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## IS *RASHISM* A FORM OF FASCISM? COMPARISON OF DEFINITIONS

### ABSTRACT

The article aims to compare the concept of “rashism” with fascism. The term “rashism” gained popularity after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and is understood as a synthesis of the “Russian spirit” with fascism, which is believed to be the cause of the aggressive and imperial policies of the Russian Federation. By reviewing the proposed definitions of rashism, alongside definitions of fascism and fascist source texts, and examining Vladimir Putin’s speeches, the article concludes with a critical assessment that challenges the validity of the rashism concept.

### Keywords

authoritarianism, fascism, Putin, rashism, totalitarianism

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 led to the popularization of the term “rashism” (also referred to as “ruscism”) The term has earned its own page in Polish and English versions of Wikipedia. Its use is primarily promoted by Ukrainians, including scholars, publicists and politicians. In its simplest terms, “rashism” is a 21st-century variant of fascism created by Vladimir Putin and the United Russia party.

As George Orwell (1944) observed several decades ago, the term “fascism” has been stripped of its meaning in public debate and is used as an epithet – a journalistic or political slur – rather than as a clearly defined political category

with specific material characteristics. The tendency to use “fascism” as an insult remains prevalent today (Kekic, 2022). This article assumes that fascism is totalitarian in nature, so any fascism is a form of totalitarianism, but not all totalitarian systems can be described as fascist. As a result, any suggestion that fascism is authoritarian will be recognized as erroneous, as will be demonstrated in the subsequent sections of the paper.

The purpose of this paper is to compare definitions of “rashism” and fascism. Achieving this goal will allow us to answer the following research problem: Is “rashism” a fascism? The article begins with a presentation of definitions of “rashism” which emerged after 24 February 2022. Following a critical analysis of these definitions, the article examines scholarly definitions of fascism and draws upon texts of fascist thinkers to make a comparison with the definitions of “rashism”. Additionally, the study addresses Vladimir Putin’s speeches delivered between 21 February 2022 and 26 June 2023 in order to examine the content of his statements and the political system of the Russian Federation. The mentioned dates correspond, respectively, to the speech in which the Russian President announced the recognition of the independence of the people’s republics in Donbas and the statement following the Wagner Group’s march on Moscow.

To address the research problem, the author conducts comparative analysis based on the method of content analysis. The study uses source texts by fascist politicians, Vladimir Putin’s speeches and academic works in Polish, Ukrainian and English. Given the contemporary nature of the subject matter, the inclusion of internet sources written in English and Ukrainian languages is necessary.

## **Definitions of “rashism”**

The popularization of the term came with Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. The Committee of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on Humanitarian and Information Policy supports the initiative of Ukrainian scholars, experts, journalists, political scientists and the public in introducing the term “rashism” into scientific, professional and colloquial discourse as a term for the prevailing ideology in Russia, which is reflected in the military actions of the Russian army in Ukraine and the attitude of Russian society toward the conflict (“Komitet z pytan’ humanitarnoyi”, 2022). Oleksiy Danilov referred to this phenomenon as something new in world history, created by Vladimir Putin and the Russian Federation. He believes that “rashists” are similar to fascists, but even more cruel, using modern technology for inhumane purposes (Syvakivs’kyy, 2022). Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenski mentioned “rashism”, foreseeing its

place in history as a term echoing actions from 80 years ago in Europe. He likened Russia's actions to those of the Third Reich in World War II, predicting that "rashism" will be documented in history books, on Wikipedia, and a lesson to future generations (Khmelnitsky, 2022).

Oleksandr Romanyuk considers "rashism" to be a new type of totalitarianism, closer to fascism and National Socialism than to Bolshevism. He argues that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has brought "rashism" closer to National Socialism. However, he compares the "Russian world" to the Italian fascists' attempt to rebuild the Roman Empire (Romanyuk, 2022). Nazar Rudyi asserts that "rashism" is an undemocratic totalitarian regime established in the Russian Federation in the 21st century. It is grounded in radical Russian imperial chauvinism, fascism and practices reminiscent of the Soviet regime. This manifests through the concept of the "Russian world", violations of international law, human rights abuses, infringement of basic freedoms, militarism, aggressive warfare, and a policy of genocide against the Ukrainian people (Rudyi, 2023).

Tomasz Kamusella (2022a) says that in Putin's Russia, according to Ian Kershaw's definition of fascism, there is hypernationalism, racial exclusion, a pursuit of destroying political opponents as well as a prioritization of discipline, masculinity and militarism. Additionally, Russia under Putin fulfills supplementary criteria, including the construction or reconstruction of an empire, the shaping of a new type of person, opposition to Western values, and assigning specific roles to individuals based on their abilities and loyalty. In another article, Kamusella (2022b) asserts that the term "rashism" describes Russia's fascist neo-imperialistic ideology following its actions in Ukraine in 2022. Rashism is likened to fascist ideologies, involving ultranationalism, persecution of opponents, forced assimilation and aggressive expansion. He notes that Russia's state ideology labels democratic opponents as "nazis" and "fascists", but "rashists" deny their own fascist nature. Yet, Kamusella argues that Russia's actions are antisemitic, xenophobic and driven by a colonial-style mission that may lead to the genocide of colonized ethnic groups and nations. He calls it "schizo-fascism" and claims that it is obvious that Putin's regime has a fascist nature.

Various definitions of "rashism" describe the concept as aiming to reconstruct the "Russian world", destroy advanced civilizations and preserve cultural backwardness (Baklanova, 2022, pp. 832–839). Also known as Russian fascism, "rashism" is characterized by a rejection of universal values, inhuman cruelty and crimes against humanity. Rooted in Russia's history since the Grand Duchy of Moscow, the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, its peak development is attributed to Putin's rule over the last two decades. Some argue that Russian

fascism is an integral part of Russian culture, prompting historians to trace its roots in the country's history and culture ("Rashyzm maye duzhe hlyboke istorychne korinna", 2022).

Summarizing the definitions of "rashism", the concept is associated with imperialism, anti-Western sentiment and Russia's aggressive warfare. While fascism is recognized as a 20th-century phenomenon, it is argued that characteristics such as imperialism and war are inherent to human nature, challenging misconceptions about fascism. There is disagreement with Danilov's assertion regarding "rashism". Despite acknowledging Russia's war crimes, the argument contests that historical events lacked precedents for the widespread destruction of cities through aerial bombs. Examples from the Second World War, including the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and carpet bombing campaigns, demonstrate historical instances of tens of thousands of civilians were killed during bombings (Brakman et al., 2004). These definitions are also emotionally charged. Fascism is fascism, and there is no need to create subtypes and legitimize them scientifically by creating a category of "schizo-fascism". The definitions provided are highly subjective and seem to have been crafted more for purposes of war propaganda than for scientific accuracy, as they selectively treat and distort aspects of fascism and totalitarianism.

## Definitions of fascism

Fascism as a political doctrine is challenging to define due to its varied manifestations where it emerged. However, when discussing fascism or fascist movements and systems, certain common characteristics emerge. Even if diverse, these share a nationalist core, which allows the classification of some movements, doctrines and regimes as fascist. Definitions of fascism typically emphasize its national, radical and sometimes revolutionary character as well as its mass appeal. Roger Eatwell points out that despite national variations and the softening of radical tones as it gained traction, fascism retained a common core centered on the attempt to create a holistic-national radical third way (Eatwell, 1999, p. 24).

In its strict sense, Jacek Bartyzel defines fascism as a political movement, doctrine, and system of governance in Italy. In its broader definition, it encompasses political movements, doctrines and systems in other countries inspired by Italian fascism, forming a synthesis of nationalism, socialism and syndicalism (Bartyzel, 2007, p. 78). Ernst Nolte argued that fascism is anti-Marxism seeking to eliminate the adversary by constructing a different, albeit similar, ideology and employing almost identical or similar methods. However, these actions always

occur within the framework of national self-determination and the uniqueness of the phenomenon (Nolte, 1966, pp. 200–21). Stanley G. Paine argues that fascism is a form of ultranationalism that proclaims the myth of national rebirth. It is characterized by extreme elitism, mobilization of the masses, exaltation of hierarchy and subordination, suppression of women, and acknowledgment of violence and war as virtues (Paine, 1996, p 14).

Robert O. Paxton identifies the foundations of fascism as follows: 1) A pervasive sense of crisis beyond the reach of traditional solutions. 2) Primacy of the group, to which individuals owe more important duties than any individual rights, whether individual or universal, and subordination of the individual to it. 3) A belief in the group's victimhood, justifying unrestricted actions against internal or external enemies. 4) Fear of the group's decline due to harmful actions of individualistic liberalism, class conflicts and foreign influences. 5) The need for closer integration within a purer community through approval, if possible, or exclusion and violence if necessary. 6) The need for power held by natural leaders (always male), ultimately concentrated in a national leader who embodies the destiny of the community. 7) The superiority of the leader's instincts over abstract and universal reason. 8) The beauty of violence and the effectiveness of will when dedicated to the group's success. 9) The right of the chosen nation to dominate others without any constraints from human or divine law, with the only criterion being the community's strength in a Darwinian struggle (Paxton, 2005, p. 51).

Emilio Gentile outlines ten characteristics of fascism as an ideology, movement and regime: 1) A cross-class mass movement with a predominant middle-class base, organized in a party-militia relying on camaraderie. 2) An "anti-ideological" ideology, defined by its opposition to other ideologies, expressing itself more aesthetically than doctrinally. 3) Culture based on mythical thinking, a cult of youth, and the militarization of politics. 4) Totalitarian primacy of politics. 5) Citizen ethics dedicated to total commitment to the community. 6) A single party serving as the armed arm of the regime. 7) A police apparatus and organized terror. 8) Political system directed by a hierarchy of officials gathered around a leader. 9) A corporatist organization of the economy. 10) Foreign policy inspired by the myth of power and oriented towards the realization of imperialistic expansion goals (Gentile, 2011, pp. 22–23).

The definition by Eatwell is very general as it does not distinguish the essential features of fascism, making it possible to consider even a nationalist organization as a fascist movement. Bartyzel's approach, on the other hand, does not address the key characteristics of fascism, such as the cult of youth, revolution

and violence, which will be discussed further. The features indicated by Paxton and Emilio Gentile define fascism, but some of them can also apply to both authoritarianism and non-fascist forms of totalitarianism. The definitions by Nolte and Paine come closest to capturing the essence of fascism.

It is difficult to avoid certain subjective aspects in defining fascism, such as its oppositional character to everything and the absence of a thinker recognized on a scale similar to Karl Marx for communists or John Locke for liberals. Fascism certainly was not merely an “anti” ideology without a positive program, as illustrated by the fascism defined by Oswald Mosley, who published several political manifestos during the interwar period (Mosley, 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; 2019d; 2019f; 2019g). He also responded to the criticism of a lack of influential thinkers, both internationally and in the case of British fascism. As philosophical sources of fascism, Mosley pointed to Spengler, Nietzsche, Christianity, ancient Greek philosophy and also Caesarism (Mosley, 2019e). In the post-war period, Mosley emphasized that fascist thought had its roots in the ideas of thinkers such as Sorel, Pareto, Proudhon, and, in the case of British fascism, English philosophers like Hobbes. He acknowledged Karl Popper’s condemnation of prominent thinkers from Plato to Hegel as fascists (Mosley, 2019e). The acknowledgment was a response to the accusation that fascism lacked intellectual depth or legitimacy.

Before outlining the essential characteristics of fascism, it is important to distinguish fascism from right-wing dictatorships. As Adam Wielomski observes, after 1945, the concept of an imagined fascism emerged, classifying regimes such as Catholic dictatorships with features like single-party rule, nationalism, conservatism and corporatism (e.g., Franco’s Spain and Salazar’s Portugal) as fascist regimes and “reserves” of fascism post 1945. However, the political systems of these countries contradicted the fascist model. The relationship of these states to fascism differed: in Spain, there was a sympathy between Franco’s regime and fascism, with the Falange Española even being part of the ruling coalition. In contrast, Portugal under Salazar viewed Portuguese fascists as hostile to the state and its system (Wielomski, 2012, pp. 219–221).

Stanley G. Paine developed an extensive classification of political movements and their representatives, categorizing them into three distinct currents: fascism, the radical right, and the conservative right. He classified NSDAP, PNF, the late-stage Rex of Leon Degrelle, the Hungarian Arrow-Cross, the Romanian Iron Guard, the French *Faisceau* movement, Jacques Doriot’s PPF party, and Marcel Deat’s RNP as fascist movements. Within the radical right, he included Alfred Hugenberg, Franz von Papen, *Stahlhelm*, Carlism, *Action Française*,

and the Austrian *Heimwehr*. The conservative right category encompassed the Austrian *Vaterland Front*, Paul von Hindenburg, Kurt von Schleicher, Heinrich Brüning, Miklos Horthy, the Vichy French government, the early Christus Rex movement led by Degrelle, Antanas Smetona, Józef Piłsudski, and Salazar (Paine, 1996, p. 15).

Benito Mussolini expressed his belief that the nation does not create the state, as assumed by the nationalist concept; it is rather the state shapes the nation. He rejected the 19th-century nationalist idea that posited the nation as the primary creator of the state. Instead, he argued that the state provides the nation with a moral unity and ensures its effective existence. According to Mussolini, a nation's right to self-determination does not stem from literary or ideological consciousness but from the state's existence, which serves as evidence of that right. In his view, the state is an entity endowed with universal ethical will and a creator of law. Mussolini emphasized that the nation takes shape within the context of an existing state and not the other way around (Mussolini, 2019). He further said that fascism is a concept that is 1) philosophical – a synthesis of thought and action; 2) spiritualistic – without which the essence of fascism cannot be understood; 3) a positive conception of life as a struggle – a belief in human pursuit of excellence, utilized in the service of the state and the nation; 4) ethical – rooted in the positive conception of life as a struggle, where a fascist rejects an “easy life”; 5) religious – recognizing opportunistic methods of action in a fascist regime; losing the ability to understand fascism as a political system but also as a thought; 6) historical and realistic – a person without understanding that they are part of history is nobody; it is crucial for an individual to be aware of the importance of tradition, language and the functioning of society. Through this framework, fascism opposes individualistic concepts that emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries. As a realistic doctrine, fascism addresses current problems by offering solutions and fostering motivation (Mussolini, 2019, pp. 25–29).

Giovanni Gentile, a philosopher of Italian fascism, distinguished fascism from nationalism by highlighting that for nationalists, the nation creates the state based on a given natural fact, while for fascists, the state is a continuous spiritual entity. Gentile criticized nationalism for its aristocratic character, arguing that the nationalist state relies on an intellectual ruling class. In contrast, he described the fascist state as popular and democratic. Gentile said that liberalism created a conflict between individual and state freedoms. He proposed fascism as a solution, advocating for absolute state power in the consciousness of

individuals. The corporatist system in fascism, according to Gentile, has a more representative character than the old liberal state (G. Gentile, 2019, pp. 82–84).

Fascism was associated with a cult of youth and revolution. In 1924, Curzio Malaparte reflected on the nature of fascism, suggesting that if it was not a revolutionary movement, its Jacobin rhetoric should be abandoned. Fascism was considered a revolution in action (*rivoluzione in atto*), requiring constant internal debate and the pursuit of new goals. Italian fascists saw it as the greatest revolution in human history, a “new light” and a “new era”. They believed that, under Duce, they were transforming the world, dismantling the old liberal-democratic order and infusing life with a new fascist spirit. Fascism aimed to bring a new era not only to Italy but to all of humanity, extending beyond the boundaries of Ancient Rome. In 1935, Italian fascists encouraged other European nations to join the revolution, create a new civilization, and cooperate in building a new Europe. Fascism went beyond a negative anti-liberal or anti-individualistic program; it constituted a comprehensive conception of life, civilization, and the renewal of values, representing a revolution of the human soul (Podemski, 2010, pp. 83–85).

Italian fascism was in favor of revolution in action, especially through the involvement of the youth, who were expected to shape the movement’s future. Mussolini emphasized that the future of fascism lay in the hands of young people. Fascists believed that the youth were predisposed to adapt to new life conditions and were free from the moral habits of the old bourgeoisie. Education of the younger generation aimed to instill a sense of responsibility for the fate of the homeland and the nation. Mussolini expected that the youth would carry the torch of fascism and undertake the challenges of building the fascist state. Fascism maintained a dynamic and youthful character, underscoring this as a significant element of the ideology. Through the involvement of young people, fascism aimed to preserve its youthful and dynamic traits, fostering a flexible understanding of new events and phenomena. Positioning itself as a youth movement, fascism distinguished the “new Italian” from the Bolshevik “new man”, portraying the former as a fully realized individual. A central element of fascist ideology was the promotion of absolute national solidarity and a pro-state instinct to build a strong society based on loyalty to the ideals of the fascist state (Podemski, 2010, pp. 88–91).

Oswald Mosley also emphasized the revolutionary, rather than reactionary, character of fascism. This leading British fascist denied that fascism was reactionary. He highlighted that members of the fascist party included not only former conservatives but also socialists and even communists. While the fascist

movement declared its intention to seize power in a way compliant with the existing legal order, its actions were revolutionary, and its revolutionary character determined its existence. By its nature, fascism challenges the existing order and blends the need for dynamic change with progress while maintaining authority and discipline. According to Mosley, the essence of fascism lies in its ability to adapt swiftly to new challenges (Mosley, 2019d, pp. 10–11). The pursuit of revolution also distinguishes fascism from communism, which aims for destruction, while fascism takes over and utilizes elements of the existing order that are deemed useful. Communism seeks the complete destruction of knowledge, skills, and entrepreneurial abilities under the guise of class struggle. According to the British fascist, the goal of communism in Russia was the destruction of everything, good and bad. Subsequently, employing technocrats from Germany and America, the Soviet regime developed a five-year plan. In contrast, fascism does not aim for destruction but for a revolution that takes over useful elements and utilizes them to create its own order in line with the vision of a corporate state (Mosley, 2019d, p. 24).

Defining fascism, the author proposes understanding it as a political reflection that constitutes a synthesis of nationalism, syndicalism, and non-Marxist socialism, seeking a third way in the clash between liberalism and Marxism, amid the decline of monarchies and weakening conservative forces. Fascism is revolutionary, representing a revolution in action – its goals are continually modified based on current events, making the fascist revolution enduring. This revolutionary character is intrinsically tied to the cult of youth. Young people, valued for their biological vigor and adaptability, are positioned as the driving force behind the fascist vision, embodying its principle of perpetual revolution in action. The cult of youth and the pursuit of revolution necessitate statolatry. The cult of the state is a pillar of fascism, as it is through the state that fascists define goals and ensure effective mobilization and methods of goal implementation. Fascism itself has a mass character, positioned between elitism and egalitarianism. While it criticizes outdated elitist systems, it underscores the necessity of new leadership, fostering a strong cult of personality around the leader. This system allows for the rotation of elites while demanding unwavering loyalty to doctrinal principles and active participation within organizational structures. Fascists offer a new vision of reality in a world facing crises in regimes, the decline of conservative parties, and the rivalry between liberalism and communism.

In the light of scholarly literature and the works of fascist doctrine proponents, fascism defined in such a way fulfills established criteria while complementing and specifying scientific definitions referenced earlier. At the same

time, fascism meets the criteria for being recognized as totalitarian, following the definition by Roman Bäcker, who distinguished the following three essential features of totalitarianism: 1) a party-state apparatus; 2) a totalitarian political gnosis with a more precise explanatory character than ideology; 3) mass mobilization controlled by the party-state apparatus (Bäcker, 2011, pp. 36–37).

It is important to distinguish between fascist totalitarian statolatry and statocracy as described by Roman Bäcker. In authoritarian regimes, state elites believe in the high value of their own state, rallying around an individual who leads the group in power. All other values except the state become insignificant, which represents a superficial convergence with fascist statolatry. However, differences become apparent beyond this point. In authoritarian statocracy, the goal is to create an ideological mosaic composed of various parties and organizations supporting the authoritarian regime. These groups make minor modifications to the program, adjusting it to accept the values of the state. The result is a state of programmatic helplessness and the possibility of attracting moderate and pragmatic opposition. It is also important to emphasize that in authoritarian regimes, the party is intended to support the center of state power, without the fusion of the party apparatus with the state, as occurs in totalitarianism (Bäcker, 2011). As a result of creating an ideological mosaic, we are witnessing a process that can be described as the neutralization of politics, and in totalitarianism – the totalization of politics.

## **Is Putinism fascist?**

“Rashism” has been proposed as a synthesis of fascism and Putinism. Therefore, after quoting the suggested definitions of “rashism” as well as definitions of fascism in scholarly literature and referring to fascist thinkers, we can determine whether such a phenomenon exists. We can already point out that these definitions consistently narrow the phenomenon to imperialism and ethnic purges, omitting all the essential features of fascism, thereby completely losing the meaning and understanding of the concept of fascism. Only Emilio Gentile pointed to the imperial character of fascism, and chronologically identified this feature as the last in his own definition, which we can perceive as one of the features of fascism, but not a decisive one in determining what is fascist and what is not.

Stanley G. Paine, one of the scholars quoted in this article, claims that fascism is not a relevant political force in contemporary times. The humanistic-materialistic culture leaves no room for the metaphysical vitalism that forms the foundation of fascism. Moreover, in today’s world, there is no space for a politicized

mass military policy, making actual neo-fascists few in number, confined to isolated, insignificant groups. According to Paine, Putinism has fewer fascist characteristics than many other dictatorships. To claim that Putinism is fascism, one would have to argue that every dictatorship is fascist, which is a simplification Paine dismisses as untenable. In that case, China would also have to be considered fascist. Putinism is not revolutionary. Its ideological references are not fascist vitalism but historical heritage and a reactionary Orthodox religion. There has never been a mass movement in support of Putin, only complete manipulation of power from top to bottom. There is no economic “national socialism” or even fascist corporatism here, but rather a corrupt “mafia state”, which explains why its army is so weak (Payne, 2022). Fascism was future-oriented with a cult of youth, while Putin’s regime is oriented towards the past and nostalgic for the Soviet era. Unlike fascism, which created a new person loyal to its doctrine, Putin’s regime relies on support from retirees and pensioners rather than the youth (Kekic, 2022).

In the Russian Federation, there is no mobilization of the masses. The elections in Russia are widely considered to be simulated, and the presented election data also provides clues that lead to specific conclusions. Voter turnout stays around 50% – 47.9% in 2016, 51.72% in 2021; also the number of seats for the United Russia party has decreased from 343 in 2016 to 324 in 2021 (“Vyборы v Gosdumu”, 2016; “Final’naya yavka na vyborakh v Gosdumu”, 2021). The announcement of military mobilization in September 2022 also revealed a low mobilization capability among Russians. Although the expected number of reservists was mobilized, several hundred thousand Russians chose emigration, and dissent among the population grew (Chawryło & Wiśniewska, 2023).

Under Putin, Russia lacks an effective opposition. Although there are several political parties and they have their representation in the State Duma (currently representatives of 8 political parties and 5 independent deputies sit in the Duma (Mislivskaya, 2021), these parties, except United Russia, operate as quasi-opposition entities designed to channel sentiments. While they may appear as opposition forces externally, in reality they are subordinate to and supportive of the Kremlin. The Communist Party of the Russian Federation serves as an example of such a party (Bäcker, 2011, p. 75). United Russia, on the other hand, is a party of the first type, serving as the political backbone for Vladimir Putin and supporting all his actions. It is a statocratic party, aiming for stability and power centralization to achieve its goals. Ideological issues do not pose a threat to the unity of this party on both organizational and ideological levels. The formal

conservatism of centralized statocracy is considered the embodiment of the party's most crucial values (Bäcker, 2007, pp. 62–70).

It is also crucial to analyze the narrative in Russia. In 2007, Putin presented the contemporary goals of Russian foreign policy and the interpretation of the post-Cold War international order during his speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007. Putin openly condemned the prevailing order and criticized the West for disregarding the interests of non-Western states. He argued that the existing order did not truly reflect the military, economic and demographic potential of these states. Additionally, Putin criticized the expansion of NATO toward Russia's borders and the lack of disarmament efforts, which undermined trust in relations between Russia and the Alliance (Putin, 2007).

Between the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, totalitarian political gnosis began to emerge in Vladimir Putin's rhetoric. During that period, Russia was veering towards hard authoritarianism with elements of political gnosis, although it lacked a party-state apparatus and mass mobilization. The glorification of Stalin as the creator of the empire, coupled with nostalgic references to the Soviet Union, underscored the retrospective nature of political gnosis in Russia (Bäcker & Rak, 2019; Rak & Bäcker, 2020).

Anti-Western rhetoric intensified in 2022. In a speech recognizing the Lugansk and Donetsk People's Republics, Putin emphasized that Ukraine is becoming a military base for NATO, preparing for an imminent attack on Russia. He claimed that Ukraine's integration into NATO would enable the United States to execute a preemptive strike deep into Russian territory, consistent with its military doctrine. According to Putin, Western countries are unwilling to negotiate and recognize the interests of non-Western states, including Russia, despite Moscow being ready for such discussions (Putin 2022, Feb 21).

In his speech on February 24, 2022, announcing the commencement of the invasion of Ukraine, Putin emphasized the same themes. He accused the "collective West" of disregarding international law and engaging in military interventions in North Africa, the Middle East, and Serbia without legal basis. Referring to the history of the Soviet Union and the Great Patriotic War, he stressed that this time Russia would not be surprised by a second attack. The strike aims to push the enemy away from Russia's borders and demonstrate the readiness of the Russian Federation to defend its borders and engage in war with NATO. Notably, Putin frequently highlighted the "Nazi" character of the Ukrainian government and army units. According to Putin, NATO is preparing to attack Russia, and it is only a matter of time (Putin, 2022, Feb 24).

In his Victory Day speech on May 9, 2022, Putin referred to the Great Patriotic War in the context of current events, which was the main theme of his address. In fact, according to Putin, every Russian family has been touched by the war with Nazi Germany in some way, and Russians take pride in being the inheritors of the legacy of World War II, which is the defeat of Nazism. While discussing the fight against the Nazis in World War II, he mentioned the historical battles fought on these lands by Russian princes such as Sviatoslav and Vladimir Monomakh, as well as generals such as Suvorov, Potemkin and Brusilov (Putin, 2022, May 9). This was seen as an indication of the historical connection between the lands of Ukraine and Russia, where Russians have lived and fought for centuries. A year later, in his speech on the same occasion, Putin reiterated these themes, also pointing out that the West has forgotten the consequences of the Nazis coming to power and who stopped their aspirations for world domination, thus emphasizing the legacy of the Great Patriotic War and the fight against Nazism as one of Russia's mythical missions (Putin, 2023, May 9).

Announcing a partial mobilization of reservists, Putin framed the Russian military's actions as a fight not only against "Nazi thugs" but also against the entire "collective West", which aims to equip Ukraine with weapons capable of attacking Russian territory. According to Putin, Ukraine and the West plan to shift the conflict from Donbas to Crimea and then to Russian territory. In his speeches, he often refers to Ukrainians as Bandera supporters and neo-Nazis (Putin, 2022, Sep 21). In his speech of September 30, 2022, Putin accused the West of seeking global dominance through the power of the dollar and technological dictatorship. He criticized the West for lacking cooperation, relying on unwritten laws and promoting racism. Putin argued that the United States aims to weaken its partners, impose its lifestyle on other nations and destroy national states. He asserted that the policies of American elites are against Western societies, denying humanity and traditional values (Putin, 2022, Sep 30).

On June 24, 2023, commenting on the Wagner mercenaries' march on Moscow, Putin referred to the history of World War I and the betrayal represented by the 1917 revolution, which resulted in Russia's defeat in the war. He claimed that on that day, Russia, including the Wagner mercenaries, fell victim to a conspiracy against the Russian state and the unity of the Russian world (Putin, 2023, Jun 24). However, he did not specify who organized this conspiracy. Two days later, he said that Nazis from Kiev, the West, and other traitors to the nation want a situation where Russians would fight against each other (Putin, 2023, Jun 26).

From February 2022 onward, there has been a noticeable intensification of rhetoric against the West, especially the USA. This discourse devalues the enemy

and constructs a myth portraying the US as absolute evil. The creation of an absolute enemy is one of the characteristics of the aforementioned totalitarian political gnosis. This theme is most articulated in the statement from 30 September, 2022. Political myths of the Kremlin have already been discussed (Bäcker, 2022). It is worth analyzing what Vladimir Putin refers to. He draws from the imperial tradition of Russia, whether it be the tradition of medieval duchies, the Russian Empire of the Romanov dynasty, and most frequently, the Soviet Union. His narrative often invokes the USSR's legacy, particularly its historical opposition to nationalism, Nazism and Banderism. Noteworthy is the reference to anti-colonial movements during the Cold War. In his rhetoric against the USA, Putin aligns with the ideas of Aleksandr Dugin and his Fourth Political Theory. Drawing from Nolte's definition of fascism – fascism as anti-Marxism – Putin does not directly combat communism; instead, he incorporates its aesthetics and rhetorical elements from the Soviet era. His opposition is reframed as a dichotomy between liberalism and conservatism, echoing Duginist interpretations of the world (Dugin, 2012).

It is also worth analyzing musical works. When referring to the contents of songs from Nazi Germany – such as “*Horst Wessel Lied*” (2023) and “*Deutschland Erwache*” (2023), the Italian “*Giovinezza*” (2018), and the British Union of Fascists’ “*Comrades the Voices*” (2020) and “*Britain Awake*” (2019) – are oriented towards the future. Leaders of fascist movements are perceived as messengers of God on Earth, tasked with establishing a new world and bringing secular salvation. Their followers are called to stand under the banners and realize the fascist vision in the upcoming struggle for a world in line with the fascist vision. Hitler, Mussolini and Mosley are subject to the highest valorization, creating an anthropolatric myth (Rak, 2017). In Putin's Russia, pro-government music has a different tone (Wałach, 2017). Putin is portrayed as the katechon (Rak, 2017) – the one holding back Russia from decline. This image is similar to the portrayal of General Augusto Pinochet in the song “*Mi general Augusto Pinochet*” (2020). In songs by Oleg Gazmanov, who supports Vladimir Putin's regime, there is an expressed longing for the times of the USSR, with the iconic song “*Sdelan v SSSR*” (2013). In this song, as well as in “*Vpered, Rossiya!*” (2015), Gazmanov expresses nostalgia and glorifies the struggles of past eras.

In Russia, there is no observable cult of youth, revolutionary narrative or call to an impending struggle that is supposed to bring about a new world in a fascist way. The absence of a narrative characteristic of fascism is distinct in Putinism. There is insufficient evidence to consider Russia a totalitarian state. The narrative creating an enemy that embodies absolute evil has pushed Russia

in that direction, but other elements characteristic of a totalitarian regime have remained unchanged. The Kremlin's center of power does not seek to create a party-state apparatus. The elections of September 2021 resulted in a decline in United Russia's mandates compared to the previous term, indicating that, five months before the invasion, the largest party experienced a decline in support. Moreover, after 24 February 2022 there was no prohibition of quasi-opposition parties that serve to channel anti-government sentiments.

Referring to Stanley G. Paine's classification, Vladimir Putin's Russia can be categorized as a regime close to authoritarian conservative right-wing. Putinism is grounded in Russian conservatism and the Orthodox religion. Philosophical references to Nietzsche or the myth of Georges Sorel are not found here. The political system of the Russian Federation is not a parliamentary democracy, but it resists a radical break with the existing political system and systematically transforms it into a more authoritarian one, as reflected in the changes to the constitution of the Russian Federation. The conservative authoritarian right-wing also refers to traditional legitimacy and elitism, explaining the lack of power alternation, connections with the church and the existence of a center of power in the Kremlin with parties that support decisions made there and channel oppositional sentiments. Putinism also preserves the status quo in the organization of society and refrains from employing revolutionary rhetoric or creating a new persona to build a new world. Putinism has undoubtedly adopted aggressive imperial rhetoric, and the military and individuals associated with private armies (until Prigozhin's death) play a significant role in the system. However, praetorianism is a characteristic of the radical right rather than fascism. Aggressive imperial policy is a feature shared by both fascism and the radical right.

## Conclusions

The concept of "rashism" and its popularization are the result of revisiting the topic of Putinism, but in a journalistic and quasi-scientific manner. It is essential to note that the term "rashism" is a propaganda construct developed during the war. For both Ukrainians and Russians, the anti-fascist narrative is natural, given their shared history as part of the USSR, when they fought against the Third Reich, experienced German occupation and served in the Red Army against Germany. The term "fascist" is used to label an enemy – an invader aiming to destroy a particular community and obliterate statehood. In the case of "rashism", this term deviates from scientific definitions of fascism. Additionally, Putinism has not evolved towards fascism, and there is no narrative characteristic

of fascism in Putin's Russia. Moreover, Putin's regime has not adopted the distinctive features of a totalitarian and fascist state.

Indeed, Putinism has been and remains authoritarian, whereas fascism is inherently totalitarian. Referring once again to Stanley G. Payne's typology, authoritarian governance is associated with conservative and radical right-wing regimes. Fascism, by contrast, is totalitarian and possesses distinct characteristics that Putinism lacks. According to Payne's framework, Putin's Russia represents a hybrid of the conservative right and radical right. Putinism does not meet the criteria of any established definition of fascism. However, given the nostalgia for the Soviet era, Putin's references to the Soviet Union's legacy, and the perception of Russia as its successor, further research could explore whether Putinism constitutes a contemporary form of post-Communist authoritarianism on the left. As Ernst Nolte observes, fascism historically emerged as an anti-communist movement. At the same time, it is worth noting that modern Russia exhibits a pronounced preoccupation with anti-fascism and anti-Nazism.

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