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## THE SCHOOL COURSE OF RUSSIAN HISTORY IN THE CONTEXT OF RUSSKIY MIR (THE RUSSIAN WORLD) IDEOLOGY IN MODERN RUSSIA

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The concept of *Russkiy mir* has no definitive interpretation: the most common view is that it is a special civilisation whose fundamental principles are based on the Russian language and culture, Orthodoxy, common history and historical memory. *Russkiy mir* has become the ideological basis of an authoritarian political regime and an important factor in Putin's geopolitics. History and historical memory has become one of the most powerful tools for establishing *Russkiy mir*. *The purpose of the research* is to outline the impact of *Russkiy mir* ideology on the content of the historical narrative and the school course of history in modern Russia. *The methodological basis* of the article is the principles of historicism, determinism and systematicity, which, when applied to historical and typological and comparative historical methods, allow us to analyse the content of *Russkiy mir* ideology and its impact on the content of history textbooks for schools in modern Russia.

*Results.* The year 2013 should be considered as a turning point in terms of accelerating the ideological unification of history teaching in Russian schools. The basic constructs of *Russkiy mir* have been implemented in Russian curriculum and history textbooks during the full-scale war against Ukraine. The Russian historical narrative presents Ukraine as an «artificially created pseudo-state», a «temporarily detached part of Russian territory», whose people are part of the Russian people, dreaming of reunification, suffering under the rule of «Nazis and Bandersites». *Conclusion.* The Russian historical narrative contributes to the formation of a distorted image of Ukraine and Ukrainians among students; it justifies Russia's territorial claims to the state of Ukraine. During the full-scale war, Russia's centuries-old imperial expansionism and the true nature of its attitude towards Ukraine in the optics of *Russkiy mir* became apparent: Ukrainophobia, ethnocide, abuse and contempt for Ukrainians.

**Keywords:** *Russkiy mir*, state ideology, geopolitics, the Russian-Ukrainian war, historical memory, history teaching in schools.



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## ШКІЛЬНИЙ КУРС ІСТОРІЇ В СУЧАСНІЙ РОСІЇ В КОНТЕКСТІ ІДЕОЛОГІЇ «РУССКОГО МИРА»

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Поняття «*русский мир*» не має однозначного тлумачення: найпоширенішим є погляд на нього як на особливу цивілізацію, фундаментальні принципи якої базуються на російській мові та культурі, православ'ї, спільній історії та історичній пам'яті. «*Русский мир*» став ідеологічною основою авторитарного політичного режиму і важливим чинником геополітики путіна. Історія та історична пам'ять перетворилися в один із найпотужніших інструментів утвердження «*русского мира*». *Мета статті* — окреслити вплив ідеології «*русского мира*» на зміст історичного наративу та шкільного курсу історії в сучасній росії.

*Методологічною основою* статті є принципи історизму, детермінізму та системності, які у поєднанні з історико-типологічним та порівняльно-історичним методами дозволяють проаналізувати зміст ідеології «*русского мира*» та її вплив на зміст шкільних підручників з історії в сучасній росії.

*Результати.* Переломним у сенсі прискорення ідейної уніфікації шкільної історії в росії варто вважати 2013 рік. Під час повномасштабної війни проти України у російські навчальні програми та підручники з історії імплементовано базові конструкти «*русского мира*». У російському історичному наративі Україну представлено як «штучно створену псевдодержаву», «тимчасово відірвану частину російської території», населення якої — частина російського народу, що мріє про возз'єднання, потерпаючи від влади «нацистів і бандерівців».

*Висновки.* Російський історичний наратив сприяє формуванню в учнів викривленого уявлення про Україну і українців; обґрунтовує територіальні претензії росії до держави Україна. У ході повномасштабної війни рельєфно проявився виплеканий століттями імперський експансіонізм росії та справжня сутність ставлення до України в оптиці «*русского мира*»: українофобія, етноцид, наруга, зненавист до українства.

**Ключові слова:** «*русский мир*», державна ідеологія, геополітика, російсько-українська війна, історична пам'ять, шкільна історична освіта.

**Introduction.** The collapse of the Soviet Union, the search for a new Russian national and state identity, and the emergence of a large Russian-speaking diaspora were factors that contributed to the formation of the concept of *Russkiy mir* (the Russian world) at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. During the first decade of the 21st century, the Russian authorities, the Russian Orthodox Church, and part of the intellectual elite established the idea of *Russkiy mir* as a special civilisation based on the Russian language and culture, Orthodoxy, common history, and historical memory. *Russkiy mir* has become the ideological basis of an authoritarian political regime and an important factor in Putin's geopolitics.

History and historical memory have become one of the most powerful tools for establishing *Russkiy mir* both inside and outside the country. History education at school largely shapes national identity, which is based on the collective memory of a common past: common ancestors, common victories/defeats, common heroes/ traitors, etc. For almost a quarter of a century of Putin's *de facto* rule, writing textbooks and teaching history in schools in Russia has become an instrument of revanchist historical policy, an element of the war of memories and information warfare with Ukraine.

One of the most fundamental studies of the ideology and practice of *Russkiy mir* belongs to the Ukrainian-American historian Serhiy Plokhii, who analysed the evolution of this phenomenon in the context of emergence and development of Russian statehood [1]. Marlene Laruelle considers *Russkiy mir* as a phenomenon of soft power and the geopolitical course of modern Russia [2]. The Ukrainian historian Larysa Yakubova has been comprehensively studying the ideology and practice of *Russkiy mir*. In one of her latest works (*Rashism: The Beast from the Abyss*), the historian linked Putin's neo-totalitarian regime, rashism, to the doctrine of *Russkiy mir* [3—6].

The subject of research by a number of Ukrainian scientists is history education in schools as a component of memory policy and an element of *Russkiy mir* ideology. A number of works highlight aspects of the Ukrainian-Russian «struggle for history» [7, p. 52—64]. In particular, the researcher Svitlana Baturina analysed the content of more than one and a half hundred titles of Russian history textbooks for the period from 1993—2016. She concluded, that Ukrainian history in textbooks rarely appears as an independent category, its subjects are usually included in the all-Russian context [8—9]. A

well-known historian, author of school textbooks on the history of Ukraine, Fedir Turchenko, analysing the attempt to implement a project of a joint Russian-Ukrainian history textbook, gave arguments that allowed him to define this project as a product of Russian historical policy [10]. Changes in approaches to the presentation of Ukrainian history in the Russian historical narrative and textbooks after the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of Russian aggression in Eastern Ukraine were analysed by Vitaliy Yaremchuk and a number of other researchers [11—14].

*The purpose of the research* is to outline the impact of *Russkiy mir* on the content of the historical narrative and the school course of history in modern Russia.

The *methodological basis* of the article is the principles of historicism, determinism and systematicity, which, when applied to historical and typological and comparative historical methods, allow us to analyse the content of the *Russkiy mir* ideology and its impact on the conceptual and eventual content of school history textbooks in modern Russia.

**The main part.** *Towards a single textbook.* *Russkiy mir* as a new state ideology with an emphasis on history and historical memory also required the ideological unification of the content of historical education, including the conceptual and eventual content of school textbooks. Trends indicating the government's intention to bring historical education under state control were already evident in the late 1990s. However, the greatest resonance was caused by the decision of the Ministry of Education and Science of December 2003 to withdraw the seal of the Ministry from a textbook on the history of Russia in the 20th century, written by Igor Dolutsky, which was popular among teachers and pupils [15]. This happened after the Minister of Education of the Russian Federation criticised certain tasks of the textbook at the ministry's meeting, which contained statements by publicists and politicians about strengthening Putin's personal power regime and creating a «police state» [16]. On the eve of the decision of the Ministry of Education and Science, President Vladimir Putin also expressed his opinion on history textbooks. Thus, at a meeting with historians at the Russian State Library on 27 November 2003, he stated that the authors of textbooks often ignore the topic of patriotism, instead of fostering in pupils a sense of pride of their country [17].

However, the year 2007 was a turning point in the government's attempts to control history in schools,

when the ideas of *Russskiy mir* became the core of state policy. Shortly before the end of his second presidential term, V. Putin took part in a conference which gathered history and social studies teachers (Moscow, June 2007). In his speech at the conference, he, on the one hand, emphasised the responsibility of authors and publishers for the content of educational literature, and, on the other, argued that textbooks had not meet the state's interests in the field of historical education. According to him, many of them were «written by people working for foreign grants», fulfilling «the orders of those who paid» [18]. At this conference, a textbook on the modern history of Russia, which was aimed at teachers and written by historian Alexander Filippov, well-known by the presidential administration, was presented [19]. According to his definition, the methodological basis of the textbook is based on the thesis of rejecting the concept of totalitarianism as an unscientific tool of the Cold War and reflecting the Soviet period from the perspective of the theory of modernisation. The author admired the grandiose achievements of the USSR under Stalin, arguing, for example, that the Soviet Union's sphere of influence then territorially surpassed all the Euro-Asian states of the past, even Genghis Khan's empire [19, p. 63]. It is not surprising that some Russian historians critically assessed the content of the modern history of Russia as presented by Filippov, emphasising that in reality the core of the concept was the task of normalisation of Stalinism as an authoritarian model of accelerated modernisation of the USSR in a «besieged fortress» and justifying the leading role of an authoritarian leader in solving similar problems at the present stage [20].

Despite the controversy surrounding Filippov's textbook, he and his leading co-author in the following years, Alexander Danilov (head of the History Department of the Moscow State Pedagogical University), prepared a textbook and methodological recommendations on Russian history for the 11<sup>th</sup> grade [21—23]. The authorities' intention was to make these textbooks the «main» and «the only» ones. As a result, they decided to reprint them on a large scale in comparison to the others [7, p. 29—52; 10, 24]. Since in 2007 Russian «experts», have analysed the content and relevance of teaching methods of 437 textbooks on Russian history. They concluded that only 20% of them, to some extent, corresponded to state principles [25].

The issue of history textbooks has become one of the main duties of the «Commission for Countering Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests», established in 2009 by order of the new president, Dmitry Medvedev [26]. The 28-member Commission was headed by the chief of staff of the presidential administration, Sergei Naryshkin. Its members were influential officials and politicians. This body included only three professional historians: Andrei Sakharov, director of the Institute of Russian History at the Russian Academy of Sciences; Alexander Chubaryan, director of the Institute of General History; and Natalia Narochitskaya, president of the Foundation for the Study of Historical Perspectives. Already at the first meeting of the Commission, which was held on 28 August 2009, it was emphasised that history textbooks play a key role in attempts to counteract the «introduction of falsified versions of history» [10, p. 416]. A manifestation of the Commission's activities can be seen in the emergence of «textbook» history studies in the former Soviet republics. It is noteworthy that Russia has shown interest in school textbooks of the new states before [27]. The most extensive of a number of publications that appeared in 2009—2012 was a report entitled «Coverage of the General History of Russia and Post-Soviet Countries in School History Textbooks of the Newly Independent States» [28—32]. In the publication, edited by A. Danilov and A. Filippov, 13 experts analysed 187 history textbooks from 12 post-Soviet countries (Azerbaijan — 10, Armenia — 11, Belarus — 10, Georgia — 16, Kazakhstan — 12, Kyrgyzstan — 6, Latvia — 6, Lithuania — 51, Moldova — 14, Uzbekistan — 11, Ukraine — 21, Estonia — 19) published in 1994—2008 [28, p. 273—284]. As a result, the authors of the report concluded that, with the exception of Belarus and partly Armenia, «all other countries have chosen to teach the younger generation a nationalist interpretation of history based on myths about the antiquity of their people, the high cultural mission of their ancestors and the «sworn enemy» — Russia and Russians» [28, p. 8—9, 16]. Experts also argued that the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation as the successor to the USSR, are presented in such literature as the main and almost the only culprit for all the troubles and misfortunes of these peoples. On the other hand, the authors emphasised, «all the good things that the peoples of the former USSR received

from living side by side with the great Russian people are silenced» [28, p. 5, 6, 262].

The authors of the Report were particularly interested in Ukrainian textbooks. This is not surprising, since the Russian historical narrative on Ukraine and Ukrainians was dominated by the imperial and Soviet historiographical traditions. According to them, all the most important pages of Ukrainian history are presented mainly as episodes of all-Russian history. It should be stressed that, as in this and other publications dealing with Ukrainian textbooks, Russian authors cover the following subjects in the most detail: *Kievan Rus'*, the Liberation War led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky, the period of *Ruin*, the revolutionary events of 1917—1920, and World War II. What these publications also have in common is that Russian authors are engaged in polemics with the authors of Ukrainian textbooks, often accusing them of lack of professionalism without evidence, and using an ironic, arrogant style of expression. Ukrainian researcher S. Baturina, who analysed more than a hundred textbooks and manuals on Russian history, written for schools and higher education institutions of the Russian Federation in 1993—2007, notes that plots related to Ukraine are found in almost 80% of them, but their «Ukrainianness» is not evident [8, p. 316].

It is worth recalling that Russia greeted the victory of pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovich in the Ukrainian presidential election with great approval. Thus, already in March 2010, on the initiative of a number of pro-Russian NGOs in Ukraine, an international conference «Russian History in School Textbooks: Experience of Teaching History in the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic States» was held in Kyiv. The forum's resolution noted that the revision of «Soviet and pre-revolutionary history and its falsification have led to the fact that the history of Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Georgia, Ukraine, and more recently Kazakhstan and some other countries is presented in textbooks as the centuries-long struggle of their peoples for independence from Russia». The forum participants called for a recommendation to the ministries of education and science of the CIS and Baltic states to start developing coordinated history courses, eliminating elements of politicisation and ambiguous interpretations of the past from school textbooks [33].

Since the beginning of Putin's third presidential term in 2012 the Kremlin has begun to use history more actively as part of its domestic policy. Thus, 2012 was declared the year of Russian history [34]. In the same year, on the

initiative of the authorities the Russian Historical Society [35] and the Russian Military History Society [36] were established. Both structures declared their succession to the respective organisations that existed before 1917.

In the field of school education, the authorities initiated and implemented a number of legislative acts aimed at unifying humanities education in schools, including history. For example, a new federal law on education, a new historical and cultural standard, and teaching materials on Russian history and world history were developed and adopted [37]. The national historical narrative was based on the concept of a «triune Russian nation». Soviet experiments in agriculture (collectivisation) and industry were presented as «Soviet modernisation». The USSR's entry into World War II was dated on 22 June 1941, etc. It should be noted, that the authors of the national history textbook nevertheless provided a list of complex issues that, in their opinion, were not based on sufficient documentary materials to objectively reflect reality. These topics include: the formation of the Old Russian state (*Kievan Rus'*) and the role of the Varangians in this process; the existence of the Old Russian nation and the perception of the heritage of Ancient Rus as a common foundation of the history of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus; the nature and assessment of the Bolsheviks' national policy; assessment of the USSR's foreign policy on the eve and at the beginning of World War II; the price of the USSR's victory in the Great Patriotic War 1941—1945; the causes, consequences and assessment of «*perestroika*» and the collapse of the USSR, etc. [38, pp. 8, 15, 24, 57, 80].

The issue of creating a «single textbook» on history has also become more relevant. Already in February 2013, at a meeting of the Council on Interethnic Relations (created to replace the «Commission for Countering Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests»), Putin stressed that history textbooks should be «built on a single concept» and «should not have internal contradictions and double interpretations» [30]. In March 2013, emphasising the need for a single history textbook, Putin stressed the need for a «canonical» version of history [40].

It is clear that the idea of a «common history» and a «single textbook» was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, whose head promised to prepare a new textbook in a year [41]. The Association of School Teachers of History and Social Studies, headed by academician A. Chubaryan and the rector of

the Russian State University for the Humanities, historian Yefim Pivovarov, the Russian Historical Society, headed by the chairman of the State Duma, S. Naryshkin, and the Russian Military History Society, headed by the Minister of Culture, Vladimir Medinsky, were also involved in the preparation of the textbook [42]. However, despite the high level of support for the idea of a «single textbook» in the government and society, some historians and NGOs criticised the initiative [43].

At this stage, the idea of a «joint Russian-Ukrainian history textbook» promoted by the Ukrainian government, headed by pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich, also failed to materialise. Despite the creation of a working group of Ukrainian and Russian historians, the idea of a joint textbook and the activities of the Russian-Ukrainian Commission have been sharply criticised by a number of Ukrainian historians and the public opinion. Professor Fedir Turchenko expressed his suspicions about the «purity of intentions» of the Russian side in the draft joint textbook. After analysing Ukrainian stories in Russian textbooks, he concluded that the creation of a Russian-Ukrainian Commission to write a joint history textbook is a real threat of imposing Russian conceptual approaches to Ukraine. To accept them, the Ukrainian historian emphasised, «means to abandon one's own national identity, to declare Ukraine's independence a historical mistake» [10, p. 357].

Nevertheless, in September 2012, the Ministers of Education and Science of Ukraine (Dmytro Tabachnyk) and Russia (Dmitry Livanov) announced the publication of the textbook «Ukraine and Russia at the Crossroads of History». The textbook consisted of the following modules: Culture of Ancient *Rus'*, Russian nobility and Ukrainian gentry in everyday life and socio-political life of the 15—17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Everyday life of a Soviet person in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, The importance of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy in the development of Ukrainian and Russian education. Nevertheless, the Russian Minister of Education and Science noted that the textbook was only the first step in a series of large joint projects and announced the prospect of creating a Russian-Ukrainian Commission to examine history textbooks [44]. The project leaders promised that in 2013 the next textbook will be published, which will cover «controversial issues» [7, p. 52—64].

#### *Unification of historical narrative and textbooks*

Under the slogans of protecting the Russian and Russian-speaking population of Ukraine, Russia annexed

Crimea and launched an aggression in Eastern Ukraine (Spring 2014). In the context of the hybrid war against Ukraine, the study of history in Russian schools has undergone profound transformations aimed at strengthening state control over the content of the school history course, including the preparation and publication of textbooks and manuals. As early as June 2014, Putin instructed the government, together with the Russian Historical Society, to supplement the concept of a unified textbook on Russian history with information on the role of Crimea and Sevastopol in the history of the Russian Empire, the USSR and modern Russia [43]. Russian historian Kirill Kochegarov promptly prepared a methodological manual for teachers entitled «Crimea as part of Russia» with a circulation of 60,000 copies. The main motive of the text, much of which is quoted by President Putin, is that Crimea «has always been and remains an integral part of Russia» [45].

In the same year, the Russian Federation approved the «Historical and Cultural Standard», which included the thesis of the «eternally Russian» Crimea, and in 2017, after much preparation, a new concept for teaching Russian history was approved. Its goal was declared to be the formation of a publicly agreed position on the main stages of the development of the Russian state in order to use the potential of the content of historical education to educate patriotic Russian citizens [46]. These circulars became, according to one Russian historian, «the practical embodiment of the model of school historical education proposed by the President of the Russian Federation in 2013» [47]. In 2020, an «improved» (compared to the previous 2017) «Concept for Teaching the History of Russia» was prepared. The updated «Historical and Cultural Standard» became its component. Unlike the previous ones, the new Concept did not contain a list of so-called difficult issues. Instead, the following topics from the history of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century appeared: Russia in the context of Georgia's attack on South Ossetia in 2008 (in the text — «the operation to force Georgia to peace»); the 2014 *coup d'état* in Ukraine and Russia's position; the reunification of Crimea and Sevastopol with Russia and its international consequences; the Minsk agreements on Donbas and humanitarian support to the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic [48, pp. 77—78, 81—82].

Based on the instructions given by the authorities, new textbooks on Russian history and world history were pre-

pared. Most of them were edited by the Minister of Culture V. Medinsky and the long-time rector of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) Anatoly Torkunov. A characteristic feature of these textbooks is the desubjectification of Ukraine and Ukrainians, the appropriation of cultural heritage and the disregard for internationally recognised state borders. In particular, the Greek colonisation of Crimea and the Northern Black Sea region (the territory of modern Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Odesa regions of Ukraine) is presented as a part of Russian history; modern Russia is positioned as the sole and exclusive heir to medieval *Rus'* and its cultural heritage. When it comes to describing the events of the 18th and 19th centuries, authors of the textbook regularly refer to Ukrainians and the Dnipro region of Ukraine as Little Russians and *Malorossia* without explaining the context or clarifying the irrelevance and incorrectness of this terminology in modern realities. The events of 1917—1921 on the territory of Ukraine are inscribed in the integral narrative of the Russian Revolution and Civil War in Russia. Like the officials of Kremlin, the authors of Russian textbooks categorically deny the genocidal and artificial nature of the *Holodomor* of 1932—1933 in Ukraine, shifting the responsibility for the famine from the Soviet authorities to Ukrainian peasants who did not want to join collective farms. In other words, such accusations of the *Holodomor* victims can be seen as justification of the crime of the Soviet totalitarian regime. When describing the events of World War II (in the Russian interpretation, the «Great Patriotic War») and mentioning the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (*Ukrayins'ka Povstans'ka Armiia*, *UPA*), the narrative of Ukrainians tendency to «betray» is promoted. Authors of the textbook define supporters of Ukraine's independence in the 20th century as nationalists. Ukrainians who support the European, pro-Western (rather than pro-Russian) course of development of an independent Ukraine are also called nationalists [9; 11; 14].

Such accents in the historical narrative were combined with/complemented by federal programmes on patriotic education initiated by the state's leadership (2015—2020). The total militarisation of the education system began. Special attention was paid to the military-patriotic education of young people, which included the creation of defence and sports camps, military-patriotic and military-historical clubs, etc. For example, in 2015, by

Putin's decree, an all-Russian public and state children's and youth organisation, the Russian Schoolchildren's Movement, was created. Since 2016, a militarised children's organisation, the All-Russian Military Patriotic Social Movement «Young Army» (*Yunarmiya*), has been operating, with the main task of involving children in military training and promoting the ideology of the Russian World. The age for joining both organisations is 8 to 18 [49].

Meanwhile, on 12 July 2021, an article entitled «On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians» appeared in Russian and Ukrainian on the website of the Russian President (the Russian Ministry of Defence added the article to the list of «mandatory topics for military and political training»). Putin's article consists of a summary of Russia's vision of the history of the two nations and a review of the relations between Russia and Ukraine at the time. Putin argued that Ukrainians and Russians are «one people», «the triune Russian people». He emphasised that «Ukraine's true sovereignty is possible only in partnership with Russia», as Ukrainian and Russian «spiritual, human, civilisational ties had been formed over centuries, stemming from the same sources, forged by common trials, achievements and victories». By repeating the old imperial myths about the artificiality of Ukrainian statehood, that the conventional West (primarily the United States) wants to «turn Ukraine into a barrier between Europe and Russia, into a bridgehead against Russia», he was actually blackmailing both Ukraine and the civilised world with a full-scale military conflict [50].

Putin's article became a guideline for the creation of the Interdepartmental Commission on Historical Education in July 2021. It was headed by a well-known ideologue of the Putin regime, personal assistant (since 2020) to the Russian president V. Medinsky. The Commission was to focus its activities on defending the national interests of the Russian Federation by coordinating the activities of scholars and authorities to develop a unified approach to historical education, analyse the activities of foreign structures and prevent attempts to «falsify history» [51].

With the outbreak of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine on 24 February 2022, Russian publishing houses began «editing» existing textbooks to remove positive or neutral references to Ukraine and Ukrainian history. One of the employees of the leading school publishing house «*Prosveshchenie*», who did not want to be named, out-

lined the tasks set for them by the authorities in the following way: «we are faced with the task of making it seem as if Ukraine simply does not exist». In September 2022, the State Duma of the Russian Federation adopted amendments to the current legislation in the field of secondary education. According to them, unified compulsory federal programmes in the humanities were introduced in Russian secondary schools, both public and private. At the same time, amendments were made to the federal state educational standard, in particular in history. As emphasised in the document, after studying the school history course, graduates should be aware of «the importance of Russia in global political and socio-economic processes», as well as understand the causes and consequences of «the collapse of the USSR, the revival of the Russian Federation as a world power, the reunification of Crimea with Russia, the special military operation in Ukraine and other major events of the 20th and early 21st centuries». On 22 December 2022, the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation approved a new school history curriculum. The aforementioned V. Medinsky has been entrusted with the task of implementing changes to textbooks that correlate with it. The new curriculum stipulates that high school students will study not only such «well-known» topics as the 2014 *coup d'état* in Ukraine, the reunification of Crimea and Sevastopol with Russia, and humanitarian support for the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic, but will also have the opportunity to discuss the «special military operation». The programme emphasises the need to interpret these issues in the context of NATO's increasing «aggressiveness» and the formation of a «new image of Russia» in the world.

It should be noted that at the end of October 2022, a scientific and educational conference on worldview and social sciences «DNA of Russia» was held in Sochi at the initiative of the Russian Ministry of Education and Science. Its goal, in particular, was: to update the political and historical foundations of Russian statehood, reconceptualise the Russian worldview and fundamental approaches to overcoming social divisions. As a result of the conference, a new discipline was introduced in higher education institutions — «Foundations of Russian Statehood». At the same time, video materials were produced under the title «DNA of Russia», reflecting the official version of Russia's historical past [52].

In April 2023, after the world had been shocked by Russian war crimes and bloody battles that were taking

place in a number of Ukrainian regions, the Federal Archive Agency and the Russian State University for the Humanities published a collection of documents under the cynical title «On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians». The collection includes 242 archival documents from the 19th and 20th centuries, which reveal the main theses of Putin's article «On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians». The publication was presented at the country's leading universities and recommended for widespread use in teaching and studying Russian history [53].

As expected, the authorities entrusted the preparation of new school history textbooks to authors whose ideological and political position was not in doubt. The lion's share of them was prepared by teams of authors headed by the rector of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, A. Torkunov (textbooks for grades 6—9) and V. Medinsky (textbooks for grades 10—11) [54]. These authors wrote a textbook on the modern history of Russia for 11th grade students, which has been taught in schools in Russia and in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine since 1 September 2023 (the new textbook replaced a similar edition of 2021) [55].

The first chapter of the new textbook is devoted to the history of the Soviet Union, which is presented as a powerful world power that achieved its greatest success under the guidance of such authoritarian leaders as Joseph Stalin and Leonid Brezhnev. The contribution of the peoples of the USSR to the victory over Nazism during the Second World War (of course, the German-Soviet war of 1941—1945 is presented as the «Great Patriotic War») dissolved into the unity of the Soviet people, for whom Russian history and the traditions of Russian statehood became the unifying factor. Post-war history was also distorted to justify the crimes of Soviet totalitarianism. The textbook explains the use of force, such as deportations, in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and the western regions of Ukraine as armed resistance by nationalists. Western countries, led by the United States, are portrayed as aggressive and insidious, aimed at destroying their main geopolitical rival, the USSR, and later Russia [55, p. 5—269].

In the second chapter of the textbook, which shows the development of the Russian Federation from 1992 to 2023, the authors contrast the failed reforms of the 1990s under Boris Yeltsin and economic growth with social harmony and «restoration of historical justice» on the world stage in the Putin era [55, p. 332, 379].



In line with Putin's 2021 article «On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians», the authors of the textbook pay much attention to Ukraine. In a separate paragraph «Russia Today. Special Military Operation», going beyond the chronological framework of the textbook, the authors repeat the myths and stereotypes of imperial and Soviet historiography. In particular, about the origin of the name «Ukraine»; they claim that in the 17th century, the Cossacks «entered» the Russian state as part of a single Russian people; they call the Ukrainian national movement in the 19th century a «project of the Austrian General Staff». Russian authors claim that it was the Austrian authorities who introduced an «artificial language» and national symbols, and that historian Mykhailo Hrushevsky «invented» the history of Ukraine. Therefore, according to the Russian authors, the technologies that the Austrian authorities applied to the Galician «Russians» for a long time, led them to believe in them and turn into malignant Western Ukrainians, who in the 19—21 centuries have a negative impact on «easterners» (the population of central and eastern Ukraine, which had long been under the rule of the Russian Empire), imposing «Ukrainian-ness» on them. The Ukrainian «separatism» «created by Austria» was adopted by Germany in the two world wars — with this thesis, the Russian authors directly identified Ukrainian nationalism with (neo)Nazism. It was the Ukrainian «Nazis» who, according to the Russian authors, became the driving force behind the Revolution of Dignity, which the text describes as an «armed rebellion», and led to the establishment of the «junta». The new Ukrainian government immediately established an «ultra-nationalist regime» — «under the dictation of the West and the Western Ukrainian minority» it began to ban everything Russian and oppress the Russian-speaking population (according to the textbook's authors, this is 80% of the population of Ukraine) and the Ukrainian language taught in the Soviet Union was replaced by a «Western Ukrainian dialect». According to the authors of the textbook, Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 was caused by «threats by the Ukrainian authorities to expel the Russian Black Sea Fleet from Sevastopol». Further, the Russian authors claim that «Nazis» from volunteer battalions suppressed pro-Russian protests in Kharkiv and southern Ukraine, «burning alive» dozens of protesters in Odesa's Trade Union House. According to Russia's version of history, a «people's uprising» took place in Donbas and a militia of «Afghan veterans, policemen,

teachers, miners» was formed. They were joined by volunteers from Crimea and Russia, and Russian soldiers allegedly took leave and went to Eastern Ukraine to fight on their own initiative, just as tsarist officers under Alexander II went to help Bulgarians who had rebelled against the Ottoman Empire. The authors of the textbooks also have their own version of the Minsk Agreements. It times of signing them, the Ukrainian government was actually in a «secret conspiracy with NATO» and was simply «messing with the minds» of the negotiators. The leaders of Germany, France and Ukraine later admitted, according to the Russian authors, that they had no intention of implementing Minsk-2. In the context of the textbook, President Zelenskyy's government also looks like a Nazi one, an enemy of all progressive humanity. According to the authors, in the early 2020s, Ukraine opened «American biolabs» on its territory, was going to restore nuclear weapons and join NATO, and then attack Crimea and Donbas. In order to save «world civilisation», President Putin launched the SVO, the purpose of which, as the textbook says, is «to protect Donbas and proactively ensure Russia's security». The authors of the textbook cite the words of the Russian president as an argument: «we did not start any military operations, we are trying to end them. These hostilities were started by nationalists in Ukraine in 2014, when a *coup d'état* was carried out». The textbook claims that the Russian army is opposed by «an ideologically pumped-up army of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, equipped with NATO weapons and trained to their standards, which is replenished by foreign mercenaries and instructors». The textbook tells us that Russia is «taking care» of the annexed «new regions» by building houses, roads, schools, and hospitals there. Western sanctions have only «benefited» Russia: the state and business are replacing imports with domestic production, the economy is growing, and new prestigious jobs are appearing, which will be taken by students after they graduate [55, p. 396—408].

Thus, the textbook performs the function of dehumanising Ukrainians by promoting the narrative of the artificiality of Ukrainian identity and the Ukrainian language, and labelling Ukrainian citizens as «Nazis». Such approaches can be used to justify not only the violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, the need to destroy the Ukrainian state, but also the most brutal war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. After all, the «Nazis», in this case, according to Russian

authors, are Ukrainians, are carriers of a hateful ideology, «absolute evil», and therefore cannot expect to be treated humanely [56, p. 25].

With the new textbook, school history teaching in Russia has finally turned into a propaganda tool, to justify and glorify the Putin regime, including the war against Ukraine. Students in Russia, as well as in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, will be taught to hate Ukraine, the United States, NATO, and the entire West through manipulation, outright fakes, and conspiracy theories.

V. Medinsky, one of the authors of the new textbook and head of the Interdepartmental Commission on Historical Education, became responsible for the implementation of the Decree of 8 May 2024 of the fifth «elected» President Putin «On Approval of the Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Historical Education» [57]. The decree stated that history was an exclusive state resource under Putin's personal control, and the ultimate goal of the educational policy was «the formation of a pan-Russian civic identity and strengthening the commonality of *Russskiy mir*».

Russian history textbooks have contributed to the formation of a distorted view of Ukraine and Ukrainians among students; prejudice against Ukrainians as persons prone to betrayal and incapable of creating their own sovereign state; and justification of territorial claims to the state of Ukraine, as it occupies «historically Russian» lands.

**Conclusions.** During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Russian authorities, the Russian Orthodox Church, and part of the intellectual elite established the idea of *Russskiy mir* as a special civilisation based on the Russian language and culture, Orthodoxy, common history, and historical memory. *Russskiy mir* has also become the ideological basis for an authoritarian political regime and an important factor in Putin's geopolitics. In establishing the new ideology, Russia's ruling elite paid considerable attention to historical education in schools, seeking to establish control over the content of its own history textbooks and carefully monitoring trends in the study of Russian and Soviet history in the countries of the «near abroad».

The Russian historical narrative presents Ukraine as an «artificially created pseudo-state», a «temporarily detached part of Russian territory», whose history is common with Russia's, and whose population is part of the Russian

people, dreaming of «liberation», reunification and suffering from the rule of «Nazis and Banderites». Therefore, according to the creators of *Russskiy mir* ideology, Ukrainian statehood as a temporary entity must sooner or later give way to the unification of different parts of the «Great Russia», if necessary, by military force. The year 2013 should be considered as a turning point in terms of accelerating the ideological unification of school history in Russia. This was «facilitated» by Putin's persistent personal «appeals», «recommendations», and then «instructions» to develop a canon of historical education at school and prepare a «single» history textbook.

After the annexation of Crimea, the beginning of the aggression in Eastern Ukraine, and to a greater extent during Russia's large-scale war against Ukraine, the basic constructs of *Russskiy mir* have been implemented in Russian curricula and history textbooks. *Russskiy mir* is an ideology of war is a threat to the sovereignty and existence of all countries declared by the Russian Federation to be part of the so-called *Russskiy mir*.

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