

In 1863, the Irishman Patrick McCabe Faye organized in Dublin a collect to help Polish people at the time of the January Insurrection: “*It was the only right that the Poland of the West come to aid of her Sister in the East*” he said<sup>1</sup>. And he was not the only one to say so: this story opens Roisin Healy’s major work *Poland in the Irish Nationalist Imagination 1772 - 1922 : Anti-Colonialism within Europe*. However, if Lenin, during his 1913 trip to Dublin, saw in Ireland a “*British Poland*”,<sup>2</sup> but closer to Galicia, than to Poland represented by Warsaw or Łódź. Galicia is considered as a cradle of Ukrainian Nationalism, for instance with the Peasant Uprising of 1846. A link is made between this three “small nations”.

In the article *Overcoming Mighty Neighbors*, precisely written during the 2014 EuroMaidan Revolution, Alexey Bayer summarized:

*The Irish have traditionally identified with the Poles and their struggle for freedom and for their own national state. They are obvious parallels between two Catholic nations being oppressed by – and constantly rebelling against – an overwhelming colonial power of a different confession. But in fact, the Ireland-Ukraine pairing may be closer*<sup>3</sup>

Bayer insists: as Ukrainians were on the barricades, this parallels should be kept in mind. And EuroMaidan was followed in March by the annexation of Crimea, the war in Donbass that last 8 years before Russia declared its “special operation”, the 24th February of 2022.

How did the perception of the “Ukrainian fate” as a parallel to “Irish fate” evolve in those two countries?

First, we will focus on comparisons made by the contemporaries, then on those created by historiography and memories. It is only with this historical background that we would analyze the part played by this identification in the Irish perception of the conflicts in Ukraine after 2014.

*“Je trouve que la bataille de la langue, le combat pour la nation et la famine entretenue sont trois choses qui sont extrêmement rares dans les pays européens. Je ne savais pas que des parallèles historiques pouvaient exister. [...] Mais j’ai trouvé intéressant de dire aussi que ce livre [Retour à Killybegs] n’est pas traduit en ukrainien pour rien.”*

Sorj Chalandon, « La langue, c’est l’épiderme d’une nation », *Perspectives Ukrainiennes*,  
Novembre 2013

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<sup>1</sup> HEALY Roisin, *Poland in the Irish Nationalist Imagination, 1772 - 1922 : Anti-Colonialism within Europe*, Palgrave McMillan, 2017, 321 p.

<sup>2</sup> LENIN Vladimir, “Class war in Dublin”, *Severnaya Pravda* 23, 29/08/1913

<sup>3</sup> BAYER Alexey, “Ukraine and Ireland: Overcoming Mighty Neighbors”, *The Globalist*, 08/02/2014

### *Irish and Ukrainian people during the Century of Nationalism - An unilateral identification?*

The identification of Ukrainians to Irish, as well as reciprocal cultural transfers were made possible by actors linked to the fields of History, Literature or language, who had contributed to the eclosion of an Ukrainian national culture. When the nations constituted themselves as *Imagined Communities*<sup>4</sup>, this political identity was built as well. In the 1840's, we are just after the publishing of Taras Shevchenko's *Kobzar*, a national hero considered as a founding father of Ukrainian language. Ukrainian people at that time lived between Russian and Austria-Hungary, while Ireland was part of the United Kingdom since the 1801 Act of Union. This identification of Ukrainians to Irish was paradoxically built in opposition to Poles and to the Irish-Polish pairing. Indeed, the 1795 partition of Poland between Russia, Austria-Hungary and Prussia had a massive echo in Europe and especially in Ireland. The critical situation of another Catholic nation was a fertile ground for an identification even if, as recalled by Healy, Irish and Poles had little in common before the XIXth century. The comparison with Poland-Lithuania and their glorious history appeared as a better political technic, than to compare with, she quoted, Slovaks or Ukrainians. In 1908, the economist and historian Franciszek Bujak clearly declared these national affinities as impossible<sup>5</sup>: Poles from Eastern Galicia were closer to Anglo-Irish nobles, in an analysis assimilating social class to nation. Irish and Ukrainians are therefore implicitly reunited as peasant people oppressed by those nobles. He was not the only one: Volodymyr Antonovych, a History teacher, found solace in the survival of the intense Irish national feeling despite anglicization<sup>6</sup>. Despite his Polish background, he saw this people as enemies of Ukrainian cause. This Irish inspiration manifested itself in different social classes. The expression "*Wirlandiya*", a mix of *wira* "faith" and *Irlandiya* "Ireland" even became popular among Ukrainian peasants<sup>7</sup>. Ukraine is still much less important in the works of Irish nationalists, and Lenin remained one of the few external actors to underline the parallels. In Switzerland, 1914, during a debate on Russian Economy, he declared "*Ukraine had become for Russia what Ireland was to England, sucking everything for it and giving nothing in return*".<sup>8</sup> But after 1917, he never mentioned that parallel again.

As for Poland, the First world War and the subsequent political changes were the occasion for those two people to fight for their Independence. In Ukraine, Mykola Porsh (1877-1944), activist of the Ukrainian Revolutionary Party, the same as Volodymyr Vynnychenko, underlined similitudes as soon as 1910. For him, the Irish and Ukrainian national movements will be very close, both socialist movements of peasants and workers, as opposed to bourgeois nationalist movements - for instance, he says, those of the Czechs.<sup>9</sup> On the Irish side, it was less clear: Irish pamphlets, edited by the Sinn Féin, compared Ireland to other "small nations", like Ukraine, but only to show the Irish Independence as more legitimate. A telling instance with this pamphlet:

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<sup>4</sup> ANDERSON Benedict, *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, 1983, 160 p.

<sup>5</sup> BUJAK Franciszek, *Galicja*, Lwów, H.Altenberg, 1908

<sup>6</sup> ANTONOVYCH Volodymyr, *Moia Isvoped'*: Otvēt G. Padaliste, *Osnova*, N°1, 94, 1861

<sup>7</sup> « The Influence of the Irish Spirit on Ukraine », *Ukrainian Weekly*, 08/08/1953

<sup>8</sup> HRYNEVYCH Lyudmila, *The Ukrainian Holodomor in the Context of Soviet Imperialism* [Conference], Holodomor Research and Education Consortium, Conference about Empire, Colonialism and Famine in Comparative Historical Perspective: The Bengale, Irish and Ukrainian Famines, Toronto, Canada, 28/10/2016

<sup>9</sup> BOJCUN Marko, *The Worker's movement and the National Question in Ukraine (1897-1918)*, Historical Materialism Book Series, Volume:229, BRILL, 2021, 426 p.

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*Irishmen, look around you! Every small nation in Europe has taken the opportunity that was upon on demanding freedom. The Poles for century were oppressed and now acknowledge a distinct nation by the whole world. The Esthonians have demanded it [...] Ukraine has demanded it. Ukraine is now a free and independent Republic. The Finns have demanded it [...] These Nations are all younger nations than Ireland. Their history is not nearly as glorious as the history of Ireland. Their oppression has not been as awful as that of Ireland!”<sup>10</sup>*

If this kind of content can be interpreted as a proof of an internationalization of national questions, after 1940 and onwards, it is something much more specific that seems to bring together Irish and Ukrainian memories.

### **The question of famines: a diachronic comparison**

Those famine's very similar names, *An Gorta Mor* “the big starvation”, and *Holodomor*, “to kill or to die by starvation”, both describes a mass death by an unnatural, man-made famine. Both countries have lost up to 25% of their population, an estimation still debated in Ukraine when 4 to 7 millions deaths are estimated. In Ireland, the depopulation is majoritarially caused by the flight of 2 million people, for 1 million dying of the famine direct consequences, out of a population of 8 millions. Due to the Soviet efforts to hide the famine, contemporary comparisons between both famines, separated by 90 years, are difficult to find. In 1935, however, the Evening Herald already covered the Ukrainian tragedy in “Irish Parallels in the Ukraine”<sup>11</sup>

The traumas this particular form of mass violence could have left exist at the national scale. Those traumas are translated into national memory by a similar bitterness towards an oppressive regime who (at the very least) let the people starve in a fertile soil, while cultivating repressive policy towards them. They still hold a special place in the antagonism between those countries and their neighbors. The famines were so considered as a major tragedy that they were sometimes called “their holocaust”, without always referring to the Nazi Holocaust<sup>12</sup>. Andrea Graziosi, a Holodomor scholar, declared that if we stick to a strict definition of “genocide”, only the Holocaust would be one, being the submit of a pyramide, that the Holodomor only approaches<sup>13</sup>. He demonstrates then the inappropriate aspect of those comparisons. We can still underline the strong similarities between these memories that still should be nuances. Cannibalism did not let in Irish memory a mark as strong as in the Ukrainian one when those tales are omnipresent. During the Holodomor, life

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<sup>10</sup> #utls000113464 : Sinn Féin, Irishmen look around you! : Every small nation in Europe has taken the opportunity the war has given of demanding freedom, 1918

<sup>11</sup> “Irish Parallel in the Ukraine”, *Evening Herald*, 18/06/1935

<sup>12</sup> O'BRIEN Jim, « The Famine is our Holocaust, a chapter of our history we should never close », *The Irish Independent*, 15/12/2020

SARFIELD BOWMAN Stephen, « The Great Famine is the furnace in which the Great Irish Soul was forged », *Syracuse*, 15/03/2013

<sup>13</sup> DMYTRYCHYN Iryna et al, *La Grande Famine en Ukraine-Holodomor (connaissance et reconnaissance)*, L'Harmattan, collection « présence ukrainienne », 2017, 216 p

expectancy was half as high as during An Gorta Mor<sup>14</sup>, and the qualification of genocide for the latter is much less accepted by historians.

If we studied texts published after the Second world War that affected those countries very differently (Ireland was neutral, 8 millions Ukrainians died), this comparison is the most studied. The famines began to be nationally commemorated in the 1990's while it used to be something essentially cultivated by the diaspora. Irish like Ukrainians realized during those commemorations that there was no major monument where a commemoration could be held. In 1997, Rowan Gillespie created the six starved figures of the Dublin Famine Memorial. The face of little girl depicted by the sculpture *Bitter memory of Childhood* created in 2008 for the most vulnerable victims, children, is as emaciated. She holds in her hands the five ears of the eponymous law, punishing by 10 years-deportation, or even by death, every "dilapidation of socialist property", including the theft of ears in a field. This can echo to the Irish song *The Fields of Athenry*, written in 1979, telling the deportation of a man whose only crime was to steal "Trevelyan's corn" to feed his pregnant wife.



***Bitter Memory Of Childhood, by Petro Drozdowsky (2008)***

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<sup>14</sup> ANDREEV Evgeny, Jacques Vallin & France Meslé, *Demographic Consequences of the Great Famine: Then and Now*, Harvard Ukrainian Studies, Vol.30, n°1/4, AFTER THE HOLODOMOR: THE ENDURING IMPACT OF THE GREAT FAMINE ON UKRAINE (2008), pp.217-241

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***Famine, by Rowan Gillespie, 1997***

***The importance of comparison in building historical parallels***

Comparative History is as old as History itself, as its instinctive aspect reminds the thought of population themselves: “*the comparative method was used by Greek historians, without theorization...*”<sup>15</sup> In books comparing Ireland to other nations, Poland is much more present than Ukraine<sup>16</sup>: what is the basis for this comparison in academic literature?

In post-soviet historiography, the Holodomor/Gorta Mor pairing is a major point of comparison between these countries. If the famines are often cited together in works treating of starvation in general, the first major comparative work, *Histories, Memories and Representations of*

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<sup>15</sup> MAUREL Chloé, *Manuel d’histoire globale*, Armand Colin, 2014, 216 p

<sup>16</sup> CHIMIĄK Galia, CIERLIK Bożena, *Polish and Irish Struggles for Self-Determination: Living Near Dragons*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020, 162 p.

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*Famine in Ukraine and Ireland*, directed by Christian Noak, was published in 2012. If in fact, it collects articles focusing on one famine, the book underlines the proximity between their imageries. We also can note that if Ukrainians compared British and Russian dominations shortly after 1940, they were not explicitly naming famines. In the Irish Press, in 1953, the former ambassador Roman Smal-Stocky said:

*Both Ukraine and Ireland were confronted with a similar agrarian problem. That, in part, forced the Irish to emigrate to America and the Ukrainians to Siberia. Britain systematically hampered the Irish economy just as the Russians did in Ukraine... [...] in our Young Ukraine, we saw Young Ireland<sup>17</sup>*

In addition to this, the comparison can be found in works focusing on just one country, showing its instinctive character. Liam Kennedy, in his 2015's *The most oppressed people ever, the Irish?*<sup>18</sup> on Irish nationalist mythology, relied on *Soviet Genocide in the Ukraine*<sup>19</sup>, works of the Polish jurist Rafael Lemkin, who coined the term genocide after the Holocaust. Questioning an *orthodox victim vision* of History, he refutes the works of Tim Pat Coogan, a book "*amplifying British responsibility*" and "*one of the most contribution of this subgenre*", he used Lemkin's work stating that the Holodomor was one, citing his speech during a demonstration commemorating the 20th anniversary of the famine, in 1953. Lemkin had however declared at this occasion that this "high crime" had been committed one century before against the Irish<sup>20</sup>.

In the same way, the British background of Ann Reid explains the reference to Ireland in *Borderland, a journey through history of Ukraine*, like in Norman Davies's *God's Playground* on Poland, being as explicit: "*Ukraine thus became to Russians what Ireland and Scotland were to the English*". However, she invalidates parallels between the Poles and the Irish, comparing the former to the English, and thus to oppressors: "*Poles, like the English responded [to Ukrainian revolts] with a curious mixture of affection, scorn and feare*". About the Holodomor, she is also calling to comparisons with the Great Famine of Ireland: "*The term famine [...] is a wrong word for what happened. Unlike the Irish Potato Famine of the 1840's, the death of 1932-3 were a deliberate, man-made event*".<sup>21</sup> Historians who worked on different countries with different angles finish with a similar analysis.

Under the direction of Stephen Velychenko, and based on a conference held in 2019 called "Ireland, Ukraine and Empires. Dependence. Conflict. Memory", *Ireland and Ukraine: Studies in Comparative, Imperial and Nationalist History* is published in 2022<sup>22</sup>. It is the first academic world totally focused on Irish-Ukrainian relations in a broader sense. We should add that before, history of cultural transfers between those countries was the main research field of Hennadiy Kazakevych. In the movement of global history, crossed and connected histories were in opposition to the comparative one, so beyond a parallel, it is a connexion and a connected history that built itself.

<sup>17</sup> "Ireland and Ukraine, both fought for their liberty", *Anglo Celt*, 19/09/1953

<sup>18</sup> KENNEDY Liam, *Unhappy the land, the most oppressed people ever, the Irish?*, Merrion Press, 2015, 294 p.

<sup>19</sup> Lemkin Raphael, *Soviet Genocide in Ukraine*, Kyiv, Mainsternia Knyhy, 2009 (1953), 208 p.

<sup>20</sup> « Ukrainians March in Protest Parade. 10,000 Here Mark Anniversary of the 1933 Famine –Clergy Join in the Procession », *The New York Times*, 21/09/1953

<sup>21</sup> REID Anna, *Borderland, A Journey through history of Ukraine*, W&N, 2015 (1997), 368 p.

<sup>22</sup> VELICHENKO Stephan, RUANE Joseph, HRYNEVYCH Ludmilla dir., *Ireland and Ukraine, Studies in Comparative and National History*, Columbia University Press, 2022, 760 p.

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In the XXIth century, this connection continued to be made through the art. In 2011, the Ukrainians of Dark Ages and the Irish of from the Bogs of Aughiska associated to create an album of Dark ambient, which is one memorial to these millions of victims, separated by the Ukrainian continent, and by 90 years of history.



**From the Bogs of Aughiska/Dark Ages - An Gorta Mor/Holodomor (2011)**

**Human Jigsaw Records**

In 2007, Patrick Quigley, from the *Irish Polish Society*, declared that what could bring together in an unexpected way Ireland, Poland and Ukraine could be the story of Constance Markievicz, a figure of the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin, and of her husband Kazimierz<sup>23</sup>.

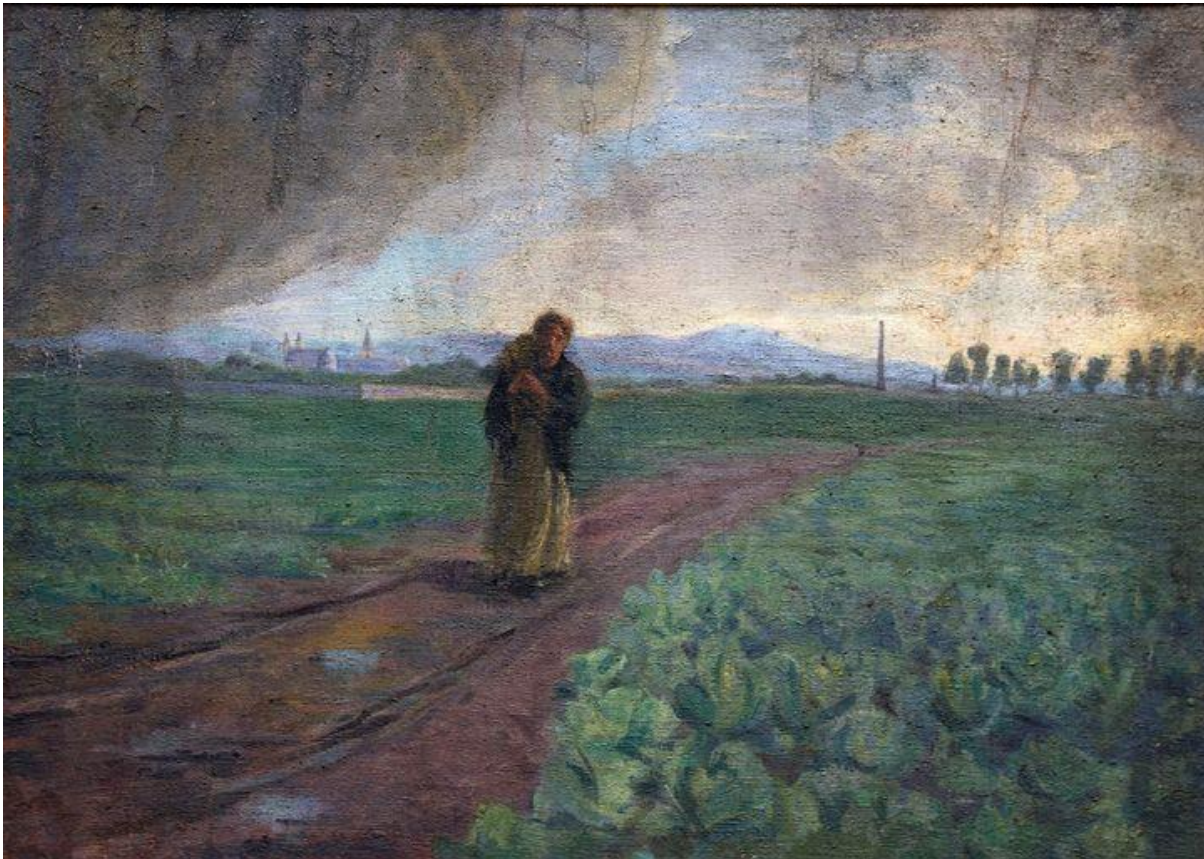
**Constance and Kazimierz Markievicz, between Ireland and Ukraine**

The union of Constance Gore-Booth (1868-1927), famous figure of Irish nationalism, feminism and socialism, born in the Anglo-Irish aristocracy, with Kazimierz Markievicz, was usually considered as an element of a common Irish-Polish history. However, it is in Ukraine, in Zhyvotivka, Vinnytsia Oblast, that Constance was visiting her family, and this is between Zhyvotivka and Lissadell that the family traveled<sup>24</sup>. Conscient of the class similarity, she observed the life of her family, as well as of villagers, enriching her political culture. If her political rhetoric, including feminist, was rather inspired by Poland, observation of local population's everyday life were most definitely comparing

<sup>23</sup> QUIGLEY Patrick, « An Irishman's Diary », *The Irish Times*, 3/12/2007

<sup>24</sup> ARRINGTON Lauren, *Revolutionary Lives: Constance and Casimir Markievicz*, Princeton University Press, 2015, 312 p.

Ukrainian and Irish societies, in this case two peasant communities widely affected by Famines, Lissadell losing up to 27% of its population.<sup>25</sup> Markiewicz was therefore an important element to allow the circulation of idea. In her “Women, Ideals and the Nation”,<sup>26</sup> read in the Students National Literary Society in 1909, she established several links between Irish women and women from minorities of the Russian Empire, like Polish women. This is one of the most marking text on intersection between gender-related oppressions and those related to ethnicity, and on the difficulty to find political allies. Ukrainian feminist were in competition with Polish ones, like Irish feminists were in competition with the British. In 2008, it is also in Ukraine that an attempt of building her museum was made, an unachieved project, lacking funds from the Ukrainian state, underlining a wealth gap with Ireland that was difficult to apprehend<sup>27</sup>. In Ukrainian press, locals complained about Patrick Quigley’s insistence. After this episode, he wrote the first biography of the couple, *The Polish Irishman: Life and Time of Casimir Markievicz*, published in 2011.<sup>28</sup> He continued to underline the ukrainian dimension, and not only Polish, of that transnational couple.



**Constance Markiewicz, *Ukrainian Landscape*, 1901**

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<sup>25</sup> Famine Mapping by Maynooth University, County Sligo Statistics, <  
<http://airo.maynoothuniversity.ie/external-content/famine-mapping-1841-1851-county-sligo> >

<sup>26</sup> MARKIEWICZ Constance, *Women, Ideals and the Nation*, Inghinidhe na hEireann, 1909, 16 p.

<sup>27</sup> СКРИПНИК Віктор, « З Ірландії вимагають звіту про музей на Вінниччині », *20 minut*, 31/07/2008

<sup>28</sup> QUIGLEY Patrick,, *The Polish Irishman: The Life and Times of Count Casimir Markievicz*, Liffey Press, 2012



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Situation nowadays in Ukraine is incomparably more critical than in 2008. First 2014 months are true breaking point in the perception of Ukraine by Westerner. Hence the choice of introducing those relations by Alexey Bayer's "recalling" at the EuroMaidan's occasion.

### *Ukraine at war (2014-2022)*

Did Ukraine's place in international geopolitical discussions, and her relations to Russia, transpose itself in Irish public discourse? To what extent does an identification appear in articles covering Ukrainian situation?

Irish were looking towards Ukraine after Crimea's annexation, and were sometimes interesting themselves to the country's history in a comparative perspective, few as *Irish Central* was admitting: "Even Ireland's horrific Great Hunger couldn't match the Ukrainian famine for pure evil."<sup>29</sup> The treatment of Ukrainians was compared to the Irish Penal Laws. But Ukrainians as well were drawing attention towards Ireland (and the other way around), and this even before the war. In 2010, Volodymyr Lytvyn warned about the error Ireland did by recognizing English as an official language<sup>30</sup>. However, the idea of a complete invasion of Ukraine was hypothetical.

Until the invasion of the 24/02/2022.

Even if a whole continent separates them, 6 months after the war began, 50.000 Ukrainians found their way into Ireland,<sup>31</sup> and with the help of the Polish community<sup>32</sup>. The 2nd June of 2022, Ireland recognized the actions of Russia in Ukraine as an act of Genocide. Alyona Shkrum, Ukrainian deputy, told the Seanad Eireann<sup>33</sup>. Held the 14th June of 2022, it was the first speech directly held by a Ukrainian deputy in another parliament since the 2022 invasion. Like many European countries those last months, Ireland finished by recognizing the genocide, the 25th November of 2022.

Shkrum insisted that Irish friendship would never be forgotten, and insisted that Ireland could understand "like nobody else" "In Ukraine, we say *Slava Ukraini*, but today I really want to say *Ireland abú*." she told the Ukrainian parliament.

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<sup>29</sup> O'DOWD Niall, « Ukraine's Stalin created a famine much worse than Irish famine », *Irish Central*, 27/09/2019

<sup>30</sup> "Ukraine vows not to repeat Ukraine's language mistake", *The Irish Times*, 25/03/2010

<sup>31</sup> "Almost 48.000 Ukrainian refugees came to Ireland since the start of war, CSO figures show", *The Irish Independent*, 20/08/2022

<sup>32</sup> "Graham Clifford: We must reach out to Polish groups in Ireland to best help arriving Ukrainians", *Irish Examiner*, 08/03/2022

<sup>33</sup> VASYLENKO Lesia, "Your friendship and generosity will never be forgotten: Ukrainian Mp's praise Ireland's response to war", *The Journal.Ie*, 14/06/2022

To conclude,

If historical “parallels” are something constructed, we should see that after 2014 Ukrainian and Irish began to look more at each other. Ukrainian concerns seem curiously similar. In the Irish memory, it is linked to past history and universal questions. A relation between

Ukrainian-Irish and Polish-Irish is clearly defined, since it underlined that if, in reality the national history of Poland and Ukraine are deeply imbricated, it looks like those two identification process

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