

In my view, President Zelensky is pursuing a deliberate policy toward Poland. Below I present a thesis which, in my opinion, is the only logical explanation for why the Ukrainian authorities have chosen a confrontational approach toward Poland and the Polish people.

During the Second World War, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) killed between 80,000 and 120,000 Polish civilians. Thousands of Ukrainian nationalists collaborated with Nazi Germany, murdering Poles, Jews, and also Ukrainians who rejected the criminal Nazi ideology promoted by Stepan Bandera and his followers. The UPA and other nationalist organizations were responsible for thousands of murders, rapes, and the burning of homes, estates, entire villages, and even city districts (for example, during the liquidation of the Stanisławów Ghetto). These are historical facts. Unfortunately, many Ukrainians – especially in eastern Ukraine – know little or nothing about them. Ukraine’s political elite and highest authorities, however, certainly do.

Why, then, has President Zelensky – as well as virtually every Ukrainian president before him – not only refused to acknowledge these crimes but also taken actions that increasingly provoke Poland and offend the Polish people? There is no doubt that President Zelensky is a courageous and intelligent leader. He has already secured his place in history. His actions during the opening days of Russia’s full-scale invasion inspired the overwhelming majority of Ukrainians to defend their homeland. These are also facts.

So why has President Zelensky chosen a collision course with the country and the nation that unquestionably did more than any other to help Ukraine after the Russian invasion? Poland’s ambassador was the only ambassador who never left Kyiv. Poland’s Prime Minister was the first foreign leader to travel to Kyiv during the full-scale war. In fact, two Polish leaders made that journey: the serving Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, and former Prime Minister Jarosław Kaczyński. Millions of Poles became involved in helping Ukraine, and countless Polish families opened their homes to complete strangers fleeing the war.

Why, then, are President Zelensky and the Ukrainian authorities now taking actions that not only offend Poles but also wound their historical memory? To me, there is only one logical answer. The Ukrainian government is already thinking about the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Ukraine had nearly 50 million inhabitants. Today, it is estimated that only 25-28 million people remain in the country. Rebuilding Ukraine will require Ukrainians to

return home.

Poland currently hosts approximately 1.5 to 1.8 million Ukrainians. Germany, despite having more than twice Poland's population, hosts roughly 1.4 to 1.5 million. Romania has around 200,000 to 250,000 Ukrainians, while Hungary has between 70,000 and 90,000. Poland hosts the largest Ukrainian community. Moreover, Ukrainians have integrated remarkably well into Polish society. Children attending Polish schools speak like their Polish classmates, look no different, and share the same interests.

The relationship between Warsaw and Kyiv reflects a certain historical *déjà vu*. During the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, much of the Ruthenian nobility living in what is now Ukraine gradually became Polonized. Great noble families such as the Czartoryskis, Ostrogskis, Sanguszkos, Szeptyckis, Tyszkiewicz, and many others originated from the lands of present-day Ukraine. In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, people often said: *gente Rutheni, natione Poloni* – Ruthenian by origin, Polish by nation. A similar process of cultural assimilation will almost certainly affect many Ukrainian children who were forced by Russia's war to seek refuge in Poland.

The Ukrainian authorities have apparently concluded that, to limit this process, however harsh it may sound, anti-Ukrainian sentiment should be encouraged within Polish society. If this happens, more Ukrainians may decide to return home after the war. At the very least, Ukrainian children growing up in Poland would be constantly reminded by their peers that they are Ukrainians rather than becoming fully assimilated. In my opinion, this is precisely what the current actions of the Ukrainian authorities are intended to achieve: to awaken hostility toward Ukrainians among Poles, making assimilation as difficult as possible. Unfortunately, President Zelensky appears to have concluded that, from the perspective of the Ukrainian state, this is a rational policy.

History offers a similar example. The Zionist movement, whose objective was the creation of the State of Israel, needed Jews who would settle and build that future state. Poland, home to the world's largest Jewish community at the time, naturally became a primary target of efforts encouraging Jewish emigration to Palestine. To achieve this goal, Poland was portrayed as a hostile country, every manifestation of antisemitism was emphasized and amplified, and – according to some historical interpretations – at times even deliberately provoked. Again, from the perspective of the Zionist movement, such actions were considered rational because the

objective was to encourage emigration to Palestine and the building of Israel. The current policy of the Ukrainian government appears similar in nature. Its objective is to persuade Ukrainians living abroad to return and rebuild Ukraine.

Of course, it is in Poland's national interest for Ukraine to remain sovereign, secure, and prosperous. At the same time, given Poland's severe demographic challenges, the arrival of nearly two million young and hardworking Ukrainians has been highly beneficial for the Polish economy. They filled much of the labor shortage created when approximately two million Poles emigrated after Poland joined the European Union. The departure of all these Ukrainians would undoubtedly be painful for Poland's economy. Yet reviving the demons of history, as President Zelensky and the Ukrainian political establishment are doing today, is the worst possible way to encourage Ukrainians to return home. Such a policy would not only destroy the prospects for good-neighborly relations between Poland and Ukraine but would also undermine the long-term geopolitical security of Central and Eastern Europe. Strong economic and cultural ties between Poland and Ukraine—the two largest countries in the region—constitute a natural counterbalance to Russian influence.

Ukraine should become a leading member of the Three Seas Initiative, the community of nations stretching between the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black Seas. According to the Three Seas Business Council, the combined economies of these countries already constitute the world's seventh-largest economic bloc. The current crisis between Warsaw and Kyiv is, in my opinion, the result of misguided policies pursued by the Ukrainian government. I fully understand that the government in Kyiv is operating under enormous pressure. I know that Ukrainians are sacrificing their lives every day while courageously resisting Russian imperialism.

Nevertheless, I am convinced that Ukraine's current policy toward Poland is fundamentally mistaken and cannot be justified by any short-term political advantage – even if it succeeds in bringing several hundred thousand Ukrainians back to their homeland. In the long run, such a policy would be as damaging to Ukraine as the Treaty of Pereyaslav was, when Bohdan Khmelnytsky accepted the suzerainty of the Romanov Tsar. If President Zelensky truly seeks integration with the West and the construction of a prosperous Ukraine, he must first stop fostering hostility among the Polish people.

The governments of Poland and Ukraine should immediately sit down together – without television cameras or social media – and work out a solution to this difficult situation. For the past five centuries, conflict between Kyiv and Warsaw has served

only one beneficiary: the rulers in Moscow.

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