

INTRODUCTION

In December 1917, one of the key leaders of the Ukrainian national movement and head of the Ukrainian Central Rada, Mykhailo Hrushevsky (1866–1934), insightfully observed:

Our Ukrainian Revolution, unfortunately, did not develop independently; it had to march constantly in step with the convulsive movements and upheavals of the Russian Revolution – chaotic and terrible. The Russian Revolution dragged us through blood, through ruins, through fire.¹

A similar perspective was offered by a Kyiv-born representative of the Polish democratic camp, Roman Knoll (1888–1946), who served as Deputy Secretary General for Polish Affairs in 1917. In early December of that year, he noted:

After the fall of the Russian Tsar, among the ‘living forces’ of the Russian Revolution, the Ukrainian movement appeared to play no role whatsoever. It took no part in the distribution of power – neither at the central nor the local level – and did not even indirectly influence the establishment of a new order in the territory inhabited by the Ukrainian people. That territory was simply another arena for the unfolding of events, much like other regions of the former empire.²

However, the dramatic developments that followed the fall of 1917 led Knoll to a more profound conclusion:

The Ukrainian Revolution became a phenomenon distinct from the Russian Revolution. Initially more advanced in social terms, it reached its culmination at the same time as the Bolshevik coup. Later, while Russia continued down the path of internal destruction, Ukraine embarked on one of constructive nation-building.³

¹ Mychajlo Hruševs'kyj, ‘V ohni j buri’, in *Na porozi novoji Ukrayiny: hadki i mriji*, ed. by Mychajlo Hruševs'kyj (Kyiv: Drukars'ke akcjonerno tovarystvo ‘Petro Bars'kyj u Kyjevi’, 1918), pp. 80–82 (pp. 80–81).

² Jan Jacek Brus'kyj, Mariuš Kožen'ovs'kyj, and Olja Hnatjuk, ‘Roman Knol’. *Zapysky z pryvodu ukrajins'koho pytannja*, 1(14) hrudnia 1917 r., in *Praci Ukrayins'ko-Pol's'koji komisiji doslidžennja vzajemnyj 1917–1921 rr.*, ed. by Vladyslav Verstjuk and Jan Jacek Brus'kyj (Kyiv: Instytut istoriji Ukrayiny, 2019), I, pp. 256–76 (p. 259).

³ Ibid., p. 261.

Both Hrushevsky and Knoll recognized the fundamental differences between the revolutionary processes in Ukraine and those in Russia, underscoring their independence and separateness, particularly in the national dimension. But what exactly was the nature of this separateness in the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–1921?

This thematic issue of AREI is the result of the international workshop “Ukrainian Statehood in the European Context, 1917–1921”, held at the Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies (IOS) in Regensburg on 15–16 June 2023. The workshop was initiated by Prof. Guido Hausmann and organized by Dr Olena Syniavska and Dr Sabina Kotova. Other scholars were also invited to contribute to this thematic edition, and their texts offer valuable insights into the diverse events and processes that unfolded in revolutionary Ukraine. The contributors seek to reinterpret the experiences and transformations of revolutionary Ukraine during this period.

This is a complex and contested historical issue – not one that can be easily framed in terms of success or failure. The period of war and revolution brought radical changes to Ukrainian society, and although the dream of a national Ukrainian state was not fully realized at the time, the events of 1917–1921 were not a defeat. The accumulated experience, historical memory, and academic research allow us to speak of a heroic – yet deeply traumatic – understanding of these revolutionary years. The articles in this issue reflect diverse historiographical traditions and research perspectives, but they also reveal a notable tension between the heroic and the tragic elements of the era. What unites them is a shared conceptual framework: the history of the struggle for Ukrainian statehood.

Yuki Murata, an associate professor at the University of Tokyo, demonstrates that the Ukrainian authorities established between 1917 and 1919 relied on foreign powers for survival and adapted their constitutional visions according to international alliances. Ukrainian leaders oscillated between federalist solutions and full independence, with their choices shaped less by ideology than by military weakness and diplomatic necessity. Anastasiia Ivanova, senior research fellow at the Institute of State and Law of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, investigates the legal institutionalization of national-personal autonomy in the Ukrainian People’s Republic. She convincingly argues that this initiative represented a serious attempt to resolve the complex issue of minority rights during revolutionary upheaval. Rudolf Mark, a professor at the University of Hamburg, provides a comprehensive analysis of the sovereignization of the Ukrainian People’s Republic, emphasizing how the idea of independence evolved under revolutionary conditions. He argues that while the Central Rada and its leaders were instrumental in proclaiming

sovereignty, it was unexpected events and contingencies that ultimately shaped the political trajectory. Ruslan Pyrih, professor at the Institute of History of Ukraine of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, examines the internal policies of the Hetmanate, highlighting its contradictions and ultimately portraying its ambiguous legacy. Olena Syniavska, associate professor at I. Mechnikov Odesa University, explores the Bolshevik policy toward Southern Ukraine, uncovering lesser-known aspects of the Soviet pseudo-republican uprisings. Wiktor Węglewicz analyses the ambivalent and prejudiced stance of the Polish authorities toward the clergy of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, arguing that such biases hindered the potential for Polish-Ukrainian cooperation. Tetiana Ostashko, from the Institute of History of Ukraine of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, contributes a thought-provoking essay on the conservative dimension of the Ukrainian Revolution and the role of Viacheslav Lypynskyi, particularly focusing on the Hetmanate of 1918 as a manifestation of conservative political ideals during that time.

In the “Essay” section, Serhy Yekelchyk, a professor at the University of Victoria, argues that Nestor Makhno, long treated as a figure of the “Russian Revolution”, should instead be seen as pivotal to understanding Ukraine’s distinct revolutionary experience. His essay explores Makhno’s complex political views, highlighting how he distanced himself from the Ukrainian national movement yet led a distinctly Ukrainian peasant uprising insurgency.

In this issue, we also publish unique and previously unknown documents from the case of Jerzy Matusiński, the Polish consul in Kyiv, who was kidnapped by the NKVD and whose fate remained unknown for a long time.

The “Reviews” section features two assessments of Joshua Zimmerman’s new biography of Józef Piłsudski⁴ – the first major biography since Marian Kamil Dziewanowski’s landmark 1969 study, published by Stanford University Press.⁵ Piłsudski’s role in defending the nascent Ukrainian state in 1920 remains a subject of historiographical debate, even as many aspects of his political career have been more thoroughly explored. The extent to which Zimmerman succeeds in revising the legacy of Poland’s Chief of State is addressed in the reviews by Jan Pisuliński and Wiktor Węglewicz.

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⁴ Joshua D. Zimmerman, *Founding Father of Modern Poland* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard Business Review Press).

⁵ Kamil M. Dziewanowski, *Joseph Piłsudski: A European Federalist, 1918–1922* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1969).