

RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE USE OF "SOFT POWER" OF UKRAINE IN INDIVIDUAL STATES (G7, AUSTRIA, SWITZERLAND, GREECE)

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The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the heroic resistance of the Ukrainian people have significantly changed the world perception of Ukraine, especially in the Euro-Atlantic region. Despite taking the first steps in cultural diplomacy since 2014, the increase in Ukraine's recognition in the world was mainly due to the beginning of the Russia's full-scale war in February 2022. In 2023, Ukraine achieved high performance in the Global Soft Power Index, but there remain problems with the systematic and financing of cultural diplomacy. Public support for Ukraine in key G7 states is declining due to various political and economic factors. And countries with strong pro-Russian influences such as Italy, Austria, Greece and Switzerland generally show a low level of support for Ukraine or neutrality. The decrease in public support poses a threat to further assistance to Ukraine, which affects its ability to resist Russian aggression. This creates the need to revise the use of "soft power" in Ukraine and restart the system of cultural diplomacy to increase the recognition of the Ukrainian brand abroad and, accordingly, to lobby Ukrainian interests among Ukrainian partners.

Analysis of the problem

The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the heroic confrontation of the Ukrainian people have completely changed the perception of Ukraine in the world, especially in the countries of the Euro-Atlantic region, where media coverage and the activity of governments in supporting Ukraine have attracted the attention of hundreds of thousands of people.

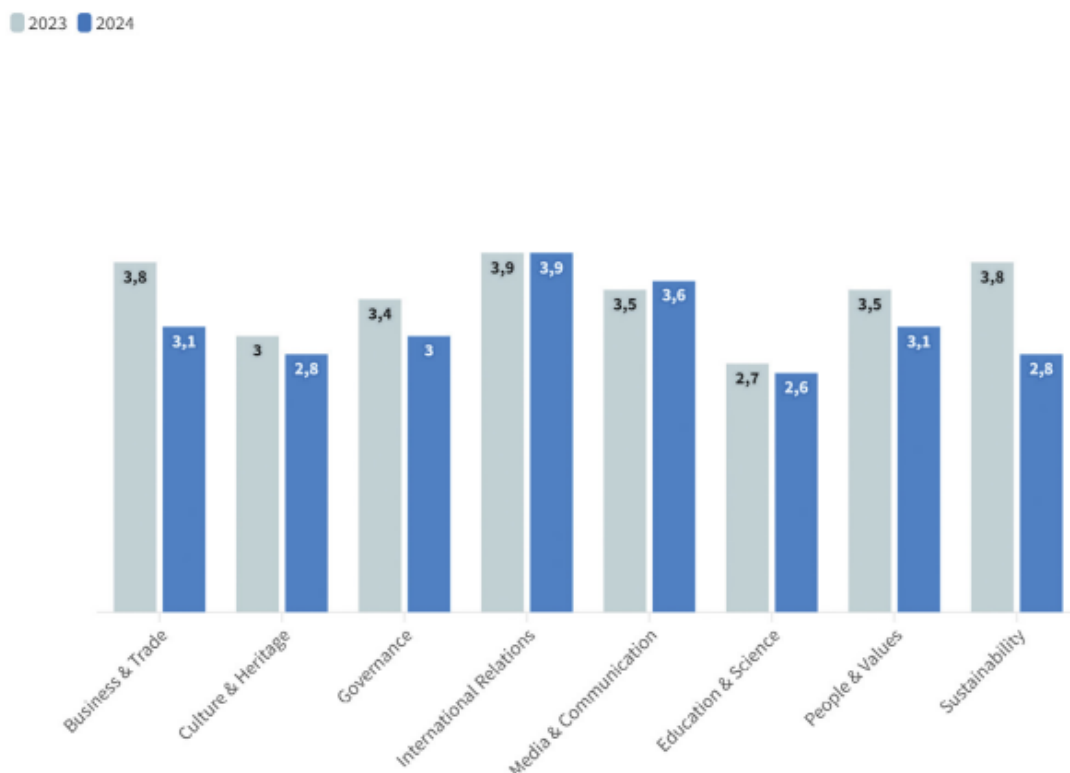
The growth of international awareness of Ukraine began after the Revolution of Dignity, which demonstrated the desire of Ukrainians to leave the zone of Russian influence and

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join the coalition of Western states within the EU and NATO. Moreover, starting in 2014, Ukraine began to pay attention to cultural diplomacy, using its "soft power". In the end, these actions were mostly unsystematic, requiring more funding, attracting qualified experts and updating the understanding of what exactly Ukraine has to offer the world.

According to the [Global Soft Power Index 2023](#), created by Brand Finance consulting agency, **in 2023 Ukraine entered the 20 most influential countries in the world, rising to 14th place in terms of recognition.** In total, in 2023, Ukraine took 37th place out of 121 among the countries of the world soft power rating.

Again, it should be understood that it was the Russian invasion and the heroic resistance of Ukrainians, and not a deliberate policy, that contributed to such an increase in the recognition of our state in the world. Judging by the dynamics of attitudes towards Ukraine by various means of soft power, Ukraine's interest is gradually declining, which shows a slight change in statistics compared to 2023 and 2024. It seems very likely that this trend will continue in the future, especially if Ukraine does not begin to implement a more systematic and focused on different populations and different states policy of cultural diplomacy.



Dynamics of Ukraine's assessment of various attributes of soft power in the Brand Finance Global Soft Power Index in 2023-2024 [Brand Finance / Brand Ukraine](#)

But despite the rapid growth of awareness of Ukraine after the invasion, the protracted nature of the war, the strong influence of Russian propaganda and the individual characteristics of the internal situation in different states create the need to revise Ukrainian cultural diplomacy, its strengthening, systematization and structuring for more effective lobbying of Ukrainian interests abroad. It is especially important to pay attention to the states, on whose help the success of Ukraine on the battlefield and its future reconstruction – the G7 countries directly depend. Besides, some European countries, in particular Austria, Switzerland and Greece, have strong pro-Russian influences, as well as a rather contradictory attitude to Ukraine, even despite Russia's attempts to genocide of the Ukrainian people.

G7 countries

G7, or Group of Seven, – an international club of governments of seven highly developed countries (the USA, Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Canada). These states are key partners of Ukraine, regularly providing financial, military and humanitarian support, critical for protection from the Russian Federation. Because of this, public sentiments favorable to Ukraine in these states are very important for continued support at the government level.

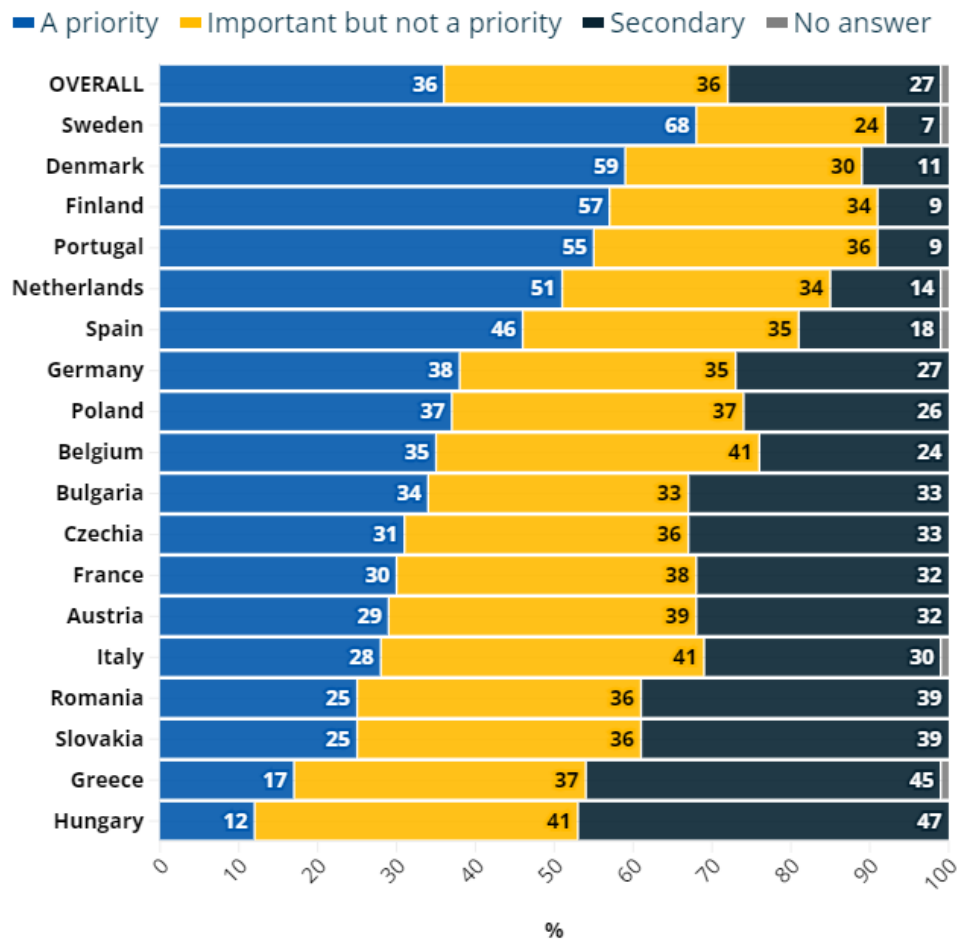
The situation in France and Germany is quite similar in terms of support for the actions of governments towards Ukraine. As of [February 2024](#), approximately 40% of citizens in both countries were in favor of reducing financial and military assistance to Ukraine. In Germany, 80% of the population has doubts about the EU's ability to replace the US in terms of the amount of support provided. In France, 26% of citizens support continued support for Ukraine, and 20% believe that assistance should be increased.

According to [a survey conducted in February 2024](#), more than three-quarters of respondents in France (76%) support the provision of humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, and 32% believe that the level of assistance should increase. In addition, the majority support the supply of French weapons to Ukraine, with 41% of respondents believing that they should continue, and 21% – support the increase. At the same time, it is noteworthy that 38% are against the supply of weapons, which is 10 percentage points more than in June 2023. The majority of the population (70%) approve of the economic sanctions imposed on Russia after the invasion of Ukraine. As for Ukrainian refugees in France, 46% of respondents would like the level of support to remain unchanged, and 19% are in favor of increasing support. However, about 35% want the number of refugees to decrease.

Unlike France, in Germany [public support](#) for military assistance is somewhat lower, as only about 20% of Germans believe that their country should do more to support Ukraine militarily. At the same time, 40% of respondents believe that Berlin sent enough weapons; and another 40% believe that Germany has provided too much military assistance.

In general, despite the still high level of public support for Ukraine, a slow decline is observed in both countries, on which Ukrainian diplomacy should work, in particular using "soft power" techniques. Separately, it should be noted that there is a phenomenon of "fatigue" from Ukrainian refugees, especially among citizens who support Eurosceptic populist political forces, such as, for example, the "Alternative for Germany" (AfD) in Germany.

Italy is also one of the EU and G7 countries where the level of support for Ukraine is one of the lowest. As of February 2024, about [50% of surveyed Italians](#) preferred to remain neutral, while 40% of respondents supported Ukraine. However, 60% of Italians are against providing military assistance to Ukraine. Besides, Russian narratives and propaganda have quite strong influences in Italy, not least due to the long-term cooperation of Vladimir Putin and openly pro-Russian Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. Moreover, both politicians and representatives of the private business sector have significant ties with Russia, which obviously negatively affects the state's attitude to Ukraine and its support in the war with Russia. Despite the fact that the government of Giorgia Meloni continues Mario Draghi's active pro-Ukrainian policy, which is quite unassuming for Italy, this is due to exclusively pragmatic goals, such as finding a common language with Brussels and defending its interests. Nevertheless, Ukraine should direct efforts to popularize the brand of Ukraine and support its positive image, which in particular received a strong impetus in 2022, among Italian citizens.



Survey results on the importance of providing assistance to Ukraine. *Ipsos for Euronews*. March 2024.

Austria

Austria has consistently been considered one of the European states where Russian influence was strongest, due to its historical memory and post-war experience, as well as the long-standing pragmatic policy of maintaining stability in the region for the purpose of economic benefit, which is why any significant geopolitical changes are considered by Austria as extremely undesirable. Austria positions itself as a neutral state, accordingly avoiding providing military assistance to Ukraine, which is also supported by society – according to the results of 2024 polls, 78% of respondents prefer neutrality. Moreover, Austrian society has always been characterized by certain anti-American sentiments and Euroscepticism, which accordingly only strengthened historical memory and openness to Russian culture.

Greece

Greece has always been marked by strong ties with Russia, which was mainly due to the historical aspects of their relations. At the start of a full-scale invasion in 2022, only [46%](#) of Greeks favored supporting Ukraine, the lowest in the EU. Moreover, polls in March 2022 showed that [66% of Greek citizens](#) did not support providing military assistance to Ukraine. Surveys conducted in February 2024 showed that only [16% of Greeks](#) expressed their readiness to support Ukraine in the struggle for the occupied territories, and [59%](#) believe that Kyiv should be pushed towards a peaceful solution to the war.

First of all, Greece and Russia are united by Orthodox Christianity, which has become one of the levers for Russia in strengthening its influence on the Greek population. Moreover, Greece for centuries perceived Russia as a regional ally and a [counterweight to Türkiye](#). In other words, a certain cultural affinity, historical ties and anti-Western sentiments inherent in a certain part of the Greek population make this state more inclined to spread Russian narratives.

A factor that should contribute to the rapprochement between Ukraine and Greece is the presence of a Greek minority in Ukraine, which, according to various sources, is 100,000-120,000 people, which mostly inhabits the South of Ukraine, in particular the Odessa, Kherson and Zaporizhzhya regions and Mariupol destroyed by Russian troops. However, such problems as the lack of attention of the Ukrainian authorities to the problems and needs of the minority, the significant impact of Russification on its representatives and the lack of mention of the Greek minority in [the Law "On Indigenous Peoples of Ukraine"](#) adopted in 2021, affected Ukrainian-Greek relations and rather did not contribute to their deepening. However, it is worth noting that at the beginning of a full-scale invasion, Greece pledged to do everything possible to support the Greek minority in Ukraine.

Switzerland

The case of Switzerland is somewhat different compared to other EU states on NATO. Neutrality has become part of the Swiss identity that they cherish for centuries, avoiding any involvement in conflicts and wars. Despite the fact that the state even joined some EU sanctions against Russia and provided financial assistance to Ukraine, Switzerland is not ready to give up its neutrality. In addition, the reluctance of the Swiss public to abandon traditional neutrality was reflected in the results of a survey conducted in 2023, according to which [more than 90%](#) of the population support neutrality in relation to the Russia-Ukraine war.

It is also important to take into account that Switzerland allows the production and export of weapons with certain restrictions, but the supply of weapons to Ukraine remains prohibited. For example, in June 2023, the Swiss parliament [rejected a bill aimed](#) at easing restrictions on the transfer of weapons manufactured in Switzerland to Ukraine through third states. There are also known cases of the Swiss government banning Germany, Spain and Denmark from sending weapons to Ukraine. Such a policy has already caused significant harm to Swiss arms manufacturers, whose profits fell by 27% in 2023, in particular due to the ban on the transfer of weapons to Ukraine.

Forecasts and potential risks

Despite the rapid growth of awareness and support for Ukraine after the beginning of the Russian full-scale invasion in 2022, due to certain internal and external factors in the policy of each of the considered states, in particular, such as Russian influence, public support for Ukraine and the actions of state governments is gradually decreasing, which, in particular, is expressed in the so-called effect "war fatigue" or "compassion fatigue", creating a certain negative sentiment in relation to Ukraine. Opinion polls in the above-mentioned states eloquently indicate that more and more citizens either oppose providing support to Ukraine or consider the assistance to be too great, gradually outweighing people who continue to defend support for Ukraine. Although Ukraine's recognition and influence is still higher than it was before the full-scale invasion, the tendency to reduce the country's reputation and return to the level of 2021 is increasingly noticeable.

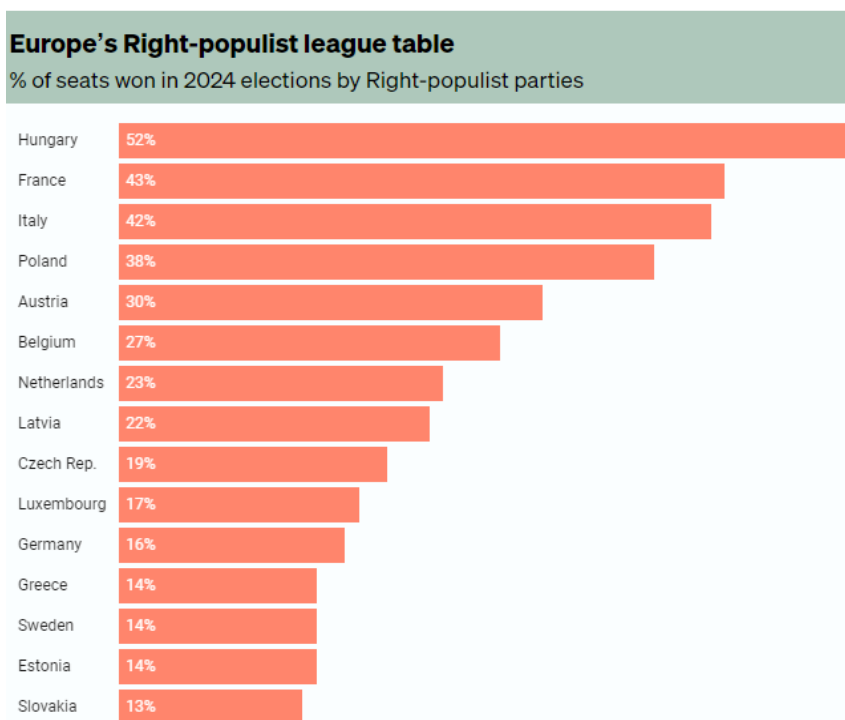
According to this [year's polls](#), unlike in previous years, Europeans are more likely to believe that Russia has an advantage in the war. As for the likely scenarios for ending the war, only 10% believe that Ukraine will win, while twice as many believe that Russia has a better chance of winning. More than a third of respondents see the end of the war in the signing of a peace treaty.

Such statistics are very disappointing for Ukraine, especially given that success on the battlefield directly depends on Western military and financial assistance. Continuing the current trend of declining public interest in the Russia-Ukraine war and "fatigue" from the protracted conflict, Ukraine risks losing not only public support, but also financial, military and humanitarian assistance provided by the governments of these states, especially taking into account the decline in support for Ukraine and faith in its victory.

Among the main risks for Ukraine is to highlight:

Coming to power of anti-Ukrainian political forces

The strengthening of far-right forces in the European region and the coming to power of Eurosceptic political parties in Europe threatens with a significant decrease in support for Ukraine. The Ukrainian issue is actively used for political manipulation, especially during election campaigns and elections. As happened in the United States and Poland, far-right and populist forces in Europe are actively promoting anti-Ukrainian narratives, thereby helping Russia. Examples of this are the activities of the AfD party in Germany, Viktor Orban in Hungary and his Fidesz party, Robert Fico in Slovakia and others who spread anti-Ukrainian sentiments in the societies of their states. For example, according to the results of [the elections to the European Parliament](#), the right-wing populist forces gained the most support in France, Italy and Germany - the G7 countries, as well as in Austria.



Percentage of seats in the European Parliament won by right-wing populist parties in the 2024 elections. UnHerd (June 2024)

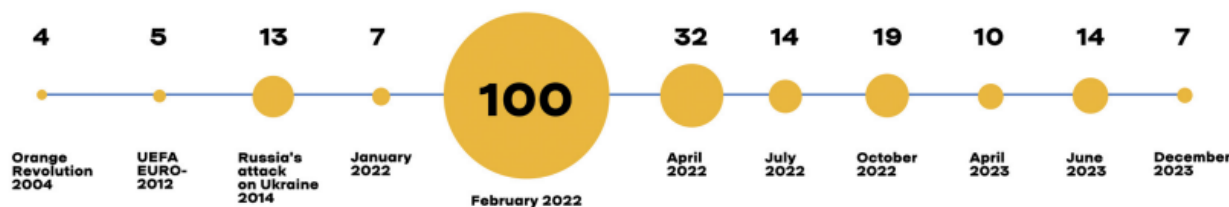
Strengthening Russian propaganda and consolidating Russian narratives

The Russian propaganda machine continues to be active throughout the world, using various sensitive topics to influence public opinion. The weakening of the coverage of the topic of Ukraine facilitates the rooting of Russian narratives, which are purposefully and systematically spread in social networks and on other platforms, with the aim of influencing the public opinion of various groups of the population.

Despite the ban on Russian media in most European countries, Russian narratives and disinformation continue to spread actively, which has an extremely negative effect on the perception of Ukraine abroad and requires more action on the part of Ukraine.

Disappearance of Ukraine from the agenda of key Ukrainian partners

Compared to the first months of the invasion, references to Ukraine appear much less often in the Western media, and recently many of them have begun to promote rather negative narratives for Ukraine, arguing that Ukraine cannot win and is already defeated, and the Russian offensive in different directions of the front is quite successful. For example, according to [Ukraine's Global Perception Report](#), prepared in 2023 by Brand Ukraine, coverage of Ukraine in international media decreased by 20%, and in social networks - by more than 40%. Moreover, "fatigue" with the theme of war, the presence of other crisis situations in the world, such as Israel's operation in the Gaza Strip in the Middle East, diminish the importance of the Russia-Ukraine war in the eyes of Western audiences and have already led to the fact that interest in the topic of Ukraine has returned to the pre-war level in accordance with the trends of [search queries in Google](#).



Trends of search queries related to Ukraine in Google around the world, 2004-2023.

[Google Trends / Brand Ukraine](#)

Recommendations

- 1. Review of public diplomacy policy, inclusion of current realities in strategic planning and implementation of the monitoring system*

The policy of public diplomacy, which began to pay attention after the Revolution of Dignity, requires revision of strategic planning and additional funding for its successful implementation. Policy should be formed in accordance with the characteristics of the country where it is implemented, as well as defining a specific target audience.

For example, an important step forward was the formation of [the MFA Public Diplomacy Strategy for 2021-2025](#), which clearly defined the main strategic goals and methods for their implementation. Nevertheless, the beginning of a full-scale invasion and the change of foreign policy priorities also require a revision of the Strategy, which needs revision and more scrupulous implementation. In particular, the already set strategic goals of raising awareness of Ukraine, perceiving it as a democratic country moving in the EU and NATO and countering harmful narratives about Ukraine should also include new and more relevant in the current conditions. For example, increasing public support for Ukraine in the societies of European states through the use of "soft power" to increase the commitment to the idea of providing financial, military and humanitarian assistance by the governments of these states, which is one of Ukraine's priorities at the moment. Another goal, which should also be taken into account, is to ensure the recognition by the Western audience of Russia as an aggressor country that has launched a full-scale war against Ukraine and the Ukrainian people, and has committed a large number of war crimes, and continues to commit new ones. Coverage of the criminal actions of the Russian Federation should form an understanding that Ukraine has the right to self-defense and acts exclusively in accordance with international law, protecting its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

2. Popularization of modern Ukrainian culture and implementation of new information policy. Activation of cultural diplomacy within the framework of the Ukrainian Institute

Ukrainian culture has great potential, which should be popularized and mobilized to implement the interests of Ukraine. The modern cultural product of Ukraine has every chance to successfully compete with a foreign one, so information policy and promotion on various platforms and social networks should become one of the means of implementing Ukrainian cultural diplomacy.

For example, the Ukrainian Institute, which was founded in 2015 to implement the policy of cultural diplomacy, currently does not have sufficient resources and capacity to implement ambitious projects. Despite the fact that the Institute's Strategy for 2020-2024 set itself significant strategic goals, such as improving the recognition of Ukraine abroad, expanding the use of the Ukrainian language in the world and supporting Ukrainian cultural figures, the real impetus for the partial implementation of such goals was made by the fact that Ukraine heroically opposes the aggressor, and the information campaign in support of Ukraine was of an incredible scale. To maintain such a result, it is important to increase funding for the work of the Ukrainian Institute, attract experts, expand its information activities and create representative offices abroad, which will help popularize

the Ukrainian brand, support and improve the level of recognition that has already been achieved.

3. Development of the Ukrainian brand Ukraine Now

The official Ukraine Now brand, launched in 2018, is an example of one of the few successful marketing campaigns of the Ukrainian government, which has received positive feedback abroad, and also has great potential for development in the future. Therefore, in this context, increasing funding and creating new opportunities for Ukraine Now is one of the strategic tasks of the state.

4. Involvement of the Ukrainian diaspora and refugees abroad

Public initiative is no less important than state policy, so diplomatic missions abroad should support various public initiatives founded by Ukrainian refugees or representatives of the diaspora. Such activities provide an opportunity to focus more on certain populations, reach a larger audience, and share personal experiences that are often even more valuable for influencing public opinion.

5. Positioning Ukraine as a bearer of European democratic and liberal values through culture

Modern Ukrainian culture is the embodiment of European values and a demonstration of the desire of the Ukrainian people to gain membership in the EU, which should be the focus. The purpose of Ukraine's image policy should be to position the country in accordance with Western democratic values, the rule of law, social security and material wealth. This will demonstrate to the European audience that Ukraine can become a full-fledged member of the European community, and the Ukrainian people defend European values at the cost of human life.

6. Constant monitoring of references to Ukraine in foreign media and regulation of information policy in accordance with the needs of a foreign audience and its perception of various kinds of information

Monitoring of references to Ukraine should be used as one of the means of regulating information policy and effective management of pro-Ukrainian narratives in the media. In addition, it is worth taking into account the "fatigue" of war, which is inherent in foreign societies as a consequence of the protracted nature of the war.

7. In the case of G7 states:

- a. Promotion of Ukrainian culture through cultural events, information activities in social media to support a positive perception of Ukraine and counteract the decline in support for assistance;
- b. Demonstration of the devastating consequences of Russian aggression for the Ukrainian cultural heritage and the need to continue supporting Ukraine in its struggle for its pro-Western choice, democratic and liberal values.

8. In the case of Austria:

- a. Cultural diplomacy aimed at demonstrating the European character of Ukrainian culture, in contrast to the so-called "great Russian culture", which until recently was often present in the Austrian cultural and information environment.

9. In the case of Greece:

- a. Creating the most favorable conditions for the Greek minority in Ukraine;
- b. Demonstration of the destruction that Russia caused to the religious sites of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the places of compact resettlement of the Greek minority in southern Ukraine.

10. In the case of Switzerland:

- a. Formation of a positive perception of Ukraine and a clear understanding that Ukraine has the right to self-defense and the restoration of its own sovereignty, to gradually root the understanding in Swiss society that in the case of the Russia-Ukraine war, neutrality is the connivance of the aggressor.

Conclusions

The resistance of the Ukrainian people to a Russian full-scale invasion greatly increased international recognition and support for Ukraine, but this success was mostly spontaneous and instantaneous, and needs to be systematized to maintain a positive perception of Ukraine in the future. Therefore, the decline in support for Ukraine in European G7 countries and states with strong pro-Russian influence emphasizes the need to revise and strengthen Ukrainian public diplomacy.

To effectively lobby Ukrainian interests and maintain international support, it is important to develop a comprehensive strategy for the use of "soft power", focused on different groups of the population and the specifics of each partner country. Such a strategy of public diplomacy should include active promotion of modern Ukrainian culture, truthful history and achievements in various fields, as well as active work with the media, cultural and educational institutions abroad, including the active involvement of the Ukrainian Institute.

It is necessary to invest in cultural projects that demonstrate the uniqueness and richness of Ukrainian culture, as well as support the Ukrainian diaspora and refugees, who can become an important ally and support in promoting Ukrainian interests abroad. It is also important to strengthen ties with foreign partners through student and scholar exchanges, cultural events and joint research projects. Only a comprehensive and proactive approach to public diplomacy will allow Ukraine to maintain and strengthen its position in the international arena. All these activities should aim to increase public support for assistance to Ukraine, as well as the perception of Ukraine as an important and reliable partner and member of the European community.

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