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**PRAISE AND CONDEMNATION OF STALIN: RUSSIA AND UKRAINE
GO THEIR SEPARATE WAYS**

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On November 24–25 the Ukrainian authorities marked the 75th anniversary of the 1932–1933 famine. President Viktor Yushchenko, Acting Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, former President Leonid Kuchma, and other political leaders attended the ceremony.

Writing in the Wall Street Journal on November 26, Yushchenko said, “The Holodomor (Terror–Famine) was an act of genocide designed to suppress the Ukrainian nation.” Yushchenko described Stalin’s policy as aimed at destroying Ukrainian national identity by targeting the peasantry and Soviet Ukrainian institutions, including national communists: “It was a state–organized program of mass starvation that in 1932–33 killed an estimated seven million to 10 million Ukrainians, including up to a third of the nation's children.”

Yushchenko’s counterpart in Russia has a very different view of Stalin. In June President Vladimir Putin dismissed Stalinist crimes with the words: “Other countries have done even more terrible things.”

The differing regimes in Ukraine and Russia – democratic versus nationalist–autocratic – have taken different approaches toward what became known in the Gorbachev era as the “blank pages of history,” especially the Stalin era.

A similar rehabilitation of Stalin is also taking place in Belarus where Stalin is, like in Russia, routinely praised on television. There, Stalinist atrocities have been presented as committed by the Nazis, while Stalinist crimes, such as at the massacre at Kuropaty, have been ignored. In contrast, Kuropaty’s equivalent

in Ukraine, the Bykivnia forest outside Kyiv, the site of hundreds of thousands of Stalinist crimes, is officially commemorated.

Yushchenko has expanded the commemoration of the Ukrainian famine and Stalinist crimes, following a process that can be traced to the early 1980s (president.gov.ua/content/150_1.html).

First, the Ukrainian diaspora commemorated the famine on its 50th anniversary in 1983, followed by the release of the 1984 film “Harvest of Despair” (video.google.com/videoplay?docid=3897393411603039499) and Robert Conquest’s book, Harvest of Sorrow.

Second, the national–democratic opposition uncovered “blank pages,” including the famine, during Gorbachev’s glasnost campaign. The Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU) was forced to admit the existence of the famine in a 1990 resolution.

Third, post–Soviet Presidents Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma issued a decree on the 60th anniversary in 1993, and more commemorative decrees, resolutions, and appeals followed.

In 2002–2004, Kuchma sought international recognition of the famine as “genocide,” a policy that Yushchenko has followed. During his three–year presidency, Yushchenko has issued seven decrees on the famine and Stalinism. UNESCO picked up the theme and issued a resolution on November 1 on the famine, calling it a “national tragedy” (unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001538/153838e.pdf).

In Ukraine, many political parties, the presidents, school textbooks, and the media have all negatively portrayed Stalinist crimes alongside Nazi crimes against humanity. But in Putin’s Russia, the crimes committed in the 1930s are ignored or marginalized while Stalin is praised for transforming the USSR into a “superpower.”

Russia’s rehabilitation of Stalin has been accompanied by a similar rehabilitation of the intelligence agencies. Last year,

copying the KGB, the FSB introduced national prizes for art, cinema, and literature that created a “positive image” of the intelligence services. But works published in Russia extolling the virtues of the KGB and its bloody predecessors far outnumber books on Stalinist crimes. In Ukraine the Security Service (SBU) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have supported the denunciation of Stalinist crimes (mfa.gov.ua/mfa/ua/publication/content/14504.htm). The SBU declassified 5,000 pages of relevant documents for the Declassified Memory exhibition in Kyiv (ssu.kmu.gov.ua/sbu/control/uk/publish/category?cat_id=63245).

In November all branches of the Ukrainian military lower the state flag in honor of the victims of the famine and Communist crimes. During that month, the military also helped repair monuments, organized lectures at military bases by writers and academics, showed films, and discussed books on the famine and Communist repression. Each year the president presents state medals to Ukrainian scholars and activists working to document Stalinist crimes.

In contrast, Alexander Filippov’s new school textbook, *A Modern History of Russia: 1945–2006*, describes Stalin as “one of the USSR’s most successful leaders” whose repression brought the USSR out of crisis (AFP, November 3). While Ukrainian textbooks denounce both Stalinism and Nazism; Filippov justifies Stalin as a necessary evil and backs his positive treatment by citing opinion polls giving him a positive approval rating among Russians of 47%.

In Ukraine the opposite tendency is taking place. Some 72.4% of Ukrainians blame the 1932–33 famine on the authorities, and 63% of Ukrainians support the recognition of the famine as “genocide” (*Ukrayinska pravda*, November 20). These polls have both cross-party and cross-regional support: 75% of the centrist Volodymyr Lytvyn bloc and 43% of the Party of Regions supported the definition of the famine as “genocide,” while Donetsk’s annual commemorations of famine and Communist repression are attended by local officials, including the oblast governor and city mayor (Donbass, November 25, 2006). Even the left supports this step. Some 80% of the Socialist Party and

41% of the Communist Party backs the use of “genocide” to describe the famine.

How the “blank pages” of history, such as Stalinist crimes, are treated reflect the nature of the democratic and nationalist-autocratic regimes emerging in Ukraine and Russia. In both countries there is cross-party, parliamentary, and public support – but over polar opposite positions. Ukraine seeks a denunciation of Stalinist crimes, while Russia praises Stalin and ignores his crimes.