

# Neighbours of the empire: Images of Russia in Lithuanian and Polish textbooks

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## Abstract

In the paper, we analyze the image of the Soviet Union and Russia presented by the Lithuanian and Polish states to the youngest generation. Our empirical data comes from textbooks for social sciences and recent history, beginning from the gaining independence of both countries after the First World War until the aggression on Ukraine in 2014. We focused on the ways of presenting to the pupils the politics, society, and culture of the Soviet and Russian states. We show how textbooks present the Russian state as irrational and dangerous and how the *longue durée* of the imperial thinking is seen as the leitmotiv of the narratives on Russian history.

## Keywords

History textbooks, memory, Soviet Union, victims, imperial thinking

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## Introduction – school transmission and its analysis

Lithuania and Poland have a long history of coexisting in a common state organism, but also as nations dependent on a state perceived as a common enemy – Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union. Today, they are independent states and members of the European Union and NATO (constituting its eastern flank, separating Western countries from Russia). The turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries brought rapid social and political changes in Europe and the world. As a result, the goals of the Polish and Lithuanian states began to be similar, and cooperation became necessary. It was enforced by external factors: the struggle for sovereignty with the Soviet Union, joint accession to NATO and then to the European Union, and, finally, joint opposition to Russia's aggression against Ukraine and joint security and humanitarian activities.

The invasion of Ukraine made both societies feel threatened by Russia. This country is presented in public discourse as dangerous and unpredictable, led by an irrational man obsessed with his visions of 'rebuilding the empire'. We, therefore, decided to see how Russia and the Soviet

Union are presented in currently used school textbooks in Lithuania and Poland. Therefore, we will not analyse the changes in this image in particular decades, but we will focus on what Lithuanian and Polish youth face in public education institutions today – during the years of Russian aggression against Ukraine. We also do not analyse the history narratives of textbooks – which events are presented and which are not, how the textbooks reflect the changes in the historiography of both countries and past and current historical disputes<sup>1</sup>. We focus on the image of Russia and Russians that can be found in textbooks, and our research goal is to identify discursive strategies that are aimed at

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perpetuating a specific (mainly negative) image of this country. Therefore, we do not focus only on history textbooks<sup>2</sup> but also on social science textbooks because they also present a specific vision of Russia when discussing such issues as international relations, international law, national minorities, contemporary threats to global security, and national and civic identity in Lithuania and Poland. Combining history and social studies textbooks in one analysis results from our focus not on analysing the ways of presenting history, but on analysing how the neighbouring country is presented (its politics, ideology, society, and culture that make up the image that is presented to students). We limited ourselves to the analysis of textbooks for the last levels of general education because the students who participate in it are the ones who enter adulthood and become citizens with full political rights (such as voting and standing in elections) and social rights (such as taking up a job or starting their own families).

For us, the analysis of school textbooks is of key importance for research on the image of Russia in neighbouring countries because the school system covers all citizens of a given country (which facilitates the transmission of a unified vision of specific issues) and does so at a time when the foundations of their worldview are being formed. Moreover, the school message is perceived socially as a transmission of ‘objective knowledge’, of facts established by specialists. This ‘school authority’ is perceived as less questionable than, for example, the authority of media messages. Owing to three factors – namely, imposing the obligation to learn at school on all citizens, the standardisation of curricula, and the standardisation of the process of preparing teachers for work – the educational system is an institution that strives to unify the inhabitants of a given country from an early age (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000). The modern nation-state and the general education system are co-occurring and interdependent phenomena. According to Ernest Gellner, the process of shaping modern national identities and the development of nation-states would not have taken place if it had not been for the development of a system of universal, mass, and compulsory education over which the state exercised monopolistic control (Gellner, 1983). One of the tasks faced by the education system in a nation-oriented state is to strive to create a culturally-homogeneous national community (Burszta & Jaskułowski, 2005, pp. 7–21). Socialisation processes take place in the school, through which young people are to be included in the active and emotional experience of their participation in the national community (Carretero, 2011).

History lessons occupy a special place in the school curriculum. They have been an element of school education since antiquity. At that time, however, they provided students, members of the then elites, with role models to follow (Chorąży et al., 2008). As James Wertsch states, ‘Unlike mathematics, history helps students to become competent and loyal members

of the nation-state’ (Wertsch, 2003, p. 70). Each state transfers the ideology of power to young people through the activities of the education system. Barbara Szacka states that when creating a narrative about the past of a national group, the selection criterion is ‘the broadly understood self-interest of the state’, which ‘is based (...) on certain consciously adopted and even formalised rules and on intuition, which leads to instinctive elimination from the images the past of everything that does not harmonise with the official interpretation of the present’ (Szacka, 2006, p. 28). That is why the history curriculum in schools, the ways of presenting the national past to the pupils, and the textual and visual narrations of the textbook are frequently analysed in social sciences and humanities (Carretero et al., 2012; Gabovitsch & Topolska, 2023).

There was conducted some research of Lithuanian history textbooks through the last decades. Back in 2002, Arūnas Vyšniauskas analysed the image of Russia, with one of the major conclusions being a statement that this image was of negative scope (Vyšniauskas, 2002, 2003). Much broader research on European values in East-Central European secondary education was implemented in 2006 (Šetkus & Šetkuvienė, 2006). Moreover, a dissertation on national minorities (including the Russian one) in Lithuanian textbooks from 1918–2018 was published (Naudžiūnienė, 2019), as well as other studies on Lithuanian history textbooks (Christophe, 2021; Naudžiūnienė, 2020). There are a lot of analyses of Polish textbooks conducted by historians, methodologists of history teaching, sociologists, and cultural studies scholars that focus on chosen historical events or processes or relations with neighbouring countries (Gross, 2010; Nasalska, 2004; Roszak et al., 2008). Among them, studies on the ways of presenting the history of Russia and the Soviet Union in Polish and Russian textbooks are also present (Maresz, 2016, 2017).

## Methodology of the research

In Lithuanian and Polish educational systems, it is the government that approves the curriculum for teaching history and the textbooks and materials used, although there is a choice for teachers which manual they will use. The Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science has approved 172 history textbooks (they cover all chronological periods and are being used by children of all grades). All of them are published on the Education Portal<sup>3</sup>. For this study, we will refer only to those textbooks approved by the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science for the final years of secondary school that are written in Lithuanian and cover the period since 1918. These are textbooks for grades 10 and 12 (in grade 11, history till 1918 is discussed, therefore these textbooks were not included in our analysis) – we analysed 13 textbooks in total.

Teachers are recommended to use these textbooks, but they often use other literature and rely on different history books, excerpts from them, or different combinations of

textbooks. The ‘History of Lithuania’, edited by Adolfas Šapoka (first published in 1936), was a significant influence, especially in the 1990s. It is the most widely read, most frequently reprinted, and most widely circulated interpretation of the history of Lithuania (last edition in 2017). Although there are many textbooks, they repeat essentially the same interpretations. There are no major contrasts in the presentation of Lithuanian history among them and in Lithuanian historiography in general. It can be assumed that teachers use the same guidelines for interpretation, even if they do not use textbooks or use them only partially<sup>4</sup>.

The subject ‘Basics of Citizenship’ in the Lithuanian education system is taught as a separate subject in grades 9 and 10 at the secondary level. The subject is part of the path ‘Basics of civic education’. The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport currently allows three textbooks published in the period 2008–2022 to be used in schools, but all of them were written just after Lithuania joined the EU and NATO. The last programme changes for this subject are 2020 and May 2023. The introduced programme changes did not involve the introduction of new textbooks to the publishing market. This state of affairs results primarily from the fact that subject teachers usually do not use textbooks; they prepare the content of individual lessons themselves, based on the core curriculum.

In Poland, the curriculum for teaching history and social sciences was changed several times. We analyse here textbooks of the two last reforms of the curriculum – of the academic year 2017/2018 and the year 2022. In the Polish system, every subject is taught at two levels: basic and expanded ones. Pupils can choose which subject at which level they want to study. After the reform of 2017/18, there are now 5 series of manuals for teaching history from different publishers (each in two levels) and 3 series of manuals for teaching social sciences from 3 publishers. In each series, there are from 2 to 8 textbooks, depending on the publisher<sup>5</sup>.

Together we analysed 13 Lithuanian history textbooks and 15 Polish history textbooks (7 at the basic level and 8 at the expanded level – from all series) as well as 3 Lithuanian textbooks for social sciences and 15 Polish social sciences textbooks (6 at the basic level and 9 at the expanded level – from all series). We focused on the written texts, the maps, and the photos. Then we analysed the excerpts, taking into account the image of the Soviet Union/Russia and how narrations about events are constructed. We conducted the analysis separately for each country and then confronted the results to make a comparative analysis.

## The Soviet Union and Russia in the Lithuanian history textbooks

The word ‘Russians’ was used until the Bolshevik Revolution. After the Soviet Union had been established, the

word ‘Russian’ was only used sporadically and the Russian people were not mentioned at all. The Soviet period is considered to be a bad time and is therefore not identified with the Russian people. Similar treatment is given to the Germans, who, in Hitler’s time, are called Nazis. The words ‘Russian’ and ‘Russians’ reappear in textbooks after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

According to the Lithuanian history manuals, the European powers that fought in the First World War and that took part in the establishment of the post-war order were generally not interested in the emergence of an independent Lithuanian state: ‘...all three of Lithuania’s great neighbours were hostile to Lithuania’s independence and statehood. Soviet Russia sought to keep Lithuania under its influence at all costs, Germany was plotting to keep Lithuania in power, and Poland was openly seeking to annex Lithuania and restore the Polish-Lithuanian state’ (Gečas et al., 2001, p. 184). The Bolsheviks were a major threat. ‘Kapsukas and the Lithuanian communists were hostile to the restoration of an independent Lithuanian state’ (Gečas et al., 2001, p. 188). In 1919, the Bolsheviks invaded Lithuania, and Litbel (a joint Lithuanian and Belarusian communist state) was established under orders from Moscow. Lithuanians organised volunteers to defend their homeland against the Bolsheviks (Kasperavičius et al., 2005, p. 20). ‘Western countries helped to repel the Bolshevik attack and arm the army’ (Kasperavičius et al., 2005, p. 22). On the other hand, the Versailles Peace Treaty did not recognise an independent Lithuania (Kasperavičius et al., 2005, p. 22), which had to fight for itself. Because of the chaos of the post-war period and despite the opposition or indifference of the major powers, independence was won by the efforts of Lithuanians. The Lithuanians took advantage of the successful geopolitical situation. The Lithuanian state is presented as built exclusively by Lithuanians.

The interwar period is presented in all textbooks as times of the impressive development of Lithuanian culture, economy, and statehood: ‘In a very short period – 22 years of independence – Lithuania changed beyond recognition, from a province of the Russian Empire to a state on a par with other European countries of the time. A nation on the verge of extinction during the years of Tsarist Russia’s oppression managed to build a state amid hostile and much more powerful neighbours. The economic and cultural progress has been impressive. Perhaps the greatest achievement of those times was the emergence of the modern Lithuanian nation. People were united by the Lithuanian language, a sense of statehood and patriotism, and the idea of independence. (...) But the greatest tragedy was the loss of independence in 1940 – the occupation by the USSR’ (Kapleris et al., 2007, p. 42).

On the other hand, the Soviet Union is mentioned in the light of the Vilnius problem, as it recognised Vilnius as Lithuania’s territory in the 1920 Soviet-Russian-Lithuanian

peace treaty and supported Lithuania against Poland. This country is shown to be treacherous and wicked in the pursuit of its aims (Gečas et al., 2001, p. 193). ‘Russia ceded to Lithuania the territories recognised by the peace treaty of 12 July 1920, but planned to seize Lithuania after defeating Poland’ (Kasperavičius et al., 2005, p. 26). In the chronological table of dry facts, Russia appears in an entirely positive light, especially in the Polish context, on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1920, when the peace treaty between the Republic of Lithuania and Soviet Russia was signed and on 26<sup>th</sup> August 1920, when Soviet Russia withdrew its troops from Vilnius and ceded it to Lithuania.

To sum up, the image of Soviet Russia gives the impression that Lithuanians were afraid of communism between the wars, but that relations with the Soviet Union were good because of the favourable treaties and support for the Vilnius region (Navickas & Svarauskas, 2016, p. 66). The textbook maps show interwar Lithuania within the borders established by the treaty between Lithuania and the USSR – Lithuania includes not only Vilnius but also Braslaū, Lida, Hrodna, Maladziečna, Augustów, and Suwałki (Kasperavičius et al., 2005, p. 114).

The narrative of the Second World War began in 1938, when Lithuania received ultimatums from Poland and, later, from Germany. Lithuania was forced to establish diplomatic relations with Warsaw and to surrender the Klaipėda region. The Soviet Union returned Vilnius to Lithuania in October 1939, but in 1940, the whole country was treacherously occupied. Germany replaced the Soviets in 1941. Soviet Russia returned in 1944–1945 and a second occupation began, lasting until 1990.

The main actors in this period were Poland, the Soviet Union, and Germany. All of these powers are generally viewed negatively. Lithuania is shown as a victim, unable to stand up to the much more powerful powers. In 1940: ‘There was no possibility of resisting the Soviets with arms’ (Navickas & Svarauskas, 2016, p. 94). On the other hand, an example is given in the North: the Finns heroically resisted the Soviets (Kasperavičius et al., 2005, pp. 126–128). The June 1941 uprising against the Soviets is presented as a small but important and symbolic sign of Lithuanian resistance. Lithuania indeed accepted that the Soviets would return to Vilnius, which they had taken from Poland, but had to accept Soviet garrisons in the country. One textbook adds that they did so because the Russians threatened to annex Vilnius to Belarus if the Lithuanians did not sign the Mutual Assistance Treaty with Stalin in 1939 (Kasperavičius et al., 2005, p. 131).

Stalin’s Soviet Russia is portrayed as a treacherous and wicked state. Here, Stalin gave up only 1/4 of the Vilnius region in 1939 (Civinskas & Antanaitis, 2001, p. 163), and the Molotov–Ribbentrop agreement is analysed in detail (Kasperavičius et al., 2005, p. 120). It is stressed that the annexation of Lithuania was carried out under the

impression of legality (Kasperavičius et al., 2005, p. 135). The German invasion in June 1941 is ambiguous. Yes, it replaced the Soviet occupation with a Nazi one, but ‘The war saved the Lithuanian population from Soviet terror’ (Kasperavičius et al., 2005, p. 149). Textbooks tell us that the Nazi persecutions were far less severe than those of the Soviets. Lithuanians treated the Germans as occupiers, successfully avoided cooperating with them, and did not create SS legions as was the case in Latvia or Estonia. The Soviets were seen as a greater threat, and about half of Lithuania’s interwar elite fled the country as the front line approached in 1944, triggering a protracted partisan war.

The Second World War is portrayed in the textbooks as a frenzy of powerful forces, and Lithuania was a victim and a plaything in the hands of the powerful. Lithuanian battalions took part in the massacres on the German side, but they had no choice (Kasperavičius et al., 2005, p. 152). Lithuanians were forced into the Soviet and German armies, not by choice (Kasperavičius et al., 2005, pp. 153–154).

The history of Lithuania during the Soviet era is very specific. There is almost nothing about national minorities. The emphasis is on the fact that the country was isolated from the rest of the world by the Iron Curtain. The activities of the Lithuanian diaspora are mentioned only in passing. Interestingly, the history of the Soviet Union is discussed separately from the history of Lithuania, even though Lithuania was one of its 15 constituent parts. The period of Soviet Lithuania is referred to as the occupation and the ‘Second Sovietisation of Lithuania’. This is an official, state-level position.

The Soviet Union is considered to be an abnormal and bad country. This is well illustrated by the titles of the chapters in one textbook: ‘The Soviet Union – a Giant with Feet of Clay’, ‘In a Country of Crooked Mirrors’, ‘The “Red Plague” Spreads Worldwide’ (Kapleris et al., 2007).

The textbooks list the negative processes that took place during the Soviet era: the abolition of statehood, terror, deportations, collectivisation, the destruction of culture, and Russification. Culture and mentality were severely damaged, and *homo sovieticus* was formed. ‘The Lithuanian population was hostile to the USSR and communism’, ‘Moscow distrusted even Lithuanian communists, and before the end of the war over 6,000 Lithuanians were sent to Lithuania. There were 6.6 million “cadres” from Russia’ (Kasperavičius et al., 2005, p. 191). There was military and peaceful resistance, with particular emphasis on armed partisan resistance (Kasperavičius et al., 2005, pp. 197–202). The resistance struggle is romanticised and its heroes are exalted. For example, it is rare to find information that the partisans killed innocent people (Kasperavičius et al., 2005, p. 198). To emphasise that Lithuanians were particularly affected, life in Soviet camps is described vividly (Kasperavičius et al., 2005, p. 196), and large numbers of victims are shown in the table ‘The share of Lithuanian exiles

among all the people exiled in the USSR' (Kasperavičius et al., 2005, p. 195).

There are also huge sections in the textbooks dedicated to economic life in the Soviet times. Economic transformation and collectivisation are accompanied by deportations and persecutions. Under Stalin, there was an economic boom owing to repression. The Soviet Union became one of the most powerful economies in the world. Thus, industrialisation and urbanisation bring some advantages, but the price paid (repressions) is presented in the textbooks as too high. After the rise of the Stalin era, stagnation and decline set in. The only glimmer of success comes from the push into space: Gagarin and Sputnik are mentioned. Under Brezhnev, scarcity – a permanent shortage of goods – takes hold.

The textbooks read a lot about the culture of the Soviet Union and Soviet Lithuania, always from the negative side: propaganda, communist education, suppressions, the corruption of the government apparatus, shadow economy, Russification, and the persecution of the Catholic Church. The Soviet environment is identified with the world of lies, and parallels are drawn with George Orwell's novels. The Soviet human being is *homo sovieticus*, living in deficit, disillusioned with everything, and constantly under attack by communist ideology. One of the most powerful quotes illustrating the Soviet human being found in the textbooks goes like this: 'Since the beginning of the Bolshevik rule, the historical memory of the people has been falsified and destroyed. Attempts have been made to abandon the teaching of history in schools altogether. The tragedy of the loss of memory was described by the famous Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov in his novel "A Day as Long as a Century." Through brutal torture, people were turned into *mankurts* – people who had lost their memory, forgotten their origins and hated even their mothers' (Kapleris et al., 2007, p. 157).

The Soviet Union is presented as one of the two superpowers during the Cold War, when the world was divided into two camps. The conflict between the two blocs is presented in examples of war in Korea and Indochina, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the war in Afghanistan, and conflicts in other parts of the world. The military rivalry between the Soviet Union and the USA is primarily linked to the nuclear arms race and the related disarmament negotiations. The possibility of nuclear war is presented as particularly frightening. An illustration is the dramatic title of the chapter 'A World on the Brink of Nuclear Catastrophe' (Kapleris et al., 2007, p. 162).

The USA and the Western world are contrasted with the Soviet world as prosperous or at least normal. While the Soviets sought to 'catch up and surpass the West', the Soviet bloc is the scene of widely reported revolutions: Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Poland in 1980/81. Indeed, the resistance towards the Soviet Union is an

important part of all textbooks. The chapters on Lithuania contain a wealth of information on the partisan resistance to the Soviet regime and the deportations that accompanied it. There is a lot about the peaceful resistance that culminated in the self-burning of Romas Kalanta in the act of protest against the Soviet occupation of Lithuania in 1972 and the Chronicle published by the Catholic Church. The chapters on resistance in the Soviet Union also mention dissidents such as Andriej Sakharov and the Helsinki Group. It must be pointed out that there is much less written on resistance and dissidence in the Soviet Union in general, compared to the descriptions of these phenomena in Lithuania.

Lithuania is shown as a victim who could not stand up to injustice. 'The Western countries remained deaf and left Lithuanians, as well as Latvians and Estonians, to their fate and the mercy of Stalin' (Gečas et al., 2001, p. 298). On the other hand, there are some positive aspects of the Soviet period: industrialisation, urbanisation (Lithuania went from a rural country to an urban country), agricultural growth, and even architectural achievements: 'In the 1970s, more milk was produced only in Denmark and New Zealand', 'The new districts of Vilnius in the USSR were distinguished by their layout and architecture', and the restoration of the Trakai Castle (Kasperavičius et al., 2005, p. 214). 'For the first time since the Middle Ages, Lithuania had Klaipėda and Vilnius at the same time, and its territory became larger than between the wars' (Navickas & Svarauskas, 2016, p. 142). 'Owing to the industriousness and economy of the Lithuanians and their subsequent entry into the Soviet Empire in the 1980s the LSSR achieved a higher standard of living than other Soviet republics' (Kapleris et al., 2007, p. 188).

But first of all, Lithuanians strived to have an independent state. The events of 1988–1991 have been widely reported in the textbooks. The restoration of independence is shown as an exceptional act by Lithuanians, a demonstration of their courage and determination. After 1990, 'The most difficult problem of Baltic foreign policy is relations with Russia' (Kasperavičius et al., 2005, p. 294). It is noted that relations with Yeltsin's Russia were still good, but not with Putin's.

When writing on post-1991 Russia, all textbooks are focused on international politics and the authoritarian regime of Putin: 'Russia's long history has not been marked by a tradition of democratic governance. (...) Today's Russia is divided between the supporters of democracy and the proponents of strong-arm rule (...) Unfortunately, in recent years, driven by great-power ambitions, the government has been steering the country towards authoritarianism. To distract the people from the troubles afflicting the country, artificial "enemies of Russia" are being created out of some neighbouring nations' (Kapleris et al., 2007, p. 273). Conflicts in Chechnya, Georgia, and Ukraine are mentioned.

Also, the new phenomena in the Russian society are described, especially the so-called ‘new Russians’. In one of the textbooks, students can read about their lifestyle: ‘Anyone over a certain threshold must have a Mercedes-500 or Mercedes-600: in the Moscow region alone, more of these cars were bought in 1992–1996 than in the whole of Western Europe in ten years. Every month in Moscow, the “new Russians” buy three or four thousand apartments in elite houses (...) Far more money is spent on buying real estate abroad (...) Russian businessmen have invested billions of dollars in US and German bank stocks—the “new Russians” love to travel. In 1994 alone, their spending on tourism in far-away foreign countries amounted to some \$7 billion, more than the International Monetary Fund loan to Russia in 1995. In total, experts estimate that the Russian rich spend \$45 billion on personal consumption, which is several times more than Russia’s total annual defence and military spending’ (Kasperavičius et al., 2005, p. 303).

In the parts of the textbooks devoted to Yeltsin’s and Putin’s Russia, the country is presented as hostile and threatening, especially to its neighbours. It is not the Soviet Union anymore, but still, it is a strange, authoritarian country.

### The Soviet Union and Russia in Polish history textbooks

Polish history textbooks present the history of the Soviet Union and Russia since the Peace of Brest, ending World War I. The collapse of the USSR is the end of textbook narratives presenting the history of Russia systematically and chronologically. The last chronologically discussed event is the Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2014. The history of Russia and the USSR is discussed in detail in textbooks and the narrative is dominated by political history. The Soviet Union is identified with its leaders – students read about ‘Stalin’s state’ or ‘Brezhnev’s state’. In textbooks presenting the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, events from the Russian history are discussed second in terms of the amount of space devoted to them in textbooks after the Polish history.

#### The Soviet Union and Russia in the international world

The narrative in Polish textbooks is a story of the slow development and decline of Russia as a superpower. The beginnings of this story do not indicate that Russia will ever become a global power. Its beginnings were the October Revolution, terror, and an exhausting civil war. It is an isolated country in the world, deprived of international contacts. It is desperately looking for an ally in Europe, so it enters into a rather exotic alliance with Germany – another

European *infant terrible*. Owing to the agreement with Hitler, the state ruled by Stalin significantly expanded westward at relatively little cost. Defeats after the German attack in 1941 were a short-term obstacle to the growth of the USSR’s power. The absolute apogee of the importance of the USSR was the end of the war and the meeting of the Big Three in Yalta. From now on, the interests of the Soviet Union were no longer limited to Europe, and it began to become a global power, with ambitions to gain influence in the whole world.

However, the moment of greatest triumph was the beginning of a slow decline, ending with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The authors argue that, to some extent, the USSR was a country doomed to collapse from the very beginning due to the way it managed its economy and outdated agriculture.

All textbooks note that Lenin and the Bolsheviks opposed the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. From the beginning, the Bolsheviks talked about the need to ‘transfer the revolution to other European countries’ (Krzemiński & Niewęgłowska, 2021, p. 487). Russia’s expansion seems to be something planned and consistently implemented: ‘[Bolsheviks] First of all, they tried to regain the lands that previously belonged to tsarist Russia’ (Kłaczek et al., 2021, p. 242). From the beginning of its existence, Soviet Russia was a threat not only to Poland but to all the territories it lost as a result of the provisions of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The territorial expansion of the communist state seems to be embedded in its philosophy of action and symbolism. When discussing the emblem of the USSR, the authors of the textbook point out that the symbolism of the state also heralded its expansion: ‘(the hammer and sickle over the globe) meant that the Soviets did not plan to stop at organising the communist order only within the borders of the USSR’ (Kłaczek et al., 2021, p. 243).

The authors of the textbooks note that already in the 1930s, the Soviet Union was a political player that was trying to influence the situation in Europe more and more effectively. The expansionist policy pursued by Stalin not only concerned territories but also led to the appropriation of communist ideology and its identification with the system of the Soviet Union. Stalin is portrayed as a diplomat who achieves his goals unfairly towards his partners in the international arena. One example of this approach is described as follows: “From that time [admission to the League of Nations in 1934], [Stalin] began to actively advocate for general disarmament, which was to create the image of the USSR as a state supporting the pacifist movement and striving for peace, and in fact, it was intended to weaken the military potential of capitalist countries” (Chwałba & Kępski, 2022, p. 396).

Owing to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the USSR annexed territories that ‘were once part of the tsarist empire’ (Choińska-Mika et al., 2022, p. 25). Therefore, the year

1939 becomes symbolic – the borders of the Soviet Union roughly coincide with the borders of Tsarist Russia. The importance of the Soviet Union in the international arena increases after successive victories over the German army. The authors of textbooks devote a lot of space to the conferences in Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam. They are described in great detail. The decisions made during the conference were of fundamental importance for the whole of Europe, and above all for Poland.

The authors of the textbooks focus on two aspects of the post-war international policy of the USSR. They look at it from the point of view of strengthening influence in Central and Eastern Europe and the growing Cold War rivalry. They describe the ‘salami tactics’, owing to which Stalin made the countries of Central and Eastern Europe dependent on him. The Sovietisation of these countries is taking place: the importance of the party leader is increasing, state symbols express the connection with the USSR, and the cult of Stalin is propagated. Subordination was expressed not only in symbolic actions. In each of the countries dependent on the USSR, there were ‘Soviet military garrisons stationed in these countries and Soviet generals and officers who held important positions in individual armies’ (Choińska-Mika et al., 2022, p. 290). Soviet ambassadors also played an important role, ‘supervising the authorities, preventing vassalised governments from making independent decisions’ (Choińska-Mika et al., 2022, p. 290).

In the end, the USSR lost the Cold War competition. The blow that ultimately weakened the Soviet Union was the arms race initiated by Regan, including the rearmament of any states or groups fighting against the USSR. The USSR was unable to take up the challenge. Gorbachev decided to limit the Soviet Union’s international military activity, for example, by withdrawing Soviet troops from Afghanistan, and also met with Reagan to limit the arms race. Ultimately, the USSR and the entire Eastern Bloc collapsed.

International relations in the world in Polish textbooks are usually described in a Manichean way. There are forces of good and forces of evil fighting against them. During the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war and during World War II, the forces of evil were the USSR and Germany. After the war, this vision of the world is briefly disrupted, only to return to it with the Cold War narrative. Here, the forces of evil are the Soviet Union, which seeks to subjugate subsequent territories, and the forces of good opposing them, led by the United States.

### *Internal politics and social life in the Soviet Union and Russia*

The Soviet Union is presented primarily as a hostile state, but also to some extent as irrational or even absurd. It is difficult to deduce from textbook narratives what could have been the reason for the Soviet Union’s undoubted success.

The authors of all textbooks emphasise the irrationality that drives the state’s leaders. When making decisions, they are guided by ideological blindness and fears.

From its creation, the Soviet Union has been shown as a state in which laws and procedures exist only for show and are dependent on the will of those in power. Lawlessness is common. The caption under the iconographic material reads: ‘Chekists killing a captured enemy of the people. The accused were shot without a court decision, often based on denunciations or confessions extracted under torture’ (Krzemiński & Niewęgłowska, 2021, p. 428). In the USSR, the psyche of the ruling individual influenced the entire state policy: ‘Stalin, who obsessively suspected those around him of conspiring and preparing an attack on his life, from time to time eliminated his competitors by force’ (Chwalba & Kępski, 2022, p. 389). Communist theory and ideology are used in the utilitarian way, primarily to gain power.

The assessment of the Soviet state is harsh and unambiguous in all textbooks: ‘The communist state system from the very beginning of its existence, i.e. from the moment of taking power as a result of the October Revolution, had a criminal character’ (Kłaczek et al., 2021, p. 246). The authors of the textbook leave no doubts and do not introduce any nuances regarding the times of Lenin and Stalin’s rule. They mention the murders of ‘class enemies’, the shooting of rebelling peasants and workers, and the labour camp system. Another element of criminal activity is the collectivisation of agriculture, which claimed ‘over 10 million victims’ (Kłaczek et al., 2021, p. 247). An example of a crime related to collectivisation is the famine in Ukraine. We read: ‘The greatest number of victims of this criminal experiment were recorded in Ukraine, where in 1932–1933, as a result of taking away the entire grain harvest from the peasants in a planned manner, an artificial famine was induced’ (Kłaczek et al., 2021, p. 247). After all, an element of the state’s criminal activity is the ‘Great Purge’ of the 1930s and ethnic cleansing.

Every economic achievement of the USSR is shown as having its disadvantages. Perhaps ‘More and more goods were being produced’, but they were of ‘worse and poorer quality’. Although ‘new railways, roads and water canals were being built’, ‘prisoners were employed to build them, and they died quickly due to difficult working conditions and lack of food’. Modernisation in the Soviet Union is an inept operation. Its main result is the death of millions of people. The economic development of the Soviet Union indeed took place, but owing to external help: ‘Owing to the support of Western specialists, primarily from the USA, the mining, metallurgical, heavy and armaments industries were expanded’ (Ustrzycki & Ustrzycki 3, 2021a, p. 81). A lot of space in textbook narratives is also devoted to the description of the slow collapse of the USSR. The authors draw attention to the deteriorating economic situation as well as ecological disasters. The most important of them is

the Chernobyl catastrophe. About the power plant itself, the authors of the textbook write: ‘The symbol of the state of the Soviet economy in the 1980s was the issue of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant’ (Choińska-Mika et al., 2022, p. 497).

The authors emphasise the ubiquity of propaganda in every area of life in the Soviet Union. This is shown as a specificity of this country, absent elsewhere in such intensity: ‘Propaganda played a key role in the indoctrination process that was to shape the Soviet man – an individual obedient and zealously devoted to the party and the state, guided by the interests of the collective. The tools of propaganda were education, science, media and socialist realist art, in which the USSR was presented as a land of happiness and abundance’ (Krzemiński & Niewęłowska, 2021, p. 432). The authors of one of the textbooks also point out that the USSR authorities acted to create a ‘Soviet human being’: thoughtless, ‘obediently carrying out even the most criminal and absurd orders of the authorities’ (Chwalba & Kępski, 2022, p. 392).

One of the textbooks describes the development of culture in the USSR in more detail. It talks about the ‘avant-garde explorations of Soviet directors’ (Ustrzycki & Ustrzycki 3, 2021a, p. 122), mentioning Prokofiev and Shostakovich as outstanding ‘composers of classical music in the interwar period’ who worked in the USSR (Ustrzycki & Ustrzycki 3, 2021a, p. 125) as well as the outstanding Russian abstractionists Kandinsky and Malevich (Ustrzycki & Ustrzycki 3, 2021a, p. 125). However, it is worth noting that the development of avant-garde culture in the USSR was a temporary phenomenon. After World War II, restrictions appeared in the cultural and scientific life of the USSR: ‘many artists, against whom there were accusations of failing to implement the recommended ideological patterns, were banned from public presentations of their works. (...) Giving in to Western influence was condemned. Fields of science such as genetics, sociology, Freudian psychology and quantum physics were rejected (they were considered “bourgeois”)’ (Ustrzycki & Ustrzycki 4, 2021b, p. 27). The authors of all textbooks emphasise the similarities between Nazi Germany and the communist Soviet Union, resulting from the totalitarian systems of both countries. Those in power make very similar decisions that limit citizens’ freedoms and develop military and expansionist potential. Both ‘Totalitarian regimes stigmatised independent artists and imposed on them their vision of art – monumental and realistic, praising the new state and the new human being’ (Chwalba & Kępski, 2022, p. 416).

### *Relations between Poland and the Soviet Union/ Russia*

Soviet Russia has been portrayed as an enemy of Poland since its founding. The war of 1920 is proof of Russia’s

hostile intentions towards the newly established Poland. Even in the interwar period, Poland and the USSR seemed to remain in the balance of power, perhaps even with Poland having a slight advantage. The textbooks devote a lot of space to discussing the course of the Battle of Warsaw in August 1920 and emphasise its enormous importance in the history of not only Poland but the whole of Europe. We read: ‘It was compared, among others, to the Victory of Vienna in 1683. Just as Sobieski stopped the Turkish invasion, now the Red Army was stopped, which saved Central Europe from communism’ (Chwalba & Kępski, 2022, p. 448).

The situation changed drastically after the aggression of 17<sup>th</sup> September 1939. Poland was occupied by the USSR and then entered the Soviet sphere of influence. Showing similarities and even analogies in the actions of great powers continues when discussing the occupation policy of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union during World War II: ‘The war against Poland waged by the Germans and the Soviets was a total war from the very beginning. The aggressors did not limit themselves only to fighting soldiers, but also attacked civilian targets’ (Choińska-Mika et al., 2022, p. 17) and ‘they treated the defeated Poles in a bestial way’ (Choińska-Mika et al., 2022, p. 18). The authors of all textbooks show beyond any doubt that the Polish authorities cannot influence the country’s international relations, because this aspect of activity was taken away by the USSR. The inability to make an independent decision is reflected in the decisions made (e.g. the rejection of the Marshall Plan) and official documents (Brezhnev’s doctrine of limited sovereignty).

According to the textbook authors, the goal of the USSR was the ‘Sovietisation’ of the Polish society. Through the presented description of the policy implemented in Poland, students learn that it is about economic changes (the nationalisation of private property and the collectivisation of agriculture), the introduction of ideologised curricula, the introduction of the Russian language, and religious persecution (Choińska-Mika et al., 2022, p. 100). The chapters of the textbook on the situation in post-war Poland are summarised in a fragment of the memoirs of the Polish writer Maria Dąbrowska, in which she writes about the threats resulting from the post-war Sovietisation and Russification of the country: ‘From the Germans, Poland was threatened with biological destruction, from the Muscovites – a hundred times more terrible – spiritual and moral. I am devastated that so many Poles turned out to be susceptible to villainy’ (Choińska-Mika et al., 2022, p. 279).

The withdrawal of former Soviet troops (since 1991) from Poland is indicated as an important moment in liberating ourselves from the Soviet influence. According to the textbook narrative, after the fall of the Soviet Union, Polish-Russian relations are dominated by the fight for the memory of the Katyn massacre, and Russia’s reactions to activities commemorating this crime – the litmus test of

Polish-Russian relations. During Boris Yeltsin's rule, relations were good, because Poland obtained 'copies of Soviet documents regarding the Katyn massacre. In 1993, during his visit to Warsaw, Boris Yeltsin laid a wreath at the Katyn monument at Powązki Cemetery, and the Russians enabled exhumation works in Katyn and Miednoye and the construction of Polish war cemeteries there' (Choińska-Mika et al., 2022, p. 572). Tensions in mutual relations appeared in the mid-1990s, when Poland was trying to join NATO or support Chechnya in its fight for independence. Especially in recent years, during Putin's rule, they have become increasingly worse.

Summarising the history of the 20th century, the authors write: 'Polish-Russian relations are constantly influenced by historical, political and economic differences, including a different attitude to the issue of security in Europe and energy security' (Śniegocki & Zielińska, 2022, p. 490).

Also, when writing about the events of the 21st century, the authors of Polish history textbooks emphasise that Russia has had imperial ambitions since the collapse of the USSR and wants to dominate the territory of the former empire (Śniegocki & Zielińska, 2022, p. 413). One of the textbooks discusses the strategy of 'hybrid war' in Ukraine. However, Russia shown in the textbook not only is an aggressor against one of its neighbours, but also tries to influence the international situation: 'Many politicians and officials in the United States accuse Russia of such interference [hybrid war] in the 2016 presidential elections, which resulted in Donald Trump victory' (Choińska-Mika et al., 2022, pp. 542–543). Russia is presented as a victim only concerning the terrorist attacks that took place on its territory. However, even if it is shown this way, it also indicates that these attacks are a consequence of Russia's policy in Chechnya (Śniegocki & Zielińska, 2022, p. 415) and that they were also a pretext to change internal policy, because after them there was a 'clear regression in the short process of democratisation of Russia compared to the 1990s' (Choińska-Mika et al., 2022, p. 542).

The Russian state is, therefore, a constant threat to Poland, other countries, and even its own society. This way of depreciating Russia focuses on presenting many examples of its hostility and brutality.

## The image of Russia and Russians in social science textbooks

There is a significant distinction in the way that social sciences are presented in each country. In Poland, it is a compilation of the political sciences, international relations studies, sociology, and law. Lithuanian social sciences textbooks are focused on the Lithuanian state and nation – its sovereignty, freedom, and identity development – and do not discuss ethnic diversity or national minorities in Lithuania.

In Polish textbooks on the subject of social studies, issues regarding relations with various nationalities are placed at two levels: national (national) and international. At the national level, the authors of textbooks discuss the issues of national minorities in Poland, and in some cases also the situation of Poles living outside Poland and Poland's policy towards them, as well as the attitude of the Polish society towards people from other countries.

In all textbooks, the information is unified for all minorities – provided according to the same pattern. There is also a lot of statistical data from censuses regarding the place of residence and the use of the native language, as well as the most characteristic customs. In the case of Russians, these are dishes and customs related to the Maslenitsa holiday. The existence of the Russian Cultural and Educational Association in Poland is also mentioned. In the textbook *Wiedza o społeczeństwie 2* (basic scope) in the case of Russians, it is emphasised that their presence results from migration during the partitions, the October Revolution, and the times of the Polish People's Republic, and the existence of Old Believers is mentioned, who fled from religious persecution from the 50s of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, to the territory of today's Poland (Smutek et al., 2021).

The textbook *W centrum uwagi 1* (extended scope) contains also a chapter on attitudes towards minorities and foreigners. It contains selected descriptions of stereotypes functioning in the Polish society. The stereotype of a Russian is presented as follows: 'History and current political events strongly influence the generally unfavourable attitude of Poles towards Russia. Poles often perceive Russians as proud and sensitive people who also behave dishonestly and deceitfully. According to some people, the Russian mentality does not correspond to the principles of Western civilisation' (Janicki et al., 2022, p. 186). The book also includes a table showing the results of surveys on the sympathy and reluctance of the Polish society towards various nations in 1993, 2005, and 2018. It shows that reluctance towards Russians definitely dominates.

The second level, at which the issue of national diversity appears, are the chapters discussing the issues of international relations after World War II. Relations with the Russian state are described in the textbook *Wiedza o społeczeństwie 3* (extended scope). After the information about the signing of the Polish-Russian treaty in May 1992, the authors state: 'Unfortunately, relations between the countries are still not easy. A big problem is the unsettled past. Examples include the fate of Polish officers after 1939 and Russian prisoners of war after the Polish-Bolshevik War. The situation is also made more difficult by mutual prejudices and Russia's superpower ambitions. Moreover, the Polish economy is still largely dependent on Russian raw materials' (Batorski, 2021, p. 19). The authors further state that the Smolensk catastrophe of 2010 also had an impact on Polish-Russian relations, but they do not say a word about

what this impact was. On the one hand, an attempt is made to provide a symmetrical description of historical events (the fate of prisoners from one and another country). Still, on the other hand, an asymmetrical relationship is pointed out, in which Poland is the victim (Russia's superpower ambitions and economic dependence on it).

In Polish textbooks, Russia is primarily a large and potentially dangerous country. Polish-Russian conflicts have the character of historical disputes (where the 'blame' is distributed more or less symmetrically) and contemporary problems are generated by the policy of Russia, not the Polish state.

In Lithuanian social studies textbooks, Lithuanian society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is presented primarily as fighting for freedom. Freedom is not only a personal matter, but also a national one and includes the fight for the right to identity. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was a fight for a free Lithuania within ethnographic borders, and later a fight against the Soviet occupation and to preserve national identity in exile. Lithuanians are presented as a nation that has been striving to liberate itself from the rule of the Russian Empire since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the nation's maturation accompanied the struggle for freedom suppressed by Russia (Bitlieriūtė & Jakubčionis, 2012, p. 38).

The most frequently mentioned 'foreign' group in textbooks are the Soviets, who fit into two categories: enemies and traitors. Soviet Russia (then still called Bolshevik) attacked the emerging Lithuanian state, which forced the government to evacuate to Kaunas, which became the temporary capital (Bitlieriūtė, Jakubčionis 2012, p. 58). After 1944, the Soviet Union sought to destroy the national identity of Lithuanians (Bitlieriūtė, Jakubčionis 2012, p. 42), which, however, did not succeed: 'During sports competitions, the word "Lithuania" was constantly heard, rejecting the adjective "Soviet". The students continued to mention Lithuania as their homeland, but not the Soviet Union' (Bitlieriūtė & Jakubčionis, 2012, p. 44).

On 11<sup>th</sup> March, 1991, Lithuania broke away from the Soviet Union. Citizens of the rebuilt Republic of Lithuania defended their democratic state against the aggression of the USSR: 'Lithuanian officers on duty – policemen, border guards, customs officers – were murdered at the border post with Belarus in Medniki. They were murdered by a terrorist group serving the Soviet Union' (Bitlieriūtė & Jakubčionis, 2012, p. 44). In the description of the struggle for Lithuanian statehood, the role of patriotism is constantly emphasised (Bitlieriūtė & Jakubčionis, 2012, pp. 64–65), especially during the period of the Soviet economic blockade in 1990 and the aggression of 1991. This leads to the creation of an image of the Lithuanian society as strong and resilient. Nowadays, the issue of globalisation is presented as a certain threat, but, as the authors of the textbook claim, Lithuania has experienced dependence on Russia and the Soviet Union, and will also survive in the conditions of globalisation (Letukienė et al., 2009, p. 99).

Post-Soviet Russia does not actually appear in textbooks – only in the context of the responsibility of 'Russian President Vladimir Putin' for mass crimes against the Chechen people during the war in Chechnya (Donskis, 2010, p. 120). Generally speaking, Lithuanian social science textbooks do not focus on contemporary Russia, but devote a lot of space to the Soviet Union as an enemy, but also as a trigger to show the strength of Lithuanian identity.

### Conclusions from the comparative analysis – discursive modes of presenting the image of Russia and the Soviet Union

Russia and the Soviet Union are presented in both Lithuanian and Polish textbooks as aliens and enemies. The image of the enemy seems to dominate, but also the image of an incomprehensible stranger appears when talking about internal social life in the USSR and its ideology. The Soviet Union in particular is presented not only as a separate state, a subject of international relations, but also as an irrational reality – another world difficult to understand due to its absurdity. The USSR is, therefore, not only a long-time neighbour, but also a strange, separate reality, incomparable to anything else.

In both countries, the ways of describing the Soviet Union and Russia are very similar. In both public education systems, they are presented as primarily criminal and hostile, of which students are provided with plenty of examples, primarily from the history of their own country and crimes committed against their fellow citizens. Not only are the same examples cited (such as the GULAG system, deportations, forced collectivisation, and the Great Purge) but the interpretations of the presented events are also the same. They are negative and emphasise the criminality of the Soviet system, but also of post-Soviet Russia (in this case, primarily concerning other nations).

We have identified four ways of depreciating the USSR and Russia as states of the modern world:

1. Emphasising their irrationality,
2. Pointing out hostility and brutality,
3. Looking at them in terms of a dehumanised 'system',
4. Emphasising similarities with the system of Nazi Germany.

In both education systems, the USSR (to a lesser extent Russia) is presented as an irrational state. Its leaders are not guided by rational considerations. Even if they want to achieve some noble goals (e.g. economic development), they choose the wrong methods, causing enormous harm and, ultimately, an effect opposite to the intended one (e.g. the collapse of the economy). Individual phobias of leaders become the basis for the functioning of the state.

The propaganda reality created by the state diverges from social reality in an almost absurd way. The entire society lives in lies and without knowledge of the world beyond the borders of the USSR. Both the state and its society become a laughing stock and are treated as alien to the extreme. A new category is even being created – modelled on biological categorisation – namely, *homo sovieticus*. This is an extreme emphasis on foreignness – the society of the USSR even becomes a species separate from the humanity inhabiting the globe. Moreover, Lithuanian textbooks show the social absurdities of post-Soviet Russia, which is not present in Polish textbooks. All this means that such a country cannot be respected, but should be taken into account because of the threat it poses to the entire world and, above all, to neighbouring nations.

The threat posed by Russia results from its superpower ambitions – Russia is perceived as a country that, almost by definition, wants to dominate its neighbours (conquer them or at least exert a large influence on them), but at the same time it can only do it by force (mainly military, but also economic or political), because it is unable to offer anything ideologically or culturally attractive. At the same time, both countries emphasise the brutality of the actions of both the USSR and Russia towards anyone who opposes them (both inside and outside). Interestingly, both in Lithuania and Poland, the ‘long duration’ of Russia’s imperial ambitions is emphasised. State ideology has changed over the centuries, but the desire to expand and maintain the empire remains constant. Textbooks often emphasise that the ambition of the USSR was to recreate the empire of Tsarist Russia, and currently, we are dealing with an attempt to rebuild the Soviet empire. The category ‘the reconstruction of the empire’ is used explicitly. By definition, then, all those who were in one empire or the other are at risk of attack or hostile action against their sovereignty. At the same time, the image created in this way gives the impression that any agreement on this matter or peaceful coexistence with mutual respect for neighbours is impossible. Russia is presented as a country that only understands the language of force and, therefore, the accession of both countries to NATO and the EU is presented as the only option to protect themselves from their ‘imperial’ neighbour. The historical narrative in textbooks clearly shows students that such foreign policy is not a requirement of the moment, but has deep, centuries-old justification.

The USSR and to a lesser extent Russia are also portrayed in terms of ‘dehumanisation’. Both their leaders and their society are not entirely human (or at least not the ‘Westerns’ that Poles and Lithuanians consider themselves to be). This image of a ‘dehumanised’ country is also reinforced by the constant use of the ‘system’ category. The names of Russians other than the names of their leaders appear very rarely in textbooks. Only Lenin and Stalin are described in more detail, but negatively, emphasising their

differences from ‘normal people’ (using categories such as ‘obsession’ or ‘phobia’). The remaining leaders simply give their surnames as the names of subsequent eras in the history of the USSR. Only the last leader – Mikhail Gorbachev – is described in a more ‘human’ way, that is, as a being with his own goals and thoughts, achieving successes, but also failing. Generally, however, we are dealing with a ‘system’ and its dehumanised functionaries.

The last way we distinguished to depreciate the USSR is to emphasise the similarities between the Soviet and Nazi systems. It is almost identical in both countries. It fits very well into the European narrative of ‘two totalitarian regimes that tried to take over Europeans’, the most tragic consequences of which were suffered by the nations of Central and Eastern Europe, which were under totalitarian rule for several decades longer than the countries of Western Europe. Such a narrative is not only a part of European memory narratives (Kowalski & Törnquist-Plewa, 2016; Maier, 2002) but also an attempt to deal a painful blow to Russia and the USSR itself. To a large extent, the politics of memory in the USSR, but also post-Soviet Russia, focuses on ‘victory over fascism’ in the Great Patriotic War (Carleton, 2011; Malinova, 2017). Moreover, the narrative about the ‘fight against fascists’ has accompanied the invasion of Ukraine, which began on 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2022, from the very beginning. The detailed and systematic showing of striking similarities between Hitler and Stalin and between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union is intended to ridicule several decades of Russian propaganda and ideological narrative, and showing its hypocrisy. Similar methods are used by researchers who present the USSR as a colonial state, although officially fighting colonialism all over the world (Tlostanova, 2012). This is another narrative method of emphasising the irrationality of the Soviet ideology, but at the same time the threat that Russia poses to Europe. It also destroys the image of the USSR as the ‘liberator’ of Central and Eastern Europe.

Narratives about the USSR and Russia in Lithuanian and Polish textbooks also aim to show the position of each of these countries in European and world history. This is primarily a ‘heroic victim’ position<sup>6</sup>. Both countries are primarily victims of their imperialist neighbour (cf. Maresz, 2017), but it is a victorious victimhood because they finally manage to defeat the brutal neighbour and gain what is most important – sovereignty. The position of the victim also serves to build the state’s moral capital, which can be used in international relations (Luczewski, 2017).

Although both countries describe different aspects of life in the Soviet Union and Russia in more or less detail, the picture of these countries is very similar. Russia is a dangerous country, especially for its neighbours. It always strives to build an empire, and the events of its imperial past are presented as a warning for the future. With such an image of Russia, there is little room to create the belief

among students that peaceful cooperation between Lithuania and Poland with this country, based on mutual respect, is possible. The only positive images concern the Russian culture. However, presenting the Russian society as a victim of numerous brutal and irrational state actions leaves room for emotions such as compassion, not just resentment and fear. Both countries are presented less as neighbours of Russians, but primarily as neighbours of Russia – the country with imperial ambitions.

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### Notes

1. There are a lot of analyses of this kind. They are crucial for people involved in historical education and history teaching methodology. In the Polish context, we can mention the work of Teresa Maresz, who carefully analyses what events are presented in Polish, Russian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian textbooks, what events are absent, and how this changes over time (Maresz, 2016, p. 2017). However, our text does not deal with the issue of teaching history or presenting historians' findings in textbooks.
2. We start our analysis with the gaining independence of both countries after the First World War, because in both countries this is presented as the beginning of the 'contemporary statehood'.
3. <https://www.emokykla.lt/bendrasis/vadoveliai/vadoveliu-duomenu-baze> [accessed: 27.03.2023].
4. It is also important to note that the curriculum is currently undergoing revision and it is possible that the lists of recommended textbooks will be revised and new ones will be written in the coming academic years.
5. In the list of references, we mention only textbooks from which citations are presented in our paper. A full list of all approved textbooks can be found on the Web site of the Polish Ministry of Education and Sciences: <https://www.podreczniki.men.gov.pl/> (accessed: 10.10.2023) We analysed all of them. A full list of Lithuanian textbooks can be found at [https://www.emokykla.](https://www.emokykla.lt/bendrasis/vadoveliai/vadoveliu-duomenu-baze)

[lt/bendrasis/vadoveliai/vadoveliu-duomenu-baze](https://www.emokykla.lt/bendrasis/vadoveliai/vadoveliu-duomenu-baze) [accessed: 27.03.2023]. We analysed all of the textbooks that were valid for the 2022/2023 school year. After the end of the school year, the database presented exclusively the new textbooks approved since the beginning of the 2023/2024 school year.

6. Łuczewski (2017: 26–29) introduces a division into traumatised and heroic victims (who are mainly fighters such as soldiers or insurgents). However, this division can also be problematic, because traumatised victims can be perceived as heroes, too.

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