





Pilotprojekt:

"'Restorative Justice' in der Ukraine:

Die (fehlende) Aufarbeitung des Sowjetunrechts von 1991 bis heute"

Пілотний проект:

"«Відновне (реабілітаційне) правосуддя» в Україні: (відсутність) дослідження радянської несправедливості з 1991 року до сьогодні"

Pilot Project:

"Restorative Justice in Ukraine:

(Not) Coping with Soviet State Crimes from 1991 until Today"

Working Paper Nr. 4 / Публікація матеріалів № 4

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The Genesis of th Regulatory Framework for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repressions of the Soviet Punitive and Repressive Regime in Ukraine: Practical Issues and Challenges

Content
Content:
I. Introduction
II. Law "On the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repressions in Ukraine" of April 17,
1991
1. Grounds for rehabilitation
2. Limitations to rehabilitation
3. Rehabilitation process
III. The Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity as drivers of change in restorative
justice
1. Recognition of the Holodomor as genocide
2. Condemnation of the legacy of the communist regime
3. Opening access to the archives of penal and repressive bodies and defining the list of fighters for
the independence of Ukraine
4. Improvement of the rehabilitation procedure
IV. Bureaucratic complications in the process of rehabilitation in the modern stage
1. Difficulties with access to the archival institutions
2. Lack of social assistance to victims of repression
V. Summary
Literature
Author Information

I. Introduction

The rehabilitation of victims of Soviet totalitarianism can be considered in two aspects: socio-political – as the restoration of historical justice, the formation of a national policy of memory, and legal – as a legally regulated activity of the state to review and annul wrongful accusations, verdicts of judicial and extrajudicial bodies against repressed persons, the restoration of their reputation and rights. It should be noted that the repressive policy of the Soviet authorities on the territory of Ukraine is actively researched in the historical and legal works of Leonid Misinkevych. Among domestic lawyers, Lyudmyla Rozhkova, Olexandra Prots, and Elizaveta Kopeltsiv-Levytska should be mentioned.

II. Law "On the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repressions in Ukraine" of April 17, 1991

1. Grounds for rehabilitation

In the wave of the national revival of Ukrainians in the end of the 80s and in the beginning of the 90s of the 20th century, a request emerged in society concerning the restoration of a good name to Ukrainians who had suffered from the Soviet penal and repressive machine. Adopted on April 17 of 1991, the Law of the USSR "On the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repressions in Ukraine" referred to rehabilitated "persons who, for political reasons, were unreasonably convicted by the courts or subjected to repressions by extrajudicial bodies ... for committing on the territory of Ukraine actions qualified as counter-revolutionary crimes under the criminal legislation of the Ukrainian SSR prior to the entry into force of the Law of the USSR 'On Criminal Responsibility for State Crimes' dated 25 December 1958".

Rehabilitation extended to "citizens convicted of anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda, ... dissemination of known false fictions defaming the Soviet state and societal system, ... the violation of laws regarding the separation of church from state and school from church, assault on a person and rights of citizens under the pretext of performing religious rites, ... persons on whom coercive measures of a medical nature were applied for political reasons, ... exiled and expelled from the permanent place of residence and deprived of their property by the decision of state authorities and management for political, social, national, religious and other reasons". Rehabilitated persons received a right to compensation and return of property and to a certain list of privileges¹.

¹ Закон України «Про реабілітацію жертв репресій комуністичного тоталітарного режиму 1917-1991 років», https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/962-12#Text.

In order to resolve the issue of establishing facts of repressive actions by the state, staff commissions were formed at the executive committees which, in cooperation with law enforcement bodies, established the groundlessness of exile, eviction, referral to special settlements as well as facts of confiscation of property during repressions².

2. Limitations to rehabilitation

However, persons prosecuted "for treason, espionage sabotage, vandalism, terrorist attacks; crimes against humanity, punitive actions against the civilian population, murders, torturing citizens and assistance in this to the occupiers in times of the Great Patriotic War; armed invasions on the territory of Ukraine, organization of armed formations that committed murders, robberies, ... persons convicted of crimes against justice, connected with the use of repressions, even if they themselves eventually suffered repressions" did not fall within the scope of the rehabilitation³. Thus, this law had essential disadvantages: firstly, it did not take into account all categories of persons who had to be rehabilitated; secondly, article 2 defined in a vague and too broad way persons who could not be rehabilitated (even if the conviction took place out of court); and it led to limitations of the restoration of the rights of the repressed, especially of those who with weapons in their hands fought for the independence of Ukraine and against the Soviet Union⁴.

3. Rehabilitation process

Until the year of 2001, 248.710 persons were rehabilitated, whereas 117.243 persons were denied rehabilitation. Such a significant number of denials is a result of the unprofessional formulation of the law, under which a large number of victims of the communist regime were formally considered to be criminals, and the subjective approach of the employees of the prosecutor's office, most of whom remained in the communist ideological matrix of values. For instance, already in independent Ukraine, military prosecutor Oleg Atamanyuk refused to rehabilitate the repressed well-known Ukrainian figure of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, Dmytro Vitovsky, since "he was an active member

² Місінкевич, Леонід. Законодавче регулювання майнових прав реабілітованих в Україні в 90-х роках XX століття, Науковий вісник Ужгородського національного університету. Серія Право, 2014, вип. 24, Т.1, с. 62.

³ The same

 $^{^4}$ Проць, Олександра, Копельців-Левицька, Єлизавета. Правове регулювання реабілітації жертв репресій комуністичного тоталітарного режиму в Україні (1991—2023 рр.), Нове українське право, 2023, вип. 3, с.84.

of the organization which aimed at waging armed resistance to the bodies of the Soviet power to the detriment of the USSR's military power, state independence or inviolability of its territory"⁵.

Several persons persecuted in Soviet times were refused rehabilitation because they confirmed their acts and did not believe that they had innocently suffered from repression since they in fact had fought against the occupying Soviet political regime. Thus, in March 1992, during the review of the criminal case, the rebel Orest Dychkovsky confirmed the 1947 testimony and explained that he did not need any rehabilitation. During the interrogation on March 23, 1992, he told the investigator: "I was an enemy of the Soviet power in Ukraine. I led an armed struggle for the formation of an independent Ukraine. I committed the acts in question in the virtue of my beliefs and conscience, since I was raised in such a spirit by my parents. ... I totally confirm my testimony"⁶.

III. The Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity as drivers of change in restorative justice

1. Recognition of the Holodomor as genocide

The Orange Revolution of 2004 and the period of V. Yushchenko's presidency marked a return to decommunization and restoration of national history. A significant step on the way to the return of the historical truth in this period was the adoption of the Law of Ukraine "On the Holodomor of the years of 1932-1933 in Ukraine" o November 28, 2006. This law recognized the Holodomor of the years of 1932-1933 in Ukraine in accordance with the Genocide Convention of 9th December 1948 as a purposeful act of mass destruction of the people⁷.

2. Condemnation of the legacy of the communist regime

In the period from 2010 to 2013, the Ukrainian government headed by V. Yanukovych was dependent on Russian special services, and Russian narratives that whitewashed the activities of the communist regime were spread in the Ukrainian public discourse. The work on decommunization legislation continued after the victory of the Revolution of Dignity in 2014. At that time, the next step of the Ukrainian state on the way to achieving the right to the truth was to consolidate on the legislative level the condemnation of the legacy of the communist regime, which corresponded with the policy

⁵ Adamovych, Sergii. Dmytro-Yaroslav Vitovsky (1919 – 1947) and His Role in the Struggle Against the Soviet Authority. *Skhidnoievropeiskyi istorychnyi visnyk [East European Historical Bulletin]*, 2023. 26, 63.

⁶ Адамович, Сергій, Кобильник Роман, Щербін Лілія, Нереабілітована пам'ять, ч.1, Івано-Франківськ, 2017, с.85.

⁷ Закон України «Про Голодомор 1932-1933 років в Україні», https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/376-16#Text.

of the European Community, as enshrined in the resolutions of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe No. 1096 (1996) of June 27, 1996, on the elimination of the legacy of former communist totalitarian regimes, No. 1481 (2006) of January 26, 2006, on the need for international condemnation of totalitarian communist regimes, No. 1495 (2006) of April 12, 2006, on fighting against the revival of Nazi ideology, No. 1652 (2009) of January 29, 2009, in relation to monuments having controversial historical interpretations in member-states of the Council of Europe, the resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of OSCE SC (09) 3 R of June 29, 2009, on the inadmissibility of advocating totalitarian regimes, on opening historical and political archives, studying the totalitarian legacy and raising public awareness, the declaration of the European Parliament of September 23, 2008, regarding the proclamation of August 23 as the day of remembrance for the victims of Stalinism and Nazism, the resolution of the European Parliament of October 23, 2008, in memory of the Holodomor – artificial famine in Ukraine of 1932-1933, or the resolution of the European Parliament of April 2, 2009, regarding European conscience and totalitarianism. Thus, on April 9, 2009, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted the Law of Ukraine "On the Condemnation of Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes in Ukraine and the Prohibition of Propaganda of Their Symbols"8.

3. Opening access to the archives of penal and repressive bodies and defining the list of fighters for the independence of Ukraine

At the same time, on April 9, 2015, the Ukrainian Parliament adopted the Law of Ukraine "On access to the archives of the repressive bodies of the communist totalitarian regime of 1917-1991" which "guarantees the right of everyone to access the archival information of the repressive bodies". Only a person who is a victim of the repressive bodies had a right to restrict access to the archival information of the repressive bodies about themselves, and family members of the victims of the repressive bodies had the right to partially restrict access to personal information about themselves for a period of no more than 25 years. In order to provide the direct right to access to the archival information of the repressive bodies, this law also presupposed the creation of the Branch state archive of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance⁹.

The Law of Ukraine "On the legal status and commemoration of the fighters for independence in the 20th century" of April 9, 2015, recognized the participants of the struggle for the independence

років», https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/316-19#Text.

 ⁸ Закон України «Про засудження комуністичного та націонал-соціалістичного (нацистського) тоталітарних ржимів в Україні та заборону пропаганди їхньої символіки», https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/317-19#Text.
⁹ Закон України «Про доступ до архівів репресивних органів комуністичного тоталітарного режиму 1917-1991

of Ukraine in the 20th century as the main subjects of the struggle for the restoration of the state independence of Ukraine – fighters for the independence of Ukraine in the 20th century, established the legal status of those fighters, as well as defined their rights in the field of state and municipal social guarantees¹⁰.

4. Improvement of the rehabilitation procedure

The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine at the same time made amendments and additions to a number of normative legal acts, but the Law of Ukraine "On the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political repressions in Ukraine" remained unchanged. The Parliament adopted the Law of Ukraine "On amending several legislative acts of Ukraine concerning the improvement of the rehabilitation procedure of victims of repressions of the communist totalitarian regime of 1917-1991" only on March 13, 2018. As researchers correctly point out, the draft of this law was developed by the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance together with M.P.s of Ukraine "for the purpose of improving the rehabilitation procedure and restoring historical justice towards persons repressed by the criminal communist totalitarian regime" ¹¹.

The law clearly defined the categories of persons having the right to rehabilitation, clarified definitions, defined forms of repression, signs of repression and established the National Rehabilitation Commission and regional commissions in regions which had to decide on the recognition of persons as rehabilitated or victims of repressions¹². Under the new law, persons repressed by extrajudicial bodies, deported or convicted for having fought for the independence of Ukraine with weapons in their hands were subject to rehabilitation. An obvious advantage of this law is the addition of an article concerning the victims of repression. They recognized: 1) a husband or a wife married to the repressed person at the time of repression; 2) children of the repressed person, including adopted children, who at the age of 18 were left without a father, mother (adoptive parent) as a result of the repression against a parent or who were born in a place of deprivation of liberty, in exile, exile during the stay of a repressed person to work in the camps of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs in the position of a freelancer without the right to leave with attachment to the districts of the construction camp, or who were born to a mother who at the time of birth was forcibly and unjustifiably

 $^{^{10}}$ Закон України «Про правовий статус та вшанування пам'яті борців за незалежність України у XX столітті», https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/314-19#Text.

¹¹ Проць, Олександра, Копельців-Левицька, Єлизавета. Правове регулювання реабілітації жертв репресій комуністичного тоталітарного режиму в Україні (1991–2023 рр.), Нове українське право, 2023, вип. 3, с. 86.

¹² Закон України «Про внесення змін до деяких законодавчих актів України щодо удосконалення процедури реабілітації жертв репресій комуністичного тоталітарного режиму 1917-1991 років», https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2325-19#Text.

placed in a psychiatric institution by the decision of an extrajudicial or other repressive body, or underage children who had been, regardless of the duration, in special reception centres or distribution centres, special baby houses or children's houses of repressive bodies, or who had been, as a result of repression against a parent forcibly deprived of their names, including family names; 3) other persons who at the moment of repression lived together or were related by common life with a repressed person or were dependent on a repressed person¹³.

At the same time, one of the controversial provisions of the Law of March 13, , is "the possibility of rehabilitation of former employees of repressive and punitive bodies who themselves suffered repression during the years of the Great Terror"¹⁴.

IV. Bureaucratic complications in the process of rehabilitation in the modern stage

1. Difficulties with access to the archival institutions

The adoption of the laws intensified requests for information from both the repressed and their relatives, as well as representatives of the public sector who defended the right of society to the truth. Article 5 of the Law of Ukraine "On the legal status and commemoration of the fighters for independence of Ukraine in the 20th century" prescribes that the state encourages and supports activities of non-governmental institutions and organizations which carry out research and educational work on the study of the history of the struggle and fighters for independence of Ukraine in the 20th century¹⁵.

However, difficulties remained in the field of access to the archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which was explained in response letters to the requests of the regional commissions on rehabilitation as an impossibility to work with documents of punitive and repressive bodies with a formal note that the departmental archive was not transferred to the National Police¹⁶. Apart from that, on May 29, 2018, in response to the request of the public organization "Postupovyy Hurt Frankivtsiv", the Department for Regime and Official Activities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine reported that there were restrictions on working with archival files because "documents of the ac-

¹³ Закон України «Про внесення змін до деяких законодавчих актів України щодо удосконалення процедури реабілітації жертв репресій комуністичного тоталітарного режиму 1917-1991 років», https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2325-19#Text.

¹⁴ Рожкова, Людмила. Законодавче регулювання процесу реабілітації жертв політичних репресій тоталітарного режиму, Приватне та публічне право, 2018, № 2, с.23.

¹⁵ Закон України «Про правовий статус та вшанування пам'яті борців за незалежність України у XX столітті», https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/314-19#Text.

¹⁶ Волошин, Тарас. Реабілітація: відновити справедливість, https://gk-press.if.ua/reabilitatsiya-vidnovyty-spravedlyvist/.

counting files of forcibly evicted persons may contain information that constitutes a state secret"¹⁷. That is, the employees of the Ministry retained sentiments towards the Soviet occupation regime which can probably explain the denial of access to archival materials.

2. Lack of social assistance to victims of repression

However, although Resolution No. 48 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of June 24, 1991, defined compensations and benefits for rehabilitated persons, the law-maker did not develop a sub-legal regulatory framework for the implementation of changes in the legislation of 2018: no definition was given of the state bodies which would be responsible for persons who received the status of "victims" of political repression and the list of benefits for them. In connection with this, the "victims" of political repressions could count on some payments or other support only at the initiative of local self-government bodies. O. Prots and E. Kopeltsiv-Levytska believe that the fact that the social assistance measures for rehabilitated persons were not provided to the victims of repressions may be considered as an act of discrimination, prohibited by the Constitution and legislation of Ukraine¹⁸.

Neither was the form of the paper of the identity of the victim of political repression worked out, nor was the institution defined that was to be responsible for issuing such documents. Moreover, the work of the regional commissions on rehabilitation was hardly supported organizationally and materially by the regional state administrations.

On May 29, 2023, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted the Law of Ukraine "On making amendments to the laws of Ukraine 'On pensions for special services to Ukraine' and 'On the rehabilitation of victims of the repressions of the communist totalitarian regime of 1917-1991' concerning fighters for independence of Ukraine in the 20th century and some other persons"¹⁹. This new legislation introduced a pension supplement for special services to Ukraine for the fighters for independence of Ukraine in the 20th century who during the communist totalitarian regime had been subject to repressions for political or religious reasons in the form of deprivation of liberty (imprisonment) or

¹⁷ Деркевич Н. Архів поліції — за сімома замками. URL: https://gk-press.if.ua/arhiv-politsiyi-za-simoma-zamkamy/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR3xxZDFdGVd9URx1eUmF460EUDtwZTpcR3XbpRG6BcLvbvyD6 VXrrIC9Tw aem AUT5a35fcNPEjInLuP al3dBlsuoa5-

UGody3oVtssMZWz8kWuqeyh3U5LF6AjgECfWQAkKfkC1cSL1A-hBvZf3K (перегляд 30.04.2024).

¹⁸ Проць, Олександра, Копельців-Левицька, Єлизавета. Правове регулювання реабілітації жертв репресій комуністичного тоталітарного режиму в Україні (1991–2023 рр.), Нове українське право, 2023, вип. 3, с. 88.

¹⁹ Закон України «Про внесення змін до законів України "Про реабілітацію жертв репресій комуністичного тоталітарного режиму 1917-1991 років" та "Про пенсії за особливі заслуги перед Україною" стосовно борців за незалежність України у XX столітті та деяких інших осіб», https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3113-20#Text.

forced unjustified placement of a healthy person in a psychiatric institution or were rehabilitated in accordance with the procedure established by law²⁰.

V. Summary

Thus, in Ukraine, the rehabilitation process of victims of repression of the Soviet totalitarian regime in fact commenced only as a result of the wave of national uplift and after the adoption of the corresponding law and a number of by-laws in 1991. At the same time, the Law of Ukraine "On the rehabilitation of victims of political repression in Ukraine" was marked by substantial disadvantages, in particular, it did not take into account all categories of persons who suffered from repression during the USSR and were subject to rehabilitation. A significant step on the way to the rehabilitation of victims of Soviet persecution and establishment of the historical truth was the adoption of the Law of Ukraine "On the Holodomor of 1932-1933 in Ukraine" on November 28, 2006, which recognized the Holodomor of 1932-1933 in Ukraine as an act of genocide.

In 2015, after the Revolution of Dignity, a legislative "de-communization package" was passed, which condemned the communist regime, provided access to archives of the punitive and repressive bodies and restored historical justice concerning fighters for independence of Ukraine in the 20th century. In 2018, legislative modifications regarding the regulatory framework for rehabilitation were added, creating the categories of persons having the right to rehabilitation, defining the forms and signs of repression, introducing the status of a "victim" and establishing the National and regional rehabilitation commissions in order to improve the procedures of restorative justice.

The formation of a legal framework in Ukraine for the rehabilitation of victims of communist political repressions and the condemnation of the legacy of the communist totalitarian regime largely depended on the political orientation of the Ukrainian authorities. Full-fledged rejection of the communist legacy was slowed down by means of hybrid pressure by the Russian Federation, which considers the USSR as a part of its colonial influence in Ukraine and refuses to recognize the role of the empire in punitive and repressive actions during the existence of the Soviet Union.

²⁰ Верховна Рада України встановила надбавку до пенсії борцям за незалежність України у XX столітті, які за часів комуністичного тоталітарного режиму зазнали репресій, https://www.rada.gov.ua/news/razom/237005.html.

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- "Restorative Justice" in der Ukraine / «Відновне (реабілітаційне) правосуддя» в Україні / Restorative Justice in Ukraine Working Paper: The Genesis of the Regulatory Framework for the Rehabilitation of Victims in Ukraine https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/317-19#Text.
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"Restorative Justice" in der Ukraine / «Відновне (реабілітаційне) правосуддя» в Україні / Restorative Justice in Ukraine Working Paper: The Genesis of the Regulatory Framework for the Rehabilitation of Victims in Ukraine

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