

The State Security Committee`s use of extrajudicial repression against the Ukrainian Helsinki Group (February 1977 – February 1979)

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Abstract.

The purpose of the article is a comprehensive analysis of the extrajudicial repressions of the punitive structures of the Soviet regime against the Ukrainian Helsinki Group (UHG) during February 1977 – February 1979. **Methodology.** The methodological basis of the article was the principles of historicism, objectivity, comprehensiveness, and continuity. The work used the methods of analysis (to study various specific repressive methods), synthesis (to write generalizations and conclusions), and abstraction (the focus was on the repressive actions of the SSC against dissidents, while excluding the actions of other Soviet authorities, as well as the features of the public activity of human rights activists). In addition, during the research, problem-chronological and retrospective methods were used, as well as the method of comparing and contrasting information from various sources (primarily KGB materials and memoirs of participants in the dissident movement). **The scientific novelty** is due to the introduction into scientific circulation of a set of little-known documents from the Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (SSA SSU), which allow us to reveal the key methods and means of using extrajudicial repressions against UHG participants by the State Security Committee (SSC). The article is the first to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the SSC`s secret operational and preventive measures against Ukrainian human rights defenders during 1977–1979. **Conclusions.** In 1977–1979, the SSC of the Ukrainian SSR implemented a large-scale and targeted campaign of extrajudicial repressions against the participants of the UHG, which combined a wide range of methods – from operational and preventive measures to intelligence and compromising activities. Analysis of a diverse source base has shown that the SSC was not limited to judicial instruments of pressure, and along with them actively used “soft” forms of influence aimed at demoralization, isolation and division of the dissident environment. Repressive policies included administrative supervision, searches, surveillance, calls for preventive conversations, provocations, discrediting campaigns, the spread of disinformation and blackmail. Taken together, they were intended to destroy the group`s structure and reduce its public activity. The multifaceted and flexible nature of the KGB`s actions deserves special attention, as the measures were carefully adapted to the psychological, social, and personal characteristics of individual movement participants. The case of Oksana Meshko, as one of the key figures of the group, demonstrates the particularly harsh nature of extrajudicial repression, which included systematic surveillance, isolation from like-minded people, agent development, and psycho-emotional pressure. Despite a powerful wave of repression, the UHG continued its activities, demonstrating resilience, solidarity, and internal potential for resistance. The SSC`s policy towards the UHG in 1977–1979 became an example of a complex and repressive mechanism for curbing civil activity under the conditions of the late Soviet totalitarian regime.

Keywords: Ukrainian Helsinki Group (UHG), Committee for State Security (SSC), Ukrainian dissident movement, human rights movement, Oksana Meshko, repression, discrediting.

Використання Комітетом державної безпеки позасудових репресій проти Української Гельсінської групи (лютий 1977 – лютий 1979 рр.)

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Анотація.

Мета статті – комплексний та всебічний аналіз позасудових репресій каральних структур радянського режиму проти Української Гельсінської групи (УГГ) протягом лютого 1977 – лютого 1979 рр. **Методологія.** Методологічною основою статті виступили принципи історизму, об'єктивності, всебічності, наступності. У роботі використано методи аналізу (з метою дослідження різних конкретних репресивних методів), синтезу (для написання узагальнень і висновків), абстрагування (увага зосереджувалася власне на репресивних діях КДБ проти дисидентів, при цьому виводилися за рамки дослідження дії інших органів радянської влади, а також особливості громадської активності правозахисників). Також під час дослідження використовувалися проблемно-хронологічний та ретроспективний методи, метод порівняння та зіставлення інформації з різних джерел (в першу чергу матеріалів КДБ та спогадів учасників дисидентського руху). **Наукова новизна** зумовлена введенням у науковий обіг комплексу маловідомих документів Галузевого державного архіву Служби безпеки України (ГДА СБУ), які дозволяють розкрити ключові методи і способи використання Комітетом державної безпеки (КДБ) позасудових репресій проти учасників УГГ. У статті вперше здійснено всебічний аналіз таємних оперативно-профілактичних заходів КДБ проти українських правозахисників протягом 1977–1979 рр. **Висновки.** У 1977–1979 рр. КДБ УРСР реалізував масштабну та цілеспрямовану кампанію позасудових репресій проти учасників УГГ, що поєднувала широке коло методів – від оперативно-профілактичних заходів до агентурно-компрометаційної діяльності. Аналіз різнопланової джерельної бази засвідчив, що КДБ не обмежувався судовими інструментами тиску, і поряд із ними активно використовував «м'які» форми впливу, спрямовані на деморалізацію, ізоляцію та розкол дисидентського середовища. Репресивна політика включала адміністративний нагляд, обшуки, стеження, виклики на профілактичні бесіди, провокації, дискредитаційні кампанії, поширення дезінформації та шантаж. У сукупності вони мали зруйнувати структуру групи та знизити її громадську активність. Особливої уваги заслуговує багатоскладовий і гнучкий характер дій КДБ, адже заходи ретельно адаптовувалися до психологічних, соціальних та особистісних характеристик окремих учасників руху. Випадок Оксани Мешко, як однієї з ключових фігур групи, демонструє особливо жорсткий характер позасудових репресій, що включали систематичне стеження, ізоляцію від однодумців, агентурну розробку та психоемоційний тиск. Незважаючи на потужну хвилю репресій, УГГ продовжувала свою діяльність, демонструючи стійкість, солідарність і внутрішній потенціал до опору. Політика КДБ щодо УГГ у 1977–1979 рр. стала прикладом комплексного і репресивного механізму стримування громадянської активності в умовах пізньорадянського тоталітарного режиму.

Ключові слова: Українська Гельсінська група (УГГ), Комітет державної безпеки (КДБ), український дисидентський рух, правозахисний рух, Оксана Мешко, репресії, компрометація.

Problem statement. In the second half of the 1970s, the Ukrainian Helsinki Group (UHG; official name – Ukrainian Public Group for Assistance in the Implementation of the Helsinki Accords) became the most organized and systematic human rights structure in the territory of Soviet Ukraine. The group was created in November 1976, and its founding members were Ukrainian dissidents Mykola Rudenko (chairman), Petro Hryhorenko, Levko Lukyanenko, Oksana Meshko, Oles Berdnyk, Oleksiy Tykhy, Mykola Matusevych, Myroslav Marynovych, Nina Strokata, and Ivan Kandyba. Its activities, aimed at recording and publicizing human rights violations in Ukraine in accordance with the 1975 Helsinki Accords, provoked a harsh reaction from Soviet punitive authorities. A special place in the system of the regime's repressive policy was occupied by extrajudicial methods of struggle, which were actively used by the State Security Committee (SSC) against the participants of the UHG. These measures were covert in nature, aimed at avoiding public resonance, moral exhaustion, isolation, discrediting and destroying horizontal ties within the dissident environment.

The relevance of the topic is due to the need for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of the functioning of the Soviet repressive system, especially in its secret, extrajudicial dimension. In modern conditions, when authoritarian regimes are once again resorting to similar methods of influencing civil society, studying the experience of Soviet special services becomes particularly important. An analysis of the SSC's activities against the UHG allows not only to restore historical justice towards participants in the human rights movement, but also to understand the origins and logic of modern practices of political persecution, which is important for building a democratic rule of law in Ukraine.

Analysis of sources and recent research. G. Kasyanov, A. Rusnachenko, Y. Danylyuk and O. Bazhan, and B. Zakharov studied the issues of the Soviet regime's repressions against the UHG in the pages of comprehensive works on the history of the Ukrainian dissident movement. In particular, G. Kasyanov, while studying the punitive actions of the authorities against human rights defenders, pays special attention to the previous efforts of the party leadership aimed at concealing the

repressions from the public. The researcher sees a significant increase in the total number of KGB employees of the Ukrainian SSR in August 1978 as an important prerequisite for increasing pressure against the UHG (Kasianov, 2019, pp. 196–212). A. Rusnachenko presents the activities of the UHG in a concise manner in the monograph; the researcher pays more attention to the composition of the participants and individual program documents of the organization than to the repressions of the Soviet regime against it (Rusnachenko, 1998, pp. 209–213). Researchers Yu. Danylyuk and O. Bazhan consider the head of the republican SSC, Vitaliy Fedorchuk, to be the key initiator of the preemptive strike against the UHG; also, analyzing the judicial repressions, they draw attention to the extremely harsh sentences handed down to the group's leaders (Danyliuk & Bazhan, 2000, pp. 202–206). B. Zakharov, drawing attention to the key milestones of the UHG's public activities, describes primarily the judicial repressions against its participants (Zakharov, 2003, pp. 112–132).

When writing the article, a study by Ja. Seko was used, which was dedicated to the characteristics of the key stages of the UHG's activities (Seko, 2012). The historian distinguishes the following stages:

- 1) November 1976 – February 1977 – the activities of the founding members of the group;
- 2) February 1977 – February 1979 – the peak of organizational activity in conditions of constant threat of arrests;
- 3) February – October 1979 – the joining of political prisoners to the UHG and a change of emphasis towards the protection of the national rights of the Ukrainian people;
- 4) November 1979 – March 1981 – the ousting of the group from the public life of the Ukrainian SSR;
- 5) April 1981 – July 1988 – the stagnation of the Helsinki movement.

The framework of our study chronologically coincides with the second stage of the UHG's existence – from the first arrests of its participants in February 1977 to the mass entry of Ukrainian political prisoners into the group in colonies and the simultaneous intensification of repression by the authorities in February 1979.

The article by scholar O. Bazhan reveals the role of the UHG in consolidating the opposition movement in Ukraine in the second half of the 1970s, and demonstrates the attitude of the world community to the problems of the Ukrainian people and human rights in Ukraine (Bazhan, 1999). B. Paska's study carefully analyzes the reaction of the Soviet regime and its punitive bodies to the creation and beginning of the group's activities in late 1976 – early 1977 (Paska, 2024). Biographical information about all participants of the UHG can be found in the encyclopedic reference book "The Resistance Movement in Ukraine: 1960–1990" (Zinkevych, 2012). Various aspects of the confrontation between the KGB and the Ukrainian national movement in the 1960s and 1970s are revealed in the articles of Y. Antonyuk and V. Trofymovych (Antoniuk & Trofymovych, 2021), V. Derevynskiy (Derevynskiy, 2023), B. Paska (Paska, 2022; Paska, 2023), Y. Shapoval (Shapoval, 2023), V. Trofymovych and L. Trofymovych (Trofymovych & Trofymovych, 2025).

Despite the existence of works devoted to the activities of the UHG, extrajudicial forms of pressure by the KGB in 1977–1979 have not yet received sufficient attention. Usually, these measures were mentioned fragmentarily, without a comprehensive analysis of their structure, dynamics, instruments, and consequences. Therefore, the article aims to highlight extrajudicial repression as a component of the state policy of combating dissent, in particular through the analysis of specific cases of pressure on leaders and active participants of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group.

The basis of the source database was previously classified materials from the Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (SSA SSU) – reports and information messages from the leadership of the KGB of the Ukrainian SSR to the top party leadership and the Kremlin center regarding the organization of punitive measures against Ukrainian dissidents. The UHG program documents and materials, collected in the 4-volume publication "Ukrainian Public Group for the Promotion of the Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Documents and Materials," which was published in 2001 (Zakharov, 2001a; Zakharov, 2001b), were actively used. The work and memories of the group's members – O. Meshko (Meshko, 1996), P. Hryhorenko (Obertas, 2008), and V. Ovsienko (Ovsienko, 2023) – were also useful.

The purpose of the article is a comprehensive analysis of extrajudicial repressions by the punitive structures of the Soviet regime against the UHG during February 1977 – February 1979.

The Results of the Research. The key tasks of the KGB in the second half of the 1970s in the context of the fight against the Ukrainian national movement were the following:

- 1) Ideological re-education of its participants who showed hesitation or took a wait-and-see attitude;
- 2) Consistent compromising before the Soviet public, other dissidents and the diaspora of those who stood firm in their positions;
- 3) Cessation of public activity of dissidents who did not respond to "prevention" due to isolation from society (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1064, p. 92).

During the implementation of the first two tasks, the key ones were the extrajudicial operational and preventive measures carried out by SSC officers. During the first two years of the UHG's existence, the general strategy of the Soviet regime's punitive bodies consisted of a combination of targeted detentions and subsequent judicial reprisals against its most active participants with a whole range of preventive and educational measures against other participants in the movement (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1064, p. 91).

In February 1977, the leader of the UHG M. Rudenko and the group member O. Tykhy were imprisoned (in June–July 1977, they received 7 years of imprisonment and 5 years of exile, and 10 years of imprisonment and 5 years of exile, respectively). In April of the same year, M. Matusevych and M. Marynovych were arrested (in March 1978, both were sentenced to 7 years of imprisonment and 5 years of exile), and in December, L. Lukyanenko (in July 1978, he received 10 years of imprisonment and 5 years of exile) (Ovsienko, 2023, 222–224). In this situation, the real leaders of the group were O. Berdnyk and O. Meshko, who during 1977–1978 initiated the involvement of other dissidents into its composition – Petro Vins, Olha Heiko-Matusevych, Vitaliy Kalynychenko, Vasyl Striltsiv, Vasyl Sichko, Petro Sichko, Yuriy Lytvyn, Volodymyr Malynkovych, Mykhailo Melnyk, Vasyl Ovsienko (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1074, p. 74; Zakharov, 2001a, p. 29). The participants of the UHG demonstrated a significant level of public activity: the creation of human rights memorandums and newsletters was intensified, and many appeals were issued to the authorities and international structures regarding the violation of general democratic and national rights on the territory of the Ukrainian SSR. In particular, during January–April 1977, ten memorandums were issued regarding the persecution of dissidents in Ukraine. In October of the same year, O. Berdnyk, P. Hryhorenko, O. Meshko, I. Kandyba, L. Lukyanenko, and N. Strokata appealed to the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR with a request to “grant the Group official status.” In the first half of 1978, the members of the Group published “Information Bulletins” No. 1 and No. 2, which collected information about repressions against participants in the Ukrainian dissident movement and various cases of human rights violations, and in November of the same year – “Information Bulletin No. 4.” Also in the summer of 1978, the Group's program document entitled “Our Tasks” appeared (Zakharov, 2001a, pp. 28–29; Kasianov, 2019, pp. 203–206).

In connection with the significant increase in the activity of the UHG in 1977 and the simultaneous relatively successful measures of the KGB against representatives of the so-called post-sixties environment (leaders – Yuriy Badzio, Borys Antonenko-Davydovych, Mykhailyna Kotsiubynska, Mykhailo Horyn, etc.), the leadership of the special service decided to terminate the case of the group operational development “Block”, which was opened against participants of the Ukrainian national movement back in 1971. In October 1977, the head of the KGB of the Ukrainian SSR, Vitaliy Fedorchuk, reported to Moscow about plans to open a new group case against the participants of the UHG, O. Meshko, O. Berdnyk, L. Lukyanenko, I. Kandyba, as well as “their accomplices” – post-sixties members B. Antonenko-Davydovych, M. Kotsiubynska, M. Horyn, Atena Pashko, Nadia Svitlychna, Pavlo Stokotely (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1064, pp. 109–110). In the end, in June 1978, the “Block” case was closed, but instead the leadership of the SSC of the Ukrainian SSR opened a new operational development case under the same conditional name. Its subjects were 23 individuals, among whom one can indeed find the names of both participants in the Helsinki movement and active post-sixties activists. The list of individuals who were in the SSC's sights as part of the new “Block” case in 1978 and early 1979 included Borys Antonenko-Davydovych, Mykhailyna Kotsiubynska, Oksana Meshko, Oles Berdnyk, Yuriy Badzio, Nadiya Svitlychna, Leonida Svitlychna, Mykola Horbal, K. Semenyuk (Kyiv), Mykhailo Horyn, Ivan Kandyba, Lyubomyra Popadiuk, Atena Pashko, Olena Antoniv (Lviv), Vitaliy Kalynychenko, Ivan Sokulsky (Dnipropetrovsk), Vasyl Striltsiv, Raisa Moroz (Ivano-Frankivsk), Vasyl Ovsienko, V. Yakivchuk (Zhytomyr), Mykhailo Masyutko, Oles Nazarenko (Kherson), Hanna Mykhailenko (Odesa) (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1074, p. 69).

In the view of the leadership of the KGB of the Ukrainian SSR, the objects of the renewed “Block” case were two interconnected subgroups: the leaders of the first were considered to be B. Antonenko-Davydovych and M. Kotsiubynska, who were not formally members of the UHG, but supported its activities; the leaders of the second were O. Meshko, L. Lukyanenko, and O. Berdnyk, the actual leaders of the UHG. The human rights organization was considered “a front for uniting nationalist and other anti-Soviet elements and intensifying their hostile activities.” Nevertheless, due to the rather close ties between the two subgroups, they were actually treated by the KGB as a “single nationalist grouping.” (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1074, p. 93).

In addition to detentions, searches, and judicial reprisals, SSC officers used a whole arsenal of extrajudicial methods against the Ukrainian Helsinki Movement. These were the following methods:

- Use of administrative supervision over former political prisoners;
- Preventive conversations and announcement of official warnings;
- Surveillance, “deterrent influence” through agents, operational sources, and trusted persons of the special services;

- Compromising both the idea of the UHG itself and its specific participants;
- Expulsion of dissidents abroad.

As a rule, the SSC in certain combinations applied operational-preventive measures, comprehensively, taking into account the specifics of the personality of each individual participant in the movement.

Many members of the UHG and individuals involved in the group's activities were under administrative supervision in the second half of the 1970s. These were primarily former political prisoners who had recently returned from prison. Since the dissidents, in the opinion of the colony administration, "did not embark on the path of correction," after their release, they were placed under administrative supervision for six months with the possibility of further extension. The relevant participants in the resistance movement were effectively placed under house arrest – they were forbidden to leave their homes at night, travel outside the district, or visit public places; they were required to report to the local police station once a month for a check-up (Zakharov, 2001b, p. 34). Such measures severely restricted the mobility of Ukrainian human rights defenders and hindered effective communication between them. In 1977–1979, L. Lukyanenko, I. Kandyba, N. Strokata, V. Ovsienko, V. Kalynychenko, and others were under administrative supervision (Zakharov, 2001b, pp. 34, 41, 59, 73–74, 89).

One of the most common extrajudicial measures in the arsenal of KGB officers in confronting UHG participants was establishing personal contact with dissidents and conducting preventive conversations. During conversations with dissidents, the KGB officers often used open blackmail to separate them from the resistance movement. The most active and uncompromising dissidents were given an official warning during such conversations in accordance with the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of December 25, 1972. According to this decree, SSC officers had the right to warn citizens officially that their actions bordered on state crimes.

Already in 1977, the KGB established personal contact with a member of the UHG I. Kandyba, and the so-called operational sources of the KGB were actively used to "re-educate" him (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1061, pp. 283–284). On September 23, 1977, the dissident was detained in Lviv and taken to the regional prosecutor's office. The head of the Lviv SSC Department, General Mykola Poluden, and the deputy regional prosecutor, Rudenko, conducted the interview with him personally. They suggested that I. Kandyba publicly renounce his views through the press and radio broadcasts and condemn dissident activity, resorting to blackmail methods. After the human rights activist refused to take such a step, he was extended administrative supervision for a period of six months (Zakharov, 2001b, p. 88). A number of preventive conversations in November and December 1977 were held with Nadia Svitlychna. After returning from prison, she renewed contacts with the dissident environment and after the creation of the UHG, established close ties with its participants, and participated in the preparation of some memoranda issued by the group. During conversations with operatives, the dissident openly expressed her dissatisfaction with Soviet reality and sought to leave the USSR. As a result, in December 1977, she was officially warned (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1068, p. 290). In May 1978, during a conversation with V. Striltsiv, a member of the UHG from Ivano-Frankivsk region, SSC Colonel Cherkasov, in an attempt to persuade the dissident to leave the human rights organization, promised to help him find a job at the school where he had previously taught. However, no results were achieved in this way. In October 1978, the KGB district administration in Dolyna, Ivano-Frankivsk region, summoned human rights movement members V. Striltsiv, Petro, Vasyl, and Stefania Sichko for the purpose of intimidation. They were warned, "If anything happens in the district on the first anniversary of the new Constitution of the USSR, they will be immediately arrested." (Zakharov, 2001b, p. 205).

In order to monitor the participants of the Helsinki movement, KGB officers successfully used an agent network, a circle of trusted persons, as well as operational and technical means (OTM). On the initiative of the secret service leadership, in 1977–1979, measures were taken to strengthen the agent positions among the UHG participants. Experienced agents "Troyanda," "Severyna," "Yaroslavna," "Verbena," etc. were introduced into the circle of the organization's leaders, which, together with the use of OTM and the external surveillance service, allowed for timely receipt of information about plans and practical actions regarding the production of samizdat and its transmission abroad. Accordingly, measures were taken to prevent and stop such actions by dissidents. Because of various intelligence-operational combinations, as well as during searches of O. Meshko and her close acquaintances alone, several hundred items of samizdat documents were seized during their preparation or attempts to transfer them to the West (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1074, p. 74). When L. Lukyanenko and O. Meshko tried to expand the number of UHG members in 1977 after the first imprisonments of its members, offers to join the group were addressed not only to Lviv dissident S. Hulyk, but also to SSC agents "Vartan" and "Lada," who apparently enjoyed trust among human rights activists. Through the agent "Lada," O. Meshko tried to deliver the letter to Moscow dissidents and abroad. With L. Lukyanenko before his arrest in December 1977, the agents "Trofymchuk," "Buh" and "Yasinsky" worked, who tried

to convince him to stop public activity in order to avoid further repressions (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1064, p. 101).

In the spring and summer of 1977, in order to reduce the public activity of the wife of the arrested M. Matuselych, a member of the UHG, O. Heiko-Matuselych, she was influenced through a KGB operative who maintained personal contact with her under the guise of a police officer. At the same time, "educational work" was carried out with the dissident with the participation of the administration of the "Soviet School" publishing house, where she worked, as well as through an operational source who enjoyed her trust and respect (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1061, p. 284). In 1977–1978, KGB officers exerted a "restraining influence" on N. Svitlychna. Operational sources of the special service tried to shift her attention from public activism and the Helsinki movement to everyday issues, drawing attention to the need for the dissident to take greater care of her health and raising her children (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1068, p. 291).

The special service also tried to exert influence through agents and operatives on O. Berdnyk and V. Kalynychenko. In the case of O. Berdnyk, it was somewhat possible to limit his activity and contacts with O. Meshko during 1978; the dissident told the SSC agent "Topol" "the situation forced him to change the tactics of hostile activity." In addition to SSC agents and trusted persons, relatives and the public at place of work and residence were involved in the "re-education" of V. Kalynychenko. He was repeatedly summoned for preventive talks to the KGB bodies, the prosecutor's office and the police, but the human rights activist did not change his behavior and did not refuse contacts with like-minded people (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1074, pp. 77–78).

The KGB leadership invested a lot of effort and resources in compromising both the very idea of creating a single human rights organization in the form of the UHG, and its active participants. In order to split the group's participants, introduce contradictions and mutual hostility into their environment through agents and other operational capabilities, individual dissidents were given the idea of the futility and inexpediency of continuing dissident activity under the cover of the UHG as a form of struggle, which did not justify itself (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1071, pp. 35–36; HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1074, p. 75). When in 1977, the Kyiv journalist and resistance movement member Oles Shevchenko intended to join the group's activities, information about his alleged cooperation with the special services was disseminated through the KGB's operational channels, which served as a pretext for his partial isolation among dissidents (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1064, p. 102). In 1977, former political prisoner Vasyl Ovsienko, who was close to the UHG, was tried to be compromised as an immoral person among his fellow villagers and was surrounded by informers. People who tried to maintain contact with V. Ovsienko were summoned to the police for interviews, and rumors were purposefully spread in the village with the aim of maximum isolation of the dissident and psychological pressure on him (Zakharov, 2001b, pp. 35–36). In 1977, the de facto leader of the UHG, O. Berdnyk, was compromised through the media – on August 12 of that year, the feuilleton "Relic Messiah" directed against him, filed by the KGB, was published in the newspaper "Literary Ukraine," and 3 more articles about the dissident's "antisocial behavior" were published in other republican publications. The operatives studied the possibility of sending O. Berdnyk to a psychiatric hospital in order to discredit him (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1064, pp. 224–226).

A special operation was organized to discredit O. Heiko-Matuselych. In order to create the appearance of the dissident's cooperation with the SSC, an operative maintained contact with her, in whose presence she received from V. Ovsienko samizdat materials prepared for transfer abroad. After their official seizure, these documents were used in preventive work with V. Ovsienko and during the announcement of an official warning to him in September 1977 with the participation of the aforementioned KGB operative. The dissident immediately informed O. Meshko and other participants in the human rights movement about this, after which O. Heiko-Matuselych was expelled from the UHG. Along with this, information about the alleged "immoral behavior" of O. Heiko-Matuselych was also brought to the political prisoners M. Matuselych, M. Rudenko and other dissidents, which led to a decrease in her public activity (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1074, p. 79).

In order to compromise O. Meshko, as the most active member of the group, in the dissident environment through the agency SSC spread the opinion that the dissident is not capable of realistic assessment of the situation, "is ready for the sake of her own popularity in the West to carry out any adventures and push like-minded people on them, regardless of the consequences and the undermining of the "movement"." SSC agents told dissidents that O. Meshko was deliberately pushing like-minded people to take unjustified steps and make sacrifices for the sake of personal interests; in particular, he was striving to receive the Nobel Prize, which allegedly harmed the resistance movement. In this regard, regular preventive conversations were held with people from O. Meshko's entourage, and in some cases she and her acquaintances were demonstratively observed, which significantly limited the activity of dissidents and contributed to the internal isolation of the UHG member. In addition, the SSC used O. Meshko's suspicion, her unfounded accusations of a number of her like-minded people (M. Matuselych, O. Heiko-Matuselych, R. Rudenko, O. Shevchenko) in

cooperation with the Soviet special services and increasingly spread the idea of her as a “crazy and quarrelsome woman, contacts with whom are detrimental in all respects.” As a result, a number of participants in the dissident movement – B. Antonenko-Davydovych, M. Kotsiubynska, L. Svitlychna, M. Horyn and others – began to lose interest in the UHG during 1978 and cut off ties with O. Meshko. The latter was kicked out of the apartments of L. Svitlychna and B. Antonenko-Davydovych “for provocative conversations,” and M. Kotsiubynska flatly refused to help her in preparing the group’s documents (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1071, p. 36; HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1074, pp. 75–76).

Many participants of the UHG in 1977–1978 sought to go abroad and submitted corresponding petitions to the authorities. As a rule, the KGB leadership had a sharply negative attitude towards the possible emigration of dissidents. In particular, the possibilities of leaving were blocked for L. Lukyanenko, O. Berdnyk, V. Kalynychenko, and others (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1064, p. 225; HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1074, p. 78). However, in some cases, the punitive authorities saw in the emigration of UHG members or sympathizers an opportunity to isolate them from like-minded people in Ukraine and weaken the dissident movement. The most striking example was the permission to leave for P. Hryhorenko in the USA in November 1977 for treatment. When the dissident and his wife were abroad, they were deprived of Soviet citizenship and were forbidden to return to their homeland (Obertas, 2008, pp. 111–113). In the spring of 1978, N. Svitlychna began to seek permission to travel abroad persistently, having received several invitations to travel to Canada. Considering, that the dissident did not plan to reconcile with the Soviet regime and abandon public activity, and the “slandorous information” she possessed was already known in the West, in May 1975 the SSC leadership recommended to the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU) to grant her request to travel abroad (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1068, pp. 289–292). First Secretary Volodymyr Shcherbytsky agreed with this proposal, and on October 12, 1978, N. Svitlychna left for the USA (Zakharov, 2001a, p. 146).

Let us consider the mechanism of the complex use of operational-preventive and educational measures by the KGB against one of the most active participants of the UHG, O. Meshko, during the studied period. Given her advanced age – over 70 years – the authorities did not dare to resort to judicial repressions against the dissident for a long period, apparently so as not to provoke international publicity.

In addition to the above-analyzed attempts to compromise the activist of the dissident movement, the KGB officers used a whole array of various repressive actions against O. Meshko. Operational control over her actions was organized – round-the-clock surveillance of the dissident; for this purpose, a technically equipped observation point was created in a neighboring empty house (Zakharov, 2001b, p. 88). Persons who visited O. Meshko’s residence (in particular, dissidents Yu. Lytvyn, V. Sichko, M. Melnyk, and others) were regularly detained and searched by the police (Zakharov, 2001b, p. 204). In order to strengthen the dissident’s isolation among dissidents, during 1978, KGB officers conducted preventive interviews with 12 of O. Meshko’s close acquaintances. In return, the UHG member was surrounded by agents and trusted persons of the KGB; she even offered one of these persons to participate in writing the group’s program documents by preparing a “Declaration” on the socio-political views and activities of Ukrainian dissidents (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1071, pp. 38–39). On February 9, 1978, her apartment was searched, during which nine KGB officers were in the apartment for about 20 hours. The door to the apartment was opened with keys taken from the dissident’s tenant at work, and during the search, a cache of documents was discovered. On February 14, police officers forcibly took O. Meshko to the KGB building for interrogation in the L. Lukyanenko case, which lasted 4 hours; as a result, the dissident was given an official warning (Zakharov, 2001b, 87–88).

The general line of the KGB was to try to isolate O. Meshko from ties with Russian dissidents completely and to prevent her from transferring UHG documents abroad through Moscow. When O. Meshko tried in June 1978 to transfer to Moscow democrats the materials of the prepared “Information Bulletin No. 2” of the UHG, KGB officers organized an entire special operation against her acquaintance Valentyna Drabata, who was transporting the documents. A KGB task force of the Ukrainian SSR was created, and during V. Drabata’s trip from Kyiv to Moscow on a train, KGB agents simulated the theft of a bag with UHG materials; then these documents were legalized through the police. The Moscow railway police department detained V. Drabata for 3 hours, although she did not report the theft (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1071, p. 37; Zakharov, 2001b, 203). In August of the same year, O. Meshko transferred a package of documents to Moscow through her daughter-in-law Zvenyslava Vivchar, but the latter entrusted this mission to a person who turned out to be a KGB source. Accordingly, the UHG materials ended up in the hands of the special services, and the person in question feigned their loss to O. Meshko (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1071, p. 39).

KGB officers tried to prevent O. Meshko completely from storing and distributing samizdat materials and documents of the UHG. During 1978, more than 300 documents were seized from her, which were to be transferred to the West; the dissident kept another 140 documents in the homes of

people who were operational sources for the KGB, and thus these materials were under the control of the punitive authorities (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1071, p. 40). On August 30, 1978, searches were carried out without a prosecutor's authorization at the homes of acquaintances of human rights activist Valentyna Terpylo and Oksana Lelyuk in Kyiv. The pretext was a denunciation by a certain Mykola Kryuchko, who informed the KGB that he had allegedly dug up anti-Soviet literature belonging to O. Meshko and had seen O. Lelyuk visiting the dissident. As reported in the Appeal of the UHG to the UN Committee on the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms, the governments of the states that signed the Helsinki Accords, and the world community (November – December 1978), for his cooperation, M. Kryuchok received housing and a monthly salary of 60 rubles. O. Meshko in the apartment of her acquaintances, Kyiv teachers Larysa and Imre Vasko, kept a significant amount of samizdat literature. In October 1978, because of the work carried out with her in the SSC of the Ukrainian SSR, L. Vasko gave the special service 85 documents and 24 tape reels (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1071, pp. 39–40; Zakharov, 2001b, pp. 203–204). Finally, on November 3, 1978, an armed attack was carried out on O. Meshko's apartment, allegedly for the purpose of robbery; there were quite reasonable assumptions in the dissident community that the KGB was also behind this action, and the real goal was to intimidate the dissident and undermine her mental health (Zakharov, 2001b, pp. 204–205).

Nevertheless, despite all the efforts of the KGB repressive machine, O. Meshko did not stop her dissident activities and even intensified them. In October 1978, the leadership of the SSC of the Ukrainian SSR reported to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine that the activist "is increasingly acting as an initiator of hostile activities of nationalist elements, is distinguished by fanaticism and stubbornness." For many dissidents (Yu. Badzio, N. Svitlychna, V. Chornovil, V. Stus, etc.), despite the discrediting measures, she became the de facto leader of the movement. Given this, in late 1978 – early 1979 the KGB leadership studied the possibility of depriving O. Meshko of Soviet citizenship and deporting her outside the USSR. If the dissident had filed a petition to leave for Israel, the special services would not have objected to such a development. It was believed that her possible departure abroad would allow the punitive authorities to achieve a final split and the cessation of the UHG (HDA SBU, f. 16, spr. 1071, pp. 41–42). However, O. Meshko refused to emigrate; she was arrested in October 1980, and in January 1981, the almost 76-year-old dissident was sentenced to 6 months in prison and 5 years of exile (Zakharov, 2001a, 115).

Conclusions. In 1977–1979, the SSC of the Ukrainian SSR implemented a large-scale and targeted campaign of extrajudicial repressions against the participants of the UHG, which combined a wide range of methods – from operational and preventive measures to intelligence and compromising activities. Analysis of a diverse source base has shown that the KGB was not limited to judicial instruments of pressure, and along with them actively used "soft" forms of influence aimed at demoralization, isolation and division of the dissident environment. Repressive policies included administrative supervision, searches, surveillance, calls for preventive conversations, provocations, discrediting campaigns, the spread of disinformation and blackmail. Taken together, they were intended to destroy the group's structure and reduce its public activity. The multifaceted and flexible nature of the KGB's actions deserves special attention, as the measures were carefully adapted to the psychological, social, and personal characteristics of individual movement participants. The case of Oksana Meshko, as one of the key figures of the group, demonstrates the particularly harsh nature of extrajudicial repression, which included systematic surveillance, isolation from like-minded people, agent development, and psycho-emotional pressure.

Despite a powerful wave of repression, the UHG continued its activities, demonstrating resilience, solidarity, and internal potential for resistance. The group's participants initiated the creation of program documents, newsletters, and memoranda, attracted new members, and maintained contacts with the international community. This demonstrated not only the high level of organizational capabilities of the Ukrainian human rights movement, but also the willingness of its representatives to sacrifice themselves in order to defend basic human rights. The KGB's policy towards the UHG in 1977–1979 became an example of a complex and repressive mechanism for curbing civil activity under the conditions of the late Soviet totalitarian regime. At the same time, the actions of the state repressive machine only confirmed the relevance, influence, and moral strength of the human rights movement in Ukraine.

Promising areas for further research on this topic include a detailed analysis of the intensification of the KGB's judicial and extrajudicial repressions against the Helsinki movement in 1979–1981, and a study of the SSC's use of the method of fabricating charges of criminal crimes against Ukrainian dissidents in the second half of the 1970s and early 1980s. It would also be worth tracing the course and consequences of the SSC's repressive actions against representatives of the post-sixties environment (Yu. Badzio, M. Kotsiubynska, B. Antonenko-Davydovych, etc.) in the second half of the 1970s, and the situation of Ukrainian political prisoners in places of imprisonment.

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