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On the Crossroads of History

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Propositions

Nicolaas A. Kraft van Ermel

1. Societies reinvent their memories and historical narratives after major (geo)political reconfigurations. It is therefore only logical that European interpretations of history are currently changing.
2. Western Europe, Eastern Europe and Russia have all interpreted the past according to problematic exclusive paradigms and insufficient explanations of twentieth century history. A thorough reinterpretation of history is therefore necessary. As the Second World War, the Holocaust and communist rule are central to European twentieth-century history such a revision should start with rethinking their meaning.
3. Contrary to Russian nationalist claims, Ukraine is a nation with its own history, language and culture. However, contrary to Ukrainian nationalist claims, both Russian culture and communist rule belong to the nation's foundations.
4. The present-day Ukrainian state is a Soviet construct: its borders, state language, nomenclature and internal structure are the product of Soviet policies.
5. The debate on whether the artificial 1932-1933 famine in Ukraine was a genocide of the Ukrainian nation is futile. By focusing on minute legalistic arguments, many interesting and necessary questions about the famine remain unasked. All political struggle about the issue does little to give the long-forgotten victims a worthy place in (Ukrainian) history.

6. Since all history is political, it is impossible to argue that politicians should refrain from history. However, legislating history creates more problems than it solves. The Ukrainian Holodomor law (2006) and subsequent Holodomor-criminalization bills, and the 2015 decommunization laws demonstrate this. In a debate on history, almost all positions should be possible. Only if such positions incite hatred against certain groups and/or individuals, or create other important social problems they should be legislated against, but only by *generic* legal provisions (e.g. against incitement of hatred etc.).
7. Describing Ukraine's contemporary problems as post-colonial is inaccurate, as the territory of Ukraine was an integral part of the many imperial projects that claimed it throughout history.
8. If the logic of Kremlin propaganda is applied to the laws of physics the universe would be a strange place as the force of gravity would simultaneously a) attract, b) repel, c) not exist and d) be an elaborate American hoax to corrupt Russia.
9. Vodka probably is the most famous word of Slavic origin; nevertheless, the far less well known Kvas is a greater gift to humanity.