



Research Article

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WAR AS A FACTOR OF TRANSFORMATION IN PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS OF UKRAINIANS

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to identify transformations in the public consciousness of Ukrainians caused by Russian aggression, primarily its impact on their awareness of their own identity, the components of which are historical memory, self-definition in relation to one's own country and people, relations with other peoples and countries, basic values, on which social life is based.

Methodology. An idea about the nature and depth of these transformations can be based on the analysis of empirical data, including the content of mass media and social networks. However, the most relevant in this sense are the data of sociological studies, which allow us to see the mentioned processes in dynamics, and therefore to draw conclusions about the presence of certain trends and formulate certain forecasts based on them. The article analyzes the results of sociological research conducted in August - September 2022 by the Democratic Initiatives Foundation, the sociological service of the Razumkov Center, and the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology.

Results. They witnessed significant changes in the attitude of Ukrainians, in particular, to the historical past, iconic historical figures and recently influential non-state institutions. On a number of issues, traditional differences in assessments between residents of central and western Ukraine, on the one hand, and eastern and southern Ukraine, on the other, are observed. At the same time, the factors contributing to the unification of Ukrainian citizens around common values, such as state independence, Ukrainian citizenship, and the native country as a place where a person sees his future, have been identified. A certain consensus was also found regarding who is responsible for the war waged against Ukraine, and the nature of future relations with Russia and the Russian people.

Keywords: *Social consciousness, Russian aggression, identity, values.*

Relevance

The war with Russia had a significant impact on the public consciousness of Ukrainians, transforming their value system, changing assessments of the past, attitudes towards significant historical events and personalities, and influential institutions that enjoyed great trust and authority until recently. These changes can be seen by analyzing the content of



mass media and social networks, and the rest, in everyday communication. We can preliminarily say that it is about the formation of a new national Ukrainian identity, the consolidation of Ukrainians into a single political nation, and the filling with real content of the constitutional definition of the Ukrainian people. This makes research that provides a clearer picture of the mentioned processes especially relevant, namely sociological surveys, primarily those that were conducted for a long time and recorded not only certain facts, but also trends resulting from their changes. Based on the results of these studies, the most adequate conclusions and forecasts can be made.

Methodology

Our goal was to analyze transformations in the public consciousness of Ukrainians as a result of direct Russian aggression that began on February 24, 2022. The data of sociological surveys conducted on August 5-12, 2022 by the Ilko Kucheriv Foundation "Democratic Initiatives" and the sociological service of the Razumkov Center were used as the subject of analysis. The face-to-face survey was conducted in Vinnytsia, Volyn, Dnipropetrovsk, Zhytomyr, Zakarpattia, Zaporizhia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kyiv, Kirovohrad, Lviv, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Poltava, Rivne, Sumy, Ternopil, Kharkiv, Khmelnytskyi, Cherkasy, Chernihiv, Chernivtsi regions and the city of Kyiv (in the Zaporizhzhia, Mykolaiv, Kharkiv regions - only in the territories controlled by the government of Ukraine and in which hostilities are not taking place). 2024 respondents over the age of 18 were surveyed. The theoretical error does not exceed 2.3%.

Sociologists were interested in such issues as the attitude of citizens to the collapse of the Soviet Union, condemnation of the USSR as a communist totalitarian regime that carried out a policy of state terror, changes in toponyms associated with the Russian Federation/Soviet Union/Russian Empire, Stepan Bandera as a prominent figure in the history of the Ukrainian people's struggle for independence. The following was also investigated: the attitude of citizens to the independence of Ukraine, the victory in the war with Russia, Ukrainian citizenship, the ideology of nationalism, prospects for building one's future in Ukraine, its political system; emotions that prevail among Ukrainians when they think about their future or the future of the country. It is possible to single out a block of issues related to the guilt of the Russian authorities and the Russian people for the resolution of this war and the relations of Ukrainians with Russians after its end (in this case, Ukrainians and Russians were defined by citizenship, not by ethnicity).

Results

The vast majority of respondents (67%) positively assessed the collapse of the Soviet Union - "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century," according to Putir. Characteristically, the number of those who share this opinion, compared to 2020, has increased by 18%, and the number of those who do not share it has halved (from 32% to 16%). Almost 59% have a positive attitude towards the condemnation of the USSR as a communist totalitarian regime that carried out a policy of state terror. This is 25% more

than in 2020. So, the war stimulated rather radical changes in Ukrainians' assessment of the Soviet past (Iak transformuietsia..., 2022).

Only 18% of respondents agreed with the opinion that the duration of the war does not depend on the choice of the Russians. 56% strongly disagree with this and another 19% fluctuate in their assessments (i.e., both agree and disagree). Therefore, the vast majority of Ukrainians place the blame for the war waged against Ukraine not only on Putin and his entourage (their responsibility was recognized by the absolute majority – 85%), but on the entire Russian people, which is not surprising, given the widely known data on mass support for the aggressive policy of their government by the Russians. Accordingly, the attitude of Ukrainians towards Russians has also radically changed. 75% of the respondents would support, after the victory of Ukraine and the de-occupation of its territories, the decision to completely break all relations with the Russian Federation up to a complete ban on the entry of Russians into Ukraine (Den Nezalezhnosti..., 2022).

It can be recalled that on May 23, 2022 a petition was sent to the President of Ukraine with the demand to ban Russian citizens from entering the territory of Ukraine for the next 50 years. She received more than 25,000 votes, necessary for her consideration. At the same time, society, including creative and intellectual circles, cultivates an uncompromising attitude towards any contact with Russians - from cooperation to joint actions for peace and discussions on anti-war topics. A certain exception is made for those who emigrated from Russia a long time ago and clearly expressed their position regarding its regime, politics and Putin personally. In the same trend is the transition of the policy of decommunization to the policy of de-Russification, and the discrediting of Russian culture, in particular, literature, as imperial and colonial in nature, and efforts to cleanse the cultural space of Ukraine from the Russian presence. Certain excesses are inevitable on this path, but they are justified by the circumstances.

The above data correlate with the results of other sociological studies, in particular, conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology on September 7-13, 2022. They showed that citizens of Ukraine feel the greatest social distance in relation to Russians - residents of Russia - 6.39 on the Bogardus scale. This means that Ukrainians would not want to see them either as members of their family, or close friends, or neighbors, or work colleagues, or residents of Ukraine, or its guests. However, almost the same social distance is found in relation to Russians - residents of Ukraine (5.03). It is greater only in relation to Roma (5.08) and Belarusians - residents of Belarus (5.34). Unfortunately, fully justified xenophobia towards citizens of the aggressor country and its satellite is projected onto fellow citizens of Russian origin. However, it can be assumed that in the latter case, this xenophobia is somewhat imaginary, without practical consequences. In everyday communication, there is no ethnic distinction between citizens of Ukrainian and Russian origin. Similarly, no increase in social distance due to language differences was recorded, since, according to the results of the study, the attitude towards Russian-speaking



Ukrainians is practically the same as towards Ukrainian-speaking ones (Mizhetnichni..., 2022).

The vast majority (67%) of those surveyed agreed with the need for "healthy nationalism" for Ukraine. Obviously, we are not talking about ethnic, but about political nationalism as an ideology of military, political and economic strengthening of Ukrainian statehood, which will contribute to increasing its resistance in crisis situations. Almost half assessed the activity of Stepan Bandera (who in the mass consciousness is the most vivid personification of nationalism) as rather positive for Ukraine. Compared to last year, the number of those who support this opinion has increased by 19%, while the number of those who do not support it has decreased by 21% (Iak transformuietsia..., 2022).

90% are proud to be citizens of Ukraine, and the share of those who are very proud of this has doubled since 2021 and now stands at 54%. 72% of respondents consider themselves primarily citizens of Ukraine. This is the highest indicator in the last 20 years. Indicators of local or regional identity have decreased over the same period. Compared to 2021, the share of those who believe that during the years of existence of independent Ukraine there were more positive than negative has doubled (37.2%), while the number of those who believe that there were more negative in this year has significantly decreased (from 29.1% to 15.1%) and slightly less - those who believe that these years were equally positive and negative (from 46.3% to 40.5%) (Den Nezalezhnosti..., 2022).

Almost 90% of respondents want to build their future in Ukraine and only 4% do not want to do this. 68% of respondents consider Ukraine to be a truly independent state. 16% do not agree with this thesis. If a referendum on Ukraine's independence were held now, 87.5% of those polled would vote "for" Ukraine's independence. Against - slightly more than 3%.

More than 90% of respondents believe in the victory of Ukraine in this war (77% believe and 15% rather believe). Only 4% of respondents do not believe or rather do not believe in victory. But the question arises, what can be considered a victory? According to the majority of respondents (55%), the victory will be the expulsion of Russian troops from the entire territory of Ukraine and the restoration of borders as of January 2014. Another 20.5% are more radical - for them, victory in the war will be the destruction of the Russian army and the promotion of insurrection/collapse within Russia. Relatively small shares of respondents will consider the end of the war with certain concessions from Ukraine as a victory. About 9% will consider the expulsion of Russian troops from the entire territory of Ukraine, except the occupied Crimea, as a victory, 7.5% - the restoration of the status quo as of February 23, 2022, and 3% - the end of the war, even if the Russian army remains in the territories that were captured by a full-scale invasion (Den Nezalezhnosti..., 2022).

51.8% believe that the activity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate rather contributes to Russian aggression, and only 11% believe that it contributes to the defense of Ukraine. We will remind you that this is the largest religious organization in Ukraine, which until recently had a significant influence not only in the East

and South, but also in the central and some western regions. Despite the fact that in the first days of the war, the head of the UOC MP, Metropolitan Onufriy, gave a quite adequate assessment of the war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine, comparing it to the sin of Cain, the openly anti-Ukrainian and collaborative activities of some of its clergy, including bishops, the long-term reluctance to take a clear position regarding the Russian Orthodox Church as one of the ideological inspirers of the Russian aggression, has significantly compromised the UOC MP in the eyes of the citizens of Ukraine. The decision of the local council of the UOC MP on May 27, 2022 to condemn the war and supposedly complete separation from the Moscow Patriarchate could not help this (Iak transformuietsia..., 2022).

In general, there is a significant decrease in trust in the church (in this case, this term refers to all religious organizations, regardless of confessions and denominations). If ten years ago it was the leader of public trust together with the Armed Forces, now it is trusted by 42% (Armed Forces - 91%), and according to this indicator it is inferior to the State Service for Emergency Situations (82%), the National Guard of Ukraine (81%), volunteer organizations (77%), the State Border Service (74%), volunteer units (73%), the President of Ukraine (71%), public organizations (44%) (Dovira..., 2022).

However, it should be noted that the estimates mentioned above vary significantly depending on the region. Thus, in the South of Ukraine (in this case, it is the Mykolaiv and Odesa regions), almost half as many respondents were positive about the collapse of the Soviet Union as in the West (41.7% and 86.2%). Condemnation of the USSR as a communist totalitarian regime was supported by 77.6% in the West and only 25.4% in the South (while 26.8% did not support it) (Iak transformuietsia..., 2022). Likewise, 62.8% of respondents in the West and only 35.3% in the South spoke in favor of a complete break in relations with the Russian Federation after the war (Den Nezalezhnosti..., 2022). The renaming of toponyms associated with the Russian Federation/Soviet Union/Russian Empire was supported by 79% of respondents in the West and only 27% in the South (42%, that is, a relative majority, spoke against). Differences also exist in the attitude to nationalism, the historical role of Stepan Bandera, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, the recognition of the guilt of the Russian people for the continuation of the war and future relations with it (Iak transformuietsia..., 2022).

The same discrepancies in assessments were found between Ukrainian-speaking and Russian-speaking interviewees (both were determined by the criterion of declaring the language of everyday communication). Thus, 73.5% of Ukrainian-speakers and 51.6% of Russian-speakers consider the collapse of the Soviet Union a positive phenomenon, 66.1% of Ukrainian-speakers and 41.4% of Russian-speakers approve of the condemnation of the USSR as a communist totalitarian regime (Iak transformuietsia..., 2022). 60.6% of Ukrainian-speakers and 41.5% of Russian-speakers spoke in favor of a complete severance of all relations with the Russian Federation, up to a complete ban on the entry of Russians into Ukraine (Den Nezalezhnosti..., 2022).

However, on some important issues, regional and main language groups show much greater and sometimes almost complete solidarity. This is the attitude towards the



independence of Ukraine - today the absolute majority in all regions would vote for it. Similarly, in all regions, the majority views victory in the war as the expulsion of Russian troops from the entire territory of Ukraine or the destruction of the Russian army, that is, they are not ready to accept peace at the price of territorial concessions, believe in this victory and would like to build their future life in Ukraine. The absolute majority place responsibility for the war on the leadership of Russia, consider themselves primarily citizens of Ukraine, that is, they prefer national identity to regional and local ones, and are proud of Ukrainian citizenship (over 90 of them in total - the highest for the entire time of sociological monitoring of this issue) and would like to build their future in Ukraine.

64% of respondents believe that democracy is the most desirable state system in Ukraine, according to 14%, autocracy can be better than democracy under certain circumstances. It is significant that by 2014 the priority of democracy was supported by less than 50% (Den Nezalezhnosti..., 2022). After the Revolution of Dignity, this figure rose to 54%, but only after the start of the Great War did it exceed 60%. This confirms the opinion that the war with Russia is for Ukrainians a struggle not only for state independence and territorial integrity, but also for values and a way of life. Ukrainians do not want to live in the archaic and authoritarian system of the "Russian world", having in front of them completely negative examples of Russia and Belarus. This is also evidenced by the above data on the increase in the number of those who positively assess the collapse of the USSR and support its condemnation as a totalitarian regime, since a positive-nostalgic attitude to the Soviet past is an integral component of modern Russian ideology.

Among the factors that unite Ukrainians, the majority of respondents recognized belief in victory in the war - 72.5%. It is followed by faith in a better future (48.1%), patriotic feelings (35.9%), the desire to overcome life's difficulties together (31.2%), as well as the feeling of losing a normal life (27.5%) (Den Nezalezhnosti..., 2022). Among the emotions of Ukrainians when they think about their future or the future of the country, the following prevail: hope (56% in the first and 66% in the second cases), optimism (3% and 40%), anxiety (36% and 31%). There are significantly fewer people who feel confident (17% and 24%), confused (19% and 9%), afraid (16% and 13%), hopeless (9% and 4%). Compared to last year, the number of those who feel hope has increased by 23%, confidence - by 16%, optimism - by 12%. The percentage of those who feel anxiety and fear remained at last year's level (Dovira..., 2022).

Conclusions

The war deprived the vast majority or even the absolute majority of our citizens of the last illusions about the values of the Soviet era and the possibility of normal coexistence with authoritarian and aggressive Russia, which not only did not overcome the imperial complexes, having had a chance to do so in the 90s, but on the contrary, developed them to the level of socio-psychological pathology. The war became an important factor in the formation of the Ukrainian political nation with an inclusive civic identity. Belief in victory, support for the independence of Ukraine, the desire to build one's future in it, a sense of

pride in Ukrainian citizenship, turning it into a cornerstone of one's own identity become the basis of national consolidation, an incentive for increasing solidarity as an active civic interaction.

Against this background, regional differences in some estimates can be considered insignificant, such that they do not affect the readiness of the absolute majority of Ukrainians to resist Russian aggression, their desire to live in a free and independent country.

Mass support for Putin's policy and the war with Ukraine put Russians in the Ukrainian public consciousness beyond the limits of human relations, and nowadays in Ukraine it is unlikely that works similar to "Letters to a German Friend" by A. Camus, written in 1943-1944 in occupied Paris, could appear. Such a work could not have appeared even during the Second World War from the pen of, for example, a Jewish intellectual. You can probably argue and try to prove something to someone who, contrary to international law, encroaches on your territory, economic resources, even sovereignty, but not to someone who encroaches on your identity, historical and cultural grounds of your existence. Russia's actions in Ukraine can be qualified as genocide, an attempt to destroy the Ukrainian people, if not physically, then spiritually. Of course, there can be no discussions, no arguments, no other forms of human communication with those who set a similar goal in relation to you.

The fact that the majority of Ukrainians would like to keep the Russians at a safe distance for at least half a century in the future shows their deep distrust in the possibilities of moral self-purification of the Russian people and the transformation of their social consciousness. This mistrust is well-founded, as it is based on long historical experience.

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