

FORMATION OF THE HISTORICAL MEMORY OF THE BULGARIAN MINORITY OF UKRAINE (1991 – 2020): ACTORS, NARRATIVES, AND COMMEMORATION

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Abstract. Nearly three centuries have passed since Bulgarian migrants appeared on the territory of contemporary Ukraine. They had to leave their historic homeland due to the strengthening of control of the Ottoman administration over all spheres of life of Bulgarians in the metropolis, as well as the intensification of the Russian-Turkish military confrontation, which drastically affected the economic, social, and cultural situation of the Bulgarian population. The Bulgarians, settled down on the Ukrainian lands, became an integral part of the multi-ethnic Ukrainian society, though fell victim to the assimilation policy of the Soviet period.

Bulgarians are undergoing a period of national and cultural revival in the independent Ukraine, which is intimately linked to the process of recovering the historical memory of Ukrainian Bulgarians, restoring the pantheon of national heroes, memorable dates, and revival of traditional culture. In this connection, the researches dedicated to the analysis of the process of formation of the historical memory of the Bulgarian community in modern Ukraine are of particular relevance.

The authors emphasize the difference between the two main groups of the Bulgarian community on the territory of Ukraine – Bessarabian and Azov (Taurida) Bulgarians, which is reflected in a reassessment of the role of the migration of ancestors of modern Ukrainian Bulgarians from the metropolis as well as in a monopolization of objects of national and cultural heritage by certain organizations, etc.

Keywords: Bulgarian Diaspora; historical memory; narrative; Bessarabia Bulgarians; Azov Bulgarians; commemoration

Introduction

The historical memory of national minorities is rarely studied in the context of its instrumentalization. It is generally accepted that the politics of historical memory (which is what provides the aforementioned instrumentalization of history) is the prerogative of

states with their ideological guidelines, educational and cultural infrastructure, resources, and capabilities. Nowadays it is especially evident that history is no longer the domain of the historian, but is increasingly used by politicians for various purposes, including consolidation of the nation and the formation of a common identity, confrontation with internal political opponents and foreign policy claims, and protection of the ideological foundations of their statehood, etc. However, given the fact that historical memory is one of the foundations of national identity and has always been used in the process of building not only the nation as a state but also the protection of identity in general, it is reasonable to assume that not only nation-states but also non-state organized elements of society with their own group identities, especially ethnic ones, are able to produce actions for the formation and correction of their historical memory. And, primarily, it applies to national minorities. Although they do not have an equal resource base and the ability to make political decisions, having developed organizational structures and the influence of these structures on the diaspora, national minorities create concepts of their historical past, their historical narratives that exist in parallel with the national-state narrative, sometimes aligning and sometimes conflicting with it.

In this connection, it is interesting to study the modern processes of formation of the historical memory of the Bulgarian national minority of Ukraine, because it is an organized, densely populated ethnic group of the South of Ukraine, with strong internal ties and identity.

The problems of the revival of the historical memory of the Bulgarian diaspora of independent Ukraine have rarely attracted the attention of researchers.

Only separate problems, concerning the topic raised in the article, were analyzed by the scholars. As one of the few examples of publications that cover the challenges of historical memory of Bulgarians in Ukraine, we should mention the article by Ukrainian Orientalist I. Semyvolos, devoted to the historical memory of the Bulgarian community of the Azov region, which is based mainly on the materials of field research (Semyvolos 2017). A valuable set of memories of long-term residents of Bulgarian villages in Ukraine contains a book by a native of the Azov Bulgarians, journalist, and local historian L. Paskalov (Paskalov 2016). Issues of the identity of the Bessarabian Bulgarians became the object of research of the Ukrainian Bulgarian historian A. Ganchev (Ganchev 2006). Within the context of investigation into historical aspects of Bulgarian minority formation in Ukraine the recent studies by Ukrainian historians A. Gede, O. Krygina, M. Zhurba, V. Dotsenko and N. Chernihovets should be mentioned. They highlight various issues of Bulgarian community history in Ukraine in a period between the middle of the 19th century and the first third of the 20th century. (Hedo, Kryhina 2021; Zhurba, Dotsenko, Chernihovets 2021).

1. Historical background

Thus, as of today, there is no comprehensive review of the process of revival and formation of the historical memory of Bulgarians in Ukraine at the present stage

of community development. An attempt at such an overview study is offered by the authors in their article. The appearance of significant groups of the Bulgarian population in Ukraine is directly connected with the development of the Russian-Turkish relations in the middle of the 18th – the last third of the 19th centuries, which were characterized by constant wars. The war of 1806 – 1812 has directly affected Bulgarians – they suffered from the constant economic exploitation of the conflicting parties (requisition of food, livestock as draught animals, etc.). The situation of the Bulgarians in their historical homeland deteriorated with each new war. All that triggered the migration of Bulgarians into present-day Ukraine. The appearance of Bulgarians in the Russian Empire was to the advantage of the latter because it would weaken the resource base of the Turks in the military respect, at the same time the Bulgarians were actively involved in the process of economic development of Southern Ukraine.

Thus, by the end of the XIX century more than 170 thousand Bulgarians lived in the territory of modern Ukraine, and as of 2001 – slightly more than 200 thousand people. The main region of compact residence of the Bulgarian diaspora in modern Ukraine is the Odesa region. It is conditioned by the proximity of the region to the theater of Russian-Turkish wars, the similarity of climate conditions of the Odesa region with the habitual conditions of their historical native land, low level of economic development of the region. Large centers of Bulgarian colonization of the Ukrainian steppes had also become southwest of Kirovograd and south of the Zaporizhzhya regions. It is worth mentioning that first of all, it is about regions areas where Bulgarian minority concentrated. For example, there are considerably more Bulgarians in the Mykolaiv region than in the Kirovograd region, yet they are largely dispersed throughout the region. (Nyagulov 2019).

2. Narratives

The peculiarity of Bulgarians in the Odessa region is that Bulgarian communities in the region deliberately isolate themselves not only from other national minorities but also from themselves – creating a situation where each separate Bulgarian settlement has developed its unique dialect. There were also bans on marriage and family relations outside the village. It ought to be noted that there were no strict prohibitions on marital relations with the inhabitants of other Bulgarian settlements, but the language barrier significantly influenced the minimalization of relations between separate groups of the Bulgarian population of the Odessa region.

The appearance of the first generation of Bulgarians born on the territory of the modern Odessa region also marked the birth of a new identity – Bessarabian Bulgarians. According to the Ukrainian historian A. Ganchev, this identity can be characterized as spatial, because the first generation of Bessarabian Bulgarians hardly realized their difference from the Bulgarian population of the metropolis. Gradually, the territorial

identity of Bulgarians in Bessarabia acquires more and more fragmented features - self-names of separate communities arise that are associated with a particular village and are perceived as something different from other Bulgarians who left the territory of the metropolis several dozen years ago.

All the aforementioned traits typical for the Bessarabian Bulgarians persist to the present day. The difference between the generations is always preserved even over time. The older generation of Bulgarians in the Odessa region speaks two languages, Bulgarian and Russian, in the majority. Younger ones, born after 1985, speak three – Bulgarian, Russian and Ukrainian. Russian is spoken universally in the Bulgarian environment of Bessarabia as an understandable language for all and performs the role of an official language, although it is not (Ganchev 2006, 266 – 268).

The situation among the Azov Bulgarians is radically different - the so-called collective trauma associated with the complex process of migration played a major role in the formation of their identity. The Bulgarians have moved to the territory of the south of the Zaporizhzhya region both from the metropolitan territory and from Bessarabia (i.e. the second wave of migration). Upon arrival at their final destination, the Bulgarians were shocked by what awaited them – absolutely unfit for life terrain, harsh local winters, which they were unfamiliar with within their homeland, etc. All these became important factors in the formation of collective trauma.

The Azov Bulgarians identified themselves as refugees “from Turkish slavery. The collective trauma associated with migration has been experienced exclusively within the community and has not been made public. It has only been possible since the early 2000s when Bulgarians started to celebrate the anniversary of the migration to the Northern Azov region (“Bulgarian Sobor”). That anniversary is perceived not as a holiday, but as a day when refugees found peace in a foreign land and escaped the persecution of the Turkish administration – it is worth mentioning that the Azov Bulgarians associate the Turks with an enemy who forced them to leave their native land and settle in the barren steppes of Azov (Semyvolos 2017, 100 – 103).

Thus, we can state that nowadays the Bulgarian minority in Ukraine has formed two different identities and hence two different narratives. The Bessarabian Bulgarians are poorly aware of their connection with their historical homeland and perceive their identity as a separate ethnic group, which is also heterogeneous in its composition. The Azov Bulgarians, on the contrary, cherish and hold sacred their connection to their metropolis, and perceive their migration to the Azov steppes as cultural trauma. Their entire cultural and social life is conditioned by the dominance of the victim complex.

3. Actors

The historical memory of Ukrainian Bulgarians is formed by a range of different actors, which largely allowed them to preserve their identity in the multi-ethnic Ukrainian society, where assimilation processes are quite active. Various ethnocultural

associations, as well as mass media and individual public activists of the Bulgarian minority, can be defined as the main actors.

The very first Bulgarian organization on the territory of the USSR appeared in Ukraine. Between 1985 and 1989, the Bulgarian Cultural and Educational Society named after St. Cyril and Methodius was formed in Bolgrad. The organization united only Bessarabian Bulgarians, i.e., it had exclusively regional character. It is remarkable that the Bolgrad society has undertaken to uphold not only the rights of Bulgarians in the region but all other ethnic minorities residing in the areas where Bulgarians are concentrated. In 1989 Azov Bulgarians began to self-organize; as a result, the Primorsk Bulgarian Cultural and Educational Society “Sdruzhenie” began its work.

The Association of Bulgarians of Ukraine is considered to be an umbrella organization of the Bulgarian national minority in Ukraine. The incentive for the creation of this organization was the adoption of several legislative acts in 1992 – “On national minorities” and “On associations of citizens”, and already in October of the next year due to the efforts of 9 Bulgarian national and cultural societies the Association of Bulgarian national and cultural societies and organizations of Ukraine was created. We should note that the representatives of Bulgaria, as well as delegates from Bulgarian organizations in Moldova, took part in the work of a policy conference. This fact testified to the recognition of Ukrainian Bulgarian communities as a part of the metropolis. The first President of the Association was F. Karazhekov.

For more than 5 years the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine has been concerned almost solely with organizational matters. The problem of cultural revival and consolidation of Ukrainian Bulgarians was on the agenda only in 1999, when the All-Ukrainian Center of Bulgarian Culture was created in Odesa. At the same time, the governing bodies of the Association were reshuffled; as a result, it was headed by A. Kisse, who is the president to the present day. A. Kisse until 1999 was unnoticeable in the membership of the Association. At that time, he was engaged in the deputy activity on the level of the Odesa region. Kisse's election as the president of the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine gave a voice to the Bulgarian minority in the legislative branch of the Ukrainian government.

Today, the Association has turned into a multi-branch organization with affiliates all over Ukraine – in Odesa, Lviv, Kyiv, Zaporizhzhia, and many other cities. About 50 organizations of Bulgarian minority joined the Association (Deryabin 2012; Etapy stvorneniya i stroyeniya 2021; Zavorodnya 2019).

Primorsky Bulgarian Cultural and Educational Society “Sdruzhenie” is a part of the Association of Bulgarians of Ukraine, but it positions itself as the leading organization of the Bulgarian national community in the south of Zaporizhzhya region. The members of “Sdruzhenie” held till recently important posts in the bodies of local self-government of the region, for example, the mayor of Primorsk Elena Bozhkova is an ethnic Bulgarian. Representatives of the Azov Bulgarian

community define themselves as “Taurian Bulgarians”, which is emphasized at all key community events.

Despite the slogan of Ukrainian Bulgarians (“Strength lies in unity!”), tension in relations, rivalry and struggle for leadership between Bessarabian and Azov Bulgarian organizations can be traced. Despite declarations, the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine primarily represents the communities of Bessarabian Bulgarians. The Primorsky Bulgarian Cultural and Educational Society, in its turn, never gets tired of repeating that they were the first among the Bulgarians in Ukraine, who started holding councils, which are considered to be historical forms of self-government of the Bulgarian population. Exactly the Bulgarian activists of Primorsk became co-founders of the all-Ukrainian Association, but they never took a significant place in the system of society management (Primorsko rayonno balgarsko kulturno-prosvetno druzhestvo (PRBKPD) “Sdruzhenie” 2021).

Mass media are important actors in the formation of the historical memory of the Bulgarian national minority in Ukraine because they help to preserve the language, culture, and traditions and to transmit them to the new generations of Ukrainian Bulgarians. All in all, more than 70 print media oriented at the Bulgarian minority have been and are being published in independent Ukraine.

The impetus for the periodicals of the Bulgarian minority was the party decree on meeting the cultural needs of national minorities. The first regular publication oriented toward the Bulgarian diaspora in the USSR appeared in Moldova. This prompted the Ukrainian party nomenclature to take action as well. It began with a Bulgarian page in the party newspapers in Odessa, but in the Bulgarian villages no one subscribed to these newspapers, and therefore the initiative went unnoticed. Finally, in 1989, thanks to the efforts of the Bulgarian Society in Odessa, the first edition of the newspaper *The Roden Kray* appeared. The next edition came out only a year later, and only then the newspaper has become a regular publication.

However, during the first year of its existence, *The Roden Kray* remained a marginal publication even among the Bulgarian population – about 3,000 people regularly subscribed to the newspaper which is less than 2% of the Bulgarians of the Odesa region. The main reason for such low figures is the language barrier. We have already mentioned above that almost every Bulgarian village has its dialect and quite often people from neighboring Bulgarian communities cannot understand each other easily. After Ukraine declared its independence the status of *The Roden Kray* newspaper has changed, it became a national newspaper financed by the state. It ceased to be a separate newspaper, becoming an edition of *The Golos Ukrainy*. To increase the number of regular subscribers, the editorial office distributed the newspaper for free at festivals in Bulgarian villages, encouraged subscribers with free bonus issues, etc. Although the newspaper has an All-Ukrainian status, the main content of *The Roden Kray* remains oriented to Bessarabian Bulgarians.

A momentous event for the Bulgarian minority was the beginning of the publication of the newspaper *The B'lgarin*, which since 1994 has been published by the Bolgrad society of the Bessarabian Bulgarians and was mainly oriented to them. The new newspaper stood in stark contrast to the non-initiative and informational nature of the newspaper *Roden Kray*. *The B'lgarin* was distinctive for its radicalism, acuteness of the issues raised, its manifestation-protest tenor in most of its articles, and its very wary attitude toward independent Ukraine. The newspaper advocated the thesis about the necessity of maintaining the closest ties of the Bulgarian minority with the metropolis. A few months later it changed its name to *The Kambana* (Shvets' 2015).

Radical tone of a vast majority of paper '*B'lgarin*'s publications was closely linked to the personality of N.Todorov, the main author of the articles and the head of Bolgrad Bulgarian community. He considered that it was the independent Ukraine that braked the process of national revival inside Bulgarian Diaspora. N.Todorov emphasized that Ukrainian authority can count on the support of national minorities only in case of doing favors in return like enhanced funding of state programs aimed at strengthening national communities. Such radicalism raised fears of some members of Bolgrad community, so the newspaper '*B'lgarin*' like it was seen by N.Todorov existed only a few months (Shvets' 2016, 47).

The *Rodoliubie* also had a radical approach. All the above publications did not last long and could not compete with the moderate *The Roden Kray*, which had the support of official Kyiv (Shvets' 2015).

The only officially registered newspaper of the Azov Bulgarians *The Slavyansko Sl'inchitse* has been published since 1996, but despite its official status, it has become a one-day newspaper. In 1997, the Crimean Bulgarians established the newspaper *The Izvor*, supervised by the Crimean Republican Society of Bulgarians. Over a short period, *The Izvor* became the most high-quality and informative print media among all minority publications on the peninsula. The newspaper of the Crimean Republican Society of Bulgarians was so popular that it advertised subscriptions to *The Roden Kray*. Obviously, the two newspapers were out of the question to compete with each other in Crimea.

The only serious competitor to *The Roden Kray* was the newspaper of the Association of Bulgarians of Ukraine *The Ukraina: Bulgarsko obozreniye*, which was initiated by the newly elected president of the Association A. Kisse. At first, A. Kisse even used the information potential of the newspaper in his election campaigns, but since 2004 the editorial board has started positioning the paper as apolitical, which corresponded to reality (Shvets' 2015; Shvets' 2012).

The personal factor often plays a decisive role in the process of formation and transformation of the historical memory and identity of a particular ethnic group when it comes to national minorities. One way or another, but behind the creation of ethnocultural societies and print publications of the Bulgarian minority the certain social activists, local historians, and professional historians, who can also

be ranked as key actors in the crystallization of the historical memory of Ukrainian Bulgarians, stood.

Leonid Paskalov is one of the most prominent representatives of the Northern Azov Region Bulgarian community, who dedicated his whole conscious life to studying the history of Azov Bulgarians. L. Paskalov worked as a teacher of the Bulgarian language, as well as a staff writer for the newspaper *The Roden Kray*. However, the most significant contribution of L. Paskalov to the preservation of historical memory and identity of Ukrainian Bulgarians was his book “*Tavriyski istorii*”, which was published several times in Bulgarian. The book covers the main stages of populating the south of Zaporizhzhya region by Bulgarians and creates a kind of pantheon of the most famous activists of the Bulgarian minority – descendants of Azov Bulgarians, etc. (Paskalov 2016; Semyvolos 2017, 105).

Alexander Ganchev, a native of Bessarabian Bulgarians and a historian from Odesa, has made the history and modern times of the Bulgarian national minority in Ukraine a subject of his scientific interests. A. Ganchev organizes regular scientific conferences on the Bulgarian minority and Ukrainian-Bulgarian relations, supervises the preservation of Bulgarian cultural heritage sites in Ukraine, and publishes scientific periodicals, focusing on a wide range of issues related to the history and culture of Azov and Bessarabian Bulgarians (Sklad kafedry. Hanchev Oleksandr Ivanovych 2020).

Vladimir Mil'chev, a historian, created an authoritative school of Bulgarian studies in Zaporizhzhia. He studies the first stage of colonization of the South of Ukraine by Bulgarian settlers; he is a co-organizer of one of the most respected scientific forums in Ukraine – *Drinov Readings* in Kharkiv, which always focused on the history of Bulgaria in general and the Bulgarian minority on the territory of Ukraine in particular (Mil'chev Volodymyr Ivanovych 2018). It is impossible not to mention the journalist Dora Kostova, who since 1995 has been heading the editorial board of the newspaper *The Roden Krai*. Dora Kostova took the helm of the leading print publication of Ukrainian Bulgarians in the most critical period of its existence. She has always consistently defended the necessity and importance of the printed word in the native language for the Bulgarian diaspora in Ukraine and was able to distance the newspaper from involvement in political projects of individual leaders of the Bulgarian minority (Slovo redaktora 2021).

4. Commemoration

Analyzing the formation of the historical memory of the Bessarabian and Azov Bulgarians we can state that the expressive difference in the narratives strongly influenced the commonality of the historical memory of the migrant communities as well. Tension and even confrontation between the two main groups of the Bulgarian population of southern Ukraine are evident in almost all aspects. The Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine, which, despite its name, represents mainly Bessarabian

Bulgarians, has tended to monopolize the right to represent the national and cultural movement of Ukrainian Bulgarians since the early 2000s.

The so-called All-Ukrainian Center of the Bulgarian Culture was opened in Odesa, initiated by the newly elected president of Association A. Kisse. One of the main missions of the center was to preserve the national identity of the Bessarabian Bulgarians, while the Azov Bulgarian communities were put aside, though they actively participated in the creation of the Association and were at its origins together with the Bulgarians from Odesa Region.

The Ukrainian Bulgarians believe that the historical form of self-government of Bulgarians was the so-called Council (Sobor), which for centuries have been held practically in every Bulgarian village. We have already mentioned that the first Councils (Sobors) in independent Ukraine were held exactly by Azov Bulgarians, in Primorsk, but later the Association took over this mission and proclaimed Odesa as a historical center and home for all Bulgarians in Ukraine. The Councils (Sobors) in Odessa were first held in 1998 and since that time they have been held every 2 – 3 years. The Board of the Association of Bulgarians of Ukraine believes that the Councils (Sobors) are necessary for every Bulgarian to remind him/her of his/her native places, traditions, and customs.

It was only in the early 2000s that Councils (Sobors) started being held throughout the country, almost in all regions where Bulgarians were concentrated. As a rule, these gatherings are occasioned on the regular anniversaries of the migration of Bulgarians to Bessarabia, Tavia, and Ukraine as a whole. The Days of Slavic Script, which are traditionally held in the same All-Ukrainian Center for Bulgarian Culture, are also important for Bessarabian Bulgarians. The question of returning the historical names to the Bulgarian settlements of Bessarabia has been repeatedly raised at these Councils (Sobors).

The Bulgarians of Ukraine, regardless of the region where the community resides, associate themselves with the medieval Bulgarian state known as Great Bulgaria. This proto-state association existed in the steppes of the Northern Black Sea region for several decades in the 7th century. All those vestiges of Bulgarian nationalistic ideas originated in Bulgaria in the last third of the 19th century were echoed in Diaspora through distributing printing materials and frequent attendance of Bulgarian colonies in the Northern Black Sea Region by metropolis' representatives.

This connection was emphasized at many councils and was eventually immortalized in a memorial to the creator of Great Bulgaria, khan Kubrat. The monument was installed to mark the 230th anniversary of the migration of Bulgarians to Ukraine and was sponsored by patrons of the metropolis. It is worth noting that the population of Great Bulgaria is quite indirectly related to the Bulgarians as a modern nation – they only took part in the ethnogenesis of the Bulgarians (and some other nations). The memorial is currently located in the village Maloe Pereschepino, Poltava region – it is maintained by pupils and teachers of the local school (Deryabin 2012, 76 – 79).

We have already mentioned above that for the Azov Bulgarians the migration to the territory of Ukraine is a kind of trauma. That is why the holding of the so-called Bulgarian Councils in honor of the anniversary of the migration is not a festive event – these are days of memory of the victims who died during the migration and in the first years on the new lands when the Bulgarians have not yet settled down in the south of the modern Zaporizhian region and have not begun the economic development of the latter.

In the memory of the Bulgarian community of the Azov Sea region, the period from the middle of the XIX century to the beginning of the First World War is considered an era of prosperity, a golden age. As a result of the active development of the uncultivated steppes, an economic boom began in the Bulgarian colonies at that time.

The Ukrainian researcher Ivan Semivolos carried out large-scale field studies inside Priazovia Bulgarians during which some interviews with the old-timers were recorded. According to I.Semivolos's evidence, a vast majority of Bulgarian villages' residents in the south of Zaporizhzhya region regard the tsarist period as the best for the Bulgarians. The further horrors of dekulakization idealized pre-revolutionary period of Bulgarian communities' history in Ukraine. Moreover, the mythical images of the fact that metropolis experienced the period of its revival occurred (Semyvolos 2017, 104).

The war and revolutionary events of 1917 – 1921 destroyed all this economic prosperity, Bulgarians were killed on the fronts of the First World War, and during the Civil War the Bulgarian settlements were almost in the epicenter of military operations. During the Soviet period, there was a so-called process of trauma repression and only after the independence of Ukraine, the Azov Bulgarians began the process of memory recovery (Semyvolos 2017, 104 – 105).

Local public activists have done a lot for the national and cultural revival of the Bulgarian population of the Azov region in the late 20th to early 21st century – for example, a writer and teacher Leonid Paskalov, who published the book “Tavriyski istorii”, which brought back the memory of many prominent figures of the Bulgarian migrant community. The book contains a large number of memories of old-timers Bulgarians of the Northern Azov region. Thanks to L. Paskalov, a memorial plaque to Misho Hadzhiysky, whom Azov Bulgarians consider a national hero, appeared in the Azov region. M. Hadzhiysky was a writer, historian, and public figure, forgotten in Soviet times, who fell victim to communist repression.

The memorial plaque was installed in the village of Inzovka, which is now a prime example of assimilation in the Bulgarian community of southern Ukraine – the locals mostly speak Russian, and only a few old-timers speak Bulgarian, although as of 2001, almost 17% of Inzovka residents listed Bulgarian as their native language.

The Holodomor and repressions are other tragic pages in the history of the Azov Bulgarians, which are firmly imprinted in the memory of the older generation of migrant communities. The memorials to Ukrainian Bulgarians, who were victims

of repressions, were installed in several villages of the Zaporizhzhya region – Kolarovka, Preslav, etc.

The village Kolarovka mentioned above currently bears the name of Sophiyevka; it is not the first change in the name of this locality during its 150 years of existence. It was named Kolarovka in honor of the Bulgarian Communist movement activist Vasil Kolarov. As a result of decommunization policy a number of localities changed their former names, so the village was renamed into Bolharka. But the Bulgarian community opposed to such decision and proposed own name, Sophiyevka. The Ukrainian institute of national memory which heads the issues on renaming did not support the community. The matter lies in the fact there is the locality of Sophiyevka in Berdyansk district, so such doubling leads to confusion. As a result, the local community made own point and the village got the name of Sophiyevka (Selo Bolharka otrymalo novu nazvu 2021; Pacheva 2011, 552).

An interesting fact is that the conflicts between donors – philanthropists and local authorities, who were also Bulgarians, have happened because of the installation of the monuments. The Azov Bulgarians do not forget about the Bulgarian national holidays that started to be celebrated in the villages in the 2000s – “Baba Marta”, “Trifon Zarezan”, and others (Paskalov 2016; Semyvolos 2017, 105 – 109).

Conclusions

Summarizing the results of our study, we can state that the heterogeneity of the Bulgarian community on the territory of Ukraine is explained by different ways of migration of Bulgarians from the territory of their historical homeland, which, consequently, influenced the process of formation of the national narrative and historical memory in each of the two main groups.

The Bulgarians of the Odesa region initially identified themselves less with the metropolis in terms of identity and, thus, realized themselves as a separate and unique ethnic group – the Bessarabian Bulgarians. The Bulgarian population of the Northern Azov region (first of all, the south of the Zaporizhzhya region) retained more features that related them to their historical homeland. For them, the migration was a tragedy and cultural trauma, and virtually all the activity of the main actors involved in the formation of historical memory is aimed at emphasizing this trauma.

The Azov Bulgarians began to realize their different identity from the metropolis already in independent Ukraine, showing considerable interest in the so-called “revival of memory”, which can be traced in the opening of monuments and memorials to local figures of the Bulgarian revival who suffered from Soviet repressions. The activity of Bulgarian national and cultural communities as well as some their members played a significant role in that event, Leonid Paskalov is the first and foremost. On the contrary, the Bulgarian community in Bessarabia now tries to emphasize its connection with Bulgaria by celebrating historically traditional holidays, opening memorials to all-Bulgarian figures, etc.

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