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CAUSES OF THE FALL OF THE CENTRAL RADA AND THE ROLE OF THE UKRAINIAN PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC’S GERMAN AND AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN ALLIES IN THE 1918 COUP D’ÉTAT: CONTEMPORARY UKRAINIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

The purpose of the article is to analyze the achievements and current trends in contemporary Ukrainian historiography regarding the role of Germany and Austria-Hungary in preparing and executing the coup d’état of April 29, 1918. Furthermore, it aims to clarify the debated aspects of relations between the Central Powers and Ukrainian conservative forces on the eve of the establishment of the Hetmanate. **Methodology.** The study is based on a combination of historiographical, problem-chronological, comparative, and systemic methods. These methodological approaches make it possible to identify and systematize the principal scholarly interpretations of the external and internal factors that shaped the preparation and implementation of the Hetman coup of 1918. **Scientific Novelty.** The scientific novelty lies in a comprehensive synthesis of contemporary historiographical interpretations regarding the role of Germany and Austria-Hungary in the events of spring 1918. It systematically categorizes the key concepts that

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explain the fall of the Ukrainian Central Rada, the selection of Pavlo Skoropadskyi as a candidate for the hetmanate, and the precise nature of the Central Powers' involvement in the power shift. **Key Findings.** The study demonstrates that contemporary Ukrainian historiography has been steadily moving away from the earlier one-dimensional interpretation of the Hetman coup as merely the result of German and Austro-Hungarian intervention. Instead, increasing attention has been given to multifactorial explanatory models that integrate the internal crisis of the Ukrainian Central Rada, the strategic interests of the Central Powers, the activities of Ukrainian conservative circles, and the personal political agency of Pavlo Skoropadskyi. The study reveals that while scholars differ on the extent of influence exerted by the German-Austrian military command in preparing the coup, most view the change of power as the result of an interaction between external and internal factors. The study highlights several historiographical gaps that require further research: unofficial contacts between Ukrainian oppositionists and German intelligence, inter-agency competition within the structures of the Central Powers, and the stance of left-wing factions in the German Reichstag toward the change of power in Ukraine.

Keywords: *Ukrainian historiography, Ukrainian Revolution, Ukrainian Central Rada, coup d'état, Pavlo Skoropadskyi, Hetmanate, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Central Powers.*

The coup d'état of April 29, 1918, which brought Hetman Pavlo Skoropadskyi to power, remains one of the most debated issues in Ukrainian historiography. As an important stage of the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917—1921, this event unfolded against the backdrop of German and Austro-Hungarian troop deployments across Ukraine. Following the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Ukrainian People's Republic was drawn directly into the geopolitical orbit of the Central Powers. This shift inevitably raised questions about the interplay between external intervention and internal prerequisites for regime change.

Two contrasting approaches have emerged in Ukrainian historiography to interpret these events. One group of scholars regards Skoropadskyi's accession to power as the result of a deliberate policy pursued by the German and Austro-Hungarian military leadership aimed at establishing a more controllable political regime in Ukraine. A second group of scholars emphasizes the internal crisis of the Central Rada, deepening socio-economic tensions, and the consolidation of conservative political forces, assigning the external factor the role of a catalyst that accelerated processes already unfolding within Ukrainian society. More recently, scholars have increasingly sought to reconcile these two perspectives by examining the mechanisms of interaction between Ukrainian political actors and representatives of the Central Powers. Particular attention has been devoted to the involvement of German and Austro-Hungarian military and diplomatic authorities in the search for an alternative to the Central Rada, the selection of the future Hetman, and the determination of the limits of his political autonomy. However, despite the growing body of scholarship on the subject, the existing literature still lacks a comprehensive historiographical analysis of these mechanisms.

Specialized historiographical studies devoted to the role of the German and Austro-Hungarian allies in the preparation and execution of the coup d'état of April 29, 1918 are virtually absent from Ukrainian scholarship. Certain aspects of this issue have been addressed in studies on the Ukrainian Revolution, the foreign policy of the Ukrainian State, and the activities of the military and political institutions of the Central Powers.

However, these discussions have generally been incorporated into broader analyses rather than examined as an independent historiographical problem.

The author of the present study has also examined this subject, although his research primarily focused on the causes of the Central Rada's downfall, intra-party conflicts, and the role of individual political actors. Consequently, the mechanisms that facilitated Hetman Pavlo Skoropadskyi's rise to power, as well as the influence of external factors, were examined only in passing [1, pp. 186—201].

The study by Serhiy Hnatiuk offers the closest historiographical assessment of this issue, tracing the evolution of scholarly interpretations of the coup d'état of April 29, 1918. Hnatiuk demonstrates that, for a considerable period, interpretations of these events remained constrained by a rigid dichotomous framework that had taken shape during the interwar era. On the one hand, representatives of the conservative state-building school — most notably Viacheslav Lypynskyi and Dmytro Doroshenko— interpreted the coup as an authentic domestic political movement. In their view, it was brought about by the left-wing radicals' inability to govern the state effectively. On the other hand, historians associated with the socialist camp of the Ukrainian People's Republic — including Pavlo Khrystiuk — took the opposite view. They portrayed Skoropadskyi's accession to power exclusively as the outcome of foreign intervention and German military diktat. Within this interpretative tradition, scholarly analysis was frequently subordinated to ideological considerations. This tendency persisted, at least in part, in both Soviet historiography and the early historiography of independent Ukraine [2, p. 55]. In examining more recent scholarship, Hnatiuk identifies a gradual departure from this historiographical dichotomy. In his view, Ukrainian historical scholarship has increasingly embraced a more balanced interpretation, according to which the coup represented an essentially Ukrainian political initiative. At the same time, its successful implementation was made possible by the military neutrality — or, in some instances, the direct support — of the German and Austro-Hungarian command [2, pp. 73—86]. It should be noted, however, that Hnatiuk's study was completed in the early 2000s. Since then, Ukrainian historiography has been substantially enriched by the works of Ruslan Pyrih, Pavlo Hai-Nyzhnyk, Olha Mykhailova, Heorhiy Papakin, Valerii Soldatenko, and other scholars. These studies have considerably expanded the available source base and offered new interpretations of the role played by the German and Austro-Hungarian allies in the events of April 1918. Consequently, there is a clear need for a separate historiographical analysis of contemporary scholarship on this issue.

The transformation of the military and political policy pursued by Berlin and Vienna toward the Ukrainian People's Republic in the spring of 1918 has become one of the most dynamic areas of contemporary historical scholarship. Current research generally takes the conclusion of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk as its point of departure, viewing it as a watershed that fundamentally reshaped the geopolitical landscape of East-Central Europe. Earlier scholarship tended to interpret the advance of German and Austro-Hungarian forces into Ukraine following the expulsion of the Bolsheviks primarily in terms of conventional military assistance. More recent historiography, however, has offered a considerably more nuanced interpretation. Increasing attention has been devoted to the socio-

cultural and psychological dimensions of the Allied military presence, highlighting the ambivalent attitudes of the local population toward the German and Austro-Hungarian armies, which had only recently been regarded as enemies during the First World War. Against this background, one of the central concerns of contemporary scholarship has become the interaction between the internal crisis of the Ukrainian People's Republic and the pragmatic strategic interests of Germany and Austria-Hungary. Scholars ask how this interaction shaped the evolution of Berlin's and Vienna's policy toward their new ally. In particular, historians have sought to explain the transition from military support for the Central Rada to its forcible removal from power on April 29, 1918.

An important achievement of contemporary scholarship has been the abandonment of the view of the Central Powers as a monolithic geopolitical bloc. Drawing upon an extensive body of diplomatic and military sources, the studies of Ruslan Pyrih and Pavlo Hai-Nyzhnyk have reconstructed the profound divisions and competing approaches that existed between the German and Austro-Hungarian leadership with regard to the Ukrainian question [3, p. 59; 4, p. 137]. Their research demonstrates that Austro-Hungarian government circles reached the conclusion that cooperation with the Central Rada was no longer viable considerably earlier than did their German counterparts. Pavlo Hai-Nyzhnyk argues that by the middle of March 1918 the authorities in Vienna had already recognized the depth of Ukraine's economic chaos, financial instability, and the evident administrative weakness of the Central Rada's government. This assessment was shaped by the Habsburg Monarchy's acute dependence on Ukrainian grain supplies. As a result, Austro-Hungarian political and military leaders increasingly linked the survival of their own state in the face of a looming food crisis to the establishment of a stronger and more effective government in Kyiv. Ruslan Pyrih likewise emphasizes that Austro-Hungarian policymakers displayed a greater willingness to consider more radical solutions. At the same time, he reconstructs the political dualism that characterized the German decision-making process itself. The German Foreign Office continued for some time to pursue a cautious policy, taking into account considerations of international law and seeking to preserve Germany's democratic image by maintaining support for the legitimate government of the Ukrainian People's Republic. The German military command, by contrast, became progressively more inclined to endorse decisive political change [3, pp. 58—59]. These observations are further supported by the findings of the Polish historian Włodzimierz Mędrzecki, who likewise emphasizes the differences between German and Austro-Hungarian approaches to the Ukrainian question. He argues that the German side pursued a more cautious policy, whereas Austro-Hungarian military and political circles demonstrated a greater inclination toward authoritarian methods of governance from the early stages of their involvement in Ukraine [5, pp. 140—145].

Borys Malynovskyi offers a comparative analysis of the policies pursued by the Central Powers, highlighting the fundamental differences between the German and Austro-Hungarian approaches to the Ukrainian question. He argues that German strategy sought to reconcile geopolitical support for Ukrainian statehood with the pragmatic demands of wartime economic policy, above all the uninterrupted procurement of food supplies [6, p. 180]. Malynovskyi conceptualizes this inherent tension through the dilem-

ma of "Ukrainian statehood" versus "Ukrainian grain." In his interpretation, Berlin was compelled to balance the long-term objective of building a strategic partner in Eastern Europe against the immediate imperative of exploiting Ukraine's economic resources. By contrast, Malynovskyi maintains that Austro-Hungarian policy was shaped by an entirely different set of priorities rooted in the internal vulnerabilities of the Habsburg Monarchy. Because the Empire incorporated the western Ukrainian lands, Vienna viewed the possible emergence of a strong and consolidated Ukrainian state on its borders with considerable apprehension. Consequently, Austro-Hungarian policymakers approached the Ukrainian question through the prism of preserving the Empire's internal stability rather than fostering Ukrainian state-building [6, p. 176]. Ultimately, the mounting pressures of the First World War also pushed German policy toward a more uncompromising pragmatism. As Malynovskyi emphasizes, this shift did not imply an intention to abolish Ukrainian sovereignty. Rather, it reflected a rational effort to establish in Kyiv a stable, predictable, and governable government capable of serving as a reliable guarantor of Ukraine's international obligations.

Within the same context, the observations of Oleksandr Reient are particularly significant. He emphasizes that the economic dimension of the Central Powers' policy was determined primarily by the need to secure a stable supply of agricultural products, effectively reducing the Ukrainian question to one of resource control. From this perspective, Ukraine was viewed not as an equal political partner but rather as a source of economic resources essential to sustaining the Central Powers' war effort. This strategic outlook objectively constrained the prospects for a genuine political compromise with the Central Rada [7, p. 53].

Expanding upon the argument that resource considerations lay at the heart of the Central Powers' policy, contemporary scholars have identified the specific institutional and socio-economic mechanisms that generated conflict between the Central Powers and the Ukrainian People's Republic. Ruslan Pyrih argues that the fundamental incompatibility between the Central Rada's social-democratic revolutionary course and the conservative outlook of the German and Austro-Hungarian military authorities was most evident in the agrarian sphere. The principles proclaimed in the Third and Fourth Universals — including the radical socialization of land, the abolition of private landed property, and the elimination of private ownership rights — stood in direct opposition to the occupation authorities' determination to restore agricultural production as quickly as possible and to secure the fulfillment of food supply obligations. For German and Austro-Hungarian military commanders, whose policies were guided by considerations of economic efficiency and administrative order, the abolition of private property was synonymous with administrative chaos. It also threatened to undermine the spring sowing campaign of 1918, thereby jeopardizing the delivery of agricultural produce promised under the Brest-Litovsk agreements. Within this context, the ideology of large landowners, grounded in the defense of private property, proved to be both ideologically and socially far closer to the worldview of the Prussian officer corps than the political program advanced by the left-wing intellectuals who dominated the Central Rada [8, pp. 83—84].

This line of argument concerning the institutional weaknesses of the Central Rada is further developed in the works of Danylo Yanevskyi and Volodymyr Nizov. Yanevskyi emphasizes the Central Rada's systemic inability to implement an effective agrarian reform and to fulfill the economic obligations it had assumed. In his view, the Germans, "understanding that dealing with the leaders of the Ukrainian People's Republic was a foolish undertaking," decided to discuss the question of who should succeed as head of state [9, pp. 39—40]. Volodymyr Nizov reinforces this argument by maintaining that the fall of the Central Rada was an inevitable consequence of its failure to fulfill both its international legal obligations and its economic commitments. As a result, the occupation authorities lost any hope of deriving tangible economic benefits from continued cooperation with the government of the Ukrainian People's Republic [10, pp. 6—11].

An important chronological refinement of this discussion is provided by the study of Fedir Prodaniuk, who, based on his analysis of a memorandum issued by the command of the Kyiv Group of Forces on March 23, 1918, argues that alternative scenarios for governing Ukraine and the idea of revising policy toward the Central Rada had emerged even before the open political crisis of April [11, p. 26]. Similar conclusions are reached by Pavlo Prytuliak and Viktor Klymenko-Mudryi, who link the evolution of the Central Powers' strategy to the gradual recognition among political circles in Berlin and Vienna that an alternative model of government in Ukraine was necessary to prevent the disruption of the food procurement program [12, p. 30; 13, p. 98]. In this context, Nataliia Kryshyna notes that the initial attempts by the German military command to secure the reorganization of Vsevolod Holubovych's government proved unsuccessful because of the Central Rada's unwillingness to compromise on the agrarian question. In her view, this contributed to the German military and political circles' eventual conclusion that the existing system of government was incapable of meeting their objectives and therefore needed to be replaced [14, p. 47].

Viktor Savchenko and Heorhiy Papakin, in turn, offer an interpretation of the crisis in which domestic political contradictions are closely intertwined with external factors. Savchenko draws attention to the reluctance of the Ukrainian leadership "to become mere puppets of foreign generals." Against the backdrop of an agrarian policy that failed to meet the expectations of the occupation authorities, this reluctance stimulated the development of military-administrative plans for direct rule [15, pp. 115—118].

Papakin interprets the events of April 1918 as the product of a synergy between the internal crisis of the Ukrainian People's Republic and the external pragmatic pressure to secure the 1918 harvest. In his view, the change of government resulted from the actions of a broad coalition of right-wing forces, ranging from large landowners to peasants, and from advocates of Ukrainian independence to pro-Russian and pro-Polish parties. Together, these groups acted as a consolidated domestic force that redirected the country's political course [16].

A distinct group of scholars specializing in the history of the Ukrainian Central Rada — Vladyslav Verstiuk, Oleksandra Kudlai, and Svitlana Pankova — approaches its systemic crisis through the interplay between the internal weakness of the Ukrainian People's Republic's state apparatus and the growing intervention of the German and

Austro-Hungarian military authorities [17, pp. 247—251; 18, pp. 457—460; 19]. Their studies emphasize that the Ukrainian leadership initially regarded the presence of the Central Powers' troops as merely "technical" or "friendly" assistance, thereby underestimating their pragmatic economic interests. The scholars primarily associate the intensification of foreign intervention with the UPR's inability to fulfill its food-supply obligations under the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and with the conflict over agrarian policy. O. Kudlai, in particular, draws attention to the legal ambiguity surrounding the status of the Central Powers' troops in Ukraine and the gradual expansion of the German military administration's powers. In this context, the Central Rada's distancing itself from the allied military command, against the backdrop of the general ineffectiveness of state administration, contributed to the deepening of the conflict. Thus, in the works of these scholars of the Central Rada, the growing German intervention is interpreted not as an autonomous external factor, but as the result of an interaction between the internal crisis of the UPR, its failure to fulfill its economic commitments, and the increasingly pronounced divergence between the policies of the Ukrainian authorities and the interests of the Central Powers.

Summarizing the range of potential scenarios considered by the Central Powers in the spring of 1918, Natalia Kryshyna, Olha Mykhailova, Pavlo Hai-Nyzhnyk, Leonid Osaulenko, and Volodymyr Zasiekin note that the possible trajectories of Ukraine's political transformation ranged from the preservation of the formal sovereignty of the Ukrainian People's Republic under external protection to the complete elimination of its statehood and the establishment of a direct foreign military administration. In particular, Kryshyna, drawing on the work of German historian Peter Borowski, highlights alternative projects discussed within German military and political circles and notes that the German side considered several possible models for Ukraine's future political order. First contacts of the German consul general in Kyiv, Fritz Thiel, were established with Georg of Leuchtenberg and his brother, who advocated the restoration of the Russian Empire. According to Kryshyna, however, this option was incompatible with Germany's strategic interests, which were predicated on weakening Russia. Subsequently, General Wilhelm Gröner and Ambassador Alfons von Mumm became inclined toward an alternative scenario involving the establishment of a German governorate in Ukraine and the formation of a Ukrainian government subordinate to the German administration [14, p. 49].

At the same time, P. Hai-Nyzhnyk identifies a number of factors that constrained the implementation of more radical scenarios. Plans for the direct annexation or partition of Ukraine under foreign occupation were impeded by significant disagreements among the Central Powers and the absence of a consolidated position in Berlin and Vienna regarding the future status and territorial boundaries of the Ukrainian lands. Consequently, the risk of disrupting the geopolitical balance within the Central Powers themselves acted as a significant constraint on the dismantling of Ukrainian statehood [20, pp. 29—32]. Mykhailova substantially expands this line of argument by adding critical administrative, personnel, and reputational risks to the existing geopolitical explanations. She rightly emphasizes that the establishment of direct military rule would have required

the deployment of an extensive German and Austro-Hungarian administrative apparatus, which the occupation authorities simply did not possess under the conditions of a protracted and exhausting war. Such a policy also carried the risk of provoking a broader anti-occupation resistance movement [21, p. 140]. Within this context, the observations of Leonid Osaulenko and Volodymyr Zasiekin deserve particular attention. They argue that debates over Ukraine's future political status intensified significantly during the spring of 1918. In their words, "Ukraine faced the threat of being transformed into an ordinary occupation zone — a governor-generalship, as had happened in Poland — with the introduction of direct military rule. Everyone realized that some kind of solution had to be found" [22, p. 77]. At the same time, this assessment is somewhat journalistic in tone and arguably overstates the practical likelihood of such a scenario. The majority of recent comparative studies indicate that the Central Powers were interested less in eliminating Ukraine's statehood or introducing direct military administration than in establishing a more governable and predictable Ukrainian government while formally preserving the institutions of Ukrainian statehood.

Thus, contemporary historiography has gradually moved toward a more balanced interpretation of these events. According to this perspective, the foreign policy objectives and military-economic pragmatism of Berlin and Vienna acted as a determining factor in the transformation of their policy toward the Ukrainian People's Republic in the spring of 1918. At the same time, the Central Rada's internal doctrinal and administrative crisis is recognized as an important, albeit largely legitimizing and catalytic, factor. It reinforced the perception of the Ukrainian government as a politically weak partner. However, it did not constitute a sufficient or self-contained explanation for the change of government on April 29, 1918.

Ivan Hoshuliak regards the foreign policy and military factors as the decisive factors in the overthrow of the Central Rada. While acknowledging the existence of a profound internal crisis and the administrative inexperience of the Ukrainian political leadership, he shifts the analytical focus to the determining role of the international context. At the same time, he observes that "only a few thousand nationally conscious Ukrainians, who were unprepared for the responsibilities of statehood, undertook the task of awakening the national consciousness of a population numbering in the millions" [23, p. 33]. This raises the question of why he regards the external factor as decisive. Yet the answer already lies in his own words: the leadership of the Central Rada lacked experience in state-building, was unwilling to acquire it, and failed to take into account the interests of Ukraine's socially and politically diverse population amid threats from neighboring states. Moreover, the invitation extended to the German forces further alienated a population that had already become increasingly dissatisfied with the Central Rada's policies [23, p. 42]. In the same context, Hoshuliak argues that "the socio-political, military, and economic situation in Ukraine was so complex [...] that the failures of that period can hardly be explained primarily by the misguided policies and mistakes of the Central Rada and its governments" [23, p. 39]. In our view, this interpretation reflects the author's methodological dependence on the traditional narrative of the Ukrainian People's Republic.

Valerii Soldatenko reconstructs these events from a broadly similar methodological perspective. Soldatenko does not regard the Hetmanate as either a natural or an inevitable stage of the Ukrainian Revolution, and he offers a critical assessment of the Hetman regime's socio-political practices. Nevertheless, he interprets the fall of the Central Rada as a historically conditioned outcome of the developments of the spring of 1918. Soldatenko assigns the decisive role in this process to the external factor, noting that "this is, in fact, so obvious that there is no need to dwell on this aspect." At the same time, he provides a detailed analysis of the internal causes of the Central Rada's crisis. Among them, he identifies the intensification of social tensions, inter-party rivalry, the loss of popular support, the negative perception of the Rada's agrarian policy among the propertied classes, and the weakness of the armed forces of the Ukrainian People's Republic [24, pp. 5—7].

Volodymyr Horak offers a more moderate assessment of these events, distancing himself from the arguments commonly advanced in conservative historiography that portray the Central Rada's policies as inherently "absurd" or destructive. In his view, the decisive factor behind the fall of the Central Rada was not so much its agrarian legislation as the asymmetric dependence of the Ukrainian People's Republic on the military power of Berlin and Vienna following the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Horak also advances a balanced interpretation of the coup d'état of April 29, 1918. He argues that the political initiative and determination to carry out the coup originated with Pavlo Skoropadskyi and the Ukrainian conservative movement. Nevertheless, the institutional implementation of the change of government — and ultimately its success — became possible only under conditions of either the favorable neutrality or the direct support of the German occupation authorities [25, pp. 113—114].

Another current in contemporary historiography shifts the analytical focus away from external influences toward domestic political and institutional factors. From this perspective, the fall of the Central Rada is interpreted primarily as the consequence of the internal disorganization of Ukraine's revolutionary statehood. The works of Oleksandr Havrylenko and Ihor Lohvynenko are particularly representative of this institutional approach. They examine the internal structure of the Ukrainian government and argue that it suffered from a critical shortage of senior state administrators, compounded by the complete dysfunction of the military and security apparatus of the Ukrainian People's Republic [26, pp. 2—3]. This line of critical analysis is further developed by Leonid Osaulenko and Volodymyr Zasiekin. They argue that the legislative activity of the Central Rada had become completely detached from social realities. In their words, "All laws, resolutions, and decisions remained suspended in the air, often never leaving government offices or meeting halls. Ordinary people, who had already suffered under the Bolshevik occupation, were simply irritated and enraged by the endless laws and reforms introduced by the Central Rada, which had allowed the occupiers into the country and had brought about famine, looting, and unemployment" [22, p. 72]. The authors further contend that the Ukrainian government, assembled from what they describe as largely random and randomly selected individuals, resembled "a noisy debating club" rather than an effective executive authority [22, p. 74].

Yurii Tereshchenko advances a distinctly state-building interpretation of these events, offering an uncompromising critique of the ideological platform of the Central Rada's leadership. He argues that the social democratic government pursued a policy of "inciting interclass hostility and confrontation," and therefore maintains that the proclamation of the Hetmanate represented a logical response on the part of Ukrainian society [27, p. 5]. Accordingly, scholars associated with this historiographical approach interpret Pavlo Skoropadskyi's accession to power and the establishment of the Hetmanate as an organic and historically justified response on the part of Ukrainian society. In their view, the new regime temporarily succeeded in stabilizing the economy, curbing anarchy, and initiating a process of systematic state-building, although these achievements were ultimately limited in duration by external geopolitical circumstances.

A distinct strand within this historiographical approach is the study of the military factor, most systematically developed in the works of Viktor Holubko. He argues that the absence of a regular national army deprived the Central Rada of the means to enforce its decisions and to exercise effective state authority. Under the conditions of revolutionary anarchy and the presence of foreign troops, this weakness resulted in the government's growing dependence on external military power [28, pp. 28—30]. In our view, however, this historiographical perspective requires an important qualification. Contemporary scholarship does not always give sufficient attention to the destructive role of the German occupation authorities themselves, who deliberately restricted efforts to establish effective and combat-ready regular Ukrainian military units.

Contemporary historiography also offers more balanced assessments of the Central Rada's internal condition. In particular, Yaroslav Hrytsak emphasizes that, despite its institutional weaknesses, the Central Rada made a fundamental contribution to the processes of national mobilization and the consolidation of Ukrainian statehood during the Revolution. At the same time, he argues that its policy of political compromise proved insufficiently effective in the highly radicalized environment of the revolutionary period [29, p. 89].

Overall, the domestic political interpretation advanced in contemporary historiography identifies a complex set of interrelated problems, including institutional immaturity, political fragmentation, a shortage of personnel, the weakness of the state's coercive institutions, and the inconsistency of governmental practices. Taken together, these factors contributed to the gradual erosion of the Central Rada's capacity to govern. Combined with the mounting pressure exerted by the Central Powers, they made the events of April 29, 1918 not merely possible but historically inevitable.

Another key issue that occupies a central place in contemporary historiography of the April 1918 coup concerns the process by which the future head of the Ukrainian State was selected. Recent scholarship has increasingly moved away from interpreting this decision as the unilateral initiative of the German military command. Instead, it is viewed as a complex process of political engineering that emerged at the intersection of the strategic interests of the Central Powers, the institutional crisis of the Central Rada, and the limited range of political alternatives available within the Ukrainian elite.

In this context, the principal criteria for selecting a candidate were less his ideological orientation or party affiliation than his practical suitability for office. Particular impor-

tance was attached to his administrative manageability, his acceptability to influential social and political groups, and his ability to ensure at least a minimum degree of stability within the state apparatus under conditions of foreign military occupation. Accordingly, the competition among potential candidates assumed the character of a political selection process in which the decisive criterion was the degree to which each contender was compatible with the requirements of a political environment shaped, to a considerable extent, by external influence.

The most comprehensive reconstruction of the candidate selection process is offered by Savchenko, who significantly broadens the traditional scope of analysis by moving beyond the figure of Pavlo Skoropadskyi alone. He reconstructs a wider circle of individuals who were considered by German and Austro-Hungarian political and military circles as potential candidates for the position of head of state. These included Yevhen Chykalenko, Mykola Mikhnovskyi, Oleksandr Rahoza, Oleksandr Slyvynskyi, and Archduke Wilhelm von Habsburg (Vasyl Vyshyvanyi).

Importantly, Savchenko evaluates each of these figures not only in terms of their political standing but also through the structural constraints that, in his view, prevented them from becoming an acceptable candidate for the Central Powers. Chykalenko, he argues, consistently distanced himself from cooperation with the occupation authorities, thereby excluding himself from the process of political selection. Despite his pronounced state-building radicalism, Mikhnovskyi was considered unacceptable because of his uncompromising political independence. Rahoza was deemed unsuitable owing to his age and the political and organizational circumstances of the time, while Slyvynskyi lacked sufficient authority within military circles and among the conservative elite [15, pp. 118—122]. Savchenko also devotes particular attention to Wilhelm von Habsburg (Vasyl Vyshyvanyi), whom he portrays as a bearer of an alternative source of legitimacy associated with Vienna and the Ukrainian elites of Galicia. Such a candidacy, in his view, risked creating multiple and potentially competing political dependencies. By contrast, Savchenko argues that Pavlo Skoropadskyi best fit the model of an "executive general," capable of performing the stabilizing functions required by the moment without seeking to advance an independent political project of his own. Some of Savchenko's conclusions, however, are open to question. His assertion that Chykalenko remained detached from the German military administration is not supported by all available evidence. Through his son-in-law, Oleksandr Skoropys-Yoltukhovskyi, who maintained close ties with the Oberkommando, Chykalenko sought to influence the course of political developments. He also expressed distinctly pro-German views, hoping that "they would take all power into their own hands here and restore order" [30, p. 10]. Likewise, we are unaware of any historical evidence indicating that the German authorities seriously considered General Oleksandr Rahoza as a potential head of the Ukrainian State. Unfortunately, Savchenko's works provide no references to the historical sources on which these assertions are based.

Pavlo Hai-Nyzhnyk offers a more critical and structurally analytical interpretation of the selection process. Unlike the approach outlined above, he argues that consultations with a broad range of Ukrainian public figures — including Mykola Mikhnovskyi, Yevhen Chykalenko, and Bohdan Khanenko — should be understood primarily as an

element of political maneuvering rather than as a genuine process of selecting a future head of state. In Hai-Nyzhnyk's reconstruction, the actual field of candidates was considerably narrower and was limited to three individuals: Pavlo Skoropadskyi, Ivan Poltavets-Ostrianytsia, and Ivan Lutsenko. The rejection of the latter two is explained not merely by their personal characteristics but, above all, by their functional unsuitability within the framework of the occupation model of governance. According to Hai-Nyzhnyk, Poltavets-Ostrianytsia was regarded as a courageous and resolute advocate of restoring the Hetman-Cossack tradition in Ukraine. At the same time, however, the Free Cossacks did not constitute a sufficiently strong or cohesive political force. Moreover, Poltavets-Ostrianytsia's political adventurism and inconsistent political convictions undermined his credibility as a viable candidate. Lutsenko, despite his clear state-building orientation, is likewise portrayed by Hai-Nyzhnyk as a potentially uncontrollable political actor. As Hai-Nyzhnyk notes, "Such a strong-willed, determined, and principled individual as Ivan Lutsenko, with firmly established political and ideological convictions and, moreover, a steadfast champion of Ukrainian statehood, might have proved a rather inconvenient Hetman for Vienna and Berlin" [4, p. 143].

Hai-Nyzhnyk's interpretation thus portrays Pavlo Skoropadskyi as the most politically convenient candidate. His social background, his status as a large landowner, and his experience in the Imperial Russian service simultaneously made him acceptable both to Ukrainian conservative circles and to the occupying powers. In this sense, Skoropadskyi emerged as a pragmatic rather than an ideological choice.

The issue is addressed in a more concise yet conceptually consistent manner by Olha Mykhailova. She notes that the field of potential candidates was ultimately narrowed to three principal figures: Pavlo Skoropadskyi, Ivan Lutsenko, and Yevhen Chykalenko. She emphasizes that German analysts continued to consider Lutsenko's candidacy almost until the very last moment, that is, until the successful execution of Skoropadskyi's coup. A particularly important contribution of Mykhailova's study concerns the figure of Symon Petliura. She notes that Skoropadskyi himself regarded Petliura as the only person whom he could envision as Hetman [21, pp. 141—142]. Nevertheless, Petliura was never considered by the Central Powers because of his clearly pro-Entente orientation, which made him a priori unacceptable within the framework of German and Austro-Hungarian political strategy.

Valerii Soldatenko likewise emphasizes the pragmatic approach adopted by the Central Powers in the formation of a new Ukrainian government. He argues that the German military command assumed that the occupation would be temporary and therefore sought to establish a government that was both governable and administratively effective. Within this framework, different branches of the occupation administration explored several possible candidates for the office of head of state. Among those considered were Pavlo Skoropadskyi, Ivan Lutsenko, and Ivan Poltavets-Ostrianytsia, whose candidacies were evaluated primarily in terms of governability, political loyalty, and administrative suitability. At the same time, other German institutions also examined the candidacies of Mykola Mikhnovskyi and Yevhen Chykalenko, while Ukrainian landowning circles discussed Bohdan Khanenko as a representative of the conservative landed

elite. Soldatenko concludes that Pavlo Skoropadskyi ultimately emerged as the optimal compromise candidate. He combined high military prestige, standing as a representative of the large agrarian sector, a monarchist worldview, and — equally important — the absence of a radical party or ideological program that might have jeopardized the political arrangements being negotiated [24, pp. 8—9].

Oleksandr Yaremenko advances a rather controversial interpretation of these events. He argues that, after receiving information about preparations for a political coup, the German military authorities began establishing contacts with its organizers. At the same time, he notes the caution with which the Germans approached these contacts [31, pp. 68—69]. This claim is rather strange — not only because the German authorities were themselves contemplating a change of government, but also because Yaremenko attributes a supposed caution to those who were, at that time, the real masters of the situation. A more plausible explanation is that such caution reflected the requirements of operational secrecy and the need to assess the actual organizational capacity and political support of the coup's organizers before committing to active cooperation.

Overall, contemporary historiography has largely abandoned the notion of Pavlo Skoropadskyi as merely an artificial "German project." Instead, his accession to power is explained as the product of several intersecting factors: the foreign policy objectives of the Central Powers, the crisis of the Central Rada, the limited pool of alternative candidates, and the broader search for political stability amid war and social disorganization.

While the question of how the future Hetman was selected has generated relatively little disagreement in contemporary historiography, the origins of the coup itself and the emergence of the idea behind it remain far more contentious. In particular, historians continue to debate where the initiative for the overthrow of the Central Rada originated and what forces first set the process in motion. Within this debate, two principal interpretative approaches have emerged. The first, which may be described as the domestic political approach, traces the origins of the coup to the crisis of the Central Rada and the political activity of Ukrainian conservative circles. The second, an externalist interpretation, assigns the decisive role to the German military command, portraying it as the principal catalyst of the political transformation that culminated in the establishment of the Hetmanate. Accordingly, particular attention has been devoted to reconstructing the earliest contacts between the Ukrainian political opposition and representatives of the Central Powers. Equally important is the question of identifying the point at which the idea of a coup evolved from a tentative possibility into a concrete political project.

One of the key interpretative approaches in contemporary historiography has been advanced by Pavlo Hai-Nyzhnyk and Olena Ott-Skoropadska [32, p. 40]. They emphasize the autonomous character of Pavlo Skoropadskyi's political initiative, arguing that the idea of changing the government originated with the general himself rather than with the German occupation authorities. In their reconstruction, the idea of overthrowing the Central Rada developed gradually in response to its growing institutional incapacity and the mounting Bolshevik threat. These circumstances, they argue, prompted Skoropadskyi to formulate his own political strategy based on the use of force. At the same time, the internal logic of their interpretation is not entirely consistent. On the one hand, the

authors emphasize that Skoropadskyi recognized the necessity of changing the government at an early stage. On the other, they trace the evolution of his thinking from an attempt to reform the Central Rada to the decision to remove it altogether. This progression suggests that his political intentions became increasingly radical over time. As Hai-Nyzhnyk and Ott-Skoropadska observe, "At first, Pavlo Skoropadskyi planned to compel the Central Rada to reform itself and replace its government with a right-wing cabinet. Soon, however, he realized that such hopes were futile." Only on 10 April they argue, did he finally decide in favor of a coup and the dissolution of the Central Rada [4, p. 149].

Valerii Soldatenko disputes this vision, yet in doing so contradicts himself: "The idea of establishing a dictatorship in Ukraine in order to counter the 'destructive forces' emerged in Pavlo Skoropadskyi's mind as early as the first half of January 1918, when it became clear that the Central Rada and its government were incapable of stopping the Bolshevik forces" [33, p. 44]. The historiographical debate between Soldatenko and Hai-Nyzhnyk represents one of the central controversies surrounding the study of the April 1918 coup. At its core lies the question of the degree of Skoropadskyi's political independence and the role played by the German military command in preparing and facilitating the transfer of power. Whereas Soldatenko tends to interpret the coup as a political project shaped to a considerable extent by external forces, Hai-Nyzhnyk emphasizes the active organizational role of Skoropadskyi himself and his closest associates.

Oleksandr Reient adds a further analytical dimension to this debate. While sharing the view that Pavlo Skoropadskyi's political ambitions took shape at an early stage, he emphasizes that their foreign policy orientation underwent a transformation over time. Reient emphasizes that Skoropadskyi initially looked to the Entente — particularly to French military and diplomatic circles — for potential support. Only the changing international balance of power in the spring of 1918, together with the effective military presence of the Central Powers in Ukraine, gradually redirected his political calculations toward cooperation with Berlin and Vienna [7, pp. 50—51].

Fedir Prodaniuk and Olha Mykhailova address the question of Skoropadskyi's initial political orientation from broadly similar perspectives, although they place emphasis on different aspects of the issue [11, p. 37; 21, p. 123]. Prodaniuk limits his analysis to noting that the prospect of French support ultimately failed to materialize. Mykhailova, by contrast, emphasizes the structural constraints that made cooperation with the Entente unrealistic from the outset, arguing that the conditions attached to such support were both unacceptable and impracticable. Mykhailova also subjects Skoropadskyi's own memoirs to critical scrutiny. She challenges his assertion that he had not contemplated assuming power before the spring of 1918. Instead, she argues that Skoropadskyi had already been seeking broad political authority during the winter, well before the coup was set in motion [21, p. 140].

Leonid Osaulenko and Volodymyr Zasiekin likewise concur with the future Hetman's own account. They argue that "during the first half of March, Pavlo Skoropadskyi was not yet contemplating the assumption of power" [22, p. 80]. In their interpretation, it was only after the publication of an article by the jurist Parchevskyi, which called for the establishment of a strong one-man authority, that Skoropadskyi began to consider such a

course of action. In our view, however, this interpretation remains open to question and requires substantial critical revision. The testimony of the Minister of War, Oleksandr Zhukovskyi, convincingly demonstrates that preparations for a change of government, as well as preliminary efforts by conservative circles to gauge political support, had begun well before the collapse of the Central Rada in April[1].

An important conceptual strand in contemporary historiography concerns the reconstruction of the decisions taken by the German military command in the spring of 1918. In this context, the overwhelming majority of scholars agree that 23—24 April marked a key stage in the institutional transition from a policy of formal non-intervention to one of effective control over the political situation in Ukraine.

Within this broader context, Ruslan Pyrih, Pavlo Hai-Nyzhnyk, and Olha Mykhailova examine in detail the first contacts between Pavlo Skoropadskyi and representatives of the German military authorities, particularly Major Hans Gasse, the head of German counterintelligence. They date these meetings to the middle of April 1918. Although the authors differ slightly in their chronology, placing the initial contacts between 10 and 12 April, they agree that these encounters took the form of preliminary consultations rather than constituting a formal political agreement [8, p. 78; 20, p. 36; 21, pp. 142—143]. According to Ruslan Pyrih, Viktor Savchenko, and Oleksandr Reient, the subsequent negotiations held between 13 and 15 April marked a new stage. During these discussions, Skoropadskyi outlined the basic principles of the future government and received German assurances of military neutrality in the event of a transfer of power. The decisive institutional threshold, however, was crossed only on 23—24 April. As noted by Mykhailova, Hai-Nyzhnyk, Reient, and Soldatenko, it was at this point that the military and legal framework of the coup was finalized [20, pp. 152—153; 7, p. 64; 21, p. 146; 24, p. 10]. As Hryhorii Pityk aptly describes it, these decisions amounted to "the death sentence" for the Central Rada [34, p. 37]. It should also be noted that the signing of the trilateral Ukrainian-German-Austro-Hungarian economic agreement on 23 April enabled General Wilhelm Groener, the principal architect of the coup, to make his final decision regarding the future ruler of Ukraine. At the same time, he required Skoropadskyi to recognize the obligations previously undertaken by the Ukrainian People's Republic concerning the export of foodstuffs and raw materials.

Another issue that remains contested concerns the extent of German military involvement in the execution of the coup. Pyrih and Papakin emphasize the indirect nature of German intervention. In their interpretation, the German authorities maintained a position of formal neutrality while, in practice, creating the institutional and military conditions that made the transfer of power possible [35, p. 14].

Valerii Soldatenko, by contrast, attributes a far more directive role to the German military command, effectively characterizing the events as a concealed form of an occupation coup [24, pp. 10—11]. Mykola Derzhaliuk likewise regards Germany as having played the decisive role in bringing about the change of government [36, pp. 60—61].

[1] Центральний державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України. Ф. 3543. Оп. 2. Спр. 1. Арк. 51 зв.

Fedir Prodaniuk emphasizes that the occupation command stood behind the coup, while simultaneously acknowledging that the overthrow of the Central Rada was also conditioned by objective domestic factors [11, pp. 39—40].

Polina Barvinska advances an even stronger interpretation, portraying Pavlo Skoropadskyi as entirely dependent upon Germany. In her view, he came to power solely through the support of the occupation authorities and was prepared to serve Berlin with complete loyalty [37, p. 87]. A similar position is adopted by Nadiia Baranovska and Olena Makarchuk, who note that "although the German side declared its neutrality on the eve of the coup, it nevertheless acted as the inspirer, organizer, and principal driving force behind the change of power in Ukraine" [38, p. 175].

Having examined both the historiography of the Ukrainian diaspora and part of contemporary Ukrainian scholarship, Serhii Hnatiuk concludes that, by reaching an agreement with the Minister of War, Oleksandr Zhukovskyi, the German Oberkommando prevented the Central Rada from arresting Pavlo Skoropadskyi [2, p. 84]. By contrast, Oleksandr Kuzmynets and several other scholars place greater emphasis on Skoropadskyi's own organizational abilities and political leadership in bringing the coup to a successful conclusion [39, p. 192].

Overall, contemporary historiography demonstrates a tendency toward a synthetic interpretation of the April 1918 coup. Within this framework, the overthrow of the Central Rada is understood as the product of the interaction between the internal crisis of the Central Rada, the increasing political mobilization of Ukrainian conservative circles, and the gradual transition of the German and Austro-Hungarian military commands toward a model of managed political influence.

A separate group of studies consists of broad synthetic surveys that examine the events of April 1918 within the broader context of the Ukrainian Revolution. Significantly, even collective monographs reveal a persistent conceptual dualism in their interpretation of these developments.

For example, the multi-volume Political History of Ukraine in the Twentieth Century and Socio-Political Transformations in Ukraine assign primary importance to external factors, portraying Pavlo Skoropadskyi chiefly as a functional instrument through which the Central Powers pursued their political objectives. By contrast, the fundamental Essays on the History of the Ukrainian Revolution, 1917—1921 and Ukraine: Essays on History shift the analytical focus toward the internal crisis of the Central Rada. They emphasize its chronic administrative weakness, financial paralysis, unresolved agrarian conflicts, and the dramatic erosion of its popular legitimacy.

At the same time, even these broad synthetic studies acknowledge that the external factor acted as a catalyst for an already existing internal instability [40—43].

A synthesis of recent historiographical scholarship demonstrates a significant shift in approaches to the study of the causes, mechanisms, and consequences of the Hetman coup of April 29, 1918. Contemporary historical research has moved decisively beyond both Soviet and émigré interpretations, which reduced Pavlo Skoropadskyi's accession to power to little more than a German-sponsored military conspiracy or an occupation coup. Instead, current scholarship has embraced a multifactorial analytical framework

that interprets the transfer of power as the outcome of a profound internal crisis of the Ukrainian state, coinciding with the pragmatic military and economic interests of the Central Powers.

The collapse of the republican regime is generally explained as the consequence of the political and ideological intransigence of the leaders of the Central Rada, the absence of a regular national army, an acute shortage of qualified administrative personnel, and serious shortcomings in the socio-economic sphere. These policies alienated both prosperous segments of the peasantry and representatives of the industrial and landed elites. Likewise, Pavlo Skoropadskyi is no longer portrayed as a merely accidental figure appointed solely at Berlin's initiative. Rather, historians have convincingly demonstrated that his accession followed a complex process of political selection in which both the occupation authorities and Ukrainian conservative circles considered a number of alternative candidates. Skoropadskyi ultimately emerged as the preferred choice because of his prestige among the landed elite, his extensive military experience, and his willingness to pursue political compromise in the interest of restoring stability — qualities that fully matched the requirements of the German military command. At the same time, R. Pyrih's interpretation is particularly noteworthy: he argues that German military support for the Hetmanate model was motivated not so much by the new ruler's descent from the historic Hetmanate aristocracy as by the practical need to demonstrate to the left-wing factions of the German Reichstag and to the international community that the change of government in Ukraine was an exclusively internal Ukrainian affair rather than the result of direct intervention by the Central Powers.

Several promising directions for future research remain. Among the most important are a detailed analysis of the informal negotiations and private contacts between Ukrainian opposition leaders and representatives of German intelligence and the diplomatic corps in the period preceding the coup. Equally valuable would be comparative studies of the policies pursued by the Central Powers in other occupied territories, as well as a more thorough examination of the disagreements over the Ukrainian question that existed among the German High Command, the Austro-Hungarian government, and the diplomatic services of the Central Powers. Such research would facilitate a fuller integration of the Ukrainian case into the broader European history of the First World War and the collapse of the continental empires.

Thus, contemporary Ukrainian historiography interprets the 1918 coup not as the result of a single determining factor, but as a complex political process shaped by the intersection of the interests of the Central Powers, the internal crisis of the Ukrainian revolutionary government, and the activities of conservative political forces. In our view, the decisive factor was the convergence of the political initiative of Pavlo Skoropadskyi and Ukrainian conservative circles, which had developed before the April crisis of the Central Rada, with the German military command's readiness to support a change of government and facilitate its practical implementation. At the same time, the possibility of carrying out the coup independently by Ukrainian conservative forces alone appears highly unlikely. Lacking a consolidated regular armed force of their own, they were unable either to remove the Central Rada from power or to consolidate their position without

the benevolent neutrality or direct assistance of the German occupation authorities. Skoropadskyi therefore could rely not so much on the independent implementation of a fully developed political plan as on the exploitation of a favorable military and political environment created by the presence of the Central Powers in Ukraine. The successful realization of the coup on April 29, 1918 thus resulted from the convergence of domestic political initiative and external military support.

It is important to emphasize that the April coup involved more than a change in political leadership. It fundamentally altered the trajectory of Ukrainian state-building, shifting it from the republican-socialist model of the Central Rada toward the conservative-authoritarian model of the Hetmanate. This interpretation provides, in our view, a productive analytical framework for understanding the causes, mechanisms, and consequences of the transfer of power in Ukraine in the spring of 1918.

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ПРИЧИНИ ПАДІННЯ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЇ РАДИ ТА РОЛЬ НІМЕЦЬКО-АВСТРІЙСЬКИХ СОЮЗНИКІВ УНР У ЗДІЙСНЕННІ ДЕРЖАВНОГО ПЕРЕВОРОТУ 1918 РОКУ: СУЧАСНА УКРАЇНСЬКА ІСТОРІОГРАФІЯ

Мета статті — проаналізувати здобутки та тенденції сучасної української історіографії щодо визначення ролі Німеччини та Австро-Угорщини в підготовці й здійсненні державного перевороту 29 квітня 1918 р., а також верифікувати дискусійні питання взаємин між Центральними державами та українськими консервативними силами напередодні встановлення Гетьманату. **Методологія дослідження** ґрунтується на застосуванні історіографічного, проблемно-хронологічного, порівняльного та системного методів, що дозволили виявити й систематизувати основні підходи до оцінки ролі зовнішніх і внутрішніх чинників у підготовці та здійсненні гетьманського перевороту 1918 р. **Наукова новизна** полягає в комплексному узагальненні сучасних історіографічних інтерпретацій ролі Німеччини й Австро-Угорщини в подіях весни 1918 р., визначення основних концепцій щодо причин падіння Центральної Ради, вибору кандидатури Павла Скоропадського на посаду гетьмана та характеру участі Центральних держав у підготовці зміни влади в Україні. **Основні результати.** Встановлено, що сучасна українська історіографія поступово відходить від одновимірного трактування гетьманського перевороту виключно як наслідку німецько-австрійського втручання. Поширення набувають багатофакторні пояснювальні моделі, які враховують аналіз внутрішньої кризи Центральної Ради, інтересів Центральних держав, діяльності українських консервативних кіл та особистої політичної ролі П. Скоропадського. З'ясовано, що попри розбіжності в оцінках ступеня впливу німецького й австро-угорського командування на процес підготовки перевороту, більшість авторів розглядає зміну влади як результат взаємодії зовнішніх і внутрішніх чинників. Визначено низку недостатньо досліджених питань, що потребують подальшого опрацювання: кулуарні контакти українських опозиціонерів із представниками німецької розвідки, міжвідомча конкуренція у структурах Центральних держав, ставлення лівих фракцій німецького Рейхстагу до зміни влади в Україні.

Ключові слова: *українська історіографія, Центральна Рада, державний переворот, П. Скоропадський, Гетьманат, Німеччина, Австро-Угорщина, Центральні держави.*