



DRAGON PROPAGANDA: HOW COMMUNIST CHINA INCREASES ITS INFLUENCE DURING A PANDEMIC

**YOUNG UKRAINIANS ON TRADE WITH RUSSIA:
IT IS A RIGGED MATCH**

**JO VANBELLE, HONORARY CONSUL OF UKRAINE IN
BELGIUM: "I WANT TO OPEN UKRAINE UP TO THE WORLD"**

**A YEAR AFTER FREEING THE POLITICAL PRISONERS OF THE KREMLIN
- INTERVIEW WITH OLEG SENTSOV AND AN ARTICLE
BY ROMAN SUSHCHENKO**

OCTOBER 2020

Brussels Ukraine Review

Online:

www.promoteukraine.org

Publisher:

NGO "Promote Ukraine"

www.promoteukraine.org

Address:

Velyka Zhytomyrska 33

Office 611

Kyiv 01601

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EDITOR'S FOREWORD

We are pleased to issue the "Brussels Ukraïna Review" for the fourth time.

We feel Your support and see Your involvement with each edition. We would like to express our gratitude for that because your articles, applications to get the paper version of the journal, and offers of collaboration are valuable feedback for us. It shows that we are doing good. Your comments inspire us for further development and growth.

In this edition, there are three interviews with famous and powerful personalities. You'll also discover articles by Ukrainian and foreign analysts, opinion makers and civil society activists, and the results of the survey on the influence of disinformation on an individual.

To mark the first anniversary of the Kremlin's political prisoners, we have interviewed Oleg Sentsov. Roman Sushchenko has written the article on this topic.

Keeping the tradition of previous editions, we provide a general analysis of the situation in Ukraine today – economics and health care. We also deal with the influence and propaganda of China during the pandemic,

and we explore business analytics as a means of bridging the information exchange between the business entities of Ukraine, Belgium and the EU. Mr. Jo Vanbelle, the Honorary Consul of Ukraine to Belgium, was the first person with whom we discussed the mentioned topics. He shared his vision of collaboration with Ukraine through corporate social responsibility. Moreover, there is an article about the popularisation of Ukrainian culture by the Ukrainian Institute.

Enjoy reading!

Marta Barandiy



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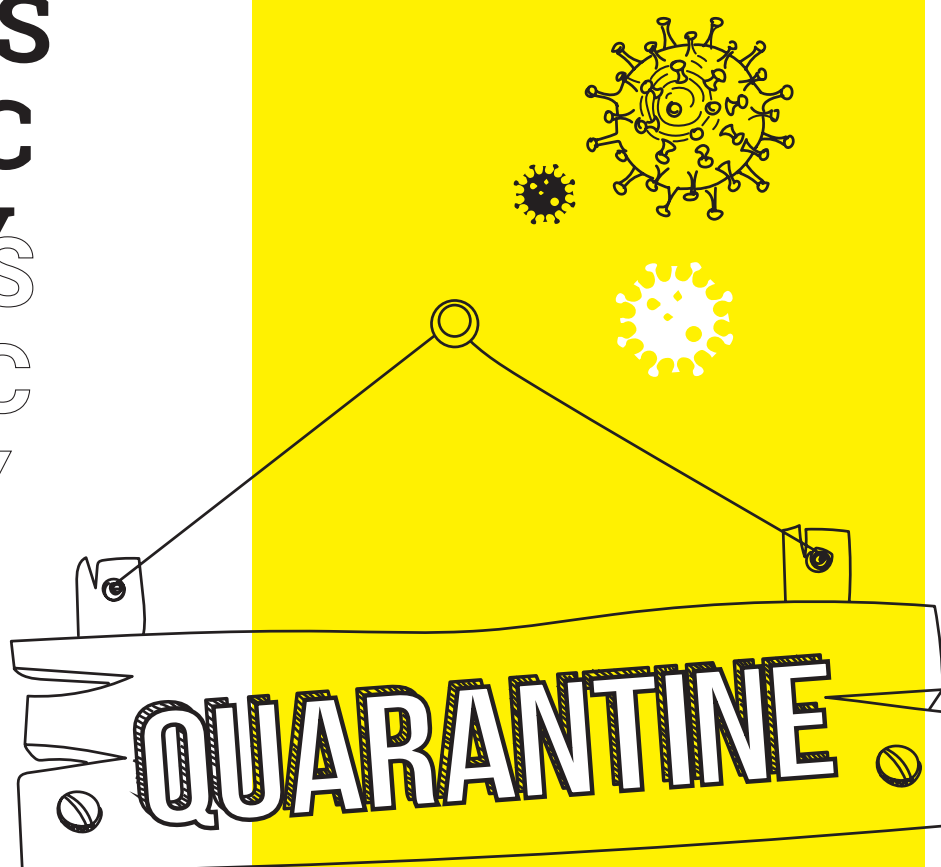
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UKRAINE'S PANDEMIC ECONOMY



INNA KRUPNIK IS A JOURNALIST, MARKETER AND ADVERTISING SPECIALIST. SHE IS A COLUMNIST ON TOPICS SUCH AS NATIONAL REVIVAL, REFORMS, CULTURAL AND MICROECONOMIC PROCESSES IN UKRAINE, AND GENDER EQUALITY. PARTICIPANT IN CONFERENCES, FORUMS, AND SEMINARS ON ECONOMIC REFORM AND POLITICS.



UKRAINE IN 2020 ECONOMY

The result of the public health measures imposed to prevent the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic imposed in Ukraine on 12 March 2020, which was gradually strengthened and weakened, was that Ukraine had not yet passed the first wave of the coronavirus disease. And this is against the background of the second wave of the pandemic spreading throughout the world, which is already formally registered in most countries.

The latest coronavirus pandemic, as well as all other pandemics starting with the influenza pandemic of 1918, occur in several waves. The first wave, second wave, and recurrence peaks during the pandemic period are different, but the problem remains: the disease returns, sometimes even more severe. The question «how to prevent further waves of coronavirus spread» is answered through epidemiological modeling, which considers social behaviour, health policy, the emergence of group immunity, and so on. But let's leave it to health professionals to assess the medical consequences of the measures, and talk about its economic implications for the national business environment.

In relative terms, the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Ukraine's economy does not look very serious. We ended the second quarter of 2020 with a collapse of only 11 percent of GDP, according to the inflation report of the National Bank of Ukraine (NBU). At the same time, according to most economic experts, Ukraine's GDP will decrease by 6-7 percent in 2020 due to the pandemic. This is an optimistic

scenario (pessimists predict GDP will fall by 11 percent in the same period), to which the economy is moving due to the timely removal of public health restrictions.

For comparison, Germany's strong economic economy "fell" almost the same way; the United States economy "fell" by 32 percent; Spain's GDP, by 18.5 percent; and France, by 15 percent. Of course, the NBU's projected GDP fall of 6-7 percent differs slightly from the 8.2 percent fall in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasts for Ukraine.

Traditionally, both in pre-crisis times and now, the engine of the national economy is mostly exports and external infusions, rather than domestic consumption. The Ukrainian economy has very underdeveloped industries focused on the production of consumer goods for the domestic market. It should be noted that the largest losses were suffered by the services sector (hotel and restaurant business, fitness centres, etc.), the transport sector, including air transport, construction, retail trade, and industry; the smallest losses were the agricultural sector and metallurgy. Ironically, our commodity-oriented economy has once again saved us from a deeper crisis. External factors again contributed to the economy. The fall in commodity prices on world markets has been significant, but the difference in prices for the metal and grain we export and for the gas and petroleum products we import has worked in our favour. Indirectly, the closedness of the Ukrainian economy also helped us not to fall deeper: our industry did not suffer so much from the destruction of global logistics chains (as an example, the shortage of supplies of components from China to European enterprises).

A small, but still optimistic, trade balance (balance of imports and exports) is added: in the second quarter of 2020 we have a big surplus (of almost \$5 billion USD). Fortunately, record gains, not record losses, were set by grain and sunflower oil exports. Imports of vehicles, large household appliances, industrial equipment, equipment for "green" energy, and some industrial goods all fell. The reason for this decline is the collapse of demand from both businesses and consumers. According to experts, the Ukrainian crisis model is very similar to the model of the Great Depression in the United States in the 1930s: deflation (falling prices), lower wages, non-adequate indexation of pensions, and declining savings, all at the same time.



The question «how to prevent further waves of coronavirus spread» is answered through epidemiological modeling, which considers social behaviour, health policy, the emergence of group immunity, and so on.



The largest losses were suffered by the services sector (hotel and restaurant business, fitness centres, etc.), the transport sector, including air transport, construction, retail trade, and industry; the smallest losses were the agricultural sector and metallurgy.

Oleksiy Kushch, an economist and expert at the Growford Institute, estimates that *“one month of strict quarantine cost the country 2 percent of GDP, or up to UAH 100 billion in monetary terms of GDP. The easing of quarantine did not contribute to the full recovery of GDP, because there was a ‘siltation’ of the economy – a stumbling on the ground. In other words, due to the mass bankruptcy of entrepreneurs, falling prices in commodity markets, etc., our economy does not have the back-up mechanisms to move itself.”*

The number of open vacancies, according to the Work.ua website, in the peak of April-May public health measures decreased to 31,000 and 26,000 from

65,000 and 61,000 in April and May 2019, respectively. That's more than double. In addition to affecting the legal labour market, the pandemic has also hit shadow employment. Many were forced to stay at home at their own expense, and some lost their jobs altogether. The unemployment rate according to NBU forecasts will increase from 8 percent to 10 percent this year (real indicators, including hidden unemployment, suggest a fall to 15-17 percent of the working population at the peak, compared to 8.2 percent in the same period in 2019). Falling prices, a lack of cheap financing, and fuzzy forecasting horizons in a crisis demotivate businesses to increase production, open new platforms, and create new jobs. Service workers have suffered the most from the COVID-19 epidemic in Ukraine. Uncertainty about future employment prospects limited workers' activity in finding a new job.

In addition to macroeconomic assessments of the labour market, it is interesting to assess the impact of the coronavirus on such elements of business as current business culture and the business environment. Thus, according to **Serhiy Marchenko**, a leading labour market expert and founder of the recruitment agency “Borsch - Recruiting the Future”:

“If we reject the economic indicators, about which much has already been written, the pandemic has had the greatest impact on business culture. Some 10 years ago, it was difficult to imagine even a small business without a suit, tie, leather briefcase. In recent years, we have become accustomed to CEOs of the country's largest companies giving interviews in T-shirts and jeans. The pandemic and mass

remote work have led to the fact that now these CEOs are not just negotiating in T-shirts, but are negotiating in T-shirts from their kitchens, sofas, balconies. And, if before the wrong colour of the tie was considered a disaster and a violation of etiquette, now no one cares about cats, children, or relatives in the frame. It turned out that the business leaders were not some aliens there, but ordinary people. It also turned out that it is possible to combine the seriousness of the businessman's intentions and what he is wearing and where he has an office. Business has become less pathetic and more real. All extra status attributes are depreciated. Instead, it matters who you are and what you produce”.



The fall in commodity prices on world markets has been significant, but the difference in prices for the metal and grain we export and for the gas and petroleum products we import has worked in our favour.

*“The main blow fell on the services sector, a critical sector of the economy in Ukraine, which accounts for 60 percent of GDP”, said **Oleksiy Kushch**, an economist and expert at the Growford Institute. “The least affected in Ukraine are the flagship export-oriented industries – agriculture (except for small farmers, who suffered from the narrowing of the market for their products) and ferrous metallurgy, where metal prices remain relatively high. In Ukraine, there is a constant of export revenues, which does not depend on quarantine restrictions, and is almost the only resource that pulls the national economy and maintains macroeconomic stability. A negative consequence can be called the specific state of affairs with the shadow economy, which according to various estimates is from 40 percent to 60 percent. If in previous crises, thanks to the shadow money buffer, it was easy to overcome the consequences of the crisis, then in this crisis, government decisions began to directly affect the shadow sector, trying to control it. The impact of the quarantine on the shadow economy this time was many times stronger than the impact on the official economy.”*

According to **Mr. Kushch**, *“The best version of the government’s crisis policy could be, but has not become, counter-cyclical economic policy and counter-cyclical employment policy: business cuts investment and jobs and the state creates them. But saving the economy was limited by investment in ‘large road construction’. And although this is an important element, it is by no means key at this stage of overcoming the crisis in the global context.”* The aid package allocated to Ukraine was not sufficient to tackle the consequences of pandem-

ics in such a large country. At the same time, from UAH 66 billion of anti-coronavirus fund UAH 35 billion was spent on “roads”. Another UAH 2.5 billion was given to the police. Only UAH 7 billion was left to fight unemployment. UAH 16 billion was spent on medicine, so for its intended purpose (1/4 part). Therefore, very little money went to revive the economy, in particular to compensate for the deficits of the population and business. At present in Ukraine we have one of the strictest quarantine models, and one of the weakest compensatory models for business loss recovery.

Real economic growth in many countries is projected for 2021, but it is likely to be only a restoration of the lost potential that states had before the pandemic. Restrained forecasts lead us to prepare for a protracted crisis and not to cherish vain hopes for a speedy recovery. Ukraine’s GDP is unlikely to grow faster than the world economy, especially given our dependence on foreign markets so far.

Our core industries (metallurgy, agriculture, energy, construction), although in the negative in the first quarter of 2020 (compared to the first quarter of 2019), are likely to have a positive effect on economic dynamics, as they will mitigate the fall in GDP. In other sectors, including light and chemical industry, transport, etc., a much deeper decline is expected.

Many countries are already preparing their own incentive and depreciation packages in the amount of 20-25 percent of GDP (10-15 percent in second-tier countries). Ukraine has formed a reserve fund of UAH 60 billion – about 1.5 percent of GDP – and that’s not enough. The same fund was used to neutralise the consequences of the flood in Prykarpattya in summer this year. Economic experts should remind the government and the NBU more often about the development of new synergetic models of action in a crisis.



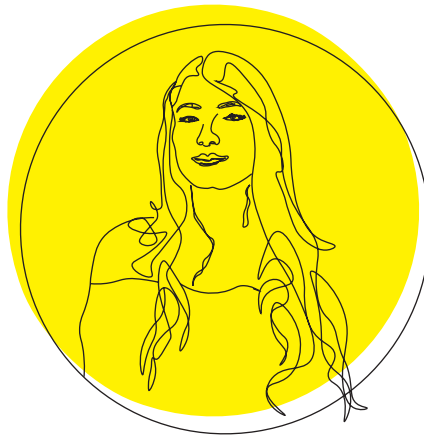
*Falling prices,
a lack of cheap
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**“SOS! THE UKRAINIAN
PUBLIC HEALTHCARE SYSTEM
IS CRUMBLING!” -
THE DISASTER OF FINANCING
PUBLIC HEALTHCARE IN
UKRAINE**

**UKRAINE IN 2020
AFTER-
CARE**



“SOS” stands for “save our souls”, which is very much a real topic of current interest since public health-care in Ukraine will surely not offer much to save the physical health of our bodies. As Ukraine makes impressive progress in IT services and the agricultural, defence, and aerospace industries, one crucial sector in the country’s economy continues to lag behind – healthcare. For instance, as a part of the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukrainian government undertook a count of artificial breathing machines and in the Kharkiv region, one of the biggest regions in the country, the number of ventilators in public hospitals barely reached 20. The result disclosed the deficient system of corrupt tender acquisition in Ukraine, whereby the government purchases equipment from the supplier that can offer the biggest bribe. No ventilator-producing supplier offered a worthy bribe, and no ventilators were purchased for public hospitals. As with everywhere in the world, the doctors treating COVID-19 patients constantly report a lack of drugs and protective equipment. However, it is Ukraine that scores high in the exposure of medical staff to the coronavirus – over 15,566 healthcare workers have tested positive since March. The number represents approximately 8.5% of all cases of COVID-19 in Ukraine as of September 2020. In Italy, one of the worst hit countries in the world where the number of cases is double of one in Ukraine, the percentage of cases among medical staff is comparable to Ukraine – 10.5% out of all cases. The Ukrainian government offers reimbursement to medical staff amounting to \$360 USD. In turn,



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according to the WHO brief «Ukraine: Can people afford to pay for medical care?», the treatment of COVID-19 in Ukraine costs a minimum of \$900 ... But this article does not seek to criticise, but to investigate – what are the main issues in the Ukrainian health-care system? And, most importantly, **what can we do** to facilitate positive change in the public medical services of the country?

When we hear about public healthcare from Ukrainian media outlets, it is usually discussed in terms of the big Healthcare Reform undergoing since 2015. The reform aims to fight corruption, provide access to free healthcare, high quality equipment, drugs, and retain exceptional specialists of the best academic qualifications and highest moral virtues. Do these promises sound “Bernie Sanders”-like yet? Unfortunately, if such utopian views sound silly in the USA, where an average nurse and surgeon annually earns \$72,000 and \$400,000 USD respectively, then these aspirations are simply a fairy tale in Ukraine, where an average nurse and surgeon annually earns \$1,500 and \$2,600 USD respectively.



The Ukrainian government offers reimbursement to medical staff amounting to \$360 USD. In turn, according to the WHO brief «Ukraine: Can people afford to pay for medical care?», the treatment of COVID-19 in Ukraine costs a minimum of \$900.

In Belgium, another country like Ukraine, with mainly public healthcare, salaries of healthcare workers are comparable to the ones in the USA. Apart from investing in comprehensive high-quality education, both EU members and the USA ensure their healthcare professionals are well reimbursed and, therefore, their medical system attracts the brightest talent that is motivated to perform well and is discouraged from participating in corrupt activities. Two such simple steps are what Ukraine should learn and apply at the core of its healthcare reform in the first place.

For years, Ukraine's education system has been struggling to produce enough highly-qualified medical specialists. First of all, the issue comes from the disincentivizing youth with the perspective of 10 years of complex educational processes that will ultimately constitute an expensive price one has to pay to be placed in an entry-level position in healthcare – a medical internship. According to the graduates of the Kyiv Medical University Class of 2020, a placement as an intern in a desirable gynaecological department can cost a student as much as a bribe worth \$40,000. Second, a low paid position at a public clinic most likely awaits a young professional at the end of their stud-

ies. Interns participating in the treatment of COVID-19 are promised a 50 percent pay raise. But the bonus pay affects only the hours of an intern's shift and not the fixed pay. Currently, a regular hourly rate for an intern in a cardiology department is 12 hryvnia, or \$0,43 USD per hour. The 50 percent increase in this rate will hardly compensate neither for years of hard work as a student, nor for the risk of being infected with coronavirus. Such lack of incentive for young talent ultimately results in extremely low numbers of experienced specialists trained in the field. The statistics of WHO are brutal: medical professionals retire faster than the new generation of professionals is being trained to take over the demand for healthcare services. The situation needs urgent fixing – the adoption of the European system of incentivising scholarships and decent pay for young doctors should become common practice.

However, the major flaw of the Ukrainian public medical system is the approach of the government. After all, hiding the symptoms of the issue instead of facilitating the fundamental change to the system itself is a typical approach of corrupt governments to policy making. Instead of trying to eliminate inefficiency and corruption at the surface – among healthcare workers, policy makers should first of all address the issue at the root – among the corrupt government bodies. Although the issue of corruption, populism, and dependence on oligarchs are the homeostatic processes the Ukrainian governmental bodies depend on, one aspect that can be altered for a better functioning healthcare system is a mechanism financing public healthcare.

What truly makes healthcare services financially solvent is the way a government conducts its cost accounting. A cost accounting system is a system for recording, analysing, and allocating the correct cost to the individu-

al services provided to patients (for instance, drugs, procedures, tests, room and board, etc.). Organizations without a cost accounting system rely on rudimentary methods such as the ratio-of-cost-to-charge. Such a system has been the case in Ukraine for decades, where the thin healthcare budget (historically around 4-5 percent of GDP) has been spread over hundreds of hospitals and allocated by the number of inpatient beds per hospital. The issue with such a system was an overwhelming number of unnecessary healthcare institutions to budget – the result of a situation, common in Ukraine, when building an extra public clinic or a hospital allows local governments to open a new channel of bribes through over-priced tenders for construction and equipment.

The Ministry of Health of Ukraine states that the key to transforming Ukraine's healthcare system in the current Reform is the development of the new financing mechanism of the sector – “money follows the patient”. The ministry's official website explains: “The state will now allocate money for the specific needs of a patient instead of financing hospitals, doctors, and inpatient beds.” The financing of the medical facilities now depends either on the number of the contracts patients sign with each doctor, or the historical data on the number of urgent cases per hospital. The good news is, now hospitals will get no financing if there are no patients, which will allow for unnecessary healthcare facilities to naturally dissolve due to low demand for their services leaving space for higher financing of well-functioning medical facilities that are in demand.

However, the issue with the new financing system is that currently Ukraine spends only around 6.9 percent of its GDP on healthcare, which amounts to \$210 of annual healthcare spending per capita in 2019.



Medical professionals retire faster than the new generation of professionals is being trained to take over the demand for healthcare services.

To answer the question whether that is enough to ensure the well-being of each Ukrainian in need of healthcare services, let us consider the cost of one of the simplest and most common surgeries – appendectomy, or removal of the appendix due to appendicitis. The total cost of the materials needed for the surgery is a minimum of \$730 (labour cost excluded). The \$210 the Ukrainian government allocates to each citizen does not cover even such a simple procedure, not to mention another very common surgery, heart bypass surgery (CABG), conducted in case of cardiovascular health issues (ischaemic heart disease, heart attack or stroke, for instance). To put things in perspective, according to WHO, cardiovascular health problems are the most common cause of death in Ukraine and in the world. The cost of materials for such sur-

gery vary from \$3,750 to \$12,600. The \$210 budgeted per citizen is in no way sufficient for ensuring even the most common medical services are provided to each given citizen, even excluding worthy pay for medical staff. In comparison, the annual healthcare spending in the Eurozone amounts to \$3,600 per capita on average. Therefore, the percentage of GDP dedicated to healthcare in Ukraine should be greatly increased, but if the budget does not allow it – Ukraine should finally abandon the utopian dream of free healthcare and allow hospitals to charge patients for costs of treatment that the government cannot cover.

To conclude, if the Ukrainian government allowed for more fundamental impact of European integration on the Ukrainian public health system, if international standards were applied not only to the bureaucratic procedures, but to the way the medical workers are reimbursed, to the way the educational and financial mechanisms worked, healthcare services would truly improve in their quality and corruption would see a dramatic slump.



The percentage of GDP dedicated to healthcare in Ukraine should be greatly increased, but if the budget does not allow it – Ukraine should finally abandon the utopian dream of free healthcare and allow hospitals to charge patients for costs of treatment that the government cannot cover.

PROCESSES IN THE EU

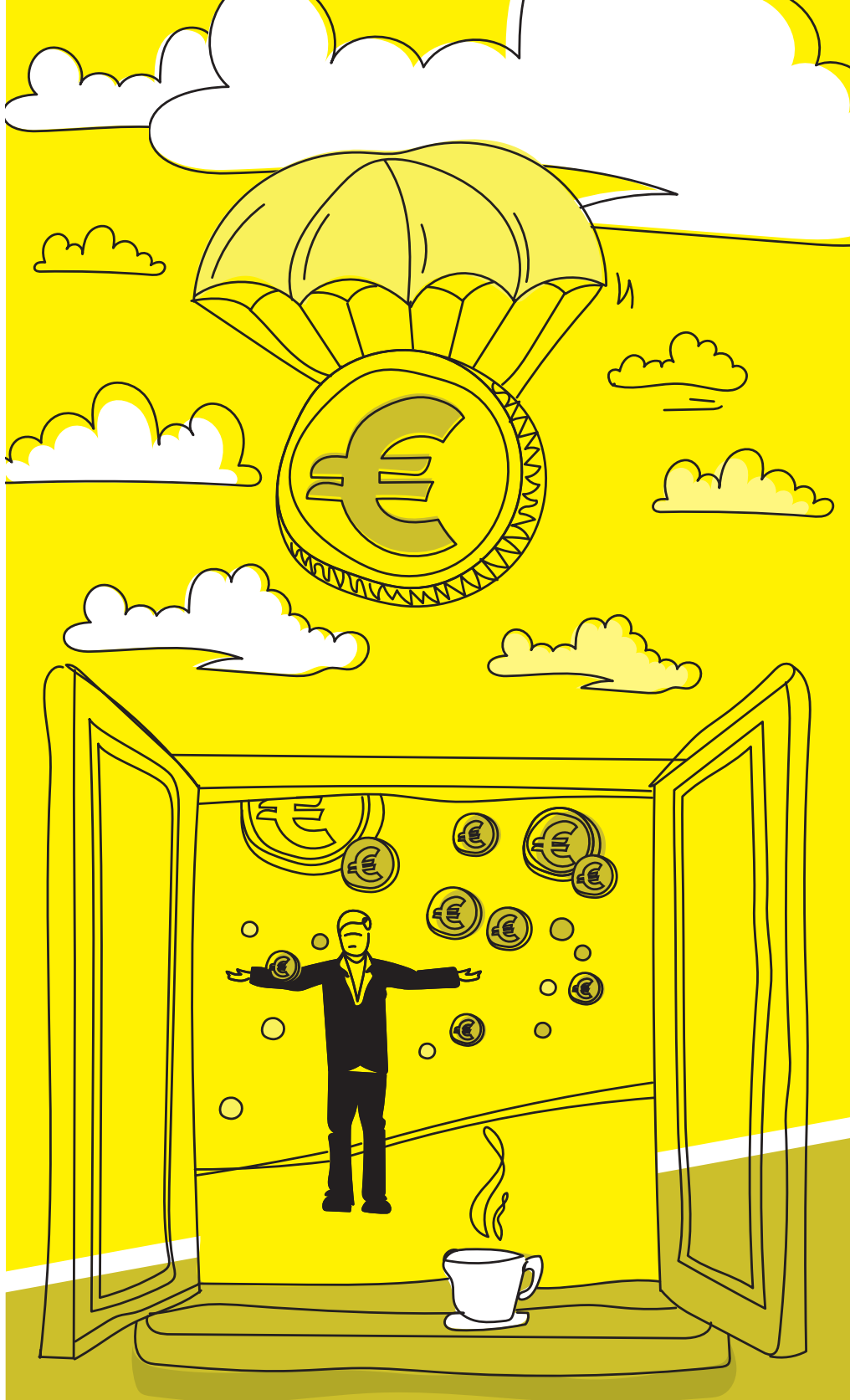


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Since its inception, the EU's currency has included the option of "international money", which is well-known in terms of economic theory. The experts of the European Central Bank (ECB) even made their own assessment of the euro's international role, according to which its "internationalization" had peaked in 2005. However, the founding fathers of the euro probably avoided this deliberate-

ly: such a status results in a number of burdensome commitments, including to serve as an informal supranational central bank. The "success story" of the "godmother of the euro" – the Deutsche Mark – demonstrates an ability to effectively find its own niche in the world of finance, while avoiding the described responsibility before the global community. The EU's sovereign debt crisis of 2010-2012 has not strengthened the positions of proponents of the **"internationalisation of the euro"**. It revealed the fundamental contradictions enshrined in the European Monetary Union's foundation: the conflict between the common monetary and separate fiscal policies of the countries-members.

INTERNATIONALISATION OF THE EURO AS A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR UKRAINE



Nevertheless, around 2017-2018 the leaders of the European Union were compelled to weigh the idea of “international euro” more critically. The United States began abusing the dollar’s status as an international reserve currency, having relied excessively on the buck while executing its sanctions policy measures. According to experts of the famous magazine, *The Economist*, “America has weaponized the dollar. In the rich and emerging world, the search is on for an alternative.” From this perspective, we may notice the actions proposed by the European Commission on 5 December 2018 aimed “to strengthen the role of the euro in a changing world.” Without a doubt, this action plan should be considered jointly with the steps towards the recovery of the EU’s economy in the wake of COVID-19 crisis. The mentioned actions are also to include the design of road-maps to increase productivity, to complete the banking union, and to smooth macroeconomic imbalances existing among the various countries being the participants of European integration project. However, the policy of euro internationalization will, for sure, remain in the top of Common Europe’s agenda in the coming years.



We can assume that against the background of the COVID-19 crisis there will be a downward trend in globalisation and some regionalisation of the world economy. In such circumstances, the internationalization of the euro can become a powerful tool to strengthen the EU’s role as a heavyweight in the world of global finance.

euro as the main foreign currency” in the realm of trade settlements with other countries.

It should be noted that there is a realistic economic basis for such statements. In particular, in 2019 the EU remained Ukraine’s largest trading partner: exports amounted to \$20.75 billion USD (33 percent of total exports), and imports to \$25 billion (37 percent of total imports). It is clear that a significant part of settlements for such multibillion-dollar trade flows is made in euros. Additionally, to function as a means of payment, the European currency, like any money, has other core functions. It can serve as a unit of account used to record the value of goods and services, to measure the amount of debt issued (including sovereign debt) or the value created by financial assets. For example, as of 30 June 2020, according to the Ministry of Finance of Ukraine, the euro made up 13 percent of Ukraine’s public and guaranteed debt. According to the estimates of the National Institute for Strategic Studies, as of 1 April 2019, the euro was also among the currencies widely used during crediting: it comprised for 9 percent of the total loan portfolio of Ukraine’s banks. On the other hand, the European currency serves as a means to accumulate wealth (store of value), in particular as a reserve currency of central banks. Thus, as of 1 January 2020, the share of the euro in the structure of gold and foreign exchange reserves of the NBU was 10.6 percent. Thus, we can conclude that despite its less important role in comparison with the US dollar, the euro is quite actively used in the economy and financial system of Ukraine, while having enormous potential to expand its role.

To be sure, it must be noted that Ukraine isn’t able to influence positively to fully complete the

EU’s banking union. However, the leaders of the European economic bloc have on their agenda a number of measures aimed at **deepening the euro’s internationalisation**, the implementation of which may significantly benefit Ukraine. Given the above, at the level of bilateral economic relations between Ukraine and the EU, the following measures can be identified to contribute as much as possible to the internationalization of the euro:

- taking for granted the active trade relationships existing between the EU and Ukraine, it would be necessary to design a system of economic motivation **to cover by settlement in euros** the highest possible share of such trade flows. A similar action would be required for investments having the EU’s origination. The propelling of lending programs for small and medium enterprises (SME), of the funding of infrastructure projects, and of energy efficiency measures would also be particularly beneficial in this regard. The role of the European development finance institutions (EBRD and EIB) is especially important in this case: these financial institutions have high-quality expertise and deep knowledge of Ukraine’s economy specifics;

- **the issuance of sovereign debt denominated in euros** may be expanded by Ukraine. A variety of quantitative easing programs has resulted in a controversial situation: the European markets are affected by multibillion-euro financial injections denominated in the single European currency.

Ukraine may potentially pick significant bonuses from such a policy conducted by the top-officials of the European economy. It is obvious that the US dollar is the dominant currency in the local economy. Arising under such circumstances, dollarization is the source of the threats to financial stability, both in public finance and in corporate business/individual households’ areas. However, it should be emphasized that there is the growing understanding of the prospects for strengthening the euro’s role in Ukraine’s economy and financial system by local political elite. Thus, feeling the aftertaste of the uncontrolled devaluation of the hryvnia (the national currency), in December 2008, Ukraine’s then-Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration, Hryhoriy Nemyria, clearly stated that “it is worth strategically choosing the euro.” He also emphasized the negative consequences of pegging Ukraine’s economy only to the US currency. In May 2017, the Supervision Board of the National Bank of Ukraine (NBU), Ukraine’s local central bank, proclaimed that “it can be observed the beginning of the fundamental economic pre-conditions to use the

Ukraine's business and the state have a unique opportunity to raise these funds at almost zero percent interest rates. This would enable local borrowers to refinance partially external debt payments denominated in US dollars: the peak of such repayments falls in the coming years, creating a potential threat to the financial stability of the country. According to the calendar of payments on external debt in foreign currency as of 1 April 2020, compiled by experts of the NBU, Ukraine's enterprises, the central bank and banks have to pay about \$26.2 billion in the third and fourth quarters of 2020 and in 2021;

■ the creation of **European-wide safe assets** is a priority to promote the euro's internationalisation. By this term are meant financial assets (mostly sovereign bonds) that carry a minimal risk of financial losses, holdings in which may guarantee the safety of investments. Unfortunately, during the sovereign debt crisis 2010-2012 the problem of the "doom loop" became obvious. This situation by its economic nature is the opposite of the described "safe asset" concept: European banks accumulated on their balance sheets a huge amount of sovereign bonds. Given the risk that these sovereigns might face possible default, the bonds generate potential losses for financial institutions instead of being a reliable insurance. It can be predicted that the demand for such safe assets will be extremely high in Ukraine and such investments may become a civilised alternative to funnelling funds to offshore jurisdictions;

■ **foreign-exchange swap lines of central banks** may effectively hedge Ukraine's financial system against losses caused by currency exchange rate fluctuations. Such special kind of derivatives would ensure the supply of the European currency desperately needed by the local financial market. The fundamental principle of this financial instrument function is to provide a certain amount of currency in exchange for another currency for a certain period of time: there is a reverse exchange of currencies at the new rate after this period. Given that central banks, printing own national currencies and managing gold and foreign exchange reserves, are the counter partners of such transaction, it is possible to supply a required amount of the currency to the market of a particular country. Nowadays the US Federal Reserve, albeit reluctantly, serves as the world's central bank through conducting such dollar currency swaps operations (including those with four less economically developed countries: Brazil, Mexico, Singapore, and South Korea). According to The Economist, by the end of April 2020 ten central banks had drawn over \$440 billion between them. From Ukraine's perspective, such type of potential financial support from the ECB will be a significant argument in favour of the promotion of the euro's internationalization.

In summary, we can assume that against the background of the COVID-19 crisis there will be a downward trend in globalisation and some regionalisation of the world economy. In such

circumstances, the internationalisation of the euro can become a powerful tool to strengthen the EU's role as a heavyweight in the world of global finance. Ukraine, while being the European Union's closest neighbour, can benefit greatly from this vector of the European policy. The core priorities for Ukraine's top-officials are to understand the mutual benefits of such cooperation for both parties, the ability to design and implement the road-map of measures required. In this context, the newly-appointed management of the NBU has all the opportunities to demonstrate a successful sample of cooperation based on "win-win" principles.



MEP SANDRA KALNIETE: “TO JOIN THE EU, UKRAINE NEEDS PERSISTENCE, PATIENCE, AND DETERMINATION”

Russia is interested in a frozen conflict in Donbas so it can have a say in Ukraine's internal politics, and President Zelensky genuinely seeks to resolve the crisis in Eastern Ukraine, says Sandra Kalniete, Latvian MEP, Vice-Chair of European People's Party Group, and member of the EU-Ukraine delegation at the European Parliament. In an interview with Natalia Richardson of Promote Ukraine, Mrs Kalniete noted that the situation in Donbas should not be an obstacle for Ukraine's European aspirations. The Latvian MEP wholeheartedly supports the idea of Kyiv joining the European Union, but cannot set any date – because Ukraine's

EU membership depends on the efforts of the Ukrainian side and the geopolitical situation.



Volodymyr Zelensky has been President of Ukraine for more than one year. What do you think of this year – was it success for him and for Ukraine, or a failure?

This is very difficult to answer because the normal development of every country in the world was interrupted by the pandemic. That's why it is very hard to say whether it was a success or not. Since March nothing has functioned normally and in many countries unemployment increases, and the GDP falls. I appreciate that President Zelensky really applies efforts to find a new way to resolve the current crisis in Donbas. It is so obvious that the Minsk process does not work, it stagnates. I would not say that all of his proposals are very successful, because to have a successful proposal, one should also have a partner who supports and accepts this proposal, and Russia is not really willing to resolve the crisis caused by Russian mercenaries in Donbas.

Everybody speaks about Russia's aggression in Donbas. We know that the European Union is worried about it, but what can the EU do to try to resolve the issue?

This is a million-dollar question. There are so many political analysts and leaders of our countries who are unable to propose a solution which is acceptable for Russia. It is really a very difficult situation. I am afraid it will be yet another frozen conflict and for years Ukraine and also Europe will be obliged to live with that, like we are living with occupied territories of Georgia and Moldova. That is something we can try to resolve by applying international pressure and with Ukraine to try to influence the Kremlin. However, I am rather pessimistic, as I believe they have the plan, they need that conflict to be frozen to have a say in Ukraine's internal politics.

At the same time, Ukraine has strong European aspirations. Do you think that Ukraine can move towards the European Union even with this conflict on its territory? Is it compatible with its aspirations to join the EU?

It must be compatible, because the move towards the European Union is a different process which is needed for the Ukrainian nation. In this regard reforms would have a specific goal and Ukraine should vigilantly wait for the right moment for its entry. You never know how the situation can change geopolitically. It really depends on Ukrainians themselves, how they prepare themselves. I can compare it with what we did in Latvia. For us joining NATO was like for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. But we did our utmost to be ready for whenever that opportunity would come. As soon it did we immediately got our foot in the door.

And now we are in NATO. This is something that I wish for the Ukrainian nation: persistence, also readiness to sacrifice what is needed for that absolutely superior goal, because without it is not achievable as the European Union is going through a rather difficult period itself. For instance, look at the Western Balkans. I was at the Thessaloniki summit in 2003 when the European Union promised European future to the Western Balkans. They are still not in. Therefore, you need persistence, patience, and determination.



The normal development of every country in the world was interrupted by the pandemic. That's why it is very hard to say whether it was a success or not.





The move towards the European Union is a different process which is needed for the Ukrainian nation. In this regard reforms would have a specific goal and Ukraine should vigilantly wait for the right moment for its entry. You never know how the situation can change geopolitically. It really depends on Ukrainians themselves, how they prepare themselves.

According to a recent poll, 60 percent of Ukrainians support Ukraine's membership perspective in the European Union. People in France and Germany are not so enthusiastic about the EU. What would you say to Ukrainians that are in favour of the EU membership? Are they too optimistic? Is it realistic for Kyiv to join the EU in the foreseeable future?

When you were speaking about France and Germany and some other countries who are not as euro optimistic as Ukraine, there is a big difference: they are in, they can afford to be pessimistic, critical, or whatever. But since Ukraine is in a waiting room, it is quite natural that 60 percent support its entry into the Union. But it takes time, a lot of work, a lot of sacrifice, and also a lot of determination. And for the foreseeable future, it is all in the hands of Ukrainians.



Do you personally believe that Ukraine will join the European Union?

I support Ukraine's membership wholeheartedly and I believe it will happen because many other nations who are now in the Union had the same experience as Ukrainians. And they are your best friends. But as I said, it will take time.

So you cannot set a date?

That would be preposterous. It would be also irresponsible if I, being a seasoned and experienced politician, would say that Ukraine will join the EU in Year X. That would be completely irresponsible because we are living in a geopolitically changeable world.



LEADS UKRAINE

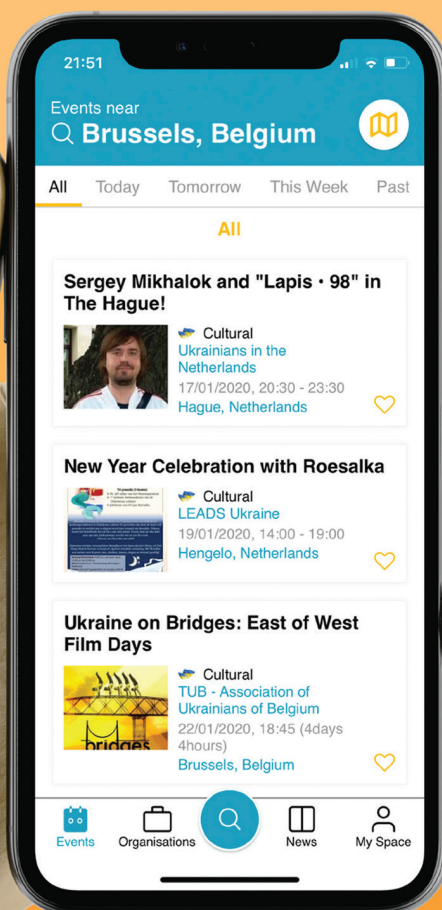
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UKRAINE-
RUSSIA-EU

**YOUNG UKRAINIANS
ON TRADE WITH
RUSSIA: IT IS A
RIGGED MATCH**

In recent years, after the illegal annexation of Crimea and the start of hostilities in the Donbas, the expediency and profitability (or unprofitability) of economic cooperation with Russia is still hotly debated in Ukraine. Some people believe that Kyiv should not maintain economic relations with the aggressor country, other people say that trade with Russia is essential.

While there is a serious debate on this topic with the participation of politicians, economists, analysts, etc., the young generation is also expressing its views – those who were born in independent Ukraine or were still very young when the Soviet Union collapsed. Quite interesting ideas about trade relations with Russia were presented by participants of the Kyiv School of Economics course “Cards, Values, Money – Where the Success of the State is Hidden”, by Oksana Syroyid, a well-known Ukrainian politician, leader of the Self Reliance party, and Verkhovna Rada deputy of the last convocation.

Kyrylo Sydorchuk, lawyer, specialist in the field of advocacy and lobbying, 30 years old:

“Several months before the Revolution of Dignity, there were many discussions about whether we should choose the Association Agreement (*with the EU - ed.*) or the Customs Union (*with Russia - ed.*). In favour of the Customs Union, the argument was made that industrial enterprises in the south and east of our country are mainly focused on the Russian market, and therefore dependent on the political situation. There was an opinion that if we sign the Association Agreement, due to the prevalence of quotas and backwardness of production, these companies won't be able to withstand competition.

Instead, Russia would want to “protect” itself from our common European market, orders would no longer arrive, and these companies would simply go bankrupt. But in terms of strategy and not tactics, this argument was supposed to work against supporters of the Customs Union. The desire to focus on a country that uses backward production significantly narrows, and even completely eliminates, innovation and further entry into new markets, although it will bring good and stable profits in the short term. But it's not just about the financial aspect.

A common market with Russia is impossible without the further adoption of the corrupt rules of the game prevailing in the Russian Federation. This implies that the business entity is protected not by institutions, but by acquaintances, closeness to the state authorities and persons who can “solve issues”. If we remain in the Russian-coordinated system, we would actually recognize that “rigged matches” are common and profitable for us, as opposed to the rules of fair competition and the free market.”

Victoria Demchko, public activist, 25 years old:

“For so long as we discuss whether something is profitable or unprofitable, we lose.

Of course, the renunciation of trade dependence on Russia will make it possible to: first, open new markets for Ukrainian companies and liberalise trade regimes; second, attract investments for the development of strategically important sectors of the economy and infrastructure (the aggressor simply cannot be interested in the prosperity of our economy and state); and third, learn Western management style and business culture.



The desire to focus on a country that uses backward production significantly narrows, and even completely eliminates, innovation and further entry into new markets, although it will bring good and stable profits in the short term.

But there are fundamental things we need to remember: the formation of Ukrainian statehood, the values we want to see at its core (this is where our paths with Russia diverge), and the war. Our soldiers are at war, whilst we continue to trade (*with the same country – ed.*)?”

Serhiy Savchenko, artist, 47 years old:

“There is an important factor for which communities come together, states are created, and companies are working. The safety factor. It is important for a businessman or woman to keep his or her business safe. The biggest problem today for both small and large businessmen or women is that they constantly feel in danger, due to instability in the state: frequent protests and revolutionary activities, corrupt officials who, due to the very nature of corruption, demand more and more, physical, economic and legal insecurity, and the coronavirus pandemic came very unexpectedly.

But look at businessmen, for example, in Poland – the state takes care of them. There are always opportunities to submit various applications for co-financing to develop business, to withstand the dangers of the pandemic, to secure the payment of wages to employees, to get interest-free government loans, etc. Businesses, especially medium-sized ones, are in the focus of government institutions. One of the main points of the anti-crisis resolution of the Polish government was actually helping medium-sized businesses and... attention! culture! Because it is super important for the state!

Business security is the basis of calm and standardised management and development! And if I wanted to persuade our oligarchs (*not to cooperate with Russia – ed.*),

I would “scare” them! I would scare by the pure truth. Because the truth is that cooperation with Russian partners is not only deprived of transparency and equality in most cases. It means that such cooperation is fraught with danger and consequently mistrust and high risks. Hence there are the unnecessary losses as compensation for normal relations. If I did a state program to “intimidate” such businessmen and women, I would launch a series of films that would tell about what happened to those who dealt with the Russians.

The most interesting thing is that you wouldn't have to invent anything. Because I'm sure that there are many cases of deception and ripping off their business partners. There are objective reasons for this, from immorality and mental rigidity to frankly harmful tasks. These risks are greatly reduced in Europe because there are laws and institutions, there is a court and levers for protection and, ultimately, a culture of coexistence, and therefore of doing business and cooperation. Thus, security is something that could be operated on when we persuade small and large businesses not to cooperate with Russia.

I knew a businessman who, before the Association Agreement was signed, reoriented his business to the West, although it was completely tied to Russia before that. I asked him, ‘Why?’ And he said, ‘It's simple. Markets are multiplied by a thousand. And it is quiet because I deal with decent people who invest even in my future decency, trusting and helping to build a convenient and transparent system of cooperation at the expense of their investments.’



A common market with Russia is impossible without the further adoption of the corrupt rules of the game prevailing in the Russian Federation. This implies that the business entity is protected not by institutions, but by acquaintances, closeness to the state authorities and persons who can “solve issues”.



If I did a state program to “intimidate” such businessmen and women, I would launch a series of films that would tell about what happened to those who dealt with the Russians.

And this must also be explained, because Europe, although smaller territorially in comparison to Russia, but the population density, culture and markets there have just crazy development. I recently met this businessman, he is incredibly pleased and remembers the past years (cooperating with Russia - ed.) without much romantic nostalgia.”

Antonina Cherevko, lawyer, international development specialist, 38 years old:

“Everywhere I look, even in economics, I do not see economics, but rather ideology. When I read *The Federalist Papers* (a series of 85 essays in support of the ratification

of the US Constitution, published in 1787-88 - ed.), my impression was that the authors wrote not so much about trade as about influence and power. And they talked about the importance of introducing these common rules for all States in order to defeat others.

By the way, there are many similarities here with Ukraine in the sense that the United States is, in fact, a postcolonial entity that has struggled for a long time and sometimes continues to struggle with its own postcolonial complexes. I was amazed that in the text there is a certain propaganda of self-sufficiency and power. All the time the authors mention power and influence in the region.

All these arguments can be applied to Ukraine, it's simple: one, two, three. Also, there is a good thesis about influence in our region: after Russia, Ukraine is the second-largest country from the former Soviet Union, which has a potential influence wider than itself, that has, relatively speaking, potential ‘neo-imperial ambitions’. This is not Belarus, and this is not Armenia, and this is not Kazakhstan, but Ukraine.”

Galyna Chyzhyk, Anticorruption Action Center, 28 years old:

“In *The Federalist Papers*, one can trace the opinion that economic rapprochement with such a huge and rich state as Russia will mostly mean economic decline for Ukrainian business. It will lead to political decline: Ukraine will be forced to make some political concessions due to economic dependence. And, accordingly, its political decline and political dependence will cause economic decline and dependence, because certain political decisions will be made to the detriment of business.”



There are fundamental things we need to remember: the formation of Ukrainian statehood, the values we want to see at its core (this is where our paths with Russia diverge), and the war. Our soldiers are at war, whilst we continue to trade (with the same country – ed.)?

**OLEG SENTSOV:
"TERRIBLE THINGS
ARE HAPPENING, AND
ZELENSKY DOES NOT
UNDERSTAND IT..."**

POLITICAL PRISON- ERS - INTERVIEW-



The most famous former Kremlin political prisoner from Ukraine, Oleg Sentsov, is not going to be a politician, but instead devotes his time to filmmaking and writing books. In an interview with the journalist of Promote Ukraine Natalia Richardson, this movie producer, writer, and public figure said that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky does not see his own mistakes and that Ukraine is stuck somewhere between Russia and Europe in its human rights record.

Mr. Sentsov, of course, it is good that you, Roman Sushchenko, Oleksandr Kolchenko, and other political prisoners were released a year ago. But what about other Ukrainians who are still in Russian prisons? What work is being done to secure their release, and are you taking part in it?

First, the government, the President, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ombudsman Lyudmyla Denisova are dealing with this issue. We are in contact with them. What can we do to release political prisoners? Talk about it. When I go to some events, when I go abroad, I always raise this topic at all levels, because we need to talk about it. I know what it's like for the guys who are still in prison.

There were two big exchanges of prisoners this year: the first before the New Year, and then there was a small exchange in the spring – the guys from Donbas returned home. But according to various sources, 130 or 140 Ukrainian political prisoners remain in Russia, most of whom are Crimean Tatars. Negotiations with Putin continue, but so far there is no progress. Although the exchange has been announced several times, nobody has been released yet from Russia's prisons.

Your lawyer has filed a lawsuit against Russia in the European Court of Human Rights. Has there been any result yet?

My case went to the final stage more than a year ago. Now we just expect a decision in this case. I hope that someday it will be delivered and it will be in our favour.

A year ago, you said you wanted to set up an NGO or foundation that might have your name. Was this fund created?

This way, I wanted to make my public activities more formal. So far, I've postponed the creation of such a foundation. After all, when you start to do it more formally, you are criticised for being a "grant-eater" for involvement in such processes. And, so far, I have decided to put it off a bit and do my job as an unofficial person.

This gives more room for manoeuvre and I am free from all these charges. I will say to those who are not very familiar with the Ukrainian realities: Ukrainians do not like people who carry out public activities funded by grants, they are all called "Soros' boys", and they are accused of ties with the West. This is all at the behest of Russian propaganda. To avoid this, I run activities more freely without having an organisation.



Do you plan to go into politics?

No, I have no such plans, I'm not going to do that. Although some of the people released with me have already become members of political parties, I'm not going to go to the polls.

Do you consider yourself first of all a movie producer, and then a writer and a public figure?

First of all, I consider myself Oleg Sentsov. And I want to remain who I am. And all these clichés, names, some other activities of mine change, and let people call me what they want to call me.

Let's not discuss in this interview the human rights situation in Russia, where you, unfortunately, spent five years in prison. But what can you say about the human rights situation in Ukraine since 2019 when you returned?

We really do not have such a terrible human rights situation as in Russia, these are incomparable things, but our record is not as good as in Europe. We are stuck somewhere in the middle. We are gradually moving towards European standards, but not as fast as we would all like.

And there is police arbitrariness - there was a scandal recently in Kaharlyk (Kyiv region) when the policemen raped a woman, there was horrible torture. This big scandal is not over yet.

Our unchangeable Minister of Internal Affairs, Avakov, remains in office, and nothing has changed. There are other examples. There is intolerance towards sexual minorities, towards people with other views. And all this is happening. Gradually, Ukraine is moving away from this Sovietesque mentality, but it has not yet reached the European level. There are several prisons where torture is used, and convicts are abused. For example, terrible things are happening in Berdyansk jail number 77, also in one prison

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in Kharkiv. There are examples, they are not massive, but they exist, and we must continue to fight against this phenomenon, because we will never be in Europe if we treat people, their lives, and their rights that way.

There is also the case of Sheremet - is there a question of respect for human rights arising from his case?

There are big questions in Sheremet's case! There was a large briefing with participation of the President, the Attorney General, and the Minister, where people were nearly indicted. It was said there was a lot of evidence and officials promised to show it all. But no new evidence has appeared, and all the evidence presented is gradually being questioned, as well as all their conclusions about the manner of walking of the accused, their height, tattoos, their presence in a certain place at a certain time, and other things

The accused are gradually being released from custody. Yulia Kuzmenko has already been released from the pre-trial detention facility; unfortunately, Antonenko still remains there. An electronic bracelet was removed from Yana

Dugar. But they will try to shove the case under the rug. Because there is a great resonance, and there is nothing to prove, there is no direct evidence, and most importantly - there is no reason why these three people, connected to each other, did it. This is kind of nonsense. Indeed, this case does not hold water, and we understand who benefited from it, and why this case continues.

Did Avakov need it?

Indeed. President Zelensky said in late 2019 that Avakov was an interim minister who had to show his effectiveness by solving high-profile cases. It was said directly, it had to be answered. Those who were more or less similar (*to the persons committed the crime - ed.*) were found, and they were accused of this murder, that's it. Avakov has been staying in office already for a year, and no one can remove him, he has become even more powerful.

¹ Pavel Sheremet was a Ukrainian and Russian journalist who was murdered in Kyiv in 2016 in a car explosion caused by a bomb.



What would you say about the actions of the new government in general? Zelensky has been President for more than a year, and his “Servant of the People” is the ruling party. Do you see positive moments in their activities?

There were very good dynamics in the first half of the year. Some things were controversial, but there was a so-called turbo regime when many laws were passed – both good and maybe not very good ones. They talked about the government of reformers, new people who obviously were not corrupt, and they did not come from the old structures. Zelensky was committed to reforms. But six months later, the Honcharuk government was removed, and the prosecutor general was removed, he was a bit independent – more independent than the current authorities would like to see.

He was removed by the “Servant of the People”; this party voted for resignation of the independent prosecutor. For me, this was a clear point, after which I do not expect anything good. Because to vote against an independent prosecutor general together with the Opposition Platform – For Life, who are outspoken enemies of Ukraine, for me it is just a betrayal and that’s it. And after that there was a movement backwards. A kind of falling apart of the country began.

Because they started appointing some government officials, no one knows them, some third or fourth link of these reserve pensioners of Yanukovych’s time. And someone appoints lustrated people, the Prosecutor General’s Office also appoints some militiamen or prosecutors of Yanukovych’s time, members of the Party of the Regions. Terrible things are happening, and the problem is that Zelensky does not understand this. The oligarchs are very comfortable with such a weak president who does not fight them, does nothing, but only builds roads.



I will say to those who are not very familiar with the Ukrainian realities: Ukrainians do not like people who carry out public activities funded by grants, they are all called “Soros’ boys”, and they are accused of ties with the West. This is all at the behest of Russian propaganda. To avoid this, I run activities more freely without having an organisation.

This is great, we are grateful for that, but it is not the level of the president to build only roads, he must be engaged in the development of the country, to defend our Constitution. And he wimps it out little by little. He does not understand, this is his problem: that he does not understand his mistakes. No one can reach him, because he sees it that way but listens to the two people around him, who give him only the information they

want to give him. He has played himself into this corner of isolation and lives in a world that has nothing to do with reality. He was elected because most people were disappointed in Poroshenko and they wanted renewal. There was a great demand for reform and justice. Now there is no justice, courts are not reformed, reforms do not take place. And that’s why Zelensky’s rating is falling a little, people are disappointed that nothing is happening in our country, almost nothing has been done this year.

Mr Sentsov, please tell us about your plans in your professional life. You are going to present a two-volume book and also start shooting a film. Is this right?

Yes, correct. I am now more focused on creativity, because I have already made a lot for society, travelling abroad for the first six months (*after his release from jail – ed.*) and meeting with European and American government officials, talking about Russian aggression, about our prisoners. I did it. I say that I volunteered at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But now I’m more focused on creativity.

I published one book in the spring, it is an apocalyptic novel. *The Second One is also Worth Buying*, a two-volume book, was published on 7 September and was presented in Lviv for the first time on 8 September. It includes prison stories, along with a hunger strike diary. Two books in one. Because the subject is the same, I wanted to publish the books together so that they would have a greater impact on the reader. And the main thing for me is the cinema: we have been preparing for filming for two months, it starts in October this year.

This is “The Rhinoceros” movie I wrote a few years ago before I was in prison, and I really want to realise it in the end.

Where will you shoot this film?

In an industrial city in the south of Ukraine.

A while ago, before all the events, did you plan to shoot in the Crimea?

Yes, because we are talking about the 1990s, and Simferopol suited me for filming, but now it is impossible to shoot there. That's why we do it in Ukraine.

Did Serhiy Zhadan give you any advice? After all, he wrote a wonderful novel on this topic.

He did not advise me in any way, because I am an independent person. I am 44-years-old, I have lived my life, and I myself can advise anyone on any issues. But I talked to Zhadan just today, we went to the dacha to one of our friends, ate pizza, drank beer, talked, lying on the lawn, had a great time. We are friends, we talk about creativity together, but we do not consult each other, each of us is a separate creator.



The oligarchs are very comfortable with such a weak president who does not fight them, does nothing, but only builds roads. This is great, we are grateful for that, but it is not the level of the president to build only roads, he must be engaged in the development of the country, to defend our Constitution.

Biography

Oleg Sentsov is a Ukrainian film director, screenwriter, writer, and public activist. He was born in 1976 in Simferopol, Crimea. He is the founder and CEO of a filmmaking company, Kray Kinema. In 2014, Sentsov was detained by Russian special services in the annexed Crimea and accused of plotting a terrorist attack. In August 2015, a Russian court sentenced the Ukrainian filmmaker to 20 years in a maximum-security prison. Sentsov's imprisonment provoked a strong reaction around the world; his release was demanded by many human rights activists, politicians, famous actors, and writers of Ukraine, Russia, Western and other countries.

Pickets, rallies, and flash mobs calling for the release of the Ukrainian political prisoner took place in many countries. In May 2018, Oleg Sentsov went on an indefinite hunger strike demanding the release of 64 Ukrainian political prisoners. In June of the same year, actions in support of the Ukrainian filmmaker took place in more than 80 countries. On 7 September 2019, Oleg Sentsov was released from the prison colony as part of an exchange of Russian criminals from Ukraine for Ukrainian prisoners of war from the Russian Federation. In November 2019, Sentsov received the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in the European Parliament, which he was awarded in 2018, but which Sentsov could not claim because he was in prison.



17 October 2020

Organizers:

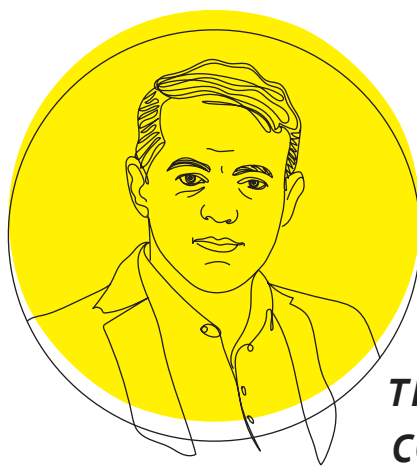


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SEVERE SANCTIONS OR THE IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS ARE INEVITABLE



*ROMAN SUSHCHENKO,
A FAMOUS UKRAINIAN
JOURNALIST, FORMER
POLITICAL PRISONER OF
THE KREMLIN, UKRINFORM
CORRESPONDENT IN PARIS,
AND NOW IN KYIV.*



The Kremlin's release of Ukrainian political prisoners hardly made headlines in the world and domestic media this year but also does not arouse lively and engaged interest on the part of Ukrainian society. Solitary pickets and the desperate attempts of relatives and friends of the Moscow regime's prisoners to draw the attention of the Ukrainian authorities, foreign diplomats and the most active part of society to this urgent problem do not inspire optimism. Sympathy and an attempt to understand can hardly be noticed in the eyes of my interlocutors. More often it is indifference, surprise, and a lack of any human reaction.

A year has passed since Ukraine managed to secure the return of 11 political prisoners and 24 sailors, who were captured at various times and unlawfully detained in the Russian Federation for years. Since then, there have been two more waves of hostages and political prisoners released from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine's eastern regions. Unfortunately, 135 Ukrainian citizens (at the time of writing) are still considered political hostages of the war waged by Russia. 135 families are waiting for their fathers, husbands, brothers and grandfathers. They are real heroes, who face the challenge of fate with dignity in isolation, going through new difficulties all the time – including changes of cells and colonies, the pressure of prisons administration, repeat offenders, and the FSB, the cold climate, terrible food and medical care, a lack of information, and the risk of catching COVID-19.

Last September, a special initiative was launched together with Mark Feygin. It aimed to offer the international community an opportunity to create an effective mechanism, primarily diplomatic, and to establish rules and arrangements to help prevent the emergence of new political prisoners. The aim is to exclude this humanitarian aspect from the existing confrontation. In the meantime, a number of consultations with diplomats, experts, journalistic community and lawyers have been held.

Discussions have been held in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, in foreign and Ukrainian embassies, and in the international arena. Oleksii Makieiev, a former political director and currently the special representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on sanctions policy, strongly supported this idea. With the appointment of Emine Japarova to the position of First Deputy Foreign Minister, the idea became more specific. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs initiated the establishment of the international action platform on Russia's release of Ukrainian political prisoners. Its inaugural meeting took place on 1 July 2020 in a videoconference format. It was joined by the representatives of the Ministry of Temporarily Occupied Territories, the President's Office, the Permanent Representative of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, by the Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as the representatives of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, non-governmental human rights organisations, and the relatives of unlawfully detained persons. Metropolitan Clement of the Crimean Diocese of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (PCU) and other religious and public figures agreed to participate in the work of the platform.



Solitary pickets and the desperate attempts of relatives and friends of the Moscow regime's prisoners to draw the attention of the Ukrainian authorities, foreign diplomats and the most active part of society to this urgent problem do not inspire optimism. Sympathy and an attempt to understand can hardly be noticed in the eyes of my interlocutors. More often it is indifference, surprise, and a lack of any human reaction.

The international platform has a serious chance of becoming an additional means of pressure on Russia, and the purpose of its action is the protection and release of Ukrainian citizens – prisoners of the Kremlin. Among the tasks initiated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the coordination of the international advocacy activities of all parties involved, including public authorities, civil society, and the relatives of political prisoners, and to increase inter-



Appealing to international governmental and non-governmental organisations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross in Ukraine, Denisova suggested that they provide humanitarian assistance to the children of the Kremlin's prisoners and help intensify the fight for the release of their parents on the international arena.

national pressure on Russian authorities in order to release unlawfully detained persons and protect their rights. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Office of the Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights are actively commenting on all facts of human rights violations by the Russian Federation and the application of repressive practices against Ukrainian citizens in the temporarily occupied territories.

Human rights and non-governmental organizations call for attention to this problem. In particular, a group of Kremlin political prisoners from the Crimea appealed to the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky. They demand that the authorities “organise and promote decisive action against the aggressor state.” The authors of the appeal offer a number of active diplomatic and preventive actions against the Kremlin regime, including the General Assembly’s termination of Russia’s veto right in the UN Security Council, the practice of prosecuting Russian officials guilty of repression against Ukrainian citizens, as well as new economic sanctions, revision of the Montreux Convention, and a change of the Sea of Azov’s status.

Ukraine’s proactive position has also helped to find like-minded people in Europe, in particular in France. A well-known public figure, French philosopher, and editor-in-chief of Philosophie magazine, Michel Eltchaninoff, commenced to implement the idea of organising international public events to protect new dissidents a few years ago. Last year, the idea provided the basis for the Festival des Nouveaux Dissidents project, which was scheduled to take place in Paris at La Villette this summer. The organisers’ idea is to arrange three days of multi-format discussions,

numerous meetings, exchanges of views and experiences, performances, and film screenings with dissidents from around the world, as well as the presentation of a special program on freedom and democracy, designed for children.

Michel Eltchaninoff is convinced that “new dissidents” revive the struggle of last century’s dissidents in a nonviolent and open way. They come up with clever and creative ways to challenge authoritarianism and abuse of power, and they fight alone with films, texts, and drawings or works of art, often along with indifference or rejection. “We want to create a space for self-expression and dialogue between dissidents around the world who often do not have a clue what is happening elsewhere. They will be able to share their experiences and explain what is happening in their countries,” Mr Eltchaninoff added in an interview. Dozens of French and foreign media confirmed their participation in the event. Victims of political repression and authoritarian regimes were also invited. Due to the spread of COVID-19, the organisers of the festival decided to postpone the international event until 2021.

The Office of the Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights demonstrates effective competencies in the release process. Liudmyla Denisova reacts to the occupier’s repression immediately. Following the recent crimes against the families of the Kremlin’s prisoners, the ombudsman appealed to the First Lady of Ukraine to take the families of political prisoners under her patronage and called on government leaders to take personal care of every child living with a mother in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.



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She also called on the parliament to urgently pass a bill to regulate the legal status and social protection of persons, illegally deprived of their liberty as a result of armed aggression against Ukraine, and members of their families. Appealing to international governmental and non-governmental organisations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross in Ukraine, Denisova suggested that they provide humanitarian assistance to the children of the Kremlin's prisoners and help intensify the fight for the release of their parents on the international arena.

The events in Belarus and the poisoning of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny are forcing Ukraine's Western partners and allies to take concrete action. The introduction of more severe sanctions against authoritarian regimes by the West is inevitable. The strict and principled demand for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners and hostages of the six-year war waged by Russia must demonstrate the political will and consolidated position of a civilization that upholds the democratic and sustainable development of humankind.



BELARUS IS NOT EXPERIENCING A MAIDAN, BUT IN ITS OWN WAY – A STRUGGLE FOR DIGNITY



**ARTEM KYZYM, BSC
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With an astonishing 80.23 percent of votes in the recent Belarusian presidential elections, the incumbent president – Alyaksandr Lukashenka – has once again secured a landslide victory over his opposition. His sixth consecutive victory, however, was met with mass protests in the capital, Minsk, over the falsifications and electoral fraud that have become apparent in the aftermath of these elections. Yet, despite a history of electoral fraud, Belarusians appear to have had enough of Lukashenka and his never-ending rule, mobilising in numbers of up to 300,000.

As a response to the peaceful demonstrations, the government deployed riot police to disperse the protestors, using batons, stun grenades, tear gas and rubber bullets. Violent clashes ensued, and to-date over 12,000 protestors have been detained, five killed, and dozens more have gone missing. This inhumane use of force against peaceful demonstrators has often drawn parallels

with Ukraine's Maidan, although whether such a comparison is justified is a different question on its own.

In order to answer this question, this article will attempt to explore the underlying structural assemblages that underpin both Belarus and Ukraine. In doing so, it will look at how national identification has served as a key mobilising tool in Ukraine, while the relative unanimity over the question of national identity in Belarus, as well as Lukashenka's monopoly over the national idea, has deprived his opposition of a crucial mobilising resource. Finally, the article will conclude by looking at the protests themselves and assess their consequences for both Belarus and Ukraine.

The question of national identity in Belarus and Ukraine

For a very long time, Belarus and Ukraine have shared a common past and culture. Both formed parts of Kyivan Rus and were later absorbed into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. They were incorporated into the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 16th century and became part of the Russian Empire in the 18th century.

UKRAINE
A WORLD

After a brief period of independence in the early 20th century, they became parts of the Soviet Union until gaining formal independence in 1991. However, due to belonging to different kingdoms and empires for the vast majority of their history, the formation of their national identities has only taken root after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. At the same time, the development of Belarusian and Ukrainian national consciousness after 1991 has taken a radically different form in each country.

In Belarus, the communist establishment was always strong – the communist economic system worked, and it took the longest time for Belarus, out of any of the former Soviet republics, for perestroika and glasnost to take root. This comes as no surprise, as it was during the Soviet era, in the 1950s-1970s when Belarus transformed from a predominantly peasant society into a modern, industrial society. It was also the Soviet era that provided Belarus with its national symbols and heroic national tales about partisan resistance under Nazi occupation. In fact, the image of ‘Partisans’ as national heroes – popularised by the work of Vasil Bykaŭ – could be paralleled with the image of ‘Cossacks’ in Ukraine.

In an independent Belarus, there was relative unanimity over the question of national identification, and after coming to power in 1994, Lukashenka used the widespread popularity of a Soviet-Belarusian national identity and manufactured a system around it – a system that is, on the one hand, nostalgic of the Soviet era, but on the other hand, caters to the notions of Belarusian neutrality, independence and non-allegiance to either the West or Russia. Lukashenka so-

lidified his rule by establishing a monopoly over this national identity and put himself and his apparatus at the centre of it. The logic then follows that anyone who votes against Lukashenka would vote against Belarusian independence and neutrality – one would essentially vote against Belarus.

This monopoly over the national idea deprived his opposition of a key mobilising resource, because too radical of a change in national orientation, such as integration with the European Union or, to a lesser extent, integration with Russia, would not find majority support. As a consequence, a large part of Lukashenka’s opposition agrees with the basic tenets of his regime: the fact that Belarus should remain independent, neutral, should not align itself with either Russia or the West, and should uphold a unique Belarusian identity that is indebted to its Soviet past.

This, however, is not the case in Ukraine. Even under communist rule, there was strong support for Ukrainian cultural nationalism centred in western Ukraine. The proportion of such a population constituted a sizeable 20-25 percent, and it was an ardent supporter of Ukrainian independence and a pro-European national orientation. At the same time, the southeast of the country legitimised Soviet rule, especially since the area was heavily industrialised and dependent on trade with the other Soviet republics.

After independence, the differences between the pro-Western and pro-Eastern sides became more apparent, culminating into a polarised and multi-vectored national identity. The west of the country supported a Western prospectus for Ukraine, whereas the southeast supported greater autonomy and better relations with Russia.

In contrast to Belarus, this identity polarisation played a key role in denying Ukrainian leaders

the opportunity to establish a centralised authority the likes of Lukashenka. The only president who came close was Leonid Kuchma. He consolidated eastern Ukrainian ‘centrists’ – who supported an ambiguous position regarding Ukraine’s national orientation – and western ‘nationalists’, creating a basis for an autocratic state in the late 1990s. However, the release of tapes suggesting the president’s participation in the murder of a journalist and the widespread corruption linked to his regime alienated the West from Kuchma, forcing him to pursue closer ties with Russia.



Although the protests might not be comparable to Maidan because national identity was never the issue, in their own right, these protests could be understood as a sort of struggle for dignity that caters to the unique circumstances of Belarus.

This formulated the basis of the Orange Revolution which unseated Kuchma and his successor, Viktor Yanukovych, in 2004. Despite the protests initially being anti-corruption protests, they were also driven by support for a pro-European vision of a Ukrainian national identity. As a consequence, a pro-Western national orientation served as a vital mobilising tool – there was a sizeable proportion of the population that found a pro-Western orientation attractive and was able to mobilise against the incumbent power and foster change.

Therefore, it is possible to argue that national identification plays a crucial role in the ability of a leader to centralise power and the ability of the opposition to mobilise against such centralisation. In the case of Belarus, the unanimity and the subsequent monopoly on the national idea deprived Lukashenka's opposition of a key resource that could challenge his rule, whereas in the case of Ukraine, a polarised national identity provided a substantial political force that challenged the incumbent power.

The case of Maidan and the ongoing Belarusian demonstrations

The difference between the Ukrainian and Belarusian opposition in their ability to use national identity as a mobilising force is an explanatory variable in why the 2006 and 2010 protests in Belarus were unable to achieve change, while mobilisation in Ukraine in 2004 and the winter of 2013-14 led to the overthrow of the government. This begs the question of what is different about the ongoing Belaru-

sian demonstrations from all previous ones and, in comparison to Ukraine, whether Belarusians are experiencing their own Maidan.

In relation to Maidan, the protests that took place in the winter of 2013-14 followed a similar logic to the Orange Revolution, except the support for a pro-European national orientation was even higher in 2013-14 than it was in 2004. As a result, apart from being an anti-establishment protest, Maidan had an underlying idea to it that was able to mobilise a large part of the population. The failure of the Yanukovych government to sign the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement was a key factor in sparking the protests, initially mobilising the youth that wanted a European future. For the first couple of weeks the demonstrations were relatively peaceful, until the government decided to use excessive force to break up the protestors. This resulted in the demonstrations gaining traction as more people started standing in solidarity with the youth and, as a consequence, the protests adopted a hybrid nature. On the one hand, the protestors demanded the resignation of Yanukovych and his government. On the other hand, they demanded change, a pro-European reorientation in national policy.

In comparison, in Belarus the vote for the main opposition candidate – Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya – and the subsequent Belarusian protests do not put into question Belarusian national identity – both are purely an anti-establishment reaction against Lukashenka's rule. When people voted for Tsikhanouskaya, they did not vote for her as a potential presidential candidate,

they simply voted against Lukashenka. It did not matter who the opposition candidate was – be it an inexperienced housewife or someone else – as long as there was someone but Lukashenka to vote for. As a consequence, her coalition garnered a hefty amount of support and a sizeable number of votes, which was more than the official 9.9 per cent figure. However, after the publication of the fabricated results, the unprecedented dissonance between Lukashenka's 80.23 per cent and the number of people who actually voted for Tsikhanouskaya served as the initial spark that ignited the protests.

Following the logic of the vote, the current protests are also purely anti-establishment in nature. There is no underlying pro-European idea behind them. They are protests of mass dissatisfaction and anger with Lukashenka and his system. What distinguishes these protests from previous ones is their scale and decentralised nature. After Lukashenka arrested the opposition leaders of the 2006 and 2010 demonstrations, the protests subsided because there was no one for the opposition to rally around. However, the current protests do not have a figure that can be arrested – they are guided by spontaneity.

Perhaps, the ongoing protests might have subsided after a week if left alone, as they did in 2006 and 2010, but what added fuel to the fire was the violent crackdowns by the government apparatus in the first week of the protests. The scale of the crackdowns highlighted the degree to which the apparatus does not care about the opinion of its citizens. The excessive use of violence against them undermined one of the most fundamental ideological narratives of Lukashenka's system – that it cares about the ordinary people and that it has their interests at heart.



As a consequence, although the protests might not be comparable to Maidan because national identity was never the issue, in their own right, these protests could be understood as a sort of struggle for dignity that caters to the unique circumstances of Belarus.

The consequences will be different

Overall, it is safe to conclude that the Belarusian protests offer a significantly different dynamic when compared to Ukraine's Maidan, especially in terms of national identification. Given this difference, it is logical to assume that the consequences of these ongoing protests will also be different from Maidan, even though at this point nothing is certain.

On the one hand, conservative estimates suggest that the protests will end in a month or so and the situation will stabilise with Lukashenka retaining power. On the other hand, the protests are credited with enough potential to overthrow the government, in which case this raises the question of a Russian response. For instance, in the aftermath of Maidan, the Kremlin used the divide in Ukrainian national identity to seize Crimea and support a war in Donbas. However, since there is no identity polarisation in Belarus and Belarusians themselves have an amicable attitude towards Russia, a repetition of the consequences of Maidan is highly unlikely. Nevertheless, the Russian reaction is also dependent on the leader who might come to power and fill the void left by

Lukashenka; and any alternative force that does come to power is free of Lukashenka's track record of human rights abuses and has real potential for normalising relations with the West. In this case, it is reasonable to assume that Moscow will not sit by idly as an unpredictable political force enters the arena.

Furthermore, given the decentralised nature of the protests, much of its outcome is dependent on the formation of a strong and organised opposition – perhaps within the framework of the Coordination Council for the Transfer of Power. Lastly, the willingness of Lukashenka to go towards dialogue should also be taken into account when looking at the consequences of the protests. Overall, many facets still remain uncertain, yet what is certain is that Belarus will no longer be the same.

A large part of Lukashenka's opposition agrees with the basic tenets of his regime: the fact that Belarus should remain independent, neutral, should not align itself with either Russia or the West, and should uphold a unique Belarusian identity that is indebted to its Soviet past. This, however, is not the case in Ukraine. Even under communist rule, there was strong support for Ukrainian cultural nationalism centred in western Ukraine.

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STEPAN NAZARENKO
IS A UKRAINIAN
JOURNALIST, PUBLICIST
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DRAGON PROPAGANDA: HOW COMMUNIST CHINA INCREASES ITS INFLUENCE DURING A PANDEMIC

When it comes to Chinese influence, the economy is most often mentioned: the location of multinational corporations in China, investments from China, the “Belt and Road Initiative” and so on. Until recently, the illusion prevailed that Beijing had little interest in the information spaces’ presence in the Western world. But in fact, China tried harder to “silence” inconvenient narratives rather than to articulate its own.

An illustrative example is the marginalisation of the Tibetan topics. The Dalai Lama was once a respected figure in the West (for China, he is a separatist), but now Western politicians largely avoid contact with him. When the spiritual leader of Tibet went on his European voyage, only a few Lithuanian deputies dared to meet him; the rest of the representatives of the EU establishment “did not notice” this tour. The same goes for business. According to the German newspaper Die Welt, the Daimler company (owners of the Mercedes-Benz car brand) in 2018 used the words of the Dalai Lama to advertise the new Mercedes: “Look at the situation from all sides, and you will become more open.” However, after official protests of Chinese diplomats, the representatives of the company apologised for this allegedly unsuccessful advertisement.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a new stage in the spread of Chinese propaganda. Only now has Beijing relied not on the silencing discussion of certain topics, but instead on the aggressive promotion of its messages in the global, and especially the Western, information space. When Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced the introduction of quarantine, he said: “China’s experience shows



The myth of a strong China that overcame the pandemic and generously helps other countries fight the coronavirus is a propaganda ploy that pushes to the background the information that China has become the first epicentre of the disease. The People’s Republic of China is an authoritarian communist country subject to severe censorship, so its official statistics should be evaluated carefully.

that unpopular and tough decisions overcome the virus and save lives. The experience of other countries shows that softness and liberality are allies of the coronavirus. Therefore, we will act harshly, immediately, perhaps unpopularly, but for the sake of one thing – the life and health of Ukrainians.” After these words, the top of the Chinese Communist Party should applaud the Ukrainian leader’s standing. After all, he voiced the main theses of China’s propaganda: authoritarian China fought the epidemic most effectively, a tough hand was the best way to curb the virus, and a weak and relaxed democratic West was incapable of accepting the challenge.

The myth of a strong China that overcame the pandemic and generously helps other countries fight the coronavirus is a propaganda ploy that pushes to the background the information that China has become the first epicentre of the disease. The People’s Republic of China is an authoritarian communist country subject to severe censorship, so its official statistics should be evaluated carefully. In April of this year, *Bloomberg* published data from a US intelligence report that, first, Beijing initially hid information about the beginning of the epidemic, and, secondly, it reduced mortality and morbidity. An international investigation would help establish the truth, but China is aggressively resisting the very idea. When the initiative came from Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, his country was threatened with a boycott of goods made in Australia, while strict tariffs were imposed, or threatened to be imposed, on Australian wheat, barley, and wine exports.

Volodymyr Zelensky is far from the only political leader who has directly expressed his admiration for Chinese methods and thanked China for its help. Controversial European leaders such as Czech President Milos Zeman and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban have spoken out in support of China, thanking it for its support during the pandemic.

Billboards “Thank you, Brother Xi” even appeared in the Serbian capital, Belgrade, this spring, and Alexandar Vučić, the country’s leader, speaks of China’s president as a brother. It is not just about medicines or protective equipment provided by China (often these goods are of inadequate quality, as shown by the scandal with the tests of Chinese production in Spain when these products were returned to China). Beijing operates systematically in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. If we take above example of Serbia: the Chinese company Hesteel bought the Železara Smederevo plant there for €46 million with a commitment to invest up to \$1 billion, and another company from China, Shandong Linglong Tire, will invest €800 million in Serbia by 2025 and open 1,200 workplaces. Chinese investors, unlike Western ones, care little about the country’s market transparency, the level of corruption, and government regulation. Beijing’s interest is different. Investments in Serbian metallurgy are offset by political and information bonuses. For example, at the New Author’s Film Festival in Belgrade, the film “Summer Palace”, which was directed by Lou Ye and which mentions the events in Tiananmen Square in



Another way to absolve oneself of responsibility for the emergence and spread of COVID-19 is to find the culprits outside China. China’s main opponent in the modern Cold War, the United States, is best suited for this role. Celestial diplomats speak openly about the “military-bacteriological activity” of the United States abroad, particularly in South Korea.

1989, was to be shown. The appeal of the Chinese embassy to the Serbian Foreign Ministry was enough to remove the film from the festival program. Not surprisingly, during the information campaign in the midst of the pandemic, the Chinese Communists had “brothers” in Serbia.

Another way to absolve oneself of responsibility for the emergence and spread of COVID-19 is to find the culprits outside China. China’s main opponent in the modern Cold War, the United States, is best suited for this role. Celestial diplomats speak openly about the “military-bacteriological activity” of the United States abroad, particularly in South Korea. This statement was made in particular by the representative of the Chinese diplomatic mission Wang Wenbin through the Xinhua news agency on 4 August 2020. Russian propaganda makes similar narratives: the local media, as well as the Ukrainian pro-Kremlin media, spread information about secret American laboratories in Georgia and Ukraine. The purpose of such manipulations is obvious: to accuse the United States of secret experiments, which are allegedly the source of dangerous infections, and therefore to prove that COVID-19 is not of Chinese but of artificial American origin.

China has a considerable set of



forces and means to advance its interests. First of all, this mission is entrusted to diplomats, who are sometimes called “wolf warriors”. They attack quite aggressively if the Western press criticises China. There have been incidents in Sweden, Germany and other countries where Chinese ambassadors had accused journalists of “stupid taste” when they dared to talk about China’s responsibility for spreading the pandemic. Such a remark was received, for example, by the German newspaper “Bild”. China also has its own “soft power”. It is represented by more than 500 Confucius Institutes around the world: in Ukraine alone, there are five such institutes. At first glance, these are just cultural and educational centres, but they are often suspected of promoting propaganda messages (silencing awkward topics and promoting Beijing-friendly narratives), in the United States they are in the field of view of the secret services. According to David Shambo, a professor of political science and international relations at George Washington University, China spends about \$10 billion a year on soft power instruments. There is also the notion of “friends of China”: there can be both right-wing and left-wing criticism of the West and anti-Americanism. In this sense, Russia and China use similar approaches. Undoubtedly, the most powerful tool of Chinese influence is business. The most striking example is Huawei and its role in building the 5G network. If overseas it is often perceived as openly espionage, then in Europe, especially in Germany, it is quite friendly.

In February, at the Munich Se-

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curity Conference, Edward Lucas, Senior Vice President of the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), delivered a report entitled “Firming up democracy’s soft underbelly. Authoritarian influence and media vulnerability”, in which he noted that Chinese and Russian propagandists use the weak links of the open media market for propaganda purposes. According to Mr Lucas, the only way out could be the uniform rules of the game, which would require the media to disclose their ultimate owners, increased counterintelligence attention to hostile information influences, refusal to publish advertising materials from representatives of authoritarian governments (this technique is actively used by Russian and Chinese politicians) and the development of media literacy of people.



SURVEY OF DISINFORMATION

REPORT ON THE ONLINE REPORT ON THE ONLINE SURVEY RESULTS ABOUT THE ATTITUDE OF UKRAINIAN- SPEAKING AUDIENCE TO THE DISPLAY OF DISINFORMATION IN VARIOUS INFORMATION RESOURCES AND ITS INFLUENCE ON DECISION MAKING

“All warfare is based on deception. Hence, when we are able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must appear inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near... devastate him and win.”

— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

The axiom “There’s nothing new under the Sun” is relevant to such an apparently modern concept as “misinformation”. An integral part of the art of war of all times and peoples, a working tool of politics from global to local levels, in the third millennium it closely affects every average Internet user.

At the same time, there is a problem of verifying the validity of information. Acute information confrontation and hybrid wars, accompanied by the spread of unreliable and harmful information in the information space, are aimed at weakening the principles of statehood, the rule of law and even humanism. This actualises the concept of “fact-checking”, “information hygiene” for ordinary citizens, and the issue of reliability of information becomes especially important.

Does the quality of information we consume matters? Do we care about its origin? Do we distinguish the truth from the fake? Are we sensitive to the manipulation and provocativeness of the news offered us by mass media?

Promote Ukraine tried to answer these and other questions by studying the attitude of the Ukrainian-speaking audience to the display of misinformation in various information resources and its impact on decision-making.

Survey Methodology

The survey was conducted on 20-26 August 2020 by means of the CAWI method and Google forms. The link to the survey was posted on the site of Promote Ukraine, Facebook, and has been mailed to the interested audience.

Development of the survey tools and information processing have been provided by the Institute of Sociological Research at Kyiv National Economic University named after Vadym Hetman.

Fake news played a role in catalysing the Enlightenment when the Catholic Church's false explanation of the 1755 Lisbon Earthquake prompted Voltaire to speak out against religious dominance.

The sociological data obtained is descriptive in nature and reflects the general attitude of Ukrainian-speaking audience to the display of disinformation in various mass media and its influence on decision making.

Thus, the survey was performed by 635 respondents aged 18 and above. Of the respondents, 98.6 percent live in Ukraine and 1.4 percent in the EU.

The most active audience is people aged from 41 to 55 (39.69 percent) and 29-40-year-olds (26.77 percent); the least number of participants is of 65 and older (4.25 percent). Almost three-quarters of respondents (74.65 percent) are women; 80.9 percent have higher education (Bachelor, specialist or Masters level); 24.25 percent are residents of towns with a population of up to 10,000 inhabitants; cities with more than one million population – 19.84 percent; with population from 100,000 to 500,000 dwellers - 17.01 percent, and the least number of respondents – 10.87 percent - from cities with a population of 50,000-100,000 people.

The vast majority of respondents read or listen to the news in Ukrainian (81.73 percent) and Russian (11.81 percent), as well as in English, German, French, and Italian. For a certain number of respondents, the language of the news is not essential, as they use an online translator if necessary.

Of respondents, 64.88 percent follow and 29.61 percent are more likely to follow events in the world, receiving most of the information from social networks (68.82 percent), online publications (63.15 percent) and partially – from friends and acquaintances (68.66 percent). Radio and print media are the least popular: they are the main source of information just for 4.25 percent and 5.67 percent of respondents respectively.



Television is *not a source* of information at all for 32.44 percent of respondents, while 49.29 percent get information *partly* from television, and 18.27 percent receive *most* of the information from TV. For 64.09 percent of respondents, *a partial source* of information is relatives, and only 0.94 percent of respondents do not receive information from social networks.

Television was also the least convincing source of information: 39.53 percent of respondents *do not trust it at all*, and only 2.83 percent *completely trust it*. The attitude to online publications and social networks is just opposite: they are *partially trusted* by the majority of respondents – 83.62 percent – and *not at all trusted* by the smallest number – 6.93 percent and 9.29 percent, respectively.

The rating of countries which information sources are trusted or distrusted by our respondents was distributed as follows:

■ the news from the EU media are *fully trusted* by 21.10 percent and *partially trusted* by 61.73 percent.

■ The news from Ukrainian media are *fully trusted* by 13.70 percent and *partially trusted* by 79.37 percent.

■ While 61.26 percent of respondents do not trust news from Russia and 31.18 percent of them do not trust news from China.

The following criteria of trust in the source of information were identified as most convincing: verification of the information source (for 93.54 percent of respondents), the credibility of the information resource (for 72.60 percent) and the country of the information origin (for 71.18 percent). The least important for trust is the popularity of the information source (by 30.08 percent).

It is important that the respondents have a clear idea of what a source of truthful information should be.

The vast majority of them believe that a source of information can be considered reliable if: (a) it is responsible for the information provided (95.75 percent); (b) it indicates the original source of the information it provides (89.29 percent); and (c) it has a proven reputation as an influential media in the national or international level (74.17 percent). The least convincing in terms of reliability is the source that uses the views of leading scientists (the relative minimum (59.69 percent) of respondents chose this criterion as important).

Of respondents, 42.36 percent check the information, even the one that seems to be true, because they believe that all information from the media should be checked. Almost the same number of respondents check what they consider doubtful (42.20 percent), while 8.35 percent do not check information that comes from credible (as they think) sources and 1.57 percent are convinced that information from the media cannot be true in principle.

Thus, **almost 85 percent** of respondents intend to **check the information** they get. However, **48.82 percent are not aware of the platforms for fact-checking** information and **only 4.57 percent know** about such platforms **and often use them**. In addition, 25.35 percent *know and sometimes use* information platforms for fact-checking, while 21.26 percent of respondents *know but do not use* them.

How do respondents assess their ability to distinguish true information from fake? Of respondents, 12.13 percent rate their personal mentioned skill at 90-100 percent, while 27.09 percent are more self-critical:

they believe that they can differentiate disinformation in 50-69 percent of cases. Almost half of the respondents (49.45 percent) are sure that they distinguish fakes in 70-89 percent of cases. Only 0.94 percent do not care about the accuracy of information.

Of respondents, 72.28 percent consider disinformation to be the one with no references to primary sources or these primary sources seem unreliable. For 17.01 percent of respondents, disinformation is something that seems absurd or contradicts their knowledge/ideas/experience. Only 3.62 percent consider it to be a disinformation because the media or a person they tend to trust, calls it disinformation. In addition, disinformation, according to the respondents' opinion, is also *a lie; distortion of information or its incomplete presentation, which distorts the original content; information that does not correspond the reality or that contradicts the available facts. It is the manipulation of facts; deliberate distortion of them for useful purposes, evaluative judgments of "experts" to influence the opinion of the audience, manipulation of the results of "ratings" and advertising content that is difficult to verify, as well as election promises and reports of "victories" of all political parties.*

Among the sources through which disinformation can be spread and is being spread *constantly*, respondents name television (64.57 percent) and social networks (54.96 percent). Friends or acquaintances (67.87 percent); online publications (62.20% percent); and print media (56.22 percent) can do this *sometimes*. Offi-

cial government pages (according to 19.53 percent of respondents) and relatives (10.71 percent) *never* spread disinformation.

For 64.09 percent of respondents, disinformation mainly comes from information sources of the countries with limited democracy or authoritarian regimes, but 6.14 percent believe that disinformation may originate from the democratic states as well.

For 26.61 percent, this question was difficult to answer. Among other options for answering this question, it is noted that the sources of misinformation can be *anyone who benefits from it or those who are financially dependent on a particular ideological, social and political orientation; all major influential countries with influential financial groups behind the media; sources can be different, depending on what (whom) the disinformation is aimed at.*

Disinformation has the greatest impact on ordinary citizens (65.35 percent of respondents), as well as on politics, culture, and business elite (30.55 percent). Aged people and people with low level of education also belong to vulnerable groups.

Only the authors of "conspiracy theories" (according to 31.34 percent of respondents) and *both* the authors of "conspiracy theories" and their victims (24.88 percent) are most interested in spreading disinformation as well as the *government and oligarchs, authoritarian states, neo-communists and globalists, Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, politicians and all those who work for them.*

Disinformation and "conspiracy theories" are interrelated! Of respondents, 22.36 percent unequivocally think so, and 41.89 percent tend to think so, while 7.72 percent do not link these concepts.

Respondents most frequently feel disinformed while reading information of a socio-political nature (54.33 percent – very often; 35.91 percent – often), advertising (43.31 percent – very often; 39.84 percent – often); entertainment (15.43 percent – very often) and about the environment (33.70 percent). Information of a technical nature (52.13 percent and 20.63 percent) and about sports (43.79 percent), as well as scientific information (48.66 percent) creates an impression of disinformation *relatively seldom* and *very seldom*.

Of respondents, 31.02 percent feel *constantly disinformed* about the situation with COVID-19, and 45.35 percent feel *rather disinformed*. This is almost five times more than the number of opposite answers (“Rather disagree” – 17.48 percent and “Disagree” – 2.05 percent).

Of respondents, 20.63 percent have no illusions about the possibility of complete abolition of disinformation, while 59.53 percent are not so categorical but believe that it is rather impossible to overcome disinformation completely. The opposite opinion belongs to 16.53 percent of respondents (3.62 percent “Strongly agree” and 12.91 percent “Agree”).

Rebuttal of false information by the mainstream media can be an effective mechanism to combat misinformation. Of respondents, 24.09 percent *absolutely agree*, and 43.78 percent *rather agree*, respectively. A total of 27.24 percent of respondents *do not agree* with this position.

According to 90.55 percent of respondents, disinformation harms Ukraine’s European inte-

gration, and the launching of a voluntary platform to control political advertising will be an effective mechanism for preventing and combating misinformation (20.79 percent are *absolutely convinced* and 47.24 percent are *optimistic* about that).

Other mechanisms of preventing and combating misinformation can be bot blocking (more than 82 percent), eliminating fake accounts (more than 88 percent) and concluding a Code of Conduct against misinformation in the EU (almost 78 percent of respondents).

The “Brussels Ukraïna Review” readers and its editorial board are interested to know your opinion on the results of this survey. If you are one of the respondents, are you impressed by the point of view of other participants? If you did not take part in this survey, what impression have you got looking through this summary?

Your feedback in the next issue of the Journal or on its web page <https://www.promoteukraine.org/journal/> is more than welcome!



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EARNING TRUST IN RESTLESS TIMES – POLITICAL PR IN EASTERN EUROPE



CHRISTIAN SPAHR IS A FOUNDER OF THE SOUTH EAST EUROPE PUBLIC SECTOR COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION (SEECOM), EUROPE'S FIRST PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATORS. THE FORMER BUSINESS JOURNALIST FROM GERMANY WORKED AS A EUROPEAN COMMISSION SPOKESPERSON AND DIRECTOR OF A KONRAD-ADENAUER-STIFTUNG BRANCH, AND HOSTED MEDIA WORKSHOPS IN UKRAINE.



The Ukrainian media landscape features a lot of contrasts – on the one hand, traditional media, dominated by business moguls. On the other hand, a dynamic alternative media scene with brilliant investigative reporters. In this field, Ukraine outplays some of the other post-communist countries.

In young democracies, political communicators have even bigger tasks in communication than their equivalents in Western countries. Three decades ago, Eastern Europe broke free from the communist system. This has been a period of ongoing changes in the political systems, with progress towards open and stable political landscapes, but also drawbacks: old boy networks have delayed the real implementation of European values. At the same time, the global political situation has become increasingly complex: the replacement of the Cold War order by a multipolar one, and especially the effects of digitalisation and globalisation, have changed the world fundamentally. Major technological revolutions like the GSM mobile phone, email, user-generated internet content and social networks took place in this short lapse of time.

More information about fundamental decisions

In some of the Eastern European countries, citizens still need to agree on fundamental political decisions: More or less EU integration? Pro-Western or pro-Kremlin? Liberal democracy or a strong state? This concerns not only the EU's neighbours but individual EU Member States. The EU's crises and the migration challenge have stirred up this debate again. Yet, a consensus on how to see the communist past has not been achieved, and a number of societies are still deeply divided on this question. In other words, citizens in Eastern Europe rather need more than less information from political stakeholders as opposed to their peers

in Western Europe. Politicians need to provide orientation in three fields: a narrative for the past, guidance in terms of EU integration, and a perspective for collective and individual development in an ever-changing global environment. Many in Eastern Europe still need to be convinced of the advantages of democracy and open societies.

Traumatic experiences with the communist state parties, political adventurers in the immediate aftermath of dictatorship and a highly polarised political discourse, in general, have weakened the reputation of decisionmakers. Corruption cases have impaired their images, too. But as much as inherently political reasons, the digital lifestyle is a challenge for the public relations of politicians. NGOs and informal movements claim more and more attention of citizens via the internet, presenting themselves as fresh and innocent players in the political field. Mass protests are being organised with the help of Facebook, Twitter, and Telegram – the latter having played a major role in recent events in Belarus. Not only the young generation uses the web to consume political information; many users create their own content, and the digital gap towards Western countries has been rapidly shrinking.

These parameters alone help to imagine how sophisticated the communications of political stakeholders need to be in the new EU Member States, the Western Balkans and the Eastern Neighbourhood. However, the challenges become even bigger when we look at the media situation. Formally, the press is independent, and freedom of speech is guaranteed by the constitutions. However, the reality is

often different, at least concerning traditional media. Many of them, especially TV and newspapers, are in the hands of media moguls who own them as an instrument of power. These media owners are not publishers in the traditional sense; they are not interested in earning money with good journalism. Essentially, they are PR entrepreneurs and invest consciously in loss-making media on basis of a hidden agenda. Their interests lie in political and economic influence to be used for their own purposes. Tacit agreements with politicians are part of this concept. On top, many media outlets depend heavily on state advertising – both national and regional. It is still a common practice for government authorities in various countries to use public funds or parts of EU subsidies to support friendly media coverage.

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A climate of interdependence between media and politics makes it difficult to enforce legal provisions or self-regulation in the media – for example when it comes to transparency of ownership and paid content, limiting monopolies in news production and distribution, and fostering ethical standards of reporting. Many South East and Eastern European countries are ranked as problematic in the media freedom rankings of the NGOs 'Reporters Without Borders' (RSF) and Freedom House. Ukraine's current position is 96th out of 180 countries with RSF, placing the country between Serbia (93rd) and Montenegro (105th).

One strong trend affects the entire media sector: growing budgetary constraints. Due to the internet revolution, citizens use more sources of information, and most of them for free – an economic disaster for traditional media who, for a long time, ignored or underestimated the challenges that lied ahead. With dramatic consequences: staff had to be reduced in media outlets, and the pulse of news making and news consumption has accelerated. Today, much less journalists produce much more news. Weak newsrooms are more dependent on PR content. As a global trend, the balance between media and PR has been lost. In many countries, for instance, Germany and the United States, PR employees have outnumbered full-time journalists. According to one of the German media associations, 48,000 journalists were facing up to 50,000 PR staff in the country already in 2014. The US Department of Labour even counted 4.6 PR experts per journalist in the same year. It has become easier to influence media and to benefit from their weaknesses.

But is this truly positive news for PR managers? The economic crisis of the media comes together with a crisis of confidence – in journalism and political communication alike. For example, in South East Europe, the lack of professional and ethical standards in media and politics fires back. According to studies conducted by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), the trust in both media and political communication is extremely low. In a representative opinion poll published in 2018, only 10 percent of Bulgarians and 15 percent of Macedonians considered the media to be independent. Besides, earlier KAS surveys in Romania



A consensus on how to see the communist past has not been achieved, and a number of societies are still deeply divided on this question. In other words, citizens in Eastern Europe rather need more than less information from political stakeholders as opposed to their peers in Western Europe.

and Bulgaria, published in 2015 and 2016, showed that less than every tenth citizen felt well informed by politicians.

If trust in traditional media is this low, are they still appropriate channels for communicating PR messages? Will citizens believe in messages conveyed through compromised news channels? On top of the questionable quality of mainstream media in parts of Eastern Europe, social networks are challenging the credibility of professional journalism. Based on algorithms, Facebook and others display predominantly news that fit the presumed interests of their users. Despite the open nature of the internet, more and more users roam in an echo chamber of unanimous messages, depending on their own political preferences and personal environment. If all ‘my’ sources on Facebook tell the same, can they be wrong? Viewed together, many opinion polls suggest that an increasing number of citizens rather believe what their friends post on Facebook than what is offered by mainstream media.

This should encourage spokespersons to check the credibility of media platforms as well as alternate or combine them, if necessary. Media relations with full-time reporters and direct communication with citizens are complementary. Next to online platforms and physical events, politicians still need traditional media to participate in the political discourse, but they may want to focus on quality outlets.

Secondly, it has become more important for political communicators to adhere to ethical standards. In the digital era, information manipulations are likely to be unveiled sooner or later – if not by newspapers, then by freelancers or non-profit media organisations.

A growing number of national and international PR associations have defined guidelines that can serve as reference. SEECOM, an organisation of public sector communicators with members from 15 countries, has its own charter of professional values, the 'Budva Declaration' of 2012. It emphasises on the need for transparency, inclusiveness, citizen participation, and integrity. SEECOM also promotes an enhanced level of internal communication between government departments, and greater exchange across borders. One example of such cooperation: in Montenegro, the government launched an application where residents can report pollution, traffic offences of officials, bad road conditions, and tax evasion. Through regional peer exchange in the framework of SEECOM, Bosnian officials examined this solution and developed ideas for similar apps. SEECOM, which has 80 members from national governments in the Balkans and international organisations, is open for associate members from the Eastern Partnership countries.

Rebuilding trust by pragmatism and openness

Building and rebuilding confidence is essential for political stakeholders. Increasingly, the young and middle-aged generations in Eastern Europe are requesting a new political style that can be described as open and pragmatic, without battles for prestige, solution- and dialogue-oriented, participatory,

and directed towards public interest instead of serving the interests of a few. The rule of law and civic rights are key topics to this group of citizens.

Instead of propaganda-like communication, more citizens are asking for dialogue with politicians – especially the internet-savvy, well-travelled young and urban segments of the population. Less and less, politicians can score with ideology; increasingly, they need to address citizens' concerns in their daily life, offering efficient political solutions. Hopes, anxieties and the trust of citizens are more important than party programmes. For instance, the economic situation, good education and transparency of the civil service are relevant topics for campaigns.



Many in Eastern Europe still need to be convinced of the advantages of democracy and open societies.

In this light, accepting modern standards in policy-making and public dialogue is a huge opportunity for public authorities and political parties. In order to be successful, both decision-making and communication need to meet high expectations and go hand-in-hand. A professional communications management is the key to ensuring that all major stakeholders within an organisation express themselves in line with official positions in order to be trustworthy for the audience.

Behind these observations lies a bigger challenge – shaping the professional role model for PR managers in the region. In many cases, the work of spokespersons and communication advisers is seen as an extension of policy-making than a part of it. From this perspective, a 'press' or 'media' department has the main task of 'broadcasting' the messages of the leadership – in other words, making sure a top politician enjoys enough airtime in the dominating TV channels and has an attractive Facebook fan page. Despite the fact that social media are already an integral part of the PR mix, communication still happens largely 'on demand' of the leaders – as a publication of positions, too often in a unidirectional way. For instance, in some of the political parties, senior communication managers don't always have access to meetings of the executive board and are not systematically used as advisers in the process of decision-making.

A true steering function for PR managers

A true steering function includes dissuasion to adopt certain problematic political positions, choosing key messages to focus on in accordance with public debates (agenda-setting), and making sure that prominent representatives speak with one voice. Other important elements of a modern PR management include precise communication objectives, audience insight (opinion polls) as well as a professional evaluation of channels and allocated resources. The implementation depends very much on the openness of the leadership for an anticipatory and methodical communications approach, in contrast to mainly depending on the intuition of the leaders.

This means a broad scope of responsibilities for PR experts in organisations. In a multi-channel and cross-media environment, even the most popular politicians need strong and competent communication teams. They cannot do PR relying on gut instinct alone. Therefore, strengthening the professional profiles of spokespersons and using their strategic advice in policy-making are important elements of the internal communication management.

Proactive measures are also essential with regard to the polarised media and political landscape in Eastern Europe. As a balanced, thorough reporting is often absent in mainstream media, political debates lack depth and tend to have a sensationalist,



Proactive measures are also essential with regard to the polarised media and political landscape in Eastern Europe. As a balanced, thorough reporting is often absent in mainstream media, political debates lack depth and tend to have a sensationalist, highly confrontational character. Negative campaigning is more widespread than in Western Europe.

highly confrontational character. Negative campaigning is more widespread than in Western Europe. 'My most important function is to reply to attacks', said one of the PR managers who participated in a workshop that I hosted. 'Communicating our own central arguments is only a secondary concern.' In this situation, internal briefings and systematic agenda-setting help to stay focused and to shape an organisation's public profile.

Dialogue and participation need further development

A modern understanding of political communication, in which citizens and journalists are not only target groups but also dialogue partners, still needs further development. This is true for political organisations around the globe, but perhaps especially in young democracies and in the decades after a political system change. Progressively, political leaders are expected to act transparently, be open to advice and agree to be subject to public scrutiny.

Although authoritarian political styles have lately yet again registered more support in both Western and Eastern societies, in most European countries, there is no way back to the role model of an omniscient strong leader whose power is without limits. Social networks, open borders, cheap flights and – last but not least – exchange programmes like Erasmus have allowed many people to compare political and societal concepts. Between 2014 and 2019, 7,300 Ukrainians have been granted to activities at European universities.



Moreover, 9,000 young Ukrainians took part in volunteering, training and exchange projects with the EU. Ukraine ranks first among the EU partner countries in these events.

The generation of future leaders in the EU's neighbourhood is already used to questioning established procedures and asking for participation. Both governments and political parties are well advised to consider this when reaching out to the citizens.

Reflecting recent democratic changes in the political systems, political stakeholders in Eastern Europe are about to fulfil a change of culture – from a top-down approach to a more collaborative environment, from the exclusiveness of power to open doors, from one-man-shows to the all-round competence of teams. The development of political systems and trends in political communication are two sides of the same coin. Ukraine has become a laboratory for bright, new ideas in civil society. The factual implementation of a democratic culture in a society effectuates changes in the ways of political interaction. The further development of political communication in this dynamic, aspiring part of Europe depends more on such a change of culture within public agencies and parties than on budget lines or organisational charts.

This contribution is mainly based on a chapter of the book "Reconnecting with citizens – from values to big data", which the author published for the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.



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LANGUAGE POLICY IN BELGIUM: LESSONS FOR UKRAINE

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BRUSSELS -

Language is more than just a way of communication. It is the basis for the history, culture, mentality, and identity of a people and nation.

The Belgian language policy is very complicated, not only because of the number of diverse official languages but also as it is a sensitive political and economic topic. In Ukraine, language policy is also quite an issue in society and it is often manipulated by politicians. Some even argue that the continuous historical fight between the Ukrainian and Russian languages is the main trigger of the six-year-long war in eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea.

The Belgian language policy so far is one of the most interesting aspects for foreigners living in Belgium. For example, getting on a train from Brussels to Mechelen, you will need to find a train that goes to Malines, or when returning to Antwerp you will get on a train to Anvers instead of Antwerpen. For local people, such translations are fine; for tourists and foreigners, it can be at times quite confusing.

Let us start with a brief introduction of the language policies:

■ Belgium has three official languages, namely Dutch, French and German, with a population of 11 million people.

■ Ukraine has one official language, Ukrainian, with a population of 42 million people.

As we can see, Belgium is quite diverse for such a small country compared to Ukraine, which is the biggest country in Europe to have only one official language.

To understand why and how Belgium manages such diversity, it is worth looking to history. The territory of modern Belgium was under the influence of different countries – it was ruled by Spanish (1585-1714), Austrian (1714-1794), and French (1794-1815) occupiers and, following this, was reunited

with the Northern Low Countries (the Netherlands) from 1815 to 1830.

The history of Ukraine is not much different as, in every historical period, the country was divided between Poland, Russia, Hungary, Turkey, and many others. The influence on the culture and language is remarkable as in every region of Ukraine there are various dialects that sometimes are difficult to understand. While in Belgium, the French exerted the most significant influence in terms of the language policy, in Ukraine, it came from Russia, the so-called russification of Ukraine.

Therefore, from a historical perspective, there are some similarities between these countries. However, today the language policies are different.

Let us have a closer look at the Belgian approach. In terms of territoriality, it is important to mention that Belgium has separate regions – Flanders, with Dutch as the official language; Wallonia, with French as the official language; Brussels as the capital city with special status and both Dutch and French as official languages; and, finally, Eastern Belgium with German as the official language. As the official language in each region is different, there are strict rules that apply, especially concerning French and Dutch-speaking areas. For example, all regional administrations like city halls, police, and other authorities are obliged to use only the official language, even if they understand other languages. From practice, this means that a Belgian citizen who cannot speak the language of the region will need a translator for communication with the authorities. At first sight, it seems

to be quite clear, you should use the local language of the region but when it comes to foreigners like tourists, international students, or expats, this can be very difficult and confusing.

Meanwhile, in Ukraine, the approach is much simpler – one official language. Despite that, in fact, small villages or even big cities in each region bordering with Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Russia, and Romania speak the language of the bordering country. Thus, in reality, the country is diverse but the language policy remains as one country – one language.

An interesting aspect is how these countries manage the language policy from the perspective of education. For example, in Belgium, while the three languages have the official status, in schools in Wallonia, the Dutch language is not part of the mandatory educational program. In Flanders, the French language is taught in a limited period, and German, accordingly, is not considered as mandatory in Flanders and Wallonia. Of course, this depends on the particular school location and the choice of the parents but, generally speaking, the situation when Belgian people from Wallonia do not speak Dutch at all and when Flemish people have, a declining knowledge of the French language if compared to two decades ago, is quite usual and, as a result, it is difficult for them to understand each other.

In Ukraine, the only mandatory language is Ukrainian, which is taught in every school. Usually, English is also taught as an essential language. Additionally, parents can choose any other language like Russian, French, Polish and many more. There was and still is an issue with teaching the Russian language in Ukraine.

Due to the strong language policy of the Russian Empire for many centuries, the Russian language dominated the Ukrainian language, which was considered as the language of farmers. Surprisingly, here we can find some similarities with the Dutch language. For many years, the French language in Belgium was considered the language of the elite and educated people, while the Dutch language was widely spoken by the lower classes of the society. The Flemish movement fought politically to gain more language rights during the 19th and 20th centuries and was aided by the shift in the economy from Wallonia towards Flanders during the mid-20th century. The border between the French and Dutch speaking provinces was drawn to indicate which language is spoken.

The language requirements from a career perspective in both countries must also be discussed. In Ukraine, predominantly English and Russian languages are required and used in professional life, while, we must remember, only the Ukrainian language has official status. After the Orange Revolution in 2004 and Euro-aidan in 2014, the Ukrainian language became more popular and is nowadays used in the majority of companies in Ukraine, together with Russian and English. Thus, professional growth requirements go beyond what the education system can provide. In Belgium, language requirements depend on the area of employment. For example, in Flanders, it is mandatory to speak Dutch and English. French knowledge is required in 75 percent of the cases, while German is very specific for the company you apply. In Wallonia, French is mandatory, and the second language might be English. A requirement to speak Dutch is rarer. Brussels requires comprehensive knowledge of Dutch, French, and English.



The language history of Belgium and Ukraine is quite similar but the way in which it is managed is different and the consequences are accordingly contrasting.

However, due to the language approach in education, professional skills requirements are also much higher than the schools can provide. Even more confusing is that the children studying in schools in Flanders and Wallonia, in fact, do not have equal job opportunities because Dutch, an essential language for work, is not taught at schools in Wallonia, while French in Flanders is taught to a minimal level. As a result, we see a higher unemployment rate in Wallonia and lots of political manipulation in this regard.

To slightly touch on the political aspect here, it must be noted that the strict rules on language knowledge apply not only to Belgians, but also to foreigners. For example, if, as a foreigner, you plan to settle in Belgium, you are obliged to learn Dutch and pass the exams for A2 level minimum. The Flemish government provides such education to each non-resident without any costs, as well as the special integration courses. Thus, in such a way, the government motivates and promotes integration, so in the future, there

could be more job opportunities for these people. In Ukraine, the situation is different. The possibilities for foreigners to learn the Ukrainian language are very limited. The Ukrainian government has recently introduced the law on the mandatory requirement to speak only Ukrainian in public places like restaurants, shops, libraries and so on. In such a way the government was trying to prevent the spread of the Russian language influence due to the military intervention of the Russian Federation in Ukraine. However, it led to civil disobedience and protests due to fear of discrimination against the Ukrainian people speaking the Russian language. Thus, the result was contrary to expectations.

To conclude, it is worth highlighting that the language history of Belgium and Ukraine is quite similar but the way in which it is managed is different and the consequences are accordingly contrasting. Ukraine has some lessons to learn from the Belgian experience. For example, how to limit the spread of the widely spoken language and how to motivate not only citizens, but also foreigners, to learn the language of the country. Of course, there are some issues in both countries but respect and equality should prevail.



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JO VANBELLE,
HONORARY CONSUL OF
UKRAINE IN BELGIUM:
"I WANT TO OPEN
UKRAINE UP TO
THE WORLD"

Many Belgian businessmen want to do business in Ukraine, but they do not know exactly how to get in the door, says Jo Vanbelle, Honorary Consul of Ukraine in the Kingdom of Belgium and Managing Partner at Vanbelle law firm. In an interview with Brussels Ukraïna Review, Mr. Vanbelle revealed his plans to the journalist Natalia Richardson to organise a summer business school for Ukrainians who want to work abroad and for Belgians who plan to operate in Ukraine. The Honorary Consul also spoke about his great fascination with Ukrainian F&B (Food and Beverage) concepts, architecture and cities.



Mr. Vanbelle, how did you become Honorary Consul of Ukraine?

I was asked. An Honorary Consul is a position that is usually only open to nationals of the guest state and it is the country – in this case, Ukraine – which decides whom it would like to have as an honorary consul. Why did I accept? Well, first of all, there is a profound sympathy that I have for the current ambassador, Mr Mykola Tochytskyi, his close family, and the staff. We met each other several times at the Cercle Royal Gaulois (an artistic and cultural private club in Brussels that also welcomes heads of foreign countries delegations), where the ambassador organised a truly amazing dinner with wine and food prepared by Ukrainian chefs. I was very impressed by that and did not expect such food and wine to exist in Ukraine because, to be honest, we knew very little about these aspects of the country. Then I visited Kyiv specifically to discover the hotel and restaurant activities of the country, to see if it was really this innovative and special as what I saw in Brussels. And it was.

Do you mean hotel and restaurant design?

Yes, design and concepts, but the food as well. There are chefs in Ukraine who are just exceptional. If you had Michelin already in Ukraine, which is one of the things I would like to see happening, I know for sure that some of the chefs that I have met in Kyiv, and probably elsewhere in Ukraine too, would instantly get a Michelin star.

Could you give an example?

Don't make me say names, because that would be not fair to the others. But not only the quality of the food, but also the concepts, decoration, and atmosphere are amazing! I didn't know that. And I said to myself: if I don't know all that – and I have travelled a lot – most Belgians won't know either. That was one of the main reasons to accept the mission: if you can help people from other countries, especially European countries, to discover little secrets and treasures that are only a few hours away, then you have to do it!

So your aim is to introduce Belgians to Ukrainian culture?

Of course! The primary reason for doing this is indeed to open Ukraine up to the world, especially to the European Union. I think Ukraine has the ambition to become as close as possible to the European Union, where its natural place actually is, because, after all, it's a European country. A good part of Western civilization comes from there. People need to be reminded of that. So, as much as Ukraine wants to become closer to the EU, the citizens of the EU should also be assisted in coming closer to Ukraine: more better knowledge and mutual understanding usually make people closer and help to collaborate.

The idea is to open up Ukraine to Belgians with specific actions. For instance, restaurants are something that everybody understands: everybody goes out to restaurants, everybody likes nice things. I have a lot of experience in that area – as a concept creator and investor in restaurants, but also as a lawyer and consultant. If I say to people over here: "Go to Ukraine if you want to try nice food," they will say: "Really?" Their interest is piqued, and then they go.

You became Honorary Consul of Ukraine last year. What are your main achievements during this time?

Together with the services of the counsellor and diplomatic services of the embassy, who are of course our main partners, we wanted to create and put in place a kind of exchange program. Let's call it a "summer school", although it can also take place in winter. It will be based on a collaboration between one or more Belgian universities and probably one or two Ukrainian universities or similar institutions. Participants from Ukraine will learn how to export their knowledge and their products – for instance, IT products – effectively. I noticed something when I tried to make things happen with people who live in Ukraine (and it's the same problem in many countries): they have a lot of experience and know-how about their product or their service but only in their own country, only in their language, only within the business concepts of their own country. That is the problem if you want to go further and abroad. And usually, countries which are working in a very particular way only export their knowledge to neighbouring countries. That doesn't help either because it's not so different to do business with a country close to your own, where traditions might still be similar. There's a difference, for instance, in doing business in Ukraine and Germany, or Belgium, or Holland. The business rules, the languages, the way business or things are done, can vary. So, there is a demand from Ukrainian people, entrepreneurs but also private people who simply say: "I would like to learn more about how to set up a business," or "I have my business, and I want to go further, and I would like to have a store, an office, an activity, for instance, in Brussels", which is a good place to do it because we are the centre of Europe. "How do I start? What should I know?"

The “summer school” I would like to set up would be open to all mentioned businessmen or women. We would create a team of professors from Belgian universities and similar institutions, the courses will be in English, and they would take place in Brussels and Kyiv and other relevant locations. The idea is that after an intense training of, let's say, a few weeks or a month (maybe partially online), we can offer a certificate so people can feel more confident to do what they want to outside Ukraine. And we would help them afterwards as well as to make it happen and to implement what they want and where they want to be.

Obviously, you were already in contact with Ukrainian business people. What do they need to learn first of all? Foreign languages, Western mentality?

It is a mix. There are many people, both in Belgium and Ukraine, who have a decent level of education and knowledge of foreign languages. However, a lot of local entrepreneurs have been essentially connected=tied? to their own country or region and previously didn't feel the urge to learn more or to open up to the world. This has changed now: the world is one big open market space, and e-commerce will not disappear. On the contrary, its importance and relevance was proved by COVID-19. Local businesses will therefore have to reinvent their concepts and their owners will have to learn new tools and skills: languages, international business culture, legal and financial rules, business practices (what to do or not to do; what to say or not, how to address an issue correctly, etc.).

The “summer school” would attract therefore not necessarily young students, but also experienced business owners from both countries. The idea is not to compete with international business schools, but to offer a decent basic training to get people going, to show them that things can also be done differently and to make them hunger for more, and all this at a low cost and within a friendly and safe environment.

Will it be very practical?

Yes. The professors will not give too much theory, it will be mostly practical. The teachers will all be experienced international professionals. COVID-19 changed our plans for this year, but we will try to get things moving again soon.

We also wanted to do a similar educational exchange for younger children. This program now also got delayed because of the sanitary situation in Europe.

What age for the younger children's summer school?

We are considering organising it for the last two or three years of secondary school (16 and onwards), students who are old enough to be more or less independent. Of course, we would find guest families for them.

Do you see much interest from the Belgian side, from Belgian businessmen and women, to invest in such a huge market as Ukraine is?

Yes, it is a huge market. I still have a lot to learn about the regional markets. At this point I don't know much more than the major cities because of current travel restrictions. But there is much more that I have to learn and to know. A big help are my two colleagues, the honorary con-

suls Mr Christian Stoop (who has been doing this for a very long time now in the Antwerp area) and Mr Kris Beckers, who is very active in Ukraine, especially because of his personal professional experience and interest in agriculture, machinery and products export.

So there is a big demand from Belgian businessmen – they just don't know exactly how to get in. I have been talking several times to the Belgian association of retail companies. An economic mission towards Ukraine should be possible as soon as we can travel again. Meanwhile, we try to help with the exchange of relevant information, contacts, etc. We organise meetings and talk to the press; anything to help out people from both sides who want to get in touch.



Ukraine has the ambition to become as close as possible to the European Union, where its natural place actually is, because, after all, it's a European country. A good part of Western civilization comes from there.

Mr Vanbelle, you mentioned COVID-19 several times. Have you done anything specific to support Ukraine during the pandemic?

Yes. We have offered to facilitate the delivery of certain medical materials during the COVID crisis thanks to our foundation Unitas (www.unitas-foundation.com).

We also had a lot of local people who got stuck in Brussels or somewhere else in Belgium and could not travel. There was also a – logical – confusion within the Ukrainian community in Belgium because of very confusing Belgian governmental communication. We tried to explain what was happening, and why, we referred people to the embassy or consular services, etc. It was a quite stressful time.

You visited Ukraine several times. Besides restaurants, what is your best experience or memory?

I was very much surprised by Ukrainian International Airlines. I think they are doing a great job: they have new planes and the people working there do their best to make your short trip nice. The first thing you often see when you travel to another country is its airline, so that's quite important: when the national carrier is good, you are already willing to discover more. And the first time I arrived at the airport in Kyiv, it was winter, it was very, very cold, there was about one meter of snow. But then you have a car waiting for you, the driver takes you through one meter of snow to your hotel without any problem. In Belgium, when the snow is one centimetre high, it's a total drama.

So, actually, everything was efficient. And of course, the city is beautiful – what can you not like about Kyiv? Sure, there is still a lot of work to do, but it's happening. And people are hospitable, they try to give the best they have when you're there. Our mission as honorary consuls is to support these efforts, make them known to the world, and provide them a little bit of extra help.



There is a big demand from Belgian businessmen – they just don't know exactly how to get in.



THE BUSINESS CLUB MOVEMENT IN UKRAINE

THE BUSINESS CLUB MOVEMENT IN UKRAINE



**SERGIY
GAYDAYCHUK,
PRESIDENT OF THE
CEO CLUB UKRAINE.**

The business club movement in Ukraine is only taking off. Today, an entrepreneur may think that there is an incredible number of business clubs in Ukraine, but in fact, if one takes a closer look and considers every single so-called organization, he or she will notice that there are actually very few authentic, high-quality business clubs.

I would divide all business associations in Ukraine into four main categories:

1. Lobbying business associations that include a broad range of companies of small to large-sized businesses. Their key goal is lobbying for certain issues. These include the American Chamber of Commerce, the European Business Association, and the Union of Ukrainian Entrepreneurs. This is one format, one role, and one function.

2. Branch business organizations that bring together representatives of one branch, such as the real estate market or manufacturers of industrial goods, etc. The life of these business associations revolves around the exchange of experience on specific issues of their branch, as well as, in part, around lobbying.

BUSINESS RESPONSIBILITY



3. Networking platforms, which can also be named differently. Many of them are called clubs, but, in the conventional sense (with respect to the English concept of a closed club), they are not clubs. They do not combine companies as do the previous two types of organizations. Instead, they unite people: entrepreneurs or directors. The key role of the majority of these networking platforms can be narrowed down to two formats: first, speakers' presentations on various topics, and, second, acquaintances and exchange of experience.

4. And last but not least, classic business clubs that meet all the criteria of a true closed club are on the way of their formation in Ukraine. The authentic closed club constitutes, first and foremost, on very clear and uncompromising membership criteria. And personal criteria for them are always on the fore, while formal criteria – belonging to business or some other

sphere – come next. Personal criteria include positive reputation, high ethical, intellectual and cultural standards, track record, and background. This is because to create solid foundations of trust, good atmosphere, and high-level discussion space, one needs to look first at personal criteria, and then at business ones. In Ukraine, the focus, in the majority of cases, is on business criteria, skipping the most important ones – personal criteria, without which a real club is impossible to imagine.

But it is a nice fact to realise that the club movement in Ukraine has started to develop dynamically. And this is good because the role of business associations in the life of society or the country is substantial. It is known that throughout history, new institutions, universities, and even entire parties have emerged out of small groups and clubs.

Why do businessmen join these clubs?

I would highlight four key factors of such motivation:

1. Belonging and self-identification. It is important for people to show themselves and others that they belong to a certain social class, have access to some places that others do not have, and that they are different, that they vary;

2. Developing your personality. In clubs like these, one can meet a lot of smart and professional people from different spheres, and one can learn a lot from them. The concentration of a large number of professionals in one place creates a unique opportunity to get knowledge constantly, develop through the exchange of experience and communication with others;

3. Access to new high-quality and strategic opportunities for developing somebody's business or projects. Let's take an example of our CEO Club: we have 200 successful entrepreneurs, which is a total of 4,000 years of business experience in various fields, if we take into account that each member of the club has an average of 20 years in business. This is a huge resource, as is access to other various valuable resources, such as: finance, valuable information, new markets, customers, partners, intelligence, expertise, etc. They are owned by a total of 200 members of the club; and

4. The opportunity to become more powerful together and to leave a mark on history. By joining other club members, we are able to do great social, charitable, or other projects that positively transform the world around us. In addition, such unity adds subjectivity to relations with the government, politicians, and major national or global institutions. Through this subjectivity we can do things that we couldn't do alone.

The CEO Clubs' participation in the public and social life of the country

Members of the CEO Club Ukraine are owners and managers of medium and large businesses. These are leaders who take responsibility not only for their own wellbeing but also implement many important projects for their country.

For example, in 2019, members of the CEO Club founded the social platform Generation+, which aims to support teenagers from



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The CEO Club is actively involved in the issues of public policy reforms and their implementation; our members are members of almost all government groups and councils that relate to the development and support of business and investment.

vulnerable categories during the adulthood transition. The goal of the project is to show children the right behavioural models, open up opportunities, and give an impetus for development.

In the winter of 2020, members of the CEO Club initiated and organized the first panel discussion, hosted by the World Economic Forum 2020 in Davos, on the new stage of strategic economic partnership and the value opportunities that Ukraine offers today.

The CEO Club also co-organised the "Greening Ukraine" initiative. The goal of the eco-project is to create a collective national success story of Ukrainians, form a high-quality image of the country, make a positive example, and at the same time draw attention to the ecosystem restoration problem.



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In the spring of 2020, the CEO Club initiated a fundraising campaign for medium-sized businesses to address the problem of COVID-19. Due to the efforts of the CEO Club members and friends of the community, more than UAH 15 million was collected for the purchase of artificial ventilation devices, automatic test devices, and other resources that medical institutions need. The Club also sponsored the publication of Chandran Nair's book *The Sustainable State: The Future of Government, Economy, and Society*, by means of the Ukrainian Association for the Club of Rome, published in September.

In 2020, the CEO Club co-founded “Editor's Club”, a platform for uniting the progressive intellectual elite of Ukraine, which aims to support independent media and bring public discussion to a new level of quality.

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UKRAINE AS A SECOND HOME. JUST A FEW STATISTICS AND PERSONAL STORIES OF FOREIGNERS IN UKRAINE



**INNA KRUPNIK IS
A JOURNALIST,
MARKETER AND
ADVERTISING
SPECIALIST.**



Since gaining independence 29 years ago, Ukraine has rather timidly but irrevocably integrated into the world economic and political community, opening its borders to citizens and aliens of other states.

The new, big, and unknown country on the map of Europe has attracted and continues to attract foreigners differently.

For one person – for educational purposes, since programmes in public and private higher education institutions are fully available, while the level of training is quite high. For another – for tourist purposes, to learn about the authentic and genuine flair, folklore or traditions. Where else but in Ukraine one might see the coexistence of Soviet architectural or cultural aesthetics and the post-modern innovations of young artists! Then, Chernobyl and the exclusion zone around the Chernobyl nuclear power plant – a real tourist magnet for foreigners from Europe and the United States, which can only be visited in Ukraine. Some people are attracted to a young European state only in terms of building their own business or investing in the economy, especially in the agricultural and energy sectors. The potential of this country and still many unoccupied business niches are very beneficial. Some people came to Ukraine for personal happiness, or in a rush for downshifting, or search of rural authenticity. Others came to share the modern expertise of projects, companies or ministries management.

According to official statistics, as of September 2019, almost 400,000 foreigners live in Ukraine based on a permanent (280,872 persons) or temporary (114,394 persons) residence permit. These and other data in the article do not include information from the temporarily an-

nexed Crimea region, the city of Sevastopol, and parts of the temporarily occupied territories in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The number of former foreigners, and now the Ukrainian citizens with tridents in the passports, is quite complicated to calculate for all the years that Ukraine has been independent.

According to the latest data, in 2014, 7,777 foreigners acquired Ukrainian citizenship in one of two completely legal ways – by territorial origin, or based on a presidential decree. In 2015, their number amounted to 4723 people, in 2016 and 2017 – 4803 and 4581, respectively, while in 2018 this number was 4775.

Residents of the Russian Federation, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, and Belarus apply to the State Migration Service for Ukrainian citizenship most often. Citizens of Jordan, Palestine, Iran, Latvia, Turkey and other countries are also interested in Ukrainian passports.

The fact that being a citizen of Ukraine has become more beneficial is evidenced, in particular, by the Quality of Nationality Index (QNI) from the global consulting company Henley & Partners. In the 2018 ranking, Ukraine occupied the 80th place among 168 countries, while in 2013 it was ranked 74th. Of course, the leading countries, where many people dream of living, are France, Germany, and Iceland. But Ukrainian citizenship does not lag far behind, but belongs to “high-quality citizenship” category. The reasons are obvious, namely – a visa-free agreement with the European Union (EU), a vector to reforms, and International Monetary Fund (IMF) support. Some downward trends in the “Public Order and Stability” section are associated with the occupation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine.

Ukraine’s famous sights, delicious cuisine, beautiful women, relatively low prices, a significant amount of alcohol in the lives of Ukrainians, and other appealing things can make a exciting impressions on foreigners via a short visit to Ukraine as a tourist. By the way, in recent years, Ukraine was visited by about 22-25 million sightseers annually. According to the State Border Guard Service, in 2018, in addition to traditional visitors from Moldova (4.1 million), Belarus (2.5 million), Russia (1.5 million), and Poland (1 million), there was a significant increase in travel by citizens of Great Britain (33,000+), USA (30,000+), Germany (25,000+), Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, France, Sweden, Canada (a rise from 5,000 to 7,000), Spain, Italy, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, China (an increase from 10,000 to 15,000), and Saudi Arabia and Japan (3,000+).

But to get to know people, to feel the rhythm and flavour of Ukrainian life, in a sense to create one’s history here, it is worth living in Ukraine for some time. We know many public or well-known people for whom Ukraine has become a home or a place of more or less permanent residence or work. The list of the those who once acquired Ukrainian citizenship together with a promising (or state) job includes ex-ministers Aivaras Abromavicius (Lithuania) and Natalia Yaresko (USA), former



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Odesa Regional State Administration head Mikheil Saakashvili, former National Police head Khattia Dekanoidze and former Deputy Interior Minister Eka Zguladze (all from Georgia). There were many “legionnaires” in power, but some even succeed to relinquish Ukrainian citizenship. Former Minister of Health Ulyana Suprun (USA) remains active in civil life.

Among the foreign entrepreneurs about whom Ukrainian media like to write and shoot video reports is a farmer from Belgium, Mr Bernard Willem, who set up a cheese and goat farm in the Dmytrovychi village, Lviv region. Since the farm was established with foreign investment, the pleasant moments of cheese-making development and his agricultural experience sharing with Ukrainian farmers, were accompanied by regulators’ revisions, conflicts with the authorities, and attempts to involve La Ferme d’Elise in murky corrupt system. However, Bernard and his Ukrainian spouse Maria managed to resist. They defended the right to do their business honestly and taught their employees to respect what they engage in. Now Bernard’s farm is one of the showcase goat cheese farms in Ukraine.

The life of foreign volunteers who came to defend Ukraine’s East from Russian aggression can be called worthy of a film or a book. One of the most striking examples is Marko Paslavsky, a US citizen, a Manhattan’s native, a graduate from West Point (the most prestigious US military academy), and an officer who served in an elite unit. In 2014, at the age of 55, he volunteered for the Donbas Battalion.

Before that, he was an active protester on the Maidan, and earlier one of the most successful investment consultants, who has made a career, wealth and reputation in Ukraine. He was sometimes called the CIA's overseer of Ukraine and its development direction, the chief agent of changes from the United States. It is unclear what specifically inspired Marko Paslavsky to make his choice and stand up for Ukraine: whether the memories of relatives, who emigrated to the United States from Ukraine in 1944, or upbringing in a Ukrainian kindergarten and school in New Jersey, or first-class military and civilian training at West Point. Perhaps it was all at once. On 19 August, in the battle for Ilovaisk, Marko was killed, fulfilling his duty as a soldier and defender of Ukraine. The bright memory of a warrior.

Some other foreigners who also contribute to Ukraine's growth, have agreed to tell us about their impressions of life here and the general attitude towards Ukraine and Ukrainians.

For instance, Toralph Weise, a 53-year-old German citizen from Bautzen, has been working in Ukraine since 2001. Before that, he studied here in 1987-1992.

An urban planning engineer by profession, Mr Weise headed the Construction Industry Support Foundation for many years. He considers the material and technical base creation for teaching construction business about 1,000 students of vocational schools to be one of the essential gains in his professional activity in Ukraine. "Just investments in vocational education and training have exceeded €3 million since 2008, and many specialised training events have been held for more than 500 students from 13 Ukrainian universities," says Mr Weise. In addition to professional achievements, according to Mr Weise, Ukraine has made significant progress in political and social terms. Despite all the pauses, retreats, and well-known external factors that hinder economic progress, the overall development of Ukraine is positive. Mr Weise is pleased that the image of Lenin and other Soviet symbols, which he faced during his studies, have disappeared from the Ukrainians' daily life, and self-awareness of Ukrainian society has increased. "Of course, I had some difficulties with adaptation, but the fact that I have been working and living in Ukraine for 20 years speaks for itself. All the difficulties were not great enough to make me leave," Mr Weise jokes. Thanks to the German folk wisdom, which says that when you "come to another country, open your eyes first, and then your mouth," it was easy for Mr Weise to get used to the customs and life in Ukraine, to learn Russian, and to understand Ukrainian quite well. "The only thing I couldn't get used to was the fact that sometimes the right angle here is not 90 degrees, but 87 or 93 degrees," says Mr Weise, and "a nailed screw holds better than a screwed nail." He also says that professional life is not so thoroughly planned as in Germany.

Mr Weise also finds it very life-affirming and kind that Ukrainians still congratulate him, a German, on Victory Day. The German specialist is surprised by the ability of Ukrainians to experience almost everything robustly. "I still can't understand how so many mothers and fathers with a minimum wage (income) go through this life, quite skilfully bringing up their children. I like Ukrainian humour, especially under difficult life circumstances. What I do not perceive and cannot understand is the Ukrainian attitude to the law and the legal system, as well as the numerous, odious, senseless fences and concrete walls that are around, especially in industrial areas," Mr Weise shares, sincerely. Avoiding direct advice, but through his professional experience and its application in Ukraine, Mr Weise tries to communicate to his students that creativity and purposefulness in work are the essential prerequisites for professional achievements and correct life goals. The rest is work, knowledge, experience. At the same time, he always warns Ukrainians against ingrained stereotypes about Germans, who, in our imagination, "walk as stiff as a poker, almost have no sense of humour", and that "everything that lies on the streets of Germany is gold." Mr Weise expressed his most cherished wish to all Ukrainians with a quote from Goethe: "To stand with free feet of free people on free land."

Forty-three-year-old Islam Dababseh, a native of Hebron (Palestine), expressed a slightly different view of life in Ukraine. Islam came to Kyiv in 1996 at the age of 18. Here he graduated from the Bogomolets National Medical University, defended his dissertation and obtained the Candidate of Medical Sciences title. Then he has been serving as a cardiovascular surgeon at a public hospital for 15 years. However, the lack of public hospitals reformed by 2016 and the realities of theft and non-transparent tenders forced him to resign and get a Chief Physician position in a private clinic. According to Mr Dababseh, or the 'Islam doctor' as patients call him, his native Palestine is currently developing a bit faster than Ukraine, possibly because the state invests budget funds and modernises all sectors of the economy at once. Islam believes the reform process in Ukraine is slower, especially in medicine. But in his opinion, as an entrepreneur, doing business with foreign investments is better here. Although corruption in senior-level management often hinders during the issuance of various permits and certificates, once Mr Dababseh adapted to Ukraine quickly, mastered Russian for a "better understanding of future patients by a good doctor". A former Palestinian and a citizen of Ukraine now, he considers the stereotype that foreigners have no place here, that they take away Ukrainians' jobs, the most unpleasant moment of his life in

our country. "Working in a public clinic, I was often asked what I was doing here, why I did not come back to my country after graduation? Such daily manifestations of xenophobia and disrespect for my nationality, tangentially or jokingly, were very depressing at first, because I never violated the rules of Ukrainian life or culture and did not allow such treatment of Ukrainians in my homeland. The adaptation and overlooking some trifling xenophobia made me understand that, in 25 years, I feel almost Ukrainian. I behave like a Ukrainian, and I highly estimate the opportunity to become a good specialist," Islam shares.

The next of "our" foreigners, Mr Alfred Praust, was born in Vienna, Austria. He visited Ukraine first in 2004 during the Orange Revolution, then travelled between Austria and Ukraine until 2008, until settling in Kyiv in 2009. An MBA Fellow at the Austrian University of Economics, he made a great career in industry and engineering and then came to Ukraine by accident, being invited by a family friend during a creative holiday after the successful restructuring of a companies' group in Austria. Then he helped a friend with the implementation of his projects and founded two companies in Kyiv and then later in Transcarpathia. When the 2008/2009 crisis started and his first companies got closed, Mr Praust did not leave Ukraine. He launched another happy project, by marrying a Ukrainian (a well-known soloist of the National Opera of Ukraine, Susanna Chakhoyan) and raising a son.

Since 2009 he has accompanied and advised different businesses about bilateral Ukrainian-Austrian projects. But a small number of such projects, even after the 2013 Revolution of Dignity, prompted Alfred to establish the

Ukrainian-Austrian Association (UAA) in 2017 as a platform for cultural, social, and business projects and events. It is difficult to find one more person among foreigners in Ukraine, who is doing so much for the development of bilateral (and not only bilateral) ties, cultivating cultural and business diplomacy. Last but not least, in 2019, Mr Praust was elected to the position of General Secretary of the International Council of Business Associations and Chambers in Ukraine. Moreover, the Association founded by him was also invited to join. According to Mr Praust, some things have changed for the better in Ukraine. We became more oriented to the West, which is confirmed by the Association Agreements with the EU and the visa-free regime. We have a sufficient level of freedom of speech, especially in social media, which is an achievement of the Orange Revolution. Love for the country has strengthened in Ukraine due to Russian aggression in Crimea and Donbas. "Ukrainians have greatly changed their mentality from post-Soviet to global. Some industries have 'flourished', including IT or the agricultural sector. In general, in macroeconomic terms, now Ukraine looks more stable, partially due to the pressure on reforms by the International Monetary Fund." Mr Praust is pleased for Ukrainians. Among the negative issues, Alfred notes the oligarchs still wielding strong power and influence, the existence of monopolies in certain sectors, the endless judicial reform, and only a slight reduction in corruption in recent years. All these things, he says, cause a lack of trust among foreign investors and business. The level of investment needed for prosperity and growth is not at all as it might be. Sometimes there is a work force shortage for certain projects, caused by labour migration to the West. Therefore, changes and improvements in Ukraine, according to Mr Praust, will not happen as fast as the government promises.

The difference in culture and mentality also impacts the culture of doing business. That often prevents Ukrainians from doing business successfully in Western Europe, and Europeans – from doing business in Ukraine. Sometimes it even seems to Mr Praust that the number of Ukrainian projects in Western Europe is greater than the number of Western projects here. “Every time I return to Ukraine from Austria, I get a cultural shock. A small example: I’m not a very diligent driver, like the majority of Ukrainians. I often receive fines in the first days of my stay in Austria. On my return to Ukraine, I keep on following the traffic rules strictly, and that causes sneers from the Ukrainian drivers. What Ukrainian does not consider a foreigner who moves at a speed of 60 km/h to be fun? At the same time, my life in Ukraine has helped me to expand my experience and horizons, and I am grateful to you for that. I became convinced that ordinary people are generally friendly and hospitable, as I had felt this once in my childhood in Austria. And they do not cause the problems in Ukraine. I do not speak Russian or Ukrainian, but I do not face significant communication problems, especially in business circles. I consider transferring my expertise in Western standards of communication and management for successful business my contribution to Ukraine,” Mr Praust admits.

Another example of a foreigner who has fallen in love with Ukraine is Mr Roman Chechek. He was born in Odesa but moved to Israel when a teenager. For the first time since then, he returned to Ukraine in 2014 after Maidan.

One of the reasons to come back was love with a girl from Kyiv and a joint decision to live here. A chef by profession, Mr Roman started his own business – a street food brand with the folk name ‘Didko’ [Didko in Ukrainian means a devil]. – Later he founded a small farm with his wife Julia and their two young daughters. And all that was done in a big city! Comparing life in Israel and Ukraine, Roman assesses the standard of living in Israel including social conditions, wages, lower levels of corruption as higher, but emphasises his admiration for the patriotic rise in Ukraine and hopes for the best. After leaving Israel, Roman quickly adapted to the rules of Ukrainian life, and the very fact of his birth in Ukraine increased his sincere patriotism and speed in mastering Ukrainian. Roman got acquainted with the best people of Kyiv, learned the language, and did not hesitate to speak with mistakes, due to his previous experience of moving to Israel and diving into a new language and mentally different environment. “I get irritated when a person like me, who has lived here just four years – can speak Ukrainian, but somebody who has been living here all his life cannot or does not want to. I organize master classes: I teach people to cook various dishes of Israeli cuisine. I always study something. For example, I was in the Ivano-Frankivsk region last year, studying blacksmithing there. Hopefully, I will go this year as well. Ukrainians taught me not to give up, even when it’s hard, and I want to cry and kick myself. I knew how to do it before, but in Ukraine, I’ve honed that skill,” Mr Chechek says. The experience of serving in the Is-

raeli army and the worldview nurtured there, gives Roman grounds to motivate Ukrainians to value their army, volunteers, public figures, artists, and the Motherland in general. He emphasises that he came from a country where customs and holidays, as well as love for the Motherland, are a sacred duty. “I like it here. I am a full member of society. I feel free. However, I still do not quite understand how some Ukrainians (not even so old) miss Soviet Union, Russia, how they sincerely believe populist promises. Here, both me and Ukrainians still have to work and work on ourselves,” Mr Chechek admits.

So, foreigners have their way in Ukraine, their own experience of getting used to Ukraine and adapting to life here. But almost every case tells us about their respect for us, a sense of solidarity with us, and their conscientious work for the benefit of Ukraine to develop and move closer to Europe. And we, Ukrainians, are also motivated by this.

ON THE STRATEGY OF THE UKRAINIAN INSTITUTE



CULTURAL PAGES

The Ukrainian Institute is a newly established specialized public institution in Ukraine working in the field of cultural diplomacy. This area of public policy is relatively new for modern Ukraine. Only a few years ago, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine established the Department of Public Diplomacy, which also includes cultural diplomacy. In this article, we speak about the first steps of a young institution for the development of the strategic and systematic policy of cultural diplomacy of Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Institute was founded by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine in June 2017; nevertheless, it commenced its full-fledged work only in 2019, after the open call for the position of Director General resulted in the appointment of the Institute's leadership, creation of the team, and the introduction of the basic legislative acts that regulate its work. Almost immediately after the launch, the Institute's team managed to implement 84 projects in 12 coun-

tries: Austria, United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, Lithuania, Germany, Poland, the United States of America, Ukraine, France, Czechia, and the Netherlands.

The Ukrainian Institute is not the only player in this field of cultural diplomacy. For decades, this function was carried out in Ukraine or abroad by the public sector and civil society and was possible due to the efforts of many individuals and organizations. The ecosystem of cultural diplomacy is very diverse, and the task of the Ukrainian Institute is not only to implement projects but instead to act as an architect of this ecosystem, to systematize and strategically direct these efforts of different actors, and to develop and implement policies and strategies.

In July 2020, the Ukrainian Institute presented a medium-term strategy — a roadmap that comprehensively explains how this institution will work, what it is and what it is not, what its far-reaching ambitions are, and how they can be achieved.

The strategy of the Ukrainian Institute continues the good tradition established in the post-Maidan years by other new state organisations and public agencies, not only in the field of culture but also in other related fields.

First, it was important for the team of the Institute to explore and define the very concept of cultural diplomacy. As an established phenomenon and practice, it has existed for over a century. There are different concepts and approaches to cultural diplomacy, and the Ukrainian Institute's strategy had to identify the most effective and justified model, appropriate for the Ukrainian context and realities. About 10 similar institutions were analysed, including the oldest ones such as British Council and Goethe Institute, as well as the recently established, which are more similar to the Ukrainian Institute's model, such as the Lithuanian Culture Institute. Agencies with quite different functions were also taken into account, namely China's Confucius Institute and some others. As a result of this research, the most relevant features were integrated into the Ukrainian Institute's strategy.

To make the document as comprehensive and informative as possible, different actors from the governmental and public sectors, who work in Ukraine or abroad, were invited to co-work on the strategy. It made the strategy development process expert, open, and inclusive. A series of strategic sessions, public and internal consultations, and study tours produced important feedback from the expert community in Ukraine and abroad, and offered the Institute many valu-

able suggestions. The strategy allows the Institute to move towards a far-reaching goal, but does not limit the ways of reaching that goal, not restricting the institution in specific means or specific projects or formats. It is a flexible and down-to-earth document, which derived from the Institute's daily practices, lessons learned by the team members, and feedback from the professional community.

It is crucial that the Strategy of the Ukrainian Institute, defined for the time frame of 2020-2024, does not start from a zero point. The strategy already reflected the daily work and programs happening in 2020. Even during the global pandemic, the team acts along the lines with the strategic imperatives that have been set earlier. In March, 80 percent of projects planned for 2020 at the end of the previous year had to be cancelled or postponed. Just a month later, the team created a new annual plan and started to implement it. At the same time, the team continues to stick to the goals, vision, and mission statements set in the strategy; only the tactics of how to implement these goals were changed. This indicates that the strategy works.

According to the strategy, the Institute works for wide audiences both abroad and in Ukraine, and informs and engages them in cooperation and co-creation. As a public institution, the Institute is paid for by Ukrainian taxpayers, so it is important to inform the public about the value created for their money.

Also, significant efforts are made to build relationships with professional audiences abroad in the field of education, culture, and science. For this purpose, the Institute cooperates with Ukrainian diplomats abroad, as well as with those foreign Ukrainians who already have experience in organising cultural events to represent Ukraine. The partners by default are those Ukrainian institutions that produce cultural products, such as the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation, the Ukrainian Book Institute, Ukrainian State Film Agency and National Oleksandr Dovzhenko Centre. Together with all these partners, the Ukrainian Institute can either create new

cultural products or present readymade projects abroad.

Another important audience is the media, opinion leaders, as well as partners who help spread the word, multiply it, and thus achieve greater impact. That is why partnerships are the basis of the Institute's programming, communication and research work. At least one Ukrainian or foreign institution is involved in every project conducted by the Ukrainian Institute. Only in this way will the results be sustainable and the Institute will be able to increase the field of opportunities for all the partners involved and achieve common goals.

For a long time, given the colonial and totalitarian past, Ukraine was deprived of its agency as a state. The Ukrainian Institute clearly stated in its mission that Ukraine needs to achieve the position of an equal partner who has something to offer and something to interest the world. The country cannot allow a situation when decisions or talks about Ukraine take place without Ukraine, which is not a failed state, not a beggar who stands in a victim position towards others. We need to strengthen our own voice, the ability to articulate that voice to those who can hear it; but first we ourselves have to create and develop this voice. In this process, the role of cultural diplomacy is one of the crucial ones. That is why the mission of the Ukrainian Institute is "to strengthen Ukraine's international standing through the means of cultural diplomacy." Based upon the very notion of 'international standing' (or, in other words, agency), thematic frameworks, program directions, or specific projects are developed.

The geography of the Ukrainian Institute's activities is one of the most debatable issues, both in the professional environment and among the general public.

Of course, it must meet the foreign policy priorities of Ukraine, which have to be defined in synergy with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since the first year of its activity, the Institute started working in the Euro-Atlantic direction. The medium-term strategy also took into account the countries where the most important cultural and educational institutions for international cooperation are located.

The geography of activity will be gradually expanded. The new regions to be added in the coming years will be Asia and the Middle East; more European countries will be added step-by-step. In 2021, the Ukrainian Institute will start working in Japan, Turkey, and Qatar.

The ability to reach the strategic goals in the focus countries directly depends on the level of funding of the Ukrainian Institute and the number of staff, as well as the presence of permanent representation of the Institute in a particular country. The absence of branches does not prevent the Institute from working abroad, but branches will help make its work more systematic and impactful. The Institute will be able to open its foreign branches in case of sufficient and guaranteed three-year funding and further support of their development, as it is unwise to invest in such a costly and time-consuming process without a guarantee that affiliates will continue to be properly secured. In addition, to make them work properly, many things need to change in the regulated public sector in order to be able to hire people via employment contracts and make easy payments abroad. It would be reasonable to establish a pilot office, for example, in Poland, to test the branch model and, having gained practical experience, go on applying it in other countries.



The Ukrainian Institute clearly stated in its mission that Ukraine needs to achieve the position of an equal partner who has something to offer and something to interest the world.

At the current stage, the Institute operates actively even without branches through study tours, networking, and communication with the widest possible range of people who will help to program and implement its activity abroad. These activities cover a great number of institutions, embassies of other countries in Ukraine, people who have experience in implementing cultural diplomacy projects or work in these countries, foreign Ukrainians, and many others.

The next step, after developing the strategy and its public discussion, is to prepare country papers to provide for brief and clear memos for the context of these countries, the peculiarities of work in the country in question, the activity of the Ukrainian diaspora there, and local political, cultural, and humanitarian problems which can be solved by the cultural diplomacy of Ukraine. In this work, the Institute relies on cooperation with expert think tanks, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and diplomats. These data will help to qualitatively determine the objectives, tools, and criteria for assessing the effectiveness of the Institute's activities in these countries.

Making a new institution from scratch, limited by the constraints of the post-Soviet state system, is a long and gradual process. A strong and stable entity working with the international practices cannot avoid such important processes as planning and evaluation; this, in fact, is the key feature that distinguishes "new" organization, including the Ukrainian Institute, from the post-Soviet rigorous bureaucracy modes. With a clear vision of goals, understanding how to achieve these goals, and analysis of every step, the Ukrainian Institute confidently overcomes the challenges that arise, from the inertia of the system to rapid global changes and the pandemic, and confidently moves forward.



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