

Exploring History-Based Propaganda in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine

Propaganda has long been a part of human history. Different political regimes, churches, and political parties resorted to propaganda to communicate their values to the world, to create a unified society, or to impose their visions on reality. Propaganda has had many faces – from Catholic missionaries tasked with propaganda fides to the posters explaining to the soldiers in the trenches of WWI why it was "dulce et decorum pro patria mori."

The Soviet propaganda stands prominently in this long history. Set about to create a new world and a new man to inhabit it, the Soviets employed all means possible to make reality seem closer to their ideals. The country they had built as a result was "a propaganda state," as Peter Kenez wittingly put it. Propaganda penetrated all parts of the everyday existence of all Soviet nations. The rhymes the children sang at kindergartens, the films that adults would come to watch at the cinema, the novels and poems written by "engineers of the human souls," not to mention the tourist routes and cookbooks, all of that called on Soviet citizens to "sow wisdom, sow the good, the eternal" in the name of Communism and the Party.

The very nature of history, of the society's knowledge of its past, was probably the most fitting material that the Soviet state came to possess for propaganda purposes. New narratives were set up, new monuments erected, and new history textbooks written to ensure everyone in the country remembers the same centuries-long movement toward the 1917 Revolution and the "friendship of the nations" with Russians in charge. This sort of propaganda used history to explain the ways of the present-day world. It manipulated history to conceal unpleasant truths and erased any traces of history that did not fit it.

The Soviet history-based propaganda not only tailored the history textbooks but also found more discreet and invisible ways to plant necessary images of the past in its citizens' minds through cinema, animation, and literature. One of the successful vehicles of propaganda was school and university education, especially humanities. Ministries of Education and Ministries of Culture were tasked to help the Communist Party spread "correct" history narratives. The ongoing war perpetrated by Russia against Ukraine has shown how powerful those narratives still are. History played an important role in justifying claims for territories and political power in Ukraine and in all post-Soviet conflicts.

Our joint project, which is being implemented by several civil society organizations from Armenia, Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine with the financial support of the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, invites teachers and secondary school students to explore the different ways in which history was and still is being used in propaganda. The main purpose of this project is to study and analyze examples of propaganda in history teaching and public history. We want young people to learn about the instrumentalization and weaponization of history. We also seek to provide schoolteachers with the toolkit necessary to study propagandistic history narratives and teach about them.