



RUSSIAN AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE

COURSEBOOK

Introduction

The subject of the course is to explain the nature of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, its causes, narratives describing it, and in particular the accompanying disinformation.

The aim of the course is to increase students' awareness of the threats arising from neo-imperialism and neo-colonialism.

The program of the course is addressed to students from the Middle East, in particular Iraq, including the Kurdistan region.

The program of the course includes 4 classes of 45 minutes, including 2 classes for the lecture and 2 classes for the seminar.

Teaching tools: projector, computer, board.

Brief description of the course:

1. Presentation of the causes of the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine. Discussion of the context of events: granting Ukraine a guarantee of independence and territorial integrity in 1994 and the emergence of pro-Russian separatism in 2014.
2. Discussion of Russian hybrid aggression in 2014 and its transformation into a full-scale conflict in 2022.
3. An overview of Russia's attempts to attribute its activities to other entities.
4. Explanation of imperialism and Russian colonialism and their relationship to the war in Ukraine.
5. Discussion of Russian propaganda about the war in Ukraine, in particular directed at the inhabitants of the Middle East, based on preying on resentments and distorting history. Explanation of why Russian propaganda is permeated with cynicism and hypocrisy.
6. Discussion of the Russian modus operandi of manipulating in the international information space the image of its aggression in Ukraine.
7. Seminar



Content of the course

1. The cause of the Russian aggression war in Ukraine; guarantees of territorial integrity and the emergence of pro-Russian separatism

The cause of the war in Ukraine are plans to rebuild the empire by an aggressive power that Russia is. Russian leader Vladimir Putin himself, already in 2005, called the collapse of the USSR "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century" and repeatedly afterwards expressed his regret over the closure of this colonial-imperial entity. In the course of signing the acts of annexation of the Ukrainian oblasts of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, he once again stated that the collapse of the USSR was a "national catastrophe" that allegedly "shredded and torn our national unity alive". The British might have as well written this about the disintegration of their Empire.

Putin is trying to impose his imperial-colonial version of Russia's history, which is supposedly "Holy Russia", having a divine anointing to conquer neighbouring nations. In this context, he argued that Ukraine "is not just a neighbouring country for us [...] it is an inalienable part of our own history, culture and spiritual space". There is as much truth in this as in the claim that the countries created after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire are not only neighbouring countries of Turkey, but are its inalienable part. Just as no Iraqi would agree with such an approach, Ukrainians reject Putin's words. His thesis that Ukrainians supposedly are "small Russians" forming part of the great Russian nation is simply a slap in the face for Ukrainians.

Neither Ukraine nor any other countries have given Russia any reason to fear for its security. Since the beginning of its invasion, Russia has lied on the subject, using various resentments operating, among others, in the Middle East, including particularly Iraq, in regards to the West, NATO and the USA. It is worth recalling that since the end of World War II in 1945, Russia has not been attacked, although it has done so many times. Dominated by Russia, the USSR has occupied, among others, Poland in the years of 1945-1993, invaded Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, not to mention the invasion on Afghanistan and many other imperial-colonial aggressions.



Poland, like many other Central European countries, despite the enormous harm suffered from the hands of Russia, tried to maintain friendly relations with it based on mutual respect and equal treatment. However, Russia does not want to be a normal country, but an empire. The territory of Russia, its sovereignty and territorial integrity have never been threatened. This also applies to national liberation movements in the Russian colonies, i.e. areas conquered mainly in the 19th century, which culturally, ethnically and historically have nothing to do with Russia, e.g. Chechnya, Buryatia, Kalmykia, etc. Although the colonial status of these areas is a historical injustice, in order to build friendly relations with Russia, it was decided to consider it an internal matter of Russia.

However, this does not suffice for Russia. It believes that the sovereign states that were once part of its empire should be subordinate to it. This applies in particular to Ukraine, as well as Belarus, although also Poland and many other countries. From its perspective, it considers limiting its imperial sphere of influence through sovereign decisions of nations liberated from its yoke to be an "attack" on itself. No free nation can accept such an approach.

The collapse of the USSR in 1991 was not the result of war or external pressure, but was agreed by the leaders of Soviet Russia, Belarus and Ukraine at a meeting in Białowieża in December 1991. In this way, Ukraine was reborn as an independent country. In the referendum held at that time, 90% of voters were in favour of independence, with a turnout of 84%. In the currently occupied by Russia regions of Ukraine, 84 percent in Luhansk Oblast, 77 percent in Donetsk Oblast, 90 percent in Kherson Oblast, and 54 percent in Crimea voted for independence. Russia unreservedly recognized not only Ukraine's independence, but also its borders. Moreover, in December 1994, it signed the Budapest Memorandum, in which it declared itself as the guarantor of Ukraine's territorial integrity, in exchange for Ukraine's resignation from its nuclear arsenal.

Pro-Russian separatism suddenly appeared in 2014, when Russia decided to punish Ukraine for striving for greater independence. It was not about a plan to admit Ukraine to NATO, as many NATO members opposed it, and therefore it was completely



unrealistic. However, even if Ukraine was to join NATO, it would be a matter of its sovereign decision and the acceptance of other NATO members, and not some aggressive empire usurping the right to decide about others. The people of Iraq should understand this. In 2014, Ukrainians took to the streets to protest against the pro-Russian authorities, as they increasingly travelled to neighbouring Poland and saw the gap between how Poles lived and how they lived. Especially young Ukrainians wanted to develop and have the same perspectives as other Europeans and that is why they wanted Ukraine to start integrating with the European Union. Taking away this opportunity from them by the pro-Russian authorities was the final straw that broke the camel's back, so they decided to protest and overthrew the then president. Ukrainians wanted to integrate with the economic structures (no one had thought about any Western weapons or NATO before the Russian aggression). Can they be blamed for this? Don't young Iraqis want to have better lives too?

However, the aforementioned separatism was not associated with any national minority striving for independence, because there is not and has never been a Donetsk, Luhansk or Crimean nation (the only Crimean nation is the Tatars, who are in favour of Ukraine). From the very beginning, the goal of "separatism" has been to seize the lands of Ukraine and their annexation to Russia and imposing a pro-Russian regime on Ukraine. "Separatism" was organized by Russian security agents, mercenaries and soldiers sent to Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk. They were called "the green men" because they operated in unmarked uniforms, which was contrary to international law. The activity of soldiers of a foreign country on the territory of the other is an invasion contrary to the United Nations Charter, and this is what the operation of "the green men" on the territory of Ukraine was. At that time, Ukraine was too weak to resist. The corrupt rule of pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich led to the disintegration of the army and its infiltration by traitors. Yanukovich himself was overthrown in 2014 by a people revolution and fled from Ukraine to Russia, fearing criminal liability. Russia currently states it still is a legitimate president, although several elections have been held in Ukraine in the meantime.

2. Russian hybrid aggression and its transformation into a full-scale war

Russia therefore invaded Ukraine already in 2014 and has been at war ever since. Ukraine is struggling to restore its territorial integrity, guaranteed by Russia in 1993, and has no territorial pretensions to Russian territory. It also does not want to change the authorities in Russia and interfere in its internal affairs. Meanwhile, Russia is usurping such a right against Ukraine. By what right? By the only one known to Russia: the law of the fist.

On February 24, 2022 Russia has launched a full-scale invasion on Ukraine. At the same time, in order to misinform the world's public opinion, it termed its invasion a "special operation" and tried to convince the world that it was not at war with Ukraine. But this time they were in for an unpleasant surprise, as not only the Ukrainian army but also the entire nation resisted decisively.

Russian aggression from its very first day was very brutal. Residential buildings of no military significance were shelled, not to mention civilian infrastructure that provided residents with access to electricity, gas, and water. However, when Russia realized that the population of Ukraine was definitely hostile to aggression, then it deliberately carried out attacks in such a way that there were as many victims as possible. On one hand, it was supposed to be a punishment, and on the other, to intimidate Ukrainians into surrendering. **Because it also did not work, Russia decided to commit the crime of genocide. For this purpose, massacres of civilians were conducted, including in Bucza, Hostomel and Irpin, where in March 2022 more than 400 people were brutally murdered. These were not accidental crimes, but were carried out on the basis of proscription letters drawn up by the Russian authorities.**

These are not the only Russian crimes committed during the invasion of Ukraine. They intensified after Russia failed to implement its original military objectives, i.e. in particular lost the battle for Kiev. The seizure of the Ukrainian capital, coupled with the authorities' flight or their murder, was supposed to allow Yanukovych to be brought to Kiev and installed there at the head of the pro-Russian regime, as an allegedly legal power. However, nothing came of it, and the Ukrainian authorities, led by President Volodymyr Zelensky, remained in Kiev and headed the defence. Ukraine's fight with Russia was uneven from the beginning, and despite this, the demoralized Russian army



had to withdraw from a large part of the occupied territories. In November 2022, The Armed Forces of Ukraine liberated Kherson, one of the 4 occupied peripheral cities (equivalent to the capitals of the Muhafaz).

Russian troops are responsible not only for the murders but also for the mass rape of women. In addition, Russian mercenaries, i.e. infamous "Wagners", carried out public executions that were not inferior to Daesh in their brutality. What is the difference between smashing a tied man's head with a hammer and cutting it off? What is the difference between the crimes in Bucha and Irpin and the massacres in Sinjar or Camp Speicher? Daesh tried to blow up a dam in Mosul, which was thwarted as a result of a special operation. In June 2023, the Russians blew up a dam in Nowa Kakhovka, causing the flooding of large areas and an ecological disaster. This was aimed at stopping the Ukrainian counteroffensive against Crimea. Ukraine had to take care of the evacuation of approx. 40,000 people from flooded areas and spilled water blocked the further progress of the counteroffensive. The Russians also threatened to detonate a nuclear power plant in Zaporizhzhia.

Another crime committed by the Russians in Ukraine was the mass deportation of Ukrainian children to the depths of Russia. Stolen from their parents to be raised there as fanatical Russian nationalists who hate their own homeland. This fate befell as many as 700,000 Ukrainian children, and it is for this reason that the International Criminal Court in The Hague is prosecuting the main perpetrators of this crime: Russian President Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova, who directly led this action. This is also reminiscent of Daesh methods applied to children deported from Sinjar. As it is clear, the great criminals, whether Russian or Daesh, think and act similarly.

When the Russians understood that they would not be able to occupy the whole of Ukraine, and the population of this country would never forgive Russia for both the attack itself and the crimes committed in the course of it, they decided to seize as much of the territory of this country as possible. So they quit the fiction that there were some separatist republics whose population supposedly sought self-determination and simply annexed the conquered areas. To legalize it, they held fictitious referendums. Their results were predetermined, and people were herded to them under the barrels of rifles.



3. Russian attempts to attribute their own actions to others

At the same time, Russia is constantly suggesting that Poland wants to occupy the western part of Ukraine. Moreover, Russia has repeatedly suggested Poland to conclude an agreement on the partition of Ukraine. As most of the territory of Ukraine belonged to Poland in the 17th and 18th centuries, and until 1939 the 5 western oblasts of today's Ukraine belonged to it. However, Poland decisively rejected these proposals because, unlike Russia, it respects the territorial integrity of other countries. It is also particularly cynical for Russian propaganda to suggest that it is fighting "Banderites" in Ukraine. The word "Banderites" comes from Stepan Bandera, whose movement during World War II was responsible not only for fighting the USSR but also for attacks on Poles (genocide). But Poland solves its problems with its neighbors, especially those related to a painful history, by peaceful methods, and not conducting aggressive acts, murders and rapes.

Since the first days of the war, Ukrainian refugees, fleeing Russian bombs, murders and rapes, have been coming to Poland en masse. Poland opened its doors wide to them, with a significant part of the refugees being Russian-speaking. Russia claims that Ukraine persecuted Russian-speaking citizens, but they fled to Poland. In total, since February 2022, more than 15 million Ukrainians have crossed the Polish border, mostly women and children. Although most of them have returned to Ukraine, but there are still several million refugees from Ukraine in various European countries. The most part, because approx. 2 million, expect in Poland the end of the war.

As a result of the war in Ukraine, initiated by the Russian attack, about 200,000-250,000 people, and hundreds of thousands are injured. Russian barbarism has also led to mass destruction, and the blockade of Ukrainian ports has caused food problems in many countries. The whole time, Russia deceives part of the world's public opinion by claiming that it wants peace. The problem is that if it really strived for it, it would withdraw from the occupied territories of Ukraine. But it does not do that. **Because Russia understands many words differently. For it, the word peace means the unconditional capitulation of Ukraine, which would entail surrendering to the imperial and colonial voracity of Russia.**



4. Imperial and colonial Russia and its aggression against Ukraine

Every nation has the right to self-identification and self-determination. The inhabitants of Iraq, both Arabs and Kurds, as well as other ethnic groups, know this perfectly. Many times they have had to shed their blood to defend themselves against tyranny, colonialism of powers and terrorism. Stronger ones often seek to subjugate the weaker neighbours, take advantage of their internal problems, and the great powers instrumentally treat other nations, using them in their game. Therefore, nations experiencing the struggle for freedom should understand each other.

However, different nations also have different historical experiences. The Middle East has experienced the colonial rivalry of European powers. However, no one today disputes the existence of British or French colonialism, but these times are over. However, the era of Russian imperialism and colonialism has not ended, and the irony is that Russia is trying to present itself as a liberating and anti-imperial force where its knout has not been experienced. Neither tsarist nor Soviet, nor the current, Putinist Russia has never been and is not a liberator, and the nations of Central Europe, such as Poland and Ukraine, know this very well.

The fact that the Russian conquests have not been overseas does not change the fact that this empire have occupied areas that had nothing to do with the Russians, their identity and their history. This was the case in vast areas of Siberia, the Far East, Central Asia, the Caucasus, as well as in Central Europe. Russia has subjugated other nations, plundered their territory, populated them with Russians, and also Russified the local population. Currently, Russian mercenaries, the so-called Wagnerites, are operating in a similar way. Russia is sending them, among others, to the Middle East, e.g. to Syria, or to Africa, to fulfill the Russian empire's dream of overseas colonies.

In 1831, the great Russian poet Alexander Pushkin wrote a poem entitled "Slanderers of Russia" in which he claimed that the struggle of Poles for freedom was a "family dispute". It was at a time when Russian troops were drowning the Polish national uprising in blood, and no one in Poland treated it as a "family dispute". "Leave us, after all, you do not know these blood-drenched sides [...] for you it is an alien, incomprehensible our eternal family dispute," wrote Pushkin. But the Poles saw it



completely differently. Russia conquered Poland, taking advantage of its internal problems, enslaved it, and then claimed that the fight of Poles for freedom is an internal matter of Russians and Poles, which others are unable to understand, so they should not interfere.

5. Russian propaganda: preying on resentment and falsifying history; cynicism and hypocrisy – an art that the Russians have mastered to perfection

Today, Russian propaganda presents its assault on Ukraine in a similar, falsified way. Cynically using the negative historical experiences of the Middle East, it tries to forage on resentments directed against the former European colonial powers and the USA. Russia preaches that it is defending itself against the invasion from the USA and NATO, and that Ukrainians are "brothers" whom the West allegedly uses instrumentally. In this falsified image, Russia once again appears as an anti-imperial force. Only that Ukrainians dying under Russian bombs, like Poles 200 years ago hanged by merciless Russian "brothers", see it completely differently. Poles know this not only on account of their own experiences, but also because millions of Ukrainians have found shelter in Poland, fleeing from criminal "brothers". Reducing the fight of Ukrainians for their freedom and independence to the global game of the USA is a big lie formulated to sound credible to those who have other historical experiences.

Poles are not and never have been Russians, although in the 19th century The Russians tried to persuaded the world otherwise. The same is true for Ukrainians. It is a separate nation, with its own language, its own identity and its own history. The fact that the Ukrainian language is similar to Russian does not make Ukrainians Russians. Iran might as well base its territorial claims to the Kurdistan Region in Iraq on the similarity of the Persian and Kurdish languages. For centuries, the history of Poles and Ukrainians has been united, and relations between the two nations have been sometimes better and sometimes worse. As recently as 100 years ago, some areas, today belonging to Ukraine, were part of Poland and Poles lived there. However, unlike Russia, Poland respects the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. This is what fraternity is all about, not rape, because one is stronger and at the same time lying to the world about one's motives.



Russia presents a false picture of history to justify its aggression. Meanwhile, it is true that Ukraine found itself within its borders as a result of imperial conquest in the 17th and 18th centuries, just like Poland a little later. Intensive Russification and the policy of denationalization in the nineteenth century had an effect, although limited. As a result, some Ukrainians became Russian-speaking. However, they did not cease to be Ukrainians and did not become Russians. Today, Russian-speaking Ukrainians suffer as much from Russian aggression as those who speak Ukrainian. In Poland, it is just as easy to meet Ukrainian refugees who speak Russian today as those who speak Ukrainian.

In 1991, a colonial colossus called the Soviet Union disintegrated, just as the colonial empires of Great Britain or France had disintegrated a little earlier. Ukraine declared independence, which was supported by 90% of its citizens in a referendum. In Crimea, occupied by Russia in 2014, 54% of the population voted for the independence of Ukraine, and in the oblasts that Russia currently wants to conquer, i.e. Donetsk, Luhansk and Kherson, 77%, 84% and 90%, respectively. At that time, Russia did not question the legality of these referendums and recognized both the independence of the new country and its territorial integrity. 23 years later, it suddenly changed its mind because it did not like the new Ukrainian authorities and their political decisions. Every nation and every country has the right to decide what foreign policy it wants to conduct and with whom to enter into alliances. This applies to all Iraq, Ukraine as well as Poland. Manipulating history, on the other hand, is a dangerous game. Crimea or Kiev have been part of various countries and empires throughout their long history, as was the case with Baghdad, Basra, or Mosul, and this is certainly not the basis for claiming territorial claims by neighbours. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine is not related to the aspiration of an ethnic group to self-determination, but is based on the revisionism of an aggressive power in relation to the borders it has recognized itself.

A different geographical location and different historical experiences mean that countries choose different allies and have a different view of great powers such as the USA or Russia. However, one thing is clear: no power can command another nation to love it and recognize it as a friend or brother. All the more so, it cannot punish and terrorize another nation in order to force it into friendship. After all, friendship imposed by force is absurd. All nations and countries should understand and respect the decisions



of others. Russia believes that only the great powers have the right to vote, to which it also counts itself, and the rest are toys that are being played for. Freedom-loving nations cannot accept such an approach.

Russia claims that the Ukrainian authorities do not represent Ukrainians, as a supposed "overturn" took place in 2014. Since then, presidential and parliamentary elections have been held there twice, in which various parties and candidates competed fiercely. The current president, Volodymyr Zelensky, was elected in 2019 in elections whose validity was not questioned by anyone, and in which 63% of Ukrainians took part.

Who is to decide who is the legal authority in Iraq, Poland or Ukraine? Neighbours or foreign powers or the nation? Is Iraq still ruled by the Baath Party and all elections are illegal? Is the Iraqi constitution of 2005 illegal because it was not approved by Saddam Hussein? Who should decide about it? Moscow, Washington, Ankara, Tehran, London, or maybe Israel or the nation? The Ukrainians have elected the president and the parliament, and other states have no right to interfere in this. The same as in the case of Iraq.

Moreover, Russia's cynicism and hypocrisy are shown by its attitude towards Saddam Hussein and his overthrow. Russia has never been disturbed by the crimes of this tyrant. Neither the chemical weapons attack on Halabja nor the 1991 slaughter of Shiites in southern Iraq. It would be difficult to prove otherwise when Russia is burdened with a long list of crimes. As part of their colonial conquests, the Russians mercilessly murdered not only "Polish rebels" but also Muslim nations of Central Asia and the Caucasus.

In the 1990s, in two Chechen wars, tens of thousands of civilian residents of the Caucasus, citizens of Russia, died at the hands of Russian soldiers. At the time, Russia claimed it was defending its territorial integrity against separatists. A few years later, in 2008, Russian troops invaded the territory of Georgia and to this day occupy part of its territory. Polish President Lech Kaczynski warned the world about Russian imperialism, and two years later he was killed in a plane crash on Russian territory. Four years after his death, Russia questioned the territorial integrity of Ukraine, stirred up separatism and began to call itself a defender of the right to self-determination, and its mercenaries



operating on the territory of Ukraine shot down a passenger plane, killing 283 passengers and 15 crew members.

In the case of Ukraine, Russia began to invoke dubious historical arguments, forgetting at the same time that when it came to the Caucasus, where Russia considered its territorial integrity sacred, it had suddenly conquered it in the 19th century. Crimea, on the other hand, was conquered by Russia in 1783, and its indigenous people, the Muslim Tatars, are now persecuted because they did not recognize the Russian annexation in 2014. Many of them stay in prisons and penal colonies. In this connection, it is worth mentioning how Russia treats Muslims. Although they represent at least 15% of the country's population, they are almost absent from the authorities at the central level. Islamophobia is deeply rooted in Russia, as evidenced by the fact that there are only 4 legal mosques in Moscow for 2.5 million Muslim residents of the Russian capital. Meanwhile, in Ukraine, Muslims have never complained about persecution.

Russia supported Saddam Hussein up until the end, and considered his overthrow a crime, but there is no problem with cooperation with those who came to power thanks to his removal. Moreover, it wants to convince them that the Ukrainian authorities are illegal despite the elections, and the legal authority is a man who was expelled by the Ukrainian people 7 years ago and is now hiding in some luxury villa in Russia. At the same time, Vladimir Putin stated that since the US invaded Iraq in 2003, Russia could also invade Ukraine. So Russia admits that in its own understanding it is acting illegally and doing what it condemned in the case of Iraq. At the same time, however, no other country has annexed part of Iraq, as Russia does in the case of Ukraine. The fact that Saddam Hussein was an enemy of Iran does not prevent Russia from bringing drones from Iran to spread terror in Ukraine. Is it possible, then, to be more deceitful than Russia?

From the bloody pacification of the 1920 uprising to the assault on Daesh, Iraqis have repeatedly fallen victim to the crimes committed against them. The Kurds will never forget that Saddam Hussein carried out a chemical attack on the inhabitants of Halabja, thus murdering approx. 5,000 civilians. It wasn't his only crime, after all. Today,



Ukrainians are the subject to such crimes, and the perpetrator is colonial and imperial Russia. In March 2022, The Russians murdered approx. 400 defenseless civilians in Bucha, Ukraine. The aim was to intimidate residents and punish them for resistance. Russian President Vladimir Putin is being prosecuted by the International Criminal Court for the mass deportation of Ukrainian children. Abducted from their parents, they end up in new "families" that try to instill in them hatred for their own nation and relatives. Exactly the same way as Daesh did in Iraq a few years ago, murdering parents and forcing children to obey with terror, brainwashing them and training them to be terrorists. Therefore, what's the difference between Daesh and Russia? Approximately 19,500 Ukrainian children have been abducted by the Russians and they do not want to give them back to their families. The Wagner Group is part of the Russian armed forces. Although it is officially a private military enterprise, it is actually subordinate to the Russian authorities. At the same time, Wagner's group commits crimes whose brutality does not give way to Daesh. This applies, among others, to public executions involving smashing the head with a hammer, mass rapes of women and underage girls, etc.

Human life has the same value whether in the Middle East or Central Europe. Aggression against another country is evil, as is murdering people defending their homes and families and fighting for their homeland. Imperial conquests and colonial exploitation are also bad, and Russia is precisely an imperial and colonial country. Poland and Ukraine were colonies of this empire, but they freed themselves from it. Now the empire is attacking again, because that is its nature. It cannot exist without conquests. Therefore, the war in Ukraine is not only about a territorial dispute, but about unbridled ambitions to rebuild the empire, and not within the borders of the USSR, but of tsarist Russia. If the world allows Russia to conquer Ukraine, the Baltic countries will be next, followed by Poland and other Central European countries. Russia will only stop where it is stopped and there will be no peace until then. This, in turn, will trigger a chain reaction of destabilization in other parts of the world, including the Middle East, bringing new wars.

The Russians proclaim one thing on their television, and another thing they tell nations that do not know them as well as Poles or Ukrainians. At their place, they preach Great Russian imperial propoganda, announcing the conquest of half of Europe, the destruction



of cities and the murder of the population. On state television, supposedly serious experts threaten to bomb European cities with nuclear weapons. They make no secret of the fact that their goal is to rebuild the Empire to its widest borders in history. They tell others that they want peace.

Peace in Europe can only be achieved in one way, i.e. by Russia's withdrawal to the 2014 borders and its commitment to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbours. This is not an exorbitant demand. After all, no one is requiring the partition of the Russian colonial empire by allowing all indigenous nations of its territory to self-determine, although this would be as just as the dismantling of the British or French colonial empire. It is therefore difficult to call such a restraint of one's imperial ambitions a push against the wall. In Central Europe exposed to Russian imperialism, no one expects residents of other regions of the world, including the Middle East in particular, to make Ukraine's drama a priority. It is clear that everyone has their own problems. However, it is about understanding others.

6. Russian modus operandi (operation techniques) of manipulating in the international information space the image of its aggression against Ukraine.

The main area of activity of the Russian propaganda apparatus in the international information space invariably remains the continuation of information and psychological operations aimed at distorting the perception of the Russian attack on Ukraine. The Russian propaganda apparatus maintains its activity which is based on an attempt to replace the facts about the Russian attack on Ukraine with a false impression of conducting a proxy war in Ukraine, a defensive one against the "provocative policy" of the West and NATO.

Since the beginning of the invasion, social media sites associated with Russian disinformation operations have promoted information materials showing Ukraine as a dependent country (servilistic towards the West), dominated (non-sovereign), taking action "on behalf of" the EU or NATO (tasked against Russia – in the Kremlin's propaganda optics). This is a permanent ploy of Russia. **Russia, whether tsarist, Bolshevik, Soviet or contemporary, has always sought a concert of powers, that is, to divide the world into spheres of influence between several of the strongest players, as**



if the rest of the world did not exist. Poland has experienced this, always being between two powers: Russia and Germany. For centuries, both countries have tried to impose on the world narratives that there is nothing worthy of attention between them, at most some satellite, small countries that need to be shared – nothing else. Similarly, without regard to the will of the inhabitants, they divided the Middle East (including the territories of Iraq), the Ottoman, Persian and later British empires. Stubbornness, will to fight, history, tradition, rejection of foreign domination and attachment to one's own statehood allowed to oppose such an approach. Both if we talk about Poland and Iraq. **Ukraine is currently facing the same challenge and imperial cruelty that Poland and Iraq have had to deal with not so long ago. Therefore, nations experiencing the struggle for freedom should understand each other.**

Every nation has the right to self-identification and self-determination. The inhabitants of Iraq, both Arabs and Kurds, as well as other ethnic groups, know this perfectly. Many times they have had to shed their blood to defend themselves against tyranny, colonialism of powers and terrorism. Stronger ones often seek to subjugate the weaker neighbours, take advantage of their internal problems, and the great powers instrumentally treat other nations, using them in their game.

The Russian Federation is very well aware of the history of the countries of the Middle East, the efforts and sacrifices that these nations have had to make on the way to their own statehood and in its defence. Therefore, its main propaganda effort in the region is the message aimed at obliterating the Ukrainian fight against Russian imperialism. The Russian propaganda apparatus is trying at all costs to present Ukraine as a failed country, practically non-existent, without history, without its own statehood, without national cohesion, irrelevant. Because when they achieve this, they will be able to go back to their favourite "concert of powers" and tell the world that they have simply taken care of their rebellious province, where a handful of adventurers made a noise, but the matter is over. These are just their temporary "internal affairs". This follows the same pattern as the bloody pacification of the 1920 revolution on the territories of Iraq effected by the British. And Putin himself compared his attack on Ukraine to the US intervention in Iraq in 2003, which he, at the same time, condemned. **Turkish and Iranian airstrikes on Iraq, carried out without its consent, are also currently being**



explained as "internal affairs". Internal affairs end where the borders of other countries begin, and the countries with imperial impulses must understand this.

However, different nations also have different historical experiences. The Middle East has experienced the colonial rivalry of European powers. However, no one today disputes the existence of British or French colonialism, but these times are over. However, the era of Russian imperialism and colonialism has not ended, and the irony is that Russia is trying to present itself as a liberating and anti-imperial force where its knout has not been experienced. Neither tsarist nor Soviet, nor the present, Putinist Russia has never been and is not a liberator, and the nations of Central Europe, such as Poland and Ukraine, know this very well.

Getting back to Russian optics. The authorities in the Kremlin were firmly convinced that this would be the case. That they would drive in as if to their own place, a moment of turmoil and they would present to the world the end of "their internal affairs". Hence, they propagandistically called the war a "special operation", after all, only operations, not wars, are carried out inside "one's" country. However, Russia was the biggest victim of its own propaganda. The authorities in the Kremlin believed that despite one of the world's largest rates of corruption, the mafia-oligarchic and feudal way of managing the state, they really are the power they have created themselves to be. And Ukraine is the country as they forged it to be, that is, practically non-existent. A side effect of decades of self-creation and propaganda is the failure of their power and the brutal exposure of all weaknesses, because the country and the Ukrainian nation did not disintegrate in the face of aggression, as the Kremlin's propaganda suggested and expected. Ukraine has put up and still does fierce resistance. Resistance that probably none of the big "players" had expected, starting with America through China and ending with Russia itself. The great ones probably still lived under the Cold War assumptions that only they could challenge each other. A truly united half of the world, with the largest economic powers at the forefront, was needed to end the Cold War and bring (break-up) the USSR to its knees. Meanwhile, slightly more than 3 decades later, the geographically largest country in the world, predestining to the top of the top, with global ambitions, threatening all around to "overturn the table" (international order) - **the Russian Federation - led by chauvinism and pride knocked its teeth out, broke its**



hands and is barely able to stay on its feet in a clash with the country it has considered to be fallen. History once again shows us that, firstly, pride reigns before a fall, and secondly, the strength and will to self-determination elude all tables in the analyses. The Iraqis have the right to a similar assessment of the actions of the British or Americans, but they should remember that the Russians or Chinese have shown in other parts of the world that they do not have good intentions. The Iraqi inhabitants should also agree that it is fair for a tyrant and an imperial aggressor to break their teeth when attacking a weaker opponent.

The Ukrainians have obviously the Western support (a coalition of the willing from Ramstein): in military equipment, and humanitarian or financial. Under no circumstances can it be omitted or hidden. However, it must not be forgotten that this support has been very heterogeneous and sometimes, especially at the beginning, downright symbolic. It was similar in the case of foreign aid when the war with Daesh was fought in Iraq. However, this did not make the war a conflict of Islam, allegedly represented by Daesh, with the "unfaithful" from the West or the Iranian "apostates". Daesh had nothing to do with defending Islam, just as Russia has nothing to do with freedom and anti-imperialism. And Daesh waged war against Iraqis, with Shiites as well as Sunnis, Kurds, Arabs and Turkmens, Muslims, Christians and Yazidis. Russia wages war against both Ukrainian-speaking and Russian-speaking Ukrainians.

In the case of Ukraine, however, there was unprecedented aid coming from Poland, humanitarian as well as military (Poles, without building special camps, accepted the biggest number of refugees and were the first to hand over heavy military equipment (tanks, artillery, etc.) to Ukraine in bulk quantities). Unfortunately, the Ukrainians had to somehow earn and work for the support of others, even give a blood sacrifice, which unfortunately in many cases ended in genocide, as in Bucha, Irpin, Hostomel, Motyzin or Mariupol. **Only the defence of the capital and independence began to activate greater support because Western societies and politicians fooled by Russian propaganda also thought that it would be over quickly. Fortunately, Russian practice very quickly showed how much it differs from theory. And the Russian weaponry looks like in practice, and not on advertising leaflets.**



Since 2014, i.e. since Russia invaded Ukraine for the first and second time (Crimea, eastern Ukraine), in the Russian message Ukraine is: a fallen, artificial country, increasingly poorly managed from year to year, "a rebellious region of great Russia". In turn, according to propaganda, Ukrainians are lacking their own uniqueness, identity or culture "fascists", or subhumans managed by the "Kiev junta" (at best, such "slightly inferior Russians").

The message, meticulously constructed by Russian propaganda centers, was supposed to evoke a sense of Russian superiority over Ukrainians. Building a sense of superiority/national pride in exchange for a deteriorating standard of living is the canon of Russian social management. The canon, which in the years before the war of 2022 had taken an extreme form – building a variety of Russian racism and xenophobia.

Of course, the reality cannot be imposed on such a meticulously built message: "the worse ones are not doing badly with us, the better ones by far, and the whole civilized world is still cheering for them". One of the main features of Russian propagandists is the continuity of the message. In order to ensure it in an inadequate reality, additional enemies and threats are created (sense of security management). Among other things, this is the source of the much inflated Russian war statistics. Their task is to show their own society that – according to the original assumptions – the Russian army has long ago destroyed the Ukrainian armed forces, and now they are fighting against the entire NATO and Polish mercenaries. In the Russian propaganda message – addressed to its own society – it is permissible to lose when half of the world colludes against "heroic Russia" but never, ever with the Ukrainians.

Poland has always been the leading country in the region, uniting smaller countries and warning the West against Russia's aggressive and neo-imperialist policies. So far, the Russian Federation has tried to neutralize Polish warnings, generating countless information campaigns aimed at Western societies, based on the message that this is nothing but Polish prejudice and Russophobia.

In the Russian propaganda apparatus, Russophobia ceased to be an occupation used solely to determine xenophobic phenomena, and became a tool for building a



propaganda message. Attributing Russophobia to critics of the policy of the Russian Federation imposes a cognitive context on the recipient, undermining the credibility of the thesis proclaimed by the critic. So far, the use of the concept of Russophobia has allowed propaganda facilities to undermine the legitimacy of the actions of countries, politicians or institutions, attributing them a lack of objectivity in their action. It must be admitted that the farther to the West from Russia, the greater the impact of these campaigns.

Currently, due to the fact that the soundness of Polish actions and the accuracy of the assessment is emphasized everywhere, Russian planners of information activities have had to adapt the narratives to the social discourse. The latest unveiling and continuation of the above activities (i.e. the depreciation of trust in the Polish assessment) in the international public opinion is the creation of Poland as an aggressive and offensive country that sends tens of thousands of mercenaries to fight against Russia in Ukraine.

In addition, one of the permanent main tasks of the Russian propaganda apparatus was to maintain the cult of the leader. This leader for more than 20 years is, of course, Vladimir Putin. Russian propaganda ensures that he is adored and recognized in the world as a rock star, and all failures are attributed to someone else (a known trick since the time of Tsarist Russia: good-car, bad-boyars). Let's check the performance of this leader of all time. Putin – the father of Russia's providence, the all strategist, the genius of planning a few steps ahead has achieved so much, in such a short time:

- he has united Ukrainian society.
- He has united the West.
- He caused even moderately pro-Russian groups in Ukraine to take up arms against Russian imperialism and also in fear of another Bucha or Irpien.
- He expanded NATO to include pacifist Sweden.
- He expanded NATO to include Finland, a 1,340-kilometer additional border with NATO,
- He disposed of Russian land and missile troops.
- He got rid of the best military pilots and officer cadres.



- He sent 600-700 thousand Russians (they fled forced conscription) on compulsory holiday.
- He strongly contributed to the first rebellion in the history of Russia since the end of World War II (the so-called Prigozhin and Wagner rebellion).
- He has reduced gas exports by 25% - a drop in exports forces the Russians to reduce production in the country to a level not seen since 1978.
- He cut himself off from western products, markets, capital, and companies.
- He became dependent on China, Iran and North Korea.
- He took away the savings of average Russians. He destroyed the currency and the stock exchange. He has been emptying the National Wealth Fund (e.g. drops in oil and gas revenues are replenished from NWF funds). Funds for improving infrastructure (roads, railways, bridges), social care, health care, helping the poorest are spent on senseless war. He took the present from the current generation of Russians and the future from two (at least) future generations.
- He inflicted PTSD on several hundred thousand men (mainly conscripts), trained and released violent prisoners (ex-Wagnerites) ahead of time, raising national statistics on firearms crime from 30% to 720% (depending on the region).
- And many many many other successes.

For his numerous "contributions to the country", he received a prestigious arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court in The Hague (ICC). And all this to fulfil a sick, detached from reality ambition. It remains to wish all chauvinistic, neo-colonial regimes such "great leaders"!

On the other hand, the Russian "dreams" of fighting NATO are perfectly illustrated by a popular joke: "Two Russian Jews met. One says to the other:

- How's it going? How are you?
- How have you been... They say there's a war.
- What war? Not a special operation?
- War I say! Us (Russia) vs NATO.
- Like, for real?



- Yes, a war. Russia is fighting NATO.
- What are the results?
- More than 100,000 Russian soldiers have already been killed. The rockets are running out. Much of military equipment of the Russian Federation has been destroyed and blown up.
- And what about NATO?
- About NATO? **NATO has not arrived yet."**

7. Seminar – issues to be discussed

- a) Russian aggression against Ukraine in the light of international law and the guarantees given by Russia to Ukraine in 1994.
- b) The course of Russian aggression – from hybrid to full-scale warfare
- c) The concept of imperialism and colonialism in the context of Russia's actions (comparative context)
- d) Russian propaganda and its tools, the problem of falsifying the history and preying on resentments
- e) Russian modus operandi of manipulation in the international information space

Learning outcomes:

- a) Student knows the causes of Russian aggression against Ukraine and understands its legal and international context
- b) Student knows the course of Russian aggression against Ukraine, including its evolution from the stage of hybrid war to full-scale war
- c) Student understands the imperial and colonial nature of Russian politics
- d) The student knows the tools of Russian propaganda on the matter of Ukraine and understands how it tries to influence the inhabitants of the Middle East using resentment and falsification of history
- e) The student knows what is the Russian modus operandi of manipulation in the international information space



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