

Ukrainian non-fiction

In Bed with the Bear

Neighbouring Russia as a historical challenge

Non-fiction. Kyiv 2023. approx. 200 pages

This book tells the story of the uneasy experience of coexistence with a state that is constantly seeking to expand its borders, while at the same time complaining about prejudiced attitude from those who live next door to it. Even after the aggression of Russia against Ukraine not all people in Europe have understood that they shouldn't reassure themselves that such problems only affect Ukrainians, Belarusians or Moldovans. History shows that if the aggressor is not dealt with in time, any country in Europe and even in the world can eventually become Russia's neighbour.

Comparing Russia to a bear seems obvious to many today. However, such an association arose in the 16th century completely unintentionally and almost by chance. Only later did the Moscow rulers do their part to justify this association with a bear. Could it have been different? In the corresponding Russian folk tale, too, the bear does not defend his private space from invasions like his three English colleagues, but forces a girl who has gotten lost in the forest to live with him under the same rule – and threatens her with death if she does try to escape.

Russia itself usually does not wait for someone to come, but boldly invades other people's houses and declares them its own. This book attempts to tell the story of exactly how that happens.

From the first victim Novgorod where people lived and developed independently, forming their own cultural, economic and political tradition, being absorbed by Muscovy in the 15th and 16th centuries, to the Tatars, Belarusians and Ukrainians over many centuries. Finally, all of this culminated in an attempt to establish a power over the whole of Europe by fueling up national conflicts between the Western States, using not only the army, but also bribes and propaganda.

Mustafin reveals also historical details mostly unknown to the broad Western audience. For example Bakhmut known today as a place of heavy fighting between the Russian army and the Ukrainian Armed Forces. The town has a long history though. It first came into prominence in the early 18th century. Back then, Ukrainians and their Russian neighbours, the Don Cossacks, were fighting each other for the local salt mines.



THE AUTHOR

sample translation available
english

Oleksii Mustafin was born in Kyiv in 1971. He studied history at the Mykhailo Drahomanov Pedagogical University in Kyiv, but later worked mainly in the fields of journalism, politics and media management. He has held the position of news director at leading Ukrainian TV channels (INTER, STB, ESPRESSO). From 2013 to 2016 he was the general director of educational channel Mega-TV, from 2016 to 2017 as a producer of Media Group Ukraine he created a new information cross platform for the TV channel „Ukraina“ and the newspaper „Segodnya“. He is a member of the Ukrainian Television Academy and sits on the supervisory board of the “Honor of the Profession” journalism award. Between 1990 and 2005 he was politically active for the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party and also was engaged in media and political consulting. Mustafin has published over a dozen popular books on historical topics, including “The Power of the Maidan. Who Invented Democracy and Why” (2016), “Downfall: Crises of Political Regimes” (2021), “Pearls in the Steppe: Conversations about the Past of the Ukrainian South” (2023). Mustafin lives in Kyiv.

Oleksii Mustafin

press reviews

“Oleksii Mustafin combines scientific rigor and journalistic expressiveness, making his book easy to read and trustworthy.”
ANDRYIY LYUBKA, Writer

“The style of this work might remind one of a fictional story, but the author is very accurate in his facts and meticulous in his details.”

SERHYI OLHOVSKY, Historian, professor at Taras Shevchenko National University

“Even if you think you are well versed in history, Oleksii Mustafin might well surprise you.”

OLEKSANDR ZINCHENKO, Historian, former Vice-Director of Ukrainian Institute of National Memory

“Unlike many other historians, Mustafin is distinguished by his thorough knowledge of history, simple language and logical, consistent and generally spot-on presentation of facts and their interpretation. Mustafin could easily be compared to Serhii Plokyh, if he were a scholarly historian like the latter. But Mustafin is a journalist first and foremost, and therefore his writing is easy and understandable for all non-fiction readers, be it about misfortunes that determined the fate of nations or about the real history of the late modern period. And most importantly, the stories Mustafin tells can be understood not only in Ukraine, but also abroad, on all continents.”

SERHIJ RUDENKO

“Oleksii Mustafin’s book „In Bed with a Bear“ is not just interesting, but also extremely necessary. In simple language, fascinating fact and captivating characters, it traces the chronology of Russian imperialism from the destruction of Novgorod to the present day.”

OLENA KONDRATIUK, Vice-Chair of the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) of Ukraine

“Oleksii Mustafin combines his skills of a historian with many years of experience as a media manager. This allows him to analyze global processes from the point of view of what actually engages the general audience. Respect for details, analysis of long-term processes and trends of how humanity becomes ever more aware and sensitive of rights and dignity for everyone makes his texts interesting for both professionals and a wide range of readers. Mustafin’s irony does not only liven up how the information is presented, but also makes it impossible to use his books for ideological indoctrination. „In Bed with a Bear“ is a dynamic, thorough and convincing work that encourages the audience to think for themselves, debunks historical stereotypes informed by centuries of propaganda and negligence, uncovers the roots of processes that still affect things in Europe, Asia and the world, and satisfies intellectually.”

KOSTIANTYN DOROSHENKO, Publicist and art curator

Oleksii Mustafin