

## Ruscism as a variant of the fascist form of state-legal regime

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**Abstract.** The relevance of the paper lies in the emergence of a new type of fascism in the Russian Federation – ruscism, which in the 21<sup>st</sup> century returned humanity to the understanding that the revival of the most dangerous forms of the state-legal regime is possible. The purpose of the study is to define ruscism, analyse its origin as a separate phenomenon and the development of constituent elements, and identify similar and distinctive features with classical fascism and its varieties. Methods of dialectics, analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, generalisation, and analogy are used as methodological tools. Historical and comparative approaches allow investigating the evolution of the origin and development of ruscism, identifying its common and distinctive features with classical fascism and its varieties. There are clear signs of fascism and its varieties. The paper examines the convergence of fascism with the Russian world, Russian imperial chauvinism, and criminal practices of the communist regime of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. It is established that the result of the ruscist regime was the creation of a totalitarian repressive militaristic state in Russia, which unleashed aggressive wars against Georgia and Ukraine. The study highlights the systematic violations of international law, human rights, and fundamental freedoms inherent in the ruscist regime, and the implementation of the policy of genocide of the Ukrainian people. The definition of ruscism is formulated and the history of the development of both its individual constituent elements and it as an integral phenomenon is considered. The practical value of the study is to unify the use of the definition of ruscism both at the scientific and legislative levels to condemn and prohibit it as a criminal, misogynistic ideology and a form of state-legal regime

**Keywords:** Nazism; Russian world; war; genocide; Russian orthodoxy; terror

### Introduction

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was marked by the global dominance of the democratic state-legal regime, which led to the social development of humanity and was designed to establish a stable world order based on the generally accepted principles of international law.

The Russian Federation had imperial plans that a priori contradicted not only the basic principles of international law but also the established norms of modern civilisational development of mankind. Starting with the aggressive war against Georgia in 2008, the intervention of Russia in Syria, the initiation of a hybrid war against Ukraine in 2014, and in 2022, a full-scale conventional war with constant threats of using nuclear weapons – Russia actively pursues its geostrategic policy. Such a policy followed from the ruscist ideology, which became the basis for the state-legal regime of Russia and managed not only to revive the basic postulates of fascism and Nazism but also to enhance them in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It is vital to define the concept of ruscism (Makarchuk, 2022) or rashism (Snyder, 2022a), analyse the history of

its origin as a separate phenomenon and its constituent elements, and identify similar and distinctive features with classical fascism and its varieties. What is most important is to condemn and prohibit ruscism as a criminal, misanthropic ideology and form of the state-legal regime.

Some aspects of ruscism were studied and partially disclosed by this concept. Snyder (2022a) considered the term ruscism, the similarity of its features with fascism, and noted the expediency of identifying Russian fascism as ruscism. V. Makarchuk (2022) covered the legal aspects of the development of ruscism and indicated the multi-nationalism and polyreligion of ruscism. R. Hula (2016) made an attempt to analyse such a basic component of ruscism as the Russian world from civilisational, historical-mental, geocultural, geopolitical, network-globalist, socio-communicative, state-instrumental, and religious-clerical perspectives. S. Plokhly (2017) revealed the historical aspects of the development of the Russian world as the basis of ruscism, disclosed the evolution of this phenomenon in various formations of the Moscow-Russian state. V. Horbulin (2017) systematically

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determined the role of ruscism in the context of the hybrid war unleashed by the Russian Federation against Ukraine long before 2014.

Despite the achievements of the above-mentioned authors, ruscism is a fairly new phenomenon that has not been sufficiently studied from the historical and legal side. Given the fact that ruscism fully acquired the characteristics of fascism after the beginning of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, it is obvious that there is a need for a comprehensive approach to ruscism as a form of state-legal regime, which will allow it to give a formal legal assessment.

The purpose of this study is to disclose the meaning of ruscism and follow its connection with such phenomena as Nazism and fascism.

The study is based on the dialectical method, which discloses ruscism as objectively and comprehensively as possible in a rational discussion with other researchers.

Using general scientific methods of analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, generalisation, and analogy, it was possible to break down ruscism into its constituent parts for in-depth examination, integrate the elements of ruscism into a unified whole, draw preliminary and final conclusions, and identify the similarity of studied objects based on certain characteristics, enabling the justification of their similarity based on other attributes as well.

Historical and comparative approaches allow investigating the evolution of the origin and development of ruscism, identifying its common and distinctive features with classical fascism and its varieties. Using the formal legal method, attention is focused on the textual analysis of the law of Ukraine "On the use of the ideology of ruscism by the political regime of the Russian Federation, condemnation of the foundations and practices of ruscism as totalitarian and misanthropic" (2023), the Statement of The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine "On the use of the ideology of ruscism by the political regime of the Russian Federation, condemnation of the foundations and practices of ruscism as totalitarian and misanthropic" (2023), Declaration 482 of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly "United and Decisive Support for Ukraine" (2022), which define and evaluate ruscism. Within the framework of the structural and functional method, the signs of ruscism are determined.

### The classical concept of fascism

Fascism in the classical concept is considered a reactionary, right-wing extremist movement aimed at establishing an open terrorist dictatorship, brutal suppression of democratic rights and freedoms, and the opposition (Shemshuchenko *et al.*, 2004). The central ideology of fascism is the theory of a corporatist state and totalitarianism, with compromises with monarchy and the church, significant socialist influence, the absence of racism and anti-Semitism (Halusko, 2013).

In the 1930s-1940s in Germany, the most well-known variant of fascism was created – Nazism. It is defined as a totalitarian movement based on the ideas of German expansionism and revanchism, leadership cult (Führerprinzip), extremist nationalism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and the ideology of the "Aryan race" (Halusko, 2013). The characteristics of a fascist regime were inherent in Francoist Spain, the Balkan regime of the Ustaše, Portugal during the time of Salazar, and certain Latin American countries. Yet the advantages of a democratic rule of law regime proved to be so

evident that fascist states eventually embarked on the path of building democracy.

U. Eco (1995) established a list of features of this ideology to determine whether a particular state and legal regime belong to fascism. The list includes: the cult of tradition, which involves rejecting modernism; the concept of "action for action's sake", without reflection and critical thinking; identifying dissenters from the official position of power as traitors; racism; appealing to the dissatisfied middle class; radical nationalism; creating the image of enemies; propagating war as a way of life; disdain for the weak; propagating heroism and heroic death in defence of fascism; machoism, cultivating contempt for women and intolerance and condemnation of non-traditional sexual habits; selective populism; restricting complex critical reasoning through newspeak – a reduced vocabulary and elementary syntax.

### Development of ruscism as a variant of fascism

By tracing the development of the Russian state from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present day, one can observe how, due to ideologues of Russian nationalism like Alexander Prokhanov or Alexander Dugin, foundational components of fascism were adopted and deliberately integrated into Russia's state and social structure under the concept of Russian world. Starting with the cult of traditions in Russia, the persecution of dissenting opinions, the superiority of Russians and all things Russian, the cultivation of the idea of a hostile West, the glorification of Soviet crimes and the imperial past, and culminating in the formation of a cult of the leader embodied in Putin. All of the above is accompanied by radical racism, which after a full-scale invasion of Ukraine turned into a blatant genocide of Ukrainians.

Consequently, all the criteria of fascism have received priority in their development in Russia, are implemented in state policy, and are actively popularised by ruscist propaganda. Thus, a single concept of ruscism was developed.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, fascism, modernised in Russia under the guise of the Russian world, is opposed to the classical Western liberal-democratic regime (Rudyi *et al.*, 2021). It is proposed as an alternative to the "imperfect" democratic state-legal regime.

Timothy Snyder, a professor at Yale University and a recognised authority on the history of Eastern Europe, was one of the first to draw attention to this. In an article for the New York Times (Snyder, 2022b), he noted that today's Russia meets most of the criteria used by researchers to define fascism. In Russia, the cult of a single leader – Vladimir Putin – has been developed. The cult of the dead around the Second World War has also been developed. The myth of the glorious imperial past that needs to be restored through a deadly war against Ukraine is propagated. Official use of symbols Z and V, rallies, the prevalence of manipulative propaganda, interpreting and promoting war as a purifying act of violence are observed. The war against Ukraine is not only seen as a return to traditional fascist battlegrounds but also a return to traditional fascist language and practices. T. Snyder (2022b) proposed the term ruscism to identify Russian fascism, suggesting to use ruscism in English, which does not change its meaning.

Russian fascists, in establishing ruscism, have given it a national hue by incorporating the so-called "bonding" of the Russian world. In the classical scheme of the Minister of

National Education of the Russian Empire, Sergei Uvarov, autocracy, Orthodoxy, and nationality are the foundations of the Russian world (Hula, 2016). Modern-day ruscists have slightly modified their ideology by adding Russian language and culture to Orthodoxy, presenting autocracy (i.e., dictatorship) as shared historical memory and shared views on social development (Melnyk, 2015). This bonding of the Russian world allowed the ruscists to rewrite their own history, in which, for example, the Second World War is absent, or one of the largest European nations – the Ukrainian nation – is denied, while the crimes of the communist Soviet totalitarian regime are portrayed as heroic deeds, etc. Thus, the glorification of the criminal imperial past, described in the “correct” ruscist history, sanctified by Russian Orthodoxy, makes Russian culture and language instruments that are sacred and superior to other languages and cultures.

The main goal of the Russian world is to unite all “Russians” into one large state, which is an exact copy of the concept preached by A. Hitler and A. Rosenberg in the 1920s-30s regarding the unification of the disconnected German nation. The “Russians” include three categories of the world’s population: ethnic Russians, regardless of where they reside; Russian-speaking population, regardless of nationality; compatriots who have ever lived in the territory of the Russian Empire, the USSR, and other state entities, including their descendants. Therefore, the ideology of the Russian world essentially projects the idea that conscious Ukrainians are natural enemies of the “Russians” (Horbulin, 2017).

The ruscists, without any conscience, despite their pseudo-fight against fascism, use classic Russian fascist ideologists like Ivan Ilyin (whom Putin often cites in his speeches). According to Ilyin’s views, the Russian nation, which is called for a constant war against spiritual threats, becomes a divine being (Snyder, 2018). Based on this statement, Russians (it is unclear who specifically belongs to them: “Russians” themselves or all ethnic groups and nationalities residing in Russia) are God’s chosen people, and thus, any of their actions are justified and sanctified by divine providence. It is not surprising why the ministers of the Russian Orthodox Church bless the servicemen of the Russian army for an aggressive war against Ukraine. The government at the legislative level not only decriminalises war crimes committed by its servicemen in Ukraine (Russians will not be punished..., 2022) but also confers the honorary title “guards” on the 64th Brigade, which occupied Bucha in Kyiv Oblast in March 2022 and was involved in war crimes (Putin gave an honorary title..., 2022). As human rights activist O. Matviychuk noted, Russia uses war crimes as a method of waging war (Russia uses war crimes..., 2022). This is one of the most disgusting forms of ruscism in action, when the top political leadership of Russia encourages and supports crimes that have all the signs of genocide.

Another characteristic feature of ruscism is branding their opponents as fascists or Nazis without any reason. Calling others fascists while being a fascist is Putin’s main practice. J. Stanley, an American philosopher, calls this “undermining propaganda”, and T. Snyder – “schizofascism” (Snyder, 2022b). In their racist policy, ruscists have surpassed even the Nazis, who divided races into “creators”, “carriers”, and “parasites” but acknowledged their existence. Ruscists, in the person of their “Führer” Putin, have denied the very existence of Ukrainians (there are only “Little Russians”), and they interpret the Ukrainian state as artificially

created and, accordingly, one that has no right to exist (Putin, 2021). Anyone who disagrees with this position is labelled as a nationalist, fascist, or Nazi, and they must be destroyed or reeducated. This was set as the main goal of the so-called special military operation, which was, in fact, a full-scale aggressive war against Ukraine with elements of genocide against the Ukrainian nation.

In his paper, Professor V. Makarchuk (2022) highlighted the specific features of Russian fascism, such as multi-nationalism and multi-religiosity, pseudo-multi-party system, ultra-chauvinism, the corrupt-mafia structure of the state, and dishonest and deceptive rhetoric of its leaders. It is hard to disagree with the arguments presented in the paper, as it is evident that the ideologists and creators of ruscism, given its apparent primitiveness, tried to fill the gaps with lies, propaganda, and total fear. These components can explain the multi-national and multi-religious nature of ruscism, as finding other arguments to justify the desire of over 200 nations and nationalities residing in present-day Russia, who practice not only aggressive Russian Orthodoxy but also peaceful 21<sup>st</sup> century religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Protestantism, Catholicism, etc., to fight for the Russian world is impossible (Rudyi, 2023).

The historical origins of ruscism as a cohesive phenomenon and its individual elements remain open questions. The term ruscism was first used in the paper “Ordinary ruscism” in 1990 as a critical response by M. Andreev to the militaristic views of Karim Rash. Historian A. Shubin (2006) even compared the “warlike conservatism of Rash” with Nazism. However, the term did not gain widespread use, probably due to the Yeltsin-era Russia’s attempts to build something resembling democracy.

Modern understanding of ruscism began to take shape after the Russian-Georgian War in 2008 and the start of the Russian-Ukrainian War in 2014. Yet it can be hypothesised that the development of individual elements of ruscism occurred long before these events.

Despite Italian fascism being fully formed in the 1920s, certain elements of this harmful ideology were embedded in Russia as early as the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries when Moscow started positioning itself as both the New Jerusalem and the New Rome, known as the Third Rome. The Roman Church was destroyed by heresy, while the Church of the Second Rome, which inherited the imperial and spiritual power after the fall of the First Rome, was captured by Muslims (Plokhly, 2017). According to the authors’ intentions, the concept of “Moscow – the Third Rome” bestowed sanctity and greatness upon the Muscovite, and from 1721 onwards, the Russian state, as it preserved the only “correct” religion within this state. The Moscow monarchs received unlimited power within the country and the ability to conduct an aggressive foreign policy to expand the Empire. Due to autocracy and Orthodoxy, the Muscovite state was transformed from a principality into a kingdom and, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, into the Russian Empire, greatly expanding its territories through aggressive wars and the subjugation of nations.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after transforming the Russian Empire into the Soviet Union (under the guise of the USSR), an important component of modern ruscism was formed – the secret service, which, under various names like Cheka (All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage), GPU (State Political Directorate), NKVD (People’s Commissariat for Internal

Affairs), MGB (Ministry of State Security), and KGB (Committee for State Security), ensured the dictatorship of the Communist Party within the country and implemented the policy of external expansion of the communist ideology worldwide.

The Orthodox religion (it was first banned and then made an instrument of state policy) was replaced by the ideology of the so-called dictatorship of the proletariat, which, according to the Bolsheviks, gave legitimacy to their power. Neither the proletariat nor the peasantry ever had real power in the USSR; it was completely concentrated in the hands of the Communist Party and the secret services. Until 1991, these two organizations, under the guise of the utopian idea of building communism, pursued aggressive foreign and domestic policies, resulting in the deaths of millions of people, total terror, and one of the most horrific crimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the Holodomor. These crimes did not receive a proper international legal assessment, and the trial of the Communist Party and the KGB did not take place. Moreover, representatives of the Soviet secret services not only avoided accountability but also preserved their criminal organisation under the name of the FSB (Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation).

Despite attempts to democratise Russia, starting from 1991, the descendants of the Soviet secret services began a process of seizing power, culminating in the election of Putin as the president of Russia on May 7, 2000. From this date onwards, Russia effectively started developing a fascist dictatorship of the Italian type, where a junta composed of officers from the secret services took control of top state, political, administrative, economic, and business positions (Felshtynskiy & Popov, 2022). By destroying the Russian opposition, independent media, and establishing a powerful propaganda machine, ideal conditions were created for the development of ruscism. In just 100 years, Russians managed to surpass Italian fascists, supplementing their ideology with elements of the Russian world and Russian imperial chauvinism, accompanied by aggressive wars, militarisation, repression, torture, and another attempt to commit genocide against the Ukrainian people.

Thus, it can be concluded that modern ruscism combines various elements developed during the formation of the Moscow-Russian state. The fact of the creation of the ideology of ruscism in Russia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and its introduction as a form of state-legal regime is also obvious and undeniable.

An important problem is the inconsistent use of the term ruscism, often replaced by other definitions, which can lead to confusion in the identification of the Russian criminal regime. Yu. Felshtynskiy and M. Stanchev (2022) note that as of 2022, a completely fascist state and a fascist ideology called the Russian world have been established in Russia. The Russian world is an integral part of ruscism but in its essence a narrower phenomenon. Ukrainian legislators, in the Law of Ukraine “On the Prohibition of Propaganda of the Russian Nazi Totalitarian Regime, Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation as a Terrorist State Against Ukraine, Symbols of the Military Invasion of the Russian Nazi Totalitarian Regime in Ukraine” (2022) from May 22, 2022, defined the Russian regime as Nazi. Nevertheless, in May 2023, in the Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine “On the use of the ideology of ruscism by the political regime

of the Russian Federation, condemnation of the foundations and practices of ruscism as totalitarian and misanthropic” (2023), legislators used the term ruscism and, for the first time on the legislative level, proposed a list of its characteristics and consequences. Therefore, there is a need for Ukrainian legislators to unify the identification of the Russian regime, primarily at the national level, as a separate type of Russian fascism – ruscism, to further lobby for the creation of an international court for its condemnation and prohibition. At the international legal level, the term ruscism is also used, namely in Paragraph 20 of the Declaration 482 of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly “United and Decisive Support for Ukraine” (2022).

In summary, to achieve a clear identification of ruscism, it can be defined as a form of non-democratic totalitarian state and legal regime established in the Russian Federation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century based on radical Russian imperial chauvinism, fascism, and the practices of the communist regime of the USSR, manifested in the form of the Russian world, violations of international law, human rights, and fundamental freedoms, militarism, and the execution of aggressive wars and policies of genocide against the Ukrainian people.

## Conclusions

The paper defined the concept of ruscism, explored the historical retrospective of its origin and development, and highlighted similarities and differences with classical fascism and German Nazism. The Ukrainian and international legislation regarding the use of the term ruscism were analysed, and a unified approach to its usage in official documents was proposed.

To summarise, it can be stated that ruscism combines the most inhumane manifestations of fascism, Nazism, and communism. The glorification of the “Russian” race, genocidal policies in Ukraine, discrimination against neighbouring countries and peoples, including the indigenous peoples of the Russian Federation sanctified by the Russian Orthodox Church, leaderism, and manipulations of propaganda are combined with total lies and, as a result, the unleashing of the largest conventional war on a planetary scale since World War II. Considering the threats and negative consequences caused by ruscism, humanity needs to draw adequate conclusions, which will be embodied in the condemnation and prohibition of ruscism as an ideology and form of state and legal regime at the international and national levels. An integral part of the fight against ruscism should be bringing its creators and leaders to criminal responsibility.

There is an urgent need for in-depth further studies on ruscism to specify the stages of its creation, provide a clear international legal evaluation of both the phenomenon and its consequences, and develop mechanisms to counter and prohibit ruscism. This will allow understanding the reasons for the emergence of another variety of fascism, which seemed to have received international condemnation and should only be perceived as marginal by individuals and organisations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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## Conflict of interest

None.

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## Рашизм як різновид фашистської форми державно-правового режиму

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**Анотація.** Актуальність статті зумовлено виникненням у Російській Федерації нового різновиду фашизму – рашизму, який у XXI ст. повернув людство до розуміння того, що можливе відродження найнебезпечніших форм державно-правового режиму. Мета статті – дати визначення поняття «рашизм», проаналізувати історію його зародження як окремого явища та формування складових елементів, виділити схожі та відмінні риси з класичним фашизмом та його різновидами. З методологічного інструментарію використано методи діалектики, аналізу, синтезу, індукції, дедукції, узагальнення та аналогії. Історичний та компаративістський підходи дали змогу дослідити еволюцію зародження та формування рашизму, виокремити його спільні та відмінні ознаки з класичним фашизмом та його різновидами. Визначено чіткі ознаки фашизму та його різновидів. Досліджено конвергенцію фашизму з концепцією «руського міра», російським імперським шовінізмом та злочинними практиками комуністичного режиму Союзу Радянських Соціалістичних Республік. Установлено, що результатом рашистського режиму стало створення тоталітарної репресивної мілітаристської держави в Росії, яка розв'язала агресивні війни проти Грузії та України. Наголошено на притаманних рашистському режиму систематичних порушеннях принципів міжнародного права, прав та основоположних свобод людини, реалізації політики геноциду українського народу. Сформульовано визначення поняття «рашизм» та розглянуто історію формування як окремих його складових елементів, так і як цілісного явища. Практичне значення дослідження полягає в уніфікації використання визначення «рашизм» як на науковому, так і законодавчому рівнях з метою засудження і заборони рашизму як злочинної, людиноненависницької ідеології та форми державно-правового режиму

**Ключові слова:** нацизм; «руський мір»; війна; геноцид; російське православ'я; терор