

Sane, and Called Insane: Psychiatric Repression and the Ukrainian Human Rights Movement

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we examine the use of punitive medicine against dissidents in the USSR in 1970–1980, particularly in the Ukrainian context, where fighters for human rights and opponents of the regime became some of the main targets of repression. While the Helsinki Accords opened space for human rights advocacy, the Soviet Union responded with systematic repression, imprisonment, and terror, using psychiatric institutions as instruments of control and intimidation. Through examination of three case studies: Pyotr Grigorenko, Leonid Plyushch, and Mykola Plakhtniuk, the paper highlights quotes from biographies, records, and reports about their stays in hospitals to better illustrate what they went through. Drawing on samizdat sources, international reports, and diaspora activism, the study shows how punitive medicine became widely recognized as a violation of human rights, sparking global condemnation through organizations such as Amnesty International and drawing criticism conferences in Belgrade (1977) and Madrid (1980). By showing the international reaction, we aimed to observe the dual role of dissidents and transnational advocacy networks in challenging Soviet repression and shaping the broader human rights discourse of the late Cold War.

PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIS PAPER

The political abuse of psychiatry in the USSR has been documented since the early 1970s, first by people who lived through it and then by Western clinicians and historians. Zhores and Roy Medvedev's *A Question of Madness* (1971) recounts Zhores Medvedev's own forced confinement in a psychiatric hospital, and Alexander Podrabinek's *Punitive Medicine*, published in English in 1980, collects case histories of dissidents held in such hospitals.¹² Sidney Bloch and Peter Reddaway's *Russia's Political Hospitals* (1977) was a pioneering Western study of how psychiatric diagnoses were turned against

¹ Zhores A. Medvedev and Roy A. Medvedev, *A Question of Madness*, trans. Ellen de Kadt (London: Macmillan, 1971).

² Alexander Podrabinek, *Punitive Medicine*, trans. Alexander Lehrman (Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma, 1980).

political dissenters.³⁴ More recently, Robert van Voren, who took part in the campaign against Soviet psychiatric abuse, has examined the struggle against the All-Union Society of Neuropathologists and Psychiatrists and the tensions it caused inside the World Psychiatric Association, and has summarized the wider history of the practice.⁵ Together, these works establish that the misuse of psychiatry was systematic rather than accidental, and this paper relies on them for that premise.

A second body of scholarship places dissent within the diplomatic history of détente and the Helsinki process. Daniel Thomas argues that the human rights norms of the Helsinki Final Act empowered opposition movements in the Soviet bloc and contributed to the fall of communism.⁶ Sarah Snyder shows how diplomats and activists, working at the negotiating table and from below, turned the Helsinki process into a framework for monitoring human rights. Barbara Martin examines how Andrei Sakharov and Roy Medvedev disagreed over whether linking détente to human rights would help or harm dissidents.⁷ Benjamin Nathans's 2024 history of the Soviet dissident movement, which won the 2025 Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction, offers a comprehensive account of the movement and discusses the state's pathologizing of dissent.⁸ Rebecca Reich's *State of Madness* turns to the dissidents' own responses, examining how dissidents writing in Russian, such as Aleksandr Vol'pin, Vladimir Bukovsky, Semyon Gluzman, Joseph Brodsky, and Andrei Siniavsky, answered psychiatric diagnoses in law and literature.⁹

Ukraine appears in this literature mainly as one setting among many. The *Encyclopedia of Ukraine* identifies the special psychiatric hospital in Dnipropetrovsk and lists more than forty Ukrainians subjected to involuntary psychiatric treatment, including Plyushch and Grigorenko, but, to our knowledge, few studies build on such lists to examine the Ukrainian cases in their own right.¹⁰ This paper addresses three gaps. First, it treats the Ukrainian cases as a subject in their own right. Plakhotniuk's case reveals a dimension of psychiatric repression that is specific to the Ukrainian setting: insisting on speaking Ukrainian could itself be recorded as a symptom, and the Dnipropetrovsk hospital required patients to use Russian. Second, it connects individual experience to international response. Studies of the Helsinki

³ Sidney Bloch and Peter Reddaway, *Russia's Political Hospitals: The Abuse of Psychiatry in the Soviet Union* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1977).

⁴ Robert van Voren, "Political Abuse of Psychiatry—An Historical Overview," *Schizophrenia Bulletin* 36, no. 1 (2010): 33–35, <https://doi.org/10.1093/schbul/sbp119>.

⁵ Robert van Voren, *Cold War in Psychiatry: Human Factors, Secret Actors* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010).

⁶ Daniel C. Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁷ Barbara Martin, "The Sakharov-Medvedev Debate on Détente and Human Rights: From the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the Helsinki Accords," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 23, no. 3 (Summer 2021): 138–74, https://doi.org/10.1162/jcws_a_01009.

⁸ Benjamin Nathans, *To the Success of Our Hopeless Cause: The Many Lives of the Soviet Dissident Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2024).

⁹ Rebecca Reich, *State of Madness: Psychiatry, Literature, and Dissent after Stalin* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2018).

¹⁰ Paul Dzul, "Psychiatric Hospitals, Special," in *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, vol. 4 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), <https://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CP%5CS%5CPsychiatrichospitalsspecial.htm>.

network trace diplomacy and organizations, and studies of psychiatric abuse trace professional politics or literary strategy, but fewer follow a single prisoner's testimony from the hospital ward through the *Chronicle of Current Events*, Amnesty International, *Index on Censorship*, the World Psychiatric Association, and the Belgrade and Madrid meetings. Third, it reads memoirs and interviews alongside the security services' own paperwork. In 2015 a Ukrainian law opened the archives of Soviet repressive bodies to public access, and the case file of Plakhotniuk, which records his refusal to speak Russian in the section on his mental state, can now be compared with his memoirs and with Gluzman's account.¹¹ The paper does not offer a complete history of psychiatric repression in Ukraine; it uses three well-documented cases to show how that repression worked and how it became visible to the outside world.

BACKGROUND

During the détente of the 1970s, the global political and human rights situation was shaped by a mix of cooperation between superpowers, ongoing authoritarian rule, and a growing focus on human rights. Détente helped reduce Cold War tensions, but it also made human rights a major topic in world politics, leading to new activism and international discussions.

The political situation was quite complex, as the period of détente between the major superpowers, intended to calm the rising tensions between the US and USSR, was fragile and often marked by ideological differences, especially regarding internal governance and rights. Many countries, both in the Eastern Bloc and the Global South, remained under authoritarian rule.

Thus, intellectuals in countries suppressed by authoritarian regimes saw détente as a chance to push for change and fight for human rights. This eventually led to a “breakthrough” for human rights, with increased attention from governments, NGOs, and international organizations becoming a logical step in resisting repressive regimes.

A major turning point in the human rights movement, especially within the USSR, was the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). Although it was not a binding treaty, the conference recognized the postwar boundaries of Europe and created a framework for reducing political and military tensions between East and West, while also aiming to improve human rights in the Communist Bloc.

The CSCE process had three main phases: the first was the Meeting of Foreign Ministers held at Dipoli in Espoo in 1973; the second was a series of negotiations in Geneva from 1973 to 1975; and the third was

¹¹ "Parliament Opens Access to Archives of Communist Regime," Centre for Democracy and Rule of Law (CEDEM), accessed September 20, 2026, <https://cedem.org.ua/en/news/parliament-opens-access-to-archives-of-communist-regime/> (reporting the Law of Ukraine of April 9, 2015, "On Access to the Archives of Repressive Bodies of the Communist Totalitarian Regime of 1917–1991").

the Helsinki Summit in 1975. The final document, known as the Helsinki Agreement, was signed on August 1, 1975, in Helsinki, Finland, by 33 European countries along with the United States and Canada.

In practice, the first two phases fixed the map and the mechanism; the third - Helsinki's Final Act - opened the door to test whether signatures would restrain a state's treatment of its own citizens.¹²

The Helsinki Final Act was divided into four "baskets" each covering different areas of cooperation and responsibility. The first basket included ten principles covering political and military issues, territorial integrity, the definition of borders, peaceful settlement of disputes and the implementation of confidence building measures between opposing militaries. The second basket focused on economic issues like trade and scientific cooperation. The third basket emphasized human rights, including freedom of emigration and reunification of families divided by international borders, cultural exchanges and freedom of the press. Finally, the fourth basket formalized the details for follow-up meetings and implementation procedures. In the USSR territory the third basket became the primary focus of USSR dissidents, as this fundamental principle has always been a sore subject, and the success of the other baskets depended on its effective regulation and implementation. The third basket of the Helsinki Accords included explicit commitments to respect human rights, such as freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and movement. These were rights routinely violated in the USSR, making them a focal point for dissident activism. Besides, the majority of the dissident movement were the so called *shistdesyatnyky* (sixtiers). It was the generation of Ukrainian artists, poets, writers and public figures who worked in the relatively calm period of the "Khrushchev thaw", but were suppressed after the first wave of repression in 1965.

The USSR became one of the members who signed the Act in 1975, despite the Soviet Union concentrating on consolidating post-World War II borders. The Act became a powerful tool for local activists and dissidents. Even though Soviet leadership emphasized the first basket of the Helsinki Accords, the principle was the inviolability of frontiers, territorial integrity, and non-intervention in internal affairs. The Third basket of Helsinki Accords "on promoting human rights, fundamental freedoms, and humanitarian contacts" motivated soviet dissidents and activists for fighting for human rights. Besides, the majority of the dissident movement were the so-called *shistdesyatnyky* (sixtiers)¹³, those, the generation of Ukrainian artists, poets, writers, and public figures who worked in a pretty calm period in the period of the "Khrushchev thaw", but were suppressed after the first wave of repression in 1965.

¹² OSCE: Helsinki Final Act (official) — <https://www.osce.org/helsinki-final-act>

¹³ The *Shestydesyatniki*, or *Shestydesyatniki*, is the name given to a generation of Soviet and Ukrainian intellectuals with a strong civic stance who entered the culture (art, literature, etc.) and politics of the USSR in the second half of the 1950s — a period of temporary relaxation of communist totalitarianism and Khrushchev's "thaw" and most fully manifested itself creatively in the early and mid-1960s (hence the name). The *Shistdesiatnyky* were an internal moral opposition to the Soviet totalitarian state regime, among them were political prisoners and "prisoners of conscience," dissidents.

To follow the progress of the USSR in implementing the human rights protections established in the Act, human rights activists set up Helsinki Monitoring Groups in the Soviet Union and across Europe. These groups tracked violations of the Act and drew international attention to human rights violations.

In November 1976, a group of Ukrainian intellectuals, writers, and former political prisoners, including figures like Mykola Rudenko, Oleksiy Tykhy, and others, officially announced the creation of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group. Their goal was to monitor Soviet compliance with the Helsinki Accords, document abuses, and inform the international community. The Ukrainian Helsinki Group, during the years of its existence, had 41 members. Even though it did not have a massive number of members, it made a significant impact on the dissident movement and awareness about human rights and the Helsinki Act among citizens of the USSR and other Soviet republics that tried to work side by side.

For sure, the USSR's authoritarian regime could not allow "Western" organizations to encroach on the system of control that had been established over so many years. The actions of the dissidents and the Helsinki Group itself were seen as a direct threat to the state's control over society. Therefore, the Soviet authorities resorted to their usual methods of solving the "problem," and used various ways to suppress the activities of human rights movements.

Thus, in 1972–1973, there was a massive wave of arrests, searches, and interrogations of dissidents. It is called the second great wave of arrests, after the arrests of the Sixties in 1965. However, neither in 1965 nor in 1972 did this stop the human rights movement. Instead, it forced the Soviet Union to come up with even more inhuman methods of repression. The USSR used a wide range of harsh and systematic methods to persecute, surveil, and torture dissidents who fought for human rights. These methods included constant surveillance, psychological pressure, defamation, forced confessions, imprisonment, and the use of punitive psychiatry. The goal was to silence dissent, discredit activists, deter others from joining the movement, and eventually break their own faith in changing the regime.¹⁴

When prosecutions risked publicity, psychiatry offered a quieter weapon: a diagnosis that erased a defendant and made dissent look like disease.¹⁵

For that goal, to change the mind and break the person inside, the Soviet regime used a new way of torture - punitive medicine. Punitive psychiatry in the USSR emerged as a systematic practice in the late 1950s and became a widespread tool of repression by the 1970s, targeting political and religious dissidents under the guise of medical treatment. It is believed that this method can be called one of the worst, as the outcomes and changes in both the mental and physical health of a human was almost unjust.

To illustrate the widespread use and diverse methods of punitive medicine against dissidents, we present three personal accounts of individuals who, for advocating human rights and supporting the

¹⁴ The Sakharov-Medvedev Debate on Détente and Human Rights: From the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the Helsinki - Barbara Martin

¹⁵ The Ukrainian Weekly (1982) and dissident histories on 1972 crackdown —
https://archive.ukrweekly.com/wp-content/uploads/The_Ukrainian_Weekly_1982-05.pdf

implementation of the Helsinki Accords in Ukraine, as well as for their nationalist views, were confined to special psychiatric hospitals. The individuals whose personal narratives were examined included General Petro Hryhorenko, a general of society Army, who became a human rights dissident and a member of Moscow Helsinki Group; Leonid Plyushch, a profound mathematician; and Mykola Plakhotnyuk, a teacher, philologist.

CASE STUDIES

Since the Belgrade CSCE Review Conference in 1977, numerous authoritative sources, both inside and outside the Soviet Union, confirmed that the U.S.S.R. systematically used psychiatry as an instrument of political repression. State officials continued to confine citizens to psychiatric hospitals for political, rather than medical, reasons; hundreds of nationalists, human-rights activists, would-be emigrants, religious believers, and workers' rights advocates were victims of the political misuse of psychiatry. Developments at the time indicated that the regime had intensified its campaign to punish individuals in the Soviet Union who spoke out against psychiatric repression.

Officially, the Soviet authorities explained the situation through constitutional laws. Article 58-10 of the Stalin-era Criminal Code, "Anti-Soviet agitation", was to a considerable degree preserved in the new 1958 Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic Criminal Code as Article 70, "Anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda". In 1967, a weaker law, Article 190-1, "Dissemination of fabrications known to be false, which defame the Soviet political and social system", was added to the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic Criminal Code. According to these codes, officials showed "justice" by sending inconvenient individuals to mental institutions, to "treat" them so they would love the regime.

For that reason, many new hospitals needed to be opened, because such a large number of those who were accused could not be placed elsewhere. In 2005, referring to the Archives of the CPSU Central Committee and the records of the three Special Psychiatric Hospitals, Sychyovskaya, Leningrad, and Chernyakhovsk, to which human rights activists gained access in 1991, Prokopenko concluded that psychiatry had been used as a punitive measure against about 20,000 people for purely political reasons. This was only a small part of the total picture, Prokopenko said. The data on the total number of people who had been held in all sixteen prison hospitals and in the 1,500 "open" psychiatric hospitals remains unknown because parts of the archives of the prison psychiatric hospitals and hospitals in general are still classified and inaccessible.

The main target of the regime, which wanted to completely control even the minds of the opposition and reduce it to a minimum, was highly educated social groups who stood out and did not align with the regime. In this way, political and human rights activists, as well as religious figures, were the main groups who suffered from punitive medicine.

It is evident that the members of the Helsinki Group endured significant hardship, and a considerable number of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group members were subjected to punitive medical "prison". In order

to gain a more profound understanding of the experiences of human rights activists during their time in these institutions, a comprehensive review of three case studies, personal recollections, and the accounts of members of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group was conducted.

The first case study refers to the one of the most important Crimean Tatar human rights activists, Petro grygorenko. Being a member of the Moscow Helsinki group, he questioned the human rights of his nation, as well as stood up for the minorities in USSR, such as Ukraine. His figure became as one of the most mentioned one, while talking about punitive medicine in USSR.

Case Study 1: Petro Grigorenko

Petro Grigorenko was a paramount figure in the history of Crimean Tatars and also became the most famous victim of punitive medicine. Two completely different periods can be clearly seen in the biography of Petro Grigorenko's life. At first, he was a Soviet general who fought in World War II and firmly believed in the ideals of the party, but later became a staunch opponent of the Soviet regime. He became one of the most well-known human rights activists, defending the rights of the Crimean Tatars, helping to establish Helsinki groups across the USSR, and speaking internationally against repression of dissidents.

During the war, he rose quickly through the military ranks and eventually became a general. After the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, he had concluded that the Soviet system was incompatible with the ideals of Leninism. Since then, he started questioning the regime and stood up at protests against it. In 1964, Grigorenko was arrested. However, his military record made a public trial politically risky, so he was declared insane and sent for compulsory treatment for two years. After his release, he was stripped of his ranks and worked various jobs such as loader, guard, and tour guide.

In May 1969, Grigorenko was arrested again and once more placed in a psychiatric hospital. This time, a wave of international protest arose in his defence. In 1971, Kyiv psychiatrist Semyon Gluzman, using medical records sent to him, proved that Hryhorenko was completely healthy. Under pressure, the authorities released him in 1974.

In 1976, Grigorenko became one of the founders of the Moscow Helsinki Group. A few months later, the creation of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group was announced at his Moscow apartment.

In 1977, Grigorenko was forced to go to the United States for medical treatment. Soon after, he was deprived of Soviet citizenship. In exile, he worked tirelessly to expose human rights abuses in the Soviet Union. Thanks to his efforts, the tragedy of the Crimean Tatars gained wide international attention.

More information about his time in the mental hospital was found in his autobiographical book "Memories", where he described his staying here. Generally, his stay at the clinic, compared to most cases, was not that dreadful. Being a public figure, the extreme tortures and conditions that were applied

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to other prisoners were not inflicted on him. He suggested that his stay and public status actually helped many other “patients,” as the conditions became less severe after his arrival, they told him: “You could not imagine what it was like before you came” or “It will go back to how it was after you leave,” supporting the clue.¹⁶

But calling his stay a normal one is impossible. Even though he was a well-known figure, he was still a “patient” of the Soviet regime. That refers and summarises Grigorenko's statement: “The conditions in a lunatic asylum, the total absence of civil rights and the lack of any real hope of release, represent the most important and most horrifying circumstances encountered by anybody interned in an SPH.”¹⁷

Additionally Grihorenko reports the initial motive of placing intellectuals to the hospitals, referring to the clue that it was to destroy the anti-Soviet thinking of them. He said:

“Intellectually gifted people in all special psychiatric hospitals are deprived of the opportunity to engage in mental work. Not only was I denied paper, pens, and pencils, but I was also not allowed to keep a half-centimetre piece of pencil lead in my cell, which I used to make barely visible marks on the pages of my own books to indicate passages of text that caught my attention”¹⁸

In his memoirs Petro Grigorenko does not focus only on himself. A large part of his book was concentrated on the violations happening to other patients of the hospital. This is how he describes what he witnessed during his stay there:

“In general, everyone's suffering is individualized. I got a slightly more humane doctor, and it's easier now. There is now some openness, which is also a relief. In the Cherniahovskaya SPB, I witnessed isolated cases of patients being beaten by orderlies and supervisory staff. There were two terrible cases of suicide. One hanged himself in a position that required him to strangle himself with his own strength. The other cut his throat with a simple (blunt) piece of iron. He apparently did not so much cut as tear his throat for a very long time.

Plyushch also tells about cases when patients took revenge on medical staff who often mistreated them. These actions showed the anger and hopelessness that grew from constant abuse:

“There was an equally terrible case of revenge. One of the ‘patients,’ who had been repeatedly beaten by orderlies, took a hammer with him when he returned from work (he was making boxes). When he arrived at the ward, he found the orderly who had constantly beaten him and struck him on the head with the hammer with all his might. I

¹⁶ Hryhorenko, Petro. *Memoirs*. Detroit: Ukrainski Visti Publishing, 1984. P. 675

¹⁷ Hryhorenko, *Memoirs*, 676.

¹⁸ Ibid P. 679

later learned from the doctors that the orderly survived, but left the hospital a complete idiot.”¹⁹

Luckily, mostly because of his popularity, Grigorenko was not prescribed medicine, which was not the case for the next dissident and dear friend of Petro Grigorenko - Leonid Plyushch.

Case Study 2: Leonid Plushch

Leonid Plyushch was an outstanding Ukrainian mathematician, publicist, literary scholar, and human rights activist, Samizdat author who was treated for a 'maniacal desire for freedom'. Yet coercion was not only chemical; language and identity themselves could be pathologized, which was featured in the faultline of the next case.

He was actively involved in the Ukrainian national democratic movement of the 1960s. Plyushch was a liaison between Ukrainian and Moscow human rights activists. It was he who introduced Muscovites to Ukrainian samizdat and transported samizdat books from Moscow to Kyiv, from where they were distributed throughout Ukraine. In 1969, he became a member of the Initiative Group for the Defence of Human Rights, signing the group's protest letters.

In January 1972, Plyushch was arrested on charges of 'anti-Soviet activity.' His main 'crime' was his activism and public criticism of the Soviet regime, especially his involvement in the Initiative Group. From January 1973, he was forcibly treated in a psychiatric hospital in Dnipropetrovsk with a diagnosis of 'sluggish schizophrenia.' His case had symbolic significance in protests organized in Western Europe against the use of psychiatry to persecute political opponents in the USSR.²⁰ Persistent advocacy by his wife and international protests eventually led to his release and emigration from the USSR in 1976.

The story of Leonid Plushch is probably one of the most shocking, as he went through a lot of drug treatments and tortures. In the hospital, Plyushch was kept in overcrowded and degrading conditions among severely psychotic patients. He was subjected to high doses of haloperidol, insulin, and other drugs, which led to a steady deterioration of his mental and physical health.

The same as Petro Grigorenko, being a public figure, and also due to his wife's influence in the public sphere, he was not prescribed the worst methods of treatment, as the officials were afraid of being criticized by international figures. Still, with his records, we can assume what was happening to other, not that publicly influential figures. Here is one of the memoirs telling about one of the methods used in

¹⁹ Ibid P. 675

²⁰ Plyushch, Leonid. *In the Carnival of History*. New York: Schasnist Publishing House, Prolog and Suchasnist Library, no. 141, 1980. p.308

hospitals:

“The worst punishment was considered to be sulphur. After an injection of sulphur, a person’s temperature rises to 40°C; the injection site hurts, and the person can neither walk nor lie down. Many patients, as a result of the sulphur injections, develop haemorrhoids. The doses of sulphur are gradually increased. In the twelfth ward, they usually gave a course of ten to fifteen injections. Everyone spoke with fear about the ninth ward: there the doses were larger, and the course consisted of twenty to twenty-five injections. (Plakhotnyuk was transferred to this ward so that we would not meet.) I was never given sulphur because they were afraid of my wife.”²¹

In his memories he also mentions that the pain was so unbearable, that other patients made attempts of suicide. Mostly the prescriptions of sulphur were used against those who made protests in the hospital, in what Leonid tried not to take part in. Seeing the methods of punishments against any manifestation of protest or expression of identity, he concluded: “The treatment and regime in the psychiatric hospital, as I saw from my own experience, were clearly aimed at breaking a person’s will to resist.”

Even though, he tried to be pretty cautious during his staying in hospitals, he was still prescribed with heavy drugs later of his staying:

“In the twelfth ward, I was prescribed haloperidol in small doses. In the ninth ward, I underwent two courses of insulin therapy. After each injection, the doctors would tie me to the bed, as they did not want to deal with insulin shock complications. Later, they gave me large doses of trifazine - in tablets (three tablets at a time, three times a day) and in injections. When I developed acute inflammation of the gums, I was given neither tablets nor injections.”²²

The outcomes of this treatment were severe. Haloperidol may cause dizziness, drowsiness, difficulty thinking, or problems controlling body movements, which can lead to falls, fractures, or other injuries, along with a decrease in dopamine production. Both haloperidol and trifluoperazine work by blocking central dopamine receptors, which causes apathy and a reduced interest in anything. This effect, as a major one, Plush also went through himself:

“Even though I hated swallowing the tablets, they drove away my desire to read or even think, and I quickly lost interest in political matters, then scientific ones, and eventually even in my wife and family. My memory deteriorated sharply, and my speech became short and fragmented. I developed

²¹ Plushch, *Carnival of History*, 308.

²² *Ibid* p.308

autism and misanthropy, and I spent whole days lying in bed, trying to sleep. My mind was left only with thoughts about cigarettes and bribes to the orderlies for extra food.”²³

The profound psychological effect of punitive psychiatry - to break down even the core values of individuals. Plyushch describes how medication-caused apathy and physical symptoms limited his ability to interact naturally with his family, turning visits, especially with his children, into emotionally difficult experiences. He feared that losing his sanity would, in a way, help his persecutors, and this shows how psychiatric measures were deliberately used to destroy a prisoner's morale and will to resist.

Plyushch's memoirs show that the damage caused by punitive psychiatry went far beyond his own physical and mental health. It reached into his private life, harming his ability to interact with his wife and children in a natural way:

“I didn't even want visits, which I had once so eagerly awaited, because I feared that Tanya[wife] would tell me about new arrests, and I didn't want her to see the apathy, drowsiness, and convulsions caused by haloperidol. Visits with my children were especially painful: ‘I had to force myself to smile and try to joke.’”²⁴

“The feeling of hopelessness, the inevitability of remaining in this hell, drove many healthy prisoners to think about suicide. I, too, was losing the will to live. I held on only through self-encouragement: don't get angry, don't forget, don't give up!”²⁵

In January 1976, L. Plyushch left the USSR with his family and since then has lived in France. Western psychiatrists recognized him as sane. Later in 1979, L. Plyushch wrote an autobiographical book *In the Carnivals of History*, which was reprinted in many languages in many countries of the world.

L. Plyushch became the foreign representative of the Ukrainian Helsinki group in the West. He devoted a lot of time and energy to helping friends who were languishing in Soviet torture chambers. By the end of the 70s, he had lost his illusions about the possibility of "good" socialism and became a convinced anti-communist.

Leonid Plyushch's path to the psychiatric hospital stemmed from his long-standing role as a public intellectual and critic of the regime. By contrast, Mykola Plakhotniuk's ordeal began with something seemingly modest and reasonable: a letter requesting that Ukrainian children be taught in their own language. Yet even this appeal was viewed as a threat to Soviet authority.

The reasons for their persecution were different, one punished for his connections to Moscow's human rights movement, the other for defending the dignity of Ukrainian speech, yet the outcome was the same. Both were labelled with the same damning diagnosis of “schizophrenia,” a label flexible enough to

²³ Ibid p.323

²⁴ Plyushch, *Carnival of History*, 323.

²⁵ Ibid p.323

pathologize either a “maniacal desire for freedom” or the refusal to abandon one’s mother tongue. Both of them were healthy. Both of them were standing for human rights in Ukraine.

Case Study 3: Mykola Plakhotniuk

Mykola Plakhotniuk was a Ukrainian dissident, doctor, member of the Creative Youth Club (in the 1960s), public figure, member of the Shistdesiatnyky (Sixties) movement, long-term political prisoner in Soviet concentration camps, and victim of punitive psychiatry during the Soviet era.

In 1963, after reading about the Creative Youth Club (CYC) “Suchasnyk” in a newspaper, Mykola Plakhotniuk became involved in its work.

In the summer of 1963, M. Plakhotnyuk wrote a letter to the Ministry of Higher Education of the Ukrainian SSR, in which he proposed that teaching be conducted in Ukrainian, since the institute was attended mainly by Ukrainians or those who had studied Ukrainian at school. The letter was forwarded to the rector of the medical institute, Prof. Bratus, who told M. Plakhotnyuk that it was not possible to teach in Ukrainian because there were foreigners studying at the institute who had to be taught in Russian. It was this letter that became the starting point for persecution and future imprisonment in a psychiatric hospital.

On January 12, 1972, during the mass repression of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, Mykola Plakhotnyuk was arrested. He was charged under Part I of Article 62 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR with “anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda.” In September, an examination by the Serbsky Institute in Moscow diagnosed M. Plakhotnyuk with “schizophrenia with paranoia, periodically insane.” The Kyiv Regional Court ruled to send M. Plakhotnyuk for compulsory treatment in a special psychiatric hospital in Dnipropetrovsk.²⁶

During interrogations after his arrest, he continued to defend his position, knowing that consequences might be really bad for his health. Here is what Plakhotnyuk's personal file says about his behaviour during the report: "Mental state: during the interview, the subject behaves in a remarkably relaxed manner, with a sense of self-respect. He categorically refuses to speak Russian, stating that he can only convey his thoughts and feelings in Ukrainian, and therefore insists on the presence of an interpreter during the conversation. During the conversation about the charges against him, he becomes angry and irritable, saying that he has fought and will continue to fight against injustice and the state's unfair treatment of Ukraine, repeatedly stating that Ukraine must be free and that its Russification is unacceptable."²⁷

²⁶ Criminal Case No. 60 against Mykola Hryhorovych Plakhotniuk. KGB Investigation Department under the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR. Archive No. 58098-ФП. Begun January 12, 1972 – Completed October 12, 1972. p.4

²⁷ "Criminal Case No. 60," 4.

“Witnesses note that Plakhotniuk spoke only in Ukrainian, although he had a good command of Russian, and expressed to certain individuals his dissatisfaction that education in some schools and universities of Ukraine was conducted in Russian, believing that “Russification” was taking place in Ukraine.”²⁸

These words are interesting and terrifying not only in relation to Plakhotniuk’s case, but also to the national question in the USSR, where the position on communication in one’s native language was perceived as a symptom of mental disorder. Here is how the attitude was seen from Plakhotniuk side:

“After the ward round, a Leningrad journalist, a so-called “anti-Soviet,” approached me and advised me to speak Russian, saying that otherwise they would inject you with neuroleptics.”²⁹

In regard to this matter and his personal conflict, he talked with his friend, dissident and physician Semen Guzman. He reported that the situation in Dnipropetrovsk was more challenging than in Kazan, primarily due to the requirement to use Russian in all aspects of communication, including correspondence and conversations with medical professionals, as the staff were unable to comprehend Ukrainian. This situation gave rise to personal conflicts and misunderstandings, with the same requirements being strictly enforced in Dnipropetrovsk.³⁰

However, the conditions and requirements of the hospital regime no longer allowed the use of Ukrainian. This tendency was especially strict in the Dnipropetrovsk hospital, where even letters to family had to be written in Russian, not only by the sender, but also by the addressee. Interesting fact that it mostly happened in the hospital in Ukraine. Here is what Plakhotniuk writes about language matters in Kazan hospital, where he was transferred in 1976 after Dnipropetrovsk hospital.

“In the first period of my detention in Dnipropetrovsk, I wrote letters in Russian both to my relatives and to my friends”³¹

“Valentina(wife) was asked to write letters in Russian, but she insisted and said that she would appeal. If such a conflict arose in Dnipropetrovsk, they would simply pump me full of neuroleptics.”³²

One more memory of Guzman summarizes and indicates all that was happening to Plakhotniuk and the terrific things happening in the Dnipropetrovsk in comparison to Kazan hospital:

“When we met after nine years of imprisonment, he told me that despite the not-so-pleasant stories told

²⁸ “Criminal Case No. 60,” 5.

²⁹ Plakhotniuk, Mykola. *Diahnoz: Vil’ni. Sioma seriia / Karal’na psykhiaetriia*. Suspil’ne Dnipro - Mykola Plakhotniuk about forced psychiatric treatment

³⁰ Plakhotniuk, Mykola. *Diahnoz: Vil’ni. Sioma seriia / Karal’na psykhiaetriia*. Interview with Semen Gluzman. Suspil’ne Dnipro

³¹ Mykola Plakhotniuk, “*Kolovorot: Statti, spohady, dokumenty*” (Kyiv: Smoloskyp, 2012), 506.

³² Plakhotniuk, Mykola. *Diahnoz: Vil’ni. Sioma seriia / Karal’na psykhiaetriia*. Suspil’ne Dnipro

by colleagues and doctors, those were the sweetest days after the Dnipropetrovsk hospital, even considering the abuse.”³³

Added to his personal conflict over language was his professional background as a doctor, which both helped him to resist the effects of the drugs and therapies he was given, and deepened his realization of how his own country was treating him.

Guzman says that Plakhotnyuk told him that “they were given doses of neuroleptics, the entire ward was given the same dose, regardless of the diagnosis, which made the patients lively. However, I was able to control myself, as I am a doctor and understood what was happening to me”.³⁴

After all the torture, he finally returned to normal life in 1982, although gaining access to work and finding a job was very difficult. Above all, he continued to hold his pro-Ukrainian, nationalist position. Unlike most dissidents, he was among those who chose to stay in Ukraine, even though his friends urged him to emigrate. Plakhotnyuk's story is exceptional, as this dissident distinguished himself with his unique stance on the Ukrainian language, which he managed to preserve even through torture during interrogations and in a psychiatric hospital.

INTERNATIONAL REPRESENTATION OF THE PROBLEM

The use of psychiatric institutions to suppress dissidents did not pass unnoticed by the international community. The strong connection with the diaspora and the many emigration cases among dissidents after their trials in the 1970s–1980s led to recognition of punitive medicine in the USSR at the international level. Dissidents who managed to escape tried to show as much as possible to bring attention to the problems of the dissident movement in the USSR. Their efforts were heard, and punitive medicine was highlighted across the world.

In this chapter, we will go through the most prominent publications that reported on human rights violations in the USSR, particularly in Ukraine, as well as the work of Ukrainian Helsinki representatives. We will also observe the ways information was transported, represented, and shared on a larger scale. Through these records, we will look at how violations against dissidents were perceived abroad.

Samizdat

Information leaked abroad through different methods, but the most recognisable one was *samizdat*³⁵ and

³³ Plakhotniuk, Mykola. *Diahnoz: Vil'ni. Sioma seriia / Karal'na psykhiaitriia*. Interview with Semen Gluzman. *Suspil'ne Dnipro*

³⁴ Plakhotniuk, Mykola. *Diahnoz: Vil'ni. Sioma seriia / Karal'na psykhiaitriia*. Interview with Semen Gluzman. *Suspil'ne Dnipro*

³⁵ Samizdat is self-published material. Samizdat was a system of uncensored textual production and circulation that developed in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death, and which spread in the 1970s to other Communist bloc countries, usually published by dissidents.

*tamizdat*³⁶. Most of this transmission was carried out at great risk, and some dissidents were sentenced to labour camps for assisting in samizdat, including M. Plakhotniuk.

The most profound and popular publication was the *Chronicle of Current Events*, which reported on trials, news, and incidents that occurred in the USSR. This publication became the main source of information for spreading news for the diaspora and officials abroad.

Below is a piece from the April 1971 edition of the *Chronicle*, about the sentencing of Borisov and Fainberg to a mental hospital:

“Ideological dissent is often declared to be a symptom of mental illness, and persons in perfect mental health are sentenced to compulsory treatment in prison-hospitals, where in conditions of utter lawlessness they are subjected to every conceivable outrage to compel them to renounce their beliefs. In defiance of the law, which specifies that compulsory treatment may be prescribed for a period not exceeding two years, people are kept here from two or three to thirteen or fifteen years, while political prisoners are held until such time as they renounce their beliefs. Thus persons who refuse to barter their beliefs are doomed to permanent imprisonment.

Besides this, the most refined methods of persuasion are applied, ranging from restricting the victim’s reading or placing him among patients who are seriously ill and dangerous to those around them, to prescribing neuroleptic and other drugs which act drastically on the brain and threatening to use electric shock therapy, i.e., the most calculated methods of physical torture.”³⁷

Another edition of the *Chronicle* reports on a conversation between Vladimir Bukovsky and the English professor F. A. Jenner, concerning the response in *The Times* to Bukovsky’s request that English professors examine the medical records of several dissidents who had been sentenced to mental hospitals. After studying their cases, Professor Jenner and his colleagues at the Department of Psychiatry, University of Sheffield, concluded that:

“grave doubts about the legitimacy of compulsory treatment for the six people concerned, and their indefinite detention in prison mental hospital conditions”.

The authors of the letter to the *Times* editor go on to say:

“It seems to us that the diagnoses of the six above-mentioned people were made purely in consequence of actions in which they were exercising fundamental freedoms, as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and guaranteed by the Soviet Constitution.”³⁸

³⁶ Tamizdat which was written in countries of Communist bloc, but rather was smuggled to the West and published there(“там,” “там,” meaning “there”).

³⁷ Hunger Strike: Borisov and Fainberg, April 1971 (19.3), 7 March 2016, No 19 : 30 April 1971

³⁸ International Congress of Psychiatrists, 1971 (22.3), 8 December 2015, No 22 : 10 November 1971

In Chronicle edition 50.7 (August 1978), Alexander Podrabinek's trial was reported, presenting the story of one of the most profound fighters against punitive medicine. Alexander wrote an important book in which he collected the stories of about 200 victims of special hospitals in the USSR and called it "Punitive Medicine". He was also one of the organisers of the "Working Commission to Investigate the Use of Psychiatry for Political Purposes." Unfortunately, to this day we do not have a full edition of the book, as it was destroyed by the Soviet regime.

"So now with the search and persecution of Podrabinek, the KGB demonstrates its readiness to crush people who try to publicize the facts of the torture of dissenters by the agencies of the KGB with the help of hangmen in white coats."

"The world ought to know that Alexander Podrabinek may pay with his freedom for the freedom of others. We call on all progressive organizations, and especially doctors, to defend Podrabinek."³⁹

The Chronicle of Current Events was the most systematic and courageous record of punitive psychiatry inside the USSR. By documenting individual cases, naming hospitals and doctors, and publishing appeals by relatives and dissidents, it created a body of evidence that was impossible to dismiss as rumour. Shared abroad, these reports fed into Amnesty International dossiers, the campaigns of the Working Commission on Psychiatric Abuse, and the proceedings of the World Psychiatric Association. In this way, the Chronicle not only presented the personal stories of victims but also served as the essential bridge between Soviet dissenters and the international community. Its meticulous reporting gave substance to charges of "punitive medicine" and made clear that psychiatric abuse was not isolated or accidental, but a recurring instrument of political repression.

In the next chapter, we will focus on one of the most recognized non-governmental organizations dedicated to the protection and promotion of human rights - Amnesty International. Campaigning worldwide to defend the rights of individuals and groups, it became one of the largest and most trusted sources of information about the violations occurring in the USSR.

Amnesty international

Founded in 1961 in London by Peter Benenson, its mission is to prevent and end grave abuses of rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Amnesty International also became one of the first organizations that was publishing reports on punitive medicine in the USSR. It did immense work, reviewing over 100 cases and highlighting their common features.

³⁹ D. Babich, Vyacheslav Bakhmin, Irina Kaplun, Felix Serebrov, Pyotr Grigorenko, Sophia Kalistratova "They Cover up the Traces of Crimes" (14 March 1977)

“Since August 1977 Amnesty International has learned of 110 persons who have been put in Soviet psychiatric hospitals against their will, in the absence of any evidence that they were dangerous or posed a physical threat to themselves or to others. The common feature of their forcible confinement is the direct link between their exercise of human rights and the official decision to put them in a mental hospital..... Amnesty International regards these people as prisoners of conscience.”⁴⁰

The world reacted strongly to Amnesty International's reports on the political misuse of psychiatry in the USSR. Western delegations brought up Amnesty's materials during the Helsinki negotiations with the Soviets, and governments in the US and Europe used them in discussions and human rights hearings. The World Psychiatric Association also passed a resolution condemning such abuses in 1977 as a result of the reports' intense pressure. Amnesty's reports transformed the accounts of Soviet dissidents into generally acknowledged evidence of state crimes because the organization was believed to be impartial and its reports accurate.

Index of Censorship

Another prominent publication that played a key role in revealing the truth about punitive medicine was *Index on Censorship*. The journal shared personal stories and first-hand accounts by victims. The most famous was “My Five Years in Mental Hospitals” by Viktor Feinberg, a philologist, prominent figure in the Soviet dissident movement, participant in the Red Square demonstration of August 25, 1968, and a determined fighter against punitive psychiatry.

Many authors, scientists, and academics were prompted to speak out after these texts were reprinted in prominent newspapers in the US and Europe, igniting public outrage. *Index* gave the issue an emotional impact and fostered unity in intellectual and cultural circles, whereas Amnesty's work generated professional and political pressure. Together, they ensured that Soviet punitive psychiatry was morally discredited and officially denounced throughout the world.

A real sensation was an article about Petro Grigorenko, probably the most famous victim of punitive medicine, in the *New York Times*. The article included different sides of biography of Grigorenko, including the main focus on his experience of staying in mental hospital:

“In essence, they agreed that Grigorenko’s dissent was the result not of rational conviction but, rather, of psychopathology. According to their theory of his mental illness, Grigorenko was suffering from a chronic paranoid condition that at times reached psychotic proportions and that caused him to act in ways that had brought him into conflict with Soviet law. Specifically, that illness caused in him a

⁴⁰ “Additional Cases of the Political Abuse of Psychiatry in the U.S.S.R.,” prepared by Amnesty International, September 1983

penchant for “reformism”, a need to reform society, to speak out and act out against authority and to focus himself repeatedly and obstinately on dissident themes.”⁴¹

The article included a special interview with Grigorenko and a psychologist. In one of the questions, Grigorenko once again showed his true personal strength and determination to change the regime. When asked why he decided to engage in all that (dissident organization), knowing he could be shot, he answered:

“It was because I couldn’t acquiesce to the regime. I knew that I would not achieve anything by organizing the union, that it would be discovered very soon. But I thought that that would awaken a moral feeling in other people. ... Soviet psychiatrists considered this to be the main evidence for my mental disease, the fact that I entered into this activity knowing of its futility. If American psychiatrists should have the same opinion, I would have to say, I would have to insist that they’re wrong.”⁴²

Due to Amnesty's efforts, abuse of psychiatry for political purposes was one of the agenda items of the Sixth Congress. Subjects discussed at the Sixth Congress of the World Psychiatric Association held in Hawaii in August 1977 was the abuse of psychiatry for political purposes. Its General Assembly subsequently adopted the following resolution:

“That the World Psychiatric Association take note of the abuse of psychiatry for political purposes and that it condemn those practices in all countries where they occur and call upon the professional organizations of psychiatrists in those countries to renounce and expunge those practices from their country and that the WPA implement this resolution in the first instance in reference to the extensive evidence of the systematic abuse of psychiatry for political purposes in the USSR.”⁴³

Belgrade and Madrid conferences

After signing the Final Helsinki Act in 1975, the participating States declared their resolve to continue the multilateral process initiated by the first Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. They decided to organize follow-up meetings and conferences. Eventually, four conferences were held: in Belgrade, Madrid, Vienna, and Paris. In our research, we will focus on the first two - Belgrade and Madrid, where the violation against dissidents in USSR was highlighted the most. Thanks to the work of the Helsinki monitoring groups and the spread of their documents through samizdat, the issue of punitive psychiatry in the Soviet Union entered international diplomatic discussions.

⁴¹ Reich, Walter. “Grigorenko Gets a Second Opinion: Twice Declared Mentally Ill, Twice Committed to Prison Hospitals, One of the Most Famous of the Soviet Dissidents Sought Another Psychiatric Reading on a Visit to the United States. His Re-examination Posed Unique Medical and Ethical Dilemmas.” *The New York Times*, May 13, 1979.

⁴² Reich, “*Grigorenko Gets a Second Opinion.*”

⁴³ Amnesty International, *Political Abuse of Psychiatry in the USSR: An Amnesty International Briefing* (New York: Amnesty International USA, March 1983)

Belgrade 1977

At the 1977–1978 Belgrade Review Meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), Western delegations criticized the Soviet Union for violating the Helsinki Final Act by pointing to cases of dissidents locked up in psychiatric hospitals. They used evidence from the Moscow Working Commission on the Use of Psychiatry for Political Purposes and *A Chronicle of Current Events*.

It is important to note that the Ukrainian Helsinki Group was not invited to the conference, but they did everything possible to make their voice heard. Aside from the diaspora's efforts and the documentation of reports in samizdat, they prepared 11 memorandums and appeal letters to the Helsinki Accords in order to gain the right to participate in the conference. Even though this attempt was unsuccessful, many records about punitive medicine and abuses against dissidents were still heard and taken into account during the conference.

In its "Memorandums" Nos. 4, 5 and 6, in letters to the countries that will participate in the Belgrade Forum-77, to PEN International, to the leaders of the USSR, etc., the Group to Promote wanted to call the attention of the world community to the complete lack of any guarantees in defence of Law in Ukraine and Soviet Union, even though it signed international agreements on Human Rights, which are not being implemented. Here are the elements from the letter by Petro Grigorenko to Participants of the Belgrade Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and Amnesty International, where he was bringing attention to violations happening with dissidents:

"July 1, 1977. At a closed trial Rudenko and Tykhy are convicted of "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda" and sentenced to seven and ten years of labor camps, with an additional five years' exile. The prosecutor's case is based entirely on their Helsinki-monitoring activity. Meanwhile, the preparatory meeting of the CSCE Conference opens in Belgrade.

The Ukrainian Helsinki Group sends a series of appeals asking the delegates in Belgrade for help against continuing repression."⁴⁴

Even though delegates from the Ukrainian Helsinki Group were not able to attend the conference, the recognition of some members and their public statements helped draw attention to human rights issues in the USSR. At the next conference in Madrid in 1980, these issues received even more attention, and more detailed records were delivered.

Madrid 1980

The Madrid Meeting of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) took place between November 1980 and September 1983. It was a follow-up to the Helsinki Accords of 1975, where

⁴⁴ *The Human Rights Movement in Ukraine: Documents of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group, 1976–1980* (Toronto: Smolenskyp, 1980), 22.

countries had promised to respect human rights, improve cooperation, and strengthen security in Europe. In Madrid, the delegates gathered to review how well those promises were being kept.

One of the strongest debates at Madrid was about human rights violations in the Soviet Union. Western countries, especially the United States, brought up evidence that the Soviet government was using psychiatry as a tool of punishment. Instead of treating mental illness, Soviet doctors in “special psychiatric hospitals” often locked up political dissidents, people who spoke out against the regime or tried to leave the country. Reports from the U.S. Helsinki Commission described this practice as a serious abuse of human rights, and American delegates repeated these findings at the Madrid meetings.

The head of the U.S. delegation, Ambassador Max Kampelman, also spoke powerfully about this issue:

“In the Soviet Union, psychiatry, a healing science, has been perverted into an instrument of cruel political repression. Men and women, sane and exercising their rights as human beings under the Helsinki Final Act, have been, usually without trial, brutally condemned to the grotesque world of politically controlled psychiatric institutions, where they have been silenced through drugs and violated in a manner reminiscent of the Middle Ages.”

“International Covenant on Human Rights, the USSR recognizes the right of “everyone to leave any country, including his own.” Yet we are informed that there are 35 individuals confined in psychiatric hospitals for attempting to leave the Soviet Union ‘illegally.’”⁴⁵

Delegates also noted how this practice broke international law. The Soviet Union had signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees the right of every person to leave their own country. Yet reports presented in Madrid showed that at least 35 people were being held in psychiatric hospitals simply for trying to emigrate.

CONCLUSION

By the end of the 1980s, the USSR was increasingly targeted by international officials. The tireless efforts of dissidents and advocacy groups forced the regime to confront global outrage over punitive psychiatry. By raising these cases at the Madrid Conference, Western delegations amplified the voices of dissidents and advocacy groups, pushing the regime to respond. The persistent highlighting of violations against dissidents and opposition figures at international conferences, in publications, and through speeches pressured the regime to stop suppressing everything happening inside the country. Moreover, immigration and the diaspora played a crucial role in spreading information to large audiences, which certainly could not go unnoticed.

⁴⁵ U.S. Congress, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Abuse of Psychiatry in the Soviet Union: Prepared Statement of Hon. Dante B. Fascell, a Representative in Congress from the State of Florida, and Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe*, September 20, 1983.

In the later years of the decade, under the reforms of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, the political use of psychiatry began to decline, and many imprisoned dissidents were released. Yet, the damage inflicted on individuals and families remained irreversible, leaving deep scars on Ukrainian society and the broader human rights community.

The struggles of this last generation of dissidents offer several important lessons for historians today. First, they show how far regime ideology and control could reach, penetrating even medical institutions, supporting the idea that no part of society could stay untouched by the regime's influence. Second, they reveal how the USSR, even while signing international agreements like the Helsinki Accords, found ways to bypass them, treating dissidents in hospitals as if they were being “taught to love the Motherland.” Third, they highlight the power of international NGOs, publishing houses, and diaspora networks, whose efforts helped free dissidents from psychiatric imprisonment and spread their stories from local contexts to nationally and internationally recognized platforms. Several directions for future research follow from these findings. First, the opening of Ukrainian archives of Soviet repressive bodies since 2015 makes it possible to study KGB case files and, where they survive, related medical records more systematically, which could test whether the pathologizing of Ukrainian language use seen in Plakhotniuk's case was a pattern or an exception.⁴⁶ Second, comparing the special psychiatric hospital in Dnipropetrovsk with those in Russia, such as Kazan, Leningrad, and Chernyakhovsk, would show how far conditions and rules differed between republics. Third, the sources used here are dominated by well-known men; oral histories with relatives of lesser-known patients, and with women and non-dissident patients, would show whether their experience matched that of Grigorenko, Plyushch, and Plakhotniuk. Finally, historians and medical ethicists could trace how the memory of these abuses has shaped psychiatric ethics and reform in post-Soviet Ukraine, building on the argument that documenting the abuses shaped modern understandings of professional responsibility in medicine.⁴⁷

Punitive medicine became not merely another tool of repression, but a deliberate strategy to break independent thought, forcing love not just for the Motherland but even for the regime itself, and instill fear by labeling freedom as “schizophrenia.”

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