



Voices of Ukraine: #6 How is the war changing Ukrainian society?

Edwin Bendyk

In our debate, we are interested in Ukrainian society, the greatest hero of the events since February 24, 2022 – which constantly has the opportunity to get to know itself through social research. Studies published since the start of the war have shown attitudes to the future of the state and the armed forces, the level of optimism, and so on. At a roundtable held in July 2022, Ukrainian sociologists discussed society after the country's victory. Today, we would like to invite Ukrainian researchers to tell us about Ukrainian society half a year into the war, 30 years after regaining independence, and after other events shaping Ukrainian identity.

In July, I read an interview with Yevhen Holovakha about Ukrainian society in *Ukrainska Pravda*¹, which stated that more has happened in

The *Voices of Ukraine* series of debates organized by the Batory Foundation ideaForum and the weekly news magazine *Polityka*.

Russian aggression and the war in Ukraine have dominated media coverage in recent weeks. With great suspense, we follow the news from the battlefield each day. We watch in horror as cities are bombed and civilians suffer. The news and the sight of people fleeing war arouse sympathy, resulting in gestures of unprecedented solidarity.

Given the abundance of news and information, the voices of the Ukrainian people often get lost. What makes the Ukrainian resistance so effective, and why is the Ukrainian society so resilient? What goals have the Ukrainians

¹ Sociologist Yevhen Holovakha: *Zelensky's Ukraine is the 96th quarter* [interview], *Ukrainska Pravda*, July 26, 2022, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2021/07/26/7301554/> (access: November 25, 2022).

the few months of the war than over 30 years of independence. Which processes have been accelerated by the war? What is the key thing that has happened? Many observers were surprised that Ukraine did not surrender, enacting Putin's scenario, which assumed that the country would cease to be independent within three or four days. That did not happen. On the contrary, the opposite process took place.

Yevhen Holovakha

Recently, national resilience – the ability to respond to challenges and threats linked to the political and economic situation in today's world – has been coming to the fore of social sciences. Both according to international assessments and Ukrainians ones, Ukraine's resilience was considered very low. As a result of this overall assessment, the Russian authorities formed the flawed opinion that Ukraine – as an unformed and unstable nation, and a society divided by internal political and regional disputes – would not be able to fight for its freedom and sovereignty. The Russian venture, which was doomed to failure, resulted from this assessment of the Ukrainians' low level of national resilience.

Why did this happen? Not because they had not been reading Ukrainian sociologists' work, but because they did not understand it. A National Academy of Sciences report on national resilience, the ability to withstand threats and risks, was prepared in 2021. The sociology section showed that the level of national resilience is high enough, according to many indicators. However, we need to be objective and say honestly that we have observed a complicated situation in recent years, as far as Ukrainian society is concerned. It was a society of contradictions, ambivalent and indeterminate in its geopolitical, socio-economic and moral-psychological dimensions. In geopolitical terms, the European integration vector was faring quite positively, even prior to 2014. At the same time, the post-Soviet reintegration direction was not in worse shape and – in certain years, such as 2012 – was even more important than the European integration

set for themselves in their armed resistance against the Russian aggression? What are the limitations of a peace agreement? What do the Ukrainians want with regard to the European Union, NATO, and other alliances? What is the reconstruction of the country following the war supposed to look like? What will the relations between Ukraine and its neighbouring countries be like?

These are just some of the questions we are going to ask Ukrainian experts, journalists, artists, and politicians. There is no doubt that the future is now being shaped in Ukraine, and, to a great extent, its final form will depend on the men and women of Ukraine. Let's hear what they have to say!

The main topic of the sixth discussion in the series was the changes that the war has caused in Ukrainian society. Research and sociological surveys conducted just before the invasion and during the war show that the Russian attack led to the consolidation of society and its integration around the Armed Forces, state institutions and public authorities at the national and local level. The people of Ukraine remain very optimistic and are convinced that they will win this war, even if it lasts a long time. However, war is also a constant stress resulting from threats to life and safety, economic difficulties, problems with provisions, material damage, difficulties in accessing social services, separation from relatives and fear for those fighting at the front. How to explain the phenomenon of high morale of the Ukrainian society despite all these difficulties? What might be the further evolution of moods and attitudes? How is the attitude changing towards Russia and Russians, towards allied countries, as well as towards structures such as the European Union or NATO? How has the national consciousness and value system been transformed? The discussion took place on September 14, 2022 with the participation of Natalia Chernysh, Oleksandra Deyneko, Olexiy Haran, Yevhen Holovakha and Edwin Bendyk as the interviewer.

vector. In socio-economic terms, society was not certain that capitalism had provided it with something good and worthwhile, unlike the Soviet, socialist model. Most people were sure that they had lost, rather than gained, something as a result of the changes in their standard of living and everything that concerns the economic status quo. And finally, the moral and psychological dimensions: the phenomenon of moral superiority that sociologists wrote a lot about in the 1990s and early 2000s. Most of society was perceived as insufficiently adapted in moral terms. This was the self-assessment.

At first glance, all this pointed to Ukrainian society's inability to make positive changes. Yet right after the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, significant changes were observed. Above all, the direction of European integration in society's development was unambiguously defined and backed by the vast majority. Support for the direction of post-Soviet reintegration fell to around a quarter of society. This geopolitical direction for Ukraine ultimately developed in this way. Unfortunately, the geopolitical direction was not strengthened by many other indicators linked to the possibility of real social change. Ukrainians had merely defined their direction, but did not yet have enough potential to take action.

The past seven years changed society and slowly amassed the potential that fully revealed itself after the full-scale Russian invasion. People really started to feel and become aware that there is no other path for Ukraine. Disappointment with relations with Russia, which prior to 2014 had still been seen as a natural comrade, or even a patron, was growing. All this was slowly wearing off. The historical experience of Ukraine, which had been subject to Russian pressure for centuries and had complicated geopolitical relations with many historical actors, was coming to the fore. All this slowly prepared the foundations on which, literally within weeks of the Russian invasion, the perception of reality in Ukraine changed, in political, rational and emotional terms.

There are many examples. How Ukrainian institutions were viewed changed and trust in the president increased. Before 2014, Ukrainian presidents had received much worse assessments than other countries' presidents. Other political institutions started to be viewed positively, too. Earlier research had shown that all this was seen in extremely negative terms; later, a fundamental change in how Ukraine's development path is perceived was recorded. When we asked them in 2021, around 70% of respondents said that Ukraine is not developing in the right direction. Then, at the start of March 2022, as many as 70% said that events are going in the right direction.

In terms of the emotional component, the main emotion felt by people in 2021 when speaking about Ukraine was sadness. During the first weeks of the war, around 75% of peoples felt pride, while 27–28% continued to feel sadness. Joy was in third place! So far, we have registered a high level of destructive stress, which we are constantly measuring using a methodology developed at our institute. This is obviously understandable: war takes a toll on people's lives, hence the physiological or psychological stress. An extraordinary phenomenon of the increase in national spirit is that, against this backdrop, people primarily feel pride, followed by joy.

This is linked to values. Here, the values of self-organisation and independence – which Ukrainians had never demonstrated, but which started to rise constantly – came to the fore. As per our research, the process of perceiving oneself as a citizen of Ukraine had been going in the right direction, but very slowly. In 2012, just 62% of Ukrainians considered themselves citizens of Ukraine. At the start of our independence, this was as low as 40%. In March 2022 and subsequent surveys, including the most recent one in August, as many as 97% considered themselves citizens of Ukraine.

To seek a parallel with natural sciences here: tectonic changes are taking place. Of course, it is an irony of history or fate that the main catalyst of the extraordinary changes in Ukrainian society is Russia's president – Putin. Ukraine's tragedy has therefore turned into Ukraine's reformulation as a country with an integrated society. Regional differences have practically disappeared. For years, Natalia Chernysh has been conducting excellent monitoring research comparing Lviv and Donetsk. While positive changes were really taking place, they were slow; step by step, almost unnoticeable. And now, in just a few weeks, fundamental changes have taken place. All this has happened amid serious problems with people's psychological state. This will probably reveal itself in the future. At the moment, women are feeling much more distressed, while men involved in fighting and defence feel less stress. This is the most stable category of people in terms of their psychological state; the strongest, most motivated and creative part of society.

If we were to summarise the social changes that have occurred, they would have to be described as fundamental. The legacy of the past eight years is not changing. There is no prospect of any turning back towards the East. New features and highly significant social characteristics are being added to this. Today, we can say that Ukrainian society has become ready to achieve its goals, for consistent European integration, and to acquire the features of a modern European nation.

Edwin Bendyk

What kind of nation are the Ukrainians – a cultural nation or a nation state? What do they identify with? Has an answer already emerged and, if so, when?

Natalia Chernysh

At the 18th Congress of the Polish Sociological Association in Warsaw in September 2022, Polish sociologists dedicated one of the first panels to the war between Russia and Ukraine. They spoke about how our sociologists are studying these processes and the results of this research. The guests from around Poland included sociologists from the University of Wrocław, with whom we are constantly working, and with whom we had published seven "Lviv-Wrocław Bulletins" by September 2022.² The Wrocław academics publish it in three languages: Polish, Ukrainian and English. We see the interest that these bulletins are attracting; our issues are in hot demand, and the results of our studies are well known and used by the European Sociological Association.

The attitude of sociologists around the world to the war between Russia and Ukraine varies. Polish sociologists fully support the Ukrainian side and are eager to cooperate with us. Many people attended our sociological panel on researching the phenomena that accompany the war, and there were many questions. During the first days of the war, we connected online with the Wrocław sociologists and have been working closely to this day. Polish and foreign sociologists were interested in how it came to this and how we can explain it. The Ukrainians are some kind of unformed nation, they are who knows what, one day they are in favour of joining NATO, the next they are against it. As if Ukraine were torn in two. This stereotype in thinking about Ukraine was spread by Mykola Ryabchuk, who published the famous text *Two Ukraines* in 1996.³ This myth was also present in the sociological milieu.

² See: <https://pts.org.pl/en/socjologia-ukrainska/>.

³ Later published in the following book: M. Ryabchuk, *Two Ukraines: Real frontiers, virtual games*, Kyiv 2003.

A historian by training, I was already interested in this question as a student. I read works by Ukrainian emigré sociologists and historians writing from Canada or the United States. It is an interesting question: what is Ukraine? Is Ukraine a nation? A nation state or a cultural nation? This polemic began in the 19th century. Are the Ukrainians capable of “obtaining” their own state and holding onto it? Is Ukraine doomed to failure? Emigré researchers pointed to three historical periods when Ukraine had its own state and independence, which it then lost: the Kyivan state (Kyivan Rus’) in the 10–11th century, the Cossack state in the mid-17th century, and the national liberation struggles of 1918 and 1921–1922. Each time, Ukraine fought for independence, achieved it – and then lost it.

What happened then? Ukraine’s first president, if we can call him that, Mykhailo Hrushevsky – the eminent historian who authored the first history of Ukraine and emigrated to Vienna after the national liberation struggles failed – founded a Ukrainian Institute of Sociology in Vienna, rather than a historical institute, as might have been expected. As he told everyone surprised by the move: “I wanted to understand why Ukraine would gain independence and lose it. Who are we? Are the Ukrainians capable of obtaining their state, fighting for and achieving independence? If not, let us not waste our strength; what are all these uprisings or revolutions for? May the Ukrainians sing and dance well, have their own theatre, and so on. Nothing will come of independence.” With the help of sociology, Hrushevsky wanted to understand whether we have a chance of obtaining statehood and forming a Ukrainian political nation, regardless of ethnicity.

This discussion is still underway. Some people would say: “There are two Ukraines and they will never be together.” Mykola Ryabchuk repeated Samuel Huntington’s thesis. In his book *The Clash of Civilisations*, Huntington put forward the thesis that the Ukrainians are historically condemned to division; the fault line between Orthodox and Western civilisation supposedly runs along the Dnipro. This stereotype survives to this day. At the same time, something that gets called a tectonic shift is taking place now. I would use a different term here: an “exponent” – that is, a wave. This term also comes from natural sciences. At first, it is quiet, then different forces form at the bottom. Suddenly, there is a wave that changes everything within a few months.

Now we are wondering why this happened. There were some kinds of currents and forces, because nothing can come from emptiness. In my view, the most important effect of these tectonic or exponential changes appeared on the front. For three months, we spoke of a Ukrainian counteroffensive, we yearned for it, we wanted the Russians to be losing. Nothing was happening and suddenly a wave took everything in the Kharkiv direction. In certain locations, the Ukrainian troops reached the border with Russia. I hope that there will also be an exponent of this kind in the Kherson region, too. Or an even bigger exponent covering the whole country, so that we can get rid of this whole Russian presence. Let them sit on their own borders. We will not go to them, but may they leave us and our neighbours alone.

In my opinion, the outcome of this is the formation and emergence of a Ukrainian political nation, regardless of ethnicity. Regardless of where we are from – Donetsk or Lviv. Even regardless of what language we speak. Please look at the front: many of our soldiers speak Russian. Language and words are not what matters the most. Deeds and actions are. Natural rapprochement between Lviv and Donetsk would be weak and slow, but the exponent came and this is what happened. From my time working in Canada and the US, I remembered the work of Ukrainian researchers who said that the Ukrainian nation will be strong through its state when it confirms all this with blood. I had thought: why speak of blood in times of democracy and the development of peace? Now I think that those Ukrainian researchers knew what they were talking about: in the Białowieża Forest, Yeltsin gave us

a present, the Soviet Union collapsed, and Ukraine became independent. There was no blood then; there was slow development. Now we are paying a huge price for the nation: when we hear about those who have died on the front and on burnt-out Ukrainian land, when we lecturers stop teaching students normally because we hear air raid alarms and must end the class, when Ukraine has 15 million internally and externally displaced people, out of a population of 41 million...

If only you had seen how people left through Lviv: train carriages of children and women who dropped everything and had to flee Ukraine to stay alive. Poland took in 1.3 million Ukrainians, more than any other country in the world. On behalf of the Ukrainian nation, I thank the Polish nation and the Polish authorities for so much support. Poles have already become tired from providing this support, because they have given us a lot. I personally thank the journalist Sławomir Sierakowski, who raised millions of PLN for drones for the Ukrainian army. With all our hearts, we would like to thank the Poles who were not indifferent and gave money to their brothers from Ukraine.

We can now say that there are not two Ukraines. I once entitled one of my articles "Two or twenty-two Ukraines".⁴ We counted eight Ukraines, but then we saw those regions, division, differences – now this is absent. Our research is accompanied by various results. In the Rating sociological group's 17th nationwide survey on identity, 84.7% of respondents chose the response "citizen of Ukraine". According to the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, the percentage is 94%. These numbers contain the vast majority. Respondents chose this identity.

The citizen-of-Ukraine identity is the foundation of the Ukrainian nation. It is an indicator of "do we have this nation or not"? In my opinion, the Ukrainian nation has already formed itself, it is strong, because identity was paid for by blood. In an interview with Al-Jazeera in 2014, I said that we have two results thanks to Putin: he has not managed – and will not manage – to destroy Ukrainian identity, the Ukrainian state and the Ukrainian nation. I am glad that this has happened. It is very sad that so much blood was needed for this to happen. Young, handsome soldiers who were meant to live, love and enjoy life have died on the battlefield. Yet if we finish off this Russian beast, we will live well. We will rebuild everything. Our neighbours will also live well and in peace. If, God forbid, Ukraine were to fall, the Poles or the Baltic States' inhabitants could be next. The beast will not stop itself. If we do not finish it off now, it will return again in two or three years. It has many inhabitants, 140 million. It can announce a mobilisation and produce new weapons. And it will certainly come again; it might bypass Ukraine, remembering its defeats, but it will come to our neighbours. This is its aggressive nature. This is why we must combine our efforts, unite and tighten our belts.

Taking advantage of this opportunity, I would like to thank our Polish friends once again for their support and say that everything will be fine – we will have Ukraine and you will have Poland. We will live in friendship and peace, because this is the highest justice. It simply cannot be otherwise. This is not a matter of some kind of regime or political order, but a matter of existence. Either they will destroy us or we will break them.

⁴ N. Chernysh, *One, two or twenty-two Ukraines: a sociological analysis of the social identities of representatives of three generations of inhabitants of Lviv and Donetsk*, "Duch i Litera" 2002, No. 11–12, pp. 6–20.

Edwin Bendyk

Speaking of Mykola Ryabchuk, his latest book, in which he explains himself regarding the “two Ukraines”, among other things, was published in Polish recently as *Czternasta od końca. Opowieści o współczesnej Ukrainie*.⁵

We have been speaking in macro categories, about society as a whole. Yet we know that these events are taking place in specific places and cities. Olexandra Deyneko has links to Kharkiv, which has turned out to be a surprising city. In Poland and elsewhere, it is seen as a city close to Russia, associated with pro-Russian attitudes; for instance, due to the widespread use of Russian in everyday life. I remember that, when I visited Kharkiv in 2013, the biggest statue of Lenin loomed over the main square; the atmosphere there was like from a different era. When I returned a year later, the rapid pace of changes in the city, which had suddenly really experienced a revolution, could be seen. Kharkiv's residents are simply defending themselves. How significant is the factor of discovering local identity here, after reform and decentralisation? Discovering a sense of agency linked to the awareness that Kharkiv is part of Ukraine? What is the interplay between these macro and micro processes here?

Olexandra Deyneko

As a resident of Kharkiv, I must say that we really do face a huge number of stereotypes about our city. Indeed, the city was Russified during Soviet times. Yet today we can calmly say, based on sociological data, that regional differences in Ukraine are being levelled right now. Today, to be a Ukrainian means to get involved in both military and civic resistance efforts. In this context, civic identity comes to the fore. Kharkiv was, is and will remain a Ukrainian city. Many of my friends are switching to Ukrainian as their everyday language, voluntarily. This is a positive indicator of the formation of a political nation in our country.

I would also like to mention a category of social unification that we should remember when speaking about national stability. Unification takes place according to various formulae. In today's Ukraine, two formulae apply. Firstly, we are uniting against a common enemy; we have already been integrating in this direction since 2014 and, of course, even more actively since February 24, 2022. Secondly, we are uniting around the common good and the aim of winning this war. People's realisation of this shared desire has made them start cooperating in a completely different way.

The quality of interpersonal cooperation in Ukrainian society has changed. In social sciences, we use the categories of weak and strong social relations when discussing social capital. To put it simply, strong social relations are characterised by a high level of trust and the intensity of communication in one's closest circle and family. In contrast, weak relations are more formal contacts with a lower level of trust; for example, we predominantly have weak relations with our friends on Facebook. With the start of the war, we noticed that spheres that were until now regulated by weak social relations transformed into strong relations in an instant. People opened their doors to refugees from Ukraine's other regions, without knowing them, and thereby demonstrated a level of trust that characterises strong social relations. Much has happened, not only at the horizontal level of interpersonal cooperation visible in the mass movement of volunteers, welcoming refugees into one's own home, and so on.

⁵ M. Ryabchuk, *Czternasta od końca. Opowieści o współczesnej Ukrainie*, translated by K. Kotyńska, A. Saweńc, J. Cieplińska, M. Petryk, O. Szelążyk, Kraków 2022.

It is also worth talking about how vertical trust has changed: trust in state institutions, the authorities and the state. These relations have gotten stronger. For example, Kharkiv's mayor lived in the metro, in a shelter, for a while. He spent a lot of time with people and thereby shaped these strong relations. Until the war, residents had been critical of him and his trust ratings were negative, which changed when he got involved in resistance efforts. In any case, I am not only talking about Kharkiv, but about all the cities and spheres of local administration in Ukraine, which, from the first days of the war, remaining the authority closest to the people, became leaders and supported resistance efforts. Seeing local leaders' resistance, residents naturally incorporated these practices into daily life and joined volunteer efforts.

I would like to cite interesting data from research conducted in mid-March [2022] by Dnipro-based organisation "Operativna Sotsiologhiia" (Rating Sociological Group obtained similar results).⁶ During the war, just 15% of inhabitants have not gotten involved in volunteer efforts. If we look at the data from before the war, just 15–20% of people had. Attitudes and practices have therefore shifted fundamentally and – equally importantly – are not fading. During research in July [2022], it turned out that, regardless of objective fatigue, people are supporting volunteer efforts even more strongly in financial terms. Earlier, it was 27%; now, it is 36%. Integration based on a new quality of vertical/horizontal relations and combined social capital – all this fosters society's unification and reconstitution in wartime conditions.

I am certain that if we wanted to use a comparative methodology and compare social integration in Ukraine with that in other European countries, all the indicators would definitely put us in first place. We would have the highest level of trust in institutions and the state, mutual individual trust, and civic identity. Indeed, the war has united Ukrainian society, not only at one level; the war has integrated us at every level, from the micro to the macro. We are speaking about fundamental changes and a different quality of relations in Ukrainian society in wartime.

The key thing is not to lose this. Our forecasts here are optimistic: when we achieve common happiness in the form of victory, we should assign ourselves another shared goal and common good: Ukraine's recovery. Unfortunately, the threat will not disappear – neither any time soon, nor within a generation – because, regardless of who is in power in Russia, we know that the imperialist tendencies will not disappear in a day, a year or 20 years. We will live in constant awareness of this danger: while it will only be potential after victory, it will become part of our everyday life.

Edwin Bendyk

We have discussed the accelerated process of consolidation around institutions, as well as the consolidation of a multi-ethnic political nation. What are this society's values? A study conducted in post-Soviet or post-communist societies a few years ago found Ukraine to be fairly conservative, with a high level of patriarchy and homophobia, and so on. Today, we are seeing a large share of women in the army, for instance. To what extent is this war creating a different model of society, including its values? Will it be an authoritarian society or a more pluralistic and horizontal one?

⁶ https://oper.so/index_ENG.html.

Olexandra Deyneko

I think that, regardless of all the features that describe how society functions in wartime, Ukrainian society is currently displaying the highest democratic standards, according to every indicator. Before the war, it was said in the West that Ukraine has poorly developed democratic institutions; now, it is difficult to name a country anywhere in the world that could rival us in terms of our ability to self-organise, the huge value we assign to freedom, and bottom-up initiatives by civil society. I think that, after the war, we will experience even richer development of democratic institutions and place even higher demands on state bodies and politicians. We will have zero tolerance for corruption and huge expectations when it comes to the transparency of the authorities' actions. The war will make us a significantly more democratic society than before it.

Edwin Bendyk

I would like to introduce the theme of politics now. We have spoken about social and institutional transformation. However, this is a tough political moment in Ukrainian history. The debate is increasingly heated, which is a virtue, because it can be observed in the Ukrainian free media. Despite the war, there is no censorship or restrictions on criticism of the president or the authorities. Could the war become an impetus to modernise the political system?

Olexiy Haran

I will focus on sociological questions and discuss the dangers and problems we face. For starters, I will add a comment as a historian: I doubt that we can talk about Kyivan Rus' as an unsuccessful Ukrainian state organism. There was no Ukraine then, or even Kyivan Rus', because Kyivan Rus' is a historical term. There was a Grand Prince of Kyiv. Ultimately, this early feudal state collapsed, like the other early medieval feudal states of France and Italy, like the empire of Charlemagne. I am saying this so that we do not distort history using today's models.

Moving onto sociological questions: the changes we are observing now are largely the result of Ukrainians' *en masse* resistance. This is really a national war. All this was maturing: opinion polls show the processes of the formation of a Ukrainian political nation. Yevhen Holovakha has spoken about the percentage of people who describe themselves above all as citizens of Ukraine. Yet I would draw attention to how we have always asked questions with a choice: what is most important for you? Who are you above all: citizens of Ukraine, or do you have some kind of regional or local identity? A dangerous tendency appeared at the start of the 2000s, when Ukrainian national identity was almost as high as regional identity. And then national identity grew. The first big jump was the first Maidan, followed by the second Maidan, and then the events of 2014. Since then, we have seen a constant trend. All this was maturing earlier.

Sociologists conducted opinion polls on the eve of the war, all of which showed that Ukrainians would fight. Yet for some reason, there was disbelief: Putin did not believe it and the West did not believe it. They thought that we would surrender within two or three days. Perhaps we did not really believe it ourselves. It is one thing to ask a person whether they will fight for his country and another when it is actually happening.

I agree that the Ukrainian political nation really has undergone a complicated process and started forming at the start of the 1990s, when Ukraine was heading for independence. At the time, national democrats' stance was that we should cooperate with national minorities. There was a popular slogan

that said: “for your and our freedom”. These processes were underway and have now become visible. However, they are not unexpected – we knew about them. In truth, they turned out to be a surprise for the “Putinverstehers” in the West.

What did the process of forming a Ukrainian political nation look like? What were the contradictions in citizens’ opinions? We asked Ukrainians: “What emotions do you feel in connection with Ukraine’s future?” Hope always came first, but fear was second. These two concepts were correlated. As Yevhen Holovakha rightly said, trust in presidents always decreased after elections. The paradox was that, asked what direction the country was going in, Ukrainians replied that, obviously, in the wrong one. And how do you see your own future next year? In positive terms, obviously. Iryna Bekeshkina explains this as follows: when we assess events in the state, we always look at them through the prism of television. It is a kind of traditional Ukrainian political game of talk show: everything is lost, we are dissatisfied with something, we have a traditional distrust in the authorities. And when a person is asked about their own future, they think: “I have a pair of hands and my head screwed on the right way, I will do everything, I will manage”. The prospect of one’s own growth has always been more positive than the belief in the direction the state is going in.

Unexpectedly, since the start of the war, the belief in the country’s future now surpasses the belief in one’s own future. This is understandable, because many people have found themselves in a difficult situation. The number of IDPs has been mentioned here: one-third or more of Ukraine’s inhabitants have become migrants. The situation is very complicated. Yet when people are asked about Ukraine, their assessment is optimistic.

What are the problems? Firstly, regarding authoritarianism: recently, our traditional partners from the KMIS [Kyiv International Institute of Sociology] conducted a professional survey commissioned by Opora. They asked Ukrainians whether they agree that some powers should be delegated to a strong leader and that the law can be sacrificed for this purpose. This survey showed that they do. Ukrainians believe that the law and certain freedoms can be sacrificed, that these powers can be put in strong hands. We waited impatiently for our survey, conducted with the Razumkov Centre, which asked similar questions. Our results are different, but – in reality – not contradictory. What did our results show? Asked whether they would give up some of their freedoms for the sake of prosperity, 30% of Ukrainians said yes, but 47% said: “no, we are not ready for this kind of sacrifice”. The trend is obvious: the higher the level of education, the higher the percentage of people who said: “we do not want to give away our freedoms”. This is very important. Asked which is better, democracy or authoritarianism (in certain conditions), the percentage of respondents choosing democracy has increased: after 2014, it was 54%, and now it is 64%. 13% of respondents chose authoritarianism and 14% are indifferent; their comfort is key. Still, Ukrainians are choosing democracy and freedom.

Is this inconsistent with the KMIS-OPORA poll? They asked about the situation here and now, in wartime. Of course, during a war, we give away some of our rights and consciously agree to certain restrictions. Yet speaking of fundamental values, Ukrainians continue to have faith in democracy and freedom. This is very important.

In terms of restrictions: some are justified and we know that the opposition also backed the declaration of martial law. We try to criticise the authorities less, we impose a certain self-censorship on ourselves. Yet there are obviously actions by the authorities that nonetheless attack the opposition; for example, when three opposition television channels were not allowed to join the single televised news marathon, when they were disconnected from digital television, although they are available via cable.

We need to keep an eye on this; there are certain threats, because the authorities now have huge support. The president – the head of the state – embodies power, the country and Ukrainians' trust in Ukraine and the Ukrainian authorities. The temptation can always appear, because there is a variety of people in the president's entourage. These kinds of threats exist and we should keep them in mind.

I am convinced that there will be no monopolisation of authority in Ukraine. This is primarily due to the mood among Ukrainians, who traditionally reject authoritarianism. We saw this during the two Maidans. A second moment of this kind: when we obtained EU candidate status. This is very important and, in part, thanks to our friends from Poland, who worked hard on this. Let me give you an example: when the chairman of the specialist anti-corruption prosecutor's office was chosen, he was not the president's man and the committee was unable to meet to approve him. When the EU said that this is a necessary condition, the entire committee gathered promptly. Everyone recovered and voted for the person that the president's office had not wanted.

Do we have the following future ahead of us: everything will be fine, we will stamp out corruption and have the rule of law? No. There will be a struggle, but the state is obviously in a better situation now than it was before the Russian invasion. Sometimes, the authorities are forced to reckon with citizens' opinion. At the start of the war, there were all kinds of proposals; for example, that instead of NATO, there will be security guarantees for Ukraine. In this case, will you choose NATO or security guarantees? Thank God, Ukrainian public opinion turned out to be unified here. Ukrainians said: "We do not want to give up on NATO". An agreement on security guarantees is being discussed, but at the same time our authorities say that we will not give up on NATO. We do not know how all this will be described, but we want real security guarantees. Various countries treat this in various ways. So far, we have not obtained tanks, aircraft or adequate air defence. Our situation is changing, but everything is happening rather slowly. Here, the fighting is not over at all. Speaking as a political scientist: in the multilateral security guarantees, there will undoubtedly be a fight for every comma. Yet it is also clear that the authorities will not give up on NATO now, because social opinion will not support it.

The final issue that I want to discuss are regional differences. The Russian language and the Moscow Patriarchate – these are painful issues for us. Of course, regional differences have decreased. Will they remain, though? I suspect so. We will have regional differences, but they will be less deep than before the war. Speaking of the Russian language, a bottom-up process of derussification is underway. Someone here said that many soldiers on the front speak Russian. I recently returned from the front, where I was conducting research on the frontline and saw how difficult it is for those soldiers to speak Ukrainian. I was in a territorial defence batalion from Dnipro and suggested that we speak Russian. They replied: "No, no, no. We want to learn Ukrainian as a principle. We will learn the language."

This process has undoubtedly accelerated. Nevertheless, I see that a sizeable group in Ukrainian society will not switch to Ukrainian, at least not in daily life, and will continue to use Russian. We should not dramatise things here. At the state level, it is understandable that everyone in state positions will use Ukrainian.

We repeatedly spoke about decommunisation during the Yushchenko era and later. The "Leninopad" began in a bottom-up way in 2014 and the situation has changed. I don't know what will happen to the Moscow Patriarchate. What should be done with it? We all understand that it would be best if it were to cease to exist and the parishes were to go to the Church of Ukraine. Many communities are making this decision now, but it is a complex process. We are all hearing calls to ban it. We must think about how it should be done. It is obviously an alien structure on Ukraine's territory, but many believers still

go there, whether out of habit or out of tradition, or because they have a Russian Patriarchate church nearby or are on good terms with the priest. Hence we need to think about it and foster this process, but in no way radicalise it or impose bans. I think that we are on the right track here; the trend is clear, but we should not downplay the problems, either.

Putin says that Lenin created Ukraine. Let's not say that Putin created Ukraine, though he unintentionally fostered this. We know that facts have consequences. We understand that the year 2014 deprived Ukrainians of their illusions concerning Russian friendship, and that the year 2022 cemented this conviction and dispelled the illusions of the West, which had long retained daydreams about dialogue.

Edwin Bendyk

How are you looking to the future? With optimism or unease? If the former: what is the main source of this optimism? If the latter: what are you most fearful of?

Natalia Chernysh

By nature, I am a moderate optimist. As a long-time sociologist, I see grounds for cautious pessimism. It seems to me that the processes that have just taken place will be difficult to calm down or reverse. Earlier, our sociologists would ask – as Hrushevsky did – whether we are dealing with a Ukrainian nation state or only a cultural nation. Right now, we have very interesting relations between the nation and state. Earlier, we had an aim: to obtain statehood. And now people are thinking: “If, God forbid, the Ukrainian state decides to sign a peace agreement on Russia's terms, we will fight without the state.” Once, the main aim was to obtain a state. And now, it is said that the state is not the master here; the state and the authorities are servants. If the state allows itself to do these sorts of things, we will keep fighting. This wave cannot be halted, unless we exhaust everything Ukrainian. One of our soldiers said: “If we are defeated, we will not live to see it, because we will all be dead. To defeat us, they need to kill us.” And this is what Putin wants.

First of all, then, there has been a shift in the relations between the authorities, the state and the nation. The Ukrainian nation has tasted the implementation of civic thought and will go after it.

The second thing filling me with optimism as a sociologist is the fact that, both in Ukraine and in the Western world, bottom-up pressure on state structures is increasing. Earlier, they also thought about what voters would say. And now the West is sending us weapons – not much, but still. If even Germany has changed its international doctrines, this is due to a strong bottom-up movement. The pressure on the authorities is significantly stronger and people are forcing politicians to act more rapidly. Once, Chancellor Angela Merkel would not allow the German army to be expanded, which practically destroyed it. If Germany is not sending a large amount of weapons, this is also largely because it has empty arsenals. It was not producing weapons. Now there is a completely different chancellor, Olaf Scholz – not because he came to love Ukraine, but because his voters told him: “Let's help, if we can.” At the moment, 70% of EU citizens, in both the old and new member states, support this. Of course, some people are unhappy – in France, thousands of people took part in demonstrations in favour of peace with Russia – but most of society support it. We don't know to what extent this will be a long-term attitude.

As sociologists we must say: do you want the fall of Ukraine? Think: after us, they will come to you. Support Ukraine to nip evil in the bud. This will ensure peace; the peace we need. You are not paying

with your lives. It will be a little colder in your home, but you will not be forced to fight on the front or in danger of dying. Look how many thousands of people – both soldiers and civilians – Ukraine has lost. We are the ones fighting.

Someone asked: “And what if Putin drops a nuclear bomb on Ukraine?” Could he? If you ask people on the front “If Putin drops the bomb, will that stop you?”, they reply: “Let him try. We will reach Moscow and get him there.”

Hrushevsky said that the Ukrainians take a long time to harness the horse, but ride it swiftly. They will do it. Don't worry about us. Worry about yourselves and support us. It will all be fine.

Olexandra Deyneko

Both optimism and pessimism. Pessimism because I see the risk of cracks and the formation of new fault-lines. Regional differences are becoming blurred right now, but we have a basis for new divisions. After the war, we will have completely different criteria for social mobility and stratification, and of course those who fought and actively helped will have the biggest social opportunities. However, new social groups that could find themselves at risk of social isolation are appearing. For now, I have Ukrainian refugees in mind. How will they be seen by the society that won the war? Will they be integrated into this society appropriately? Will they be accepted? This is one potential fault-line.

A second fault-line that we have spoken about already is language. I am pleased that all of us here agree that we need to recognise Russian-speaking Ukrainians' Ukrainianness. If this calm approach is continued, people will learn Ukrainian and switch to it. We cannot artificially create disintegration. However, there are grounds for optimism: according to research by Rating group in August 2022, asked for their assessment of the next ten years, people said 6.5/7. In 2021, before the war, it had been 4.5/7.

Finally, I would like to mention William Isaac Thomas' sociological statement that if people accept a situation as real, it becomes real in its consequences. May these assessments become our future very soon.

Olexiy Haran

We are optimists and have spoken about the grounds for optimism. This is shown by the Ukrainian nation, our volunteers, soldiers and civil society. In terms of the dangers right in front of us, I can cite President Zelensky, who said that the next 90 days will be critical when it comes to preparation for the winter and a potential energy crisis caused by the Russians. This is very important. We are aware that Putin may attempt to do this. This will be a weapon against the Ukrainians, to break their faith in victory. Yet, above all, it will be aimed at Europe, to divide it and stimulate anti-establishment movements. This is the first common danger for all of us.

The second danger is that the West will not send us appropriate weapons and will push us to reach artificial compromises with Russia. I am not among those who say: “We will reach Moscow and destroy Russia” and so on. The West should not impose “compromises” that destabilise Ukraine on us. The Ukrainians do not want this. The minimum programme is Ukraine's territorial integrity. Please give us weapons. Thank you for what you are giving us, but for now there is still not enough of it.

Yevhen Holovakha

To round up, I would like to thank the Polish state and nation. This extraordinary support has boosted Ukrainian optimism about Western assistance. At the beginning, the West was very hesitant. We saw real support from the Polish nation and the Baltic States – the kind we expected.

Our key problem is not that we are not supported. Our problem is that we might not get back our own country and state. On many matters, I agree with the other speakers, but the thesis that we will fight without the country if it does not do something is dangerous. No, we cannot do anything without the state. They will kill all of us then. This is not an alternative. We have historical experience of serious anarchy, military democracy and everything needed to build certain democratic institutions. Yet we lack the experience of a strong state. We need to amass this experience. The state should be supported.

Another danger is authoritarianism. The point is for the state not to use an opportunity for abuse. In my opinion, this threat is not as terrible as the threat that, at some point, we will be disappointed by our state. In Russia, it is believed that the Ukrainians adapt very easily: it is enough to conquer them and they will immediately serve Russia. Have you seen a single Ukrainian from Russia who is fighting? Where are the millions of ethnic Ukrainians in Russia? Half the generals we have killed have Ukrainian surnames. There are regions inhabited by many Ukrainians that support Russia and the military operation the most. I have many relatives in Kuban and I must say that they are greater Putinists than the Moscovites. The Russians know that Ukrainians can sometimes adapt and serve, so their key task is to destroy support for the state, which we have only just achieved. There is a threat of authoritarianism, but this is opposed by our experience of anarchy and military democracy. I have my own experience of life in Ukraine, where there were attempts by Yanukovich to seize power. We know how that ended. A serious threat that cannot be minimised or forgotten is the view that we will fight even without a lack of support.

Olexiy Haran

We were asked to conduct research on those referred to as right-wing radicals in the West. In the West, they fear that they are the ones who could destabilise something. We know how many stereotypes there are. I went to the front and spoke to Azov, Pravyi Sektor, Svoboda. I asked them many things. There is a unanimous opinion: no partisans. We are part of the army. Even Pravyi Sektor, which previously spoke of its separateness, declares this. Now it says: “We are part of the army, we adapt to orders, we are part of the Ukrainian state.” I think that this is very important. We now have the opportunity to fight the anarchy that was harming us.

Edwin Bendyk

Thank you for this fascinating lesson on Ukrainian society and recent events. Thank you for your honest statements, which are analytical and knowledge-based without idealising reality or ignoring threats. Of course, I want the optimistic scenarios to materialise. This will be a victory for everyone, not only Ukraine. This is why we are together and helping how we can. We know that this will not end yet. I was surprised by the realism of Ukrainians who – asked about the war – are able to assess rationally and know that it still needs to go on. The Ukrainians are not buying into crude optimism; they know that this requires sacrifice. May these sacrifices deliver results as quickly as possible.

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