

Yushchenko's Fascist: The Bandera Cult in Ukraine and Canada*

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Abstract: Viktor Yushchenko's 2010 designation of Stepan Bandera, the war-time leader of the most radical and violent branch of the Ukrainian far right, as a national hero constituted, in many ways, the climax of the third post-Soviet Ukrainian president's instrumentalization of history. Yushchenko's political use of history triggered sharply polarized, and often emotional discussions of Bandera's role in history, not only in Ukraine, but also in Canada, the United States, Poland, and Israel. This article analyzes the "Bandera debate" against the backdrop of the significant advances in the historiography of war-time Ukrainian nationalism since the openings of archives in recent decades.

Introduction

Having suffered a humiliating defeat in the first round of the 2010 Ukrainian presidential elections, the outgoing president Viktor Yushchenko on 28 January 2010 took the step of posthumously designating the wartime leader of the most radical wing of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists—also known as the OUN(b)—Stepan Bandera, as "Hero of Ukraine," the highest honor of the Ukrainian state. This controversial decision, some observers suggested, was aimed at mobilizing pro-Yanukovych voters in the east and south of the country against the "Orange" candidate Yulia Tymoshenko.¹ Yushchenko and Tymoshenko, former allies during

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