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THE WAY TO INDEPENDENCE: THE POLITICAL EXPERIENCE OF LITHUANIA AND UKRAINE IN THE LATE 1980'S - EARLY 1990'S

Abstract. *Based on a comparative analysis, the article examines the political processes of gaining state independence in Lithuania and Ukraine, which began in the course of reforms of “perestroika” in the late 1980’s. The impetus for the awakening of civil position and national revival in Lithuania was the publication of secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which confirmed the fact of Soviet occupation of the Baltic States. The “Baltic Way” was an example of mass nonviolent resistance to the communist regime. Following this example, the population of Ukraine organized the “Living Chain”, which became a symbol of Ukraine’s unity and its desire for independence. Separation from the totalitarian communist ideology was the key to active state processes in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s. Lithuania was the first of the union republics to fight for secession from the USSR, setting an example for Ukraine in the struggle for statehood.*

Keywords: *Lithuania, Ukraine, Sąjūdis, the Movement, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the living chain, independence.*

ШЛЯХ ДО НЕЗАЛЕЖНОСТІ: ПОЛІТИЧНИЙ ДОСВІД ЛИТВИ І УКРАЇНИ КІНЦЯ 1980-х – ПОЧАТКУ 1990-х рр.

У статті, на основі порівняльного аналізу, розглянуто політичні процеси здобуття державної незалежності в Литві і Україні, що почалися в умовах курсу реформ «перебудови» в кінці 1980-х рр. Поштовхом до пробудження громадянської позиції і національного відродження в Литві стало оприлюднення таємних протоколів пакту Молотова-Ріббентропа, що підтверджували факт радянської окупації країн Балтії. Взірцем масового ненасильницького спротиву комуністичному режиму стала акція «Балтійський шлях». Наслідуючи цей приклад, населення України організувало «Живий ланцюг», що став символом соборності України і прагнення її до незалежності. Відмежування від тоталітарної комуністичної ідеології стало запорукою активних державницьких процесів кінця 1980-х – початку 1990-х рр. Литва першою із союзних республік пройшла шлях боротьби за вихід із СРСР, давши Україні приклад боротьби за державність.

Ключові слова: *Литва, Україна, Саюдіс, Рух, Пакт Молотова-Ріббентропа, живий ланцюг, незалежність.*

Introduction At the present stage of historical development, Ukraine is experiencing a difficult period of defending its sovereignty in the face of Russian military aggression. The Baltic states are the political partners that have shown full support for Ukraine since the beginning of the struggle for the restoration of its independence in the late 1980's and to this day. Despite the territorial remoteness, political and socio-cultural differences between Ukraine and Lithuania, in our history there are common points of contact and fruitful cooperation that create the historical foundation of the future partnership. The common Soviet past, the experience of overcoming the totalitarian practices of the Soviet regime increases the interest in studying the political history of the two countries, drawing historical parallels and comparative analysis of the struggle for state independence in the crisis and collapse of the Soviet Union. The urgency of these issues is exacerbated by the common borders of Lithuania and Ukraine with the Russian Federation, which has declared itself the successor to the USSR, whose "Putin" regime pursues a policy of rebuilding the union, including through armed aggression. Lithuania and Ukraine are united by common pages of Soviet history, common historical experience, past stages of joining and leaving

the Soviet Union, which led to the corresponding problems of the post-Soviet period, and therefore, the experience of overcoming them has not lost its relevance today.

Many contemporary works directly or indirectly relate to the political sphere of Lithuania and Ukraine, both modern and Soviet, including in the second half of the 1980's - early 1990's, analyzing the features of the movement for the restoration of independence, the creation of political organizations and movements, ideological concepts, program documents of informal organizations, etc. The historiography of the problem can be divided into three groups: the study of Lithuanian political history; historical studies of political, socio-economic, socio-cultural formation of Ukraine; comparative analysis of certain aspects of the historical and political development of Lithuania and Ukraine in the second half of the 1980's - early 1990's. In particular, in this regard, a significant contribution was made by Lithuanian scientist Dr. Justinas Dementavičius, who in his publications, through the integration of political science, philosophy and history, shows reflections on various forms of Lithuanian political thought [5]. He highlights some aspects of the Sajūdis movement in the publication "Lietuvos laisvės liga" [6]. Materials of the project "Apie projektą. Kgb veikla Lietuvoje" [7] provide an opportunity to describe the activities of the repressive body of the USSR KGB in Lithuania and see its gradual nationalization. Works by Olexandr Boiko [13], Volodymyr Lytvyn [23], Ruslana Potapenko [33], Oksana Tarapon [40] and others analyze the policy of the period of "perestroika" in Ukraine and the participation of the conscious part of society in socio-political movements. Additional material on the research topic can be found in referential books [24]. A comparison of the causes and driving strategies of decommunization in Ukraine and Lithuania is made in the publication of Lesia Kotsur. Radio Svoboda publications, which cover the cooperation of public organizations of Ukraine and Lithuania on the way to independence in 1988-1991, are quite important for our research [15]. However, the symbiosis of the political experience of Lithuania and Ukraine on the path to independence still requires subject research.

The aim of this article is a comparative analysis of the political experience of Lithuania and Ukraine in the struggle for state independence in the late 1980's - early

1990's, confrontation with the communist regime of the Soviet Union in the wake of totalitarian ideology, overcoming Moscow centrist policy in the pursuit of independence.

Research methods include methods of comparison, analysis, synthesis, generalization, specific-problem, which will create a single conceptual basis for research. The comparative method will determine the common and different historical features of Lithuania and Ukraine in the USSR, compare the political situation, the formation of civil society, which influenced the state-building processes of the late 1980's - early 1990's, show the impact of Lithuanian experience on political consciousness in Ukraine, holding political actions aimed at breaking with the official ideology of the USSR, etc. The method of analysis and synthesis will help to trace the individual components of socio-political processes in the republics in the course of "perestroika", and on the other hand - to show them as a holistic interdependent process of national development and state competition in the political space of that time. assumptions for conclusions. The generalization method will help to recreate a holistic picture of state processes in Lithuania and Ukraine since the late 1980's. The concrete-problem method is aimed at studying specific events and facts, their systematization, which will help to specify the subject of research.

The course of "perestroika" as a prerequisite for the political awakening of the republics. The policy of the Soviet Union was based on the planting of communist ideology at all levels of society, which was ensured by the work of an extensive propaganda apparatus, cultural, educational, and scientific institutions. The current leadership of the Russian Federation adheres to the strategy of information, hybrid warfare to spread and maintain its influence, especially in the post-Soviet space. On January 11, 2021, Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda wrote on his Twitter page that "those who falsify history continue to wash their bloody hands and avoid responsibility for the deaths of our freedom fighters". The statement referred to the attempts of the Russian government to rewrite history, and for many Lithuanians, these are vivid memories and events that took place on the "eve" of the Republic of Lithuania's withdrawal from the Soviet Union. The Achilles' heel is the Molotov-

Ribbentrop Pact, the Soviet-German non-aggression pact of 1939, a secret protocol that divided Central and Eastern Europe into spheres of influence and became a bifurcation point for the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states [3]. In addition, in the American magazine for 2020 “The National Interest” published a statement by Putin that the occupation of the Baltic states took place “by agreement”. In other words, there has been a recent trend of high-ranking Russian officials zealously defending the pact condemned by the Soviet leadership in 1989.

The Lithuanian government has repeatedly emphasized Russia attempts to discredit the Lithuanian struggle for independence after World War II and to show the Soviet Union occupation of Lithuania as a legitimate accession to the USSR. At the same time, distorting information about Lithuania’s membership in NATO and the EU. The events of January 1991, which Russia actively interprets “in its own way”, are called by the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on information monitoring and media “a large-scale Kremlin campaign of disinformation and revision of history not only against Lithuania but also against Western democracies”. Thus, the EU diplomacy singled out the Russian media “Sputnik”, which, with the funding of the Russian authorities, disseminated “misinformation” about the events of 30 years ago in Lithuania [15].

In fact, the events on the eve of the Second World War, in particular, the agreement between Hitler’s Germany and the Stalinist USSR on the delimitation of spheres of influence in Europe can be attributed to the common problems of Ukrainian-Lithuanian history. The signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the “Treaty of Friendship and Borders between the USSR and Germany” in August-September 1939, as well as a number of secret protocols led to the occupation of the Baltic states by Soviet troops and the incorporation of Western Ukraine into the USSR, which Soviet propaganda presented as a “liberation campaign of the Red Army” [24].

It is no coincidence that the conspiracy of the Nazi and Communist regimes and their complicity in the outbreak of World War II have been carefully concealed by the Soviet leadership for decades. For the first time, secret annexes to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 23, 1939 and the Non-Aggression Pact between

Germany and the USSR of September 28, 1939 were published in the USSR only in 1989 [24]. The truth about these events had an extraordinary impact on the process of awakening the peoples enslaved by the USSR and the beginning of the active phase of the struggle for liberation. The cynicism of the secret protocols was not only the Stalinist leadership's involvement in the outbreak of World War II, it was, in fact, about territorial bargaining for "delimitation of areas of mutual interest in Eastern Europe" between the two totalitarian regimes, whereas, according to a secret protocol of 23 August 1939, the territory of the Lithuanian state was transferred to the sphere of influence of Germany [37], and as a result of secret agreements on August 28, 1939 - was included in the sphere of interests of the USSR, which provided for appropriate measures of the Soviet leadership "to protect their interests" and the next territorial delimitation of borders [36].

We consider it appropriate to emphasize that if for the Lithuanian state its inclusion in the sphere of interests of the USSR carried exclusively negative connotations of occupation character, the accession of the territories of Western Ukraine to the Ukrainian SSR (albeit within the USSR) was fateful and became the starting point to unite lands within common political borders. This fact was then speculatively used by Soviet propaganda as a positive influence of Soviet policy on the development of Ukraine. However, the price for unity turned out to be too high for the Ukrainian population of the annexed territories - deportations, repressions, destruction of national, political, civil, religious and cultural bases of life, etc. Thus, from 1939 to 1940, 50,000 political prisoners were tortured in prisons in the territory of Galicia "liberated" by Soviet troops alone, and more than a million residents were deported [24].

Ukraine, which until 1939 was territorially delimited by the borders of different states, has its own regional features in the struggle for state sovereignty. As the territories of Western Ukraine were included in the USSR only on the eve of World War II, the population of this part underwent less genocidal practices of the Bolshevik regime, was more politically mature, had a higher level of civil society, maintained more active state aspirations and pro-European orientations. In our opinion, this brings the political realities in Western Ukraine closer to the end of the

1980's to the political processes in Lithuania, which was the first to leave the USSR. On the other hand, the western Ukrainian region has become a kind of locomotive of socio-political transformations for other regions of Ukraine, historically weakened by the influence of Russian politics and long-term permanent repressive practices. It was in the western Ukrainian territories that autonomous and independent state processes began in the late 1980's, coordinated with Kyiv and then transferred to other regions of the Ukrainian SSR.

The course of reforms initiated by the new General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, Mikhail Gorbachev, in April 1985 gave a powerful impetus to the shaking of the totalitarian ideology of the Soviet system. They envisioned a course to renew the socio-political sphere, accelerate socio-economic development, were to help overcome the crisis [43] and went down in history as "perestroika". The Commander of the Latvian Order of the Three Stars, a member of the Verkhovna Rada of the Republic of Latvia at the time, Oleksii Hryhoriev, stressed that progressive changes in the republics would not have been possible without changes in Moscow. He conveys his first impressions of Gorbachev's speech at the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee as follows: "I was struck by the new language, which was radically different from the Suslov-Brezhnev office of party documents, to which we, the children of the stagnation era, are so accustomed. New wind blew, life blew from the most unexpected side" [9]. The new leader of the USSR, emphasizing in his political report to the XXVII Congress of the Communist Party in February 1986 the need for important changes, new psychology, stimulating grassroots grassroots initiative, development of democracy, publicity, but outlined the invariability of the state's course, political tasks and strategies of rapprochement of national cultures, separation from national isolation, etc [18]. At that time, the country's top leadership was not yet aware of the irreversibility of the changes. The inconsistency of reforms, the inability of the central leadership to effectively address the socio-economic problems of society accelerated the growth of the national crisis. After the January 1987 Plenum of the CPSU Central Committee, the task of democratizing public life was brought to the fore, which intensified the process of self-organization of civil

society in the union republics, the creation of informal organizations, growing opposition to the current regime, awakening national consciousness, etc. Eventually, the CPSU increasingly began to “not fit” into the course of “perestroika”, lagging behind the course of events initiated by public and political organizations, the center of the driving forces of “perestroika” is shifted “from top to bottom” and the central government [13, p. 12-13].

The processes launched “from above” have become irreversible. The late 1980’s marked the beginning of state aspirations in the union republics. The Baltic republics were the first to start this competition, with Lithuania taking the lead. In 1988, the “exploded bomb effect” was made public by a statement from the official rostrum of the Latvian Writers’ Union, historian and publicist Maurice Wolfson, about the Soviet occupation of Latvia in 1940 by Soviet troops [9]. Thousands of unauthorized rallies took place in Lviv this year. All these events spurred the processes of self-determination in the republics of the USSR. By mid-1989, the consolidation of democratic political forces took place, forming popular fronts - the first independent organizations of a mass character. Thus, the “Estonian People’s Front” numbered 60,000, the “Latvian People’s Front” numbered 115,000, Saidis in Lithuania 180,000, and the People’s Movement of Ukraine represented about 280,000 active members [13].

The “Baltic Way” and the process of dissociation from the ideology of totalitarianism. Thus, the existence of secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact became known to most Baltics against the background of the policy of “perestroika” and the course of publicity. It is no coincidence that the Soviet Union vehemently denied the existence of such a document, arguing that Lithuania’s voluntary accession to the USSR [2]. After all, according to Member of the European Parliament Sandra Kalniete, then this message had the effect of “explosion”, as it explained the reason for the occupation of the Baltic countries. A protest movement against the illegal accession of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to the Soviet Union has begun. On August 23, 1989, the people of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia joined hands to form a living chain 600 km away, connecting the three capitals and marking the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. This action, which

was attended by about 2-2.5 million people, was called the “Baltic Way” and became a symbol of unity and the struggle of the Baltic States for independence. She showed that despite almost 50 years of occupation, the Baltic states have not lost their national identity, ideas and desire to regain independence [29]. Later, UNESCO recognized this powerful and effective action as a phenomenon of non-violent resistance and included it in the international register of the “Memory of the World” program [9]. This event was the focus of the world’s attention, it became an example of inspiration and imitation for the enslaved peoples of the USSR. The greatest achievement of the action was the recognition of the invalidity of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact by the leadership of the USSR. Six months after this event, Lithuania withdrew from the USSR, launching a parade of sovereignty in the Soviet Union. The shock core of the “Baltic Way” participants were Lithuanians. Professor of Vilnius University, linguist, member of the living chain Oleh Poliakov recalls the great national upsurge, a sense of significance of the historical moment. In his opinion, it was the “Baltic Way” that became “the beginning of gaining the desired freedom, restoring the lost independence”, a manifestation of the desire of the Lithuanian people to leave the USSR. Representatives of other republics, including Ukraine, also took part in the action. O. Hryhoriev mentioned that on the eve of August 23, 1989, Ukrainian organizations came to him with a request to help Ukrainian representatives (about 12 people from Lviv) join the action in order to hold something similar in Ukraine. With this assistance, Ukrainians also became part of the “Baltic Way” [9].

The experience of the Baltic Way in Ukraine was used on January 21, 1990 to commemorate the Act of Unification of the Ukrainian People’s Republic and the Western Ukrainian People’s Republic on January 22, 1919. On that day the People’s Movement of Ukraine organized a human chain lined up Rivne - Lviv - Ivano-Frankivsk and stretched for about 700 km, including up to 5 million people [21, 38]. As in Lithuania, this action was one of the effective steps towards the restoration of statehood, testified to the special atmosphere of the rise of its participants, in Ukraine it also symbolized the unity and unity of the territories. Demonstration of unity was held as part of the action “Ukrainian Wave”, a total of 30 rallies were held,

accompanied by a wave of national upheaval. In Lviv alone, participants of the holiday rally raised about 5,000 yellow and blue flags [21].

It is noteworthy that the German-Soviet agreements of 1939, following the peoples of the Baltics, were demonstratively condemned by the population of the western Ukrainian regions. On September 17, 1989, on the central streets of Lviv, similar to the Baltic action, a “living chain” was organized for the anniversary of the entry of Soviet troops into the territory of Western Ukraine[21]. Later, in February 1991, the “Galician Assembly” (joint session of Lviv, Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk regions) adopted a resolution condemning the illegal actions of Stalin and Hitler in 1939, which led to the outbreak of World War II and the occupation of Western Of Ukraine. The decision recognized the act of unification of the Ukrainian People’s Republic and the Western Ukrainian People’s Republic on January 22, 1919 as the basis for the unification of Ukrainian lands. A request was sent to the Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian SSR regarding the legal and political assessment of the unification of Ukrainian lands [40]. The emphasis of the population of the Baltics and Western Ukraine on the tragic events of World War II, condemnation of Soviet policy and the fact of Soviet occupation is extremely important, it was politically oriented to distance itself from the dominant ideology of the communist regime. It was the liberation from the ideologues of Soviet propaganda and the communist scale of values that became the key to successful state competitions in Lithuania. Ukraine’s experience shows that regions where these ideologues were less entrenched were the first to advocate the restoration of national processes and the idea of statehood.

In Lithuania, the processes of decommunization and liberation from communist ideological control began in the late 1980’s, where the memory of real historical events was passed on to living witnesses. For example, Arunas Bubnis, head of the Center for the Study of Genocide and Resistance in Lithuania, said that Victory Day on May 9 was last celebrated by Lithuanians in 1987, that the locals did not like this holiday, associating it with a large number of victims and the Soviet occupation (“The USSR liberated us from the Nazis, but the Soviet army forgot to leave Lithuania”). Even then, the European tradition of commemorating the victims

of the war on May 8 began to spread [19]. In our opinion, this is a significant aspect of the readiness of Lithuanians in the late 1980's to resist the powerful Soviet ideological propaganda, which aimed not only to impose communist doctrine, but also to cement the peoples of the USSR with common values based on historical myths. Among the widespread propaganda ideologues, the concept of the "Great Victory" in World War II was one of the powerful means of shaping a collective policy of memory, common sacrifice, and the invincible power of the Soviet people. In addition, we agree with the statement of historian Dmitry Berger that Victory Day on May 9 was to "cut one episode of World War II from the general outline of history and put it apart", avoiding the unpleasant truth about the Soviet Union complicity in solving the world tragedy [10]. In Ukraine, the "war for memory" over the events of World War II lasted for many decades and was officially completed only in 2015, when the Decree of the President of Ukraine shifted the focus from 9 to 8 May, which was designated as Remembrance and Reconciliation Day. However, such a long process contributed to the fact that the engaged concept of the "Great Victory" was actively used by the Kremlin propaganda to promote the ideas of "Russian peace", it served as a tool to restore Russia's geopolitical influence in the post-Soviet space, slowing down the process of mental "exit" of many Ukrainians from the USSR, and thus restraining the development of their state consciousness [34].

Movement for the restoration of independence. Lithuania was the first of the Baltic republics to launch the process of secession from the USSR. When the independence movement began in the Soviet Union in the second half of the 1980's, Lithuania became a leader and a guide for other countries. The first thing Lithuanians did in 1988 was to officially return their true national flag. It was an ideological moment that showed the consolidation and desire to revive the independence of Lithuanian society. Lithuanian flags began to appear en masse at the first anti-Soviet rallies in Kyiv, as they became a legal substitute for banned Ukrainian symbols. The police then severely punished the raising of the yellow and blue flag [31]. Lithuania was not only an example to follow. She made an invaluable contribution to debunking Soviet myths and "brainwashing" communist propaganda.

National movements intensified, and informal non-governmental organizations and the media emerged that were not controlled by the Communist Party. The question of sovereignty and even independence became relevant, and the political movement intensified [28]. Back in June 1988, scientists, cultural figures, journalists and concerned activists, led by Vytautas Landsbergis [20] “Lithuanian Perestroika Movement” was founded (Lietuvos Persitvarkymo Sąjūdis). It was an informal political organization that set itself the task of restoring Lithuania’s independence. This idea was actively supported and promoted by the head of the organization Vytautas Landsbergis, while other members were less radical and initially satisfied with broad autonomy in politics, economics and culture. The strategy of struggle was a peaceful way with the use of legal tools. An effective method of struggle was the interpretation of the reforms of “perestroika” and publicity. Because, at the initial stage, “perestroika” was a screen and protected from local communist fanatics, obsessed with party and communist ideology, and gave the opportunity to make their political connections, to place new democratic accents and to formulate opinion. Hence the name “Movement for Reforms”, later simply “Movement”. Thus, on June 24, 1988, the first mass meeting was held, organized by Sąjūdis , at which the CPSU was informed about the goals of the newly created organization. The next large-scale meeting took place on August 23 and numbered about 25,000 people. The demands of “Sąjūdis ” were in line with publicity and “white spots” in history, because society demanded the truth about the Stalinist years, repression, revealing secret Nazi-Soviet protocols, abuse of bureaucracy, discrimination against the Lithuanian language, and so on. The demands also included the protection of the environment and the cessation of the construction of the third nuclear reactor at the Ignalina nuclear power plant. And, most importantly, the idea of restoring Lithuanian statehood [7].

It is worth emphasizing the significant contribution of Lithuanians to the formation of a free press in Lithuania and Ukraine. Between 1989 and 1990, almost half of the Ukrainian samizdat press was published in Lithuania, often at “Sąjūdis ”. After all, the media in Ukraine were under the close supervision of the KGB in special rooms behind the iron doors [31]. As for the “Lithuanian Perestroika

Movement”, it was supported by part of the Lithuanian press, including the secret newspaper “Sajūdis News”, “Renaissance” and others. In total, about 150 different newspapers were published in support of Sajūdis [8]. In this regard, the communist authorities used enormous resources to prevent the publishing process itself and the distribution of publications.

At the same time, the leaders of the Lithuanian Communist Party were hesitant about the effectiveness of Horbachiov’s policy of “perestroika” and the course of publicity, which were designed to preserve and reincarnate the Soviet system in the context of growing democratization and depoliticization of society [33]. These fears were not unfounded, as the number of Baltic independence fighters who were actively involved in public demonstrations in Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn was constantly growing. These tendencies were actively spread in various regions of the USSR, especially in Western Ukraine.

The transformation processes and ideas of national revival announced by “Sajūdis” also had a reaction from the KGB. As “Sajūdis” authority grew, the KGB actively monitored information and, with the help of an extensive network of agents, slandered members of the organization in the media, discredited the activities of leaders and active members. Every effort was made to split old and newly created organizations. Counter-propaganda was carried out. But the positive thing was that the changes that took place in the last years of the Soviet regime did not allow the KGB to use repression, dismissals, arrests and other intimidating methods that had been actively used in previous years. The KGB was forced to move its activities to the public sphere and fight for public opinion. Because of this, the KGB counter-propaganda in the media tried to present its version of historical events concerning guerrilla movements and post-war repressions. The origins of the “Sajūdis” movement were presented as “anti-regime” in appearance. That is, the information was presented as foreign interference in the affairs of the Soviet Union - the West. The image of “enemy” – “friend” was formed. Moreover, there have been attempts to damage relations with diaspora organizations and discredit the very idea of independence. According to the instructions of the KGB chief, “special operations”

were carried out in Lithuania. An action plan codenamed “Blizzard” was even developed, which provided for measures against unauthorized rallies. At the same time, all these measures were ineffective, as evidenced by the decrease in the number of recruits to the KGB: in 1988 - 594 people, in 1989 - 358 people, in 1990 - only 117 people. This gives grounds to conclude that the KGB adopted the ideas of national revival and restoration of Lithuanian independence [7]. A similar scenario of the development of the political movement and opposition to it by the communist regime was observed in the western regions.

In May 1989, Lithuania’s sovereignty was proclaimed, and Lithuania’s entry into the USSR was declared illegal. In December 1989, the Communist Party of Lithuania seceded from the Communist Party of the USSR and renounced its monopoly on state power. On December 30, 1989, the “Pravda” newspaper published a statement by 38 KGB officers who supported the withdrawal of the Lithuanian Communist Party from the CPSU. In February 1990, 101 representatives of “Sąjūdis ” joined the Verkhovna Rada of the Lithuanian SSR, out of 141. Vytautas Landsbergis was elected Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada. At the first session of the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR on March 11, 1990, the “Act on the Restoration of the Independent Lithuanian State” was adopted, which repealed the Constitution of the USSR in Lithuania. That is, the inclusion of the republic in the USSR as a result of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was considered illegal [25].

The Kremlin’s policy has largely determined a similar scenario in the union republics that began the real path to independence. Moscow tried to resist the independence processes in the union republics. The decision of the Lithuanians to restore statehood was declared invalid, saying that it is possible only after the adoption of the law on the order of withdrawal of the republics from the USSR, which was adopted on April 3. On March 23, 1990, Soviet army units entered Vilnius. On April 13, the Soviet leadership sent an ultimatum to Lithuania, proposing to recognize the validity of the USSR Constitution by April 15 and to renounce its claims to independence. Not receiving a positive answer, a resolution was issued in Moscow on April 17 to impose an economic blockade of Lithuania. Lithuania, in

turn, presented Gorbachev with a bill for the damage to the Lithuanian Republic caused by the Soviet government. However, the energy blockade forced the Lithuanian Verkhovna Rada to announce a moratorium on the “Independence Act” on June 29, temporarily stabilizing relations with the center. However, on December 28, 1990, Lithuania lifted the moratorium on the Act unnoticed by Moscow [25].

The difficult economic situation, rising prices, and the destructive actions of pro-Moscow forces in Lithuania have led to protest rallies and social tensions between conservative and patriotic democratic forces. After weapons were used by Soviet airborne troops and KGB special forces on January 13, 1991, 14 people were killed and 150 wounded. The events in Lithuania shook the country, provoked rallies and demonstrations in various cities of the USSR, which made the process of its disintegration inevitable. On February 9, 1991, in a referendum, 91% of the Lithuanian population confirmed the decision to restore Lithuania’s independence, and two days later the Verkhovna Rada passed a law on the “Lithuanian State”. These events had an extraordinary impact on the development of civic consciousness in Ukraine, dozens of Ukrainians took part in the January events in Vilnius, fighting for the independence of Lithuania and Ukraine. On January 11, 2020, 11 of them received a medal from the President of Lithuania for their participation in the defense of the independent Republic of Lithuania [39].

The events in Lithuania were closely monitored in the Ukrainian SSR at all levels. After all, the Lithuanian model was a model for democratic forces on how to withdraw Ukraine from the USSR, and for the communist ruling elite on how to prevent this. It was a country where a large number of different informal organizations gathered, human rights activists held their meetings, and the Lithuanian parliament became a symbol of democracy [30].

The prototype of the “Lithuanian Movement for Perestroika” in the Ukrainian SSR was the “People’s Movement of Ukraine for Perestroika”, which was founded in 1989. In the summer of 1988 there was a need to create an organization like the Baltic fronts. This idea was advocated by informal associations of Kyiv, Lviv and Vinnytsia. As in Lithuania, the organization included a huge number of intellectuals.

From the name it is clear that the organization at the initial stage also supported the policy of “perestroika”. But, unlike the program of the Baltic People’s Fronts, the Ukrainian version was more moderate. In particular, the program contained a formal provision recognizing the “ruling role” of the Communist Party and there was no requirement for a new union treaty, which meant supporting the idea of a confederation rather than a federation. At the same time, the proclamation of the principles of pluralism at the initial stage allowed the Movement to act as a broad democratic front, which included representatives of different ideologies and views. The head of the organization was a poet, public figure Ivan Drach. “Movement” was engaged in the policy of historical memory, consolidation of the Ukrainian nation, strengthening the position of the Ukrainian language, etc. It was the People’s Movement that organized the “living chain” in January 1990, on the anniversary of the Act of Unification of the Ukrainian People’s Republic and the Western Ukrainian People’s Republic, modeled on the Baltic Way.

In the parliamentary elections to the Ukrainian SSR in March 1990, the Democratic Bloc of Ukraine won a quarter of the vote and formed a parliamentary opposition, the People’s Council. At the same time, in 3 western oblasts - Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil - “Movement” won a “lightning” victory and came to power. It was under the pressure of the Movement that on July 16, 1990, the Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian SSR adopted the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine. Under such conditions, in the fall of 1990, the Rukh’s program was changed. In particular, it was no longer about “perestroika” but about the complete dismantling of the totalitarian system. On August 24, 1991, the Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian SSR adopted the Act of Proclamation of Independence of Ukraine [17]. Since then, Lithuania and Ukraine have had their own path of development.

We can say that it was the victims in Vilnius who protected Ukraine from the bloody scenario, they showed Moscow’s readiness for forceful scenarios to solve inter-republican problems, because the union center feared the “Lithuanian reaction” to Lithuanian events in Ukraine. In addition to the regional specificity of Ukrainian territories, the issue of Crimea was problematic. According to the memoirs of the first

President of Ukraine L. Kravchuk, then Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of the USSR, despite understanding the need to increase independence for Ukraine and the willingness of the people to support it, “I felt that any emergency could provoke the center to resolve the Ukrainian issue... Ukraine, in comparison with Lithuania, was in a much more difficult situatio” [39].

Conclusion Thus, Ukraine and Lithuania have historically been united by the experience of being part of the USSR, the political struggle to secede from it and overcoming the post-totalitarian influences of the communist regime in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s. system, giving it certain democratic features, became the starting point of its collapse. Lithuania’s political experience in the struggle for state independence in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s was a successful example of dissociation from the ideology of totalitarianism, which began with the condemnation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the occupation of Lithuania by the Soviet Union. This became the basis for the shaking of the communist regime in Lithuania and a prerequisite for rapid state processes. The experience of the political struggle of the Lithuanian state became an example to follow for Ukraine, where due to the historical territorial division of state-building processes had their own regional features. and Western Ukraine became the locomotive of national-state processes. Ukraine must continue to use the experience of Lithuania in the process of further decommunization, liberation from Russian imperial myths and focus on cooperation with the EU.

The synthesis of common experience of the struggle for independence and common history reveals points of contact between Lithuanians and Ukrainians. And Lithuania’s support during the Revolution of Dignity 2013-2014 shows that Lithuania is not just a reliable ally, but a country with a firm and consistent position on the situation in Ukraine. Becoming a member of the European Union and NATO in 2004, Lithuania broke free from the “vices” of the post-Soviet space and created all the necessary prerequisites for its civilizational progress [32]. As for Ukraine, in 2014 the “Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU” was signed [41, 42].

Under such political circumstances, Ukraine recognizes that Lithuania is an active supporter of the movement of Ukrainians to the EU, with which there are no

civilizational opposites. Moreover, the development of relations with the Republic of Lithuania occupies a prominent place among Ukraine's foreign policy strategies. This is evidenced by the bilateral cooperation between the presidents of the two countries, who signed a number of treaties and agreements [22]. One of the priorities of Ukraine's foreign policy is full-scale friendly relations with countries geographically close to us, ie Lithuania [27].

Lithuania, in turn: supports Ukraine in the international arena (EU, NATO, OSCE, UN); contributed to obtaining a visa-free regime with the EU, the final ratification of the UA with the EU; expanded cooperation in the field of defense and security; strengthening economic, energy and infrastructure cooperation; supported the entry of Ukrainian business into the markets of Lithuania and the EU, obtaining business loans from international and Lithuanian banks. For its part, Ukraine is sincere in its aspirations for Lithuania: it is restoring the historical heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in Ukraine; improves the business climate; increases economic cooperation; increases cooperation between non-governmental organizations and the development of student exchange; enters new cooperation projects in the fields of energy, ecology, IT sector; strengthens multilateral regional cooperation, and most importantly, reforms Ukraine and implements the laws adopted in the framework of the implementation of the UA of Ukraine with the EU [11].

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