

The Invasion of Ukraine and the archives

Gustau Castañer, ICA-SAHR/ASF

On 24 February, after months of increasing tension, the military forces of the Russian Federation invaded Ukraine. President Putin spoke about a “special military operation” with the purpose of “disarming and de-nazifying” Ukraine. When writing these lines, 20 days later, the plans for a quick Russian victory have been upset by a ferocious Ukrainian resistance that has unleashed tactics increasingly more brutal by the Russian army. Civil population is another target in this war and the archives are no exception in this conflict.

You will find below a summary of news presented in chronological manner so that you can follow the situation, a task not always easy in an armed conflict.

In my opinion you will find one the best coverages of the military aspects of the conflict in the Twitter account of Jomini of the West

@JominiW

<https://twitter.com/jominiw/status/1505385093485015041?s=12>

27 February

Destruction of the Cherhihiv archives (see Washington post article of 14 March for details)

<https://twitter.com/incunabula/status/1498273747782049804?s=12>

Here Gregory Aimaro-Parmut, from Indiana University, speaks about his experiences conducting research at these archives:

<https://networks.h-net.org/node/4555727/blog/khroniky/6119067/post-soviet-dichotomy-western-researchers-experiences-security>

6 March

The Scotsman

Lost for words: protecting libraries and archives in Ukraine

Nick Poole @NickPoole1 , Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (<https://www.cilip.org.uk/>)

<https://www.scotsman.com/news/opinion/lost-for-words-protecting-libraries-and-archives-in-ukraine-nick-poole-3595915>

“It may seem odd to speak about libraries, archives and databases in the midst of a war. But we have seen enough of conflict around the world to know that the first resort of tyrants is often to bomb the archives and shell the libraries. You disrupt and destabilise a people by disrupting their sense of self – their language, their literature, their culture...

When it comes time to recover and rebuild, people often turn to the library as a place of trust, truth, peace and even reconciliation. The process of recovery post-conflict depends on the restoration of basic systems – births, marriages, deaths, bank accounts – which themselves depend completely on the integrity of the public record.”

7 March

Archivists Without Borders International. Manifesto supporting the Ukrainian people

“In view of the escalating violence caused by the armed aggression against Ukraine, Archivists without Borders International expresses its solidarity with the Ukrainian people and in particular with the professionals in charge of information and archive management, as well as its deep concern for the fate of archives, both public and private, now threatened with destruction.

The preservation and use of the documentary heritage stored in a country's archives ensures respect for citizens' rights, control of the administration and support for research. Archives are also the basis for economic, social, scientific and technological development, as well as for the promotion of culture, the reconstruction of memory and national identity. Finally, they are an essential tool for the protection of individual and collective human rights and for supporting the fight against the violation of these rights.

For these reasons, documentary repositories represent a prioritized target in the context of this armed conflict.

AsF international, together with its international partners, will closely follow the evolution of the situation and offer its professional and technical support as the situation allows.”

9 de març

The Guardian

“Ukrainians in race to save cultural heritage

Many believe destruction of cultural assets is part of Kremlin strategy to ‘erase’ Ukraine as independent sovereign state”

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/09/ukrainians-in-race-to-save-a-nations-cultural-heritage>

The article mentions the SUCHO (Saving Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Online) initiative: <https://www.sucho.org/> . They present themselves as “a group of cultural heritage professionals – librarians, archivists, researchers, programmers – working together to identify and archive at-risk sites, digital content, and data in Ukrainian cultural heritage institutions while the country is under attack”.

Here you can find an interview to Quinn Dombrowski (<https://library.stanford.edu/people/qad>), from Stanford University, where she speaks about this project: <https://www.marketplace.org/shows/marketplace-tech/digital-archivists-race-to-preserve-ukrainian-heritage/>

10 March

Resolution of the International Council on Archives

“EB MEETING 2022-03-10

RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF UKRAINE

1. The International Council on Archives (ICA), through a majority vote among the members of its

Executive Board, and:

a) in the light of the armed aggression launched against Ukraine, including its people, both military and civilian, its government, its cities and infrastructure, and its irreplaceable documentary and cultural heritage, by the government of the Russian Federation with the support of the Republic of Belarus,

b) in support of the people of Ukraine, its legitimately and democratically elected government, and its professional communities and institutions involved in information, records and archives management now at risk of destruction,

c) consistent with the principles and values upheld by the ICA that support the rule of law, care of the world’s archival heritage and the protection of all personnel dedicated to the stewardship of irreplaceable documentary heritage, has decided to suspend its relations with the four Russian and Belarusian public archival institutions that are members of the ICA:

RUSSIAN FEDERATION:

- Russian Federal Archival Agency*
- Committee on Archives by the Government of Udmurt Republic*
- State Committee on Archives of the Republic of Tatarstan*

REPUBLIC OF BELARUS:

- Department for Archives and Records Management of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus

2. Suspension of relations means that all formal contacts between these institutions and their employees with the ICA, its entities (expert groups, sections, branches) and authorities (Fund for the International Development of Archives, Programme Commission, Forum of National Archivists, Forum of Professional Associations, Executive Board, General Assembly) and all participation in ICA's activities and events (conferences, congresses, International Archives Week, and similar activities) shall be halted until such time as a ceasefire has been negotiated to the satisfaction of the legitimate government of Ukraine and ensuring the safety and sovereignty of the individuals and institutions that protect the cultural heritage of Ukraine.

3. The ICA, its entities, authorities and members are called upon to implement this decision of the ICA Executive Board with immediate effect.

4. The ICA strongly appeals to the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Belarus to stop this armed aggression, urging them to respect and protect the professional communities and institutions involved in information, records and archives management, who are the guardians of the memory of Ukraine, but also of the records and archives testifying to the identity, rights, and responsibilities of its people and its legitimately and democratically elected government.

**RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON ARCHIVES (ICA)
EXECUTIVE BOARD**

10 MARCH 2022"

14 March**Washington Post**

"Putin's assault also targets Ukraine's history

It is not only the country that faces erasure"

https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2022/03/14/putins-assault-also-targets-ukraines-history/?utm_campaign=wp_main&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter

Alexandra Sukalo @AlexandraSukalo is a historian of Russia and Eastern Europe and a postdoctoral fellow at the Clements Center for National Security at the University of Texas at

Austin. Her current book project is a history of the Soviet political police under Lenin and Stalin in the Soviet Union's western republics.

“On Feb. 27 in Chernihiv oblast, Russian shelling severely damaged the regional headquarters of the Security Service of Ukraine, or Sluzhba Bezpeky Ukrainy (SBU), which houses important archival materials including documentation of Nazi atrocities in Ukraine. If Putin succeeds in destroying or removing critical records like those in the SBU archive, it could erase Ukrainians' distinct experiences and buttress Putin's view of history, in which, among many other things, he sees Ukrainians and Russians as one people...

On Dec. 28, Putin went one step further in his assault on history when Moscow's Supreme Court ordered the closure of Memorial International, Russia's oldest civil rights group, which studies Soviet political repressions and crimes. In his remarks to the court, prosecutor Alexei Zhafyarov charged the organization with creating “a false image of the U.S.S.R. as a terrorist state by speculating on the topic of political repression in the 20th century.” After this ruling, historians writing about Soviet atrocities have become persona non grata in Putin's Russia.

Any criticism of powerful actors — even those in the past — is seen as a challenge to Putin's own power. As a result, historians seeking to retain access to Russia's archives may have to modulate their findings if they run counter to Putin's narrative or accept that they may no longer be able to conduct research in Russia.

The Ukrainian government has directly challenged Putin's war on history. In an effort to promote transparency, the Ukrainian parliament passed a law in April 2015 throwing open the doors of the country's Soviet-era political police archives to researchers around the world. Until Russia's invasion of Ukraine, researchers at the Haluzevyi derzhavnyi arkhiv Sluzhba Bezpeky Ukrainy housed in the SBU headquarters in Kyiv, had access to records of criminal tribunals and interrogations as well as the personnel files of the Soviet political police officers working in Ukraine. This is just one of the many critical archives that Putin could destroy to pervert understandings of the past and history itself.

It is not only Ukraine that faces erasure — it is also Ukraine's history. The very existence of archives like the SBU poses a direct threat to Putin. It is impossible to imagine a scenario in which he would allow these crucial files to remain in Ukraine. As the world realizes that Putin's objectives are grandiose, it becomes clearer that he will not be satisfied only by “demilitarizing” Ukraine. He will also seek to erase Ukraine's separate and distinct history from the archival record.”

The excellent article of Alexandra Sukalo mentions the archives of International Memorial. Here is the statement by the International Council of Archives on this matter:

“The International Council on Archives (ICA), the world body representing archivists and archival institutions, expresses its deep concern for the future of the Archives, Library and Museum of International Memorial. Since it was founded over 30 years ago as a nongovernmental

organization dedicated to preserving the memory of Soviet-era political repressions, International Memorial has grown into an archives, library and museum of world importance.

Memorial's Archives contains more than 60,000 files on persons who were repressed during the Soviet period, as well as files on dissidents, photos and videos, and oral histories. From these files, Memorial has developed various databases, of which the list of victims of political repression and the list of NKVD staff in the 1930s are notable. The archival materials are open to researchers unless the person transferring the documents to Memorial has specified that they be restricted from public use. The Archives provides assistance to people searching for information about repressed relatives.

Memorial's Library contains more than 40,000 books and brochures in Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, English, German, French, Italian, Polish and Czech, which are also available for public use.

Memorial also has a Museum, where it exhibits objects of camp life that have been transferred to Memorial by former prisoners or their relatives and works of art created by prisoners of the Gulag. In addition to exhibitions in its main museum space, Memorial also organizes travelling exhibitions.

Given that background, ICA is deeply troubled by the decision of Russia's Supreme Court on 28 December 2021 to order the closure of International Memorial. ICA urges the Government of Russia to protect the archives and enable uninterrupted access to them.

The Universal Declaration on Archives, adopted by both ICA and UNESCO, states, "Open access to archives enriches our knowledge of human society, promotes democracy, protects citizens' rights and enhances the quality of life." ICA strongly believes that the uniquely valuable holdings of International Memorial—archival, bibliographic, and museum artifacts—should be protected and the records made continuously available as a tool to ensure that history of the past is preserved with dignity and accuracy.

Paris

March 2022"

15 March

The Guardian

Ukrainian heritage is under threat – and so is the truth about Soviet-era Russia

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/15/ukrainian-heritage-under-threat-truth-soviet-era-russia>

Anna Reid (<https://www.rcwlitagency.com/authors/reid-anna/>) is a historian and author of the book "Borderland: a Journey through the History of Ukraine".

"Also at risk are Ukraine's archives. Since Putin began closing the Russian ones to all but approved researchers, Ukraine's records have become a way into the Soviet period for historians not only of Ukraine, but the whole Soviet Union. Their closure is a blow to scholars round the world. Daria Mattingly, a leading historian of Stalin's 1932-3 artificial famine, fears "archivocide". Russian occupiers "might destroy everything that doesn't fit into their narrative ... That would be catastrophic; it would be the erasing of Ukrainian identity."

In Kyiv and elsewhere, archive staff are working round the clock to scan documents and to move digitised material on to servers abroad. For some it is already too late. The building that houses the Chernihiv province's KGB records lost its roof to shelling a few days ago; it's not yet clear how much was lost."

19 March

The Economist

Vladimir Putin's war endangers Ukraine's cultural heritage

The loss of museums, exquisite architecture and valuable archives is awful to contemplate

<https://www.economist.com/culture/2022/03/19/vladimir-putins-war-endangers-ukraines-cultural-heritage>

Another threat to Ukraine's heritage is the potential loss of archives and libraries. Over the past 15 years or so, Russia has closed its most sensitive archives to all but a small coterie of approved researchers. Ukraine's institutions, by contrast, were open, making it a centre for the study not only of Ukrainian history but of that of the whole Soviet Union. Not knowing when or if they will be accessible again is a blow to scholars worldwide. The even bigger fear is that Russian occupiers will destroy archives or purge them of material that does not fit Mr Putin's view of the world. In the words of the Kharkiv architectural historian: "They want to deconstruct not just buildings, not just infrastructure, not just the Ukrainian state. They want to deconstruct us, the Ukrainian people."