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RUSCISM AS A NEW VERSION OF TOTALITARIANISM

This paper is devoted to clarifying the essence of ruscism as a phenomenon of modern socio-political reality. It is noted that the concept of ruscism appeared in public and scientific circulation as a result of the formation of Putin's regime in Russia, and its spread is connected with the beginning of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war. Although this concept has already received its interpretations in the publications of a number of analysts, there is still no complete conceptual understanding of it. The author believes that the conceptual understanding of ruscism should be carried out within the framework of totalitarian studies, since it is a new version of totalitarianism. The idea of ruscism as a simple imitation of fascism and Nazism is refuted. The emphasis is placed on his historical Russian roots.

Attention is drawn to the facts that, firstly, Russian statehood originates in the Golden Horde, from which it inherited the despotic character of government and aggressive foreign policy; secondly, Russia has never had long periods of democratic rule in the course of its historical development; thirdly, the first totalitarian regime in the modern world arose precisely in Russia; fourthly, under Stalin, it acquired the greatest totalitarian quality in history. The author emphasizes that ruscism cannot be considered a simple resuscitation of Stalinism, because it arose in the new historical conditions of the development of both Russia and its international environment, which determined its peculiarities.

The peculiarities of ruscism as a new version of totalitarianism are that: the creation of a totalitarian party, the formation of a broad totalitarian movement, and the development of a totalitarian doctrine took place already after Putin acquired state power; the Russian political system is formally multi-party; the control of the political regime over the functioning of the economy is carried out not so much by formal state institutions as by Putin's informal clan.

Keywords: *ruscism (rashism), totalitarianism, fascism, Nazism, Bolshevism, Stalinism, Russia.*

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Ruscism is a relatively new concept in the modern political lexicon. Its appearance is connected with the formation of the Putin's regime in Russia and the Russian military aggressions. However, its global spread is due to the beginning of a large-scale war of Russia

to destroy Ukraine, which attracted the attention of many publicists, scientists, public and political figures in this phenomenon. An article by Yale University history professor Timothy Snyder, published in the New York Times, played a major role in the spread of this term (Snyder 2022).

The relevance of the study of ruscism is due to the fact that the policy and practice of the political regime of modern Russia destroys the

existing world order based on international law, and threatens a new world war that can destroy all mankind.

The concept of ruscism has already received its interpretations in the publications of a number of analysts. Ostep Kryvdyk, Head of the Ukraine and the World Department at the Analytical Center of the Ukrainian Catholic University, gave the following definition: «Ruscism is the ideology and practice of the ruling regime of the Russian Federation, based on the idea of the supremacy of 'Russian compatriots', their 'special civilization mission', anti-democracy and neo-colonialism of the Soviet-imperial type, the use of Orthodoxy as a moral doctrine, and geo-economics' instruments, energy carriers first of all» (Кривдик 2010). The publicist Oleksandr Kostenko interprets ruscism as a «kind of sociopathy» based on an illusory ideology that «justifies the admissibility of any arbitrariness for the sake of misunderstanding the interests of Russian society» (Костенко 2014). The writer Igor Garin associates ruscism with the Putin regime, which is a «criminal corporation that systematically violates the constitution and the law in its own narrow and mercantile interests» (Гарин 2015). It is worth noting that each of these definitions focuses on certain characteristics such a phenomenon as ruscism, but there is no holistic conceptual understanding of it yet. In this paper, I set the goals of interpreting ruscism as a new version of totalitarianism, clarifying its historical origins and specific peculiarities.

Is Ruscism Fascism or Nazism? The term «ruscism» arose from a combination of two words: Russia (in its English transcription) and fascism¹. That is, ruscism is Russian fascism in lexically. The majority of analysts who touched on the problem of ruscism emphasize the similarity of the policy and practice of modern Russia with the policy and practice of states that are generalized as fascist.

However, fascism is a rather broad concept that has several interpretations. In communist sociology, fascism is interpreted as an extreme form of anti-communism and a «terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary and most aggressive circles of the monopoly bourgeoisie» (Шевель, Мазур 1971: 528). In Western sociology, a fascism is customary to define as an extreme form of autocracy based on

militaristic nationalism, contempt for electoral democracy and political and cultural liberalism, a belief in natural social hierarchy and the rule of elites, and the desire to create a «people's community», in which individual interests would be subordinated to the good of the nation (Soucy 2002).

Most researchers of this phenomenon believe that fascism has two main forms – social fascism and Nazism. A classic example of social fascism is the ideology and practice of the Mussolini's regime in Italy², while Nazism is usually associated with the ideology and practice of the Hitler's regime in Germany. Social fascism and Nazism have significant differences in ideology and practice, despite the presence of common fundamental features, such as the rigid dictatorial nature of the political regime, the destruction of civil society structures and the nationalization of society, the abolition of civil liberties and political rights, anti-liberalism, nationalism and militarism.

The main difference between social fascism and Nazism in the field of ideology lies in the interpretation of nation's concept. In the ideology of social fascism, the nation is interpreted as a community of past, present and future generations forming the state, and the state itself is defined as the legal form of the nation's existence (Mussolini 1932). Instead, Nazi ideology, which is based on racial theory, interprets the nation as a community of same blood people (Родионов 2009). In the ideology of social fascism, the enemies of the nation are defined according to political criteria – they include opponents of the fascist movement and the fascist state. In Nazi ideology, the enemies of the nation, in addition to political opponents, also include «inferior peoples», some of which must be completely destroyed, and others partially, turning those who remain into their slaves. An essential sacrilege also consists in defining the «ultimate goal» of the fascist and Nazi movements. Such a goal is the return of all the territories of one's state, which were previously lost for some reason in social fascism. The Italian fascists had the goal of creating a Mediterranean empire, i.e. returning Italy to the borders of Great Rome. The goal of German Nazism was to establish the worldwide domination of the Aryan race. In the realm of practical politics, both were lured by large-scale repression, the killing of their opponents, and the creation of concentration camps for

¹ This term is written as «rashism» in some English-language publications by Ukrainian and Russian authors.

² The term «fascism» actually originated in Italy. Mussolini's regime was officially called «fascist» rule.

civilians. However, the «death camps» in which the total extermination of prisoners was carried out were characteristic only of Nazism. Nazism was also characterized by tougher and unconventional means of waging aggression wars and a more inhumane attitude towards the population of the occupied territories.

The analysts of ruscism do not have a single opinion regarding the identification of this phenomenon either more as social fascism or more as Nazism. The association of ruscism with Nazism was strengthened by Russia's large-scale war against Ukraine, during which mass murders of the civilian population of the occupied territories were carried out and barbaric methods of military operations were used (Варницький 2022). However, the ruscism was more associated with social fascism in studies of the previous period. Andrey Zubov, a famous Russian historian, claimed that modern Russia resembles the «Italian regime of the Mussolini era» (Васильєв 2015). «Russia ... resembles Mussolini's Italy or Franco's Spain more than it does the Third Reich», the authoritative Russian political scientist Vladyslav Inozemtsev considered (Inozemtsev 2017). "Putin's regime resembles Mussolini's fascism", Russian theologian Kirill Govorun reflected (Говорун 2022). The identification of ruscism as social (Italian or Spanish) fascism was caused not so much by the fact the anti-human nature of Putin's regime was not yet sufficiently revealed that in the pre-war period, but by its ideological and economic foundations.

The main postulate of Putin's regime in the ideological sphere is the proclamation of the «creation of a Russian world». However, the adjective «Russian» does not appear here as an ethno-racial characteristic of the nation, but as a socio-political one. The Russian nation is interpreted as a totality of people who form the Russian state, regardless of their ethnic and racial affiliation. Although the Russian ethnos is declared to be the fundamental element of the Russian nation, belonging to it is determined not by the criterion of blood, but by cultural characteristics (language, religion, traditions). In this aspect, the idea of creating a Russian world resonates with the Italian fascists' idea of regeneration the Pax Romana.

The economic system of modern Russia is also more reminiscent of the Italian corporate model of the Mussolini era or the Spanish economic model of the Falangist dictatorship than the «organic economy» of the Third Reich in the degree of its submission to the state and government regulation. It does not have such

strict state control over the activities of private enterprises, as was the case in Nazi Germany, where Wirtschaftsführer strictly controlled the owner of enterprise.

Ruscism as an original Russian phenomenon. The discussion about what ruscism is will be scholastic if we ignore its genetic roots. In this context, we must agree with the opinion by the Ukrainian historian and politician Oleksandr Sych that it is «wrong to compare ruscism with the already known phenomena of fascism or Nazism» (Скоростецький 2022). Fascism and Nazism are varieties of a more general socio-political phenomenon defined as totalitarianism. Although the concept of totalitarianism belongs to the main ideologist of Italian fascism Giovanni Gentile, but the first totalitarian system in the world did not originate in Italy, but in Russia. The totalitarian system began to take shape immediately after the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. It had all the characteristics that were later identified as classic signs of totalitarianism by Karl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski: a single mass party led by a charismatic leader and a cult of his personality; an official ideology that must be shared by all population; a monopoly on mass media; a monopoly on means of armed struggle; a terrorist police control of public behavior; a centralized control and management of the economy (Friedrich & Brzezinski 1965: 15-27). When the fascist movement was gaining strength in Italy and the Nazi movement was emerging in Germany, they took the Bolshevik system in Russia as a model of own political organization. The political police as a tool for realizing the goals of the ruling party originated in Bolshevik Russia, not in Fascist Italy or Nazi Germany. Back in Lenin's time, concentration camps for civilians who were considered enemies of the Bolshevik regime were created in Russia.

Moreover, the degree of totalitarianization in Russia under Stalin was higher than in fascist Italy and, even, in Nazi Germany. The English sociologist Stanislaw Andreski, who holds the opinion that not all totalitarian regimes had the same degree of totalitarianism, believed that Mussolini's fascist regime was only 55% totalitarian, Hitler's Nazi regime was 85% totalitarian at the beginning of Second World War and was 95% one at its end, while Stalin's regime was almost one hundred percents' totalitarianism (Andreski 1984: 44). Such a degree of nationalization of the economy and complete abolition of the institution of private property was not found in any of the fascist

countries, including Nazi Germany. The scale of Stalin's political repressions (especially in 1937) far exceeded fascist ones. Even Hitler's holocaust, as a result of which 6 million Jews were destroyed, was preceded by Stalin's Holodomor, which took the lives of 8.7 million people in a more barbaric way³ (Wolowyna 2021).

The Bolshevik regime was characterized by an imperialist foreign policy from the very beginning of its existence. It managed to restore the vast majority of the territory of the Russian Empire through military aggression against the young nation-states that arose on the ruins of Tsarist Russia in Ukraine, Belarus, Transcaucasia, and Central Asia in 1918-21. In order to reduce the national resistance of the peoples of the newly annexed territories, the new version of the Russian Empire was given the name of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (SU). The Soviet republics were declared to be sovereign states, but they were strictly governed from Moscow in reality. At the beginning of the Second World War, Stalin implemented a new series of acts not only to restore the territorial space of the Russian Empire, but also to expand it. Western Ukraine and Western Belarus (as a result of aggression against Poland in September 1939), 9% of the territory of Finland (as a result of aggression in November 1939 – March 1940), Bessarabia (due to an ultimatum to Romania in June-July 1940), Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia (as a result of its occupation in August 1940) were included in the SU.⁴

Russian Communism set world domination as its ultimate goal like German Nazism. However, the Russian communists set this goal earlier and skillfully disguised it with the idea of a world socialist revolution. Hitler and Stalin tried to agree on the division of Europe before and at the beginning of Second World War, but the mutual exclusivity of their ultimate goals and distrust of each other led to the German-Soviet War of 1941-45. During this war, Stalin unexpectedly became an ally of the Western democracies. The joint victory over the Nazi-militarist bloc allowed Stalin not only to legitimize the annexations of 1939-40 and

annex new territories,⁵ but to make the states of Central-Eastern Europe his satellites. Attempts to further expand their geopolitical space led to the Cold War between the SU and the Western democracies, which lasted four decades and which it lost. The defeat in the Cold War led to the avalanche collapse of the communist regimes, the disintegration of the SU and the formation of 15 independent states on its ruins, one of which was the Russian Federation. But it soon returned to the totalitarian quality (Романюк 2014).

Thus, the above arguments indicate that ruscism is a descendant of Russian communism rather than fascism and Nazism, although their influence on the practice of the Putin's regime cannot be denied. The question arises, why the first totalitarian regime in the world arose in Russia? The answer to this question involves clarifying the origins of the Russian state and the peculiarities of its development.

The origins of Russian statehood and its historical development. Karl Marx, analyzing the origin and essence of the Russian state, wrote: «The bloody mire of Mongolian slavery, not the rude glory of the Norman epoch, forms the cradle of Muscovy, and modern Russia is but a metamorphosis of Muscovy» (Marx 2010:77). Indeed, Russian statehood does not originate from Kyivan Rus, contrary to the claims of Russian historiography, but from Muscovy, the emergence of which was a consequence of the Mongol-Tatar invasion. Muscovy began to form after the Moscow prince Ivan Kalita received from the khan of the Golden Horde Özbek the approval for «the great reign» over all Horde-controlled lands of the former Kyivan Rus in 1328⁶. Muscovy, being a protectorate of the Golden Horde, inherited its despotic rule and brought up the slavish obedience of its population, which did not undergo significant changes even after it gained independence in 1462. It declared itself a descendant of Kyivan Rus and changed its name to Russia, wanting to get rid of its Horde

³ Although the majority of the murdered population consisted of ethnic Ukrainians and Kazakhs, Stalin's Holodomor was carried out not according to ethnicity, but to the level of resistance the Bolshevik regime.

⁴ Territories that were not part of the Russian Empire (Galicia, Bukovina, and the Memel region) were annexed in 1939-40.

⁵ Half of East Prussia (taken from Germany), four islands of the Kuril Range (taken from Japan) and Transcarpathian region (ceded by Czechoslovakia) were annexed to the SU after Second World War. These territories never belonged to the Russian Empire before. Japan still considers the islands taken from it to be its original lands.

⁶ The essence of the «great reign» was that the khans of the Golden Horde trusted to collect tribute for them from the population of this territory by the Moscow princes.

roots. However, attempts to civilize Russia, which were repeatedly made by its tsars, either did not affect the despotic essence of state ruling, or led only to some of its softening, which was inevitably followed by the restoration of its rigidity. Russia's foreign policy was closely connected with its internal development. It began with the collection of the «lands of Rus» by Moscow princes, and transformed eventually into large-scale captures of other territories both in the East and in the West. Tsar Peter I proclaimed Russia an empire in 1721. The Russian Empire became one of the largest states in the world at the end of its existence, occupying an area of 22.8 million sq. km. (Shvili 2021).

Heavy defeats on the fronts of the First World War and a sharp deterioration of the social and economic situation led to the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917. However, the short period of democratization of Russia was soon replaced by the Bolshevik dictatorship. Bolshevism was a radical version of Marxism by its origin, which arose in the conditions of Russian reality and culture. The dictatorship of the proletariat was interpreted in it as the dictatorship of the leaders of the Communist Party; the socialization of production – as the rigid subjugation of the entire economy to the state, instead of creating an «association of free producers»; the destruction of the exploiting classes – as terror against «class enemies» and all opponents of the new political regime; the world socialist revolution – as armed aggression against other countries, with the goal of liberating their peoples from capitalist slavery. The implementation of Bolshevik ideas in practice led to the emergence of a modern form of despotism, which was called totalitarianism. The Soviet totalitarian system existed for three quarters of a century. Its disintegration and demise were caused by two main factors. The objective factor was visualized in the inability of the system, in which there is no freedom, to solve the tasks of modern social development. The subjective factor consisted in the fact that the Soviet bureaucracy, which completely disposed of the «socialized» means of production and had great social privileges, could not legally pass them on to their descendants.

An electoral democracy and a presidential-parliamentary system of government were introduced, an institution of private property and free enterprise were restored, and a wide range of political rights and civil liberties were declared in Russia after the demise of communist totalitarianism and the collapse of

the SU. However, the great social difficulties caused by large-scale systemic transformations and the bureaucratic nature of the privatization of state property caused an increase in nostalgia for a relatively prosperous past among the Russian population. In addition, Russia remained a multinational state, where the national-administrative entities began to strive for greater autonomy, and even complete independence. Chechnya's attempts to secede from Russia caused a war that destabilized the political situation in the country and led to the growth of Russian nationalism and chauvinism. The collapse of the SU, which was perceived as primarily a Russian state by Russian people, also had a negative impact on their consciousness, giving birth to a revanchist trend. It was against the background of these trends that Vladimir Putin, a KGB offspring, won the presidency in 2000. The Russian political system began again to acquire a totalitarian character under the Putin's rule.

Thus, ruscism is not only a consequence of the previous functioning of the communist regime, but the result of the entire historical development of Russian statehood, which, according to the Russian historian Yuri Pivovarov, is a «movement from point A to point ... A» (Пивоваров 2006). Russia has never had long periods of free development, it lacks democratic traditions, and the consciousness of its people has been raised for centuries on the basis of paternalism, chauvinism and imperialism.

The differences between ruscism and classical totalitarianism. In the same way that ruscism is not a simple tracing of fascism or Nazism; it is not a restoration of Stalinism. Ruscism is an original phenomenon that differs from those models of totalitarianism that are considered classical.

The first difference is related to its formation. Putin's coming to power was not preceded by the creation of a totalitarian party, the formation of a broad totalitarian movement, and the development of a totalitarian doctrine. The «United Russia» party, the «patriotic» movement and the «Russian World» doctrine were created after that.

The second difference lies in the formal existence of a multiparty system. Although «United Russia» is the ruling party, its status is not legally established. Some other parties are also represented in the federal and regional legislative assemblies, but they are satellites of «United Russia». The political system of modern Russia resembles the systems that used to exist in a number of communist states in

Eastern Europe and today exist in communist China in this aspect. However, the statutes of Russian satellite parties do not state that they operate under the leadership of the ruling party. The elections are held regularly, but their results are falsified. The opposition parties have been completely pushed out of the political system and are subjected to increasingly harsh persecution, although formally they still exist.

The third difference concerns the economy. In addition to the public sector, the private sector is also formally preserved in Russian economic system. However, commanding heights both in the public sector and in the private sector are occupied by «Putin's clan», which consists of his personal friends and relatives, former colleagues in the KGB and the St. Petersburg City Hall. The big business, the owners of which tried to oppose of Putin's regime, was completely destroyed. The medium and small businesses are tightly controlled by the local bureaucracy. Thus, the control of the political regime over the functioning of the economy is carried out not so much by formal state institutions, as in classical totalitarianism, but by informal clan structures. This peculiarity gave birth to an unprecedented degree of corruption.

Conclusion. Ruscism is essentially a new version of totalitarianism. Totalitarianism as a social phenomenon and type of political system arose precisely in Russia, as a result of the Bolshevik coup of 1917. The emergence of totalitarianism was determined by the origin and historical development of Russian statehood. Fascism and Nazism then only imitated the main features of the system created by the Russian communists.

The concept of ruscism arose to define the nature of Putin's criminal regime in Russia. Although this regime arose on Russian historical soil, analysts began to associate its practice more with fascism and Nazism than with Bolshevism and Stalinism. Attempts to identify ruscism as fascism or Nazism are due to the fact that Fascist and Nazi crimes against humanity received the great disgraceful mark throughout the world, while the crimes of Russian Communism did not yet.

At the same time, ruscism cannot be considered a simple resuscitation of Stalinism, because it arose in the new historical conditions of the development of both Russia and its international environment. The political and economic dominance of democracies in the modern world caused to the long-term masking of the inner essence of Putin's regime by «sovereign democracy» and his foreign policy

intentions by concern for the oppressed state of «compatriots» in other countries. The sluggish response of Western democracies to the threat posed by the Putin's regime explained by Russia's large nuclear arsenal. However, Putin crossed the "red lines" by making claims for a new division of the world (similar to Potsdam) and launching a large-scale war against Ukraine. Russia's relations with the West turned into a new cold-hot war. Russia has no chance of winning this war. The defeat of Russia in this war will lead not only to the destruction of Putin's totalitarian regime, but its consequence may be the collapse of the Russian state.

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РАШИЗМ ЯК НОВА ВЕРСІЯ ТОТАЛІТАРИЗМУ

З'ясовується сутність рашизму як феномена сучасної соціально-політичної реальності. Відмічається, що поняття рашизму з'явилося в публічному та науковому обігу внаслідок становлення в Росії режиму Володимира Путіна, а його поширення пов'язано з початком повномасштабної російсько-української війни. Хоча це поняття вже одержало свої інтерпретування в публікаціях низки аналітиків, проте цілісного концептуального його осмислення поки що немає. Автор вважає, що концептуальне осмислення рашизму має здійснюватися в межах тоталітарних студій, оскільки той являє собою нову версію тоталітаризму. Спростовується думка про те, що рашизм є простим наслідуванням фашизму та нацизму. Наголошується на його історичних російських коренях.

Звертається увага не те, що, по-перше, російська державність бере початок в Золотій Орді, від якої вона спадкувала деспотичний характер державного правління та загарбницьку зовнішню політику; по-друге, у процесі свого історичного розвитку Росія ніколи не мала тривалих періодів демократичного правління; по-третє, першій у сучасному світі тоталітарний режим виник саме в Росії; по-четверте, за Сталіна він набув найбільшої в історії тоталітарної якості. Автор наголошує, що рашизм не можна вважати простою реанімацією сталінізму, бо він виник в нових історичних умовах розвитку як Росії, так і її міжнародного оточення, що зумовило його особливості.

Особливості рашизму як нової версії тоталітаризму полягають в тім, що: створення тоталітарної партії, формування широкого тоталітарного руху та розробка тоталітарної доктрини відбулися вже після того як Путін набув державну владу; російська політична система формально має багатопартійний характер; контроль політичного режиму за функціонуванням економіки

здійснюється не стільки формальними державними інститутами, скільки неформальним путінським кланом.

Ключові слова: *рашизм, тоталітаризм, фашизм, нацизм, більшовизм, сталінізм, Росія.*

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