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# Decommunisation in Dnipropetrovsk and Dnipro in 2014–2019

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Decommunisation and memory politics have been important to civil society activists, historians, and political scientists because of their influence on the social and political life of post-communist countries (see Motyl 2015; Portnov 2015; Oliinyk and Kuzio 2021). The launch of the process of decommunisation began on 9 April 2015, when the Ukrainian parliament approved four laws 'On access to Archives of Repressive Agencies of Totalitarian Communist Regime of 1917–1991'; 'On the condemnation of the communist and National Socialist (Nazi) totalitarian regimes, and prohibition of propaganda of their symbols'; 'On the Legal Status and Honouring the Memory of Fighters for Ukraine's Independence in the Twentieth Century'; and 'On Perpetuation of the Victory over Nazism in World War II of 1939–1945.'[1]

We first need to explain the terminology used in this chapter. *Decommunisation* is defined as the process of deprivation of the consequences of communist ideology on an internal level of human consciousness and on an external level by the removal of monuments and changes in street and city names. *Leninopad* (Lenin-fall), refers to the demolition of monuments of Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin's monument throughout Central Ukrainian cities, including Dnipropetrovsk, in 2014–2015. Despite declaring Independence in 1991, Ukraine inherited a considerable footprint of the Soviet past not only in the mindset of its citizens but also in the memorial space. Quite often, monuments to communist leaders, particularly those of Lenin, were used by pro-Russian forces for destabilising the social and political situation before and after launch of Russian military aggression against Ukraine in 2014.

During the Euromaidan Revolution, participants fought not only against usurpation of authority by President Viktor Yanukovych but also against symbols of authoritarianism in the form of monuments to Soviet figures and urban toponyms. In the wake of the Euromaidan Revolution, participants of the Dnipropetrovsk Maidan appealed to the authorities to remove the monument of 'the proletariat leader' from Lenin's square in Dnipropetrovsk. However, the central authorities were disorganised and reluctant to undertake any actions. Therefore, participants of the Dnipropetrovsk Maidan and civic activists did not wait for Kyiv's permission and on 22 February 2014 dismantled the monument, adding to *Leninopad* spreading throughout Central Ukrainian cities. Only a small number of people opposed the demolition of the Lenin monument. On the same day, deputies of the Dnipropetrovsk City Council renamed Lenin Square into Heroes of Maidan Square, because a tent camp had been based there during the Euromaidan Revolution.[2] For a long time, the remnants of Lenin's monument were used as an improvised memorial to the fallen heroes of the Dnipropetrovsk Maidan, and later those killed in the war in the Donbas region of Eastern Ukraine. These events should be considered as the beginning of the changes which became known as decommunisation. The next steps in this direction took place in 2015.

### Why in 2015 and Not Earlier?

In the context of the above three questions arise. Why did decommunisation not take place after Ukraine's

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Declaration of Independence in August 1991? Why did decommunisation not begin after the 2004 Orange Revolution? Why was decommunisation only possible in 2015?

Ukraine's 1991 Declaration of Independence took place without a radical change of former Communist Party elites or changes in public attitudes. Former communist party and '*nomenklatura* cadres' remained in power. Although the population no longer supported Marxist-Leninist ideological guidelines, it expected an improvement in social and economic conditions. Communist idols were only removed from the streets and squares of Western Ukrainian cities and Kyiv. There was no dismantling of monuments in Dnipropetrovsk oblast or other Russian speaking cities in Eastern-Southern Ukraine prior to the Euromaidan Revolution.

In May 2006, after the Orange Revolution the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance (UINP) was created. Its main task was to formulate and implement state policy in the revival and preservation of the national memory of the Ukrainian people.[3] A criminal case was opened in 2009 against the organisers of the 1932–1933 Holodomor which ended with their conviction. However, the lack of consensus of political forces in parliament, the unwillingness of local elites to dismantle the Soviet memorial legacy and election of Party of Regions leader Viktor Yanukovych were obstacles to decommunisation.

## Ukrainian Patriotism versus the 'Russian Spring' in Dnipropetrovsk

In 2014, the population of Ukraine continued to live in the grip of historical myths and a distorted consciousness which could be described as a form of social schizophrenia. People knew or had free access to information about the crimes of the leaders of the Soviet state but continued to co-exist with streets named after them and walk alongside monuments erected in their honour.

The past never left the public consciousness; moreover, it distorted and disfigured the present and the future. The communist impasse of the past did not allow Ukrainian society to move forward. Memorial spaces and toponyms of towns and villages of Dnipropetrovsk oblast were the embodiment of the Soviet totalitarian past. Ukrainian citizens could not understand that the totalitarian past and democratic present could not coexist.

From this impasse there were only two exits. The first one was to remove the remnants of the Soviet totalitarian legacy in favour of a future based on human dignity, rule of law and Ukraine's integration of European values. The second would be resuscitation of the Soviet historical past through the Russian World with the prevalence of the state over human rights, no rule of law, absence of basic freedoms, and authoritarianism.

Patriotism grew exponentially in Ukrainian society after the Euromaidan Revolution and especially after the launch of Russian military aggression. This was reflected in the widespread hanging of national flags and other forms of Ukrainian symbolism, including artwork, on houses, balconies, and cars. One of the most noticeable was the drawing of an image of the Ukrainian national emblem by FK Dnipro 'ultras' in May 2014 on the Parus Hotel, an uncompleted Soviet era building on the right bank of the Dnipro River, confirming the Ukrainian identity of the city of Dnipropetrovsk and Dnipro.

Pro-Russian forces in the spring and summer of 2014 were not very visible in Dnipropetrovsk, except for a few episodes when the Russian tricolour was raised near the City Council building. The balance of power in Dnipropetrovsk and the region had changed. In January 2014, you could have been beaten for flying the Ukrainian flag and four months later for flying the Russian flag. Participants of the Dnipropetrovsk Maidan did not represent a critical mass of the population but nevertheless it became the basis for civil society. They took an active pro-Ukrainian stance which intensified after the appointment of oligarch Ihor Kolomoyskyy in March 2014 as head of the Dnipropetrovsk state regional administration. Pro-Russian forces and those with nostalgia for the Soviet Union either hid themselves or left the territory of Dnipropetrovsk oblast.

One of the manifestations of an active stance was the dismantling of Soviet monuments by which the Soviet empire had dominated the public space. Throughout February–December 2014 there was a spontaneous dismantling of Lenin monuments in the city of Dnipropetrovsk and the Dnipropetrovsk region by patriotic Ukrainians who saw it to

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prove their resolve in the face of Russian military aggression. Sometimes, the authorities dismantled monuments themselves in order not to have political confrontation. The last Lenin monuments to be dismantled in the Dnipropetrovsk region were in Novomoskovsk and Synelnykove because of local opposition.

## Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance Takes Control of Decommunisation

From August 2014 the UINP resumed its activities as a government body and became the leader and generator of the decommunisation process. The staff of the UINP began to prepare a package of decommunisation laws. A public debate ensued on whether to dismantle Soviet monuments and rename toponyms. Opponents of this process presented three arguments.

Firstly, they appealed to the need to first deal with material and economic issues after which renaming could take place.[4] Those arguments had been heard for quite a long time since 1991 and if prolonged meant the renaming process would never take place. Secondly, Soviet monuments and the toponyms of the Soviet era were 'our past and we should not fight it, no matter what they are.' For some proponents of that argument, the Soviet past was indeed part of their identity which continued to impact their vision of the world and they perceived renaming as an insult to the historical memory of the city.[5] Despite the existence of an independent Ukraine, they continued to behave as if they were citizens of a country that no longer existed and were more impressed by Russia as the successor state to the USSR. Soviet toponymy and monuments resembled the visual image of the landscape of a territory which they used to inhabit. Thirdly, a very small group of Dnipropetrovsk inhabitants viewed Soviet works of art in the monuments as a cultural heritage. This was despite the fact most of those objects were created as shoddy fakes with little significant artistic value.

The three arguments did not stand up to scrutiny. Monuments and street names are not part of history but in fact events and people in whose honour they were created and named. Monuments and toponyms are part of the memorial space which have a significant impact on the formation of moral and ethical norms. Soviet leaders who committed crimes against millions of victims cannot serve as an example from a moral and ethical point of view.

Why then did some inhabitants of Dnipropetrovsk oppose toponymic changes and the removal of Soviet-era monuments? Firstly, change is not always acceptable to many people. Changes can be unpredictable, do not necessarily have positive consequences, and often do not achieve the desired effect. Changes are undertaken through the mobilisation of political will and resources. Secondly, fear of the unknown future paralyses political will and the desire for change. The Soviet totalitarian past was ingrained in the minds of some Ukrainian citizens who were born and raised in the USSR. They associated changes with famine, repression, and war and other traumatic experiences. Thirdly, people were convinced that changes would not last for a long period of time. Toponyms in Ukraine have changed many times during the twentieth century by the Tsarist Russian Empire, Bolsheviks, Nazis, and nationalists after 1991. Why change anything if it will be changed again? Fourthly, Soviet monuments and toponyms testified to the longevity of communism and demonstrated that despite being an independent state since 1991, Ukraine continued to belong to the post-Soviet space. An inhabitant of the city of Dnipropetrovsk who lived on Lenin Street, near Lenin Square with its Lenin's monument when visiting Russian cities felt at home with the same street names and monuments.

Among the opponents of toponymic changes were moderates who believed that renaming should be to neutral names, such as Floral Street, Lilac Street, or Rainbow Street. They were characterised by an absence of any ideological beliefs, whether communist, pro-Russian, nationalist, or pro-Ukrainian. In their opinion, neutral names would help to avoid possible misunderstandings between different political camps and prevent another 'war of monuments and toponyms' in the future.

In the Mikhail Gorbachev era, the KGB hired veterans from the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan to attack *Rukh* (abbreviated for Ukrainian Popular Movement for Restructuring) activists and the national flags they carried (see figure 6.1). A quarter of a century of nation building in independent Ukraine, the Euromaidan Revolution and Russian-Ukrainian war, lay the ground for de-communisation.

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In 2015 most inhabitants of Dnipropetrovsk opposed the dismantling of monuments and changing toponyms. This though, gradually changed over time. Importantly, few inhabitants of Dnipropetrovsk actively stood up to defend the monuments (as they may have done prior to 2014) and their opposition was therefore passive.

## Toponym Changes in Dnipropetrovsk

The first renaming in the city of Dnipropetrovsk took place before the adoption of the decommunisation laws under public pressure and they were therefore not systemic. A more systemic process only appeared after the adoption of the decommunisation laws and the formation of the City Commission for naming (renaming) streets, alleys, avenues, squares, parks, squares, bridges, and other objects located in Dnipropetrovsk which began working in Summer 2015. The Commission was headed by the acting chairman of the City Council Halyna I. Bulavka with co-chairmen the executive committee manager of the City Council Vadym A. Shebanov and the Secretary Svitlana V. Gladka (Svitlenko 2016, 100).

The Commission included historians with a specialty in local history, architects, museum staff, public and political figures. The first organisational meeting of the Commission working group which took place on 10 June 2015, was headed by Dean of the History Department at Oles Honchar Dnipropetrovsk National University Serhiy I. Svitlenko. Between June and November 2015, members of the working group met and suggested proposals for renaming city toponyms which were submitted to the meeting of the City Commission. The concept of toponymic reforms at the national, regional, and local levels, was presented on 17 June 2015. The Commission working group proposed a wide range of names that reflected the entire Ukrainian historical narrative. Dnipropetrovsk and Dnipro's urban space now included historical figures tying it to other regions of Ukraine. Inhabitants of Dnipropetrovsk and Dnipro are no longer disconnected from national school textbooks and the names of streets and squares in other Ukrainian regions.

As a result of many months of work by the working group, the City Commission proposed changing 317 toponyms. Many of these names were fiercely discussed and debated. Most members of the Commission, who complied with the law, advocated renaming which considered the history and culture of the region, as well as the current political processes. A small number of Commission members attempted to use the decommunisation process for situational political interests and without a knowledge of local history proposed unreasonable and controversial names. On 24 November 2015, the city Council of Dnipropetrovsk agreed to change 57 toponyms.[6] On 26 November 2015, another 259 toponyms were added to the list, giving a total of 316.[7]

Members of the Commission disagreed on naming one of the streets after OUN leader Stepan Bandera after it had provoked heated discussions. Finally, the City Commission agreed on two alternative names for Lenin Street – its historical name *Voskresenska* or Stepan Bandera. The alternatives were handed over to the city council which chose the first.[8]

One of the oldest streets in the city had never changed its name but the Commission argued to rename it because Moscow is the capital of the state undertaking military aggression against Ukraine. *Moskovskaya* Street was renamed Kyiv Rus ruler Volodymyr Monomakh Street. Another street which was renamed without any provocations and conflicts was Dmytro Donskoy, who was one of the heroes of the Russian nationalist pantheon. Although it did not fall under the decommunisation law the City Commission proposed to change the ending of the name of the street and Dmytro Donskoy therefore became Dmytro Dontsov. Unlike the well-known Bandera, opponents of decommunisation had not heard of the nationalist ideologue Dontsov.

Some new toponyms re-affirmed the Pridniprovya region's close connections with neighbouring Cherkasy, Kirovohrad, and Poltava which re-orientated Dnipropetrovsk from being part of Ukraine's 'East' to its 'Centre' (at the very least, 'Central-East'). Additional new street names re-affirmed historical ties to Zaporizhzhya and Kharkiv. Lubenska Street was named after a district in the centre of Poltava oblast which had been an important trade route between Dnipropetrovsk and Poltava. Slobozhansky Avenue was renamed after an important trade route between Dnipropetrovsk and Kharkiv.

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## Re-Connecting to Ukrainian History

The new toponyms re-confirm connections of the Dnipropetrovsk region to different periods of Ukrainian history. The Prydniprovyia region, the centre of which is the city of Dnipro, lies on both sides of the Dnipro River and the origins of the region's name is 'Land Beyond the Rapids.' Nomadic Iranian, Turkic-speaking, and agricultural Slavic communities settled in the region from ancient times and during the medieval era. The new names of Sarmatska, Derevlyanska and Tiverska streets appeared in memory of the history of these peoples in the Pridniprovyia region. Sarmatians were an Iranian-speaking ethnic group who had occupied all Southern Ukraine between the third century B.C. to the third century A.D. *Derevlyany* and *Tivertsy* were Slavic tribes who lived in the Pridniprovyia region in Kyiv Rus. Other streets were named after the royal dynasty of Kyiv Rus during the tenth to thirteenth centuries: Princess Olha, Svyatoslav the Brave, Volodymyr the Great, Yaroslav the Wise, Volodymyr Monomakh, Roman Mstislavovych, and Danylo Halytsky.

An important historical period for the Dnipropetrovsk region was the Cossack era. Streets were re-named after Prince Constantine of Ostroh, Prince and Cossack Hetman Dmytro Baida-Vyshnevetsky, Hetmans Petro Doroshenko, Ivan Mazepa, Pavlo Polubotok, Danylo Apostle and many others. Historical ties to Zaporizhzhya are represented by Melitopolska Streets (Melitopol was a district in the centre of Zaporizhzhya oblast) and Khortytska. Khortytsya Island within the city of Zaporizhzhya was a major Cossack encampment destroyed by Russian Tsarina Catherine in the late eighteenth century. The Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhya regions were major centres of Ukrainian Cossacks from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. Five of the eight Zaporizhzhyan Cossack fortresses are to be found in what is now Dnipropetrovsk oblast.

The Cossack past of the Dnipropetrovsk region was reflected in a dozen new street names. *Starokozatska* (Old Cossack) Street is in honour of Ukrainian Cossacks as well as restoring historical justice; in the nineteenth century it was called *Kozatskaya* named after Cossack units in the Tsarist Russian imperial army. *Haydamatska* and *Ivana Honta* Streets refer to the uprising of Ukrainian peasants and *Haydamaky* Cossacks and one of its important leaders Ivan Honta. The eighteenth century *Haydamaky* uprising against the Polish nobility took place in what are now Cherkasy and Kirovohrad oblasts.

The embankment on the right bank of the Dnipro River was named Sicheslav which pays tribute to the Zaporizhzhyan Sich Cossack state tradition. Ukrainian scholars and civil society activists have often used Sicheslav to describe the name of the city of Dnipropetrovsk and Dnipro. *Sich* lane is a new toponym referring to the historical existence of Zaporizhzhyan Cossacks in the Dnipropetrovsk region.

Kryshtof Kosynsky, Ivan Sulyma, Pavlo But, and Yakov Ostrianyn Streets were re-named after Cossack Hetmans and leaders of anti-Polish uprisings during the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries. Other new street toponyms were named after Cossack Hetman Pylyp Orlyk (one of the authors of the first Ukrainian constitution of 1710, the second oldest in the world), Kostya Hordiyenko (the last Hetman of the *Chortomlyk Sich*), Dmytro Horlenko (Colonel of Pryluky and ally of Hetman Ivan Mazepa in the anti-Moscow uprising of 1708–1709), and Cossack chroniclers Hryhoriy Hrabianka and Samiylo Velychko.

Re-naming fulfilled three purposes. Firstly, it replaced the Soviet name of Komsomolskaya (*Komsomol* [Communist Youth League]) Street. Secondly, the new name confirmed the existence of Ukrainian Cossacks in the Pridniprovyia region during the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries long before the appearance of Tsarist Russian Empire Cossack units. The Cossack fortresses of old and new Kodaky was first built in 1635 on what is now the city of Dnipro over a hundred years before the founding of Yekaterinoslav in 1776. Two streets were re-named after Semen Bardadim, a Hetman of New Kodaky and Petro Kalnyshkevsky, the last Hetman of the *Pidpilna Sich*. Fortress Street referred to the Cossack fortress of Novyy Kodaky (the name of the city of Dnipro during the pre-Tsarist Cossack era).

Thirdly, pre-Tsarist Cossack toponyms undermined Russian President Vladimir Putin's so-called *Novorossiysk* (New Russia) project which made territorial claims against Eastern-Southern Ukraine. 'New Russia,' in the same manner as New France (Quebec), Nova Scotia (New Scotland) and New England, ignored native inhabitants in those four

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regions before the arrival of French, British and Russian colonists (Turchenko and Turchenko 2015, 18). The Tsarist Russian, French and British Empires all claimed there was no 'civilisation' before their arrival.

In fact, the Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhyan regions had been inhabited and developed by Ukrainian Cossacks for centuries before their annexation by the Tsarist Russian Empire. A street was re-named after Opanas Kovpak who belonged to the Mahdenko Cossack officer's family, a colonel of the *Pidpilna Sich* who participated in Ukrainian colonisation of the Prydniprovya. Another street was re-named after Cossack Maxim Diy who is one of the founders of Diyvka village, now within the confines of the city of Dnipro.

In addition to Kyiv Rus and the Cossack eras, the Tsarist Russian Empire is represented by Governor Andriy Fabr, founder of the Olena Blavatska Theosophical Society, religious intellectual Theodosius (Makarevskyy), philanthropist Nadiya Alekseenko, naturalist Ivan Akinfiev, engineer Volodymyr Khrinnykov, educator Kateryna Messarosh, Mayor Ivan Ezau, film director Danylo Sakhnenko, and historians Vasyl Bidnov and Antin Synyavskyy. Mykola Sadovskyy Street commemorates one of the luminaries of Ukrainian theatre whose life and activity were intimately connected with the city of Kropyvnytskyy in the centre of the Kirovohrad region.

Other new street names pay tribute to Ukraine's national and cultural revival in the nineteenth century, such as the writer Oleksandr Konyskyy, historian Volodymyr Antonovych, historian and philosopher Mykhaylo Drahomanov, and the *Tarasivtsi* Brotherhood youth organisation of Ukrainian patriots. Vasyl Karazin Street commemorates the founder of Kharkiv University in 1804 and Dmytro Bahaliy Street is named after a well-known historian who lived and worked in Kharkiv.

The next period of history with new toponyms relates to the Ukrainian national revolution of 1917–1921. Streets have been renamed in honour of historian and Chairman of the Ukrainian Central Council Mykhaylo Hrushevsky, Chairmen of the Directory Volodymyr Vynnychenko and Symon Petlyura, and founder of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences Volodymyr Vernadskyy. Ukrainian cadets who died in 1919 fighting the Bolsheviks near Kyiv were immortalised with *Heroyv Krut* (Heroes of Kruty) Street. Other streets named after historical leaders from this era include partisan Hetman Tryphon Hladchenko, educator Fedir Storubel, engineer and educator Ivan Truba, and the anarchist leader of the Revolutionary Insurgent Army of Ukraine Nestor Makhno. Kholodnoyarska Street immortalises the anti-Bolshevik Ukrainian insurgents of the *Kholodnoyarsk* Republic in 1919–1922 in the Cherkasy region.

The Ukrainian nationalist movement of the 1930s and 1940s, which had fought Polish, Nazi, and Soviet occupations, never became a controversial issue in the decommunisation process in Dnipropetrovsk. Streets were re-named after the head of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) Yevhen Konovalets, commander of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and head of OUN Roman Shukhevych and OUN leader Vasyl Kuk, who had run the OUN underground in Dnipropetrovsk in 1942–1943 during World II. Streets were also named after Ukrainian nationalist ideologues Mykola Mikhnovskyy and Dontsov who were born respectively in the Poltava region and Melitopol, Zaporizhzhya oblast.

New street names of Soviet era intellectuals and scholars have appeared. These include former Dean of Dnipropetrovsk State University Volodymyr Samodryha Street, city architects Oleksandr Krasnoselskyy and Pavel Nirinberh Streets, writer Vasyl Chaplenko Street, composer Andriy Shtoharenko Street, artist Volodymyr Lyubarskyy, and Jewish religious figure and the last Lubavitcher Rabbi Menachem Schneerson. FC Dnipro player Petro Loiko is immortalised by the re-naming of the football stadium which is located on the left bank of the city.

A large group of new toponyms were named after important members of the dissident and cultural movement of the 1960s to 1980s, some of whom were from the Dnipropetrovsk region where they suffered from political repression by the KGB and from the KGB's use of Afghanistan veterans as vigilante's (see figure 6.2).

These include dissident poets Vasyl Symonenko and Vasyl Stus, dissident Vasyl Makukh (who was buried in Dnipropetrovsk), Soviet General and leader of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group Petro Hryhorenko, poet and composer Volodymyr Ivasyuk (who was murdered by the KGB), sculptor Vadym Sidur (who was born in Katerynoslav), dissident Ivan Sokulskyy (see Zhuk 2010, 37–40, 48–52, 57–64) and historian and poet Borys M. Mozolevskyy.

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The modern period of the history of the Dnipropetrovsk region honours the Heavenly Hundred who were murdered during the Euromaidan Revolution. Dnipropetrovsk City Council renamed Kalinin Avenue on 28 January 2015 in honour of Sergei Nigoyan, an Armenian refugee living in Dnipropetrovsk oblast, who was killed by a *Berkut* riot police or pro-Russian vigilante sniper in January 2014.[9] After the first attempt on 29 December 2014 was unsuccessful after infringing regulations, the renaming was adopted on the second attempt in Summer 2017. At a public hearing most of the participants and the city authorities led by Mayor Boris Filatov voted in favour of Sergei Nigoyan Avenue. Nigoyan is an iconic figure for the modern Ukrainian state because he is the personification of the desire for a free and democratic civic nation.

Dnipropetrovsk oblast has the largest number of security forces killed in the Russian-Ukrainian war.[10] Several patriots killed during this war are honoured by streets named after journalist Alexander Chernikov and railway man Oleksandr Serebryakov in the respectively Checheliv and Samara districts of the city of Dnipro. The Alley of Heroes, which immortalises the killed heroes of the Russian-Ukrainian war, was opened next to the Dnipro oblast state administration.

## The Goals of the City Commission

Opponents of toponymic reform in Dnipropetrovsk claimed the City Commission intended to remove all Soviet names to erase this period of history from memory. This was also the mistaken claim made of decommunisation in general in the open letter by Western academics written by David Marples and James Sherr.[11] In reality, as this chapter shows, hundreds of Soviet-era names remain in the new toponyms alongside ones named after historical figures who had been previously ignored. In fact, most of the new toponyms are associated with individuals from the creative professions, not politicians, party, or military figures. The re-naming process was a means to revive spiritual and material values, rather than the goal of confrontation.

Special attention in the new city toponyms was given to avenues named after Oleksandr Pol and historian and archaeologist, and long-time Director of the Dnipropetrovsk National Historical Museum Dmytro Yavornytsky who had decisive influences on the formation of the socio-economic and socio-cultural image of the city of Dnipropetrovsk. The commission faced a dilemma about what name to replace Karl Marx Avenue which runs through the centre of the city, and following discussions, it was named after Yavornytsky who contributed to the development of historical scholarship in Ekaterynoslav. D. Yavornytsky Dnipropetrovsk National Historical Museum has transformed into a leading centre of culture in a city where there had not been a university until 1918. During the Tsarist Empire the avenue had been called Ekaterynoslavskiy in honour of the Russian Empress Catherine II linking the city to Russian history. From 1923–2016 the avenue was named after Marx to demonstrate Dnipropetrovsk was part of a communist state.

Sergei Kirov Avenue, named after a communist functionary who had nothing to do with the city of Dnipro, was re-named Oleksandr Pol Avenue. In the nineteenth century, Pole helped to transform a provincial, small agricultural town into a powerful industrial and economic centre. The Dnipropetrovsk oblast state administration and Dnipropetrovsk *oblast* council are on Oleksandr Pol Avenue.

In his lifetime, Pole attracted European investments into the region's economy. Since 2014, Ukraine's European integration is reflected in new toponyms in Dnipropetrovsk and Dnipro named after Italian national hero Giuseppe Garibaldi, medieval Czech thinker Jan Hus and the 1968 Prague Spring, as well as more general street names such as European, Krakow, Belgian, Bratislava, and Croatian. Until 2015, *Horvatska* (Croatian) Street was named after Oleko Dundich, a Croat who had fought for the Bolsheviks.

## History and Controversy

Another important feature of decommunisation was the return of historical toponyms. Modern Dnipropetrovsk grew out of several smaller settlements which had existed in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries. Novyy Kodak, Polovytsya, and Samara (Bohoroditska Fortress) influenced the formation of the city's infrastructure. Diyivka, Sukhachivka, Taromske, Mandrykivka, Lotsmanska Kamyanka, Kamyanka Livoberezhna, Lomivka, Amur,

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Manuylivka, Nizhnedniprovsk, and Samarivka were absorbed into the city of Dnipropetrovsk during different periods of history. The urban history of the Dnipro is characterised by polycentrism.

Prior to decommunisation, the city's historical development had been poorly reflected in its toponymy, especially on the right bank of the city. In the twentieth century, when the city grew rapidly with the appearance of new micro-districts, architects (usually sent from Moscow) did not consider local names when planning the city's development and they imposed communist names which had no ties to the region. Thus, Dnipropetrovsk was depersonalised and resembled oblast centres in other regions of the Soviet Union.

Five districts on the right-bank of Dnipro were renamed. All of them had standard names associated with iconic figures from the Soviet Communist Party pantheon or landmark events and organisations. These included *Leninsky*, *Babushinsky* named after Bolshevik revolutionary Ivan Babushkin who died long before the creation of the Soviet Union, Sergei Kirov Avenue named after member of the Politburo Kirov, *Zhovtneviy* in honour of the Bolshevik October revolution; and *Chervonogvardiysky* (Red Guards). As a result of the renaming, *Zhovtnevy* became *Sobornyy* in the *rayon* (district) with *Soborna* Square. *Babushkinsky* became *Shevchenkivskyy* named after the Ukrainian bard Taras Shechenko. Kirovsky became *Tsentralna* because the district occupies the central part of the city where the city council and post office are located. *Chervonogvardiysky* became *Chechelivsky* because this was the oldest residential area in the nineteenth-twentieth centuries. *Leninsky* became *Novokodatsky* because part of the district consists of the former settlement of New Kodaky, the Cossack forerunner of today's city of Dnipro.

On the left bank of the city, the residential area Frunzensky-1, named after one of the military leaders of the Bolshevik Party Mikhail Frunze, was renamed *Lomivsky* after a former settlement of that name where well-known Soviet Ukrainian writer Oles Honchar was born. Frunzensky-2 was renamed *Kamyanskyy* because part of the district covers the former *Kamyanka Livoberezhna*. Soviet party functionary Vorontsov Avenue was renamed *Manuylivskyy* after a former village of the same name. French Communist Maurice Thorez Street was renamed *Berezanivska* named after a former district of the same name. These new toponyms reflected the multifaceted history of Dnipropetrovsk and Dnipro and the Prydniprovyia region throughout Ukraine's history.

## Removing Monuments

Work was carried out as to which monuments were to be removed. After the demolition of the large Lenin monument in the central square in February 2014, activists tore off a memorial plaque from the building of the Dnipropetrovsk oblast council which had immortalised head of the Cheka Soviet secret police Felix Dzerzhinsky. Another monument to Lenin, which stood near the Ilyich Palace in the Chervonohvardiyskyy *rayon*, was dismantled on 26 February 2014. On 27 June 2014, the National Defence Headquarters dismantled the bust of Lenin near the Dnipropetrovsk oblast State Administration. However, the stone plinth on which the bust stood with the inscription 'Victory of Communism is Inevitable' was dismantled only on 10 June 2016. In August 2014, activists removed a plaque in honour of Stanislaw Kosior, one of the organisers of the *Holodomor*, on the street named after him. In April 2015, two Lenin monuments in the Prydniprovsk and Pivnichnyy *rayons* were demolished.

The next steps to implement the law 'On Condemnation of the Communist and National Socialist Regimes' were taken by newly elected city mayor Filatov. In November 2015, the City Commission prepared a list of eighteen monuments, twenty-three plaques, two stella's and one obelisk which were to be dismantled. A proposal was put forward to create a 'Park of the totalitarian period' which would house these dismantled monuments;<sup>[12]</sup> however, the authorities were in no hurry to finance this.

On 29 January 2016, without waiting for a response from the authorities, public activists in Dnipropetrovsk dismantled the monument to Grigory I. Petrovsky on Station Square.<sup>[13]</sup> The monument had personified an entire era when Dnipropetrovsk was a closed city in the Soviet Union and Petrovsky closely connected the city with Soviet identity.

In February 2016, new members of the city council headed by Mayor Filatov issued another resolution to dismantle 46 objects which fell under the decommunisation law, a step which speeded up the dismantling of monuments and



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memorials throughout the oblast.[14] On 16 February 2016, a plaque dedicated to the leader of the Communist Party of Ukraine Volodymyr Shcherbytsky, known for his ruthless repression of dissidents and Russification policies, was removed from the building of the Dnipropetrovsk oblast council. On 11 November 2016, memorial plaques to Leonid Brezhnev and Shcherbytsky were removed from the Maxim Gorky Theatre.

On 3 March 2016, the bust of the Bolshevik Artem (Sergeev) was removed from the territory of the *Dniprovazhpapirmash* plant. On 9 March 2016, the bust of Bolshevik Mikhail Kalinin was dismantled in the Square of Memory and Reconciliation (the new name of Mikhail Kalinin Square). On 16 March 2016 on Oleksander Pole Avenue a bust of Bolshevik Kirov was removed. On 5 May 2016, images of Bolsheviks Sergo Ordzhonikidze, Kalinin and Kliment Voroshilov were removed from the Gorky Theatre.

### Renaming the City and Oblast

The city council also had to deal with the question of renaming the city and oblast which combined the name of the river (Dnipro) and a Bolshevik and co-founder of the Cheka secret police (Grigori Petrovsky). Prior to 2014, pro-Russian groups, such as the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine, and the Party of Regions had supported the return of the Tsarist Russian Empire's name of Ekaterinoslav. Ukrainian patriots pointed out that Empress Catherine II had destroyed the autonomous Ukrainian Cossack Hetmanate. In response, pro-Russian supporters of Ekaterinoslav resorted to manipulation by saying the city will be re-named after St. Catherine. After 2014, the implementation of this proposal became impossible. Another manipulation took place in 2014–2016 when the Opposition Bloc (consisting of former members of the Party of Regions) supported re-naming Dnipropetrovsk after St. Peter.[15] These different manipulations by opponents of the renaming of the city and oblast were aimed at keeping the city under the influence of the Russian World.

The growth of Ukrainian patriotism after 2014 increased the number of supporters of the idea of renaming the city to Sicheslav. This name had been first proposed by Yavornytsky in 1918 at the congress of the Ekaterinoslav Ukrainian Teacher's Association which had been supported by Chairman of the Ukrainian Teacher's Association Eugene Vyrovyy. Supporters of this name change included representatives of the intelligentsia of Ekaterinoslav, such as writers Vasyl Chaplenko, Valerian Polishchuk, Vasyl Sokil and others.

The change to Sicheslav was supported in the Ukrainian diaspora; for example, by the writer Yar Slavutych.[16] After 1991, Sicheslav's work was popularised in Ukraine with the reprinting of his work in the *Sicheslav* newspaper, the regional Writer's Union magazine, *Sicheslav Almanakh* published by the *Sicheslavshchyna* Dnipropetrovsk regional organisation of the National Union of Local Lore of Ukraine and other publications. Renaming Dnipropetrovsk to Sicheslav was especially popular among supporters of the Euromaidan Revolution and veterans and volunteers from the Russian-Ukrainian war.

The city commission considered Sicheslav as the new name for the city of Dnipropetrovsk and even submitted it for approval to the city council. Among other proposals, the name Dniproslav enjoyed support among some members of the commission because it combined parts of the names of Dnipropetrovsk and Ekaterinoslav (Svitlenko 2016, 102). Other proposals included Dniprovsk, Dnipropol, and Novyy Kodak. In July 2015, eight names (Dniproslav, Dnipro, Sicheslav, Dnipropetrovsk, Dnipropol, Kodak, Novyy Kodak, Svyatoslav) were submitted to the public who could vote for one of them on the website of the city council.[17]

Of these, Dnipro was chosen. The city stands on the Dnipro River, which divides and unites it at the same time, and a famous geographical place for many Ukrainian writers and poets. Besides for many decades, the city's residents have been accustomed to using the abbreviated name of Dnipro for the city. The Ukrainian parliament's Committee on State Building, Regional Policy and Local Self-Government supported the renaming of Dnipropetrovsk to Dnipro on 5 February 2016 and parliament adopted a resolution implementing the decision on 19 May 2016.[18]

On the same day, the head of the Dnipropetrovsk oblast State Administration Valentyn Reznichenko signed the order 'About the renaming of toponyms in settlements in the region.' Besides changing the name of the city, it also changed the names of another 35 toponyms. The city council officially renamed the city to Dnipro on 7 September 2016. On

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the same day a second vote by the city's council abolished Dnipro's brotherhood with Russian cities.

From spring 2016, the power to rename toponyms within the decommunisation process transferred to the Dnipropetrovsk oblast State Administration. On 2 March 2016, a working group of historians, archival and museum staff, experts on monuments and government officials was established to control the implementation of the law 'On Condemnation of Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes' throughout the territory of Dnipropetrovsk oblast.[19] A group of experts focused on toponymic reform throughout the region.

## Decommunisation Slows Down

The creation of a Park of the Totalitarian Period was discussed on 29 November 2016 during a round table which took place in the Dnipro city council.[20] On 31 March 2017, a conference on the 'Park of Totalitarian Periods as a Tool for Decommunisation of the Dnipro' took place in the city council. Scholars from Dnipro, Kyiv, Zaporizhzhya, Lviv, and Kryvyi Rih discussed the scholarly and practical aspects of the idea of creating a park.[21] At the beginning of 2018, a location for the future park had been determined and project documentation completed.[22] However, because of subjective and objective circumstances, the realisation of the idea of creating a park slowed down.

A similar situation emerged with renaming Dnipropetrovsk oblast. In January 2018, Dnipro activists submitted a petition with a proposal to rename Dnipropetrovsk to Sicheslav oblast.[23] The explanatory note to the petition stated that the proposed name is specific to the historical and geographical area, corresponds to world and domestic practices of toponymic nomination and would positively affect the image, economic and socio-political situation in the city and region. In 2018, public hearings were held, and proposals were submitted to parliament where 240 deputies supported the renaming of Dnipropetrovsk oblast to Sicheslav on 7 February 2019 in Bill 9310-1. The bill was passed to the Constitutional Court of Ukraine which voted on 2 April 2019 in favour of renaming the region. The next step was to hold a vote in parliament to change the Constitution, but this was prevented by presidential and pre-term parliamentary elections leaving the renaming unresolved.

## Conclusions

Toponymic reforms in 2015–2016 and the decommunisation process in 2014–2019 led to 300 changes in toponyms in the city of Dnipro. Dozens of monuments and memorials were dismantled. The urban toponymic landscape was fundamentally changed to names related to local history and Ukrainian symbolism. New toponyms reflect the complex and multifaceted history of the city which arose in Cossack times and was formed by Ukrainians and other ethnic groups.

In Eastern-Southern Ukraine, the greatest decommunisation process took place in Dnipropetrovsk. Monuments and names linking the city and region to the Tsarist Russian Empire and Soviet Union have been nearly all removed. The change of name of Dnipropetrovsk to Sicheslav oblast remains on the table. Nevertheless, changing the consciousness of the city and region's inhabitants is a longer-term process which would require decommunisation to be succeeded by a process of decolonisation.

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