



Social and Political Dynamics of Ukraine Amid the Collapse of Empires: A Historical Analysis of the Period 1914–1918

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Abstract: In the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war, parallels with the First or Second World Wars have been drawn and are being drawn more than once. Therefore, the issue of Ukraine during the First World War remains relevant from the point of view of its specificity in the conditions of cardinal geopolitical changes that swept the world after the end of the war and led to further tragic events, in particular, the Second World War. The purpose of the research is to analyze the standpoints of various participants in the war on the “Ukrainian issue” as well as the attempts of Ukrainian forces in the conditions of war to carry out cardinal state-building transformations. The object of the research is the Ukrainian lands within the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires, which were at the epicenter of the war. The methodological basis of the research is the methods of critical analysis of sources, analysis and synthesis, logical analysis, structural-functional and generalization and comparison methods. Ukrainian lands during the First World War were the epicenter of the struggle of the largest empires of the world. Ukrainians, who were subjects of different empires, were forced to shed their blood for foreign interests, fighting against each other. The lands of Ukraine, in addition to becoming a theater of bloody military operations, were also devastated by economic exploitation, destruction of infrastructure, roads, bridges, cities and villages. The population suffered from repression, hunger, looting, diseases, epidemics, social insecurity. Ukrainian political and public and military forces (Societies of Ukrainian Progressives, Main Ukrainian Council, Union for the Liberation of Ukraine, Ukrainian Sich Riflemen, General Ukrainian Council), trying to focus on external forces, were unable to achieve unity of their actions, which negatively affected the struggle for the Ukrainian cause. The events of the Ukrainian Revolution in the conditions of the First World War demonstrated the desire of Ukrainians for their own statehood and independence, however, at that time it was not possible to create a stable state formation. Therefore, studying the experience of the achievements and defeats of Ukrainians during the First World War is important from the point of view of understanding the origins of Russian imperial encroachments, the positions of many European countries towards Ukraine, as well as for realizing the need to unite efforts in adverse external and internal circumstances.

Keywords: Austro-Hungarian Empire, Hetmanate, West Ukrainian National Republic (WUNR), World War I, Russian Empire, Ukrainian issue, Ukrainian organizations, the Ukrainian People's Republic (UPR), Orthodox clergy, theological seminaries.

Introduction

In 2018, 100 years have passed since the end of World War I. In the politics of memory of Ukraine, the events of World War I are not mainstream [1], unlike many European countries, where the events of the Great War (as it is known in the world) are a significant part of historical and cultural memory. The events of 1914–1918 radically changed the political map of the world, primarily Europe. Empires collapsed: Russian, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, German. Meanwhile, new hegemony emerged in world politics: The United States and the Soviet Union. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (future Yugoslavia), Poland, Hungary, Finland, and Czechoslovakia also restored their statehood or received it for the first time [2]. On the other hand, Ukraine, despite its efforts, was unable to establish its statehood for a long period of time on the ruins of empires.

Economic systems, industrial development, healthcare and education, information systems, logistics, etc. became radically new compared to previous periods. The pace of life accelerated to an unprecedented extent. At the same time, the hopes of millions of people that the world would no longer dare, after everything it had experienced, to wage war on such a scale and with the use of such an incredible amount of resources, did not come true.

The study of the First World War's history was conducted for a considerable amount of time from an anti-war perspective. However, this perspective on conflict is appropriate for cultures that are peaceful. Since Ukraine is embroiled in conflict, discussing the negative aspects of war is irrelevant at this time. It is imperative that the country discuss the issues that cause war, how and why it breaks out, and how to exit it while overcoming the obstacles as much as possible and appropriately orienting itself in the maelstrom of political unrest.

Literature review

The First World War is part of the historical memory of Europe and the world at large [3, 4]. The war that engulfed the world in 1914–1918 was unprecedented in terms of loss, destruction and geopolitical consequences. It led to the fall of the Austro-Hungarian, German, Ottoman and Russian empires. The fatal shot of Gavrilo Princip on June 28, 1914, in Sarajevo was the trigger for further tragic events. In fact, the foreboding of war was in the air. Moreover, previous military conflicts had not resolved the disputes that engulfed the world at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. [5].

The bloodiest fighting took place on Ukrainian soil. Ukraine became the epicenter of the struggle of empires. Therefore, the memory of this war is significant for Ukrainian historical culture and memory. The restoration of historical memory of the war and its memorialization is discussed in the article by V. Shevchenko [1]. The complicated and violent history of relations between Imperial-Soviet Russia and Ukraine in historical retrospect must be thoroughly and objectively studied in order to comprehend the current geopolitical changes, of which the Russian-Ukrainian war is one of the focal points. In this sense, it is necessary to turn to the work of the Swiss-Austrian historian A. Kappeler, who thoroughly approached the coverage of the history of the relationship between the “unequal brothers”, with an emphasis on events related to nation-building, in particular, those that took place in Ukraine during the First World War [6].

The content of the “Ukrainian issue” for the countries participating in the First World War was studied by A. Yarosh, who emphasized the goal of the Russian Empire to seize Eastern Galicia, Northern Bukovina and Transcarpathia, the territorial expansion of Austria-Hungary through the annexation of Volhynia and Podolia, and also Germany's plans to divide the Russian Empire, in particular, by populating the territory of Ukraine with its citizens [7]. Internationalists, political scientists, and historians have all frequently focused their studies on the “Ukrainian issue” during World War I. The monograph by V. Holovchenko and V. Soldatenko highlights the position of Ukrainian lands within the empires on the eve of the war, the revolutionary events of 1917 and the beginning of the Ukrainian national-political revival and state-building processes, the role of Ukraine in establishing a regional system of political relations as well as the “Ukrainian issue” following the war [8].

The course of events on Ukrainian territory during the First World War, the specifics of national revival, state-building and international activities against the backdrop of hostilities, economic, demographic, and cultural losses of Ukrainians, the role of propaganda and the forms and methods of propaganda as a lever of influence in the war, are covered in the works of K. Bila [9], O. Lysenko [10], R. Pyrig [11], O. Razyhryayev [12], and G. Hausmann [13]. Diplomacy during the Great War, the interests of the warring states, the course of hostilities, and the economic and

territorial interests of various participants in the confrontation have become the subject of comprehensive analysis in collective monographs edited by Reient [14] and Troyan [15]. J. O. Liber [16] in his study conducted a panoramic review of the identity of Ukrainians through the prism of the impact of wars and genocides.

War is a comprehensive and multifaceted phenomenon. Therefore, studying various aspects of war is important both in view of the modern Russian-Ukrainian war and in order to understand its role and place in the lives of different people. In particular, E. Kostyshyn and A. Lozynskiy examined the problems of organizing social assistance for Ukrainians during the First World War. The researchers examined the activities of the Ukrainian branch of the All-Russian Zemstvo Union, the Southwestern Front Committee for Assistance to Sick and Wounded Soldiers of the All-Russian Union of Cities, the Red Cross Society of Ukraine, and a number of well-known philanthropists and public organizations [17, 18].

The specifics of the national identity of Ukrainians in the Carpathian region during the First World War were studied by S. Borchuk and P. Kostiuchok, emphasizing that “the war qualitatively accelerated the processes of national self-realization. It prompted a clear choice of “friends and strangers”. The result of this was the deepening of one’s own national self-reflection” [19].

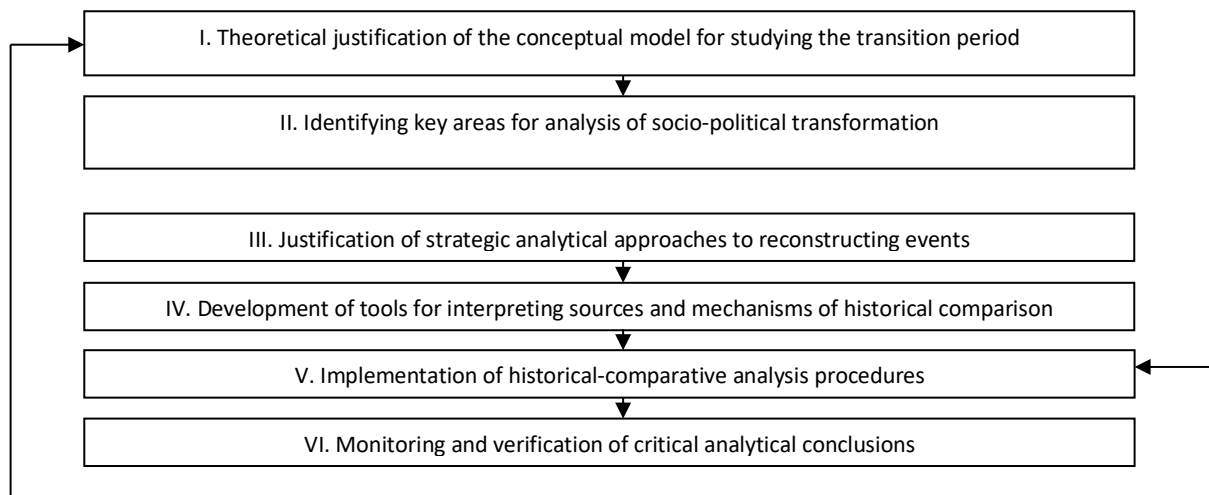
In addition, to understand the geopolitical, historical, cultural and economic situation of Ukraine on the eve and during the First World War, it is necessary to turn to research devoted to the history of state-building processes in Europe, the study of national movements, cultural processes, political, diplomatic and economic ups and downs [20, 21, 22, 23, 24].

Methods

Research architectonics and conceptual optics

It research is not limited chronological reconstruction events of 1914–1918. His methodological construction built as multidimensional interpretive system that combines historical-comparative analysis, institutional reconstruction and elements political sociology. We assume that decay empires is not instantaneous event. This the process in which political institutes are collapsing faster than is transforming social consciousness (Figure. 1).

Figure 1: Sequence formation methodological models research socio-political speakers Ukraine in the conditions decay empires



Source: compiled by the authors

The analytical framework is based on three supporting concepts: imperial decline as a structural crisis of power, social mobilization as a catalyst changes and polycentricity as a form of transitional management. In the center research is staying interaction Ukrainian political actors from by the power structures of the Russian and Austro- Hungarian Empires. Not isolated. In conflict environment.

Formation spring bases and criteria selection

The empirical basis of the study is formed from several groups sources. Firstly, regulatory documents from 1914–1918, including government orders, manifestos and acts Central Council. Secondly, archival materials that reflect positions administrative structures and military organs. Thirdly, the memoir literature and journalism period. Selection was carried out by such criteria: authenticity of the document, presence of a direct connection with the Ukrainian political movement, reflection social dynamics and opportunity comparison with alternatives sources. Special WARNING devoted to texts that fix change in the government's rhetoric regarding the war. General corps is 64 historical documents, 23 journalistic materials and 41 modern historiographical research. Such combination allows combine synchronous and retrospective analysis.

Methodological tools and analytical procedure

Research uses historical-comparative method for comparing political transformations in different imperial contexts. Institutional analysis used for evaluation stability administrative structures. Content analysis allowed us to identify key categories political rhetoric, including “autonomy”, “self-determination”, “loyalty”, “federalization”. Analytical procedure consisted of three stages. First, a chronological reconstruction events from by division into microperiods. Further accomplished comparison positions different actors. On final stage done interpretation changes social structures through prism mobilization processes (Table 1).

Table 1: Analytical matrix research socio-political dynamics of 1914–1918

Period	Political context	Social processes	Key actors	Analysis method	Interpretation result
1914	The beginning of the war	Mobilization population	Imperial administration	Chronological analysis	Strengthening centralization
1915	Military escalation	Growth social tension	Military structures	Institutional analysis	Attenuation legitimacy
1916	Radicalization of discourse	Activation national movements	Ukrainian political organizations	Content analysis	Formation autonomist requirements
1917 (spring)	February revolution	Mass political participation	Provisional Government, Central Rada	Comparative method	Polycentricity authorities
1917 (autumn)	October Revolution	Destabilization administration	Bolsheviks structures	Institutional analysis	Fragmentation management
1918 (beginning)	Proclamation statehood	Redistribution powers	Ukrainian government	Systemic approach	Attempt institutional stabilization
1918 (spring)	External intervention	Social polarization	Foreign military forces	Comparative analysis	Dependence from external factors
1918 (end)	Change modes	Fatigue society	New political coalitions	Interpretive synthesis	Fragility government structures

Source: compiled by the authors

Classification socio-political transformations

Based on analysis Three types of transformations are distinguished. The first type concerns institutional erosion imperial mechanisms. The second related from growth political subjectivity Ukrainian movement. The third covers social landslides caused by war and economic crisis. Classification was carried out by criterion intensity changes. Institutional transformations took place fast, social changes had inertial nature. Political mobilization acted as a catalyst, but not as a guarantee stability. Separately analyzed rhetoric Statehood. Frequency the terms " autonomy " and " independence " are growing after 1916, which indicates evolution political thinking. However this evolution is not accompanied adequate institutional resource.

Integration modeling historical speakers

Finishing stage provided for the synthesis of the obtained results into a conceptual model. The model is based on the interaction three variables: imperial decline, social mobilization, institutional innovation. Interconnection between them is not linear. Gain mobilization maybe simultaneously stimulate state-building and raising level conflict.

Validation was carried out by cross-referencing comparison different types sources. Documents imperial administrations compared with the materials Ukrainian political structures. Identified disagreements interpreted as indicator crises legitimacy. Methodological construction not claims finality. It allows outline structural patterns transitional period. And more one. Disintegration empires turned out to be not only geopolitical event. This was social an experiment on society that tried simultaneously to free oneself and self-organize.

Results

Professor H. Brands called the last 100 years “the Ukrainian century since this country has been a central figure in every major global conflict of the modern era” [25]. According to the expert, due to its resources (agricultural land, minerals) and geographical location (primarily because of access to the Black Sea), Ukraine is a kind of strategic prize in geopolitical plans and visions [25]. Consequently, it is not surprising that Vladimir Putin’s plans to restore Russian hegemony – which he effectively identifies with the USSR, whose collapse he claims is “the greatest tragedy of the 20th century” – include the current Russian-Ukrainian war [26].

The famous political scientist Z. Brzezinski once wrote about Ukraine as a geopolitical pivot:

“Ukraine, this new and very important piece on the Eurasian chessboard, it is a geopolitical pivot because its very existence as an independent state helps to transform Russia. Without Ukraine, Russia has ceased to be a Eurasian empire. < ... > if Moscow regains control over Ukraine, with its 52 million people and vast resources, as well as access to the Black Sea, Russia will automatically become a powerful empire again, spanning Europe and Asia. Ukraine’s loss of independence would have direct consequences for Central Europe, turning Poland into a geopolitical pivot on the eastern border of a united Europe” [27, 28].

J. O. Lieber, relying on Z. Brzezinskiy’s ideas about geopolitical players and geopolitical points of resistance, considers Ukraine in the First World War (which he interprets as the first total war and the revolutionary events that shook Europe during this war) as a geopolitical point of resistance. The 1920–1930s were the second such important period in the history of Ukraine in the XX century. First of all, we are talking about the Holodomor, which had a cardinal impact on Ukrainians as a people. The third significant period is the Second World War and the struggle of the Organization of Ukrainian nationalists - Ukrainian Insurgent Army, as well as Stalinist deportations [29]. Given his comprehension of the First World War’s impact on the development of Ukrainian identity, J. O. Liber’s research is crucial to our academic paper [30, 31].

In addition, it is important, from the perspective of the present, to analyze the attitude of Ukrainians toward the war. This is primarily about activists, leaders of political parties, societies, and the intellectual elite. Such information helps us understand the historical and cultural processes that unfolded on the European continent in connection with the war, and, probably, have echoes in current events (Table 2).

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Table 2: Ukrainian organizations that were active during the First World War, representing the interests of various political forces and Ukrainians in the two empires

Name	Creation date, location	Actors	Political views and orientations
Main Ukrainian Council (MUC)	August 1, 1914, Lviv	K. Levytskyi (chairman), M. Vasylo, L. Bachynskyi, O. Skoropys-Yoltukhovskiy (total – 15 people).	Non-partisan political representation. They called for support for Austria-Hungary in the war. They sought to be the sole representative of Galician Ukrainians in international affairs and to form a national army.
Union for the Liberation of Ukraine (ULU)	August 4, 1914, Eastern Galicia; operated first in Lviv, then in Vienna. There were branches in Berlin, Lausanne, Istanbul	D. Dontsov (chairman), A. Zhuk, V. Doroshenko, M. Melensky, S. and R. Smal-Stotsky, B. Lepky, S. Rudnytsky	Created by political emigrants from the Dnieper region and Bukovinians and Galicians; main task: to represent the interests of Ukrainians who were under Russian rule. Purpose of activity: the struggle for the independence of Ukraine, using the war of Austria-Hungary and Germany against Russia. The future structure of Ukraine: a constitutional monarchy and a unicameral parliament. Cooperated with the GUR and ZUR
General Ukrainian Council (GUC)	May 5, 1915, Vienna.	K. Levytskyi, M. Vasylo, L. Bachynskyi, O. Skoropys-Yoltukhovskiy, M. Melenevsky.	All-Ukrainian political organization; regarding Ukrainian lands – an independent Ukraine, independent from Russia; territorial-national autonomy and unification of Ukrainian lands into a national region within Austria-Hungary. It advocated a constitutional Austria - Hungary, as opposed to Russian autocracy
Ukrainian Sich Riflemen (USR)	August 6, 1914, Lviv	2.5 thousand volunteers. 28,000 thousand signed up for the call of the GUR. But the Austrian government was afraid of such a large Ukrainian armed formation. The core was participants in the Sich, Plast and Sokol movements. E. Konovalets	Ukrainian national combat unit, the first since 1709.
Society of Ukrainian Progressives (SUP)	1908. About 60 cells in the Dnieper region.		Inter-party political organization of Ukrainians of the Dnieper region. They advocated for the national-territorial autonomy of Ukraine within the Russian Federation. During World War I, some of the activists were for the defeat of Russia, some were for the defeat of Austria-Hungary and the annexation of Ukrainian lands to Russia.

Source: compiled according to [32, 33]

Thus, for most Ukrainian organizations, World War I became an impetus for intensifying their actions to build their state or autonomy within democratic countries. Some of them believed that the collapse of the Russian Empire was the path to the emergence of an independent Ukraine; others were sympathetic to Austria-Hungary. Such dispersion

of Ukrainian forces did not contribute to the consolidation of Ukrainians at the political level and subsequently negatively affected the results of the Ukrainian Revolution.

Discussion

The landmark events that characterize the history of Ukraine in the XX century from the point of view of postcolonial studies, in our opinion, were very aptly characterized by Professor of History and Global Studies Mark von Hagen: “At the beginning of the twentieth century, Ukraine was divided between two empires that ended during World War I. The emergence of a transnational national liberation movement had strong roots in these two empires, but Ukraine was not destined to gain lasting national independence, and instead was redistributed between an already imperialistic Soviet Russia and a nationalized Second Polish Republic that also closely resembled imperial rule. With the outbreak of the Second World War, Polish rule over Ukraine was supplanted by the much harsher colonial policies of the Third Reich. Stalin’s Ukraine was the site of another excessive colonial rule, man-made by hunger and terror, the Holodomor. Much of Ukraine’s twentieth-century history was marked by military occupations and periods of “peacetime” colonialism, but there was never the political independence that those who opposed colonialism insisted on” [34].

It is evident that the territory of Ukraine has always attracted the interests of various states and governments that sought to establish their own way of life here. In the context of the topic of our research, the views of A. Kappeler are valuable, who, describing the events of 1917–1918, emphasizes that Ukrainians at that time were the only people from the former Russian Empire who not only went against the Russian Provisional Government but also influenced the course of politics in Russia at that time [6].

The lands of Ukraine, its economic and demographic potential on both sides of the Austrian-Russian borders were the main theater of hostilities and political plans. In such extremely difficult circumstances, it was vital for Ukraine to make its political choice aimed at ensuring its national-state interests, and not at playing the role of a puppet in foreign expansions.

The tragedy for Ukrainians was, first of all, that, being territorially part of different warring states, they were caught in the middle of the loudest fighting from the very first days. Almost 3,5 million Ukrainians in the army of the Russian Empire and 250–300 thousand in the ranks of the Austro-Hungarian army were forced to fight against each other, defending the interests of the warring empires that were alien to them [35]. Also, “2 thousand Galicians and Bukovinians fought as part of the volunteer Legion of Ukrainian Sich Riflemen” [36].

In addition, one cannot ignore attempts to manipulate national feelings and statesmanship aspirations. These are plans for Ukraine in geopolitical concepts on the eve and during the First World War. In 1915, lawyer and sociologist Rudolf Kjellén, analyzing the causes of the war and predicting its consequences, indicated that “one of the primary tasks of the war should be to resolve the problems of Eastern Europe - from the balance of power and the configuration of borders” [37]. He welcomed the national liberation struggle of the peoples of the former Russian Empire in his future writings, noting that, finally, after long deprivation and rejection, Ukrainians and their historical and cultural heritage began to be perceived as part of European civilization. [37]. According to geographer and geopolitician H. Mackinder, Ukraine is the Eurasian heartland. In 1919, he was unequivocal in his conclusions: “Who rules Eastern Europe rules the Heartland (the Heart of the Earth – Author), and who rules the Heartland rules the World Island, and who rules the World Island rules the World” [25]. During the First World War, the Slavic scholar R. Seton-Watson made a lot of efforts to ensure the independence of the people who entered the world political arena after the fall of empires. He had meetings with leading figures of the Ukrainian movement both from Galicia and the Dnieper region: M. Hrushevsky, I. Frank, K. Levytsky, A. Sheptytsky, S. Baran. He especially appreciated the work of T. Shevchenko and the activities of A. Sheptytsky in the field of cultural and patriotic education and considered the Ukrainian Cossacks – the “Republic of the Steppe” – to be the embodiment of democratic ideals for Europe [38]. The historian and political figure also paid attention to Ukraine during the First World War. A. Toynbee [39]. He first learned about Ukraine in 1909 while studying at Oxford College. At first, he considered it in the context of the partitions of Poland. Later, the scientist drew attention to the linguistic basis of the differences between the different peoples inhabiting the empire. A. Toynbee, in the spirit of his time, also reflected on the “Ukrainian issue” in the context of war [40].

As for the plans of the warring states, they all had their far-sighted tactics and strategies regarding Ukrainian lands.

1. For Austria-Hungary, it was important to maintain control over Galicia and take control of Volhynia and Podolia. In the distant future, the possibility of creating some kind of Ukrainian autonomy within Austria-Hungary in the territories that were once part of the Russian Empire was envisaged. Another option was an autonomous Ukrainian entity within Poland, which would be part of Austria-Hungary. The “Ukrainian issue”

at the state level arose in Hungary at the beginning of 1918 in connection with the proclamation of the independence of the UNR by the Fourth Universal on January 22, 1918, and the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty between the UNR and the Quadruple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, Turkey) on February 9 of the same year. [41]. In general, the key decisions of the Habsburg policy in the east usually belonged to Hungary. The official policy of Budapest was based on the vision of Ukraine (together with Romania and Russia) as a threat to the concept of the inviolability of borders, which was developed by the Hungarian government in April 1918. The desire of Ukraine to unite its ethnic lands was seen as a potential danger threatening the eastern borders of Austria-Hungary. That is why Hungary actively supported the revival of Poland, hoping that its borders would extend deep into the east, into Ukrainian territories, thus leveling Ukraine's claims to Galicia, Bukovina and Transcarpathia [42].

2. For Germany, it was extremely important to establish control over the east and south of Ukraine, including Crimea. This was to become a platform for further economic expansion into the Caucasus. First of all, the oil-producing regions of Azerbaijan and other sources of raw material supply for German industry were of interest. German policy in Eastern Europe, including Ukraine, was formed by three centers. Pro-German political forces aimed to defeat the Russian Empire and reduce its borders far to the east. Therefore, the Ukrainian national movement was seen as a factor weakening the Russian Empire and useful for German plans. The possibility of an independent Ukraine was assumed exclusively within the framework of the strategy of Germany's advance to the east. German colonization of Galicia and the Black Sea region was planned [43]. Another group, the basis of which consisted of journalists and scientists, advocated the independence of the peoples of the Russian Empire. Ukraine was expected to be a reliable outpost of Eastern Europe, a shield from Russian expansion to the West. The third group, led by Professor O. Hörch, supported Bismarck's line on the development of friendly relations with Russia on the condition of its integrity. Official Germany maneuvered between these projects for a long time. Ultimately, the collapse of the Russian Empire became the catalyst for Germany's position in Ukraine. At that time, Berlin was inclined to support national self-determination. During 1917, Germany's interest in Ukraine grew rapidly. The outline of German plans for Ukraine took shape in October 1917. Ukraine's economic potential played an important role in this. It was determined that the separation of Ukraine would significantly weaken Russia, especially in the Balkans and the Black Sea straits. This would provide Germany with access to the Middle East through the Balkans. However, the rapid change in the political situation in Ukraine did not contribute to the implementation of these plans [44].
3. Maintaining control over the Dnieper region was the main goal of the Russian Empire. Along with this, in order to strengthen its position in the international arena and intensify its advance to the West, the Russian Empire was interested in establishing its power in Galicia, Bukovina and Transcarpathia. An important task was to eliminate any manifestations of the Ukrainian national movement in Galicia. As Metropolitan A. Sheptytsky wrote at one time, "The war is being waged against us because the Moscow Tsar could not tolerate the fact that in the Austrian state, we have freedom of faith and nationality: he wants to tear that freedom away from us, to put us in chains" [36].

However, despite the attention paid to the "Ukrainian issue" by both politicians and intellectuals, in reality, the problems of the Ukrainian people, separated by the borders of empires and immersed in the maelstrom of the First World War, were considered through the prism of the interests of different countries, and not of Ukrainians themselves. Therefore, the words of the Ukrainian political figure V. Lypinsky are more relevant than ever: "<...> without its own Ukrainian State there cannot be a Ukrainian Nation, and without the Ukrainian Nation there cannot be human public life on the Ukrainian Land <...> Political idleness under the tutelage of a Moscow or Warsaw gendarme will not give you strength <...>. Only a hard knightly struggle for your Power on your Land will give you it" [45].

Officially, World War I began on August 1, 1914. Russian troops managed to occupy Bukovina and Galicia by the fall of 1914 and enter the north-eastern part of Hungary. Desperate winter battles and the Tarnów-Gorlytsya campaign of May 1915 significantly changed the situation on the battlefield – the front advanced more than 300 km to the east in six months. For the next three years, there were no significant threats from the east for Germany and Austria-Hungary. This allowed Austria-Hungary to occupy territories in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. There was another short advance of Russian troops in the summer of 1916 during the Brusilov Offensive and a brief success of Kerensky's offensive in 1917 [46]. In the occupied territories (which were Ukrainian lands), the Russian authorities severely suppressed the Ukrainian cultural movement: Ukrainian organizations were closed, Ukrainian publications were banned, Ukrainian figures were arrested and exiled. The liquidation of the UGCC was also being prepared. The

Austrian reconquest in the spring of 1915 stopped the policy of forced Russification. However, the Western Ukrainian territories continued to suffer from the devastation of the war, continuing to be a theater of hostilities [47].

The situation was also tense in the Dnieper region, in Kyiv, where the political situation during the war years, and especially after the revolutionary events in the Russian Empire in 1917, changed rapidly almost daily. In particular, in the journal "Vyzvolnyi Shliakh" M. Melnyk described the situation that had developed in Kyiv in June 1918:

"Kyiv was overrun by Russian fugitives, painfully hostile to Ukrainian statehood, who, from monarchists to leftists, were relentlessly campaigning against Ukraine's separation from Russia and created a number of organizations aimed at preventing the consolidation of the Ukrainian state. The capital was threatened by the danger of sabotage and assassinations (the explosion of ammunition at the Zoo, the murder of Field Marshal Eichhorn). The German and Austrian command advised the Hetman to remove this "incendiary Great Russian element" from Kyiv, promising their assistance. The reorganization of the cabinet and the elimination of the "incendiary Moscow element" did not come to pass. It is possible that the Hetman received a whole series of threats even from his closest entourage" [48].

After the February Revolution of 1917, the Provisional Government was formed in the Russian Empire. In addition, the revival of national life and centrifugal political processes began. The Central Rada was formed in Kyiv, headed by M. Hrushevsky. Initially, the Central Rada advocated for the autonomy of Ukraine and the transformation of Russia into a democratic federal republic. The Russian Provisional Government recognized the Ukrainian Central Rada. However, the issues of its political powers and territorial jurisdiction remained unresolved [49]. In addition, the influence of Bolshevik propaganda was growing in eastern Ukraine. After the Bolsheviks seized power in Petrograd in November 1917, the Central Rada proclaimed the creation of the Ukrainian People's Republic (UPR) and did not recognize the Bolshevik government as legitimate. In December 1917, the Bolsheviks held the All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets in Kharkiv and formed a Bolshevik government, in opposition to the UPR [50]. In January 1918, Bolshevik troops launched an offensive from the Left Bank to Kyiv. At that time, the Central Rada was negotiating with the Central Powers (Austria-Hungary, Germany), hoping for military assistance from them in the fight against the Bolsheviks. On January 22, 1918, the independence of the UPR was proclaimed. However, Soviet troops occupied Kyiv. And the Ukrainian government was forced to evacuate. On February 9, 1918, the aforementioned Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty was signed between the UPR and the Central Powers [51]. In early March, Austrian and German troops drove the Bolsheviks out of Kyiv. The UPR government returned, and in April the Bolshevik army retreated from Ukraine. However, the policy of the Ukrainian government, especially regarding the land issue, contradicted German plans. Therefore, on April 29, 1918, Hetman Pavlo Skoropadsky came to power. Within a few months, the Hetmanate had carried out a number of reforms, especially successful in the field of cultural and educational life. However, the policy on the land issue and a number of unpopular economic measures as well as the intention of the federation with non-Bolshevik Russia caused opposition to the actions of the Hetman and his government. The surrender of Germany and Austria in November 1918, on which P. Skoropadskyi relied, led to a coup in Ukraine. The UPR Directory came to power, initially headed by V. Vynnychenko (December 14, 1918 - February 10, 1919 (1919–1920) and then S. Petliura (February 11, 1919–November 10, 1920) [11, 52].

As for the Western Ukrainian lands, even before the collapse of Austria-Hungary in October 1918, a meeting of Ukrainian figures was held and in November the Western Ukrainian People's Republic (WUPR) was formed. The meeting and proclamation of the WUPR were preceded by the creation of the Ukrainian General Military Commissariat (UGMC) in Lviv in September 1918. It began preparing for an armed uprising. This was a general wave of national upheaval that swept the people after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Ukrainian National Council, headed by Ye. Petrushevych, became the political representative body of the Ukrainian population. On the night of October 31 to November 1, 1918, the UGMC armedly established power in Lviv and the county towns of the region (November Revolution in Galicia). The institutional and state activities of the Ukrainian forces began, in particular, the creation of the Ukrainian Galician Army. Territorially, the WUPR covered Eastern Galicia, Bukovina and Transcarpathia, where a total of 6 million people lived. However, Ukrainian independence contradicted Poland's plans. The Ukrainian-Polish War of 1918–1919 began, however, it already chronologically goes beyond the First World War.

The ethnic lands of Ukraine, divided by borders, for years, turned into an arena of bloody chaos of a fratricidal war for Ukrainians. The largest offensive operation of the war took place in Western Ukrainian territories – the Battle of Galicia (August–September 1914), as well as the successful Brusilov Offensive for the Russian Empire in May–September 1916. For the countries of the Quadruple Alliance, the Gorlice-Tarnów Offensive (April–June 1915) was successful. But for Ukrainians, all this meant only death, the pain of loss, disease, hunger, looting, and repression [53].

The struggle for the democratization and Ukrainization of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, which lasted until the beginning of the 20th century, became the foundation for the emergence of the movement for its autocephaly. This process prepared Ukrainian society and the national movement for such an important step. It was at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries that a cohort of nationally conscious spiritual figures formed in Ukraine, ready to lead the movement for the independence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from the Russian Orthodox Church. Their merit lies in the upbringing of a whole galaxy of church leaders who, starting with the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–1921, actively joined the struggle for autocephaly. From the very first steps of the Ukrainian Central Rada, these figures took up the cause of creating an independent Ukrainian church. Their efforts were crowned with success in 1921, when the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church was founded in Kyiv.

Thus, the First World War, which became a watershed for many socio-political processes of the XX century and effectively ended the “long” XIX century, not only destroyed the empires that existed at that time but also encouraged many previously stateless and enslaved peoples to take action to establish their own state. It is noteworthy that the war was preceded by a rapid technological leap in the development of mankind: the construction of railways and bridges, the emergence of new types of transport and communication, the improvement of everyday life, etc. Moreover, in the context of Ukraine’s history, the first Ukrainian parties were formed, the Ukrainian national movement moved from the cultural to the political level, and so forth.

For a more clear understanding of the tragedy of the First World War for Ukrainians, let us quote the words from the memoirs of Vasyl Garba, a graduate of the Podolsk Theological Seminary:

“The enormous and human drama unfolded here (in the city of Kamianets-Podilskyi – Author) clearly in many spectra. Kamianets itself was located in the immediate rear of the front and was a kind of wide gate or checkpoint of the southwestern front. There, to the front, to the west, marching companies of soldiers went and went, sometimes bravely with songs, sometimes wearily, doomed without songs. Their red-yellow faceless columns in the distance merged with the same color of the Podolsk loam. Almost continuously, day and night, convoys and transports with ammunition, weapons, and fodder moved sluggishly there. From there to the east, in the hinterland, the Dyadkiv company trucks with the wounded rolled in an intermittent stream; sporadic spasms appeared gray-blue columns of captured Austrians, as if they were being treated with some kind of acrid disinfectant spirit. They were tired, hungry, but apparently openly happy that everything was over for them and that they were alive... Sometimes from such a foreign-enemy column a pleading, hungry voice would come: Sir, bread! Bread and butter! And not one person on this side would hear a confused shot: But these are our people! There were days when the military meat grinder at the front worked very intensively, then the rolls of wagons with the wounded stretched from Dovzhek all the way to Novy Plan. The sanitary trains did not have time to transport the wounded to the distant rear. All the corridors of the zemstvo hospital were clogged with the seriously wounded. Several times, seminarians and seniors from other boys’ schools volunteered to carry the seriously wounded, who could no longer withstand the journey on the shaking carts along the cobblestones of the city, and they were carried on stretchers to temporarily arranged dressing stations. In general, Kamianets of those times was clogged with transit hospitals, medical units and soldiers of various units, ranks and assignments. The surrounding villages were also packed with troops, near and far reserves, convoys and various auxiliary military and economic units” [54].

Ukraine’s experience during the First World War is extremely valuable for understanding modern challenges. It demonstrates how disunity and the lack of a unified strategy among Ukrainian political forces negatively affected the development of its own statehood. Despite its desire for independence, Ukraine was unable to create a stable state entity at that time, finding itself at the epicenter of geopolitical clashes between empires. It is important for modern Ukraine to take these historical lessons into account in order to effectively resist imperial encroachments and consolidate efforts to protect its own sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Conclusion

For the Ukrainian lands and Ukrainians, divided between different states for a long time, the First World War was a severe test. Ukrainian lands, primarily Western Ukrainian, for years turned into the battlefields of the largest empires of the world at that time. This entailed human losses, destruction of infrastructure, the usual socio-economic way of life, looting, famine, diseases and epidemics, abuse of prisoners and the civilian population, etc. In addition, the occupation of Western Ukrainian lands by the Russian Empire entailed repressions against Ukrainian figures, and suppression of Ukrainian scientific, cultural, religious, and educational life.

The active use of the “Ukrainian issue” on the eve and during the war by the warring parties was actually aimed not at solving the problems of Ukrainians but at economic and political gain, and demographic and cultural exhaustion of Ukrainians.

At the same time, the First World War became a kind of catalyst for the activation of the political vector of the development of the Ukrainian movement. The creation of political and military organizations of Ukrainians on both sides of the borders, their desire for the subjectivity of Ukraine testified to the level of organization of Ukrainian figures. However, they failed to unite their efforts and use the available opportunities to achieve the goal – the emergence of an independent Ukraine.

Implications and Projections

A reconstruction of the events of 1914–1918 leads to the conclusion that the collapse of empires creates not only a power vacuum, but also space for experimentation with new forms of political organization. The Ukrainian case demonstrates complex dynamics: institutions are formed faster than trust in them is established. It is this asymmetry that becomes a source of instability. The implications go beyond the historical narrative. The experience of the transition period shows that social mobilization without a clear administrative structure is prone to fragmentation. Political agency is growing, but it does not always take on manageable forms. Therefore, the key factor for stabilization is a combination of symbolic legitimacy and institutional discipline. Without this, the state remains a declarative construct.

The prognostic dimension is also ambiguous. Similar processes may be repeated in contemporary societies experiencing a crisis of multilevel governance. History does not repeat itself, but the mechanisms of crisis are similar. The sudden weakening of the center activates the periphery, but at the same time exacerbates competition between new political centers. Further research should focus on the quantitative dimension of social mobilization and the comparison of transitional regimes in different regions of Europe. It is particularly important to investigate how the rhetoric of legitimacy changes during periods of institutional breakdown. This is where the key to understanding the duration of political transformations lies.

Declarations

8.1. Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

8.2. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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