

Institutional and socio-psychological determinants of the delinquency of ruscism in the war against Ukraine

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Abstract. The research relevance of the institutional and socio-psychological determinants of ruscism delinquency in the context of Russian aggression against Ukraine is determined by the unprecedented scale of crimes against humanity committed by the Russian occupants. The study aimed to provide a comprehensive coverage of the historical, political, ideological, legal, propaganda and socio-psychological factors that determine the criminal behaviour of the invaders. The main findings of the study showed that the crimes of ruscism are not isolated excesses of individual perpetrators, but a natural outgrowth and quintessence of the centuries-old tradition of Russian imperialism, which over a long historical period systematically violated the fundamental norms of international law, disregarded basic human rights and cynically despised the values of civilised coexistence of peoples. The delinquency of ruscism has deep historical roots, going back to the centuries-old tradition of territorial expansion, political despotism and unpunished state terror that have defined the character of the Russian state for centuries. The current manifestations of racist crime are an organic and natural extension of the neo-imperial paradigm of the “Russian world”, which is based on great-power chauvinism, outright contempt for the sovereignty and identity of other nations and justifies Moscow’s right to dominate neighbouring nations. A decisive role in generating massive public support for the aggressive war against Ukraine was determined by the Kremlin’s powerful and extensive propaganda machine, which, through controlled media and public

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discourse, systematically demonised and dehumanised the Ukrainian people and legitimised any atrocities and crimes against humanity in the eyes of Russians under the cynical pretext of “protecting the Russian-speaking population”

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Introduction

Since 2014, when Russia illegally annexed Crimea and launched military operations in eastern Ukraine, the Ukrainian people have been living under constant aggression from Russia. The hybrid war waged by Putin’s regime against Ukraine included sponsorship of terrorism, support for separatist movements, information attacks and other forms of destabilisation of the Ukrainian state. However, on 24 February 2022, this aggression escalated into a full-scale invasion, which became the greatest challenge to the entire civilised world since the Second World War. Contrary to international legal norms, the basic values of peace, democracy and humanity, Kremlin politicians are seeking to implement groundlessly far-fetched, imperial goals of destroying the Ukrainian people and state. Civilians, children and the elderly are being killed by artillery and rocket attacks. Social infrastructure, including medical, educational and cultural institutions, is being destroyed. Russian total aggression also includes information and semantic warfare aimed at destroying spiritual values, including moral and legal norms (Danilyan *et al.*, 2023).

The usual manifestations of a war of aggression are the commission of antisocial behaviour and various types of crime by the occupants. To define the latter, it is customary to use the concept of “delinquency”, which has an interdisciplinary meaning and whose content is revealed in law, sociology and psychology (Spytska, 2023). In this context, there is an urgent need to study the issues of institutional and socio-psychological determinants of the invaders’ delinquency. The research relevance is determined by the scale and brutality of the crimes of the ruscist troops against the civilian population of Ukraine. It is necessary to reveal the conditionality of these crimes by the system of ideological, political, legal, moral and psychological norms and guidelines officially adopted in Russia and supported by the majority of the population. This statement is the methodological basis for the topic’s disclosure – the identification of objective, institutionally accepted and socially approved determinants of the occupants’ criminality.

The problem of the delinquent nature of ruscism in the war against Ukraine is relevant and requires further study. L. Pries (2022) addressed Russian aggression against Ukraine in the context of the problem of organised violence, noting its systemic nature and rootedness in the political culture of Russia. E. Fortuin (2022) and O. Dudko (2022) analysed the use of the term “genocide” in Russian propaganda and the limitations of the modern definition of genocide in the context of mass atrocities in Ukraine. However, these works do not pay sufficient attention to the problem of institutional and socio-psychological determinants of racist delinquency. R. Cherepakhin (2022), G.G. Littleton (2022) and O.S. Datsko (2020) studied Russian propaganda as an instrument of war, enemy image formation and disinformation. E. Johansson-Nogués and E. Şimanschi (2023) also examine the mechanisms of information distortion and justification of aggression in Russian propaganda. However, these studies do not offer a comprehensive analysis of the institutional and socio-psychological sources of invaders’ delinquency.

J. McGlynn (2023) examines Russians’ attitudes to the war, drawing on media analysis and interviews to show the entrenchment of alternative Kremlin narratives in the minds of the majority. C.E. Ehrlich (2021) examines the problem of propaganda and distortion of history in the post-Soviet space. B.E. Johansen (2023) analyses ultranationalism as a form of mass insanity. However, these works do not focus directly on the problem of ruscism delinquency and do not offer a systematic analysis of its determinants.

Thus, despite the importance of existing studies, they do not provide an exhaustive answer to the question of the institutional and socio-psychological determinants of the delinquency of ruscism in the war against Ukraine. This study aims to fill this gap by offering a comprehensive analysis of the historical, political ideological, legal, propaganda and socio-psychological sources of the occupants’ criminal behaviour. The study will allow for a deeper understanding of the institutional and socio-psychological determinants of the delinquency of ruscism.

The study aimed to reveal the main institutional and socio-psychological determinants of the delinquency of ruscism in the war against Ukraine. To achieve this goal, the following objectives have been set: (1) to consider the real picture of racist offences and to classify them; (2) to analyse the historical, political, ideological and legal preconditions for the delinquency of ruscism; (3) to identify the information-propaganda and socio-psychological sources of racist delinquency.

Materials and methods

In this study, which examines the institutional and socio-psychological determinants of the delinquency of ruscism in the war against Ukraine, a set of methods of scientific knowledge was used to comprehensively analyse this complex and multidimensional phenomenon. The axiological method was used to determine the essence and origins of ruscism ideology, its values and worldview. The study analysed the system of values that underpins ruscism – great-power chauvinism, imperialism, ethnic and religious intolerance. The study demonstrated its incompatibility with the basic values of modern civilisation – freedom, democracy, and respect for human rights.

To comprehensively cover the phenomenon of ruscism, a set of methods of scientific knowledge was used. Comparative analysis has revealed the typological affinity of ruscism with other totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century, while preserving its identity, determined by the specifics of Russian historical development. The structural-functional approach was employed to address ruscism as a holistic system of interconnected elements (ideological postulates, propaganda narratives, organisational structures, repressive practices), which together ensure the reproduction of racist sentiments and the implementation of the Kremlin’s aggressive policy. The critical method was employed to reveal the manipulative nature, internal contradictions and groundlessness of historical analogies of ruscism ideology. At the same time, the systemic analysis revealed a set of institutional factors (authoritarianism, lack of opposition, militarisation

of society) that create a favourable environment for the establishment of ruscism and have a destructive impact on the mass consciousness of Russians.

To study the socio-psychological origins of ruscism, the methods of psychological and cultural-historical anthropology within the theoretical framework of the analytical psychology concepts by C.G. Jung (2021) of the collective unconscious and archetypes, were used. The author analyses the archetypal images and mental structures of the Russian public consciousness that have become fertile ground for ruscist ideology – paternalism, sacralisation of the state, attraction to the “strong hand”. The works of psychohistory were also involved the ideas of L. deMause (2002) on the impact of childhood trauma and collective fears on socio-political processes. The influence of the Russian intellectual tradition (pan-Slavism, Eurasianism, the concept of the “Russian world”) on the justification of the Kremlin’s neo-imperial claims and the formation of a great-power identity is studied from the standpoint of cultural and historical psychology in the tradition of L.S. Vygotsky and A.R. Luria (Yasnitsky, 2015).

The methods of social constructivism were used to gain a deeper understanding of the socio-psychological mechanisms of the production and spread of ruscist ideology. From this methodological perspective, ruscism appears as a discursive construct that is reproduced and legitimised through certain narrative practices and rhetorical strategies. The peculiarities of the content and structural organisation of texts and statements representing the ruscist worldview are investigated using discourse analysis. The study identified discursive figures and linguistic means aimed at sacralising the war, dehumanising Ukrainians, justifying war crimes. The author traces the continuity of these propaganda techniques from earlier examples of totalitarian ideology.

The methods of social constructivism were used to gain a deeper understanding of the socio-psychological mechanisms of the production and spread of ruscist ideology. This approach uses discourse analysis to identify characteristic narrative practices and rhetorical strategies used to sacralise the war, dehumanising Ukrainians and justifying war crimes.

The cluster analysis was used to systematise the entire array of ruscist crimes by the criteria of nature, object and method of commission, identifying such main categories as premeditated murder, torture, kidnapping, sexual violence, deportation, attacks on civilian objects, use of prohibited weapons, looting, ecocide. This illustrated the diversity and systematic nature of the occupants’ atrocities and confirmed the thesis that delinquency is organically rooted in the hateful essence of ruscism. The formal legal method is used to interpret the content of international humanitarian law and to qualify the criminal acts of racists following these norms. The method of legal hermeneutics was used to clarify the spirit and letter of the Rome Statute (1998) and the Geneva Conventions (1949) in the context of assessing violations of the laws and customs of war by Russia in Ukraine.

The research was based on statistical data, the results of sociological surveys, expert opinions, regulatory documents, official reports and analytical materials of international organisations. Data from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2023), the National Police (Peryn, 2023), and the Tribunal for Putin (T4P) initiative (Statistics of the T4P..., 2024) were used to assess the scale and nature of racist crimes against the civilian population of Ukraine. The relevant provisions of the Rome Statute (1998) and the Geneva Conventions (1949) were analysed to qualify these crimes from the point of view of international law, Conventions on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons (2003) and other international legal acts.

Results

A complete picture of ruscist offences and their classification. One of the most serious aspects of Russian full-scale aggression against Ukraine has been the massive and systematic crimes against civilians, which by their nature, scale and brutality have no precedent in modern European history. According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2023), as of 7 May 2023, at least 23,606 civilian casualties have been recorded as a result of the Russian invasion, including 8,791 killed and 14,815 injured (Fig. 1).

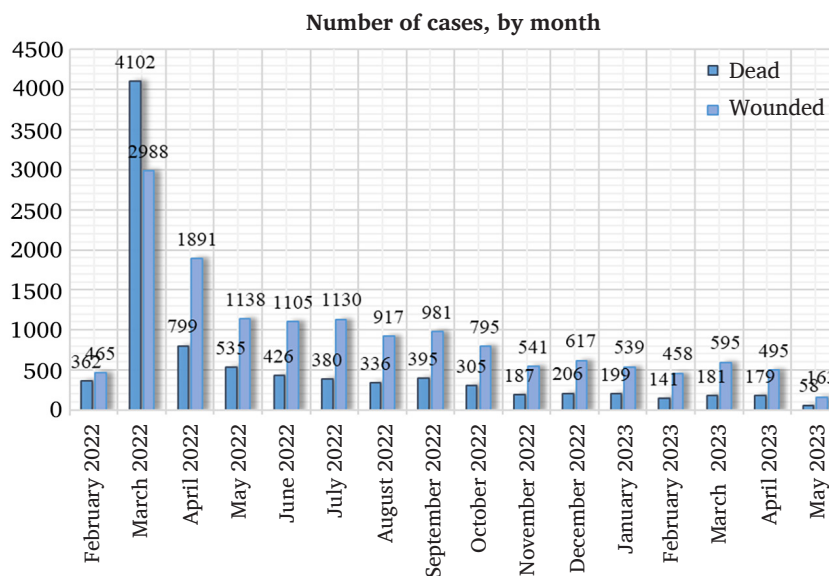


Figure 1. Civilian deaths and injuries according to the United Nations (UN) as of 8 May, 2023

Source: compiled by the author based on Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2023)

The figures in Figure 1 reflect only the tip of the iceberg, as the actual number of victims may be many times higher due to the impossibility of obtaining complete information from the temporarily occupied territories and areas of active hostilities. From the beginning of the full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022, the Russian invaders have launched a campaign of terror against the civilian population of Ukraine, resorting to a wide range of criminal acts, each of which constitutes a gross violation of international humanitarian law. One of the most widespread and shocking practices was the mass murder of civilians, which was accompanied by cruelty and cynicism. As noted by V. Polishchuk (2023), in every settlement that resisted the occupiers, there were shootings, executions, torture and abuse of defenceless people. A striking example was the Bucha district in the Kyiv region, liberated in April 2022, where more than 420 civilians died. The bodies of tortured people with traces of violent death were lying in the streets, in houses, and yards. Cynicism was manifested in the actions of the occupiers before the retreat – according to eyewitnesses, Russian soldiers organised a “safari”, shooting men of military age in the back of the head. These atrocities were a shock to the entire civilised world and unequivocal evidence of the genocidal nature of the aggressor’s actions.

In addition to direct killings and torture, the Russian occupiers resort to the practice of enforced disappearances and abductions. According to the National Police (Peryn, 2023), since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, more than 8,000 cases of enforced disappearance of Ukrainian citizens have been registered, the vast majority of which took place in the temporarily occupied territories. These crimes constitute a violation of Article 7(1)(i) of the Rome Statute (1998), which qualifies enforced disappear-

ances as a crime against humanity. In addition, kidnapping is covered by Articles 147 and 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (2001). Another form of crime against civilians that underscores the genocidal nature of the occupier’s actions is the abduction and forced deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia under the guise of “evacuation” or “rehabilitation”. According to the Children of War (n.d.), as of 9 May 2024, there were 19,546 children forcibly taken to Russia in the databases. 388 children were returned, the fate of the rest remains unknown. Abduction of children is a grave violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Geneva Conventions (1949), Article 8(2)(a)(vii) of the Rome Statute (1998) (unlawful deportation and displacement). The Criminal Code of Ukraine (2001) qualifies these actions under Article 438, and in the case of orphans and children deprived of parental care, also under Article 169 (illegal actions regarding adoption).

A different side of Russian war crimes in Ukraine is the practice of destroying civilian infrastructure, which not only poses a direct threat to human life but has also acquired the character of ecocide. Between 24 February 2022 and 14 May 2023, according to the T4P initiative alone (Statistics of the T4P..., 2024), 17,080 cases of shelling of residential buildings, 2,884 attacks on shops, factories and other business facilities, 1,393 attacks on educational institutions, 418 attacks on hospitals were recorded, as shown in more detail in Table 1. Large-scale destruction of civilian objects that have no military significance is a violation of several articles of the Rome Statute (1998), in particular art. 8(2)(a)(iv) – mass destruction of property not justified by military necessity; art. 8(2)(b)(ii) – intentional attack on civilian objects; art. 8(2)(b)(ix) – intentional attack on buildings dedicated to education, religion, art, science or charity.

Table 1. Targets of attack according to T4P data as of 14 May, 2023

No.	Losses	Number of cases
1	Residential buildings	17,080
2	Shops, factories and other business facilities	2,884
3	Vehicles	2,137
4	Educational institutions	1,393
5	Civil infrastructure facilities	1,264
6	Hospitals	418
7	Government buildings	415
8	Farmland, forests	381
9	Transport infrastructure	359
10	Entertainment venues	317
11	Temples	252
12	Historical sights	147

Source: compiled by the authors based on Statistics of the T4P war crimes database (2024)

The use by the occupation forces of means of warfare prohibited by international humanitarian law is worth highlighting. Russian invaders used cluster munitions, incendiary and phosphorus weapons, and launched ballistic and cruise missiles at densely populated areas in Ukraine (Khmelnitska, 2022). These acts constitute war crimes under Article 8(2)(b)(xx) of the Rome Statute (1998) (use of weapons, ammunition and equipment and methods of warfare of a nature to cause superfluous injury or suffering or to have indiscriminate effects). In addition, they violate Conventions on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons (2003), Protocol III thereto,

and the Convention on Cluster Munitions (2008). Neither Russia nor Ukraine is a party to the Convention on Cluster Munitions (2008). At the same time, the use of cluster munitions in armed conflicts is regulated by international humanitarian law, in particular the provisions of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions (1949), which prohibit indiscriminate attacks and attacks likely to cause excessive harm to the civilian population concerning the expected military advantage.

Although both sides of the conflict *de facto* use cluster munitions, the nature and method of their use differ. Ukraine has committed itself to partner countries to use

the provided cluster weapons exclusively against legitimate military targets and only in cases of extreme necessity and in compliance with the principle of proportionality (Press gaggle by press..., 2023). Instead, Russia has systematically and indiscriminately used cluster munitions in populated areas (Segura, 2024), in violation of fundamental norms of international humanitarian law. In particular, there are numerous known use cases of Russian Iskander intermediate-range ballistic missiles and “Smerch” and “Uragan” multiple-launch rocket systems with cluster warheads to strike densely populated urban areas in Kharkiv (Ukraine: Cluster munitions launched..., 2022), Odesa (Segura, 2024), Mykolaiv (Ukraine: Cluster munitions repeatedly..., 2022), Kramatorsk (Death at the station..., 2023) and other cities. These actions resulted in massive civilian casualties and significant damage to civilian infrastructure.

The indiscriminate nature of the attacks and their unjustified military necessity distinguish the Russian tactics and qualify the use of cluster weapons by the aggressor as a war crime. Indeed, Article 8(2)(b)(xx) of the Rome Statute (1998) expressly prohibits the use of weapons of a nature that causes excessive injury or suffering or that is indiscriminate in effect, in violation of the principle of proportionality. In addition, indiscriminate attacks with cluster munitions against civilians and objects violate several other provisions of the Rome Statute (1998), including:

- ▶ Article 51(4) of Additional Protocol I defines indiscriminate attacks as those not directed against specific military objectives; employing methods or means of warfare which cannot be directed against specific military objectives; or employing methods or means of warfare whose effects cannot be limited.

- ▶ Article 51(5)(b) of Additional Protocol I prohibits attacks on military objectives located in populated areas unless they are military objectives and civilian casualties are not disproportionate to the expected military advantage.

- ▶ Article 8(2)(e)(i) of the Rome Statute (1998) prohibits the intentional directing of attacks against the civilian population as such or against individuals not taking a direct part in the hostilities.

Thus, it is the indiscriminate, disproportionate and unjustified use of cluster munitions by Russia that distinguishes these actions as war crimes under international humanitarian and criminal law. Bringing those responsible for these crimes to justice through national and international judicial institutions should be one of the elements of restoring justice and international law and order.

Sexual violence against women, men and children in the occupied territories has become a horrific practice of the invaders. As reported by the Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights Lyudmyla Denisova (In Ukraine, 400 complaints..., 2022), as of early May 2022, more than 400 cases of rape had been registered in 8 regions. However, the actual number of victims is possibly ten times higher, as victims of sexual violence rarely report. These crimes fall under Article 8(2)(b)(xxii) of the Rome Statute (1998), which prohibits rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution and other forms of sexual violence. At the national level, the acts are classified under Article 152 (rape), Article 153 (sexual violence), Article 156 (corruption of minors) of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (2001). The systematic looting of the occupied territories was an example of a blatant disregard for international law. The scale of the looting is evidenced by the fact that

according to the official data of the T4P initiative (Statistics of the T4P..., 2024), there are 775 cases of looting of settlements alone. These actions are classified under Article 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (2001) (looting as a violation of the laws or customs of war), as well as Article 8(2)(b)(xvi) of the Rome Statute (1998) – looting of a city or town.

Another dimension of the occupier’s criminal activity was the destruction of the natural environment and ecological systems, which poses a threat of a national and international environmental catastrophe. The explosions of fuel depots, attacks on critical infrastructure, and the flooding of mines in Donbas have led to the release of hazardous substances into the soil, water, and atmosphere, and the death of flora and fauna. According to Article 441 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (2001), mass destruction of flora or fauna, and poisoning of the atmosphere or water resources is classified as ecocide. At the same time, Article 8(2)(b)(iv) of the Rome Statute (1998) prohibits attacks that are likely to cause extensive, long-term and serious damage to the natural environment. In general, the entire array of unlawful acts committed by Russian troops on the territory of Ukraine against civilians and objects can be qualified under national law as violations of the laws and customs of war (Article 438) (Rome Statute..., 1998). In the international legal framework, these crimes fall within the definition of war crimes and crimes against humanity under the Rome Statute (1998). The complex and systematic nature of the occupier’s criminal actions indicates that they are not the excesses of the perpetrators, but part of a planned state policy, the goal of which is the destruction of the Ukrainian nation.

Unprecedented measures are being taken in Ukraine and around the world to ensure a proper legal response to the crimes of the Russian invaders. National and international mechanisms for recording and investigating war crimes have been established, such as the Joint Investigation Team, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Violations in Ukraine, the United Nations Human Rights Council Special Commission on Human Rights, and others. At the national level, the prosecutor’s office, police, and security agencies investigate crimes. Thousands of criminal proceedings have been opened over violations of the laws and customs of war, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. However, much more powerful tools are needed to bring the perpetrators to real accountability and prevent the aggressor’s impunity, such as a special tribunal to try war crimes and the crime of aggression. The creation of this accountability mechanism should be a top priority for the international community.

Thus, the crimes of the Russian armed forces and the political leadership of the aggressor country against the civilian population of Ukraine are unprecedented in their scale and brutality and constitute a violation of the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law. By their nature, these unlawful acts qualify as war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of genocide, which entail individual criminal liability of perpetrators and officials following international criminal law. Bringing to justice the direct perpetrators of crimes and those who committed crimes in their official capacity, including the highest military and political leadership, through the establishment of a special international tribunal should become a moral and legal imperative of civilised humanity and a warning to potential aggressors in the future. Without this, justice cannot be won, and the rule of law cannot be restored.

Historical, political, ideological and legal prerequisites for the delinquency of ruscism. Over the centuries, Russia has developed an aggressive, expansionist paradigm that views neighbouring peoples, including Ukrainians, not as sovereign nations but as objects of domination and assimilation. This paradigm was manifested in both practical policies dominant ideological attitudes and legal doctrines. The historical basis for Russian aggression against Ukraine was a long process of forming an imperial identity based on the ideas of exclusivity, messianism and “land-gathering”. According to Ukrainian historians O.M. Sytnyk and Y.M. Balanovsky (2022), the origins of Moscow’s expansionist aspirations date back to the times of Kyivan Rus, whose heritage Moscow princes began to appropriate as early as the twelfth century. Imperial ambitions became especially pronounced after the fall of Byzantium in 1453, when the concept of “Moscow – the Third Rome” was established, proclaiming the divinely chosen nature of the Moscow Kingdom as the last stronghold of true faith. This concept justified territorial conquests under the pretext of “defending Orthodoxy”.

During the 16th and 19th centuries, the Moscow Kingdom, and later the Russian Empire, rapidly expanded through the conquest and incorporation of neighbouring nations. The seizure of Ukrainian lands, which began with the Pereyaslav Rada in 1654, was accompanied by the systematic suppression of statehood and autonomy aspirations, Russification, and the eradication of the historical memory of Ukrainians. The defeat of the Zaporozhian Sich in 1775 and the enslavement of the Ukrainian peasantry became a symbol of Russian despotism. In the nineteenth century, the ethnic identity of Ukrainians was denied at the official level, and the Ukrainian people were proclaimed the “Little Russian branch” of the triune Russian people (Kresin, 2020; Sytnyk & Balanovsky, 2022). The brutal suppression of any manifestations of free thought or national identity emphasised the repressive nature of Russian imperialism and its inseparability from the practice of state terror. The imprisonment of Taras Shevchenko for anti-authoritarian poetry, the Valuev Circular of 1863, and the Ems Decree of 1876, which banned the use of the Ukrainian language, are telling examples. These measures were aimed at levelling the cultural identity of Ukrainians as a separate people, eliminating the historical memory of the state’s past and preventing the development of a national movement (Remy, 2007).

After the Bolshevik coup of 1917 and the establishment of the communist regime, the continuity of aggressive imperialism persisted, despite the slogans of proletarian internationalism. As the British historian L. Rees (2022) rightly noted, despite the declarative condemnation of “tsarism”, Soviet leaders unconditionally followed the great-power policy of their predecessors. The creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was the reincarnation of the Russian Empire on a new ideological basis. It is noteworthy that even the formally proclaimed principle of national self-determination of the Union republics was brutally trampled upon by the Bolsheviks during the bloody suppression of the Ukrainian People’s Republic, the subsequent repression of “Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism” and the famine genocide of 1932-1933 (Farmer, 1977). Later, Soviet national policy combined demonstrative “rooting” and glorification of “friendship of peoples” with further Russification, levelling ethnic differences and discrimination against non-Russian

peoples, in particular in education, culture and the personnel sphere. The main ideological construct was the formation of a “new historical community – the Soviet people” (De Stefano, 2023), which *de facto* meant assimilation into the Russian-speaking community and the displacement of national identities. The systematic eradication of the historical memory of Ukrainians was accompanied by large-scale falsifications of history, such as the appropriation of ancient Russian heritage by Russia and the silencing or distortion of national liberation struggle cases. Thus, the Bolshevik regime ensured the continuity of the Russian imperial paradigm, adapting it to new realities. Overtly racist and great-power concepts were complemented by quasi-internationalist rhetoric and more sophisticated methods of assimilation. However, the goal was to deprive Ukrainians of their right to identity, history and statehood (Boele *et al.*, 2020).

The collapse of the USSR in 1991 and the restoration of state independence by the post-Soviet republics was a triumph for national liberation movements and a heavy defeat for the supporters of the “one and indivisible” empire. In Russia, the successor to the USSR, this trauma has caused an acute identity crisis. Nostalgia for the Soviet past and imperial revanchism are defining features of both public sentiment and political elites (Boele *et al.*, 2020). Since Putin came to power, the authoritarian regime has been rapidly reincarnated and the imperial paradigm has been restored, this time based on the Russian World ideology. From the very beginning of his rule, Putin began to systematically dismantle the sprouts of democracy, curtail political freedoms and persecute the opposition, creating conditions for unlimited personal power. At the same time, the foreign policy aimed at restoring Russian hegemony in the post-Soviet space became increasingly aggressive (Zahid, 2023). Furthermore, Russia’s foreign policy under Putin’s presidency is based on the Primakov doctrine (DeLong, 2020). This doctrine, formulated in 1990, envisaged the restoration of Russia’s status as a superpower, countering the unipolar world order under the auspices of the United States, multi-vectorism in international relations and the establishment of Russia’s exclusive sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space. As the Polish researcher M. DeLong (2020) notes, after Putin came to power, the line set by Primakov was pursued by his successors, primarily Igor Ivanov and Sergey Lavrov. The main directions and assumptions of his concepts are still repeated in official documents articulating Russia’s security and defence doctrine (DeLong, 2020).

Thus, the Primakov Doctrine has become a guiding principle for Putin’s foreign policy, explaining Russia’s desire to dominate the former Soviet Union, its confrontational attitude towards the West, and its willingness to use force to achieve its goals. An integral part of it is the attitude to Ukraine as a sphere of Russia’s “privileged interests” and the non-recognition of its right to a sovereign geopolitical choice. This results in Russia’s aggressive policy aimed at undermining Ukraine’s statehood and subjectivity, ranging from political and economic pressure to direct military aggression. In general, the determination of the conceptual foundations of the Primakov Doctrine describes Russia’s strategic aspirations and behaviour in the international arena. At the same time, this does not absolve the Putin regime of responsibility for its deliberate slide into neo-imperialism and crimes against international law committed for the sake of great-power ambitions.

The first manifestation of neo-imperial encroachment was the failed attempt to interfere in the 2004 elections in Ukraine, which led to the Orange Revolution (Strycharz, 2022). This defeat was a personal trauma for Putin, who saw Ukraine as an existential threat to his regime. Since then, undermining Ukraine's statehood and obstructing its European integration has become the Kremlin's top priority. The methods ranged from economic blackmail and information operations to direct aggression. The neo-imperial aggression culminated in Russia's armed attack on Ukraine in 2014, which included the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of war in Donbas (Sutyagin, 2022). These acts were a gross violation of international law as enshrined in the United Nations Charter (1945), The Helsinki Final Act (1975) and the Memorandum on Security Assurances in Connection with Ukraine's Accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (Budapest Memorandum) (2014) which guarantee the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states. In particular, the annexation of Crimea was a direct violation of Article 2 of the United Nations Charter (1945), which prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity of any state. Incitement to separatism and the deployment of troops in Donbas is an act of aggression that falls under Article 3 of the Definition of Aggression (General Assembly Resolution..., 1974).

The violent rejection of the territories of a neighbouring state was accompanied by an appropriate ideological design. The annexation of Crimea was justified by the theses of "historical justice" and "sacred significance" of the peninsula for Russia (Borgen, 2015). The aggression in Donbas was masked by a cynical mythology about "protecting the Russian-speaking population from the oppression of the Kyiv junta" (Sytnyk & Balanovsky, 2022). These propaganda narratives highlighted the openly neo-imperial, revanchist nature of Russia's policy. The official ideology of Putinism eclectically combines great-power chauvinism with conservative clerical rhetoric about Russia's special civilizational mission and its confrontation with the "decaying West" (Kuzio, 2022). The basic concept is the "Russian world" doctrine, which justifies Moscow's right to dominate all territories with a Russian-speaking population. It is a modification of the great-power slogan "Mother Russia will gather her lands". Accordingly, to legitimise the seizure of Ukrainian territories, Russian propaganda has again resorted to the old theses about the "unity" of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples, manipulatively interpreting the concept of "brotherhood" as synonymous with the subordination and inferiority of Ukrainians (Sytnyk & Balanovsky, 2022; Tripathi & Karlekar, 2024).

An integral component of the aggressive ideology was the constant production of the image of the enemy, the stirring up of anti-Western and anti-Ukrainian hysteria through controlled media. Ukraine has been artificially demonised as a failed state, a haven for 'neo-Nazis and Banderites', and a foothold for the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) aggressive plans against Russia. These propaganda clichés created an atmosphere of hatred in Russian society and created the illusion of legitimacy of aggression against a neighbouring country (Zahid, 2023). A natural continuation of this policy was the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia on 24 February 2022. This war is the culmination of Russian centuries-long imperial expansion and its outright desire to destroy the Ukrainian state and identity. It is a gross violation of the fundamental norms of international law that

prohibit aggressive war and guarantee the right of people to self-determination. Russian invasion falls within the definition of the crime of aggression under Article 8 of the Rome Statute (1998). It is worth emphasising that the aggression against Ukraine was ideologically sanctioned at the highest state level of Russia. Putin's opus "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" (2021) is illustrative, denying the very existence of a separate Ukrainian nation and proclaiming Ukrainian statehood as "anti-Russia" artificially created by the West (Reid, 2022). The war of aggression is cynically justified by the need to "denazify" and "demilitarise" Ukraine. The destruction of Ukrainian identity, language and culture is glorified as the "liberation" of Ukrainians from nationalist "enslavement" and "return to the bosom of Russian civilisation". Thus, the concept of "protecting Russian-language speakers" has been transformed into the concept of complete subordination of Ukraine and the elimination of its subjectivity (Dzyublenko, 2023).

The comprehensive support for the aggression by the political and military leadership of Russia, the media and the majority of society shows that it is not an excess, but a natural product of the centuries-old imperial paradigm (Boyd-Barrett, 2023). Ignoring international law, denying the right of peoples to self-determination, demonising national liberation movements and justifying war crimes – all of this is based on legal doctrines and ideological concepts that have been systematically produced in Russia. As noted in the Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. On the Statement of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine No. 3078-IX "On the Use of the Ideology of ruscism by the Political Regime of the Russian Federation, Condemnation of the Principles and Practices of Ruscism as Totalitarian and Hateful" (2023), the signs of ruscism as a totalitarian, hateful ideology include:

- self-aggrandisement of Russia and Russians through violent oppression and/or denial of the existence of other peoples;
- systematic violation of generally accepted principles and norms of international law;
- the use of prohibited methods of warfare and the systematic commission of war crimes.

Thus, delinquency is not an accidental but an organic and natural outgrowth of this ideology. The current war against Ukraine has become a litmus test that has demonstrated the criminal nature of the Putin regime as a direct heir to the great-power aggressive policy of Russian imperialism. The unprecedented crimes against humanity, war crimes and acts of genocide committed by the Russian occupiers are a continuation of the systemic practice of state terror and the eradication of the national identity of peoples who have suffered from imperial expansion for centuries. Legal nihilism, disregard for human life, and denial of the sovereign right of other nations to exist are the constants that have defined Russia's policy in the past and that have reached their peak today in the war of aggression against Ukraine.

The inability of Russia to exist in the paradigm of international law and civilised relations between states is derived from its imperial nature. As Ukrainian diplomat D. Kuleba (2022), despite the collapse of the USSR, the Russian elites and society "retain and dominate a typically imperial, chauvinistic worldview" that "requires constant territorial expansion, conquest and control over neighbours". In Putin's Russia, the cult of violence and militarism have become pervasive, and aggression against other nations has become the

regime's main tool for self-assertion. It is no coincidence that Russian propaganda glorifies the atrocities of its troops in Ukraine, and the mass consciousness justifies any crime for the sake of the coveted "revival of the empire". Thus, the delinquency and criminality of ruscism is a direct consequence and embodiment of its man-hating totalitarian essence, rooted in the centuries-old tradition of Russian imperialism. Systematic violations of international humanitarian law, war crimes and crimes against humanity are not failures, but the norm for a political regime and army guided by a neo-imperial ideology of revanchism, expansionism and disregard for the sovereignty of other states. In this system of coordinates, crime is transformed into valour, and sadism into a manifestation of patriotism. However, even the most brutal repression and the most cynical lies cannot stop the natural desire of people for freedom. Ukraine's successful resistance to the Russian invasion and the unprecedented consolidation of the Ukrainian nation around the idea of defending its statehood have demonstrated the collapse of the imperial paradigm and the illusory nature of Moscow's neocolonial encroachments. At the same time, the war has become a powerful catalyst for the transformation of the global security system and international law (Kotsur, 2023). It demonstrated the inevitability of punishment for the crime of aggression, proved the need to strengthen preventive mechanisms against revisionist states and increased responsibility for violations of international humanitarian law.

A key element of the inevitable defeat and condemnation of ruscism must be the prosecution of the political and military leadership of Russia and the direct perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The establishment of a special international tribunal for the crime of aggression against Ukraine has already become the subject of active discussion in the UN and other international organisations. The implementation of this initiative will send a powerful signal to potential aggressors and ensure that the tragedy of the Ukrainian people does not happen again in the future. The fundamental principle of international law – *pacta sunt servanda* (treaties must be honoured) – can only be effective if there is inevitable punishment for those who brazenly violate it. An equally important task is to comprehensively delegitimise and condemn the ideology of ruscism as a hateful totalitarian doctrine incompatible with the values of civilised humanity. Just as the criminal nature of Nazism and fascism was once debunked, so too is the inevitable global historical verdict of ruscism, which has compromised and discredited itself in the eyes of the international community with its atrocities in Ukraine. Only by realising the perniciousness of the imperial paradigm will Russian society be able to free itself from the "Russian world" and embark on the path of democratic development and peaceful coexistence with its neighbours. Until this happens, the international community must make every effort to contain, isolate and demilitarise Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism, which poses an existential threat not only to Ukraine but to all of humanity.

In summary, it should be noted that the delinquency and criminality of ruscism is a direct result and quintessence of Russian imperialism, which for centuries has systematically violated international law, human rights and the values of civilised coexistence of peoples. This ugly phenomenon represents the historical and logical conclusion of more than 400 years of state terror, expansionism and the oppression of entire nations in the name of building an oppressive "prison

of nations". Given the scale of the crimes committed and the threat to the very existence of the international legal order, the condemnation and punishment of ruscism, as well as the eradication of its ideological and institutional foundations, is a categorical moral and legal imperative of our time.

Information-propaganda and socio-psychological sources of ruscism's delinquency formation. Information and propaganda activities and socio-psychological factors play an extremely important role in shaping the delinquent consciousness and behaviour of racist representatives. It was targeted propaganda and the corresponding ideological processing of the population that created an atmosphere of hatred, xenophobia and psychological readiness for the most serious crimes against humanity in Russian society. The main way of spreading ruscist ideology is a powerful state propaganda machine, which includes Kremlin-controlled media, an army of bloggers and trolls on the Internet, cultural, scientific and pseudo-scientific figures, politicians and public figures (Tsyrenzhapova & Woolley, 2021). According to research, Russia is the world leader in the use of disinformation and manipulation, being responsible for 62% of interference in the internal affairs of other countries (Pivtorak *et al.*, 2023). Russian propaganda penetrated the information space of many countries long before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

It is on the distortion of reality and substitution of concepts that the entire system of propaganda support for the war is based on. Since 2014, the Russian media have consistently demonised Ukraine as a "failed state", a "haven for neo-Nazis", a "US puppet". The real invasion is cynically referred to as a "special operation", the seizure of foreign territories as "protection of Russian speakers", and war crimes and genocide as "saving the fraternal people from the Banderites". The propaganda narrative about Ukraine as an "artificial state" and "primordially Russian lands" that threatens the very existence of Russia was widely circulated. All this created in the mass consciousness of Russians a sense of existential threat from the neighbouring country and a psychological readiness to destroy it (Zahid, 2023). The Russian propaganda machine uses a wide arsenal of mind manipulation technologies: from falsification of facts and emotional agitation to outright intimidation and dehumanisation of the enemy. The emphasis is on speculating on the archetypes of "threat", "hostile environment" and "stronghold", which are intuitively close to the authoritarian mentality (Tsyrenzhapova & Woolley, 2021). Even the most odious propaganda clichés, such as "denazification" or "liberation" of Ukraine, are based on appeals to the sacrifice, heroism and messianism of the "defenders of the Russian world". In general, Russian propaganda is purposefully removing any moral and legal safeguards against aggression and war crimes in the eyes of Russian citizens.

One of the main directions of racist propaganda is to justify the crimes of the occupiers in Ukraine and to shift responsibility to the victim of aggression. The general logic is to legitimise the thesis that "we were forced to do this because it was impossible to do otherwise" (Zahid, 2023). For this purpose, narratives about "Ukrainian Nazis", "persecution of Russian speakers", "biolabs", "nuclear weapons" are actively used (Pivtorak *et al.*, 2023). As a result, in the minds of the Russian public, a picture is formed of a kind and peaceful Russia, which the cruel Ukrainian Nazis, on the orders of the insidious West, have brought to such a state that it is forced

to “defend itself” and “restore justice”, without hesitation. In this way, the aggressor and the victim are inverted, and mass war crimes are presented as a forced response to someone else’s imaginary crimes. In turn, this entire propaganda construct is based on socio-psychological and pseudo-moral attitudes deeply rooted in the Russian consciousness. First, it is about great-power chauvinism, imperial complexes, totalitarian thinking and lack of legal consciousness. Aggressive propaganda works where there is a suitable ideological and value-based ground for it. As C.G. Jung (2021) noted, “individuals become a crowd when they are overwhelmed by a common idea, when their conscious personalities are supplanted by a common unconscious”.

Numerous historical traumas and mythologies have become this collective unconscious in Russian society, primarily about Russia’s “greatness” and “chosenness”, its “historical right” to dominate other nations. The cultivation of the image of a “besieged stronghold”, the “sacred borders” of the empire, the “superiority” of Russian civilisation over the “rotten” West have served for centuries to justify the regime’s foreign expansion and internal crimes. These archaic notions did not disappear after the collapse of the USSR but rather gained a new dimension with the rise of Putin (Sytnyk & Balanovsky, 2022; Zahid, 2023). The Kremlin’s historical policy aimed at whitewashing the crimes of the totalitarian past and rehabilitating imperial ambitions plays a particularly destructive role in shaping racist consciousness. According to historian L. Rees (2022), “Vladimir Putin is responsible for such a positive attitude towards Stalin in modern Russia”. The glorification of the Soviet “great past” became a way of compensating for the trauma of the collapse of the USSR and generating revanchist sentiments. As a result, an entire generation has grown up in Russia, whose consciousness has been poisoned by chauvinistic propaganda, nostalgia for a “strong hand” and hatred of the West and Ukraine. At the same time, other factors that created the psychological basis for the formation of ruscist criminal behaviour should not be underestimated. First, it is the influence of the criminal subculture, which has deep historical roots in Russia. The criminal hierarchy, the cult of power, the opposition of “friends and foes”, sadism and disregard for the rule of law have organically blended into the “traditional values” of Putinism. It is not without reason that the Russian occupation forces are particularly cruel, cynical and prone to atrocities against the civilian population. The practice of conscripting prisoners convicted of serious crimes and promising pardons in exchange for participation in the war of aggression is also indicative. Sadists and rapists have been given a “licence to kill” under the guise of the propaganda thesis of “protecting Russian-language speakers” (Harrison, 2023).

All these manifestations of war crimes committed by Russia and crimes against humanity in Ukraine are a direct violation of the Geneva Conventions (1949), which prohibit all violence, torture, and cruel and degrading treatment against civilians and prisoners of war (Art. 3, 13, 27, 32). The actions of the Russian occupiers fall under the definition of war crimes under Article 8 of the Rome Statute (1998) and crimes of genocide under Article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948). In particular, the deportation of civilians and the forced displacement of children is a gross violation of Article 49 of the IV Geneva Conventions (1949) and Article 7 of the Rome Statute (1998). Furthermore, Putin and

Russian Children’s Ombudsman Lvov-Belova were notified of suspicion of the deportation of Ukrainian children (Situation in Ukraine..., 2023). At the same time, all the anti-Ukrainian hysteria in the Russian media fully falls within the definition of incitement to genocide under Article 3 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) (direct and public incitement to commit genocide). Thus, the information environment and mass consciousness in Russia are imbued with narratives and attitudes that not only legitimise but glorify delinquency and crime at the level of state policy. Long before the invasion, Russian propaganda had shaped the image of Ukraine as an existential threat, which provided moral and psychological justification for any crimes for the sake of Russia’s “survival” in the confrontation with the “insidious West”. Archaic imperial mythologies, the cult of power and disregard for international law, multiplied by cynical distortion of reality and substitution of concepts, have turned Russian society into a silent accomplice to aggression.

It would be a mistake to consider ruscism as a strange anomaly or a consequence of propaganda. Its criminal potential is deeply rooted in the social psychology and historical experience of Russian society. Centuries of despotism, totalitarian terror, apologetics for violence and disregard for the rule of law have created a distorted picture of the world in the mass consciousness, in which “greatness” justifies any crime. Therefore, it is impossible to overcome the delinquency of ruscism without understanding its deep historical, cultural and mental origins. Only through the decommunisation, de-Stalinisation and derussianization of Russian society, through its return to the coordinate system of international law and civilised values, is its moral recovery possible. Until this happens, the aggressive and criminal nature of ruscism will pose a deadly threat not only to Ukraine but to all of humanity.

Discussion

The study comprehensively covered the institutional and socio-psychological determinants of ruscist delinquency in the context of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. The findings demonstrate the systemic nature of ruscist crimes, their roots in the historical tradition of Russian imperialism, the totalitarian nature of the Putin regime, and the targeted propaganda policy of dehumanising Ukrainians.

Comparing the results of this study with the conclusions of R. Kwiecień (2022), it is possible to state the conceptual unity in the assessment of the Russian invasion of Ukraine as the most serious encroachment on the international security system and world order since the end of World War II. In both works, Russian actions are qualified as an unprovoked act of aggression against a sovereign state, which poses a direct threat to the fundamental principles of international law, such as the prohibition of the use of force, respect for territorial integrity, and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. The researchers agree that the brutality and audacity of the Kremlin’s violation of peremptory norms of *jus cogens* requires a consolidated and decisive response from the international community to restore justice and prevent the recurrence of such crimes in the future. At the same time, this study, unlike R. Kwiecień, addresses the analysis of the socio-cultural and ideological basis of Russian aggression, considering it not as a situational excess, but as a natural manifestation of the Kremlin’s neo-imperial,

expansionist policy, which is positively based on a centuries-old tradition of despotism, militarism and disregard for international law.

Another important aspect of the problem is the prospect of bringing Russia to justice for the crime of aggression within the existing mechanisms of international criminal justice, in particular, the International Criminal Court (ICC). This issue is addressed in the study by A. Salari and S.H. Hosseini (2023), who thoroughly analyse the ICC's ability to consider the crime of Russian aggression considering the current procedural restrictions and Russia's non-participation in the Rome Statute. The authors come to the disappointing conclusion that the ICC's jurisdiction over the crime of aggression is extremely limited, as the Court can only hear relevant cases against States Parties to the Statute or upon referral by the UN Security Council. These results coincide with the conclusions of this study that the existing international legal instruments are insufficient to comprehensively punish ruscism as a holistic criminal ideology and practice. However, while A. Salari and S.H. Hosseini address the problems of the ICC's jurisdiction, this study considers a wider range of possibilities for bringing the Putin regime to justice, including the prospects of creating a special international tribunal for Ukraine, following the example of the tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Therefore, despite the acknowledgement of serious institutional limitations, this paper shows greater optimism about the international community's ability to find legal ways to punish the aggressor and restore justice.

Another dimension of the analysis of the phenomenon of ruscism is its consideration through the prism of internal political, ideological and socio-psychological determinants that determine the Putin regime's inclination to aggressive, expansionist policies in the international arena (Asadchykh *et al.*, 2024). This aspect of the problem was highlighted by J.J. Driedger (2023) in an analysis of the origins and manifestations of militarism in modern Russia, linking them to the deeply rooted authoritarian traditions of Russian statehood, Putin's personality cult, and a deliberate policy of militarizing public consciousness, imposing the image of a "hostile environment" and hegemonic claims to dominance in the region. These observations reveal significant overlaps with the findings of this study, which also traces the genetic link between ruscism and Russia's imperial heritage, emphasising the decisive influence of the ideology of neo-imperial revanchism and great-power chauvinism on the Kremlin's foreign policy. At the same time, unlike J.J. Driedger (2023), who focuses on the domestic political dynamics of the Putin regime, this study addresses the international legal dimension of the problem, in particular, the qualification of specific crimes committed by Russia in Ukraine in terms of the relevant norms of international humanitarian and criminal law. This ensures a systemic vision of ruscism as a holistic destructive phenomenon, whose criminal nature is manifested not only in external aggression but also in totalitarian practices within Russia itself.

A.G. Timofte (2023) significantly contributed to the discussion of the individual responsibility of the top political Russian leadership for the initiation and conduct of an aggressive war against Ukraine. The author thoroughly analyses the possible ways of bringing Putin personally to international criminal justice, considering the advantages and limitations of various institutional mechanisms – from

national courts of European countries to the International Criminal Court and a hypothetical special tribunal for Ukraine. Based on a thorough legal analysis, A.G. Timofte concludes that the most realistic and effective option is still to establish a separate international tribunal on the model of the tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, which would ensure an impartial trial and inevitable punishment of Russia's top officials for the crime of aggression. These considerations conceptually coincide with the findings of this study, which also emphasises the urgency of establishing a special tribunal for Ukraine as a top priority of the international community in restoring justice and preventing the recurrence of similar crimes in the future. At the same time, despite the solidarity in recognising the need for personal responsibility of Putin and his entourage, this study considers this problem in the broader context of condemning ruscism as a hateful totalitarian ideology whose criminal manifestations are not limited to aggression against Ukraine but pose a global threat to the entire democratic world. Therefore, while A.G. Timofte (2023) focuses on the procedural aspects of prosecuting the crime of aggression, this study comprehensively delegitimises and dismantles the ideological foundation of ruscism as a prerequisite for preventing the recurrence of totalitarianism and imperialism.

Another dimension of the legal analysis of ruscist crimes is the qualification of specific acts of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the Russian occupation forces on the territory of Ukraine. This aspect was addressed by J. Geneuss and F. Jeßberger (2022), who analysed the facts of mass killings, torture, sexual violence, deportations, destruction of civilian infrastructure and other egregious violations of international humanitarian law by the Russian military. Based on a huge array of documented evidence, the authors convincingly argue that the atrocities of the occupiers fully fall within the definition of war crimes and crimes against humanity following the provisions of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Rome Statute (1998). These conclusions are fully confirmed by the results of this study, which also emphasises the brutality, systematic nature and scale of the racist atrocities in Ukraine, qualifying them not only as war crimes but also as a deliberate policy of genocide against the Ukrainian people. At the same time, this study proposes to conceptualise these crimes in the context of the general human-hating nature of ruscism, considering them not as excesses of individual perpetrators, but as an organic manifestation of a racist, imperialist ideology that does not recognise the right of other nations to exist and self-determination.

The study of the information and propaganda dimension of Russian aggression against Ukraine is of utmost importance for the conceptual understanding of the phenomenon of ruscism. A valuable contribution to this discussion is made by S. Selvarajah and L. Fiorito (2023), who analyse the role of the media in shaping global public opinion on the war in Ukraine and the prospects for bringing Russia to international accountability. Based on the study of publications of influential Western media, it is possible to note the decisive influence of Russian propaganda on distorting the perception and assessment of events in Ukraine by the international community. In particular, the author emphasises the widespread attempts to relativize the Kremlin's responsibility for the aggression, to downplay the scale of Russia's war crimes, to impose the narrative of a "civil war" in Ukraine. These

findings reveal a significant overlap with the results of this study, which also identifies Russia's targeted disinformation policy as a key tool for legitimising aggression and avoiding responsibility for crimes committed. At the same time, while the analysis of S. Selvarajah and L. Fiorito (2023) focuses mainly on the external dimension of information warfare aimed at an international audience, this study addresses the destructive impact of Kremlin propaganda within Russia itself. Considering information manipulations as the main tool for generating mass support for the war against Ukraine in Russian society, this study interprets them as an integral part of the government's totalitarian control over society, without which the Putin regime's criminal aggression would be impossible in principle.

Considerable attention in the current scientific discourse is also paid to the discussion of optimal models of international criminal justice for the crime of Russian aggression against Ukraine. A notable milestone in this debate is the work of T. Dannenbaum (2022), which offers a comprehensive comparison of the legal and political arguments for and against various options for establishing a special tribunal, from the formation of a new body to the establishment of a tribunal by a coalition of states, following the example of the Nuremberg Tribunal or the Special Court for Sierra Leone. Having carefully weighed all the benefits and drawbacks, the author concludes that the optimal format in terms of legitimacy, effectiveness and practical feasibility would be to establish a tribunal based on a multilateral agreement of the States. This position finds full support in this study, which also considers the multilateral treaty model as the most viable option for ensuring the inevitability of punishment for racist crimes. At the same time, in addition to the arguments of T. Dannenbaum (2022) regarding the impartiality and procedural efficiency of such a tribunal, this study also emphasises its importance as an instrument of comprehensive moral and political delegitimation of ruscism – not only condemnation of personal crimes of the top leadership of Russia but also recognition of the criminal, hateful nature of the ruscist ideology itself.

An important contribution to the conceptualisation of the information and propaganda dimension of ruscism is made by D.I. Drugă (2023), who offers a systematic overview of the key themes and narratives of Russian propaganda aimed at justifying aggression against Ukraine. Based on extensive empirical material from the Russian media, the dominant motives of Kremlin disinformation, such as accusing Ukraine of "Nazism" and "genocide of the Russian-speaking population", claims of "American biolabs", "the threat of Ukraine's accession to NATO", "suppression of pro-Russian protests" were identified. Convincingly demonstrating the manipulative, propagandistic nature of these narratives, D.I. Drugă (2023) notes their key role in the ideological legitimisation of armed aggression and the dehumanisation of Ukrainians as a nation. These observations reveal many substantive overlaps with the findings of this study, which also treats the outlined propaganda narratives as the most concentrated expression of the hateful nature of racist ideology. At the same time, by examining specific themes and techniques of Russian propaganda, this study tries to fit them into the broader context of the neo-imperial ideology of the "Russian world", which uses information manipulation not situationally but systematically to substantiate its claims to regional hegemony.

An interesting addition to the analysis of the information dimension of the Russian-Ukrainian war is the article by J.E. Barnes (2022), which focuses on the intensification of the Kremlin's propaganda machine on the eve of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Based on close monitoring of the Russian media, the author documents the rapid growth of disinformation, fakes, emotional manipulation and outright calls for aggression against Ukraine in the Russian public discourse. J.E. Barnes (2022) determined this propaganda campaign as a deliberate attempt to create an information basis for direct military invasion, mobilise public support by demonising Ukraine and fuelling hysteria regarding the "threat of NATO membership". These results are fully correlated with the findings of this study, which also identifies the information surge on the eve of 24 February as the tip of the iceberg of the Kremlin's ongoing anti-Ukrainian propaganda. At the same time, unlike J.E. Barnes (2022), who focuses on the immediate prehistory of the invasion, this study proposes to consider this propaganda campaign in the much broader temporal and conceptual context of Russia's information war against Ukraine, which has been systematically and consistently waged since 2014 as part of the Putin regime's overall neo-imperial strategy.

Finally, it is difficult to overestimate the heuristic value of the comprehensive case study of the Russian disinformation campaign during the war against Ukraine presented in the study by J. Mandić and D. Klarić (2023). Based on extensive empirical material on monitoring the information space, the authors provide a systematic analysis of the goals, means and consequences of the Kremlin's large-scale and well-coordinated information aggression aimed at undermining the legitimacy of Ukrainian statehood and destabilising Euro-Atlantic unity. Among the most destructive manifestations of information warfare, researchers rightly identify a massive flow of fake news, conspiracy theories, and distorted interpretations of events designed to justify aggression and demonise Ukrainians. These conclusions are fully confirmed by the results of this study, which also proceeds from the recognition of the systemic nature, ideological basis and expansionist goals of Kremlin propaganda. At the same time, in addition to the technological aspects of information aggression thoroughly analysed by J. Mandić and D. Klarić (2023) on the technological aspects of information aggression, this study offers a deeper conceptualisation of ruscism's propaganda activities as an integral part of its overall totalitarian nature. Whereas the above-mentioned authors limit themselves mainly to descriptive and functional analysis of specific cases, this paper aims to understand the phenomenon of racist propaganda in the context of the philosophy of totalitarianism as a fundamentally anti-humanistic worldview that cultivates hatred and violence and serves as a way for producing a "controlled consciousness" ready to commit the most serious crimes.

Summing up the above, it should be noted that the main results of the study logically fit into the modern scientific discourse of understanding ruscism as a holistic political, ideological and socio-cultural phenomenon, whose criminal essence is manifested both in aggression against Ukraine and in total control over Russian society. Comparison with the conclusions of leading scholars shows that the data obtained in the study significantly deepens the understanding of the institutional, ideological and socio-psychological origins of racist delinquency, revealing its historical pattern and systematic nature.

Conclusions

Offences of ruscism in the aggression against Ukraine have reached an unprecedented scale and barbarism. These include mass killings of civilians, torture, enforced disappearances, abductions, deportations of children, destruction of civilian infrastructure, use of prohibited weapons, sexual violence, looting and ecocide. By their nature, these crimes are classified as war crimes, crimes against humanity and acts of genocide under international humanitarian and criminal law. Their systemic nature indicates that they are not the excesses of the perpetrators, but part of a planned state policy aimed at destroying the Ukrainian nation.

The delinquency of ruscism has deep historical roots in the centuries-old tradition of Russian imperialism, expansionism and despotism. Over the centuries, an aggressive, invasive paradigm has been formed that views neighbouring peoples, including Ukrainians, as objects of domination and assimilation. After the Bolshevik coup of 1917, this paradigm took the form of Soviet totalitarianism, which, under the slogans of internationalism, continued its policy of Russification, eradication of national identities, and state terror. Putin's rise to power saw the reincarnation of the authoritarian regime and the restoration of the imperial ideology of the Russian world, which justifies Moscow's right to hegemony over the post-Soviet space. The annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of the war in Donbas in 2014, followed by the full-scale invasion in 2022, were the culmination of this neo-imperial aggression, which is a gross violation of fundamental international law.

Information and propaganda activities and socio-psychological factors played a decisive role in shaping the delinquent consciousness of ruscism. The Kremlin's powerful propaganda machine systematically produced a distorted picture of reality, narratives of hatred, xenophobia and demonization of Ukraine through controlled media, the Internet and cultural figures. This was based on the deeply rooted great-power chauvinism, imperial complexes, totalitarian thinking and lack of legal consciousness in the Russian mentality. The historical policy of whitewashing the crimes of the totalitarian past and reviving the cult of Stalin's personality had a particularly destructive impact. The

propaganda systematically justified the "right" to aggression against Ukraine and legitimised any crimes to "protect Russian speakers" and confront the "insidious West". All of this has created an atmosphere of hatred in the mass consciousness of Russians and a psychological readiness to commit the most serious crimes against humanity. Thus, the delinquency and criminality of ruscism is a direct outgrowth and quintessence of Russian imperialism, which for centuries has violated international law, human rights and the values of civilised coexistence of peoples. Ukraine's successful resistance to the Russian invasion demonstrated the collapse of the neo-imperial paradigm and the criminal ideology of the Russian world. The condemnation and punishment of ruscism through the establishment of a special international tribunal, as well as the eradication of its ideological and institutional foundations, is a categorical moral and legal imperative of our time. Only through the demilitarisation, denazification and derussianization of Russian society is it possible to return it to the coordinate system of international law and civilised values.

This study has certain limitations. It is based primarily on data from open sources and does not exhaust the full range of historical, ideological and socio-psychological origins of ruscism. The study is limited in time and cannot consider all potential transformations of the Putin regime and Russian society. Nevertheless, the analysis lays the foundation for further understanding of the phenomenon of ruscism. Promising areas include studying the mechanisms for bringing the Putin regime to justice, strategies for derussianization of Russian society, ways to restore Ukraine, and understanding the lessons of the war for future international security. Without the delegitimization of ruscism as a totalitarian ideology, it is impossible to establish the principles of humanity, law and peaceful coexistence of peoples.

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Conflict of interest

None.

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Анотація. Актуальність дослідження інституційних та соціально-психологічних детермінант делінквентності рашизму в контексті агресії РФ проти України зумовлена безпрецедентним масштабом злочинів проти людяності, які чинять російські окупанти. Мета статті полягала у всебічному висвітленні історичних, політико-ідеологічних, юридичних, інформаційно-пропагандистських і соціально-психологічних чинників, що зумовлюють злочинну поведінку загарбників. Основні результати дослідження засвідчили, що злочини рашизму не є ізольованими ексцесами окремих виконавців, а закономірним породженням і квінтесенцією багатовікової традиції російського імперіалізму, який протягом тривалого історичного періоду систематично порушував фундаментальні норми міжнародного права, нехтував базовими правами людини та цинічно зневажав цінності цивілізованого співіснування народів. Делінквентність рашизму має глибоке історичне коріння, сягаючи своїм корінням в багатовікову традицію територіальної експансії, політичного деспотизму та безкарного державного терору, які століттями визначали характер російської держави. Сучасні прояви злочинності рашизму є органічним та закономірним продовженням неоімперської парадигми «русского мира», яка ґрунтується на великодержавному шовінізмі, відвертому презирстві до суверенітету та самобутності інших націй та обґрунтовує право Москви на домінування над сусідніми народами. Визначальну роль у продукуванні масової суспільної підтримки агресивної війни проти України відіграла потужна та розгалужена машина кремлівської пропаганди, яка через підконтрольні медіа та публічний дискурс систематично демонізувала й дегуманізувала український народ та легітимізувала в очах росіян будь-які звірства та злочини проти людяності під цинічним приводом «захисту російськомовного населення»

Ключові слова: воєнні злочини; великодержавний шовінізм; дезінформація; пропаганда ненависті; дегуманізація; масова свідомість