

## **PUBLIC OPINION AND POLITICAL POSITIONS IN WESTERN COUNTRIES: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UKRAINE'S STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION**

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Nearly two years after the start of the full-scale aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, the issue of continuing support from the West becomes crucial for our state to achieve goals for the restoration of territorial integrity and a just peaceful resolution. Existing support mechanisms mostly have an ad-hoc format and are allocated in packages depending on urgent requests from Ukraine and the capabilities of partner countries (the "Rammstein" format and macro-financial assistance from individual countries and international organizations). The institutionalization of aid, especially through bilateral defense agreements, NATO programs, and the approach to EU membership, remains in the negotiation phase and, due to the protracted conflict, increasingly depends on the political processes within partner countries.

Dysfunction in the U.S. Congress, the potential victory of Donald Trump in the 2024 presidential elections, the war in the Middle East, and the growing popularity of extreme right and left forces in EU countries on the eve of the European Parliament elections create a danger of reducing the level of financial and military assistance from key partners to Ukraine.

### **Public opinion and political positions in the USA**

Support for Ukraine in the USA has become a domestic political issue, which will be one of the key issues in the 2024 presidential and congressional elections. The Republican Party will seek to use the Russian-Ukrainian war to criticize the administration of J. Biden and the Democratic Party as a whole, particularly regarding the levels of assistance, influence on the defense capabilities of the USA, and the lack of a long-term strategy for resolving the conflict.

The continuation of economic and military aid to Ukraine remains one of the most contentious issues in Washington. Congress avoided a government shutdown by passing a

temporary spending bill that will fund the government until February 2, 2024, but without support for Ukraine. This occurred primarily due to the division within the Republican Party – the positions of many Republicans opposing any temporary measures or bills that allocate additional funding to Kyiv. With the appointment of the new Republican Speaker of the House, Mike Johnson, it can be expected that the amount of aid allocated to Ukraine will no longer be subject to review until the 2024 presidential elections.

The urgency of the Biden administration's request for the extension of funding for Ukraine allows Republicans to link it to other issues, such as reducing overall government social spending or building a wall on the Mexico border, thereby blocking the initiative. That's why the White House has chosen the tactic of tying Ukraine's funding to military aid to Israel. On the one hand, this increases the chances of unlocking funding; on the other hand, maintaining this linkage in the future will require greater political efforts from the presidential administration in the event of prolonged and expanded conflict in the Middle East.

Sociological surveys in the United States demonstrate the preservation of support for Ukraine among the American population, but its level has decreased compared to the previous year. In particular, a survey conducted by the [Chicago Council on Global Affairs](#) from September 7 to 18, 2023, showed that the majority of Americans support the continuation of economic aid (61%) and military supplies from the U.S. to Ukraine (63%). However, this majority has decreased from November of the previous year (65% in November 2022 and 72% in July 2022). In comparison to representatives of other parties, Republicans remain the least inclined to support providing greater economic (47%) and military (50%) aid to Ukraine, while Democrats (76% economic, 77% military) and independent voters (58% economic, 60% military) continue to support such assistance.

The [Reuters/Ipsos](#) poll conducted in early October 2023 demonstrated that 41% of surveyed Americans agreed with the statement that Washington "should provide weapons to Ukraine", compared to 35% who disagreed, while 24% were undecided. When broken down by party affiliation, the results were as follows: 52% of Democrats supported providing weapons to Ukraine (this figure was 61% in May 2023 according to a Reuters/Ipsos poll). Among Republicans, support for supplying weapons to Ukraine decreased from 39% in May to 35% in October.

A [Gallup](#) poll published on November 2, 2023, indicates a further decline in the number of supporters for providing financial aid to Ukraine and increasing contradictions between Democratic and Republican voters. In response to the question "*Should the U.S. maintain its financial support to Ukraine for as long as Ukraine requests it, or should there be a time limit on that support?*" 37% of respondents chose unconditional support, while 61% indicated the need for setting limits. Among Democratic voters, 65% support maintaining financial aid for Ukraine's needs, while among Republicans, only 14% do.

Public support for Ukraine will be a crucial factor in the medium term. Americans' fatigue from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan forced presidential administrations to withdraw troops without achieving declared goals. Prolonging the Russian-Ukrainian war may also lead to fatigue among American voters, especially regarding the provision of significant military aid packages. Similarly, the expansion or prolongation of conflicts in the Middle East may increase criticism of support for "two wars" and the growth of isolationist tendencies.

This factor is exacerbated by discussions about the U.S. readiness for a potential conflict with China. As the presidential election date approaches, confrontation with Beijing will be emphasized as a critical threat to U.S. national security. Representatives of the "Trumpist" wing of the Republican Party (MAGA) will play a leading role in this discourse. Support for Ukraine, particularly with weapons from American arsenals, may be seen as weakening the Pentagon's ability to counter China.

### **Public opinion and political positions in EU countries**

In the midst of the political crisis in the USA regarding the approval of the budget and the amount of aid to Ukraine, EU countries are gradually increasing their share in the financing of our state. As of July 31, 2023, according to data from the [Kiel Institute for the World Economy](#), out of almost \$100 billion of promised and provided military aid, the United States' share was 47%, and EU countries' share was 37%. At the same time, in the face of a possible cessation of American support, European leaders emphasize that they will not be able to fully replace the United States as a donor of military assistance.

Key political events that will determine the future European support for Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression will be election campaigns and possible political crises in key countries of the union. Like in the USA, in many EU countries, the issue of aid to Ukraine is used as an element of domestic political confrontation. This was demonstrated in the parliamentary elections in Poland and Slovakia.

In particular, in June 2024, elections will take place in the European Parliament, where the presence of far-right and far-left forces opposing support for Ukraine may increase.

The results of the [Eurobarometer](#) survey, conducted at the end of August 2023 in all 27 member countries of the organization, demonstrate that there is a high level of support for Ukraine in the EU states. 86% of respondents approve of the EU continuing to provide humanitarian aid to people affected by the war. 77% agree that the EU should accept people fleeing the war, and 71% support the imposition of economic sanctions against Russia. Approximately two-thirds of Europeans (67% and 65%) believe that the EU should support Ukraine's path to European integration and its integration into the single market. Finally,

65% support providing financial and economic assistance to Ukraine, and 57% believe that the EU should support the procurement and supply of military equipment and training for Ukraine.

Considering Germany's leading role in the EU, domestic political processes in this country will influence the consensus on supporting Ukraine by other states. Although the next elections to the Bundestag are scheduled for 2025, local elections are taking place in 2023-24. On October 8, 2023, regional elections were held in Bavaria and Hesse, where parties in the ruling coalition [demonstrated](#) low results. The Social Democratic Party (SDP) received only 8.4% in Bavaria, the Free Democrats did not overcome the 5% barrier, and the Greens received 14.4%. In contrast, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Hesse received 18.4% (+5.3% compared to the 2018 elections), and in Bavaria, it received 14.6% (+4.4%). Currently, AfD holds the [second position](#) at the national level and may receive 21% of the voters' votes. The creation of a new left-wing party led by pro-Russian politician Sahra Wagenknecht could further undermine the position of the ruling coalition and significantly impact the political situation in the country.

### The Impact of the Israel-Hamas Conflict

The Hamas attack on Israeli territory on October 7, 2023, aligns with Russia's strategy to divert the attention of the global community, prolong the conflict, and continue to destabilize Western unity in support of Ukraine. The increase in conflicts requiring the leaders of Western countries to respond allows the Kremlin to hope for a strengthened negotiating position in the coming year. Although the types of weapons needed by Ukraine and Israel differ, the potential risk of a wider war in the Middle East may divert the attention of the United States and key European countries from their focus on Ukraine. This will affect the decision-making of both American and European bureaucracies.

The entanglement of the U.S. presidential administration in issues of aid to Israel and Ukraine, on the one hand, increases the chances of receiving assistance amid political tensions in Congress and calls for the mobilization of democracies in the fight against authoritarian states. On the other hand, it creates potential conflicts both within the Western bloc and in relations with Global South countries.

The voting in the United Nations General Assembly on a resolution calling for a "humanitarian ceasefire" in the Gaza Strip demonstrated [divergences](#) among Western states. Countries such as France, Belgium, Spain, and Norway supported the resolution. France also [broke unity](#) with its Western allies in the Security Council by voting for a Brazilian resolution on resolving the crisis around the Gaza Strip.

Western support for Israel's operation in the Gaza Strip also reduces the chances of reaching a consensus with Global South countries in condemning Russia's war against Ukraine. The casualties among Palestinians due to Israel's military operation are portrayed in many

developing countries as evidence of the "double standards" of Western countries. With regards to future resolutions condemning Russian aggression against Ukraine, an increase in the number of states abstaining from voting can be expected.

The conflict in the Middle East will also shift the attention of EU citizens to issues of terrorism and migration. The attacks on October 13 in France and October 16 in Belgium prompted several EU countries to strengthen counter-terrorism measures. During the European Parliament election campaign, far-right parties will exploit the dissatisfaction of EU citizens with the increase in illegal migration, especially through Mediterranean countries. The question of assistance to Ukrainian refugees may also be used in domestic debates, particularly in neighbouring countries of Ukraine and Germany, which currently host the largest number of refugees.

### **Security Guarantees and NATO Membership**

On the sidelines of the NATO summit in July 2023 in Vilnius, Lithuania, G7 countries [adopted](#) a 'Joint Declaration of Support for Ukraine', providing the foundation for long-term bilateral security agreements in accordance with the '[Kyiv Security Compact](#)' proposed in September 2022. The commitments in this Joint Declaration formalize assistance for the prolonged conflict, including the supply of modern weaponry, joint training and military exercises, as well as support for Ukraine's military-industrial complex.

While Ukraine views this as a temporary option, some individual member countries of the organization see security guarantees as an alternative to NATO membership to ensure the security of our state. An argument is also made that in future peace negotiations, Ukraine's participation in military blocs may be considered a compromise by our country to contribute to the resolution of the conflict.

Alternative security guarantee models, other than NATO membership, do not take into account the intentions of the Russian Federation, which is guided by imperial ambitions and has no plans to stop at its current territorial gains. Russia is resuming weapons production and demonstrating its ability to mobilize and prepare new troops for invasion. Even if Russia suffers a military defeat in 2024, or the conflict is "frozen", it will be able to gather forces for a new attack within [three to four years](#).

For Ukraine, bilateral security guarantees are an unsatisfactory solution as they would deplete Western resources in the case of a prolonged conflict and keep Ukraine dependent on external support, with no chance of real economic recovery. NATO membership may be the most effective way to deter Russia in the long term. Thus, the funds saved on Ukraine's defense, as part of NATO's collective defense, can be directed towards economic reconstruction.

## Recommendations for strategic communication:

- 1. Realistic assessment of Ukraine's capabilities.** In the initial phase of the war, Ukraine was able to withstand due to mobilizing all its resources and international support. Currently, the war has entered a positional phase where the key levers are technological, economic, and human resources. The Russian economy is not facing an imminent collapse, and it is adapting to the needs of the military-industrial complex. Russia's mobilization resource allows it to maintain a 400,000-strong military group in the occupied territories and, despite significant losses, continue active offensive actions on several fronts. The Russian budget for [military expenses](#) in 2024 will be \$115 billion, 2.5 times more than Ukraine's. It is important to convey the message that the military conflict, despite the absence of significant territorial changes, does not lose intensity and continues to threaten the independence of Ukraine. Russian Federation's imperial ambitions extend beyond Ukraine and spread to other countries in Eastern and Central Europe (Moldova, the Baltic countries, and Poland). Russia's closeness to North Korea and Iran, increased dependence on China, create risks of expanding the zone of instability to other regions and fueling new conflicts. Restoring Ukraine's territorial integrity to the borders of 1991 will require several large-scale military operations that will demand significant military resources. The resource imbalance between Ukraine and the Russian Federation necessitates the continuation of military and financial support from Western countries.
- 2. The importance of Ukraine's victory in preventing new conflicts.** Emphasizing that Ukraine's victory is a decisive factor in preventing conflicts worldwide and deterring other aggressors. Underscoring that support for Ukraine is not just an altruistic act but also an investment in global security. If Russia does not suffer defeat, other authoritarian regimes may receive a signal about the possibility of changing borders by force, leading to an increase in conflicts and further destabilization of the international security system.
- 3. Demonstration of military successes.** Focusing on the liberation of occupied territories diverts attention from the fact that Ukraine is waging a massive war on multiple fronts against a significantly larger and well-armed enemy. During the summer-autumn of 2023, Ukraine successfully restored exports through Black Sea ports and created a threat to Russian naval bases in temporarily occupied Crimea, resulting in the relocation of Russian Black Sea Fleet ships from Sevastopol. In turn, the restoration of maritime trade allows Ukraine to increase export revenues and reduce dependence on Western aid. It is important to highlight the increasing losses of Russians (personnel and equipment), Ukraine's advantage in artillery, depletion of reserves in Russia, and the necessity of procuring weapons from North Korea and Iran.

4. **Reforms despite war.** Ukraine's commitment to democracy and the ability to implement reforms in the midst of a full-scale war with authoritarian Russia are crucial arguments for maintaining international support for the West. The necessary demonstration of success stories includes combating corruption among top officials, improving the efficiency of public administration, implementing reforms on the path to European Union membership, creating conditions and risk mitigation for attracting foreign investment. Existing mechanisms for controlling the distribution of aid from donor countries ([USA](#), EU countries, Japan, etc.) should be consistently mentioned in international communication to prevent political speculation about possible misuse of assistance.
5. **Avoid public calls for the dissolution of Russia.** Shift the focus from calls for total defeat of the Russian Federation to seeking a more favorable future for Russia and its neighbors (regime change and democratization processes). Emphasize Ukraine's victory primarily as a condition for the defeat of imperialist Russia. In countries fearing the consequences of instability or the disintegration of the Russian Federation, emphasize that the Russian military must be defeated on the battlefield, specifically on Ukrainian territory. The defeat of Russia, even without disintegration, will have positive consequences for the security of the European continent: it will lead to changes in Belarus, open the way to restoring the territorial integrity of Moldova and Georgia, and strengthen stability in the Balkans.
6. **Ensuring the security of Ukraine without NATO membership.** Develop realistic strategies to ensure Ukraine's security if NATO membership is not achieved in the near future. Immediate and medium-term military assistance is crucial, but it will be more reliable if Western countries formalize it in long-term commitments that, however, will not be an alternative to NATO membership. Negotiating bilateral security agreements with G-7 countries and neighboring countries, ratified by the parliaments of these countries, will institutionalize international support for our state. This, in turn, will help shift the issue of assistance from the political to the bureaucratic level.
7. **Development of domestic defense industry.** Collaborate with American and European companies to develop Ukraine's defense industry, demonstrating the ability to be a contributor in the defense sector. Emphasize potential benefits for Western companies involved in this cooperation.
8. **Explain the cost of inaction.** The delay in supplying weapons from Western partners has already led to a prolonged conflict and given Russia time to build up defensive fortifications. It is important to emphasize that funds already provided to Ukraine are an unsuccessful investment if they do not help restore territorial integrity (our victory = your victory). Any reduction in Western military aid to Ukraine or any negotiations

for a ceasefire will lead to catastrophic consequences, as these events will give Russia the respite needed for regrouping, reevaluating its military strategy, and renewing aggression. Explain the historical and imperialist context of the conflict, avoiding simplification into a narrative of democracy versus authoritarianism. A successful example could be the comparison of costs and benefits in the event of Russia's victory and the resurgence of the threat to NATO countries – a return to the days of the Cold War. At the peak of the confrontation with the USSR, the US [maintained](#) a contingent of 430,000 military personnel in Europe (in 2022 – about 100,000). Under such a scenario, annual costs for the US and its NATO allies to deter Russia would significantly exceed current expenditures to support Ukraine.

- 9. Emphasize the humanitarian aspect of Russian aggression.** In the context of diminishing emotional support for Ukraine's war with Russia in Western countries, it is important to conduct targeted campaigns that remind the world of Russia's war crimes and demonstrate the "human stories" of this war. "New voices" can be involved, such as veterans and active Ukrainian combatants, volunteers, refugees, and displaced persons from cities destroyed by the Russian army. In addition to advocacy visits to partner countries, work on disseminating objective information about Russian war crimes on social media with adapted messages for the youth of Western countries (in platforms such as TikTok, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram) is crucial.

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