

The Lenin statue used to stand on Nova Bohdanivka's main square for as long as villagers could remember. The local administration used to repaint it gold every year. In 2015 came the law on decommunisation and the authorities had to remove the monument. They then held an open vote and it was decided to replace the statue with a fountain. It is painted bronze. It has become the focal point of official celebrations and wedding pictures. People come from far to admire the fountain. According to the mayor, everyone refers to it as the 'Lenin Fountain' because it's on the exact spot where Lenin stood. And so Nova Bohdanivka does not have a Lenin monument anymore. Yet residents have a Lenin fountain instead.

As in Nova Bohdanivka, Lenin has physically disappeared from Ukraine's urban landscape. In 1991, there used to be over 5,500 monuments dedicated to the Bolshevik leader on the territory of newly independent Ukraine. It was the highest density of Lenin statues per square kilometre among the former Soviet republics. They were all toppled in three different waves - early 1990s, post-2004 Orange Revolution period and post-2014 Revolution of Dignity period. Since late 2016, there is officially no Lenin left standing in Ukraine's public space, apart from Russia-annexed Crimea and Russian-led separatist territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Yet "Diadia Vova" (Uncle Vova, after the nickname post-Soviet people gave to Vladimir Lenin) has come back to people's minds and to public debates. The decommunisation has recharged Lenin and other artefacts of communist legacy with their ideological controversies.

The last wave of Leninopad, literally "Leninfall", sent shockwaves across the country as it was meant to go far beyond the toppling of statues. Decommunisation goes deeper than desovietisation. It was not about wiping off the legacy of a political regime but about denouncing an ideology Ukrainians had to live with for some 70 years. It was about scraping off colourful mosaics from walls of buildings. It was about renaming streets and cities. It was about introducing legal penalties for the promotion of "totalitarian ideologies of communism and nazism" (with an obvious emphasis on the former). It was about rediscovering, some would say rewriting, Ukraine's history and the history of Ukrainians and to define a new national historical discourse.

Such a bold move at a time of revolution, economic crisis and war opened new opportunities to debate as well as stirring up tensions. Yet it fell short of providing a series of answers to a series of existential questions. How to analyse Lenin's actions both in their historical context and in early 21st century political understanding? How to assess the USSR impact on Ukraine and Ukrainians other than through an all-negative approach? Are all Soviet-era mosaics tools of ideological propaganda? Once Lenin is toppled, what should come next? Who should be Ukraine's new heroes? By the way, does 21st century Ukraine actually need heroes?

Given Ukraine's relatively open and plural political system and Ukrainians' legendary sense of originality, some responses have surfaced. Here, a Lenin statue is turned into Star Wars villain Darth Vader. There, another monument has become a Cossack warrior. Another statue is clean and kept in a private collection. Some pedestals are left untouched. Some other spots Lenin used to stand on are now home to religious figures and cartoon characters. Out of this diversity of reactions to the decommunisation process, one understands the lack of a unified and consensual national discourse. It has become even more complicated because of Ukraine's politics - and geopolitics.

In the context of Russia's hybrid war, some answers appeared obvious to the political and historiographic establishment. National heroes are the ones who fought for the country's independence, however controversial they may be. Lenin and USSR were all negative and it is time for Ukraine to turn towards positive Europe. Ukrainians are a victim nation that suffered from Moscow imperialism and colonialism for centuries. Through the figurehead of Russian-born Lenin, decommunisation has become a process of derussification that extends to language, culture and religion. The recognition of a Ukrainian independent orthodox church by the Ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople in early 2019 is perceived add a new item of Ukraine's independence, one that ends Moscow's century-long domination.

Such a discourse is more a reflexion of contemporary Ukrainian - legitimate - grievances towards Russia than the objective analysis of historical realities. It also raises the issue of Ukrainians' role in the Orthodox church over the past 300 years and of their contribution to the founding of the USSR. Was the communist rule the mere consequence of a foreign invasion and occupation? Ukrainian bolsheviks were themselves very active in building communism back then. Did the USSR only exploit Ukraine's resources and oppress its population? There were several different phases over 70 years of communism that ranged from severe political repression, famine and cultural discrimination to prosperity and national rebirth.

To present communism and the overall relation to Russia as alien is explainable in the current context. It is convenient for the political elite and nationalist fringes of the population. Yet it is not consensual all across the country, the way a national historical discourse may be. The author does not wish to voice any opinion here. It is Ukrainians themselves who ask openly these questions. It seems that decommunisation has marked only a step in the country's efforts to build a post-independence sense of living together. It is not the end. One often hears Ukrainians complaining they did not have the opportunity to write their own history, unlike other European nations. The time has come for Ukrainians to decide on the way they want to understand their history - and to build their future.