

## The role of Ukrainian wartime resilience for modern identity-building

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### **Abstract**

In repelling Russia's invasion, Ukrainian society is undergoing significant transformations affecting the modern identity. Under hard circumstances, resilience has become a wartime rescuing strategy and distinctive social feature enabling. It manifests itself in various ways, such as intensive and rapid rebuilding after Russian missile strikes, a plethora of grassroots initiatives and mass volunteering, the derussification being implemented differently: from renaming of public sites to changing the school curricula and the shift from Russian to Ukrainian among ordinary Ukrainians, a cultural resistance, defending the democracy under the legal restrictions, etc. The individual participation in national resistance contributes to a significant growth in a number of those who identify themselves as "Ukrainian citizens" and feel a living connection with a country.

Amid the war in Ukraine, the V4-Ukraine cooperation proves to be vitally important for the collective resistance to the evolving threats from the Russian Federation and world's autocracies at large. To provide the states with a better resilience and coherence, the paper suggests strengthening cooperation between the Visegrad countries and Ukraine with a special focus on regional security and fight against the soft Russian influence in the region, deepening the security, economic, and cultural ties between Poland and Ukraine, resolving of historical contradictions being used by Russian propaganda to undermine the regional stability, and democracy promotion in the region.

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## Introduction

In studies, resilience is traditionally regarded as part of the strategies and programs at national and international levels<sup>2</sup> as well as both the state and the process of actively enduring the malign influence and any encroachments. On the backdrop of the crushing war on Ukraine after eight years of Russia's undeclared hybrid warfare in eastern Ukraine and the occupation of the Crimean peninsula, social transformations are paradoxically hastened. Two points have been highlighted over that.

Firstly, this war has indeed accelerated the formation of the modern Ukrainian nation and identity, so in this sense, it's a pivotal moment in contemporary history. Starting with the "negative" impetus of elimination of Russia's colonial presence and cultural domination in Ukraine, it increasingly centers on resilience as a key element of the new content and shape of the Ukrainian identity, free of references to the Russian context. Secondly, Russia's invasion of Ukraine affects international, especially regional relations significantly and forces countries to reconsider policies towards Russia and hopefully restart a system of collective justice and security in the mid-term. In particular, Poland proved its regional leadership in the endeavors for supporting Ukraine and elimination of the Russian threat to Europe. On 23 June 2022, Ukraine and Moldova were granted candidate status for accession to the European Union. Nowadays a closer cooperation is critical for more efficient withstanding Russia's invasion and challenges being constantly posed by the growing autocratic powers across the globe.

Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to outline the key elements of the Ukraine's identity that is being shaped during the war, and analyze how resilience of the Ukrainian public contributes to the process. In addition, the paper explores what is the role of Poland and other V4 countries. In the end, a set of policy recommendations has been placed.

## Resilience for the construction of the Ukrainian identity: analysis

### *Cultural Factors That Undergird the Identity Formation*

Culture determines the self-identification, the purposes of resistance, and a future vision of Ukraine. As a complex phenomenon Ukrainian identity was usually defined via a set of universal characteristics, such as an ethnic origin, the self-identification, the conscious involvement in the Ukrainian space, and purposeful work to spread the Ukrainian culture and idea, not always fully represented. In this regard, several directions for identification of

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<sup>2</sup>Dorina Baltag, "The resilience of the Eastern Partnership: what role for the Visegrad countries?", The Institute of International Relations Prague, Think Visegrad, <https://bit.ly/3GzfS8q>

Ukraine's residents could be inferred: the Ukrainian identity as well as the Russian imperial tradition and the identity of "a Soviet man," the Ukrainian European identity, etc. Having no reliance on statehood, the Ukrainian identity had long been developing on the traditional ethno-cultural basis. It was predicated thus on the praising of Ukrainian historical memory, shared symbols, folk culture and folklorism, the Ukrainian language, for some time religious affiliation (e.g. the Cossack Orthodoxy, the clandestine Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine under the Soviet occupation), etc.

Since the late 19th century, when the marginalization of local and religious identities started among the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe, the scales were tipping either towards an ethnographic sentiment and exclusivity or the development of a political/civic nation and inclusiveness. Nowadays, ethnocentrism is gradually being replaced by the political or civic concept of a nation. However, the formation of a modern Ukrainian nation is over neither after the declaration of independence in 1991 nor thirty years later, after the tumults of the turn of the centuries, several revolutions, and the hybrid aggression of the Russian Federation in 2014. However, 2014 became one of the turning points, and its achievements have been further being expanded and in 2022.

Currently, the imagery of the Ukrainian "national character," a stereotypical invention of the Romanticism era, has been acquiring an updated, practical meaning. Individualism, an ambiguous feature inherited from the historical way of living, and horizontal decision-making echoing with Kyivan Rus' and Cossacks free assemblies can be mentioned here. Resilience and solidarity, horizontal trust and cooperation, individual responsibility and societal agency are being reinforced by daily courage and local examples of fierce resistance. A sound historical basis matters, as numerous tragedies of the past and heroic memory strengthen a sense of national continuity and resistance, provoking different reactions at this point, from the rejection of the old Soviet names of military units in favor of Ukrainian history, and the rehabilitation and reintegration of prominent national figures, as Ivan Mazepa and Yevhen Chykalenko marginalized by the Russian-Soviet propaganda, to talks about the shift to the Gregorian calendar<sup>3</sup>, and dismantling of Soviet and Russian imperial monuments affecting all walks of life, not just elites. Today historical continuity is felt less as a historical and cultural imitation, and more as the destruction of historical myths, the advancement of historical and media literacy, increased openness and diversity, the return of contested and traumatic memories, the recognition of democracy as the most effective system of government, and the reduction of the inferiority complex.

Speaking about the present shifts in cultural identity, it is worth mentioning cultural resistance including legislative and grassroots initiatives, derussification, and a language issue. Cultural

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<sup>3</sup> The Orthodox Church of Ukraine has already allowed the congregation to celebrate Christmas on 25 December.

resilience contributes to the Ukrainian identity formation at all times, speaking foremost about the grassroots cultural activities and initiatives. Among legislative measures, cultural restrictions can be mentioned such as banning Russian music in public space, the import of books from Russia<sup>4</sup>, strengthening the status of the official language, and many others. Restrictive measures are balanced by the positive, supportive steps, for example, the Verkhovna Rada adopted the allocation of certificates for the purchase of books for children under 14 years old and the introduction of the rebates for bookstores that will sell exclusively Ukrainian books.

The grassroots resistance is critical. A layer of wartime folklore, humor and meme culture has already emerged. During heated discussions on renaming and owe to engagement of experts and professionals, a lot of great names erased from memory have been raised, and the colonial markers is being removed from a city symbolic map while traumatized, neglected, and persecuted genuine figures of Ukrainian, Polish, Jewish and other histories are being returned. Large social campaigns such as the issue of extremely popular post stamps by Ukrposhta, memes about “cotton,” “Kherson watermelons,” the sunken cruiser “Moskwa,” and the damaged Crimean bridge, etc., can be mentioned. The language of war is being shaped<sup>5</sup>, filling up with new and redefined concepts, and the emancipation of obscene vocabulary took place<sup>6</sup>, too, that means the connection of speech with social reality has strengthened. It manifests resistance, as well as a psychotherapeutic potential, which enhances societal resilience. A prominent Ukrainian psychoanalytic Roman Kechur marks the “Ukrainian indifference” which will end the Russian empire. He regards humor as the evidence of Ukrainian healing and self-distancing from the Russian imperial space<sup>7</sup>.

The process of derussification and, more broadly, decolonization affects the current identity-building. Started during the Revolution of Dignity, a spontaneous fall of Lenin-s received legal justification by the decommunization law adopted by the Verkhovna Rada in 2015. The process has been progressing differently in some places, like in Kharkiv and Odesa once extensively russified, where it was hampered by local authorities but the full-scale invasion moved it towards decolonization. Opening a large number of Ukrainian names and historical contexts for an ordinary citizen, public discussions and the concrete steps of renaming, dismantling, exclusion and inclusion of certain names and events of the cultural and social history of Ukraine brought more self-understanding to broader society. After the outbreak of the war, more than 40% Ukrainians stopped listening to Russian music. Similarly, nearly 70% Ukrainians stopped watching Russian TV series, given that 23% did not watch it prior to the full-scale war.

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<sup>4</sup> Adopted by the parliament but yet not signed by President Zelensky.

<sup>5</sup> Oleksandr Mykhed, The Language of War, TORCH | The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities, October 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4CO2a8NcCg>

<sup>6</sup> Kateryna Mola, “Книжка під час війни,” ГРУНТ, 2022. <https://grnt.media/analytics/knyzhka-pid-chas-vijny/>

<sup>7</sup> Роман Кечур, “Росію доб’є українська байдужість,” Zbruc, 2022. <https://bit.ly/3V54jdd>

In order not to sound too optimistic, it should be noted that a quarter of respondents still continue to consume some Russian content<sup>8</sup>. However, it is certainly an exemplary trend.

It is necessary to clarify that “canceling Russia” does not mean an attack on a “great culture,” but the transfer of this culture to quarantine. After all, it is the Russian culture full of chauvinism and xenophobia that brought up a generation of murderers, legitimized the painful imperial ambitions of its population, and it is Russia that actively exploits its culture as a weapon. No wonder that the director of the Russian state Hermitage Museum has openly declared that the Russian culture is a mean of the “special military operation,” which is an Orwellian newspeak expression for the war. It also applies to decades of soft influence via funding of academic, cultural, and media centers and institutions across the world, the expansion of the Russian Orthodox Church as an influential politicized institution to spread the anti-human ideology of the “Russian world,” etc.

A language issue, being for a long time an object for the Russian propaganda and a contrived reason for the Russian Federation to invade Ukraine in order to allegedly “rescue the Russian-speaking population,” is gradually losing its meaning. The war has destroyed an artificial regional division into “Western” and “Eastern” Ukraine off<sup>9</sup>. Different languages indeed are spoken in the Ukrainian army but the Ukrainian citizens respect the Ukrainian language. Currently Ukrainians are switching to Ukrainian more intensively and want to break with the “Russian world” that usually invades via the Russian-speaking space (but not only). New polls show that since the invasion, up to 18% of Russian-speaking Ukrainians have completely switched to Ukrainian, while 61% spoke Ukrainian prior to a full-scale stage of the war<sup>10</sup>. Nearly half of bilingual Ukrainians (42%) began to use the Ukrainian language more frequently in everyday life<sup>11</sup>. Many share their traumatic experience, once being humiliated because of the Ukrainian language by their professional milieu, friends or Russian-speaking family, so the shift to Ukrainian is felt as the liberation. In this regard, the practice of public transition in social media is quite popular, for example, in a Ukrainian segment of Twitter, there was a movement of “My Last Tweet in Russian.”

However, it is difficult to assess how actively the process of transition will continue. It seems that the biggest surge of transition took place at the beginning of the invasion as an emotional step, against the backdrop of patriotic fervor and a shock of the real danger of losing the country. After getting used and somehow adapted to the war, people are less inclined to

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<sup>8</sup> “Seventeenth National Survey: Identity. Patriotism. Values (August 17–18, 2022),” Sociological Group “Rating” (Rating Group), 23 August 2022. <https://bit.ly/3hUeRxK>

<sup>9</sup> In fact, that Russian concept has firstly been shaken during the Revolution of Dignity.

<sup>10</sup> According to the newest unpublished survey conducted by Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation.

<sup>11</sup> “57% українців перейшли, або стали частіше спілкуватись українською з 24 лютого — опитування Суспільного,” Suspihne, 20 October 2022. <https://bit.ly/3AqoM4j>

change their language habits emotionally. Nevertheless, the transition continues, though slower. Meanwhile, the belief that a “language problem” in Ukraine is far-fetched has grown in the society. Today 44% of Ukrainians think so, as opposed to 27% in 2021<sup>12</sup>. Basically, the war crowned a large discussion assuming that the Russian language in Ukraine was the result of forced russification; a fact has been acknowledged. However, sociology proves that a “language conflict” in Ukraine does not exist as such. Of course, the facts listed do not negate a role of the Ukrainian language and an urgency of decolonization, which is impossible without understanding of the forced russification and related historical traumas. Due to polls, 86% Ukrainians agree that Ukrainian should be the official language<sup>13</sup>.

### ***The role of Poland as part of Ukraine’s European vector***

Historically, Poland was one of the first states to support the declaration of independence of Ukraine. The renewed Russian threat has restarted relations between Poland and Ukraine, which had been cooling down amid the rise of populism and strengthening of the conservative vector in Polish politics in recent years, as well as due to the significant Russian hybrid activity<sup>14</sup>. It is common knowledge that the Russian malign influence over the region was predicated, among others, on the speculation on the difficult pages of shared memory of Ukraine and its historical neighbors Poles and Jews, as well as the Hungarian issue for a long time. However, in the first weeks of the war, Poland accepted millions of Ukrainians fleeing the war without creating refugee camps, allocated a lot of humanitarian aid and weapons, set up logistics routes and airports, and now strongly advocates for support of Ukraine at the international level. Polish organizations helped Ukraine in rescuing cultural heritage and evacuating cultural valuables, supporting the artists and cultural workers, independent media and journalists and so on.

For Ukrainians, the face-to-face encounters with Poles in Poland enabled learning from the experience abroad, a cultural exchange, and the expansion of the horizon which is critically important for the identity-building and a better understanding of both Europe and themselves as part of Europe. Today about 83% Ukrainians mentioned a “good” or “very good” attitude towards Poles<sup>15</sup>. People believe that Poland provides help to Ukraine because of the similar historical experience, a kind of understanding of the existential Russian threat, and neighboring solidarity. About 36% of Ukrainian citizens wish to learn the Polish language in

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<sup>12</sup>“Боротьба в інформаційній та культурній царинах: що думають українці про державну мовну політику та пропаганду на тлі агресії РФ,” Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 2 June 2022. <https://bit.ly/3AsckRH>

<sup>13</sup>“Seventeenth National Survey: Identity. Patriotism. Values (August 17–18, 2022),” Sociological Group “Rating” (Rating Group), 23 August 2022. <https://bit.ly/3hUeRxK>

<sup>14</sup> I am making references to my own analytical studies of the Russian propaganda in media and Russia’s influence on and funding of the anti-gender movements in Ukraine and V4 countries.

<sup>15</sup> Yevhen Prykhodko, “Опитування. Як змінилося ставлення українців до поляків,” Nova Polshcha, 24 August 2022. <https://novapolshcha.pl/article/opituvannya-yak-zminilosya-stavlennya-ukrayinciv-do-polyakiv/>

case it is free while 44% speak or understand it better or worse. The surveys show that the bulk of Ukrainians expect the development of good neighborly relations, a closer economic and cultural cooperation, and an open border between two states in the long run. To put it differently, Ukrainians feel a great deal of sympathy towards Poland and Poles because of not only an invaluable support since the outbreak of the war, but also similar values, history, and a future vision, which provides a solid basis for good relations after the war is over.

An attitude towards Poland is largely the same positive among Ukrainian elites. Among Ukrainian politicians and intellectuals, an idea of honest historical reconciliation and a building of the forward-looking strategic relations with Poland prevails. “Moscow will continue to split and provoke if we do not equip ourselves with an idea to live for the future,” says Oksana Yurynets, Ukrainian MP and co-chair of the Group for Inter-Parliamentary Relations with the Republic of Poland<sup>16</sup>. Such Polish institutions as the Polish Historical Institute and joint historical groups can bear the responsibility for a settlement of historical disputes which can be an obstacle further, as the Russian Federation and the world’s autocracies exploit historical traumas and conflicts for inspiration of tensions and divisions in democratic societies and destabilization of states from within. In addition, Poland could share its experience of European integration and positive societal transformations which will be particularly relevant during the rebuilding of Ukraine. In view of the above, the future positive relations between Poland and Ukraine should be built on the principle of equal partnership and respect, historical reconciliation, mutually beneficial cooperation, and legal simplification of free movement and employment.

With the displacement of the Russian colonial legacy and cultural presence, there is a room for strengthening the place of European culture in Ukraine. It also resonates with the European expectations and vector of Ukraine, which was granted the candidate status for EU membership on 23 June 2022. In the physical and mental geography of Europe, Ukraine used to be regarded as a part of the vague “East” and at worst “Russia,” while nowadays its place in Europe is far clearer in every sense. Given the great help provided by Poland and the fact that Poland is a place of refuge for about three million Ukrainians as well as the geographic and historical proximity, Polish culture already occupies a particular place and can improve its significance in Ukraine. Already, Poland’s presence in Ukrainian symbolic and real space is increasing. For example, this is done through renaming of public sites and streets: Poland Street in Dnipro, Kamianske, Korosten, Sarny, Lech Kaczyński Street in Zolochiv, Maria Skłodowska-Curie Street and Stanisław Lem Square in Lviv appeared; there were also the proposals for Polska Street in Zaporizhzhia, Vinnytsia, and Warszawska Street in Lutsk. In Ukrainian universities, there are or emerge educational programs and curricula in Polish

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<sup>16</sup> Halyna Tereshchuk, “Відносини України і Польщі у 2021 році. Виклики на рік прийдешній”, 29 December 2021. <https://bit.ly/3gg7MHb>

philology: Lviv, Lutsk, Kyiv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Mykolaiv, Kharkiv, Drohobych and many others. There are talks about the inclusion of more Polish authors to school curricula, such as Maria Konopnicka, Andrzej Sapkowski, Stanisław Lem, and others. Recently, the Verkhovna Rada has established legal and social guarantees for Polish citizens to officially work and study in Ukraine, as well as created conditions for an 18-month stay after the day of publication of the law. In addition, negotiations on the simplification of Polish imports and border control are ongoing. No less important is the connection of Poland with Ukrainian day-to-day life and space as far more Polish goods are on sale in Ukrainian markets today or a dense transport connection with Polish cities exists. After February 24th, popular social media such as Tik-Tok which is sensitive to local preferences of the audience are much more active in offering Polish content in Ukraine instead of Russian that dominated prior to the full-scale war. Therefore, Poland has a chance to replace vacancy in Ukrainian cultural space as the “closest” European state that Ukrainians feel connected to, but it needs more efforts to be invested on both sides.

### ***The major trends happening in the Ukrainian society in wartime***

It is no exaggeration that Ukrainians perceive the wartime reality in a special fashion, predominantly with no fears but a rage against the occupiers, the understanding that Russians can ruin their house and life each time but the life should go on, and resist actively and effectively. The Ukrainian Institute of Sociology’s recent data show that the civic identity of Ukrainians has almost doubled over the thirty years of independence<sup>17</sup>. During that time, Ukrainian society has gone through several stages: from post-Soviet adaptation and economic difficulties characterized by flourishing regional and local identities, through the ongoing “third revolutionary mobilization” of the civic identity, in terms of Serhii Dembitskyi<sup>18</sup>. Back in 2020, nearly a third of people (27.4%) identified themselves as residents of their locality or region, while 61.7%—as citizens of Ukraine<sup>19</sup>. It means that the Revolution of Dignity and the start of the hybrid Russian war on the eastern regions of Ukraine could not completely break the “mechanism of regional conflict.”<sup>20</sup>

The all-out war contributed much to the process. Now 84.6% of the respondents called themselves Ukraine’s citizens<sup>21</sup> (some surveys find up to 94%). With a reservation that the degree of influence of large migration and displacement on the sociological results is questionable in these accounts. Showing no significant difference between different age,

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<sup>17</sup> Serhii Dembitskyi, Indicators of National-Civic Ukrainian Identity, Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, 2022. <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=1131&page=1>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Artur Нтyрия, “Ідентичність: як зрозуміти, що я – українець?”, Radio Free Europe, 25 July 2022. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/ukrayinska-natsia/31951984.html>

<sup>20</sup> Serhii Dembitskyi, Indicators of National-Civic Ukrainian Identity, Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, 2022. <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=1131&page=1>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

gender, and regional groups, the data suggests that there is the undergoing formation of the Ukrainian nation on a basis of civic identity. It also erodes the outdated narrative of the Russian propaganda about the regional division of Ukraine into the “Western” and “Eastern.” In a crisis, there is a reassessment of values and a request for the return of the identity which has been forced out and colonized by the empire, and it will keep growing stronger in the course of the war. In addition, about half of Ukrainians identify themselves as Europeans.

Building the strong horizontal ties can be regarded as the central element helping in resistance, reflecting in a strong position of the volunteer movement and a dense network of grassroots initiatives. The capability to take responsibility and at the same time to trust and unite, provides a good basis for social resilience. There is an apparent association between these processes and devolution, in particular the decentralization reform launched a few years ago and the redistribution of power at the local level. During the war, participative democracy thrives, for instance in the Lviv Region, they continue to develop educational policies for IDPs under the framework of joint projects with the Council of Europe. The resistance of society is manifested at all levels: from protests in the recently deliberated Kherson under Russian barrages to a daily boycott of goods and services of those companies that have not withdrawn from Russia, and mass campaigns in social networks, from local volunteer groups cooking food for the army to long queues to military enlistment offices. In conversations, Ukrainians share the opinion that the COVID-19 pandemic caused alienation, detachment, and distrust in people. Instead, the appalling war paradoxically strengthened the ties between people, trust, cooperation, and mutual assistance<sup>22</sup>.

Resilience is largely manifested in emotions of anger and an active response to the daily war crimes of the Russians, in particular in social media. Recent polls confirmed that 46% respondents feel anger towards the war and Russian attacks, although about the same number do not feel it<sup>23</sup>. In any case, this is an active emotion, opposite to a panic, and it shows that people are psychologically mobilized for resistance. Moreover, the main emotion felt by the bulk of people, 75% is pride for the country<sup>24</sup>. In this regard, Ukrainian society has developed certain wartime traditions and rules. The fundraising for four Bayraktars has already become legendary, and it looks particularly fantastic compared to the sluggish gathering of socks for the Russian military. Each time after massive shelling and attacks, a number of donations to charitable foundations in support of the Armed Forces soars. When Russia carried out the most massive missile attack on energy infrastructure and

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<sup>22</sup> I am mentioning the conversations about the war with ordinary citizens and volunteers, in particular from the western Ukrainian city of Stebnyk.

<sup>23</sup> “Самопочуття українців під час війни: емоції, очікування, особистий досвід – опитування у західних та центральних регіонах,” Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 7 June 2022. <https://bit.ly/3XfXRSw>

<sup>24</sup> “Seventeenth National Survey: Identity. Patriotism. Values (August 17–18, 2022),” Sociological Group “Rating” (Rating Group), 23 August 2022. <https://bit.ly/3hUeRxE>

communications since February 24th, Ukrainians donated more than UAH 227 million to charitable foundations and volunteers in just one day on October 10<sup>25</sup>. The head of the famous foundation Serhii Prytula wrote afterwards: “You [Russians] have angered Ukrainians.”

The fastest possible restoration of buildings and infrastructure destroyed by Russians is another remarkable part of Ukrainian resistance. In doing so, people understand the power outages and lack of communications that have to be experienced due to the destruction of energy infrastructure. The majority is definitely ready to be without electricity than without freedom; it is brilliantly outlined in Volodymyr Zelensky’s recent formula of “Without light or without you? Without you.” Quick planning and flexibility and a high adaptability became a part of the Ukrainian schedule—and a recipe of resilience. New ways of doing everyday routine are being invented, like cooking food on burners, gathering in cafes that have electric generators, or organizing artistic exhibitions which are held under candlelight. It provides people with a sense of involvement in individual resistance in day-to-day life.

A critical issue of the control of the authorities obviously got weakened because of the invasion. Since martial law was introduced, some democratic practices have been restricted including free media and freedom of peaceful assembly due to the Constitution, and a tacit taboo on the public criticism of the authorities existed in the first months. Nevertheless, more than half Ukrainians including 61% of young citizens up to 39 years old stand for the minimal state interference in their private life. During the war, 64% Ukrainians still consider democracy as the most desirable form of government, and this number growth in comparison to pre-war figures<sup>26</sup>. Therefore, it is presently a difficult task for civic society to control the authorities in full, so this work is being actively done by independent media and investigative media centers, media, human rights organizations, other NGOs, for example, the authoritative association “Detector Media,” “Center for Civil Liberties,” “Institute of Mass Information,” “ZMINA Human Rights Center” and multiple others as well as via mass activity in social networks, collective appeals and petitions to different bodies of power, etc. Thus it was possible to oust a corrupt judge from the Constitutional Court, and defend currently the Dovzhenko-Centre, an important cultural institution supported by the Polish institutions among others, from the outrageous arbitrariness of the authorities. Petitions to ban the import of Russian books, legalization of the Istanbul Convention and the same-sex marriages, control the work of the Ombudsman and others gained public resonance. However, many things worsened and need more attention such as the monopolization of Ukrainian television, appointment of corrupt figures from the old elites, a toxic activity of the current Minister of Education and Minister of

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<sup>25</sup> Valentyna Dudko & Тома Mironenko, “У відповідь на масований обстріл українці перерахували найбільшим волонтерським фондам понад 227 млн грн (Оновлюється),” Forbes Ukraine, 10 October 2022. <https://bit.ly/3hRn1Ho>

<sup>26</sup> Independence Day of Ukraine: What Unites Ukrainians and How We See Victory in the Sixth Month of War, Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 22 August 2022. <https://bit.ly/3ggd59z>

Culture, etc. It encourages Ukrainians to watch the hands of officials more closely and look for ways to effectively express their dissent.

It is impossible to avoid mentioning gender equality as an aspect that helps society to sustain. Formerly, anti-gender activities in Ukraine and other European countries have been massively inspired and sponsored by Russia in recent decades. The evidence showed that anti-gender lobbying is a component of Russian “military operations” in attempts to destabilize the democratic world. In wartime, Ukraine managed to ratify the Istanbul Convention, which allows more effective protection of women from domestic violence. Human rights activists and women’s organizations have been fighting for this decision for ten years. Nowadays, over 38 thousand military women are serving in the Armed Forces, which together with civilian female workers makes up 50 thousand. It is one of the highest numbers among the armies of NATO member states. In 2021, a women’s role in the state defense has been recognized by the change of the official holiday’s name to the Day of Defenders of Ukraine which in Ukrainian is the Day of Male and Female Defenders<sup>27</sup>. Women-led initiatives demonstrate significant success in the international arena. For example, recently the Center for Civil Liberties, headed by human rights activist Oleksandra Matviichuk received the first Nobel Peace Prize in the history of independent Ukraine. The Kyiv Independent, a media outlet founded by women (CEO Daryna Shevchenko, Editor-in-Chief Olha Rudenko), has gained a record number of readers (two million on Twitter alone) and paid subscriptions (about 70 thousand dollars monthly on Patreon) in the first months of the war. Women’s presence and agency makes a positive contribution to the quality of resistance and life in the country. Equal rights and justice is a key to a better society as a whole.

Certain improvement of overall media and information literacy can be seen as the positive side-effect, additionally. Engulfed in Russian malign disinformation and finally aware of that fact, ordinary Ukrainians have to pay more heed to news and information and tend to check it. Here, regular and fierce discussions on whether the information spread is not fake, scandals between those who publish information and pictures about Russian attacks and those who see it as a threat, an established “culture of silence” after serious events on the frontlines, the spread of tools for hiding information (blurring or cropping photos, removing metadata) are rooted. People look for ways to protect their information sovereignty and try out new services for communication. At the same time, information security remains a weak link both because of the abuse of media freedoms by the current political elite, and of constant Russian attacks and interference as well as physical destruction of communication infrastructure.

## Recommendations

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<sup>27</sup> In Ukrainian: День захисників і захисниць України.

In light of the above, the recommendations proposed here are based on an understanding of resilience as a factor contributing to the modernization of the Ukrainian identity and having a potential to restart regional alliances and associations, and advance the regional security policies and cooperation.

## Ukraine

- It should keep attention to democratic rules and control power as well as protect and promote democracy among the society in wartime. The authorities must stop attempting to take undue control over independent institutions such as Dovzhenko-Centre, and media, not using the united news marathon for its political purposes.
- Ukraine should invest in its culture, language, free media, education, and human rights protection.
- Deepening economic and cultural cooperation with Poland and other Visegrad Four countries is necessary to strengthen the regional security framework.
- It should continue a fight against the Russian propaganda inside including removing former pro-Russian propagandists from a government-supported media marathon, signing by Zelensky the law banning the import of Russian books, etc.
- It is mandatory to increase Ukraine's presence on the international stage through the dissemination of knowledge on Ukraine, a Ukrainian experience exchange, cultural cooperation as well as combating Russian propaganda and disinformation on Ukraine-related topics. It is in need of the modernization of the representation strategies of Ukrainian culture. Thus the inception of such institutions as the Ukrainian Institute, in Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic, and Hungary is a must. Likewise, the foundation of more platforms for cultural exchange and a dialogue on a continuous basis, such as fellowships and residencies for Polish professionals and experts as well as from other V4 states, is needed.

## Visegrad Four Countries

- It is necessary to counter the “war fatigue” and expound to democratic societies an importance of the fight for democracy happening in Ukraine.
- Helping in receiving more effective weapons for the defense and repulsing the Ukrainian territories is currently most appreciated in Ukraine.
- Each time speaking about Ukraine in different contexts, they should speak about Ukraine and its interests and peculiarities, not the Russian Federation.
- They need to recognize that the Russian Federation wages war using its aggressive culture.

- They should strengthen the own cultural and information “immunity” to Russian malign influences and, more broadly, the methods and technologies used by autocracies to impact on democratic societies, including conducting effective countermeasures against the Russian propaganda and disinformation (such as anti-gender, “anti-vaccine” and other “soft power” activities etc.).
- No less important to reorient the Eastern European studies to study of the region itself and the regional authenticity, history, relations, cultural cooperation, etc., and not to Russian studies, which they frequently are de facto.
- Strengthening democracy and societal resistance to populism, and advanced human rights protection is imperative.
- Against the backdrop of challenges and threats imposed by the war, the search for the ways of restarting international human rights and security NGOs, and the development of the new mechanisms for regional security and response seem extremely relevant.

## Poland

- It is recommended that Poland, jointly with Ukraine, develops more cultural and public diplomacy as well as scientific, educational and other projects including free language courses aimed at mutual understanding and learning of two countries, and a fruitful cooperation.
- There is a security issue and public request in Ukraine for a balanced reconciliation of the difficult past, so more attention and directed efforts on the Polish side as well as the continuation of the democratic policy regarding Ukraine on equal terms are much expected and would be appreciated.
- The inception of the Polish-Ukrainian historical commission, consisting of respected academics and experts for dealing with the complicated historical memory could be of importance.
- The simplification of border crossing and the establishment of a free movement could be mutually beneficial and is expected in Ukrainian society.
- More practical assistance for Ukraine in implementation of the best European practices and integration to the EU in forms of training and education, collaboration, international observation, etc. will be very appreciated.

## Further reading

Nataliia Boiko, Liudmyla Skokova, Ukrainian-Polish Relations During the 2022 War in Ukraine: Background and Consequences (Sociological Analysis), 2022. <https://bit.ly/3TKCxle> [in Ukrainian]

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