia.

### Political Discourse

The passions triggered by the tragic events of 1943/44 came as a surprise to the majority of Ukrainian politicians. They were less of a surprise in Poland given the activities of the Polish Institute of National Remembrance, the Council to Preserve the Memory of Combat and Martyrdom and the National Security Office. Under the aegis of these institutions, large-scale research was undertaken on the events of 1943/44 in Volhynia and other western Ukrainian regions, based on scrupulous collection of facts, documents and oral testimony. The results were published in 2000 in a book by Władysław and Ewa Siemaszko that bore the expressive title *Ludobójstwo, dokonane przez nacjonalistów ukraińskich na ludności polskiej Wołynia, 1939–1945* [*Genocide of the Polish Population of Volhynia Perpetrated by Ukrainian Nationalists, 1939–1945*]. The book became the subject of unusually heated debates in Poland, among Ukrainian organizations and authors, and,

in time, between Polish and Ukrainian politicians, scholars, and community activists. Indeed, this publication (recommended, *inter alia*, for study in schools) became one of the most powerful arguments in the discussions of 2003, when the Polish side, supported by civic organizations and their parliamentary representatives, launched a rather extensive campaign intended to obtain Ukraine's acknowledgement, at the highest level, of the mass murder of Polish civilians by Ukrainians.

This campaign was initiated by Polish organizations of veterans of the Home Army, former residents of the 'eastern Polish lands' (the Polish term for part of the western territories of present-day Ukraine), and other right-wing and radical organizations, such as the Society to Preserve the Memory of the Victims of Ukrainian Nationalists. It cannot be said that these organizations possessed or currently enjoy serious political influence in Poland, but they are well organized and engage in skilfully timed and targeted campaigns that have considerable resonance in Polish society. The executive (presidential) branch is obliged to reckon with their actions and public statements, especially when the defence of national interests is involved—regardless of how these interests are formulated.

If one were to generalize the most radical arguments of those who initiated efforts to 'bring back Volhynia' into Polish historical memory, they would run along the following lines: mass murder (genocide) of the Polish civilian population took place in Volhynia in the spring and autumn of 1943. The slaughter was initiated by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) with the intention of physically removing ('cleansing') the Polish population from those territories, and was carried out by units of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), which was under the control of the OUN. The total number of Poles killed was between 37,000 and 60,000. The scale of destruction on the Polish side was incommensurate with the retaliatory actions of the Home Army against the Ukrainian civil population and 'Action Vistula' of 1947, when virtually the entire Ukrainian population in eastern Poland was deported to the country's western regions. The Ukrainian state was to make an official acknowledgement of the genocide and apologize for it.

A more moderate position was adopted by the liberal intelligentsia, the Church and official circles. They were more concerned with achieving reconciliation rather than obtaining an apology. These circles hence avoided the terms 'genocide' and '(ethnic) cleansing', preferring to speak of 'conflict' instead. The first official statements on the assessment of the events in Volhynia were made in Warsaw on 10–11 March 2003 at a meeting of Ukrainian and Polish parliamentarians devoted to problems of inter-parliamentary cooperation. The Polish side informed the Ukrainians of the discussions going on in the country and proposed a joint declaration giving a 'balanced' assessment of the events that had taken place 60 years earlier.<sup>2</sup> Negotiations on a visit by Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski to one of the cemeteries on Ukrainian territory where victims of the Volhynian events were buried began at the same time. The matter was then taken up by the two countries' departments of external affairs. On 19 March 2003, the foreign ministers of Poland (Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz) and Ukraine (Anatolii Zlenko) exchanged statements to the effect that the 60th anniversary of the Volhynian events should serve as an occasion for historic reconciliation of the two nations. Somewhat ambiguously, the Polish foreign minister called the anniversary a 'test of truth' for the peoples of Ukraine and Poland.<sup>3</sup>

On 8 April 2003, representatives of the presidential administrations of Ukraine and Poland announced that agreement had been reached on a joint action of the two presidents to honour the memory of the dead in one of the former Polish villages on

Ukrainian territory. The date of 11 July was designated for the commemoration. The Polish president's statement on the matter showed that he was extremely vulnerable in his own country when it came to accomplishing an understanding with the Ukrainians: 'We should be as decisive as possible and as delicate as necessary.'<sup>4</sup> The presidents themselves confirmed their intentions with regard to the joint commemoration in May, when they met in the Ivano-Frankivsk oblast of Ukraine.

At the beginning of April 2003, Volodymyr Lytvyn, the head of the Ukrainian parliament (Verkhovna Rada), announced that its draft of the joint statement had been dispatched to the Polish Diet (Sejm) for coordination.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, extremely contentious debates on the content of the statement erupted in both parliaments. In the Ukrainian parliament, the course of those debates was determined by three opposing forces—the factions supporting President Leonid Kuchma; the opposition, represented by the 'Our Ukraine' bloc headed by Viktor Yushchenko, now the president of Ukraine; and the communists. The pro-presidential factions, generally not particularly interested in this problem, were fairly disciplined in their support of Leonid Kuchma with regard to mutual reconciliation. There was no unity in the Our Ukraine camp: the position of its moderate faction, headed by Viktor Yushchenko, coincided with that of Kuchma and the speaker of parliament. The right-wing parties and movements participating in the bloc insisted that Poland's attitude towards Ukraine was prejudiced and one-sided. Thirty-three deputies issued an appeal to Poles and Ukrainians rejecting Polish demands for a unilateral apology on the part of Ukraine (although no such demands were being advanced by official representatives of Poland) and stressing in particular that the Volhynian tragedy had resulted from the 'anti-Ukrainian' policy of the Polish state during the interwar period, thereby indirectly justifying what had occurred in Volhynia.<sup>6</sup> In response, on 29 May 2003 representatives of both the pro-presidential and the opposition factions (39 deputies) issued an unqualified condemnation of the actions that had led to the mass murder of the Polish civil population. At the same time, they called on Polish ruling circles 'to condemn without reserve the actions that brought about the mass murder of the Ukrainian civil population'.<sup>7</sup> The communists maintained their traditional attitude, insisting on the need to condemn the crimes of the OUN–UPA.

The process of coordinating the text of the joint statement gave evidence of disputes in the Polish parliament. In May 2003, a special delegation of the Polish Diet visited Kiev. Ratification of the final text was planned for 29 May at a joint session of the delegations of both parliaments, but did not come about after all. Representatives of both delegations declined to comment on that result. According to *Deutsche Welle*, the Polish delegation insisted that the actions of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army be defined as 'ethnic cleansing'. The Ukrainian delegation refused, as such a formulation would have given the families of deceased Volhynian Poles grounds to sue Ukraine at the International Tribunal in the Hague. In response, the Polish delegation asked for time to consult its factions in the Diet.<sup>8</sup>

In June 2003, when the coordinated text of the statement was given final approval and the formulations most irritating to both sides had been removed, radical groups in the Diet demanded a new version of the statement that was, however, unacceptable to Ukraine. The simultaneous ratification of the statement by the Verkhovna Rada and the Diet planned for 10 July (the eve of the meeting of the Ukrainian and Polish presidents), was threatened to be disrupted.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, as the date of the presidential meeting drew nearer, the demands advanced by some of the Polish deputies became less radical,

and the dispute with the presidents took centre stage. It was clear that if the presidents reached an agreement and the parliaments did not, the internal political game would be won by the executive branch. A day before the presidents met, the two parliaments approved a 'compromise' text of the statement that did not satisfy the right wing of either representative body. Interestingly enough, all the pro-presidential factions in the Verkhovna Rada voted to support the text of the statement, while only a minority of the opposition factions did so. Most of the opposition either voted against the text or abstained. The communists took no part in the vote, declaring that 'neither the Ukrainian nor the Polish people is an accessory to the tragedy that took place'.<sup>10</sup>

On the following day, at the ceremonies held in the village of Pavlivka in Volhynia to honour the memory of the dead, the presidents of Ukraine and Poland made a joint statement of 'Reconciliation on the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Tragic Events in Volhynia' (each read the text of the statement in his mother tongue).<sup>11</sup> The text included a condemnation of the killings of both Poles and Ukrainians, an appeal for public moral condemnation of 'the perpetrators of crimes against the Polish and Ukrainian peoples', and the expectation of a complete future reconciliation of the younger generations of Ukrainians and Poles, 'who will free themselves entirely of the prejudices of the tragic past'.<sup>12</sup> This symbolic action of the two presidents put a stop to the official debates. The top political spokesmen for the two countries had established the official framework for debating the problem: avoidance of mutual recriminations in favour of bilateral condemnation of criminal actions, not organizations, countries or peoples; an orientation towards the future, not the past. But that event did not put an end to discussions in society, especially among intellectuals. As noted by Taras Vozniak, a Lviv community activist and editor-in-chief of the journal *ŭ*, the act of reconciliation in the village of Pavlivka 'does not exhaust the problem or establish a guideline obligatory for all. It signals that at the political level of the Ukrainian and Polish states, at the international level, these events have been given voice and evaluated'.<sup>13</sup> It is safe to say that Vozniak's statement accurately defined the position of most intellectuals in Ukraine and Poland who discussed the problem and sought ways to resolve it in their own intellectual sphere.

### Intellectual Discourse

Turning now to the intellectual discourse on the conflict, the following circumstances are worth taking into account. First, these debates took place at two levels, namely the political and academic. Political writers were engrossed mainly in problems of a moral and ethical nature (responsibility, repentance, mutual forgiveness), while scholars generally concentrated on establishing facts and investigating and interpreting the pre-conditions, causes and consequences of the events of 1943/44. Second, political writers took part in scholarly debates, while academics prioritized publications: in both cases, the mixing of genres vitiated the 'disciplinary specifics' of the discussion. Third, all efforts to separate the moral and ethical or scholarly aspects of the problem from the political ones ended in failure. Fourth, these debates took place not only within the intellectual milieus of the two countries but also between them, with the result that the intellectual milieus of Ukraine and Poland divided not along national lines but according to their methods of resolving disputes. Representatives of both sides who sought reconciliation joined forces. Those who insisted that only one side was at fault held their ground. Finally, it is worth noting that for the Poles the discussion of the events of 1943/44 was of national

significance, while in Ukraine the problem concerned mainly intellectuals from western Ukraine and Kiev. In eastern and southern Ukraine, it did not figure as part of national memory; indeed, it was mentioned only to revive the myth, traditional in those regions, of the western Ukrainians' radical nationalism and its consequences.

As early as 1997, the writer Mykola Riabchuk, commenting on the statement of 100 Polish intellectuals in the Paris journal *Kultura* condemning 'Action Vistula' of 1947, noted that one would hardly be able to find 100 intellectuals in Ukraine prepared to sign a statement condemning the anti-Polish actions of the UPA in Volhynia. In Riabchuk's opinion, this was by no means due to absence of xenophobia in Ukrainian society or cowardice among intellectuals but to the unfinished national project in Ukraine: 'the unfinished national-liberation struggle, the half-started linguistic and cultural decolonization, and belated (by European historical standards) nation-building serve to maintain a defensive attitude, a "fortress mentality", and naturally contribute little to a realistic assessment according to the criteria of "peacetime"'.<sup>14</sup> This prognosis was confirmed to some extent in 2003. When the question arose about condemning the mass murder of civilians, the position of those intellectuals who attempted to reconcile nationalism with universal human values was ill-defined: the idea of apologizing for war crimes perpetrated by Ukrainians, which seemed at first to encounter no opposition, steadily lost its purely ethical dimension under the influence of political disputes.

It is safe to say that the vacillation of Ukrainian intellectuals (including those who managed to remain completely independent on the issue) was due in large measure to the rather aggressive attitude of some Polish community activists and scholars, who unfortunately enjoyed rather broad support in Polish society. An example of that attitude was the interview given by Ewa Siemaszko to one of the most influential mass-circulation Polish newspapers, *Rzeczpospolita*, on 22–23 February 2003. She not only appealed for a rejection of 'political correctness' and the 'pseudo-comparison' of victims on the Polish and Ukrainian sides, but also made a negative comment on an internal Ukrainian problem—the political rehabilitation of UPA soldiers (who had been treated as collaborators in Soviet times)—calling them 'heirs to crimes of the spirit against humanity'.<sup>15</sup> In western Ukraine, where the UPA remains an extraordinarily important element of the nation-building myth, declarations of this kind sufficed to make most of the population adopt a militantly defensive attitude. In the course of 2003, *Rzeczpospolita* and other mass media in Poland continually published articles on the Volhynian tragedy that presented the events exclusively from the Polish viewpoint. This appeared to be either a well-planned media campaign or the manifestation of a genuine mass experience in which the sense of insulted national honour was paramount, and it did not fail to affect the attitude of many Ukrainian intellectuals who could hardly be suspected of being xenophobic. The academic Yaroslav Isaievych, well known for his liberal views, came out against the one-sided Polish presentation of the Volhynian theme: 'in Volhynia there were not only murders of Poles but also mass murders of Ukrainians' (Isaievych, 2003, p. 7). He also asserted that the Polish side was too insistent on demanding repentance from the Ukrainians. Professor Mykola Kucherepa of Lutsk State University expressed his opinion as follows: 'We are for understanding and rapprochement on this painful question. But we shall not heap ashes on our head and repent.'<sup>16</sup> Oleh Romaniv, the head of the Shevchenko Scientific Society (an influential cultural association in the diaspora and in western Ukraine) even declared that the 'Volhynian theme' had deliberately been 'promoted' one-sidedly in Poland.<sup>17</sup> Professor Yaroslav Dashkevych, who in 1994 had

supported an unqualified condemnation of Ukrainian terror against the Polish population in 1942–44, (Il'iushyn, 2003, p. 20) stated in 2003 that Poland was turning from a strategic partner of Ukraine into a strategic enemy.<sup>18</sup> Naturally, all these statements found a positive echo among UPA veterans and considerable numbers of older western Ukrainians. Anti-Polish attitudes gained strength among some inhabitants of the western regions and gave new impetus to rather hysterical anti-Polish rhetoric amongst radical nationalist circles.

Among those Ukrainian intellectuals who were inclined towards an unqualified apology for the mass murder of Poles in Volhynia, a discussion also emerged about collective guilt for tragedies of the past. The Kiev philosopher Myroslav Popovych stated that responsibility should be wholly personal. He was contradicted by the Lviv historian Yaroslav Hrytsak, in whose opinion the individualization of responsibility, appropriate in the judicial sphere, has no place in the sphere of social consciousness: 'The choice to belong to any group is bound up with the emotions aroused in us by that group. And if I feel emotional pride in the best and worthiest deeds of that group, why should I avoid moral responsibility for its sins and crimes?'<sup>19</sup> These discussions resulted in joint action. An open letter signed by 39 Ukrainian intellectuals included the statement that 'the forcible expulsion of the Polish population from Volhynia was a tragic error'. Ukrainians and Poles were exhorted to mutual repentance.<sup>20</sup>

The Polish side had its own problems in this regard. In the course of the 1990s, as the Volhynian tragedy gradually returned to collective historical memory, a peculiar 'accusation syndrome' developed in public opinion. The events of 1943/44 were associated mainly with the notion of a 'crime against the Polish nation', and the cause of the tragedy was seen to lie mainly in the ideology of radical Ukrainian nationalism, represented by the OUN and the UPA. Once again, at the level of popular mass-circulation publications (such as the works of Edward Prus and Viktor Polishchuk, issued in hundreds of thousands of copies), stereotypes of 'criminal Ukrainian nationalism', which looked perfectly natural in the role of perpetrator of the Volhynian tragedy, was instilled into mass consciousness. If professional historians could speak of serious defects in the nationality policy of the Second Polish Republic during the interwar period (the policy of cultural assimilation of ethnic minorities, the persecution of the Ukrainian Church in Volhynia, the economic exclusion of the Ukrainian minority, and so on), these problems were ignored at the level of political writing and public discussion and debated only in restricted intellectual circles. Accordingly, when it came to the attitude of those intellectuals towards the Volhynian tragedy, they were obliged to define their positions in a rather inauspicious environment. Any 'concessions' to the Ukrainian side were liable to meet either with tacit disapproval or with rather noisy protest on the part of right-wingers. Understandably, under such circumstances it was rather difficult for Polish intellectuals to express views that ran counter to prevailing social moods.

The attitude of those who supported the idea of mutual forgiveness—an initiative that came from the Polish side—was expressed on the eve of the 60th anniversary commemorations by Jacek Kuron, an outstanding representative of the Polish anti-communist movement of the 1970s and 1980s, in a letter to Myroslav Marynovych, an activist of the Ukrainian anti-communist dissident movement during the same period. Kuron noted that honouring the dead according to the 'rhythm of anniversaries' took the events out of their historical context and thus distorted the picture of Polish–Ukrainian relations. He emphasized that the Poles, having been the stronger and dominant party

over the centuries, had 'Polonized' the Ukrainian elite and, at least twice in the twentieth century, had made it impossible for Ukraine to gain independence. He appealed not to seek the mote in the eye of one's neighbour but the beam in one's own. 'The notion that gospel truth does not apply to relations between peoples is un-Christian and runs counter to the spirit of the Gospel. For these very reasons', he wrote, 'I appeal to you—I am certain that I do so not in my name alone—and say: forgive us.'<sup>21</sup> The director of the Institute of Military History, Andrzej Ajnenkiel, also wrote about Poland's responsibility for generating conditions conducive to the Volhynian tragedy.<sup>22</sup> The historians Grzegorz Motyka and Włodzimierz Miedrzecki and the journalist Bogumila Berdychowska expressed similar views. It may be said that in this respect their opinions coincided with corresponding arguments on the Ukrainian side; also, for both these parties, the moral condemnation of the murder of peaceable civilians remained dominant. Quite naturally, the commemoration of the Volhynian events considerably heightened interest in the views of professional historians. The academic community was perhaps better prepared for discussion than any other social sector.

### Debates among Historians

Grzegorz Motyka, a Polish historian of the younger generation, has proposed a working typology of certain groups among Polish historians based on modes, techniques and methods of interpretation and representation of Polish–Ukrainian relations during the Second World War. According to him, four groups can be identified: *revisionists* (those who oppose ideological stereotypes about Ukrainian nationalism elaborated and imposed during communist rule and propose balanced accounts based on purely scholarly methods and research strategies emancipated from the dictatorship of ideology and politics); *traditionalists* (those who concentrate mostly on 'crimes of Ukrainian nationalists' with subsequent victimization/glorification of Poles); *para-scientists* (those who take full freedom in operating with facts and their interpretations and present Polish–Ukrainian relations in a black-and-white manner); and *Polish–Ukrainian historians* (Motyka, 2000, p. 168). The last category falls beyond the first three, since it is grounded on ethnic categorization. In fact, some representatives of this group could be subdivided according to the first three categories, where traditionalists and para-scientists might represent the loudest voices with heavy emphasis on 'crimes of Poles' against Ukrainians. The same typology is applicable to the Ukrainian historians: a kind of balance between traditionalists (with their tendency to an anti-Polish accusation syndrome) and revisionists can be found at the level of professional scholarship, while para-scientific trends belong mostly to the realm of ideological writings of radical nationalists and communists.

An official dialogue among historians concerning acute problems of Ukrainian–Polish relations began as early as 1993, when a commission was formed to improve the content of school textbooks on history and geography. In Ukraine it was known as a Ukrainian–Polish commission, while in Poland it figured as a Polish–Ukrainian one. Its task was to coordinate terminology in school textbooks, suggest 'politically correct' formulations, and correct factual statements and expressions that might promote the formation of negative stereotypes of neighbours. From the very beginning of the commission's work, the problem of 'asymmetrical history' was evident: if Ukraine was practically absent from the pages of Polish textbooks, Poland and Poles were cast in a rather unfavourable light as soon as 'nationalized' Ukrainian history courses began being taught at schools.

According to Pavlo Polians'ky, the former secretary of the commission on the Ukrainian side, the initial phase of its work was extraordinarily complex: arguments prevailed over constructive dialogue. As scholars whose views were too politicized soon left the commission, its activity was normalized and took on a constructive character.<sup>23</sup> The commission meets once a year (in Poland and Ukraine in turns) to discuss the textbooks that each side sends the other. Its conclusions are of an advisory nature, and authors are not obliged to take them into account. In the context of this article, it is quite symptomatic that as early as 1999, the most controversial problem, which aroused the greatest number of extraordinarily vehement discussions, was identified as that of textbook accounts of relations between the OUN and the UPA on the one hand, and the Polish population and the Home Army on the other (Polians'ky, 1999, pp. 151–153). The Ukrainian co-chairman of the commission, the well-known historian Stanislav Kulchytsky, says that to date it has proved impossible to reach a compromise on this question.<sup>24</sup> The events of 2003 associated with the 60th anniversary commemorations of the Volhynian tragedy bear out these statements.

Discussions of a more academic nature not associated with 'textbook' versions of history followed much the same scenario. In 1996, at the initiative of the World Association of Home Army Veterans, the Polish journal *Karta* and the Association of Ukrainians in Poland, a series of seminars involving Ukrainian and Polish historians was organized under the title 'Ukraine–Poland: Difficult Questions'. According to the conference procedure, historians began by raising a number of the most difficult problems for consideration. This was followed by a discussion among experts; a conciliation group then drafted a list of formulations on controversial issues. Every conference ended with a joint statement of Ukrainian and Polish historians and the publication of materials. The problems under discussion generally pertained to Polish–Ukrainian relations during the interwar period, the Second World War, and the immediate post-war period. The need for agreement on terminology became apparent at the very first conferences: in particular, when the Volhynian events were involved, Polish historians insisted on terms such as 'extermination of the Polish population' (by analogy with the extermination of the Jews) and 'ethnic cleansing'.<sup>25</sup> Ukrainian historians held out for such formulations as 'Ukrainian–Polish conflict', 'Volhynian tragedy', and 'Volhynian slaughter'. Yet there were also those who used the term 'ethnic cleansing' (Zaiarniuk, 2003, p. 262) (however, they were precisely the ones who did not end up participating in these conferences).

From the beginning, the question of the causes of the Volhynian events was among the most controversial. Some Polish historians considered the main cause to be the radical ethnic nationalism professed by the OUN and the UPA. Ukrainian historians indicated the Polish government's numerous repressive measures against the Ukrainian population during the interwar period; the Polish policy of colonizing the western Ukrainian lands (which led to conflict over the land question); provocations on the part of the German occupation authorities, who followed a policy of 'divide and rule' in this region; and the actions of the Polish police with regard to the Ukrainian population. The main principle upheld by the Ukrainian historians was that the actions of the OUN–UPA against the Polish civil population could be condemned without condemning the organizations as such. Their moderate Polish colleagues agreed that the Polish government was also partly to blame for the outburst of violence in Volhynia, but they insisted that this did not excuse crimes against the civil population. The last point was exceedingly important, as certain Ukrainian historians advanced the thesis that the slaughter of 1942–44 was a natural

reaction to the actions of the Polish side and thus indirectly justified the crimes that were committed.

This series of conferences ended on a rather piquant note. Some of the Ukrainian historians insisted that responsibility for the Volhynian events lay first and foremost with the Polish state, which had followed a policy of cultural assimilation and economic oppression with regard to Ukrainians; in similar fashion, some Polish historians placed the blame for 'Action Vistula', carried out by the Polish communist government in 1947, on the OUN–UPA, which, according to these same historians, had initiated a 'bloody confrontation' with the Poles as early as 1942. These assertions were accompanied by rather ungentlemanly conduct on both sides, which led the Association of Ukrainians in Poland to discontinue its funding of the conferences.<sup>26</sup>

Shortly before the 60th anniversary commemorations, debates among historians went beyond the bounds of their profession—indeed, the point was that historians should legitimize the idea of reconciliation. In Ukraine especially, a series of conferences was held not only for scholarly purposes but also as a way of communicating with the public at large. A Ukrainian–Polish round table entitled 'What Are We to Do with Our History?', held in Lviv on 1 November 2002, considered practically the whole range of acute questions associated with the rewriting of history in both countries and the consequences of that process for their relations. The first session of a conference on 'Ukrainians and Poles during the Second World War: Domestic and Foreign Aspects of Mutual Relations' was held in Lutsk (Volhynia) on 19 March 2003; it continued at the Ukrainian parliament in Kiev on 20–21 March. Although the conference was marked by some highly unpleasant episodes (such as the distribution of literature issued by Ukrainian right-radical organizations, which was not sanctioned by the conference organizers, and rather harsh statements by individual participants), its conclusions were fairly balanced and non-prejudicial. On 11–12 April, the Polish embassy in Ukraine and the Ukrainian club 'Without Prejudice' held a seminar with experts and journalists in Ostrih (Volhynia) titled 'The Events in Volhynia: How Are We to Live with This Burden?'; the atmosphere was also one of a search for understanding. A conference held in Lviv on 12 May with the expressive title 'The Third Front in Western Ukraine: 1939–1947' bore all the hallmarks of confrontational rhetoric.<sup>27</sup> The same tone characterized a conference in Ternopil on 'Polish Terror in the Ternopil Region from the 1920s to the 1950s'. Ultimately, efforts to include historians in the discussions so as to 'arrive at the truth' ensured that those members of the profession—Ukrainian and Polish alike—who do not distinguish ideology from scholarly cognition found themselves 'on the barricades'.

Thus the debates among intellectuals, for all their importance, had little effect on the process of normalization and subduing passions provoked by the Volhynian problem.

## Conclusions

Our survey of the Ukrainian–Polish debates on the Volhynian tragedy of 1943/44 shows that the problem was resolved only in part. The complexity of its resolution may be attributed to a whole series of circumstances. The growing strength of ethnic nationalism in both societies in conjunction with an intensified search for national identity, the need to complete the 'modernization project' (nation-building) in Ukraine, and challenges to Polish national consciousness associated with Euro-integration and the effects of globalization

made both societies more sensitive to issues linked with the revival of the 'difficult questions' of the past in collective memory.

Discussions concerning the Volhynian events of 1942–44 took place against the background of fairly complex political developments in both countries, making it necessary for official representatives to juggle the interests of quite disparate political groupings. The Ukrainian government had to seek a compromise not only with the Polish side but also with the parties of the right and centre-right. The Polish side had simultaneously to maintain its role as 'advocate of Ukraine in the West' and satisfy the ambitions of the Polish right, which enjoyed considerable public support. It is also worth noting that for senior Polish political leaders, resolving the conflict associated with the Volhynian tragedy was exceedingly important with regard to the strategic significance of relations with Ukraine in the context of expanding the EU and keeping relations with Russia on an even keel.

For Ukraine, with reference not only to the government but also to intellectuals and interested social groups, the Volhynian problem did not have the same national significance as it did for Poland. It was mainly of concern for the western regions and, for that very reason, it was beset with additional complications, since residents of those regions had to justify their views not only to the Poles but also to their fellow citizens. Similarly, on the level of intellectual debate, if for the Polish side the Volhynian problem was above all one of national significance, obliging intellectuals to take cognizance of their responsibility for the results of the discussion, for the Ukrainian side it was rather a problem of 'local significance'. All efforts to promote a national discussion about the Volhynian problem ended in failure.

Regardless of the vehemence of the discussions, which sometimes involved outright political opposition between radical groups in both countries, the desire to discuss the problem may be considered a significant achievement in itself. The presence in both countries of social groups aspiring to compromise indicates the possibility of a gradual reduction of passions inspired by historical wrongdoings, which manifest themselves now and again.

At the same time, it is useful to note the logic and algorithm of the incidence of such conflicts: for example, both Ukraine and Poland have a rather complex history of relations with Russia, and any successive 'anniversary' date may set off another explosion of passions whose consequences are difficult to predict, since the resolution of such conflicts depends mainly on the situation in those countries at a given time and is not so much a matter of well-considered policy as of contingency. The discussions of the Volhynian tragedy show that the opinions of independent experts and intellectuals (who are accustomed to seeking compromise solutions) are not always taken into account by decision makers and have very scant influence on the promotion of media campaigns and the formulation of public-relations strategies. Clearly, appropriate mechanisms and procedures should be developed in order to disseminate the opinions of these groups with a view to influencing broader strata of society. Otherwise, while historians, experts and even politicians may succeed in reaching agreement, less influential and less competent but better organized and clamorous interest and pressure groups may continue to sow extremely dangerous dissension in social consciousness.

## NOTES

1. A value of 4.0 is considered a moderate one, indicating tolerance, openness and readiness to coexist. See Panina (2003).

2. 'Pol's'ki ta ukrains'ki parlamentari hotuiut' spil'nu zaiavu pro volyns'ku trahediiu', Available at: <http://ukr.for-ua.com/news/2003/03/12/142601.html>. Accessed 14 March 2003.
3. 'Richnytsia podii na Volyni stane 'ispytom istyny' dlia Ukraïny ta Pol'shchi', Available at: <http://www.obozrevatel.com.ua/ukr>. Accessed 19 March 2003.
4. B. Bachyns'kyi, 'V ochikuvanni porozuminnia', Available at: <http://postup.brama.com>, 11 April 2003. Accessed 23 June 2004.
5. Iu. Lishchenko, 'Pravda ne mozhe buty odnobokoiu', *L'vivs'ka hazeta*, 15 April 2003. Accessed 10 June 2004.
6. Piotr Kos'tsins'kyi, 'Zlochyny neobkhdno zasudyty', *L'vivs'ka hazeta*, Available at: [www.gazeta.lviv.ua](http://www.gazeta.lviv.ua), 20 May 2003. Accessed 20 May 2004.
7. 'Vidkrytyi lyst narodnykh deputativ Ukraïny z nahody 60-richchia trahichnykh podii na Volyni', *Holos Ukraïny*, No. 98, p. 2, 29 May 2003.
8. 'Ukraïna i Pol'shcha poky shcho ne prymyrylysia', Available at: <http://www.glavred.info>, 30 May 2003. Accessed 5 June 2003.
9. 'Kompromisne neporozuminnia', Available at: <http://postup.brama.com>, Accessed 27 June 2003.
10. 'Vystrazhdanyi kompromis. Parlamenti Ukraïny ta Pol'shchi skhvalyly tekst spil'noi zaiavy pro trahichni podii na Volyni', *L'vivs'ka hazeta*, p. 2, 11 July 2003.
11. V. Zamiatin, 'Pershyi den' vzaiemnogo proshchennia', *Den'*, p. 9, 12 July, 2003.
12. 'Spil'na zaiava Prezydenta Ukraïny i Prezydenta Respubliky Pol'shcha 'Pro prymyrennia— v 60tu richnytsiu trahichnykh podii na Volyni', *Postup*, p. 1, 16 July 2003.
13. T. Vozniak, 'Mamai chy maibutnie?', *Krytyka*, no. 7–8, Jul.–Aug. 2003, p. 12.
14. M. Riabchuk, 'Podolannia mynuloho. Dialoh pol's'kykh i ukrains'kykh intelektualiv vidkryvaie shliakh do novykh vzaiemyn mizh dvoma kraïnamy', *Den'*, p. 4, 24 April 1997.
15. Cited in A. Portnov, 'Pochuty inshoho', *Krytyka*, no. 7–8, Jul.–Aug. 2003, p. 5.
16. B. Kozlovs'kyi, 'Nevypravdana zhorstokist' bula z obokh bokiv', *Vysoky Zamok*, Available at: [www.wz.lviv.ua](http://www.wz.lviv.ua). Accessed 22 May 2004.
17. V. Zinchuk, 'Mizhnarodna hra na volyns'komu poli', *Vysoky Zamok*, Available at: [www.lviv.ua](http://www.lviv.ua), 13 May 2003. Accessed 29 May 2004.
18. D. O. Svidnyk, 'Tretii front na Volyni', *Postup*, Available at: [www.postup.brama.com](http://www.postup.brama.com), 13 May 2003. Accessed 29 May 2004.
19. See M. Popovych, 'Volyn': nashe i ne nashe hore', *Krytyka*, 2003, no. 5, May; Ia. Hrytsak, 'Nashe i duzhe nashe hore', *Krytyka*, no. 7–8, Jul.–Aug. 2003.
20. 'Vidkrytyi lyst z pryvodu 60 richnytsi zbroinoho ukrains'ko-pol's'koho konfliktu na Volyni', *Ī*, no. 28, 2003, Available at: <http://www.ji.lviv.ua/n28texts/vidkr-lyst.htm>. Accessed 20 June 2004.
21. 'Z lysta latseka Kuronia do Myroslava Marynovycha', *Ī*, no. 28, 2003, Available at: <http://www.ji.lviv.ua/n28/texts/kuron.htm>. Accessed 23 June 2004.
22. Andrzej Ajnenkiel, 'Polityka Pol'shchi stosovno ukraïntsv u mizhvoiennyi period. Vybrani problemy', *ibid.*
23. Interview with author, 15 May 2005.
24. Interview with author, Kiev, 17 May 2005.
25. *Ukraïna-Pol'shcha. Vazhki pytannia*, no. 4, pp. 275–310.
26. Portnov, 'Pochuty inshoho', p. 8.
27. D. Svidnyk, 'Tretii front na Volyni', *Postup*, Available at: [www.postup.brama.com](http://www.postup.brama.com), 13 May 2003. Accessed 29 May 2004.

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