

## From Inequalities to Partnership: Analyzing a New Paradigm of Europe-Ukraine Relations in Ukrainian History School Textbooks, 2001–2024

Maria Kovalchuk 

### ABSTRACT

The idea of Europe as an embodiment of cultural and political aspirations for the people of Ukraine has been a topic since long before Ukrainian independence in 1991. Since then, however, the concept of Europe has become part of national institutions, such as education, and can be analyzed based on the fundamental elements of nation-building and national imagery, such as history textbooks for middle and high school students. Caught between a Soviet past and a European future, Ukraine has had to develop its own educational system and write its own history, including materials for teaching young Ukrainians. Previously, this issue has been studied separately, focusing either on de-Sovietization or taking a synchronic approach to study the meaning of Europe in a certain period. This article analyzes the de-Sovietization and Europeanization processes in Ukrainian history textbooks, methodologies, and course structures from the early 2000s to 2024. Unlike previous studies, this text focuses on the transformation itself and the dynamic changes in how the Soviet Ukrainian past and the meaning of Europe are dealt with. It also highlights the increasing tendency to teach Ukrainian history as an integral part of European history. I argue that since the early 2000s, the idea of Ukraine as an integral part of Europe has steadily become one of the cornerstones of history education, replacing Soviet historical narratives. This was followed by a critical reevaluation of European history and Ukrainian agency in the 2020s. Observing this transformation of the representation of Europe in Ukrainian history textbooks since the early 2000s may serve as a significant marker of change and is crucial for understanding both internal societal dynamics and self-imagining, as well as the external political and cultural aspirations of independent Ukraine.

**KEYWORDS:** Ukraine, Europe, textbooks, de-Sovietization, Europeanization.

### Declaration on Possible Conflicts of Interest

The author has declared that no conflicts of interest exist.

### Funding Statement

The publication of this article was supported by the Leibniz Research Alliance "Value of the Past."

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Maria Kovalchuk, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Maria.Kovalchuk@lmu.de,  
<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8506-2751>

From Inequalities to Partnership: Analyzing a New Paradigm of Europe-Ukraine Relations in Ukrainian History School Textbooks, 2001–2024 – ZfO / JECES 75/2026/1  
(received 2025-04-22, accepted 2025-08-12)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25627/202675111783> – eISSN 2701-0449, ISSN 0948-8294



## 1 Introduction

According to historian and renowned textbook researcher Robert Maier, textbooks “are a mirror of societal transformation. They transmit the knowledge considered by the state to be relevant and represent the ideas and values discussed in society, as well as holding visions of the future.”<sup>1</sup>

One crucial characteristic of textbooks is their simultaneous immersion in the past, present, and future. Textbooks possess great power as they construct narratives that explain, teach, and shape public opinion for years to come. In other words, they construct society by shaping the worldview of its future citizens and influencing public discourse for the coming years.<sup>2</sup>

For these reasons, Ukrainian middle and high school textbooks present an immensely dynamic field of research, mirroring a process of profound political and civic transformations, including processing the Soviet Ukrainian past and its legacies in the independent state, formulation of the new statehood philosophy, memory practices, and history writing.<sup>3</sup> Deeply transformative experiences, such as the Maidan revolutions in 2004/05 and 2013/14, influenced national and civic identity formation, paving the way to European Union (EU) accession and encouraging civic engagement. These two revolutions also marked new stages of national history reflection. Since 2005, Viktor Iushchenko, the third president of Ukraine, had brought the Holodomor to the center of memory politics. In 2015, the new parliament supported de-communization legislation and passed the corresponding laws.<sup>4</sup> The Ukrainian Institute of National Memory under Volodymyr Viatrovych, an active proponent of de-communization, ensured the implementation of these laws.<sup>5</sup>

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1 ROBERT MAIER: Introduction, in: POLINA VERBYTSKA, ROBERT MAIER (eds.): *Images of Europe in Transition: Textbook Representations in Post-Soviet Space*. Eckert. Dossiers 16 (2017), pp. 4–12, here pp. 9–10.

2 ECKHARDT FUCHS, STEFFEN SAMMLER: *Textbooks between Tradition and Innovation: A Journey through the History of the Georg Eckert Institute*, Braunschweig 2016, p. 14.

3 This paper analyzes specifically school textbooks. Therefore, when I use the term “textbook,” I refer solely to the textbooks approved for use in schools by Ukraine’s Ministry of Education.

4 The text of the law “On the Condemnation of the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes in Ukraine and the Prohibition of Propaganda of Their Symbols” (“Pro zasudzhennia komunistychnoho ta natsional-sotsialistychnoho (natsysts’koho) totalitarnykh rezhymiv v Ukraini ta zaboronu propahandy iikh’oii symboliky”) in its original language (Ukrainian) is available here: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/go/317-19> (2025-11-28).

5 For more on the topic of memory cultures in Ukraine, see: GEORGIY KASIANOV: *Memory Crash: The Politics of History in and around Ukraine, 1980s–2010s*, Budapest—New York 2022; ANDRII PORTNOV: *Memory Wars in Post-Soviet Ukraine (1991–2010)*, in: UILLEAM BLACKER, ALEXANDER ETKIND et al. (eds.): *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, New York 2013, pp. 233–254.

New perspectives on national history inevitably affected textbook writing. The Ukrainian textbooks published in the early 2000s combined a nationally centered narrative with Soviet historiographic terms, including the “Great Patriotic War” and “fascist German invaders” used to describe aspects of World War II, which repeated Soviet propagandistic lines.<sup>6</sup> The process of overcoming the legacies of Soviet history education, both in content and form, has been long and arduous, with some propaganda markers surviving in the generation of the 2010s textbooks.<sup>7</sup> Parallel to that, the idea of Europe as a community of values and Ukraine, as a part of Europe, has steadily become one of the central narratives since the early 2000s. European institutional development has been regarded in textbooks as an unquestionable path for Ukraine to become prosperous, and at the same time, “European” has become a legitimizing choice for political, economic, and cultural practices, serving as a gold standard. However, recent developments in the late 2010s–early 2020s textbooks have shown an intriguing shift towards a critical, differentiated, and decentralized vision of Europe and its policies.

This article will analyze the processes of de-Sovietization and gradual Europeanization in Ukrainian history textbook narratives, methodologies, and course structures from the early 2000s to 2024. It also differs from previous studies in its focus on the transformation itself, following the dynamic changes in dealing with the Soviet Ukrainian past, the meaning of Europe, especially since the early 2020s, and the increasing tendency to teach Ukrainian history as an integral part of European history. I argue that since the early 2000s, the idea of Europe has steadily become one of the cornerstones of history education in Ukraine, followed by an emancipatory process in the 2020s of critical re-evaluation and decentralization of European history and Ukrainian agency. Therefore, observing this transformation of the representation of Europe in Ukrainian history textbooks since the early 2000s may serve as a significant marker of change and is crucial for understanding both internal societal dynamics and self-imagining, as well as the external political and cultural aspirations of independent Ukraine.

The school textbooks analyzed include those used in the “History of Ukraine” and “World History” courses in 5th through 11th grade, published from 2001 to 2024, as well as new textbooks for the integrated course “Ukraine and the World” from 2018 to 2021.<sup>8</sup> It corresponds to the age groups 10–11 years old for the 5th grade and 16–17 years old for the 11th grade. I have deliberately omitted textbooks published in the 1990s due to the complexity of the so-called Ukrainization process in education that happened during this period, which deserves its own

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6 FEDIR TURCHENKO: *Istoriia Ukrainy 11 klas* [History of Ukraine 11th grade], Kyiv 2001, pp. 31, 34, 35, 68.

7 OLENA POMETUN: *Istoriia Ukrainy 11 klas* [History of Ukraine 11th grade], Kharkiv 2012, p. 58.

8 The list of all textbooks analyzed here is provided in the Bibliography at the end of the article.

attentive contextualization and would shift the focus from my initial research questions about the representation of Europe. The methodological and structural changes in history teaching should also be contextualized. For instance, the New Ukrainian School reform, which began in 2017, has shifted the learning paradigm from knowledge accumulation toward a competence-oriented approach, following Western methodologies and pedagogical approaches.<sup>9</sup> Recent developments in history education also include the new conceptual basis formulated in a decree under the new minister of education, Oksen Lisovi.<sup>10</sup> Among other points, this decree highlights the necessity for a crucial structural change, namely the transition from two separate courses, “History of Ukraine” and “World History,” that are taught in parallel, to a single comprehensive Ukraine-centered history course, wherein Ukrainian and world history are told in one general narrative. The two-course model is a legacy of the Soviet education system, where world history and history of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) were taught as two separate courses.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, this reform in history education brings Ukrainian history education closer to that of the country’s Western neighbors, such as Poland, which uses the single-course model, marking another step in Ukraine’s structural de-Sovietization.

On multiple occasions, the above-mentioned decree initiated by the Ukrainian minister of education stresses that the “Ukrainian nation is part of the European community” and the “view of the History of Ukraine [is] an integral part of European and world history in general.” It also advocates for “Ukraine’s inclusion, first of all, in the European space” and a “pro-European orientation of Ukrainian society.”<sup>12</sup> These statements reflect the significance of Europe and its portrayal both in education and the political discourse of Ukraine.

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9 Until 2027 in Ukraine 11th grade is the last graduating year. Starting from 2027 there will be 12 grades in Ukrainian schools according to the New School Reform. See: Law on Education (5 September 2017), <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2145-19?lang=en#Text> (2025-11-29).

10 Decree of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine from 30 July 2024 “On the Approval of the Conceptual Principles of Reforming Historical Education in the System of General Secondary Education,” see: <https://mon.gov.ua/npa/pro-zatverdzhennia-konceptualnykh-zasad-reformuvannia-istorichnoi-osvity-v-systemi-zahalnoi-serednoi-osvity> (2025-11-29).

11 SERHII HROMENKO: *Vsesvitnia istoriia Ukrainy, abo chomu odyń predmet krashchy za dva* [The World History of Ukraine, or Why One Subject Is Better than Two], <https://texty.org.ua/articles/113184/vsesvitnya-istoriya-ukrayiny-abo-chomu-odyn-predmet-krashyj-za-dva/> (2026-01-07).

12 Decree from 30 July 2024 (as in footnote 10), pp. 3, 5–6, 9.

## 2 De-Sovietization and Europeanization in the Ukrainian History Textbooks

The Soviet legacy in post-independence Ukrainian politics, culture, and education is a separate and immense topic, and history education became one of the most interesting arenas in which “Soviet Ukraine” was transformed into “Ukraine.” Researchers such as Yaroslav Hrytsak and Volodymyr Kravchenko have written extensively on this transition from a historical perspective.<sup>13</sup> For Ukraine, a country with a long-standing sense of national identity, but which did not have an extensive nation-state experience, the Soviet era was one of the most formative and productive in developing its institutions, politics, economy, and culture. According to Kravchenko, different strategies were employed in post-1991 Ukraine to de-communize public space. These strategies include a national revival doctrine that aimed “to replace the Soviet legacy with the Ukrainian one” and “an eclectic type of identity policy” that promoted compromise between Soviet and Ukrainian legacies, but, in reality, perpetuated the dominance of the Soviet component.<sup>14</sup> Soviet mythology has been gradually replaced by Ukrainian history, especially the events of the Ukrainian Revolution and short independence from 1917 to 1921, the 1918 Battle of Kruty, and the Holodomor from 1932 to 1933. However, these episodes cannot be compared to the scale of the myth of the Great Patriotic War, which became the core of current Russian memory politics. Criticizing the reactionary, uncompromising, and narrow ethnonational paradigm of identity politics, Kravchenko suggests that the most productive framework would be the national version of the modernization paradigm, which synthesizes the Ukrainian perspective, as well as constructive elements of Soviet and Russian legacies.<sup>15</sup> Education media follow this model, which started with an extremely narrow idea of Ukrainian nationhood in the 1990s and early 2000s that gradually became more and more inclusive and civic, as well as critical, about its own history.

The nation-centric paradigm of textbook writing in the 2000s was a symptom of the desire to overcome the Soviet educational and ideological system by telling its own history. This nation-building-through-education strategy has been the subject of multiple studies in Ukraine and abroad.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, concen-

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13 YAROSLAV HRYTSAK: *On Sails and Gales, and Ships Sailing in Various Directions: Post-Soviet Ukraine*, in: *Ab Imperio* (2004), 1, pp. 229–254; VOLODYMYR KRAVCHEKNO: *Fighting Soviet Myths: The Ukrainian Experience*, in: *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 34 (2015/16), 1–4, pp. 447–484.

14 KRAVCHEKNO, *Fighting Soviet Myths*, pp. 453–454.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 473.

16 NANCY POPSON: *The Ukrainian History Textbook: Introducing Children to the “Ukrainian Nation,”* in: *Nationalities Papers* 29 (2001), 2, pp. 325–350; JAN GERMEN JANMAAT: *Ethnic and Civic Conceptions of the Nation in Ukraine’s History Textbooks*, in: *European Education* 37 (2005), 3, pp. 20–37; IHOR HYRYCH: *Ukrains’ka istorychna pam’iat’*,

trating on textbook content alone cannot reflect the complexity of the educational process and leaves behind many crucial factors, including, for instance, teachers' interpretations of the material and the narrative's reception in the classroom. Research by Peter Rodgers and Olena Nikolayenko, who conducted multiple interviews with teachers and pupils in Eastern Ukraine, concentrating on extra-curricular factors, sheds light on the regional perspective of national and regional identities, politics, and citizen-making in schools.<sup>17</sup> A person's generation also influences their views on and approach to de-Sovietization processes in education. Rodgers's interviews with regional teachers in the 2000s helped reveal the tensions arising from the colliding worlds of teachers educated in the Soviet Union and the new national historical narratives they were asked to convey in their classrooms.<sup>18</sup>

Researchers have attentively observed this process of de-Sovietization (and, later, de-nationalization) since the first reflections and studies appeared in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Thanks to her numerous publications and the initiatives she chaired, Ukrainian historian Natalia Yakovenko helped facilitate early textbook writing and research.<sup>19</sup> Her study on the representation of Poles and Polish history in Ukrainian textbooks was one of the first to criticize overly nationalistic lenses in history teaching, describe existing problems, and make recommendations for developing a more fact-based and balanced view of entangled Ukrainian-Polish history.<sup>20</sup> As the Polish example did not deviate from the general trend of othering national and ethnic groups, such as Russians, Germans, and Tatars, in early Ukrainian textbooks, this issue was also addressed in studies by Germ Janmaat, Nadia Honcharenko, and Maria Kushnaryova.<sup>21</sup>

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shkil'ni pidruchnyky i osvita. Kontseptual'ni problemy istoriii Ukrainy [Ukrainian Historical Memory, School Textbooks and Education: Conceptual Problems of Ukrainian History], Kyiv 2011.

17 PETER W. RODGERS: "Compliance or Contradiction"? Teaching "History" in the "New" Ukraine: A View from Ukraine's Eastern Borderlands, in: *Europe-Asia Studies* 59 (2007), 3, pp. 503–519; OLENA NIKOLAYENKO: *Citizens in the Making in Post-Soviet States*, London—New York 2011.

18 RODGERS, p. 511.

19 NATALIA YAKOVENKO (ed.): *Shkil'na istoriia ochyma istorykiv-naukovtsiv: Materialy robochoii narady z monitorynhu shkil'nykh pidruchnykiv z istoriii Ukrainy* [History in Schools from the Perspective of Historians: Materials from the Work Meeting on Monitoring School History Textbooks of Ukraine], Kyiv 2008.

20 NATALIA YAKOVENKO: *Pol'shcha ta poliaky v shkil'nykh pidruchnykakh istoriii, abo Vidlunnia davn'oho i nedavn'oho mynuloho* [Poland and the Poles in School History Textbooks, or The Echoes of the Old and Recent Past], in: NATALIA YAKOVENKO: *Paralel'nyi svit: Doslidzhennia z istoriii uyavlen' ta idei v Ukraini XVI–XVII st.*, Kyiv 2002, pp. 366–382.

21 JAN GERMEN JANMAAT: *The Ethnic "Other" in Ukrainian History Textbooks: The Case of Russia and the Russians*, in: *Compare: A Journal of Comparative Education* 37 (2007),

From the late 1990s to the early 2000s, Ukrainian textbook research underwent an active phase of “Europeanization.” This period included Ukrainian scholars’ research visits to the Georg Eckert Institute for Educational Media (GEI) in Braunschweig, Germany, and international conferences in Ukraine and elsewhere in Europe. The Council of Europe and GEI were among the most active organizers of conferences to stimulate international dialogue with Ukrainian scholars and discuss existing challenges, new ideas, and formats in history textbook writing. One of the earliest such conferences took place in 1998 and brought together German and Ukrainian scholars to discuss societal and individual history categories in the textbooks.<sup>22</sup> Historians and textbook writers, such as Natalia Yakovenko, Yaroslav Hrytsak, Yurii Shapoval, Polina Verbytska, Stanislav Kulchytsky, Ihor Hyrych, Oleksandr Udod, and Leonid Zashkilniak, played key roles in transmitting the ideas discussed at these conferences into the next generation of textbooks and creating guiding principles of textbook research in Ukraine for further research.<sup>23</sup>

Analyzing the concept of Europe in Ukrainian textbooks has steadily gained importance since the 2010s. One noteworthy transregional conference organized by the GEI and dedicated to “Images of Europe in Transition” took place in 2016 in Kyiv. The conference collected observations and insights from textbook researchers from Central and Eastern Europe, including Baltic and Caucasian countries. Robert Maier of GEI and Polina Verbytska of Lviv Polytechnic

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3, pp. 307–324; NADIIA HONCHARENKO, MARIIA KUSHNAR’OVA: Shkola inshuvannia [The School of Othering], in: Krytyka 5 (2001), 4 (42), pp. 20–23.

22 Ukrainiis’ka istorychna dydaktyka: Mizhnarodnyi dialoh (fakhivtsi riznykh krain pro suchasni ukraiinski pidruchnyky z istoriiei) [Ukrainian Historical Teaching: International Dialogue (Experts from Different Countries on Contemporary Ukrainian History Textbooks)], Kyiiv 2000.

23 YURII SHAPOVAL (ed.): Kul’tura istorychnoii pam’iati: Ievropeis’kyi ta ukrayins’kyi dosvid [The Culture of Historical Memory: European and Ukrainian Experience], Kyiiv 2013; NATALIIA YAKOVENKO, LIUDMYLA VEDMID (eds.): Kontseptsiiia ta prohramy vykladannia istoriiei Ukrainy v shkoli (proekty) [Concept and Programs of Teaching the History of Ukraine in Schools (Projects)], Kyiiv 2009; OLEKSANDR UDOD: Suchasni ukraiinski pidruchnyky z istoriiei v otsynsi pols’kykh ta nimets’kykh istorykiv: Problemy istoriiei Ukrainy. Fakty, sudzhennia, poshuky. Mizhvid. zb. nauk. pr. [Contemporary Ukrainian History Textbooks from the Perspective of Polish and German Historians: Problems of the History of Ukraine. Facts, Opinions, Research. Collection of Articles], Kyiiv 2003, pp. 427–435; YAROSLAV HRYTSAK: Iak vykladaty istoriiei Ukrainy pislia 1991 roku? [How to Teach the History of Ukraine after 1991?], in: MAGDALENA TELUS, YURII SHAPOVAL (eds.): Ukrainiis’ka istorychna dydaktyka: Mizhnarodnyi dialoh. Fakhivtsi riznykh krain pro suchasni ukraiins’ki pidruchnyky z istoriiei. Zbirnyk naukovykh statei, Kyiiv 2000, pp. 63–75; NATALIIA YAKOVENKO (ed.): Shkil’na istoriia ochyma istorykiv-naukovtsiv: Materialy Robochoi narady z monitorynhu shkil’nykh pidruchnykiv istoriiei Ukrainy [Teaching History in Schools in the Eyes of Professional Historians: Materials of the Working Meeting on Monitoring School Textbooks on the History of Ukraine], Kyiiv 2008.

National University organized this conference and set a conceptual frame for the discussions.<sup>24</sup> To analyze the role of history education in constructing new identities, speakers explored the imagological construction of the image of Europe in different national textbooks. The lasting impact of this conference inspired the next generation of researchers to study Europe's portrayal in Ukrainian textbooks, including Svitlana Kostylieva, who analyzes contemporary higher education textbooks.<sup>25</sup> When studying the image of Europe, it should be noted how flexible and malleable that concept can be. Thanks to its vague and open definition, "Europe" serves as a surface upon which images incorporating the hopes and wishes of various people, states, institutions, and other actors can be projected. Europe can be defined in multiple ways, including as the European Union (EU) of mainly Western European states before its 2004 enlargement; the post-2004 EU, which included ten new member states; the Council of Europe, whose members do not correspond to EU member countries; a "European home," as formulated in the 2000 GEI and Council of Europe textbook study;<sup>26</sup> or, finally, the idea of Europe as a set of values or a community of shared values not limited by geographical or political borders.<sup>27</sup>

### 3 The Idea of Europe: Evolution in Ukrainian Thought

The idea of Europe as an embodiment of cultural and political aspirations, as a teleological direction for the people of Ukraine, has been a topic since long before Ukrainian independence, when the country existed in different political circumstances. Looking back 100 years, Ukraine, then a Soviet republic, was heavily dependent on the decisions made in Moscow, the center of the newly created USSR. However, Ukraine's cultural orientation toward the East or North, affected by centuries of forced Russification policies conducted in the Ukrainian lands of the Russian Empire, was not an obvious or necessary choice for the new Ukrainian Soviet elites.<sup>28</sup> Kharkiv, an epicenter of the Ukrainian and Soviet avant-garde and national communism and the then-capital of Soviet Ukraine, also

24 POLINA VERBYTSKA: *Civic Education of School Youth: Modern Aspects of Development*, Kyiv 2009.

25 SVITLANA KOSTYLIEVA: *Obrazy Ievropy u naratyvakh pidruchnykiv z istoriii Ukrainy dlia vyshchoii shkoly* [Images of Europe in the Narratives of Ukrainian history textbooks for high schools], in: SVITLANA KOSTYLIEVA: *Storinky istoriii: Zbirnyk naukovykh prats'*, pp. 226–241.

26 FALK PINGEL: *The European Home: Representations of 20th Century Europe in History Textbooks*, Strasbourg 2000, <https://rm.coe.int/1680494254> (2025-11-29).

27 SHANE WELLER: *The Idea of Europe: A Critical History*, Cambridge—New York 2021, pp. 1–15 (introduction); ANNA TRIANDAFYLLOU, RUBY GROPAS: *What is Europe?* 2nd ed., Abingdon 2022.

28 LARRY WOLFF: *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford 1994.

became the site of a significant literary debate of 1925–1928 that would influence the course of Ukrainian Soviet politics.<sup>29</sup> Conducted in the national-communist ideological frame, this debate centered on the question of Ukrainian cultural orientation toward “psychological” Europe, to use Ukrainian writer and communist Mykola Khvylovy’s term. In his politically charged pamphlets, Khvylovy wrote about the immense potential of Ukrainian culture thanks to its unique position in the borderland between Europe and Asia. He underlined that the only possible way for Ukrainian literature and culture to thrive was to orient itself toward “psychological Europe” (as opposed to Soviet Moscow).<sup>30</sup> Writing about the “psychological Europe,” Khvylovy meant a direction, a revolutionary method, a philosophical foundation, and a path but not the final goal. He claimed that the Asiatic Renaissance, a unique cultural combination of Eastern and Western influences in Ukraine, would help form a distinctive Ukrainian culture. These ideas were not received well in Moscow, as they uncovered the aspiration for geopolitical and cultural Ukrainian self-awareness, feared by the Soviet and earlier Russian imperial regimes. Later, Khvylovy saw his friends and colleagues arrested because of the debate’s implications, and died by suicide. Many of his contemporaries perished in the Stalinist terror of the 1930s. The idea of Ukraine’s orientation towards Europe was politically dangerous during the Soviet era, and therefore, it disappeared from discourse in Soviet Ukraine but not in Ukrainian émigré circles abroad.<sup>31</sup>

With Ukrainian independence in 1991, Europe and Europe-Ukraine relations became central questions in politics and culture. Civic movements before 2013 did not openly appeal to the idea of Europe. For instance, the 2001/02 campaign “Ukraine without Kuchma,” a reaction to journalist Heorhii Gongadze’s brutal killing for his investigative activities, was focused on Ukraine’s internal political crisis. The Orange Revolution of 2004 was a major protest sparked by massive falsifications of presidential elections organized by Viktor Ianukovych’s party. The Orange Revolution ensured that Viktor Iushchenko, who, in reality, received the majority of the votes, became Ukraine’s head of state. Even though this

29 On the literary debate and Khvylovy, see: OLENA PALKO: *Making Ukraine Soviet: Literature and Cultural Politics under Lenin and Stalin*, London 2020.

30 Mykola Khvylovy’s political pamphlets *Kamo hriadeshy* [Quo vadis] (1925), *Dumky proty techiii* [Thoughts against the Current] (1926), *Ukraina chy Malorosiiia* [Ukraine or Little Russia?] (censored and forbidden in the USSR, published posthumously for the first time in 1990), in: MYKOLA KHVYLOVY: *Tvory v 5 tomach. T. 5: Publicystyka* [Works in 5 Volumes. Vol 5: Publicist Texts], Kyiiv 2023. On “psychological Europe” *ibid.*, pp. 89–94.

31 See, for example: BORYS KRUPNYTS’KYI: *Istorychni osnovy ievropeiizmu Ukrainy* [Historical Foundations of Europeanism in Ukraine], in: *Literaturno-naukovyi visnyk: Knyzhka I* (Na chuzhyni), Regensburg 1948, pp. 120–130; GR. SHEVCHUK: *Toinbi chy Khvylovy, abo pro mezhi orakuliv suchasnosti* [Toynbee or Khvylovy, or about the Limits of the Oracles of Modernity], in: *Ukraiinska trybuna* (1948), 51.

revolution resonated in Europe and the world as one of the few successful color revolutions, the European idea was not at the center of its philosophy.

Almost ten years later, the idea of Europe came to dominate public discourse in Ukraine when the nation's path of accession to the European Union became endangered. On 21 November 2013, the government under Prime Minister Mykola Azarov decided to delay signing the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union for an indefinite period.<sup>32</sup> His reasoning for that decision included the economic and political pressure Russia exercised over Ukraine, including trade blockades, in light of Ukraine's possible economic reorientation away from Russia and other states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and toward the EU. Pro-Russia president Yanukovich and his government made a deal with Russia that ensured lower gas prices and a multi-billion-dollar loan for Ukraine, making the nation even more politically dependent upon and oriented toward Moscow. Furthermore, Ukraine's parliament, Verkhovna Rada, did not implement the necessary reforms for signing the Association Agreement.

After Yanukovich announced he would not sign the Association Agreement during the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, protests began on Independence Square in Kyiv. As the historian Catherine Wanner writes, "The Maidan began as a protest against something (Russian-oriented, kleptocratic governance) and became a revolution for something (a dignified life)."<sup>33</sup> Due to the initial reason for the protest, Maidan became a Euromaidan, bringing the idea of Europe to the center of the struggle. Visually, Euromaidan was represented by Ukrainian and EU flags and the refusal to bring in any party symbols that would only divide people. The European idea was a uniting factor that brought people to the streets to protest. But what did it mean exactly? Europe was an umbrella term for varied values, rights, and aspirations, such as civic freedoms, human rights, and the rule of law. As opposed to strict vertical hierarchies and the concentration of power associated with oligarchy and pro-Russian politicians, Euromaidan promoted horizontal connections, equality, grassroots activism, and individual agency, embodied in one of the most famous posters from the protest, which read, "I am a drop in the ocean (that will change Ukraine)."<sup>34</sup> Calls to fight corruption and injustice were not just abstract slogans but had very concrete formulations visualized in rich Maidan aesthetics. For instance, a series of stickers

32 Russia Urged Kiev to Delay Key EU Deal—Ukrainian PM, in: BBC News, 2013-11-26, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25100127> (2025-11-28).

33 CATHERINE WANNER: *Everyday Religiosity and the Politics of Belonging in Ukraine*, Ithaca, NY 2022, p. 82.

34 Exhibitions on visual aesthetics of Maidan have been organized in Vienna, Cracow, and other places. See, e. g.: <https://www.kuenstlerhaus.at/kuenstlerhaus/album/i-am-a-drop-in-the-ocean/> (2025-11-29).

that stressed the everyday challenges of corruption at work, in kindergartens, and in life, which people were fighting against.

The Maidan Revolution catalyzed historical awareness of ties between Ukraine and Europe or, rather, of Ukrainians belonging to Europe. This heightened historical awareness is reflected in the historiography that has appeared since then to explain Ukraine to Europe and the world and to narrate a non-isolated European and globally entangled Ukrainian history to Ukrainians. Programmatic books such as Serhii Plokyh's *The Gates of Europe* and Yaroslav Hrytsak's *Ukraine: The Forging of a Nation*, whose original Ukrainian title was "Podolaty mynule: Hlobal'na istoriia Ukrainy" [Overcoming the Past: The Global History of Ukraine], have been fulfilling exactly those two objectives, aimed at both international and Ukrainian readers.

#### 4 Europe in Early 2000s Textbooks: Untouchable Deity, Gold Standard, or Future Projection?

Ukrainian textbooks for middle and high school from the early 2000s portray Europe as a distant and idealized formation of states that Ukraine intends to join. These textbooks offer primarily a positive picture of progress and developmental successes, which serve as a reference point, a measure of achievements, and a gold standard for Ukraine in spheres ranging from politics and economy to culture and education.

When speaking about Europe in textbooks, it is crucial to clarify what exactly is understood by the term and the frame in which it is presented. Predominantly, Europe in the early 2000s meant Western Europe. It was presented as an often abstract, homogeneous, and undifferentiated unity distant from Ukraine, both mentally and geographically. Even though common Ukrainian and European legacies and shared values are often stressed in these textbooks, in the main narrative, "European" is used as a synonym for modern, progressive, and, simply put, better. In reality, focusing on Western Europe creates a gap and hinders the bridging of Ukraine and Europe, completely disregarding the epistemic existence of neighboring Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe. For instance, the 2008 eighth-grade textbook on world history includes units dedicated to Western European countries, including France, Spain, the Netherlands, and Denmark, and a thematic unit on The Thirty Years' War.

Meanwhile, Eastern Europe is almost nonexistent on this mental map as nothing is dedicated to its history; Russia and Poland are the only units in this category. Another unit in the same textbook is specifically dedicated to Western European culture, including a subchapter on the everyday life of a Western European person. There are no corresponding units for non-Western European

countries.<sup>35</sup> Such framing ignores a huge part of the experiences and entangled histories of Ukraine's immediate neighborhood. It also excludes, isolates, and opposes histories of Ukraine, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe, which are portrayed as a number of nation-states rather than a single unit. This "Western European" or "Western Civilization" approach suggests a direct adoption of pre-packaged, ready-to-be-consumed tropes and methods from Western European textbooks without a critical re-evaluation and a decentralized epistemology. This raises a need for another study using postcolonial methodologies to trace and examine the mechanisms of this adoption.

Students of the 2000s encountered Europe for the first time in fifth grade while learning about ancient Greece and the Roman Empire. Ukraine is placed in the same space of ancient legacies thanks to the Greek colonies and cities in the North Black Sea Region. Following that, the topic of the Middle Ages offers students details of the first interactions and political alliances between Kyivan Rus, presented as a predecessor to Ukrainian history, and European kingdoms. One of the most widely used stories is the multiple marriages Iaroslav the Wise, Grand Prince of Kyiv, organized between his own children and European monarchs. The 2002 fifth-grade textbooks present the dynamics and motivation for these marriages as "European countries [...] seeking the chance to live in peace with the powerful Kyivan Rus, *sought to become* relatives with its rulers."<sup>36</sup> Here, Iaroslav the Wise and Kyivan nobility are portrayed as desirable political allies and, therefore, beneficial marital options for European monarchs. Nonetheless, the proactive decision-making role lies with the "European countries," such as in the phrasing, "Henry the First *took* Anna Iaroslavna as his wife."<sup>37</sup> According to this description and especially the verb of action, marital diplomacy and active strategic planning belonged to Western Europe, while Kyivan Rus was a resourceful but also an objectified ally.

As textbook narratives in the early 2000s heavily focused on political and economic history, there are numerous examples of Europe being treated as the gold standard in these spheres. For example, one ninth-grade textbook reads,

"Although Ukraine was not at the epicenter of European historical processes and, as a dependent country, could not participate in them, the situation significantly changed during the nineteenth century. As in other European countries, large cities

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35 OLEKSANDR HISEM, OLEKSANDR MARTYNIUK: *Vsesvitnia istoriia 8 klas* [World History 8th Grade], Kharkiv 2008, pp. 254–255; NATALIIA PODALIAK: *Vsesvitnia istoriia 8 klas* [World History 8th Grade], Kyiv 2008, pp. 238–239.

36 VITALII VLASOV, OKSANA DANYLEVSKA: *Vstup do istoriia Ukrainy 5 klas* [Introduction to the History of Ukraine 5th Grade], Kyiv 2002, p. 53, author's emphasis.

37 Ibid.

grew on its territories, railways, sea, and river ports were built, and metallurgical plants were established using the latest European technology.”<sup>38</sup>

Here, Europe is a synonym for progress, and following this logic, it seems as if everything coming from Europe is better than what existed in Ukraine and is worth implementing. Interestingly, this portrayal corresponds to a widespread trend in Ukrainian society since approximately the 2010s, when adding the prefix “euro-” to any word came to mean a better version of that word.<sup>39</sup> Europe, therefore, served as a reference point on many occasions. This is the case when referring to achievements in general. It is also the case in textbooks from the early 2000s, which introduced high school students to more concrete data. There, those numbers were still compared with Russian ones, indicating, for example, the success of industry in Ukraine compared to the rest of the Russian Empire.<sup>40</sup> In textbooks from the late 2010s, Europe and European countries were used increasingly as comparative material, serving as a reference and evaluation standard for innovations, progress, and development.

Culture and education, topics often placed at the end of the unit in textbooks, use a similar paradigm of Europe-centered standards. Using Europe as a culture bearer legitimizes certain Ukrainian practices and processes, elevating their status and prestige if they follow the institutional path of their European counterparts. For example, one eighth-grade textbook reads, “Like the European universities of the time, the Kyiv-Mohyla Collegium had its own schools and branches.”<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, in the processes of cultural transfer, Ukraine is portrayed not only on the receiving end but also as a mediator for countries further east. Explaining the Northern War through a Ukrainian lens, textbook authors decide to underline its role as an intermediary enlightener, stating, for example, “While the Russians were cutting open a window to Europe, they were closing the door in Ukraine through which European influences had penetrated Russia in the previous century.”<sup>42</sup> This quote reflects the imperial dimension of “separating” or “cutting” space from above, monopolizing and dominating cultural and knowledge exchange in peripheries between Europe and Ukraine.

Textbooks from the 2000s portray Europe in an abstract and sometimes even contradictory way, as a formation of powerful states dominated by (former) empires and a teleological aspiration that embodies progress. It is hardly possi-

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38 FEDIR TURCHENKO: *Istoriia Ukrainy 9 klas* [History of Ukraine 9th Grade], Kyiv 2009, p. 4.

39 “Ievromaniia”: Chy nablyzhaie do Ievropy prefix “Ievro”? (video) [“Euromania”: Does the Prefix “Euro” Bring Us Closer to Europe? (video)], 2016-05-06, Radio Liberty reportage, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/27719593.html> (2025-11-29).

40 STANISLAV KULCHYTSKYI, IULIA LEBEDEVA: *Istoriia Ukrainy 10 klas* [History of Ukraine 10th Grade], Kyiv 2010.

41 HISEM/MARTYNIUK, p. 79.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 188.

ble to find space for criticism of Europe under such circumstances. Therefore, the paradigm shift observed in the next generation of textbooks is even more remarkable.

## 5 Transforming the Idea of Europe: The Shift toward the New Paradigm in the 2010s and 2020s

The late 2010s marked a shift in textbook writing, and the concept of Europe underwent some especially significant changes. Firstly, Europe had become a more differentiated region, no longer limited to Western European countries. Secondly, Europe was not as idealized as in earlier textbooks. Instead, it was presented with flaws that require critical evaluation. Thirdly, emphasizing Ukraine's agency in changing its political regimes and resisting Russian aggression allowed the textbooks to portray Europe on a horizontal level of partnership and shared vision of the future. The Maidan Revolutions and fighting the Russian War of Aggression do more than catalyze national potential among students; they also serve as a self-affirming position on the European and global security scene and allow a certain level of criticism directed at the political West for its lack of decisiveness.

Eastern Europe as a concept appears more often in textbooks from the second half of the 2010s, with various implications for regional dynamics and a more nuanced understanding of Europe in general and Ukraine's position in this Europe. In the textbooks' narratives, the concept of Eastern Europe explicates Ukraine as part of a wider region and, thus, integral to Europe. This change facilitates bridging Ukraine and Europe, unlike its earlier relations with a more distant Western Europe. Exploring shared historical events and entanglements in textbooks and finding similarities between Ukraine's experiences and the experiences of other Eastern European countries allows Ukraine to see itself as a part of Europe and its history as based on historical evidence rather than mere speculations.<sup>43</sup> An example of the latter has occurred in the already mentioned medieval story of the Kyivan Rus kinship ties with the other European monarchies. The telling of this story changed in the generation of textbooks published in the late 2010s and 2020s, following an upheaval in public discourse towards deepening Ukrainian–European partnership ties based on equality and common history, and as a response to the memory war with Russia.<sup>44</sup> For instance, the integrated “Ukraine and the World” textbook grants the agency and initiative for these marriage politics to Iaroslav the Wise and not the “rulers of Europe,”

43 Compare: TURCHENKO, *Istoriia Ukrainy 9 klas*, p. 4.

44 For example, see: IRYNA VUSHKO: *Historians at War: History, Politics and Memory in Ukraine*, in: *Contemporary European History* 27 (2018), 1, pp. 112–124, here pp. 116–117.

stating, “Kyiv Princes were becoming relatives with the representatives of almost all European monarchies.”<sup>45</sup> The map that visualizes this kinship in the new textbook is titled “The Foreign Affairs of Yaroslav the Wise,” emphasizing his proactive role in orchestrating these alliances. This represents the first observation made during this study, namely, a rebalancing of the power dynamics and agency that in earlier textbooks were often attributed to Europe but later were more and more given to Kyivan or Ukrainian actors. Anna Iaroslavna, or Anne of Kyiv, one of Iaroslav the Wise’s daughters who married French King Henry I, is a contested figure, as Russian and Ukrainian memory politics have tried to incorporate her into the imperial Russian and national Ukrainian projects, respectively.<sup>46</sup> In Ukrainian textbooks, especially since the late 2010s, Anne of Kyiv is given as evidence of the horizontal ties between Kyiv and European monarchies, the shared space of mobility, and alliances in the Middle Ages.

Nevertheless, most of the changes in the representation of Europe can be observed in the history of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In textbooks dedicated to the nineteenth century, there are still ambiguous evaluations when it comes to concepts of modernity and modernization, such as in explanations of the timeline of modernization. Western Europe, in this case, is presented as the pioneer of civilizational progress, whereas Eastern Europe is presented as needing to catch up with modernization to reach the political, economic, and cultural progress of its Western neighbors.<sup>47</sup> Research tendencies of the last two decades, represented, for instance, in studies by Serhii Yekelchuk and Serhii Bilenky,<sup>48</sup> formulate a persuasive argument on Ukraine becoming a modern nation against the odds, such as the lengthy stateless existence in an imperial framework. Textbooks may benefit from the abovementioned studies that examine Ukraine’s modernization path instead of following the process of Ukraine trying to keep up with other countries.

Introducing Central and Eastern Europe in the twentieth-century history textbook as a space of common experiences allows a new level of comparison between the countries. For example, a new generation of textbooks, called “Ukraine and the World,” introduces a comprehensive unit dedicated to regional aspects of the revolutions and state-building from 1917 to 1919 in Eastern

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45 MARYNA KAFTAN, IRYNA KOSTIUK, KSENIIA NOVIKOVA: *Ukraina i svit 6 klas [Ukraine and the World 6th grade]*, Kyiv 2023, pp. 27–28.

46 CHRISTIAN RAFFENSPERGER: *Ties of Kinship: Genealogy and Dynastic Marriage in Kyivan Rus’*, Cambridge, MA 2016.

47 OLEKSII STRUKEVYCH: *Istoriia Ukrainy 9 klas [History of Ukraine 9th Grade]*, Kyiv 2017, p. 6.

48 SERHII YEKELCHUK: *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation*, Oxford 2007; SERHII BILENKY: *Laboratory of Modernity: Ukraine between Empire and Nation, 1772–1914*, Montreal et al. 2023.

Europe.<sup>49</sup> Here, Europe is understood not only as a geographic or political unity of Western European countries but also inclusively, as a space of revolutions and similar experiences. Revolution and state formation as umbrella topics allow for discussions of a shared history in the same context, finding similarities and differences as well as “normalizing” the history of Ukraine within Europe by making its experiences comparable to the experiences of other European states. For instance, World War I and its connected revolutions, mass movements, and societal transformations received more attention in textbooks in the 2010s as the new Ukrainian mythology about the period from 1917 to 1921 had to be synchronized and understood from a comparative European perspective.<sup>50</sup> This methodology represents a tangible contrast to the Soviet legacies still found in the structure of the separated courses, “History of Ukraine” and “World History,” and the narratives of the earlier textbooks, which isolated Ukrainian history from its European and global entanglements.<sup>51</sup>

The new textbooks also introduce more Eastern European sources, including voices from Ukraine’s neighboring countries. For instance, the new textbooks include comments from Radosław Sikorski, then-foreign minister of Poland, on supporting post-Maidan Ukraine’s “return to the path towards the EU.”<sup>52</sup> It is impossible to understand the political landscape and interconnected nature of supranational politics without the voices of neighboring countries. The new textbooks seem to develop a far more comprehensive strategy toward Ukraine’s immediate neighbors, especially in teaching post-2014 history. After 2014, in light of Russian aggression, countries such as Poland and Lithuania became vocal and active supporters of Ukraine joining the EU, while the majority of Western European countries from 2014 to 2022 followed a policy of appeasing Russia. It is noteworthy that events from 2014/15 already appear in textbook narratives only a few years later, underlining the dynamic character of the Ukrainian textbook landscape.

Several critical points regarding Western Europe are explored for the first time or to a greater extent in the textbooks published since the 2010s than in earlier textbooks. These themes include Euroscepticism, EU and EU nations’ migration policies, the EU’s passive responses to Russian threats, and histories of European colonialism, predominantly in Africa, and their implications today.

49 OLEKSANDR HISEM: *Istoriia: Ukraïna i svit 10 klas* [History: Ukraine and the World 10th grade], Kharkiv, Ranok 2018, p. 53.

50 KRAVCHENKO, *Fighting Soviet Myths*, pp. 453–454; JOCHEN BÖHLER, OTA KONRÁD et al. (eds.): *In the Shadow of the Great War: Physical Violence in East-Central Europe, 1917–1923*, New York—Oxford 2021.

51 Compare this topic in earlier textbooks, e. g.: FEDIR TURCHENKO: *Istoriia Ukraïny 10 klas* [History of Ukraine 10th Grade], Kyiv 2010, and IHOR SHCHUPAK: *Vsesvitnia istoriia 10 klas* [World History 10th grade], Kyiv 2010.

52 MARIAN MUDRYI, OLENA ARKUSHA: *Istoriia: Ukraïna i svit 11 klas* [History: Ukraine and the World 11th Grade], Kyiv 2019, p. 294.

These criticisms of Europe and its politics change Europe's status from abstract and ideal to realistic and problematic, giving Ukraine a chance to formulate its contributions to Europe's growth.

The colonial legacies of Great Britain, France, and other European countries as well as twentieth-century decolonization processes are predominantly discussed in the 2018 "World History" course, whereas the integrated course "Ukraine and the World" often uses the term "colonial" to describe other countries' policies towards Ukraine, including the policies of Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and even interwar states, highlighting the "Colonial nature of [the interwar states'] economic policies."<sup>53</sup> Once again, this new comprehensive methodology reflects how close and synchronized the textbook narratives are with the history discipline's agenda and debates on postcolonial studies.<sup>54</sup>

When discussing Western colonialism, some textbook authors chose a different strategy, underlining the ambiguous and "contradictory consequences of colonial policies for the metropolises and the countries of Asia and Africa."<sup>55</sup> Presenting one side of a colonial European presence, these authors dedicated most of their texts to examples of how Europe "improved" industry, infrastructure, and education, lowered crime rates, and contained interethnic, interstate, and interreligious conflicts in the colonies.<sup>56</sup> Colonialism's negative consequences occupy only about a quarter of the text and include the following points: "aggressive exploitation of the colonial population and their natural resources," "growing agrarian overpopulation, people dying from hunger and epidemics," and "economic and political pressure" the colonialists placed on the "young national bourgeoisie."<sup>57</sup> This unbalanced portrayal tends to focus on the achievements of the colonial order rather than denouncing its flaws and problems as if it were written before decolonization and the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*.

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53 HISEM, *Istoriia: Ukraïna i svit 10 klas*, p. 106.

54 For a selection of programmatic texts on post-colonial studies from a Ukrainian perspective, see: MARKO PAVLYSHYN: *Kozaky z Iamayky: Postkolonial'ni rysy v suchasniï ukraïns'kii kul'turi* [Cossacks from Jamaica: Postcolonial Features in Contemporary Ukrainian Culture], in: MARKO PAVLYSHYN: *Kanon ta ikonostas: Literaturno-krytychni statii*, Kyiv 1997, pp. 223–237; STEPAN VELYCHENKO: *Pytannia rosiys'koho kolonializmu v ukraïns'kii dumtsi: Politychna zalezhnist', identychnist' ta ekonomichnyi rozvytok* [The Question of Russian Colonialism in Ukrainian Thought: Political Dependence, Identity and Economic Development], in: V. KRAVCHENKO (ed.): *Istorychna pam'iat' i totalitaryzm: Dosvid Skhidnoiï ta Tsentral'noiï Ievropy*, Kharkiv 2009, pp. 300–344; MYKOLA RIABCHUK: *Postkolonial'nyi syndrom: Sposterezhennia* [Postcolonial Syndrome: Observations], Kyiv 2011.

55 IHOR SHCHUPAK: *Vsesvitnia istoriia 9 klas* [World History 9th Grade], Kyiv 2017, p. 160.

56 *Ibid.*, pp. 160–161.

57 *Ibid.*

Stressing a common vision and common successes is another trait of the transformed image of Europe and Europe-Ukraine entanglements in the late 2010s and early 2020s textbooks. For instance, according to the 2021 textbook “History of Ukraine” for the 13–14-year-old age group, the Sich Cossacks’ participation in the Battle for Vienna in 1683 and their joint victory demonstrated “the strength of a united Europe.” Further, the book continues, “Despite the failures of Ukrainian state-building, this event became a significant demonstration of the existence and importance of Ukraine as an integral part of Europe.”<sup>58</sup> This episode bears not only political but also cultural significance. The textbook also mentions the Ruthenian (Ukrainian) nobleman, diplomat, and spy Jerzy Franciszek Kulczycki or Iurii Frants Kuchyts’kyi, who, according to legend, started the first Viennese coffee house after the siege, using bags of coffee he found in the abandoned Ottoman military camp. The figure of Kuchyts’kyi in the Ukrainian textbook illustrates Ukraine’s unique position between East and West and the valuable contributions arising from such a geopolitical and cultural location. Kuchyts’kyi’s mythological identity does not belong to one community. Instead, he serves as a mediator between the Ottoman and the Central European worlds.

Migration is another topic associated with and used to define Europe in the post–World War II world. It is also another point of criticism. Migration policies since 2015 are often discussed in Ukrainian textbooks as one of the many problems the EU faces and an issue that divides EU countries. Specifically, the failure to allocate refugees, most notably refugees from Syria who have arrived since 2015, among EU countries implies the absence of a common vision and program on how to manage the issue.<sup>59</sup> In other examples, the criticism of refugees is hostile and anti-immigration, revealing more about the authors’ views than about Europe or the EU.

“The theory of a ‘free Europe’ propagated by the German Chancellor [Angela Merkel] is quite problematic for Germany,” reads one example. “Every year, more than 400,000 people apply for refugee status, with each allowance costing Germany around 12,000 to 20,000 euros per year [...] Apart from the financial problems, uncontrolled flows of refugees are worsening the criminal situation, and terrorist attacks are becoming more and more frequent in Germany.”<sup>60</sup>

A completely different vision of refugees and their experiences is given in the new textbook by Maryna Kaftan and others. In that 2023 sixth-grade textbook (age group of 11–12-year-olds), the authors address the topic of refugees from a global perspective of (forced) migration and mobility, writing,

58 IHOR SHCHUPAK: *Istoriia Ukrainy 8 klas* [History of Ukraine 8th Grade], Kyiiv 2021, pp. 222–223.

59 MUDRYI/ARKUSHA, p. 292.

60 TETIANA LADYCHENKO: *Vsesvitnia istoriia 11 klas* [World History 11th Grade], Kyiiv 2019, p. 73.

“Refugees and internally displaced persons are a special category of migrants. Unlike economic migrants, they are driven from their homes by danger—war, political or religious persecution, or climate change. At the end of 2021, the UN counted 27 million refugees and more than 53 million internally displaced persons (people who have migrated within their own country) in the world. In 2022, they were joined by millions of Ukrainians who were forced to leave their homes due to a full-scale Russian invasion.”<sup>61</sup>

Furthermore, the authors do not single out the experience of Ukrainian refugees. On the contrary, they provide visual material to universalize the struggle of people forced to flee their homes. On the same page as the above quote, there is a photo of Syrian refugees on the Syria-Iraq border in 2013 and another photo showing Ukrainian refugees in 2022. The textbook asks students to find common and different features in these photos. This exercise helps students think in terms of fundamental and universal human rights rather than evoking alienating racist discourses, as in the previous example.

In high school, especially in the final (eleventh) grade, where students take post-1945 world history, Europe is understood predominantly as the EU. Discussing existing crises and Euroscepticism, the EU is still portrayed, in many ways, as a successful project: “Despite its problems, the [EU] is today the largest and most successful project of economic and political integration in the world, combining respect for human values and high living standards.”<sup>62</sup> It is noteworthy that, after this quoted paragraph, students are asked to think about both the advantages and disadvantages of Ukraine joining the EU, suggesting a realistic and critical evaluation of this political step.

The same textbook describes the Maidan Revolution of 2013/14, or the Revolution of Dignity, as a turning point in Europe-Ukraine relations. The revolution’s first phase in November 2013 is traditionally called “Euromaidan” because these were “protests against corruption and uncontrolled and illegal use of power by police, as well as in support of the European vector of Ukraine’s foreign policy.”<sup>63</sup> The Euromaidan protestors’ first demands mainly included steps toward EU accession. These demands represented the protestors’ active disagreement with and distancing themselves from the then-Ukrainian government, prime minister, and president, who preferred closer integration with Russia.<sup>64</sup> In the textbook’s descriptions, Europe embodies Ukrainians’ political and economic aspirations. However, after 30 November 2013, when Berkut, the special police force, violently beat Euromaidan protesters, mostly students, a new understand-

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61 KAFTAN/KOSTIUK/NOVIKOVA, p. 129.

62 IHOR SHCHUPAK: *Vsesvitnia istoriia 11 klas* [World History 11th Grade], Kyiiv 2019, p. 64.

63 HANNA KHLIBOVSKA: *Istoriia Ukrainy 11 klas* [History of Ukraine 11th Grade], Ternopil 2019, p. 225.

64 VITALII VLASOV: *Istoriia Ukrainy 11 klas* [History of Ukraine 11th Grade], Kyiiv 2019, p. 216.

ing of this protest emerged. In January 2014, after the implementation of the Kolesnichenko-Kivalov law, which forbade gatherings and endangered many constitutional rights, textbooks explain that “the demand to sign an association agreement with the [EU] receded into the background” and “Euromaidan [began] its transition into a Revolution of Dignity.”<sup>65</sup> This shift in focus away from the EU as an external embodiment of aspiration and toward the internal need for change and agency within Ukrainian civil society illustrates not only societal change but also the tone of most of the post-2015 textbooks.

Europe’s passive response to Russia’s hybrid warfare in Eastern Ukraine and the occupation of Crimea, including ineffective sanctions placed on Russia since 2014 and the Minsk Agreement, add to the de-idealized image of Europe as secure and successful but indecisive and incapable of openly naming Russia an aggressor until the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In the textbooks, Europe’s lack of response is a moment of European weakness, not a re-invention of the Ukrainian self. This treatment allows the balancing of European and Ukrainian images, making them equal and showing how each, in reality, contributes to the implementation of universalist values.

Even more so, horizontal comparisons and Ukrainian agency are formulated in topics such as peacekeeping on a global scale, when Ukrainian forces took part in peacekeeping missions before Russia’s full-scale invasion.<sup>66</sup> One textbook reads, “Ukraine acts as an equal participant in international cooperation, actively contributes to strengthening global peace and international security, [and] directly participates in the pan-European process and European structures.”<sup>67</sup>

Few books reflect on Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Among them, a new generation of textbooks written by Kaftan and others is worth mentioning. When describing the world’s reaction to Russia’s attack, their sixth-grade textbook focuses on signs of solidarity, not from states or officials but rather from people and citizens of other countries who demonstrated all over the world in support of Ukraine.<sup>68</sup>

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65 Ibid., p. 218.

66 Ukraine’s Participation in the UN Peacekeeping Activities, in: Webpage of the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the United Nations, <https://ukraineun.org/en/ukraine-and-un/peacekeeping-activities/> (2025-11-27): “Since July 1992, Ukraine has been an active contributor of military and police personnel in UN peacekeeping operations. Blue helmets represent Ukraine in six United Nations PKOs: United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UN Mission in South Sudan, United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus, United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali.”

67 OLEKSANDR HISEM: *Istoriia Ukrainy 11 klas [History of Ukraine 11th Grade]*, Kharkiv 2019, p. 213.

68 KAFTAN/KOSTIUK/NOVIKOVA, p. 30.

## 6 Conclusion

Studying the representations of Europe in the textbooks of Ukraine, a historically peripheral country or the “gates of Europe,” to use Serhii Plokhyy’s term, offers a unique position and perspective both on Europe and Ukraine itself. Europe is a teleologically loaded and, at the same time, flexible and malleable concept, embodying Ukraine’s aspirations differently depending on the dominating discourse and desires of the political elites and civil society. Images of Europe in Ukrainian textbooks also shed light on Ukraine’s self-positioning, how relations between Ukraine and Europe are constructed, and how specific actors, such as the state or civil society, wish to see those relations.

Based on the findings of this research, Europe’s image in Ukrainian textbooks underwent a paradigmatic change between the early 2000s and 2021, shifting from teleology, in other words, from a future-oriented, inspiring, and non-critical concept to more horizontal partnerships and alliances, where Europe and, more specifically, the EU are critically evaluated. These changes coincide with socio-political transformations in Ukraine since 2013 and Russia’s aggression against Ukraine since 2014, which precipitated a shift in Ukrainian self-awareness and a new, clear course in foreign affairs and internal politics. The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 deeply changed the paradigm of Europe-Ukraine relations and how they are imagined, centering the Ukrainian military and society’s agency to respond to the attack and elevating Ukraine from the periphery of Europe, where it strived for better “European-like” living standards, to a self-defending nation in a new era of European war. The image of an abstract, predominantly Western Europe in the textbooks of the 2000s gives way to a regionally differentiated Europe, actively using the term “(Central) Eastern Europe,” of which Ukraine is a part. This allows a smoother step-by-step integration of Ukraine into the mental map of Europe.

Critical evaluation of Europe is an act that demythologizes and deconstructs its cultural superiority, highlighting its weaknesses and chances for countries such as Ukraine to redefine their agency within the European frame. An ability to identify similar experiences and historical practices and compare them in the context of European countries, including Ukraine, creates a shared imaginative space and sense of belonging. Here, textbooks play a special role as a medium that transcends borders and limitations, shaping the current image of Europe and future discourses on Europe and Ukraine for students and future citizens.

Increased criticism of Europe does not necessarily include disappointment. Instead, this criticism is a way to “normalize” the image of Europe and see it more realistically. In textbooks, Ukraine is portrayed as a country that prioritized joining the EU. However, joining the EU and becoming an integral part of the political and economic union is not just an aim but a path that helps Ukraine navigate its own *becoming*. This path reflects the ideas Khvylovy expressed a century ago about the path Ukraine should define for itself, without unthink-

ingly following others. Belonging to Europe is portrayed in textbooks as one of the foundational steps on Ukraine's path, but not the only one that comprises Ukraine. Textbooks from the second half of the 2010s pursue the formulation of a unique path forward for Ukraine, ensuring that Ukraine is considered an equal partner to Europe. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is sure to be a turning point in textbook writing in many ways, highlighting the nation's struggle for its independent existence and defining the war for generations to come. Ukrainian historian Yaroslav Hrytsak, in an interview with "Osvitoria," one of Ukraine's foremost education-focused online platforms, said that "teaching history is a security issue," at the same time stressing the need for complex and open discussions about traumas and perpetrators in history lessons.<sup>69</sup> Following this vision would make critical thinking a cornerstone of history education in Ukraine in the years to come.

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69 Vykladannia istoriï—tse pytannia bezpeky [Teaching History Is a Security Issue]—Yaroslav Hrytsak (2022-01-19), <https://osvitoria.media/experience/vykladannya-istori-yi-tse-pytannya-bezpeky-yaroslav-grytsak/> (2025-11-27).

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