

Commission of Historians warns against the destruction of Ukrainian archives

The German-Ukrainian Historians' Commission warns that valuable archival holdings and cultural assets of Ukraine are being destroyed in the course of the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine. This is part of a targeted Russian policy to destroy Ukraine's historical cultural heritage.

The Branch state archive of the Ukrainian Security Service in Chernihiv and its collection have been completely destroyed by Russian attacks these days. Other Ukrainian archives, e.g. in Kharkiv, have been damaged in attacks. The exact extent of the destruction is still unknown. There are also indications that archival holdings of the former secret service archive in Donetsk and Luhansk were transported to Russia after 2014.

The former Ukrainian secret service archives were opened for historical research in 2015 and have since been used by Ukrainian and international researchers. Among other things, the archive documents enable new research perspectives on the communist repressions as well as on German occupation crimes in Ukraine during the Second World War, including questions of collaboration. These materials still remain under lock and key in Russian archives.

In the name of a supposed "denazification", Russian troops are thus destroying valuable evidence of National Socialist crimes in Ukraine, which also provided important new impulses for Ukrainian and German research into National Socialism in recent years.

Numerous other Ukrainian cultural assets have already fallen victim to the Russian policy of destruction, including churches, museums, libraries and Holocaust memorials.

In addition, Putin's Russia is trying to destroy Ukraine's historical memory by destroying Ukrainian historical literature, including history textbooks. Back in 2014, pro-Russian forces burned Ukrainian school history textbooks in Crimea, Kharkiv, and other places. In 2022, representatives of the Putin regime (First Deputy Chairman of the Federation Council Andrey Turchak, Chairman of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation Alexander Bastrykin, etc.) stated the need to confiscate Ukrainian textbooks. According to these guidelines, confiscations of Ukrainian historical and fiction literature, which does not coincide with the postulates of Kremlin propaganda, have started in the libraries of the temporarily occupied territories of Luhansk, Donetsk, Chernihiv and Sumy regions.

Behind the destruction of archival collections and Ukrainian history books is a Russian policy that tries to forcefully assert its claim to interpretative sovereignty over the history of Ukraine. We strongly condemn this policy and warn of the disastrous consequences for Ukraine's historical and cultural heritage.