



REPORT

RESILIENT UKRAINE – A DELICATE MOSAIC?

SOCIETY, MEDIA, SECURITY, AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

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NOVEMBER 2021

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Title: Resilient Ukraine – a Delicate Mosaic? Society, Media, Security, and Future Prospects
Authors: Teperik, Dmitri; Senkiv, Grigori; Dubov, Dmytro; Pokalchuk, Oleh; Miroshkin, Illia; Iliuk, Oksana; Apetyk, Anastasiia; Snihur, Larysa
Publication date: November 2021
Category: report

Photos used in the report:

Cover page: winter night in Mariupol (Shutterstock / Zamiatin)

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Page 60: Schoolboy with the Ukrainian flag on his first day at school, 1 September 2020 (Shutterstock / Zapylaieva Hanna)

Keywords: security, information, communication, media, society, resilience, vulnerability, Ukraine

Disclaimer: The research for this report was supported by the Development Cooperation Programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia. The views and opinions contained in this report are solely those of its authors and do not necessarily represent the official policy or position of the International Centre for Defence and Security, the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or any other organisation.

ISSN 2228-0529

ISBN 978-9916-9699-2-2 (print)

978-9916-9699-3-9 (pdf)

©International Centre for Defence and Security
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FOREWORD

When planning the next in-depth study of Ukraine's national resilience in 2019, we realised how far-reaching and multifaceted the problem of security in the spheres (communication, cognitive, information, and digital) chosen for analysis could be. Now we can say with confidence that the analytical picture obtained during two years of teamwork is not only unique and interesting but also useful for developing an understanding of the concept of the national resilience of Ukraine as a whole.

We were inspired by the belief that, despite the multiplicity of the components of national resilience, they are most visible and therefore better studied at the local and regional levels. In addition, we looked at places where there are significant social and political vulnerabilities, signs of socio-psychological tension, or significant prerequisites for events where a hostile influence employing a certain set of security risk factors could lead to social destabilisation.

Quoting Andrey Sheptytsky: 'The key to the transformation of Ukraine is in itself. It is difficult for us to change external circumstances, but in our will to change ourselves',¹ we cannot forget about one defining characteristic of resilience – adaptability. For this very reason, we focused mostly on the human component, since functional resilience begins with competent citizens: they are equipped with modern skills and knowledge, thanks to which they are aware of current threats, can adapt flexibly to a changing situation, and are able to effectively defend themselves from hostile influences at a personal level.

In our analytical study, we also addressed the community level, since the mosaic of national resilience consists of such elements as trust between different social groups and trust in institutions, as well as readiness for cooperation. Direct transparent interaction between civil society, the state, and the business sector is especially important in times of crisis when the system of values is under threat which, under external pressure, can be destroyed in a chain reaction or change entirely during internal socio-political cataclysms. We believe that it is the horizontal rather than vertical ties in a society that are mainly responsible for strengthening resilience.

Just as a body's immune system is helped by prophylactic measures, resilience is strengthened by routine prevention work against possible hazards. Therefore, we are sure that ignorance of our weaknesses or conscious ignoring of them, as well as forgetting mistakes made, cannot protect anyone – neither individual citizens, society, nor the state as a whole.

There is a saying that perfection is in the little things, and perfection itself is no trifle. National resilience – like a mosaic – is made up of many small parts. But resilience itself is no small matter!

Dmitri Teperik, on behalf of the ICDS analytical team

1 Natalia Bilian'ska, «[Андрей Шептицький — праведник світу \(до 155-річчя від дня народження\)](#)» [Andrei Sheptytsky - the righteous of the world (to the 155th anniversary of his birth)], Тернопільська обласна універсальна бібліотека [Ternopil regional library], last updated July 2020.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The successful conduct of any serious analytical research requires not only careful planning and management of various resources but also full cooperation and teamwork. The authors of the report express their appreciation and gratitude to all those colleagues who, both during the large-scale research period from 2018 to 2020 and during the preparation of this publication in 2021, shared their useful thoughts, valuable suggestions, and critical comments, and also helped in the collection, processing, analysis, and presentation of the data:

Tomas Jermalavičius, Alisa Pokrovskaya, Aleksandr Kardakov, Yuri Tsurko, Serhii Bozhenko, Yevhen Musiienko, Yuri Mironenko, Ivo Juurvee, Anto Veldre, Andrii Zahorodski, Volodymyr Pasika, Maria Podibaylo, Artem Dudchenko, Yevhen Onyshchuk, Artem Kostyuchenko, Athina Khadzhinova, Iryna Vorontsova, Iryna Salikhova, Natalia Frolova, Yaroslav Derkachenko, Yuri Lapaev, Ivan Kharchenko, Diana Ivannikova, Svetlana Ereshchenko, Iryna Slavova, Vitalii Yakushev, Alyona Raschupkina, Margarita Fedorenko, Alexandra Mikutskaya, Lorenzo Crippa, and David Lang.

Special words of gratitude go to all those citizens of Ukraine who voluntarily participated in numerous focus groups and in-depth interviews conducted as part of this analytical study.

The ICDS team greatly appreciates the support received from the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the framework of its Development Cooperation Programme. Part of the analytical work was also carried out with the support of the Open Information Partnership (UK).

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OLEH POKALCHUK

Oleh Pokalchuk is a well-known Ukrainian social and military psychologist, writer, publicist, and long-term advisor of leading Ukrainian politicians. He has worked in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. He is a board member of the Institute for Social and Economic Research (Kyiv, Ukraine) and the author of many scientific articles and methodological works on the topics of social fears, political leadership, and political elites. He is a leading expert of the Resilient Ukraine programme on the development of models for strengthening national resilience and psychological resistance to Russian aggression.

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Illia Miroshkin joined the team of Resilient Ukraine in 2018 as a coordinator and communication manager. He received a bachelor's degree in International Relations and Public Communication from Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University (Ukraine). His professional focus is the development and implementation of communication strategies for the social and public sectors. He also analyses the media's impact on internal processes in Ukrainian society.

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Oksana Iliuk is a communication specialist in the field of security and defence. She studies the informational and psychological impact of hostility and protection mechanisms. In Detector Media, a public organisation in the field of media and communication in Ukraine, she explores disinformation and manipulation, in particular on social media networks. She also develops tools for forming policies in the field of information and cognitive security based on Big Data. Together with the Estonian–Ukrainian team of the Resilient Ukraine programme, she works on measuring the resilience of society in terms of digital, information, and cognitive security.

ANASTASIIA APETYK

Anastasiia Apetyk is a lawyer and expert on information rights and digital security. Since 2017, at the Expert Centre for Human Rights (Kyiv, Ukraine), she has been researching security issues at the community level, problems of information and digital rights, data protection, and digital security. She advises on and develops training programmes in the field of digital rights and digital security for executive authorities and local government. She is co-founder of the public organisation MINZMIN where she directs the development of educational materials on digital security. She is the author of the first online course in Ukraine, Digital Rights and Child Safety. She is included in the *Forbes* Top 30 Under 30 rating in Ukraine.

LARYSA SNIHUR

Larysa Snihur is an expert of the Resilient Ukraine programme. She is a linguist specialising in the creation and analysis of texts of a persuasive and manipulative nature, as well as in linguistic expertise. Her research interests include the study of linguistic personality in the modern media space, linguistic and cultural concepts, and strategic communications.

GRIGORI SENKIV, 1983–2021

Grigori Senkiv was a public figure in the field of information security in Estonia, a co-founder and Director of the Estonian Centre for Security and Defence Awareness. He was engaged in applied educational projects aimed at raising awareness about security and defence among Russian-speaking youth in Estonia. As a recognised expert, he contributed to a number of analytical studies on the spread of disinformation in social networks in Estonia, the Baltic states, and Ukraine, analysed the attitudes of Russian-speaking residents of Estonia towards defence policy, and also studied the Ukrainian experience in countering modern hybrid threats.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AFU	Armed Forces of Ukraine
ATC	Amalgamated Territorial Community
ATO	Anti-Terrorist Operation
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
DPR	Donetsk People's Republic
EU	European Union
JFO	Joint Forces Operation
LPR	Luhansk People's Republic
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OCU	Orthodox Church of Ukraine
OK	<i>Odnoklassniki</i>
OPFL	Opposition Platform – For Life
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
SBU	Security Service of Ukraine [Служба безпеки України]
UOC MP	Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VK	<i>Vkontakte</i>
VPN	Virtual Private Network

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2014, after the occupation of the Crimea and part of the territories of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, Ukraine has remained the object of complex operations of influence from Russia. Effective protection from such operations is possible only if the various components of national resilience are fully explored, from regional media development to the readiness and ability of citizens to resist operations of such influence. Ukraine, like any other large country, is characterised by noticeable local specifics – significant regional differences, a number of which not only enrich the cultural and historical wealth of the nation but also have an impact (not always visible) on many social, political, and economic processes both at regional and state levels. Understanding this complexity, we should look for and develop sources of national resilience particularly in the regions.

This analytical report combines an overview of key legal documents that affect the topic of resilience; a description of the socio-political features of the south and east of Ukraine; and the results of an empirical study based on data from focus groups and in-depth expert interviews, as well as significant excerpts from the analysis of public user data and discussions on social networks. The conclusions and recommendations made reflect the main practical task of this report – to improve the understanding of stakeholders in Ukraine of the mosaic-like structure and non-linear dynamics of the development of national resilience, especially its individual components in the regional context. Thus, this report is an important starting point for further applied research, as well as for practical steps to take to strengthen the informational, digital, communication, and cognitive security of Ukraine.

For the purposes of determining the risks being studied, it is also important to understand that Ukraine as a state and Ukrainians as its citizens are characterised by completely different levels of vulnerability. Residents of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine feel that the state faces high levels of risk and, to avoid personal information vulnerability, they minimally identify themselves with the state, since most of them are deprived of practical tools of socio-political self-defence in the form of personal participation in nation-building. Within the socio-psychological situation studied in the south and east of Ukraine, a cross-section presented in the form of a mosaic of existing norms, customs, behavioural practices of the population, as well as macro- and micro-narratives in action. Thanks to this cross-section, a set of destructive factors existing in the conducive informational, social, and political environment of the south and east of Ukraine emerges.

The review of the key characteristics and indicators of socio-political and socio-psychological processes in the south and east of Ukraine indicates considerable diversity of this region but at the same time reveals significant differences from other macroregions of the country. Many characteristics of the south and east of Ukraine are justified by the multilayered and complex systemic processes rooted in the past. Nevertheless, the current socio-political and socio-psychological processes, events, and phenomena have a significant impact on the situation which, together with historical baggage, contribute to the diverse vulnerability of the south and east of Ukraine in terms of information, digital, communication, and cognitive security.

Based on the results of the analysis of data from focus groups and in-depth interviews, it can be concluded that the vulnerability of the regions of the south and east of Ukraine is created by a combination of several mutually reinforcing factors. They include the lack of adequate skills among

the population and officials to ensure, both in a broad and narrow sense, information, digital, communication, and cognitive security; widespread distrust and mental attitudes that hinder effective cooperation between the authorities, civil society, and the business sector; and a limited resource base, non-transparency of decisions, and corrupted financial flows. All of this is aimed more at maintaining the status quo in this macro-region, rather than at strengthening the resilience of communities.

Public discourse is worth mentioning separately. Despite the significant structural differences among social networks, it is possible to draw general comparative conclusions about resonant topics. Among the malicious narratives, it is necessary to highlight topics related to historical memory, discussion of Putin's activities, the situation in Russia, news of the so-called Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics (LPR/DPR), the USSR, and Soviet history. The toxicity of such topics is clearly manifested both on YouTube and on the VKontakte (VK) where some ideology-driven users operate, creating and distributing content with anti-Ukrainian rhetoric. The public segment of Instagram is also highly politicised regarding the domestic Ukrainian agenda. Thematically, much more diverse discussions are conducted mainly on Facebook where, in addition to the expected discussions about socio-political and economic problems, there are also hostile narratives. However, they are not presented directly and openly but rather disguised as part of one of the resonant topics.

Countering modern information, communication, cognitive, and cyberattacks requires comprehensive training, both technical, from the point of view of infrastructure, and expert-analytical. It is necessary to improve the understanding of the principles and mechanisms of conducting such attacks, to make a better and more regular analysis of threat indicators. This will help to improve the mechanisms of managerial decision-making at the national, regional, and local levels. It is important to introduce analytical and technical auditing of all means of communication everywhere, as well as to develop software that can quickly track changes in the multifactor monitoring and analysis system. In addition, it is necessary to ensure maximum protection from external malignant influences and consolidate the activities of government services, civil society, the business environment, and the media regarding interactive deployment of the practical tools of national resilience. This will help to neutralise the negative impact in the context of crises and conflicts.

The main recommendations of the report are to:

- Give a new impetus to the development and implementation of the culture of data-driven decisions (conducting analytical research before making informed, transparent decisions on the part of the legislative and executive authorities) and stimulate the culture of 'open data' for the formation of quality databases in public institutions.
- Replace abstract and theoretical educational activities with physical hubs and platforms of resilience where it is possible to discuss and develop security measures in different thematic areas intersectorally. It is also important to strengthen the development of various crisis scenarios with which to conduct regular civil exercises at the local and regional levels, so people will learn to interact and apply appropriate skills.
- Based on the constantly updated picture of situational threats, deploy monitoring systems at the local and regional levels to keep abreast of unwanted and malicious activity in the information, communication, and digital spaces in real time. This notification system will be beneficial to the governmental, commercial, and civic sectors.

- Rework the project format of short-term training courses for ‘experts for experts’ into new long-term formats for ‘expert for a wide range of users’: integrate fully fledged courses on functional, information, media, cognitive and communication literacy into formal (schools, colleges, universities), informal (youth centres, interest groups etc.) and professional training programmes for the development of critical thinking skills and psychological protection among different groups of the population.
- Create suitable conditions for the development of a balanced media environment: taking into account modern information and communication threats, the emergence of a powerful public independent broadcaster will set the tone for the professional qualification standards and contribute to the self-regulation of journalism.
- Encourage a new national sense-making and the creation of stable mental symbols which will require more active involvement from the new creative elite. Taking into account Ukraine’s cultural diversity, it is important to create several overlapping narrative realities that will be relatable exclusively to the residents of different individual regions but together will make up a modern Ukrainian macro-narrative.
- Stimulate the dissemination and use of the Ukrainian language to focus on high-quality products and the possibility of distributing content on various platforms, taking into account preferences based on age, and social and ethnic identity.
- When developing digital infrastructure in the regions, focus not only on the technical component but also to think carefully about the organisation of the work with data and resources, and to develop and apply a package of standards and regulations for the human component.

FREEDOM IS OUR RELIGION!

1939-1945
ПАМ'ЯТАЄМО
ПЕРЕМАГАЄМО

ба»
ні на Палісі,
нута в бою,
Заслуги.

УКРАЇНЦІ В ЛАВАХ
ОБ'ЄДНАНИХ НАЦІЙ
ПЕРЕМОГЛИ АГРЕСОРА

1939-1945
ПАМ'ЯТАЄМО
ПЕРЕМАГАЄМО



Василь Порик

Герой Радянського Союзу. Вік і номер його комплексу в Фінляндії
сформували цей портретний знімок. Погріблений і знову вбитий.
Що час швидко і його і був розстріляний.



INTRODUCTION

Since 2014, after the occupation of the Crimea and part of the territories of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, Ukraine has remained the object of complex operations of influence from Russia. All this time, these operations are distinguished by the varied and synergetic use of four dimensions of struggle: informational, cybernetic, communicative, and cognitive. The success of such operations is largely due not so much to the excellence of the Russian side but rather to its scrupulous study of the vulnerabilities of specific target groups – their habits, values, information (digital and media) literacy, the stability of cybersecurity systems, and others. Targeted attacks prepared based on these indicators can significantly destabilise the socio-political life both at national and regional levels. In many ways, the media landscape of the Ukrainian regions is unique. Regions can differ greatly from each other in terms of such indicators as trust/distrust in the same sources of information, the structure of media consumption in general, the ability to critically perceive information and not be manipulated, knowledge in the field of digital literacy or in general the level of awareness of cyberthreats.

Knowing these features and actively using them, the enemy can inflict carefully targeted strikes on Ukrainian society. Effective protection from such operations is possible only if the various components of national resilience are fully explored, from regional media development to the readiness and ability of citizens to resist operations of such influence. Informational and psychological attacks can be supplemented by cyberactivity at the regional level directed at critical infrastructure, the extraction of important information, or other uses of cyberspace against the interests of Ukraine and its citizens.

Ukraine, like any other large country, is characterised by noticeable local specifics – significant regional differences, a number of which not only enrich the cultural and historical wealth of the nation but also have an impact (not always visible) on various social, political, and economic processes both at regional and state levels. The stigmatisation of these features occurred mainly due to the fact that they have been actively and widely used in Ukraine by political technologists over the past 30 years in electoral and oligarchic-political projects. Moreover, many regional differences were presented exclusively through an ethnic-linguistic or even geopolitical prism and were assessed as a source of threats to the national security of Ukraine. Of course, first creating and then supporting such a cognitive construct, the oligarchs and their political technologists could not avoid that outcome at the time of the political crisis of 2013. Many articles and several books have already been written about the main prerequisites for this, as well as about which foundations were created for this and how, giving a broad retrospective

Ukraine, like any other large country, is characterised by noticeable local specifics. Sources of national resilience should be sought and developed in the regions

review. Moreover, Ukraine's recent experience of countering Russian aggression in 2014–2016 was succinctly conceptualised by Ukrainian and western analysts and can now be applied by other countries in various fields, including the involvement of volunteers in defence and security,² as well as the fight against disinformation at the level of the state, media, and civil society.³

2 Anna Bulakh, Grigori Senkiv, and Dmitri Teperik, *First on the Front Lines: The role of volunteers in countering Russia's military aggression against Ukraine* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, 2017).

3 Marina Pesenti and Peter Pomerantsev, *How to Stop Disinformation: Lessons from Ukraine for the wider world* (London: The Legatum Institute, 2016); Kateryna Kruk, *Analyzing the Ground Zero: What Western countries can learn from Ukrainian experience of combating Russian disinformation* (Kremlin Watch Report) (Prague: European Values Think-Tank, 2017).



Figure 1. Gaps in the national resilience of Ukraine

If regional specificities are still associated with security threats in the mass perception of information, then, from the point of view of this analytical study, a source of national resilience should be sought and developed in the regions. According to the conclusion of various experts, the Ukrainian nation has all the necessary prerequisites to form and develop resilience at different levels.⁴ At the same time, from the point of view of security, many vulnerabilities are universally found among all the regions of Ukraine: rampant corruption, public distrust of government institutions, a weakening civil society, economic dependence on monopolies, the activities of organised crime, the outflow of valuable personnel, managerial unprofessionalism in many areas, and more. Having conducted a large-scale study on the state of national resilience of Ukraine in 2017–2018,⁵ we came to some conclusions, among which it is important to note the following:

- To effectively fill in the gaps in national resilience, it is necessary to develop a unified dictionary of terms and apply an interdisciplinary and intersectoral approach both in describing the problems and in developing and implementing practical solutions.

- A number of critical vulnerabilities have been identified in the public sector (especially at the regional and local levels); they need to be eliminated, taking into account the best practices and recommendations developed by both the competent sections of civil society and the business sector.
- In the coming years, it will be necessary to focus on a noticeable improvement in the quality of human capital in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine, as building an understanding of the overall security situation and preparing and making timely quality management decisions depend on this.
- Under the right conditions, Ukraine's international partners can effectively contribute both to the successful adoption of their best practice in Ukraine and, together with Ukraine, to the joint development of new approaches to measuring and strengthening the components of national resilience at the regional and local levels.

4 Karina V. Korostelin, "National Resilience to Protracted Violence in Ukraine", *Peace and Conflict Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2020).

5 Dmitri Teperik, Tomas Jermalavičius, Grigori Senkiv, Dmytro Dubov, Yevhen Onyshchuk, Oleh Pokalchuk, and Mykhailo Samus, *A Route to National Resilience: Building Whole-of-Society Security in Ukraine* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, 2018).

This analytical report combines an overview of key legal documents affecting the topic of resilience; a description of the socio-political features of the south and east of Ukraine; and the results of an empirical study based on data from focus groups and in-depth expert interviews, as well as significant excerpts from the analysis of public user data and discussions on social networks. The conclusions and recommendations made reflect the main practical objective of the report – to improve the understanding among stakeholders in Ukraine of the mosaic-like structure and non-linear dynamics of national resilience, especially of its individual components in a regional context. Thus, this report is an important starting point for further applied research, as well as for practical steps to take to strengthen informational, digital, communication, and cognitive security.

In the National Security Strategy of Ukraine from 2020, resilience is established as one of the fundamental principles of security

1. THE LEGAL BASIS OF THE RESILIENCE COMPONENTS

In the National Security Strategy of Ukraine from 2020, resilience is established as one of the fundamental principles of security. It is defined as the ability of society and the state to quickly adapt to changes in the security environment and maintain the sustainable functioning of the state, in particular by minimising external and internal vulnerabilities.⁶ Ukraine is also developing a mechanism to form and coordinate a holistic functional system that will ensure national security and resilience. One of its principles is the effective interaction of state institutions and civil society.⁷

6 Президент України [President of Ukraine], «Указ Президента України про рішення Ради національної безпеки і оборони України від 14 вересня 2020 року «Про Стратегію національної безпеки України»» [Decree of the President of Ukraine on the Decision of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine, dated 14 September 2020, 'On the National Security Strategy of Ukraine'], No. 392/2020, Kyiv, 14 September 2020.

7 Ольга Резнікова, Костянтин Войтовський та Андрій Лепіхов, «Щодо координації діяльності з розбудови національної стійкості (стратегічний рівень)» [On the Coordination of Activities for the Development of National Persistence (Strategic Level)], Analytical Note, National Security Series, No. 9, Центр безпекових досліджень, Національний інститут стратегічних досліджень [Centre of Security Studies, National Institute of Strategic Studies], 2020.

The concept of 'resilience' in the above meaning began to be used in strategic documents in Ukraine in 2015. For example, elements of resilience can be seen in the Government's Priority Action Plan 2016, where the word 'resilience' is used nine times. The document

envisages the creation of a Trust Fund for Financing Activities, Projects, and Programmes for the Restoration and Development of Peace. This refers directly to 'ensuring social stability, the development of peace and public security.' In the government's plan for 2020, the word 'resilience' is used four times with clear reference to the concept itself.⁸ Within the framework of the first goal, 'Way to Europe', there is a separate item dedicated to building national resilience: 'The government aims to create a national system of resilience, identifying the topics for ensuring the resilience of the state body responsible for implementing state policy in the field of protection and prevention of threats of all kinds.' It also speaks of strengthening the ability of society to effectively resist and quickly recover in the event of any crisis or emergency situation; and about forming an effective mechanism that will include the stages of risk assessment, planning, exercises, agreed protocols for responding to a crisis situation, and recovery to the initial state.

The concept of resilience is often described in various strategic Ukrainian documents, without directly naming it. For example, the State Strategy of Regional Development 2015–2020 defined the importance of interaction, horizontal communications, and interdepartmental cooperation.⁹ This document also contains theses about the importance of understanding risks and working with them: 'A timely and adequate response to

8 Кабінет Міністрів України [Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine], «Розпорядження про затвердження плану пріоритетних дій Уряду на 2020 рік» [Order on the Approval of the Government's Priority Action Plan for 2020], No. 1133-p, Kyiv, 9 September 2020.

9 Кабінет Міністрів України [Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine], «Розпорядження про затвердження Державної стратегії регіонального розвитку на період до 2020 року» [Order on the Approval of the State Strategy of Regional Development for the Period up to 2020], No. 385, Kyiv, 6 August 2014.

negative trends in socio-economic development and overcoming potential threats is a necessary condition for creating new opportunities for the development of the regions and improving living standards.’ Nevertheless, in this and other strategic Ukrainian documents, the word ‘resilience’ is often used without reference to a specific concept, but rather as an adjective in the meaning of ‘stable.’

Referring to article 17 of the Constitution of Ukraine,¹⁰ it can be argued that information security has been an integral part of the overall national security system of Ukraine since 1996. Cybersecurity is mentioned in the first National Security Strategy of Ukraine in 2007,¹¹ and this field was integrated into national security in 2017 after the adoption of the law on the basics of cybersecurity.¹² The Law on National Security adopted in 2018 defined one of the basic principles of state policy in the field of national security as ‘ensuring the military, foreign policy, state, economic, information, environmental security, cybersecurity of Ukraine...’.¹³ However, in Ukrainian practice (since 2015), information security and cybersecurity are gradually being divided into two independent areas. The first is more related to the general issues of information development and information security of the individual and society, while the second is the security of information systems and cyberspace as a whole.

The following are among the current threats to national security as identified in Ukraine’s strategic documents:

- information and psychological war, the formation by the Russian mass media of an alternative distorted information picture of the world;

10 Верховна Рада України [Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine], «[Конституція України](#)» [Constitution of Ukraine], *Відомості Верховної Ради* [News of the Verkhovna Rada], No. 30 (1996): 141.

11 Президент України [President of Ukraine], «[Указ Президента України про Стратегію національної безпеки України](#)» [Decree of the President of Ukraine on the National Security Strategy of Ukraine], No. 105/2007, Kyiv, 12 February 2017.

12 Верховна Рада України [Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine], «[Закон України про основні засади забезпечення кібербезпеки України](#)» [The Law of Ukraine on the Basic Principles of Ensuring the Cybersecurity of Ukraine], *Відомості Верховної Ради* [News of the Verkhovna Rada], No. 45 (2017): 403.

13 Верховна Рада України [Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine], «[Закон України про національну безпеку України](#)» [The Law of Ukraine on the National Security of Ukraine], *Відомості Верховної Ради* [News of the Verkhovna Rada], No. 31 (2018): 241.

- the absence of a holistic communication policy of the state and an insufficient level of media culture in society;
- vulnerability of critical infrastructural and public information resources to cyberattacks.

Ukraine’s Information Security Doctrine, adopted in 2017, further elaborated the notion of information threats. The document emphasises that the national interests in the information sphere include:

- protection of people from damaging informational and psychological influences;
- protection of Ukrainian society from the aggressive informational influence of the Russian Federation;
- development of the media culture within society and a socially responsible media community;
- development and protection of the national information infrastructure.¹⁴

Similarly to the Information Security Doctrine, from 2016, the goals and tasks in the field of cybersecurity are defined in another relevant document – the Cybersecurity Strategy of Ukraine.¹⁵ Among the priorities for the development of cybersecurity (in addition to a wide range of tasks related to the planned development of the sector), it is important to note the significance of:

- involvement of the expert potential of scientific organisations, professional and public associations in the preparation of draft conceptual documents in the field of cybersecurity;

14 Президент України [President of Ukraine], «[Указ Президента України про рішення Ради національної безпеки і оборони України від 29 грудня 2016 року «Про Доктрину інформаційної безпеки України»](#)» [Decree of the President of Ukraine on the Decision of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine of 29 December 2016, ‘On the Information Security Doctrine of Ukraine’], No. 47/2017, Kyiv, 25 February 2017.

15 Президент України [President of Ukraine], «[Указ Президента України про рішення Ради національної безпеки і оборони України від 27 січня 2016 року «Про Стратегію кібербезпеки України»](#)» [Decree of the President of Ukraine on the Decision of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine of 29 December 2016, ‘On the Cybersecurity Strategy of Ukraine’], [No. 96/2016, Kyiv, 15 March 2016](#).

- increasing the digital literacy of citizens and the culture of safe use of cyberspace, comprehensive knowledge and the skills necessary to support the goals of cybersecurity, and the introduction of public and private projects to raise public awareness about cyberthreats and cyberdefence. In the law of Ukraine On the Foundation of Ensuring the Cybersecurity of Ukraine, this task is directly assigned to the sphere of public-private partnership (interaction).

In the autumn of 2020, the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine initiated the development of a new cybersecurity strategy for the country,¹⁶ and leading experts in this field made a number of valuable suggestions on how to eliminate the shortcomings of the previous document.¹⁷ Deep analytical work has also begun in Ukraine to create a regulatory framework to ensure the resilience of the regions and territorial communities from the point of view of crisis management and the civil security system.¹⁸

Information security has been an integral part of the overall national security system of Ukraine since 1996

At the level of strategic documents, the issues of 'digital literacy' are reflected in the Digital Agenda of Ukraine 2020, adopted in 2016.¹⁹

- 16 Рада національної безпеки і оборони України [National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine], «[Робоча група при НКЦК РНБО України схвалила проєкт Стратегії кібербезпеки України](#)» [The Working Group under the National Cybersecurity Coordination Centre of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine approved the draft Cybersecurity Strategy of Ukraine], news, 4 March 2021; «[В СНБО після вчорашніх хакерських атак почали розробляти Стратегію кібербезпеки України](#)» [After yesterday's hacker attacks, the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine began developing a Cybersecurity Strategy for Ukraine], УНІАН [UNIAN], 24 September 2020.
- 17 Дмитро Дубов, «[Формуючи нову стратегію кібербезпеки України: чи можемо уникнути помилок першої спроби стратегування?](#)» [Forming a new Cybersecurity Strategy for Ukraine: Can we avoid the mistakes of the first attempt at strategising?], Центр безпекових досліджень, Національний інститут стратегічних досліджень [Centre for Security Studies, National Institute for Strategic Studies], n.d..
- 18 Ольга Резнікова, Костянтин Войтовський та Андрій Лепіков, [Організація системи забезпечення національної стійкості на регіональному і місцевому рівнях](#) [Organisation of a system for ensuring national sustainability at the regional and local levels] (Kyiv: Національний інститут стратегічних досліджень [National Institute for Strategic Studies], 2021).
- 19 Степан Кубів, Олена Мініч та Андрій Бірюков, ред. [Цифрова агенда України – 2020: Концептуальні засади](#) [Digital Agenda

Furthermore, in 2017, the country adopted the concept Development of the Digital Economy in Ukraine until 2020 and an action plan for its implementation.²⁰ Also, in the Cybersecurity Strategy of Ukraine, as one of the priorities in the sphere of ensuring a reliable, stable, and secure cyberspace, 'strengthening the digital literacy of citizens and a culture of safe behaviour in cyberspace' is highlighted.²¹ It is worth noting that in 2020, Ukraine began to formulate a National Strategy for the Protection of Children in the digital environment for 2021–2026. It identifies as priorities the development of digital skills and ensuring the online security of the younger generation of Ukrainian citizens.²²

On 27 September 2021, all these scattered state policies regarding national resilience were consolidated when the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine approved The Concept of National Resilience System's Development which establishes 'the goal, main principles, directions, mechanisms and implementation timelines' for building a system of national resilience.²³

The concept modifies the scope of resilience set in the National Security Strategy of 2021 by re-labelling it as 'national resilience' and defining it as the 'ability of the state and society to effectively withstand threats of any nature and character, adapt to changes in the security environment, sustain their stable functioning, and quickly regain the desired balance after crises'.²⁴ Compared to the earlier definition, there is a clear tilt of

- of Ukraine – 2020: Conceptual principles] (Kyiv: ГО «ХайТек Офіс Україна» [Hi-Tech Office Ukraine], 2016).
- 20 Кабінет Міністрів України [Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine], «[Розпорядження про схвалення Концепції розвитку цифрової економіки та суспільства України на 2018–2020 роки та затвердження плану заходів щодо її реалізації](#)» [Order on the Approval of the Concept of Development of the Digital Economy and Society of Ukraine for 2018–2020 and the Approval of the Action Plan for its Implementation], No. 67-p, Kyiv, 7 January 2018.
- 21 Президент України [President of Ukraine], «[Указ Президента України «Про Стратегію кібербезпеки України»](#)» [Decree of the President of Ukraine 'On the Cybersecurity Strategy of Ukraine'].
- 22 Міністерство та Комітет цифрової трансформації України [Ministry and Committee for Digital Transformation of Ukraine], «[Національна стратегія захисту дітей в цифровому середовищі на 2021–2026 роки \(проєкт\)](#)» [National Strategy for the Protection of Children in the Digital Environment for 2021–2026 (draft)], 24 January 2020.
- 23 Президент України [President of Ukraine], «[Указ Президента України про рішення Ради національної безпеки і оборони України від 20 серпня 2021 року «Про запровадження національної системи стійкості»](#)» [Decree of the President of Ukraine on the decision of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine of 20 August 2021, 'On the development of national resilience system'], No. 479/2021, Kyiv, 27 September 2021.
- 24 Ibid.

the concept in the direction of the state as the main organising framework: the state is now designated as the primary point of reference in the updated approach. There is also a shift in emphasis: if the earlier approach sought to minimise external and internal vulnerabilities, the new approach refers to some unspecified 'desired balance' while omitting the issue of addressing various vulnerabilities.

Deep analytical work has also begun in Ukraine to create a regulatory framework to ensure the resilience of the regions and territorial communities from the point of view of crisis management and the civil security system

The concept also introduces the notion of the 'subjects of national resilience' which does not refer to individual citizens, instead, it specifies the lowest level of sought involvement as being civic associations. At the moment, it is difficult to ascertain how justified this approach is, but it can be argued that excluding citizens who do not belong to legally registered entities puts a question mark over the potential role of volunteer movements and self-organised yet formally not registered civic groups in developing national resilience.

The concept identifies several domains which contribute to the system of national resilience. These include cybersecurity (although just in terms of critical infrastructure protection) and 'societal resilience to informational influence' (however, the notion of 'societal resilience' is not elaborated). The remaining objectives primarily focus on the state, its institutions and governance mechanisms, without paying much attention to the role and tasks of citizens in the processes of national resilience.

In addition to approving this new concept, the Council also called upon the Government of Ukraine to establish a centre of advanced studies of national resilience as a

governmental body for the 'informational and analytical support to the functioning of the systems of national resilience'.²⁵

Through such political framework documents, a wide range of actions are planned and are being implemented into everyday life, the purpose of which is to strengthen national resilience, partly by raising awareness of existing vulnerabilities. Understanding the complexity of Ukraine's security challenges, we sought to continue analysing the gaps in national resilience, based on previous research.²⁶

2. METHODOLOGY

Based on the results of the previous analytical study on gaps in the national resilience of Ukraine, we decided to focus on the gap in the field of communication in 2019 and 2020. Closing this gap requires attention and joint efforts not only from the state and civil society of Ukraine but also from its international partners. Thus, the main task of this study was an in-depth analysis and consideration of the elements of this gap through the prism of security.

To better define and measure the communication gap, it was decided to identify four functional areas of security that are closely related to each other. In this study, **digital security** refers to cyber technologies and related skills, software, and infrastructure. **Information security** includes the media sphere, information transmission channels, mass media, and their technical platforms. **Communication** and **cognitive security** pertain to value orientations, meanings, the content of narratives, memes and info-viruses, psychological and emotional components, as well as symbols.

Taking into account the initial focus of the programme Resilient Ukraine on the development of human capital, the

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Teperik et al, *A Route to National Resilience*.

methodology employed in this study was divided into several stages. The first stage is a detailed overview of the key available indicators. Their combined analysis provides a general idea of the state of national resilience in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine. In its content, this analysis is first and foremost an analytical introduction for the planning and conduct of more accurate measurements and comprehensive research in the regions under consideration.

The second stage is a detailed description of the socio-political and socio-psychological picture of the south and east of Ukraine. To this end, various quantitative indicators were collected from a variety of open sources that characterise the political activity of the population, their attitude to the state, mental attitudes, self-identification, geopolitical orientation, perception of security threats, media consumption, as well as attitude to local prospects and the quality of governance.

We decided to focus on the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine to collect and describe available quantitative and qualitative indicators of various socio-political and media processes in these regions as a precursor to developing a general index of resilience – a task left for future endeavours. This approach does not pretend to be inclusive: it focuses more on the digital, information, communication and cognitive aspects of national resilience in the regions studied. It was easier to collect the necessary data about those aspects due to the intensity of the socio-political processes which allow for more pronounced manifestations of certain reactions on the part of society and citizens to be recorded. In addition, expert assessments of the consequences of certain decisions and events in these regions are more plentiful, so they are more accessible.

We decided to focus on the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine to collect and describe available quantitative and qualitative indicators of various socio-political and media processes in these regions

Data collection over a certain period (spring–autumn 2019)²⁷ and the subsequent analysis and further monitoring (2020 – early 2021)²⁸ allowed the team to track changes in some significant characteristics, as well as to better understand the parameters of measuring social reality through the prism of the socio-political reality and processes prevailing in the country at the end of 2020. It is also important to remember the fact that from the spring of 2019 to the spring of 2020, Ukraine experienced a significant increase, then a noticeable drop in estimates of the level of welfare and consumer attitude.²⁹ Sociologists pay attention to the polarisation of the population of the most radical regions of Ukraine and their alienation from the current course of government.³⁰

Second, we collected and analysed an array of empirical data to identify vulnerabilities and how they are perceived by the population. That was necessary to predict future challenges in communication, cognitive, information, and digital security at the regional level in the south and east of Ukraine. We, in an effort to define the local characteristics of the existing vulnerabilities, suggested that such vulnerabilities and future challenges

are often associated with the level of general awareness of security threats, the presence (or absence) of professional competencies, the use (or non-use) of specific skills, as well as the types of information consumption and behaviour among target groups.

27 The period of active political campaigns in Ukraine related to the elections of the President and the Verkhovna Rada.

28 The period of evaluating the actions of the new government of Ukraine, the consequences of the coronavirus epidemic, and local government elections in Ukraine.

29 «Індекс споживчих настроїв у вересні 2020 року стабільний і становить 71,6» [The Consumer Attitude Index in September 2020 is stable at 71.6], Info Sapiens, 20 October 2020.

30 Виктор Щербина, «Украина во мгле: социологический взгляд» [Ukraine in the mist: a sociological view], Strategic Group Sofia, November 2020.

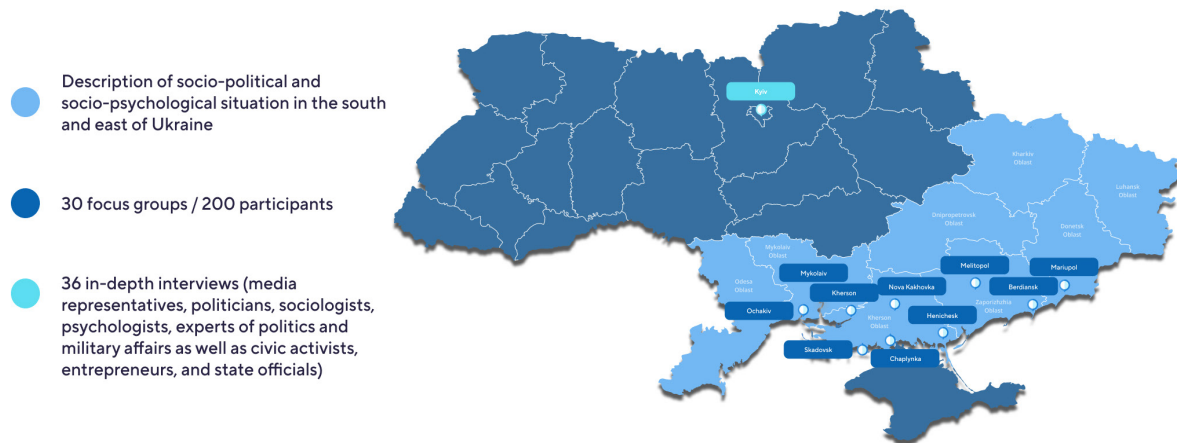


Figure 2. Geographical coverage of the regions studied in Ukraine

Data collection and analysis included focus groups, a series of in-depth interviews to obtain expert assessments, three analytical workshops, as well as the analysis of public information from social networks in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine. In the spring of 2019, 30 methodologically balanced focus groups were conducted with 200 participants in 10 cities and towns: Mariupol, Berdyansk, Melitopol, Kherson, Mykolaiv, Ochakiv, Skadovsk, Chaplynka, Henichesk, and Nova Kakhovka.³¹ Consequently, it was possible to cover the target region widely: within the framework of the questionnaire, residents of the region answered 20 open thematic questions about the perception of security threats and various factors affecting the communication, cognitive, information, and digital components of Ukraine’s national resilience.

At the next stage, in the summer to autumn of 2019, we conducted a series of 36 in-depth interviews in Kyiv with recognised experts: media experts, political scientists, sociologists, social psychologists, security and defence experts, as well as with official representatives of both the state, public, and private sectors in Ukraine. We asked each of them 15 open questions (through the prism

of communicational, cognitive, informational, and digital security) about professional competencies, specific skills, and types of information behaviour among the population of the vulnerable regions of the south and east of Ukraine. Expert assessments obtained from in-depth interviews help to identify and explain in more detail the problems, events, and phenomena described by the focus group participants.

To understand the essence and dynamics of information flows in the virtual environment, we took an analytical cross-section of publicly available information from users’ social networks and identified some patterns of distribution of ideologically charged and political information.³² That helped to better illustrate some of the challenges associated with ensuring information security in Ukraine.

Summing up all the data, we made generalised analytical conclusions and several recommendations that would help reduce the communication gap in the national resilience of Ukraine, that is, make its population, institutions, and ongoing system processes less vulnerable to informational, communicational, cognitive, and cybernetic attacks both in the physical and digital space.

31 The following were invited to the regional focus groups: 1) representatives of relevant departments and services (communication, public relations, IT, security, social protection etc.) of regional administrations and local (self-)administrations (city councils, amalgamated territorial communities) at various levels in the south and east of Ukraine; 2) representatives of key local media and communications groups (journalists, media experts, bloggers, public figures, Internet service providers, cyberpolice, specialised civil organisations, CIMIC, social psychologists and other relevant experts); 3) representatives of local vulnerable groups (internally displaced persons; national minorities; religious communities; radical ideological, political, or social movements, those unemployed and receiving benefits etc.).

32 Such information included public records (posts, comments, descriptions of photos and videos etc.) pre-filtered automatically from spam and containing keywords on socio-political and historical-political topics.

3. KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SOUTH AND EAST OF UKRAINE

Within the framework of this study, we did not go into the cultural and historical background,³³ geographical features, or economic specifics (for example, the traditional export orientation of the agricultural or industrial complex to Russia) of the south and east of Ukraine.³⁴ From the point of view of national resilience, these areas should be considered as several overlapping and partly interdependent dimensions. Each of them can be characterised by the following processes and phenomena:

1. political activity and attitude to the state (including issues of trust in the authorities and assessment of the current situation);
2. cognitive picture of the world and civil self-identification (including mental attitudes, religion, language, ethnicity, patriotism, historical memory, and others);
3. geopolitical orientation and perception of security threats (including attitude to Russia, the European Union, NATO, the war in the Donbas, and vision of threats and dangers);
4. media landscape and media consumption (including the media situation in the region, information vulnerabilities of the population etc.);
5. development prospects and quality of management and governance (including decentralisation and transparency of decisions).

33 Tadeusz A. Olszański, *A Quarter-Century of Independent Ukraine: Dimensions of Transformation* (OSW Studies Number 64) (Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, 2017).
 34 In this section of the analysis, the conditional south and east of Ukraine includes the Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk, Mykolaiv, Odesa, and Kherson regions. The authors of the study are aware of the problems of regionalisation of Ukraine and the use of certain geographical names for malicious purposes (see: «В ВСУ указали на термины, рекомендуемые для описания войны на Донбассе в СМИ» [The Armed Forces of Ukraine pointed out the terms recommended for describing the war in the Donbas in the media], *Интерфакс-Украина* [Interfax-Ukraine], 6 January 2021).

This list is a conditional and limited selection made for the practical application of the results of this study and the sake of describing the region analysed from the point of view of informational, digital, communicational, and cognitive security as of 2019–2020. This list is not complete. For a more comprehensive measurement of the state of national resilience at different levels, experts should complement and revise this list based on empirically

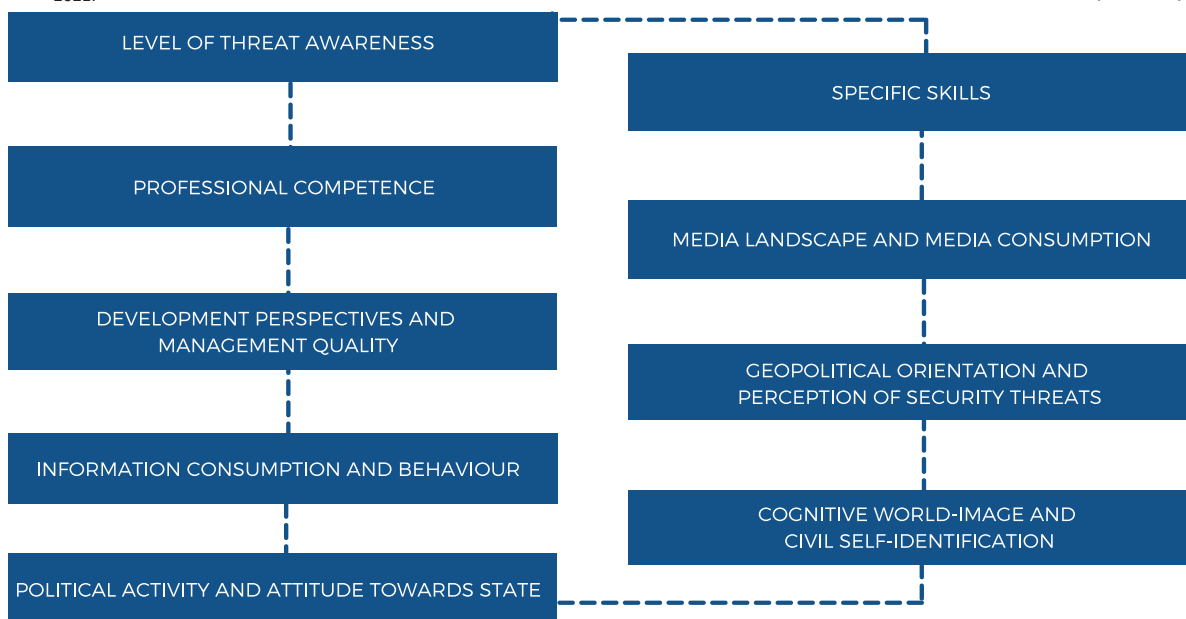


Figure 3. Example of descriptive characteristics of national resilience

proven methods.³⁵ It should also be noted that many other sociological indicators of the ongoing socio-economic processes of 2018–2020 do not record a statistically significant difference in the results for the conditional macroregions of Ukraine.³⁶ We consider the south and east of Ukraine from the point of view of various factors affecting the level of national resilience while taking into account the following possible consequences thereof:

1. sharply focusing on southern and eastern Ukraine should help, without any direct or indirect stereotyping, to better understand the needs and interests of the residents of the region as well as to reduce various personal, procedural, and organisational vulnerabilities associated with informational, digital, communicational, and cognitive security;
2. the fear of aggressive external or internal forces should not affect the way in which the knowledge acquired about the problem points of national resilience will be used. On the contrary, this knowledge should help to strengthen intersectoral cooperation and underpin a systematic approach to the development of components of national resilience at the local and regional levels.

- 35 Сергей Дембицкий, «Независимая Украина в геополитическом дискурсе: вехи и акценты» [Independent Ukraine in the geopolitical discourse: milestones and emphases], *Вісник НТУУ «КПІ»* [Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute of Visnyk National Technical University of Ukraine], *Політологія. Соціологія. Право* [Politology. Sociology. Law], Issue 1/2 (33/34) (2017): 107–119.
- 36 Ольга Балакірева та Дмитро Дмитрук, «Соціально-економічні настрої населення України: травень – червень 2020 року» [Socio-economic attitudes of the population of Ukraine: May–June 2020], *Український соціум* [Ukrainian Society], No. 2 (73) (2020): 152–171; Ольга Балакірева та Дмитро Дмитрук, «Динаміка соціально-економічних оцінок і очікувань населення України наприкінці 2019 р.» [Dynamics of socio-economic assessments and expectations of the population of Ukraine at the end of 2019], *Український соціум* [Ukrainian Sotsium], No 4 (71) (2019): 133–145; Ольга Балакірева та Дмитро Дмитрук, «Динаміка соціально-економічних оцінок і очікувань населення України наприкінці 2018 р.» [Dynamics of socio-economic assessments and expectations of the population of Ukraine at the end of 2018], *Український соціум* [Ukrainian Sotsium], No. 1 (68) (2018): 105–124.

3.1. POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND ATTITUDES TO THE STATE

It is noteworthy that political preferences in these regions and in other regions of Ukraine differ markedly. In general, over the past 15 years, electoral polarisation has formed in Ukraine, in which the preferences of residents of the southern and eastern regions of the country occupy one pole.³⁷ Taking into account the results of the first round of the presidential elections in 2019,³⁸ the results of the parliamentary elections in 2019,³⁹ as well as the results of the local government elections in 2020,⁴⁰ the residents of the south and east of Ukraine (and especially the unoccupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions next to the temporarily occupied parts of those regions, as well as areas adjacent to the administrative border with the Autonomous Republic of Crimea)⁴¹ are much more inclined than residents of other regions of Ukraine to support political forces that openly pursue a pro-Russian agenda. The average cumulative percentage of electoral support for those forces in 2019 varied from 20% in the Kherson region, 21% in Mykolaiv, 25% in Zaporizhia, 28% in Odesa, to 49% in Donetsk, and 51% in the

37 Андрій Горбаль, Андрій Процюк та Євген Бударцакий, «Вони голосують як країна: громади-флюгери і електоральна поляризація» [They vote like a country: weathervane communities and electoral polarisation], *Український центр суспільних даних* [Ukrainian Centre for Social Data], 24 February 2021.

38 «Election Viz – Україна: вибори президента 2019 – загальний результат» [Election viz – Ukraine: presidential election 2019 – overall result], *декодер*, last updated 23 April 2019.

39 «Election Viz – Україна: парламентські вибори 2019 – загальний результат» [Election viz – Ukraine: parliamentary elections 2019 – overall result], *декодер*, last updated 26 July 2019.

40 «Місцеві вибори 25.10.2020: Обрані депутати місцевих рад» [Local elections 25 October 2020: deputies of local councils were elected], *Центральна виборча комісія* [Central Election Commission], last accessed 9 June 2021.

41 «Вибори Народних депутатів України. Результати: Підсумки у регіонах України – Донецька область» [Elections of People's Deputies of Ukraine. Results: results in the regions of Ukraine – Donetsk Region], *Центральна виборча комісія* [Central Election Commission], last updated 21 July 2019; «Вибори Народних депутатів України. Результати: Підсумки у регіонах України – Луганська область» [Elections of People's Deputies of Ukraine. Results: results in the regions of Ukraine – Luhansk Region], *Центральна виборча комісія* [Central Election Commission], last updated 21 July 2019; «Вибори Народних депутатів України. Результати: Підсумки у регіонах України – Запорізька область» [Elections of People's Deputies of Ukraine. Results: results in the regions of Ukraine – Zaporizhzhia Region], *Центральна виборча комісія* [Central Election Commission], last updated 21 July 2019; «Вибори Народних депутатів України. Результати: Підсумки у регіонах України – Херсонська область» [Elections of People's Deputies of Ukraine. Results: results in the regions of Ukraine – Kherson Region], *Центральна виборча комісія* [Central Election Commission], last updated 21 July 2019; «Вибори Народних депутатів України. Результати: Підсумки у регіонах України – Миколаївська область» [Elections of People's Deputies of Ukraine. Results: results in the regions of Ukraine – Mykolaiv Region], *Центральна виборча комісія* [Central Election Commission], last updated 21 July 2019.

Luhansk region, while the national average is about 13%. As of January 2021, support for the political force Opposition Platform – For Life

Political preferences in these regions and in other regions of Ukraine differ markedly. Electoral activity of residents of the south and east of Ukraine is on average lower than in other regions of the country

(OPFL, Yu. Boyko, V. Medvedchuk, V. Rabinovich) in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine reached a record high,⁴² and residents of that region on average supported the adoption of the law on the All-Ukrainian referendum (by over 62%).⁴³ Yet, the electoral activity of residents of the south and east of Ukraine is on average lower than in other regions of the country.⁴⁴ On the one hand, this suggests a certain political indifference of the majority of residents of this macro-region (more than 60% themselves admit their political passivity).⁴⁵ On the other hand, it contributes to the noticeable success of those political parties and their representatives who, having taken first or second place in the elections, receive a legitimate platform for the introduction and dissemination of pro-Russian views and beliefs. And this finds a solid response in certain organised social groups of residents of the south and east of Ukraine, the number of which is several times more than is theoretically necessary to foment attitudes

- 42 Центр «Соціальний моніторинг» [Centre 'Social Monitoring'], «Моніторинг громадської думки населення України: січень 2021 року (оновлено)» [Monitoring of public opinion of the population of Ukraine: January 2021 (updated)], news, 1 February 2021.
- 43 The law was initiated by the President of Ukraine to give the people the right to solve state issues independently and directly, without the participation of politicians. The adoption of this policy was one of the points from Volodymyr Zelensky's presidential programme. See more: Офіс Президента України [Office of the President of Ukraine], «Владимир Зеленский подписал закон о всеукраинском референдуме» [Volodymyr Zelensky signed the law on the all-Ukrainian referendum], news, 8 April 2021; Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» [Sociological Group 'Rating'], «Суспільно-політичні настрої населення (2-3 лютого)» [Socio-political attitudes of the population (2–3 February)], research, 4 February 2021
- 44 Андрій Процюк та Андрій Горбаль, «Історична явка (2010-2019)» [Historical turnout (2010–2019)], Український центр суспільних даних [Ukrainian Centre for Social Data], 30 November 2020; Анастасія Рокитна, «Місцеві вибори: явка виборців склала майже 37%» [Local elections: voter turnout was almost 37%], РБК-Україна [RBC Ukraine], 26 October 2020; Дмитро Джулай, «Явка на виборах в Раду стала найнижчою в історії – інфографіка» [Turnout in the parliamentary elections was the lowest in history – infographic], Радіо Свобода [Radio Freedom], 22 July 2019.
- 45 Оксана Міхєєва, Євген Вілінський, Євген Глібовицький та Софія Олійник, *Безпека людини: оцінка та очікування мешканців та мешканок чотирьох областей України* [Human security: assessment and expectations of residents of four regions of Ukraine] (Kyiv: Фонд ім. Гайнріха Бюлля [Heinrich Boell Foundation], 2020).

of protest and radical change.⁴⁶ The level of readiness of the population of the south and east of Ukraine to participate in protest actions is estimated by sociologists as average for the country.⁴⁷

3.1.1. DISTRUST OF THE STATE

It is also important to measure and understand citizens' confidence in the government and public institutions if national resilience is to be described. In addition, it is necessary to monitor their assessment of the current activities of the state and the general situation in the country. In 2019, about 42% of the residents of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine believed that events in the country were developing in the right direction. That indicator was significantly lower than in other conditional macroregions or in the country as a whole (51%).⁴⁸ However, already in 2021, more than 76% of the population of the region shared the opinion that things in Ukraine were going in the wrong direction.⁴⁹ At the

In 2021, more than 76% of the population of the region shared the opinion that things in Ukraine were going in the wrong direction

same time, about 27% of residents of the south and 40% of the east of Ukraine believe that during the years of independence of the country as a whole, there were more negative events than positive ones. More than 55% in the south and east of the country assessed the situation in Ukraine as tense, critical, and explosive. In this regard, the lowest indicators of the index of state subjectivity of Ukraine

- 46 David Robson, «The '3.5% rule': How a small minority can change the world», *BBC Future*, 14 May 2019.
- 47 Ольга Червонюхін, «Готовність українців до участі в акції соціального протесту, грудень 2020» [Readiness of Ukrainians to participate in social protest actions, December 2020], Київський міжнародний інститут соціології [Kyiv International Institute of Sociology], press release 28 January 2021.
- 48 Фонд «Демократичні ініціативи» ім. Ілька Кучеріва [Ilko Kucheriv Foundation 'Democratic Initiatives'], «Громадська думка України на 28-му році незалежності держави» [Public opinion of Ukraine on the 28th anniversary of independence of the state], survey, 22 August 2019.
- 49 Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» [Sociological Group 'Rating'], «Суспільно-політичні настрої» [Socio-political attitudes].

are observed in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine,⁵⁰ the majority of the residents of which consider their state mainly independent in its actions and decisions.⁵¹

3.1.2. DISSATISFACTION WITH THE AUTHORITIES

The level of trust in various institutions of government in Ukraine (the President, Verkhovna Rada, Cabinet of Ministers) fell during 2019 and 2020.⁵² This is due to high expectations and subsequent disappointments in the policies and actions of President Volodymyr Zelensky and his Servant of the

The level of optimism among residents of the south and east of Ukraine was on average lower than among citizens of other macroregions

People party. Residents of the south and east of Ukraine especially expected an improvement in the situation in the spring of 2019.⁵³ There, unlike in other regions, it was believed that the first and most important step of the new government should be direct negotiations in the quad Ukraine-Russia-DPR-LPR for a ceasefire and the return of the Donbas. It is noteworthy that about 61% of residents of the southern regions and 55% of residents of the eastern regions shared the opinion that a strong leader is more important for Ukraine

than a democratic system.⁵⁴ Residents of the south and east of Ukraine as a whole tended to blame the president of the country for the increase in communal tariffs more often than others.⁵⁵ It is significant that with a binary choice of priorities, more than 63% preferred economic welfare to democracy.⁵⁶ The level of optimism among residents of the south and east of Ukraine was on average lower than among citizens of other macroregions.⁵⁷ The index of social cohesion and reconciliation of Ukraine also indicated a number of pain points in the southern and eastern regions of the country.⁵⁸

At the same time, it is important to understand that every citizen of Ukraine, although all living in the same country, each exists in their own special reality, constructed cognitively and communicatively by various negative or positive feelings and personal perceptions of certain processes and events. In general, the situation in the south and east of the country is characterised by distrust and dissatisfaction with the authorities, yet there is no noticeable evidence of any signs of oppression of society by the state. Most likely, the root of the problem lies in other factors. Many residents of this region of Ukraine somehow remain hostages of a combination of factors and circumstances that hinders development beyond the oligarchic-proletarian model, historical and cultural heritage, and an idealised Soviet mentality with the corresponding behavioural patterns and worldview.⁵⁹

50 A summary sociological index of 15 positions, according to which a conclusion is made about the respondents' opinions about the independence of Ukraine in decision-making, for example, internal political problems, external political, economic, cultural ones etc.

51 Пётр Йодченко, «Свободные изнутри, но не снаружи: результаты онлайн-опроса Института социологии НАН Украины» [Free from the inside, but not from the outside: results of an online survey of the Institute of Sociology, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine], *Йод.Медиа* [Iod.Media], 10 August 2020.

52 Разумков Центр [Razumkov Centre], «Оцінка громадянами діяльності влади, рівень довіри до соціальних інститутів та політиків, електоральні орієнтації громадян (лютий 2020р. соціологія)» [Citizens' assessment of the government's activities, the level of trust in social institutions and politicians, electoral orientations of citizens (February 2020, sociology)], research, 24 February 2020.

53 Український інститут соціальних досліджень імені Олександра Яременка [Ukrainian Olexandr Yaremenko Institute of Social Research], Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» [Sociological Group 'Rating'] & Центр «Соціальний Моніторинг» [Centre 'Social Monitoring'], «Україна сьогодні: виклики та перспективи» [Ukraine today: challenges and prospects], presentation, May 2019.

54 Київський міжнародний інститут соціології [Kyiv International Institute of Sociology], «Суспільно-політичні орієнтації населення України: квітень 2020 року» [Socio-political orientations of the population of Ukraine: April 2020], press release, 4 June 2020.

55 Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» [Sociological Group 'Rating'], «Суспільно-політичні настрої» [Socio-political attitudes].

56 Center for Insights in Survey Research & Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» [Sociological Group 'Rating'], «П'яте всеукраїнське муніципальне опитування, 6 вересня – 10 жовтня 2019» [The fifth all-Ukrainian municipal survey, 6 September – 10 October 2019], presentation, 9 December 2019.

57 Фонд «Демократичні ініціативи» імені Ілька Кучеріва [Ilko Kucheriv Foundation 'Democratic Initiatives'], Центр Разумкова [Razumkov Centre] & Київський міжнародний інститут соціології [Kyiv International Institute of Sociology], «Підсумки-2019: громадська думка» [Results-2019: public opinion], n.d..

58 USAID Office of Transition Initiatives, «2018 Ukraine Social Cohesion & Reconciliation Index (SCORE)», n.d..

59 Olexandr Kramar, «Break out of the vicious circle,» *The Ukrainian Week*, 11 December 2019; Максим Віхров, «Еволюція совка» [Evolution of Soviet mentality], *Тиждень* [The Ukrainian Week], 4 September 2019.

3.2. COGNITIVE WORLDVIEW AND CIVIC SELF-IDENTIFICATION

Taking into account the recent deterioration in political and economic contradictions, regional differences in the mentality of residents of the south and east of Ukraine should be noted. First of all, this refers to the immutability of values, inflexibility of beliefs, strong and stable self-identification, uncritical submission to government, and a high demonstration of religiosity.⁶⁰ A special difference in key-value characteristics (stereotypes, social well-being, interpersonal trust, economic values, corruption, ethical values, and norms) of the

Herewith, other citizens do not always perceive them in a friendly way, and this topic itself often becomes a source of conflict.⁶⁴ Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine also corrects some aspects of the self-identity of the country's citizens.⁶⁵ Among these aspects, there are several discourse clusters with the mythological dominants 'enemy', 'victim', and 'other.'⁶⁶ As noted, the territories of the south and east of Ukraine are considered in the cultural and historical plane as a kind of border between ethnic Ukraine and Russia, the influence of which is felt to the greatest extent in this region.⁶⁷

3.2.1. RELIGIOUS FACTOR

Younger generation stands out against the background of their peers from other regions with greater unhappiness, dissatisfaction with life, and pessimism

residents of the southern and eastern regions is noted by researchers studying the civil identity of Ukrainians.⁶¹ In particular, they pay attention to the younger generation which stands out against the background of their peers from other regions with greater unhappiness, dissatisfaction with life, and pessimism.⁶² It is important to remember that the southern and eastern regions account for about 77% of all officially registered internally displaced persons, the total number of whom in Ukraine in 2020 was more than 1.4 million people.⁶³

It is noteworthy that about 37% of residents of the south and east of Ukraine recognise the importance of religion for themselves, but more than 65% believe that a person can simply be a believer and not profess any particular religion. The latter differs from the indicators of other macroregions and the national average (59%).⁶⁸ Considering that the religious attitudes and church practices of residents of the south and east of Ukraine differ markedly,

Considering that the religious attitudes and church practices of residents of the south and east of Ukraine differ markedly, this topic can most likely be used to deepen an ideological split between different social groups

60 Анна Пилипенко и Наталия Литвиненко, «Украинская ментальность в координатах исследовательской программы Г. Хофстеда» [Ukrainian mentality in the coordinates of the G. Hofstede research programme], *Економічний вісник* [Economic Bulletin], No. 2 (2015): 9–19.

61 *Основні засади та шляхи формування спільної ідентичності громадян України: Інформаційно-аналітичні матеріали до Круглого столу 12 квітня 2017 р.* [Basic principles and methods by which Ukrainian citizens form a common identity: information and analytical materials for the roundtable discussion on 12 April 2017] (Kyiv: Центр Разумкова [Razumkov Centre], 2017).

62 Катерина Зарембо, ред., *Українське покоління Z: цінності і орієнтири* [Ukrainian generation Z: values and guidelines] (Kyiv: Фонда им. Фридриха Эберта [Friedrich Ebert Stiftung] & Центр «Новая Европа» [Centre 'New Europe'], 2017).

63 Міністерство з питань реінтеграції тимчасово окупованих територій України [Ministry for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine], «Кількість зареєстрованих впо станом на 13 квітня 2020 р.» [The number of registered IDPs as of 13 April 2020], news, n.d.

64 Lauren Van Metre, Steven E. Steiner, and Melinda Haring, «Ukraine's Internally Displaced Persons Hold a Key to Peace», Issue Brief, Atlantic Council Dinu Patriciu Eurasia Center, October 2017.

65 Gwendolyn Sasse and Alice Lackner, «War and State-Making in Ukraine: Forging a Civic Identity from Below?», *Ideology and Politics*, No. 1(12) (2019): 75–98.

66 Юлия Вышницкая, «Координата «национальная идентичность» в современной украинской публицистике: дискурсные кластеры» [The coordinate 'national identity' in modern Ukrainian journalism: discourse clusters], *Wladza sqdzenia* [The Power to Judge], Vol. 8 (2016): 125–135.

67 Anna Fournier, «From Frozen Conflict to Mobile Boundary: Youth Perceptions of Territoriality in War-Time Ukraine», *East European Politics & Societies*, Volume 32 Issue 1 (2018): 23–55.

68 *Держава і Церква в Україні-2019: Підсумки Року і Перспективи Розвитку Відносин* [The state and the church in Ukraine – 2019: results of the year and prospects for the development of relations] (Kyiv: Центр Разумкова [Razumkov Centre], 2019).

this topic can most likely be used to deepen an ideological split between different social groups and, as a result, for a weakening of the national resilience of Ukraine. Thus, about 44% of residents of the southern and eastern regions believe that obtaining a *Tomos* – a decree by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople that officially recognised and established the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and granted it autocephaly (self-governorship) – was a mistake and divided Ukrainians belonging to different faiths (on average, 33% in the country), and only 18% believe that this was a necessary and important step towards asserting the Ukrainian statehood (overall, 39% in the country).⁶⁹

3.2.2. THE FACTOR OF THE SOVIET HERITAGE

About 78% of Ukrainian citizens in the southern and eastern regions consider themselves patriots. This is slightly lower than in other macroregions and the overall indicator for the whole of Ukraine (83%).⁷⁰ Furthermore, about 22% of residents of the south and east of the country do not support the declaration of independence of Ukraine, that is, presumably, they hold a strong nostalgia for Soviet times. The level of distribution of such nostalgia is

About 78% of Ukrainian citizens in the southern and eastern regions consider themselves patriots

stable in the south (over 70%) and in the east (over 55%) of Ukraine.⁷¹ Almost half of the population of the south and east of Ukraine regrets the breakup of the Soviet Union and about the same number believe that Ukraine's time in the USSR was relatively beneficial, compared to the national average of 33% and

35% respectively.⁷² The researchers emphasise that residents of the southern and eastern macroregions, older people, citizens with a low level of education, and economically disadvantaged people associate themselves more with the 'Soviet man.' Accordingly, 62% of residents of the southern regions and only 51% of residents of the eastern regions chose the self-identification 'a citizen of Ukraine.' The variants 'just a person' and 'a resident of their region' are also on average more popular among residents of the south and east of Ukraine than in other regions or in the country overall.⁷³

It should be noted that regional and local identity and self-identification are becoming stronger in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine. In addition, some groups of the population have a 'Soviet / post-Soviet' identity, while in other regions and on average in the country, national-civil identity prevails.⁷⁴ The researchers note the persistence of the 'Soviet / post-Soviet' identity in the regions of Ukraine under study.⁷⁵ Although different identities may overlap and complement each other, in the case of residents of the south and east of Ukraine, it is possible to rather talk about the exclusivity of self-determination, in which both the native language and the language of everyday communication,⁷⁶ as well as active communication in a virtual environment, play an important role.⁷⁷ The so-called language issue became more acute in Ukraine in 2012 and has remained on the political agenda to this day.⁷⁸ In January 2021, a new law came into force in Ukraine regulating the use of Ukrainian

69 Антон Грушецький, Наталія Лигачова, Галина Петренко, *Джерела інформації, медіаграмотність і російська пропаганда: результати всеукраїнського опитування громадської думки* [Sources of information, media literacy, and Russian propaganda: results of the national survey of public opinion] (Kyiv: Детектор медіа [Detector Media], 2019).

70 Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» [Sociological Group 'Rating'], *«Динаміка патріотичних настроїв українців: серпень 2019»* [Dynamics of patriotic attitudes of Ukrainians: August 2019], research, 21 August 2019.

71 USAID & Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development, *«Ностальгія за радянським союзом (UASCORE 2016–2018)»* [Nostalgia for the Soviet Union (UASCORE 2016–2018)], presentation, n.d..

72 Антон Грушецький & Володимир Паніотто, *«Оцінка радянського минулого: травень 2020 року»* [Assessment of the Soviet past: May 2020], Київський міжнародний інститут соціології [Kyiv International Institute of Sociology], press release, 22 June 2020.

73 Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» [Sociological Group 'Rating'], *«Динаміка патріотичних настроїв українців»* [Dynamics of patriotic attitudes of Ukrainians], presentation, August 2019.

74 Алексей Ляшенко, *«Самоідентифікація населення України: обшче и отличное»* [Self-identification of the population of Ukraine: general and different], Research & Branding Group, 20 August 2020.

75 Simon Schlegel, *«The Resilience of Soviet Ethnicity Concepts in a Post-Soviet Society: Studying the Narratives and Techniques that Maintain Ethnic Boundaries»* *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 35 (1) (2017).

76 Volodymyr Kulyk, *«One Nation, Two Languages? National Identity and Language Policy in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine»*, PONARS Eurasia, 29 September 2015.

77 Volodymyr Kulyk, *«Українська мова в інтернеті: Торгівля, нерухомість, розваги - тут все російською»* [Ukrainian language on the Internet: trade, realty, entertainment – everything is in Russian here], *Тиждень* [The Ukrainian Week], 13 December 2016.

78 Лариса Масенко, *«Мовний конфлікт в Україні: шляхи розв'язання»* [The language conflict in Ukraine: ways to resolve it], *Українська мова* [Ukrainian Language], No. 2 (2018): 20–35.

as the state language in various spheres of activity which again provoked belligerent discussions on the topic of language policy.⁷⁹ About half of the residents of the south and east of Ukraine do not support this development.⁸⁰

3.2.3. INTERWEAVING OF LANGUAGE, ETHNICITY, AND PATRIOTISM

On average, about 80% of residents of the south and east of Ukraine use Russian in daily communication, a little more than 30% consider both languages as native (among internally displaced persons – 65%). More than 60% support the idea of equal time for studying Ukrainian and Russian languages in Ukrainian schools, in contrast to about 30% in the country at large.⁸¹ A large number of analytical materials have been published about the painful sensitivity of the language issue in Ukraine. Their main conclusions point out the considerable ability of this topic to incite conflict and to the possibility of using groups of Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine in a politically motivated escalation of ethnolinguistic and ethnocultural conflict.⁸² Aggressive actions against Ukraine were presented in a similar way during the events of 2013–2014 and the subsequent war which, rather, had a polarising effect on the re-formation of a multifaceted and unifying identity in Ukraine.⁸³

It is important to remember that in the regional context, among the residents of the southern and eastern regions, the smallest segment are those who consider the Ukrainian language an important attribute of the country's independence.⁸⁴ For most people in the south and east of Ukraine, the strengthening of Ukrainian civic identity does not worsen their attitude to the Russian language.⁸⁵ They also do not see a strong correlation between the language dilemma and loyalty to Ukraine.⁸⁶ Strict ethnocentricity in terms of investing the national identity in the national language may prevent the cohesion of Ukrainian society in the future.⁸⁷ It is noteworthy that 50% of residents aged 18–30 years from the southern and eastern regions do not think of themselves in national and ethnical categories.⁸⁸ It is in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine that the Soviet identity is particularly acutely

For most people in the south and east of Ukraine, the strengthening of Ukrainian civic identity does not worsen their attitude to the Russian language

confronted with the pro-European one, dividing society more deeply than the issue of which language is used.⁸⁹ Given the rather blurred civil identity, analysts attach much lower importance to ethnic and linguistic affiliation in the conflict than to the core worldview of the population.⁹⁰ The motley picture of

79 Дар'я Бережна, «Тільки мова, тільки хардкор: як Мережа реагує на перехід сфери послуг на українську мову» [Only language, only hardcore: how the net reacts to the transition of the service sector to the Ukrainian language], Фокус [Focus], 16 January 2021.

80 Антон Грушецький, «Рівень довіри до політиків, електоральний рейтинг і ставлення до окремих ініціатив / подій: січень 2021 року» [The level of trust in politicians, electoral rating, and attitude to individual initiatives / events: January 2021], Київський міжнародний інститут соціології [Kyiv International Institute of Sociology], press release, 2 February 2021.

81 Київський міжнародний інститут соціології [Kyiv International Institute of Sociology], «Мнєння и взгляды населения относительно преподавания русского языка в украиноязычных школах и предоставление неподконтрольным территориям Донбасса автономии в составе Украины: март 2019» [Opinions and views of the population regarding the teaching of the Russian language in Ukrainian-speaking schools and the granting of autonomy to the uncontrolled territories of Donbass as part of Ukraine: March 2019], press release, 15 March 2019.

82 *Вопросы идентичности русскоязычных граждан Украины в контексте вооруженного конфликта на востоке страны* [Issues of the identity of Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine in the context of the armed conflict in the east of the country] (Kyiv: International Alert & Украинский независимый центр политических исследований [Ukrainian Independent Centre for Political Research], 2017); Erika Harris, "What is the Role of Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Russia-Ukraine Crisis?," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 72 Issue 4 (2020): 593–613.

83 Pavlo Hai-Nyzhnyk, ed., *Aggression of the Russian Federation Against Ukraine: Ethnonational Dimension and Civilizational Confrontation* (Saarbrücken: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2018); Gwendolyn Sasse and Alice Lackner, "War and Identity: The Case of the Donbas in Ukraine," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 34, Issue 2-3 (2018): 139–157;

Iryna Matviyishyn, "How Russia weaponizes the language issue in Ukraine," *Ukraine Alert*, Atlantic Council, 25 June 2020.

84 Фонд «Демократичні ініціативи» ім. Ілька Кучеріва [Ilko Kucheriv Foundation 'Democratic Initiatives'], «Патріотизм, мова та зовнішньополітичні пріоритети – громадська думка України» [Patriotism, language, and foreign policy priorities – public opinion in Ukraine], survey, 21 January 2020.

85 Kulyk, "One Nation, Two Languages?"

86 Nadiia Bureiko and Teodor Lucian Moga, "The Ukrainian-Russian Linguistic Dyad and its Impact on National Identity in Ukraine," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 71, Issue 1 (2019): 137–155.

87 Elżbieta Olzacka, "Understanding the Conflict in Eastern Ukraine: The Role of Cultural Context," Jagiellonian University, n. d..

88 Оксана Міхеєва, *Вийти з тіні: Вплив політики (не)визнання фактів із життя людей з неподконтрольних Україні територій Луганської та Донецької областей на чоловічі та жіночі ролі у повсякденному житті* [Come out of the shadow: the influence of politics of (non-)recognition of facts from the lives of people from the uncontrolled territories of the Luhansk and Donetsk Regions by Ukraine on male and female roles in everyday life] (ПАКС [PAX], 2019).

89 Michael Gentile, "Diaboliical Suggestions: Disinformation and the Curious Scale of Nationalism in Ukrainian Geopolitical Fault-line Cities," *Geopolitics* (2020).

90 Valery Dzutsati, "Geographies of hybrid war: rebellion and foreign intervention in Ukraine," *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 32, Issue 3 (2021): 441–468.

intertwining conflicting beliefs is clearly visible in the example of Mariupol: a significant part of its residents in fact remains carriers and distributors of Soviet and post-Soviet values.⁹¹

It is also noted that the majority of residents of the south and east of Ukraine pay no attention to national-patriotic education, in its official version. The lowest percentage of those who are ready to take up arms to defend the country is also recorded here.⁹² People have neither formed respect for state symbols nor an internal desire to honour them. Public national-patriotic organisations are almost non-existent in this region,⁹³ and Ukrainian ethno-folklore traditions are extremely unpopular.⁹⁴

About 20% of schoolchildren from the eastern and 25% from the southern regions said that they did not remember anything about the Revolution of Dignity (whereas in other regions of the country, that figure did not exceed 10%). This event is supported today by an average of about 16% of schoolchildren in the south and east of Ukraine, while in other regions by at least twice as many. If more than 81% of schoolchildren in the central and western regions of Ukraine consider the people who died on the Maidan heroes, then the corresponding figure is 59% in the south and 50% in the east.⁹⁵ These and

other evaluative judgments of learners in grades 6–11 from the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine about the Revolution of Dignity indicate the problems of values-based education of the younger generation in these regions of the country. It also indicates that the consumption of distorted information directly affects the formation of beliefs and attitudes to significant events of the present.

3.2.4. THE ROLE OF HISTORICAL MEMORY IN THE WORLD PICTURE

The issue of historical memory is also related to both mentality (through ideological reference points and values)⁹⁶ and self-identification (the memory of a place in local and regional identity). Over the past 30 years, the historical policy in Ukraine has been repeatedly reviewed, partly in favour of specific political interests.⁹⁷ It can be said that there are bipolar mental and ideological attitudes of residents

Ukrainian citizens in different regions still perceive historical events and interpretations of their consequences in extremely different ways, often in diametric opposition

of the south and east of Ukraine,⁹⁸ and this factor is also important from the point of view of disinformation and manipulative influence exerted by Russia on Ukraine and other European countries.⁹⁹ That is why it is viewed

91 Майкл Джентайл, «[«Слон» у Маріуполі: які геополітичні настрої панують у місті](#)» [The 'elephant' in Mariupol: what geopolitical attitudes prevail in the city], *Вокс Україна* [Vox Ukraine], 23 November 2020. This includes paternalism, but also an extremely low sense of social responsibility and a reorientation to shamelessly selfish consumerism.

92 Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» [Sociological Group 'Rating'], «[До дня захисника України](#)» [To the Defender's Day of Ukraine], research, 14 October 2020.

93 [Результати експертно-аналітичного дослідження щодо формування стандартів національно-патріотичного виховання та визначення індикаторів ефективності проведення заходів щодо національно-патріотичного виховання](#) [Results of an expert and analytical study on the formation of standards of national-patriotic education and the determination of indicators of the effectiveness of measures for national-patriotic education] (Kyiv: Міністерство молоді та спорту України [Ministry of Youth and Sport of Ukraine], 2017).

94 Жанна Петрочко, «[Суспільно-державницькі цінності як аксіологічна основа сучасного соціального виховання в Україні](#)» [Public-state values as an axiological basis of modern social education in Ukraine], *Серія 11. Соціальна робота. Соціальна педагогіка* [Series 11. Social work. Social pedagogy], Issue 24 (Vol. 2) (2018): 124–132.

95 Національний меморіальний комплекс Героїв Небесної Сотні – Музей Революції Гідності [National Memorial to the Heavenly Hundred Heroes - Revolution of Dignity Museum], «[Революція Гідності очима школярів. Представлено результати](#)

[соціологічного дослідження](#)» [The Revolution of Dignity through the eyes of schoolchildren. The results of a sociological study are presented], news, 17 February 2021.

96 Володимир Бабка, [Історична пам'ять як фактор політичного впливу в незалежній Україні](#) [Historical memory as a factor of political influence in independent Ukraine] (Nizhyn: Ніжинський державний університет імені Миколи Гоголя [Mykola Gogol State University of Nizhyn], 2016).

97 Дмитро Мешков, «Історическая политика в Украине после 2014» [Historical politics in Ukraine after 2014], in [Громадянське виховання та демократизація в країнах Східного партнерства](#) (том 1698) [Civic education and democratisation in the Eastern Partnership countries (Vol 1698)], ed. Дитер Зерерт (Вопн: Федеральний центр громадянського виховання [Federal Agency for Civic Education], 2016), 161–171.

98 Олена Любовець, «[Національна пам'ять в Україні: регіональний аспект](#)» [National memory in Ukraine: a regional aspect], *Національна та історична пам'ять* [National and Historical Memory], Issue 6 (2013): 117–125.

99 Група з аналізу гібридних загроз «[Як Кремль використовує "м'яку силу" для гібридного впливу: кейс Росії в Україні](#)» [How the Kremlin uses 'soft power' for hybrid influence: the case of Rosstrudnichestvo in Ukraine], *Український кризовий медіа-центр* [Ukraine Crisis Media Centre], 9 September 2020.

through the prism of national security,¹⁰⁰ since Ukrainian citizens in different regions still perceive historical events and interpretations of their consequences in extremely different ways, often in diametric opposition.¹⁰¹ Undoubtedly, this creates the grounds for conflict, including from the point of view of ethnic minorities,¹⁰² since the positions and beliefs of residents of the south and east of Ukraine and residents of the western and central regions differ sharply on many issues of principle importance for them.¹⁰³ Regional differences are also observed in behavioural patterns associated with ideological events (for example, the commemoration of the victims of the Famine-Genocide, the celebration of 9 May as Victory Day in the Great Patriotic War,¹⁰⁴ the preservation and restoration of relevant monuments etc.).¹⁰⁵ It should not be forgotten that Russia uses many issues of historical memory in ideologised and politicised disinformation campaigns within the framework of the so-called ‘memory wars’ and historical propaganda aimed at rewriting history through various narratives.¹⁰⁶ In 2013–2014, instrumentalising a distorted memory of the Great Patriotic War helped the Kremlin to mobilise a lot of resources on the information front of its

aggression,¹⁰⁷ and people in different regions of Ukraine began to rethink many symbols and contentious themes related to this war.¹⁰⁸

The acceptance of national memory is much slower and weaker in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine than in other regions of the country, and many issues of decommunisation are perceived here as part of an imposed de-russification

According to many indicators, the acceptance of national memory is much slower and weaker in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine than in other regions of the country,¹⁰⁹ and many issues of decommunisation are perceived here as part of an imposed de-russification.¹¹⁰ It is worth noting that many territories of southern and eastern Ukraine, as well as historical events that took place there, were widely used in Soviet ideological mythology. The consequences of this still affect the attitudes of the residents of the region.¹¹¹ The local toponymy of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine still contains many Soviet or direct historically Russian names.¹¹² About 22% of residents of the south and east support the official prohibition of communist symbols in Ukraine (42% are against it), while more than 50% are against renaming communist toponyms.¹¹³ In comparison with other regions, the following opinions are more likely to be

100 Василь Яблонський та інші, [Політика історичної пам'яті в контексті національної безпеки України](#) [The policy of historical memory in the context of the national security of Ukraine] (Kyiv: Національний інститут стратегічних досліджень [National Institute for Strategic Studies], 2019).

101 Олена Максименко, «Війна за пам'ять: Як українцям посилити власну ідентичність? Погляд збоку» [The war for memory. how can Ukrainians strengthen their own identity? An outsider's point of view], Національний меморіальний комплекс Героїв Небесної Сотні – Музей Революції Гідності [National Memorial to the Heavenly Hundred Heroes - Revolution of Dignity Museum], 25 March 2020.

102 Iryna Brunova-Kalissetska, «Instrumentalisation of History or Inclusive Narrative? Regional Policies and Ethnic Memories in Ukraine», *Euxeinos*, Vol. 10, No. 29 (2020): 82–93.

103 Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» [Sociological Group 'Rating'], «Українці про історію, культуру та польсько-українські відносини» [Ukrainians about history, culture, and Polish-Ukrainian relations], research, 1 June 2017; Олена Кривичка, [Демаркаційні лінії в етнополітичному просторі України](#) [Demarcation lines in the ethno-political space of Ukraine] (Kyiv: Національна академія наук України [National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine], 2015).

104 Фонд «Демократичні ініціативи» імені Ілька Кучеріва [Ilko Kucheriv Foundation 'Democratic Initiatives'], «День Перемоги і його місце в історичній пам'яті українців» [Victory Day and its place in the historical memory of Ukrainians], survey, 5 May 2020.

105 Anna Chebotarova, «Memory and Military Conflict: Politics of History and its Societal Perception in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine», *Euxeinos*, Vol. 10, No. 29 (2020): 115–127.

106 Julie Fedor, Markku Kangaspuro, Jussi Lassila, and Tatiana Zhurzhenko, eds., *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Ярослав Тинченко, «Порожні п'єдестали» [Empty pedestals], *Тижень* [The Ukrainian Week], 3 July 2019; Volodymyr Yermolenko, ed., [Re-Vision of History: Russian Historical Propaganda and Ukraine](#) (Kyiv : K.I.S., 2019).

107 Alexandr Osipian, «Historical Myths, Enemy Images, and Regional Identity in the Donbass Insurgency (Spring 2014)», *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society*, No. 1 (2015): 109–140.

108 Oksana Danylenko, «Symbols, Meanings, and Conflicts: How the Interpretation of History Influences Contemporary Events in Ukraine», in [Engaging Crimea and Beyond: Perspectives on Conflict, Cooperation and Civil Society Development \(Global Dialogues 1\)](#), ed. David Carment and Milana Nikolko (Duisburg: Käte Hamburger Kolleg / Centre for Global Cooperation Research, 2015), 29–33.

109 Tomasz Stryjek, Joanna Konieczna-Salamatin i Kamila Zacharuk, [Українці о історії, культурі і стосунках польсько-українських](#) [Ukrainians on history, culture and Polish-Ukrainian relations] (Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2017).

110 Ksenia Maksimovtsova, [Language Conflicts in Contemporary Estonia, Latvia, and Ukraine: A Comparative Exploration of Discourses in Post-Soviet Russian-Language Digital Media](#) (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2019).

111 Максим Віхров, «У тіні міфологем», *Тижень* [The Ukrainian Week], 18 February 2021.

112 Юлія Дукач, «На чію честь названі вулиці України?» [In whose honour are the streets of Ukraine named?], [Тексти.org.ua](#) [Texty.org.ua], 6 November 2018.

113 Фонд «Демократичні ініціативи» імені Ілька Кучеріва [Ilko Kucheriv Foundation 'Democratic Initiatives'], «Шостий рік декомунізації: підсумки та прогнози» [The sixth year of decommunisation: results and forecasts], n.d..

shared in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine: the Russian language is a historical heritage of Ukraine that needs to be developed; 9 May is the Victory Day of the Soviet People in the Great Patriotic War; in order to achieve peace in the Donbas, it is necessary to negotiate with Russia and representatives of the so-called DPR/LPR; and radicals and nationalists are causing the collapse of the country and do not understand how to manage it.¹¹⁴

It is noteworthy that the regional self-consciousness of the residents of Ukraine, their connection with civil identity, and their foreign policy orientations are being thoroughly studied not only in Ukraine but also in Russia. Moreover, Russian researchers state that, in the absence of clear political worldviews, regional aspects of Ukrainian identity appear to be an important factor that significantly influences Ukraine's foreign policy.¹¹⁵ Of course, the complexity of the challenges that hinder the building of Ukraine's national identity and political nationhood was analysed long before the 2014 military conflict and continued during it.¹¹⁶ Since the Soviet heritage was officially labelled as alien and hostile, this creates a conflict for the part of the population for which the Soviet identity remains an important component of their self-consciousness. Their pro-Russian world understanding is now considered by the pro-Ukrainian mainstream as 'everyday separatism.'¹¹⁷ And in response, this mainstream receives the reproach that the substance of Ukrainian national identity is conservatism and xenophobia.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless,

some evidence of nationalist radicalisation in Ukrainian society was particularly noticeable in the period from 2014 to 2017.¹¹⁹ At the same time, the topic of Russian-speaking patriotism in Ukraine deserves special attention and more in-depth study.¹²⁰ The Kremlin's use of the Russian language and culture as an instrument of war leads to expected consequences: fellow citizens adhering strictly to the idea of ethnocentric self-determination view such phenomena through the prism of security and treat Russian-speaking patriots accordingly.

3.3. GEOPOLITICAL ORIENTATION AND PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY THREATS

There are clear regional differences in the issues of Ukraine's foreign policy orientation: there are more supporters of the pro-Western direction of the country's movement in the west and in the centre of the country, and more opponents in the south and east. On average, 37% of residents of the south and east of Ukraine are against the country's accession to the European Union (whereas, the average for the whole of Ukraine is 22%). They mostly support the idea of equidistance from Russia and the West or have a pro-Russian orientation. Compared to other macroregions of Ukraine, the share of the so-called Eurosceptics is significantly higher in the southern and eastern regions of the country,¹²¹ where negative assessments also prevail of the Association Agreement and Free Trade Zone between Ukraine and the European Union that concluded in 2014.¹²² And although the majority of residents of the eastern regions of Ukraine are not supporters of European integration, experts believe that this topic alone is not capable of causing public opposition

114 Київський міжнародний інститут соціології [Kyiv International Institute of Sociology], «Суспільно-політичні орієнтації» [Socio-political orientations]; Фонд «Демократичні ініціативи» [Foundation 'Democratic Initiatives'], «День Перемоги» [Victory Day].

115 Вадим Шнейдер, *Региональные аспекты украинской идентичности в контексте внешнеполитического выбора Украины в начале XXI века* [Regional aspects of Ukrainian identity in the context of Ukraine's foreign policy choice at the beginning of the 21st Century] (Moscow: Российский государственный гуманитарный университет [Russian State University for the Humanities], 2018).

116 Елена Грицай и Милана Николко, *Украина: национальная идентичность в зеркале Другого* [Ukraine: national identity in the mirror of another] (Vilnius: ЕГУ [EHU], 2009); Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilczewska and Richard Sakwa, eds., *Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives* (Bristol: E-International Relations, 2015).

117 Артемий Плеханов, «Разрушение пространства советского символического господства в постсоветской Украине» [Destruction of the space of Soviet symbolic domination in post-Soviet Ukraine], *Политическая наука* [Political Science], No. 3 (2018): 190–216.

118 Александр Дегтярев, «Национальная идентичность и перспективы украинской государственности» [National identity and prospects of Ukrainian statehood], *Научные Ведомости (Серия Философия. Социология. Право)* [Scientific Bulletin (Series Philosophy. Sociology. Law)], No. 24 (245), Issue 3 (2016): 71–76.

119 Volodymyr Ishchenko, "Nationalist Radicalization Trends in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine," Policy Memo: 529, PONARS Eurasia, May 2018.

120 Taras Kuzio, "Russian-Speaking Patriotism in Ukraine: Under-Researched and Misunderstood, Part II," NYU Jordan Center for the Advanced Study of Russia, 11 February 2021.

121 *Українське суспільство та європейські цінності* [Ukrainian society and European values] (Kyiv: Інститут Горшеніна [Gorshenin Institute] & Фонд імені Фрідріха Еберта в Україні та Білорусі [Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Ukraine and Belarus], n.d.).

122 Український інститут соціальних досліджень [Ukrainian Institute of Social Research] et al, «Україна сьогодні» [Ukraine today].

or protests,¹²³ but they note that the electorate of the OPFL, which prevails in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine, is much more anti-Western and anti-European in particular than pro-Russian in its geopolitical attitudes.¹²⁴ The situation is different with NATO: 45% of residents of the southern and 58% of the eastern regions are against Ukraine's membership in the alliance (compared to 30% for the country as a whole).¹²⁵ Most of the opponents of joining NATO are older residents (without higher education, with less income, living outside regional centres). It is noteworthy that, in the opinion of about 35% of residents of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine, NATO is associated with Soviet or Russian labels (an aggressive military bloc created to contain

There are more supporters of the pro-Western direction of the country's movement in the west and in the centre of the country, and more opponents in the south and east

the Soviet Union and Russia).¹²⁶ On average, more than 41% of the population of the south and east of Ukraine supports the non-aligned status of the country (in contrast to 26% for the country as a whole).¹²⁷ The image of indefinite balancing and a bridge between two global forces of the world has always been popular among some social groups in Ukraine, and thanks to its cultivation within the country, it has also influenced the external image of Ukraine.¹²⁸ many Western researchers and

analysts still perceive Ukraine through the prism of Russia and orientalist stereotyping (that is, as a country of Eastern culture).¹²⁹

About 20% of the population of the south and east of the country advocate for Ukraine to join the CSTO, and about 35% of the population advocate for Ukraine's membership in the Customs Union which is higher than for Ukraine overall (12% and 23% respectively). Note that about 20% of residents of the south and east of Ukraine declare that they are ready to accept Russian citizenship and go there to live if they were given \$100,000 to do so (the Ukraine average was 11%).¹³⁰ Those who do not consider Russia an aggressor include 32% of residents of the southern and 45% of residents of the eastern regions. Whereas, 74% of residents of the south and 64% of residents of the east of Ukraine (and 40% for the country overall) regard Russia positively.¹³¹ Furthermore, 64% of residents of the southern regions and 71% of residents of the eastern regions of Ukraine do not hold Russia responsible for unleashing a war against Ukraine, but rather tend to lay blame on the oligarchs and the Ukrainian government. And only 23% believe that the Revolution of Dignity was a just uprising of the people against an authoritarian government.¹³² About 50% believe that the International Monetary Fund and the United States now have the most influence on Ukraine. And only about 20% think that Russia has an influence: these indicators are almost diametrically opposite to those in other regions of the country.¹³³

123 Центр «Нова Європа» [Centre 'New Europe'], «Європейський Донбас: як комунікувати євроінтеграцію на Донеччині та Луганщині» [European Donbas: how to communicate European integration in the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions], events, 22 October 2020.

124 Сергей Дембіцький, «Геополітичні орієнтації населення України у 2018–2020 роках: динаміка змін та сучасний стан» [Geopolitical orientations of the population of Ukraine in 2018–2020: dynamics of changes and the current state], *Соціологія: теорія, методи, маркетинг* [Sociology: Theory, Methods, Marketing], No. 2 (2021).

125 Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» [Sociological Group 'Rating'], «Суспільно-політичні настрої населення: грудень 2019» [Socio-political attitudes of the population: December 2019], presentation, December 2019.

126 Центр міжнародної безпеки [Centre for International Security], «Аналітичний звіт за результатами соціологічного дослідження «Сприйняття НАТО на Донбасі та Півдні України»» [Analytical report on the results of the sociological study 'Perception of NATO in the Donbas and Southern Ukraine'], February–March 2021.

127 Фонд «Демократичні ініціативи» [Foundation 'Democratic Initiatives'], «Підсумки-2019» [Results-2019].

128 Nadiia Bureiko, "Ukraine's Image of 'In-Between-Ness,'" *UA: Ukraine Analytica*, 4 (10) (2018): 42–49.

129 Taras Kuzio, "Academic Orientalism in Russia-Ukraine Scholarship," *E-International Relations*, 2 December 2020, <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/12/02/academic-orientalism-in-russia-ukraine-scholarship>.

130 Юлия Сахно, «Геополитические ориентации жителей Украины: февраль 2019» [Geopolitical orientations of Ukrainian residents: February 2019], Киевский международный институт социологии [Kyiv International Institute of Sociology], press release, 27 February 2019; Київський міжнародний інститут соціології [Kyiv International Institute of Sociology], «Суспільно-політичні орієнтації: квітень 2020 року» [Socio-political orientations: April 2020], presentation, 4 June 2020.

131 Український інститут соціальних досліджень [Ukrainian Institute of Social Research] et al, «Україна сьогодні» [Ukraine today].

132 Детектор медіа [Detector media], «Як змінились уподобання та інтереси українців до засобів масової інформації після виборів 2019 р. та початку пандемії COVID-19» [How have the preferences and interests of Ukrainians towards the media changed after the elections in 2019 and the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic], Analytical Report, 29 September 2020.

133 Центр «Соціальний Моніторинг» [Centre 'Social Monitoring'], «Думки та погляди населення України: липень-2020 за результатами всеукраїнського соціологічного опитування населення» [Opinions and views of the population of Ukraine: July 2020 according to the results of the all-Ukrainian sociological survey of the population], news, 21 July 2020.

3.3.1. PERCEPTIONS OF THE WAR IN DONBAS

The majority (more than 73%) believe that Ukraine should make compromises for the sake of restoring peace and returning territories, and 32% of residents of the southern and 43% of the eastern regions believe that the occupied territories of Donbas should be offered autonomy and federal status.¹³⁴

Among the residents of the south and east of Ukraine, there are fewer who have a positive or trusting attitude towards veterans of the Anti-Terrorist Operation / Joint Forces Operation (ATO/JFO)

About 30% are ready to consider the possibility of a full amnesty for all participants in hostilities against Ukrainian troops.¹³⁵ More than 77% of residents of the eastern and 85% of residents of the southern regions supported President Zelensky's decision to withdraw Ukrainian troops from the demarcation line, compared with 59% on average across the country.¹³⁶ Note that, in comparison to other regions and the general picture for the country, among the residents of the south and east of Ukraine, there are fewer who have a positive or trusting attitude towards veterans of the Anti-Terrorist Operation / Joint Forces Operation (ATO/JFO).¹³⁷ About 33% of residents of the south-east of Ukraine believe that the OPFL offers the most thoughtful and realistic solutions to end the military conflict in the Donbas and establish peace and also generally do not trust the conditions for the implementation of the

so-called Minsk agreements.¹³⁸ At the same time, about one third of those in the south and east of the country believes it would take less than a year to fully restore peace in the Donbas.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, Ukrainian society understands that the resolution of the conflict in the Donbas will be a kind of test for Ukraine's survival, for its independence as a state, and for the viability of its society.¹⁴⁰ The data from sociological surveys show a difference in the opinions of residents of the south and east of Ukraine from those of other regions on issues related to possible scenarios of de-occupation of the uncontrolled territories of Donbas and Crimea. It is important to note that in the south and east of Ukraine there is more support for positions and statements, the essence of which is reflected in pro-Russian narratives.¹⁴¹

About 60% of residents of the eastern regions and about 40% of residents of the southern regions support the preservation of current and the development of future relations with Russia. On average, about 50% of residents of the south and east of Ukraine share the opinion that Russians and Ukrainians have always been and will remain fraternal peoples (the figure for the country as a whole is 27%).¹⁴² Furthermore, 64% of residents of the east of Ukraine and 54% of residents of the south of Ukraine support the idea of a full return of Ukrainian enterprises to the Russian market (compared with 40% on average in the country), and more than two thirds of residents of the south and east on average believe that the economic interests of Ukraine would

134 Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» [Sociological Group 'Rating'], «Суспільно-політичні настрої: грудень 2019» [Socio-political attitudes: December 2019].

135 «Усилення санкцій ЄС и США против РФ будут способствовать освобождению Донбасса – опрос» [Strengthening of EU and US sanctions against Russia will contribute to the liberation of Donbas – survey], *Интерфакс-Украина* [Interfax-Ukraine], 15 January 2018.

136 Фонд «Демократичні ініціативи» імені Ілька Кучеріва [Ilko Kucheriv Foundation 'Democratic Initiatives'], «Громадська думка: листопад-2019» [Public opinion: November 2019], survey, 25 November 2019.

137 Anna Kvit and Tamara Martsenyuk, «Attitudes towards ATO/JFO veterans and their political activism in Ukraine», *Ukr. socium*, 2(73) (2020): 172–184.

138 Центр «Соціальний Моніторинг» [Centre 'Social Monitoring'], «Думки та погляди населення України» [Opinions and views of the population of Ukraine]; Olexiy Haran, Maksym Yakovlyev, and Maria Zolkina, «Identity, war, and peace: public attitudes in the Ukraine-controlled Donbas», *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 60, Issue 6 (2019): 684–708.

139 Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» [Sociological Group 'Rating'], «Суспільно-політичні настрої населення (13-17 грудня 2019)» [Socio-political attitudes of the population (13–17 December 2019)], research, 19 December 2019.

140 Алексей Семенин, «Экзистенциальный вызов: Смогут ли предстоящие выборы вернуть мир в Украине» [Existential challenge: will the upcoming elections bring peace back to Ukraine], in *Аналитика, Дискуссии, Мнения* [Analytics, Discussions, Opinion], ed. Ольга Васильцова (Kyiv: Фонд им. Фридриха Эберта – Региональный Офис «Диалог Восточная Европа» [Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung - Regional Office 'Dialogue Eastern Europe'], 2018), 119–121.

141 «Майбутнє Донбасу та Криму: що про це думають українці» [The future of Donbas and Crimea: what Ukrainians think about it], Український кризовий медіа-центр [Ukraine Crisis Media Center], 24 March 2021.

142 Станіслав Кульчицький та Михайло Міщенко, *Україна на порозі об'єднаної Європи* [Ukraine is on the threshold of a united Europe] (Kyiv: Центр Разумкова [Razumkov Centre], 2018).

be best served by lifting sanctions against Russia.¹⁴³ Most residents of the southern and eastern regions are not concerned about any rapprochement with Russia, on the contrary, they are more concerned about the closure of borders with Russia and the potential entry of Ukraine into NATO.¹⁴⁴ It is noteworthy that almost half of the residents of the eastern regions of Ukraine believe their country should not support any of the parties to the political conflict in Belarus, which began in 2020, while about one third of the residents of the southern regions are ready to support its illegitimate president Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Support for the Belarusian opposition among residents of the south and east of Ukraine is much lower than in other regions or on average throughout the country.¹⁴⁵

3.3.2. FEARS, THREATS, AND CHALLENGES

Among the main security threats to the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine, sources distinguish the following:¹⁴⁶

1. A low level of trust in local authorities, civil society organisations, and the state structures responsible for internal security.
2. The economic problems of the majority of the population and the rejection of reforms.
3. Poor quality of transport infrastructure.
4. The unsatisfactory quality of the health and education systems.
5. Worsening demographics and the increasing human resource deficit.

Among the local problems, the corruption of the authorities, the danger of a new redistribution of resources and export markets, as well as obstacles to the development of the tourism industry are also identified as local problems. Environmental problems are particularly acute, and the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine are the leaders in the country in terms of pollution.¹⁴⁷

From the viewpoint of residents of the south and east of Ukraine, one of the main challenges that determines the vulnerability of the region from the point of view of personal security of the individual is the ongoing regression of the region

According to the interviewed security experts, in the southern and eastern regions of the country, the number of incidents and actions that are possibly aimed at destabilising Ukrainian society is increasing (for example, acts of vandalism, violence, religious provocations, illegal use of weapons, recruitment by foreign intelligence services, fake bomb threats, sabotage, and other activities).¹⁴⁸ In

Матеріали дослідження [The Ukrainian frontier: challenges for Tavria. Research materials] (Kyiv: Центр міжнародної безпеки [Centre for International Security], 2020); Ілге Дагл Гастнґз, Оксана Лемшка та Ем Шердер, «SCORE про тенденції в Україні: Вибрані показники» [SCORE about trends in Ukraine: selected indicators], Центр сталого миру демократичного розвитку [Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development], July 2019; Давимука, Замікула & Кравченко, *Український фронтир* [Ukrainian frontier].

143 Центр «Соціальний Моніторинг» [Centre 'Social Monitoring'], «Моніторинг громадської думки населення України: оцінки та настрої після місцевих виборів за результатами всеукраїнських соціологічних опитувань дорослого населення: червень, липень, серпень, вересень, листопад 2020 р.» [Monitoring of public opinion of the population of Ukraine: assessments and attitudes after local elections based on the results of all-Ukrainian sociological surveys of the adult population: June, July, August, September, November 2020], press release, 30 November 2020.

144 Міхеєва et al, *Безпека людини* [Human security].

145 Інститут соціальної та політичної психології Національної академії педагогічних наук України [Institute of Social and Political Psychology of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine], «Громадська думка українців щодо подій у Білорусі поки що не сформувалася» [The public opinion of Ukrainians regarding the events in Belarus has not been formed yet], press release, 17 September 2020.

146 Центр міжнародної безпеки [Centre for International Security] & Національний інститут стратегічних досліджень [National Institute for Strategic Studies], «Паспорт безпеки України: Індекси дослідження» [Safety Passport of Ukraine: research indices], presentation, 2018; Олександра Давимука, Микола Замікула та Валерій Кравченко, *Український фронтир: виклики для Таврії*.

147 Світлана Матус, Галина Левіна, Тетяна Карпюк та Ольга Денищик, *Базове дослідження стану та напрямів розвитку екологічної політики України та перспектив посилення участі організацій громадянського суспільства у розробці та впровадженні політик, дружніх до довкілля* [Basic study of the state and directions of development of environmental policy and prospects for strengthening the participation of civil society organisations in the development and implementation of environmental-friendly policies] (Kyiv: Міжнародний фонд «Відродження» [International Foundation 'Renaissance'], 2019).

148 Міністерство з питань реінтеграції тимчасово окупованих територій України [Ministry for Reintegration of the Temporary Occupied Territories of Ukraine], «Впродовж травня в Україні зафіксовано більше 400 подій, що можуть дестабілізувати українське суспільство» [In May, over 400 Events were recorded in Ukraine that could destabilise Ukrainian society], news, 30 June 2019.

addition, in the south and east of the country, attacks on civil society activists and human rights defenders are comparatively more frequent than in other parts of Ukraine.¹⁴⁹ On average, more than 60% of residents of the south and east of Ukraine are dissatisfied with the security situation in which they live and with the progress of the fight against crime.¹⁵⁰

From the viewpoint of residents of the south and east of Ukraine, one of the main challenges that determines the vulnerability of the region from the point of view of personal security of the individual is the ongoing regression of the region. This degradation is especially felt in the Northern Azov region and around the areas bordering the Crimea,¹⁵¹ as well as near the occupied parts of the Donbas.¹⁵² About 40% of residents of the southern and eastern regions believe that the economy and public well-being, in general, are more important than independence and victory in the current war,¹⁵³ and, for more than 65% of the population, security is primarily protection from harm and confidence in the future.¹⁵⁴ This is also relevant in the light of various restrictions due to the coronavirus epidemic: residents in the southern and eastern regions have the lowest level of financial reserves on average (they can withstand no more than two weeks of strict quarantine). It is worth adding that, on average, about 36% of residents of the south and east of Ukraine believe that

‘the coronavirus was specially developed and deliberately spread in the world in order to reduce the number of people on the planet and/or for the sake of harming individual countries.’ This was the most common option among respondents. About 17% assign responsibility for the spread of the coronavirus to the United States.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, it is noted that readiness to be vaccinated against coronavirus is noticeably lower in the south and east of Ukraine than in other regions.¹⁵⁶ This indicates the informational vulnerability of many social groups in the macro-region under consideration. There is also the polarisation of the population of the southern and eastern regions on many issues related to security threats both at the personal level and at the level of communities and the region: the main fault lines run between ideological beliefs, between different income levels, and between different generations.¹⁵⁷

3.4. MEDIA LANDSCAPE AND MEDIA CONSUMPTION

The information space of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine was formed as a result of both general historical processes and insufficient attention by the authorities to the informational problems of the region, at least before the onset of Russian aggression. The structure of the media space in the region remains heterogeneous. Russia can still broadcast across the border territories and convey its position on a wide range of issues. Analysts note the great influence that Russia has on the agenda of the national media throughout Ukraine.¹⁵⁸ Over the past five years, Ukrainian society has learned to generally cope well with exposure to various forms of informational aggression and Kremlin

149 Анастасія Москвичова, Тетяна Печончик & Людмила Янкіна, *Активізм 2020: моніторингова доповідь щодо переслідувань активістів і правозахисників* [Activism 2020: monitoring report on the persecution of activists and human rights defenders] (Kyiv: Центр прав людини ZMINA [Human Rights Centre ZMINA], 2020).

150 *Паспорт безпеки України: підсумки та рекомендації* [Security Passport of Ukraine: results and recommendations] (Kyiv: Центр міжнародної безпеки [Centre for International Security] & Національний інститут стратегічних досліджень [National Institute for Strategic Studies], 2018).

151 Центр близькосхідних досліджень [Centre for the Middle East Studies], «Українське міжмор'я: інвестиції в безпеку людини для зміцнення безпеки Європи – аналітичні матеріали та рекомендації» [Ukrainian Intermarium: investing in human security to strengthen the security of Europe – analytical materials and recommendations], Національний інститут стратегічних досліджень [National Institute for Strategic Studies], n.d.

152 *Паспорт безпеки України* [Security Passport of Ukraine]; Фонд «Демократичні ініціативи» ім. Ілька Кучеріва [Ilo Kucheriv Foundation 'Democratic Initiatives'], «Суспільні настрої на Донбасі-2020 – регіональне опитування» [Public attitudes in the Donbas, 2020 – regional survey], survey, 9 April 2020.

153 Київський міжнародний інститут соціології [Kyiv International Institute of Sociology], «Суспільно-політичні орієнтації населення України: квітень 2020 року» [Socio-political orientations of the population of Ukraine: April 2020].

154 Фонд «Демократичні ініціативи» [Foundation 'Democratic Initiatives'], «Суспільні настрої на Донбасі-2020» [Public attitudes in the Donbas, 2020].

155 Антон Грушецький, «Думки і погляди населення України щодо походження коронавірусу і його поширення у світі: травень-червень 2020 року» [Opinions and views of the population of Ukraine regarding the origin of the coronavirus and its spread around the world: May–June 2020], Київський міжнародний інститут соціології [Kyiv International Institute of Sociology], press release, 26 June 2020.

156 Київський міжнародний інститут соціології [Kyiv International Institute of Sociology], «Ставлення українців до вакцинації і можливого карантину, березень 2021» [The attitude of Ukrainians to vaccination and possible quarantine, March 2021], press release, 17 March 2021.

157 Міхеєва et al, *Безпека людини* [Human security].

158 Taras Kuzio, «Russia is quietly occupying Ukraine's information space», Ukraine Alert, Atlantic Council, 27 June 2020.

propaganda.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, media experts note that, due to its unique patterns of media consumption, the population of the south and east of Ukraine is more inclined than residents of other regions to consume, believe, and disseminate pro-Russian interpretations of certain socially and politically significant

Due to its unique patterns of media consumption, the population of the south and east of Ukraine is more inclined than residents of other regions to consume, believe, and disseminate pro-Russian interpretations of certain socially and politically significant events

events.¹⁶⁰ More than 55% of residents of the south and east of Ukraine believe there is an attack on freedom of speech in the country, while in other macroregions, this figure is about 38%. However, the number of officially registered cases of violations of freedom of speech in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine does not exceed the average for the country.¹⁶¹ In contrast to 36% for the whole country, 61% of residents of the southern and 51% of the eastern regions disagree with the statement that there is too much pro-Kremlin propaganda in the media in Ukraine and that the state and society are not very responsive to it. More than 70% oppose the prohibition on Russian TV channels and Russian social networks in Ukraine, and even more than 80% of residents of the south and east of Ukraine oppose the prohibition on performances of Russian artists and the screening of Russian films, considering it a mistake and a restriction of the rights of citizens.¹⁶² Accordingly, the issue of language policy and the policy of limiting the influence of Russian media products remain factors of contradiction between residents of different regions of the country.

159 Artem Babak et al, *Words and Wars: Ukraine facing Kremlin propaganda* (Kyiv: KIC, 2017).

160 Грушецький, Лигачова & Петренко, *Джерела інформації, медіаграмотність і російська пропаганда* [Sources of information, media literacy, and Russian propaganda].

161 Інститут масової інформації [Institute of Mass Information], «Свобода слова в Україні у 2019 році погіршилася – ІМІ» [Freedom of speech in Ukraine worsened in 2019 – IMI], news, 16 January 2020.

162 Український інститут соціальних досліджень [Ukrainian Institute of Social Research] et al, «Україна сьогодні» [Ukraine today].

3.4.1. PROBLEMS OF CLASSICAL MEDIA

Television remains the dominant media resource in the southern and eastern regions of the country: almost 80% of residents point to TV channels as their main source of information.

This is the highest figure for any region in Ukraine. It is noteworthy that about 50% of those who regularly watch Russian TV channels live in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine where only about 30% of the population trust information from national Ukrainian TV channels, and also, on average, more often get information about the situation in Ukraine

and the world through personal contacts (relatives, friends, neighbours, colleagues, and acquaintances).¹⁶³ About 60% of the residents of the southern and eastern regions believe that most people in Ukraine are brainwashed by television,¹⁶⁴ and political talk shows are less popular than among residents of other regions of the country.¹⁶⁵ On average, there is greater interest in local Internet portals and web publications in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine,¹⁶⁶ while in the online media of these regions, press releases (41%) and social networks (12%)¹⁶⁷ are the primary sources of information, and about a third of the content is devoted to stories on crime and other extraordinary events.¹⁶⁸ Regional online publications also record more political 'hit pieces' than in other regions of

163 Грушецький, Лигачова & Петренко, *Джерела інформації, медіаграмотність і російська пропаганда* [Sources of information, media literacy, and Russian propaganda].

164 Центр «Соціальний Моніторинг» [Centre 'Social Monitoring'], «Моніторинг громадської думки населення України: Червень 2020. Радикалізація настроїв на фоні економічної та політичної кризи» [Monitoring of public opinion of the population of Ukraine: June 2020. Radicalisation of attitudes against the background of economic and political crises], presentation, 23 June 2020.

165 Грушецький, Лигачова & Петренко, *Джерела інформації, медіаграмотність і російська пропаганда* [Sources of information, media literacy, and Russian propaganda].

166 «Понад 80% українців стикалися із дезінформацією про Covid-19, — нове опитування USAID-Internews» [More than 80% of Ukrainians have faced misinformation about COVID-19 – a new USAID-Internews poll], *Internews*, 16 October 2020.

167 Інститут масової інформації [Institute of Mass Information], «Основним джерелом інформації в регіональних онлайн-ЗМІ є прес-релізи - дослідження ІМІ» [The main sources of information in regional online media are press releases – research by the IMI], news, 31 May 2019.

168 «25% матеріалів у херсонських газетах про кримінал» [25% of materials in Kherson newspapers are about crime], *Мост* [Bridge], 30 May 2019.

the country.¹⁶⁹ The main consumers of such materials in the south and east of Ukraine remain pro-Russian political forces.¹⁷⁰ In the regional Internet media of the south and east

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of Ukraine, a relatively high proportion of international news is published about Russia, and a minimal amount is about the United States or international organisations.¹⁷¹ It is noteworthy that for residents of the southern (32%) and eastern (42%) regions, ‘neutrality and impartiality of the media’ is a more important factor in choosing the media than for other regions. The greatest demand from media consumers in the south and east of Ukraine is to expose corruption and cover positive changes in the state and society.¹⁷² For obvious reasons (for example, desensitisation, fatigue, growing demotivation), Ukrainian citizens are gradually losing interest in the topic of war. This means that the coverage of this topic in the media is decreasing which undoubtedly causes concern among experts.¹⁷³

Radio in all the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine is experiencing developmental problems characteristic of this type of media. The level of trust in radio remains quite high, although the level of its real influence (use) is noticeably falling. For example, in 2015,

35% of respondents across Ukraine said that they regularly listened to the radio but by 2018, this figure had already dropped to 26%. About 25% of residents of the south and east of Ukraine listened to the radio every day, but only 21% of radio listeners used the radio as a source of news.¹⁷⁴ The greatest problems are experienced by the Public Broadcasting Company of Ukraine, Suspilne. Due to a number of legal reasons, including non-compliance with government regulations, Suspilne has consistently encountered problems with paying its fees to the State Service of Special Communications and Information Protection of Ukraine for the services necessary to distribute its signal. As a result, for example, in 2018, the radio signal of Suspilne was repeatedly turned off in various regions of the country,¹⁷⁵ including in the southern regions.¹⁷⁶ In some border regions, a difficult situation with digital broadcasting exists, that is, the concentration of FM frequencies and cable networks among Ukrainian providers persists.¹⁷⁷ For example, according to regular monitoring data, in some localities in the south of Kherson region, only Russian television signals are received.¹⁷⁸ The end of analogue broadcasting of Ukrainian television created gaps in media coverage in some areas of the south and east of Ukraine where there is no high-quality digital television signal and the real coverage of digital broadcasting is about 60–65%.¹⁷⁹

169 ‘Hit piece’ is a journalistic term that implies the deliberate placement of hidden advertising or anti-advertising under the guise of an author’s own material.

170 Інститут масової інформації [Institute of Mass Information], «Найвищий рівень джінси в онлайн-медіа Тернопільщини, Одещини та Херсонщини - дослідження ІМІ» [The highest volume of ‘hit pieces’ in the online media of the Ternopil Region, Odesa Region, and Kherson Region – research by the IMI], news, 15 July 2019.

171 Інститут масової інформації [Institute of Mass Information], «Найбільше міжнародних новин в онлайн-медіа півдня та сходу України стосуються Росії – дослідження ІМІ» [Most of the international news in the online media of the south and east of Ukraine concerns Russia – research by the IMI], news, 18 September 2019.

172 «Як змінились уподобання та інтереси українців до засобів масової інформації» [How have the preferences and interests of Ukrainians regarding the mass media changed], *Детектор медіа* [Detector Media].

173 Максим Віхров, «Містечко розстановки пріоритетів» [The art of prioritisation], *Тижень* [The Ukrainian Week], 9 July 2019.

174 Аналітичний звіт про результати соціологічного опитування мешканців південних і східних областей України, яке проводилося компанією GfK у 2016-2017 рр. за підтримки української ініціативи з підвищення впевненості (UCBJ), що фінансується Агентством США з міжнародного розвитку (USAID) [Analytical report on the results of a sociological survey of residents of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine, conducted by GfK in 2016–2017] (Kyiv: Інститут масової інформації [Institute of Mass Information], n.d.).

175 Роман Якель, «Білі плями в ефірі 6 березня» [Blind spots on air, 6 March], *ZN.UA*, 1 March 2019.

176 Світлана Шевцова, «Південь України: український мовник німотствує – ворожі голоси розкошують» [The south of Ukraine: while Ukrainian broadcasters keep silent, enemy voices are living large], *Укрінформ* [Ukrinform], 3 July 2019.

177 Національна рада України з питань телебачення і радіомовлення [National Council of Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine], «Стимулювання розвитку мереж українського радіомовлення і кабельного телебачення на прикордонних територіях змінить ситуацію на краще» [Stimulating the development of Ukrainian radio and cable television networks in the border areas will change the situation for the better], news, 30 July 2019.

178 Крымская правозащитная группа [The Crimean Human Rights Group], «На юге Херсонской области в 8 населенных пунктах вещает только российское ТВ» [In the south of the Kherson Region, there are only Russian TV broadcasts in 8 localities], monitoring, 18 April 2021.

179 Олена Щербина, «Огляд медіасередовища Запорізької області» [Overview of the media environment of the Zaporizhzhya Region], Інститут демократії ім. Пилипа Орлика [Pylup Orlik Institute of Democracy], 19 August 2019.

3.4.2. THE VIRTUAL WORLD AS A SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Residents of the southern and eastern regions on average do not use the Internet as regularly as in the western and north-central regions. The lack of a computer or other device (18%) or the high cost of Internet services (9%) are the main barriers to using the Internet. Increasingly, people are accessing the Internet via a mobile phone, as reported by 61% of respondents.¹⁸⁰ About 44% of residents of the southern and about 38% of the eastern regions of Ukraine use social networks as a source of up-to-date information about the situation in the country.¹⁸¹ It is important to remember that, as elsewhere in the world, social networks in Ukraine have become one of the main platforms for various pro-Russian, anti-Western narratives,¹⁸² as well as an environment in which agents of hostile informational influence operate, including at the regional level.¹⁸³ Analysts of social networks note that, unlike those in other regions, young people (15–34) in the south and east of Ukraine are more passive in discussing issues of national identity, socio-economic opportunities, and civic activism. However, it is noteworthy that Anatolij Sharij, a blogger with an ambiguous civic and political position,¹⁸⁴ is a top influencer among the youth of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine.¹⁸⁵ YouTube is the most popular social network among young people from the eastern and southern macroregions (59%), compared to Facebook (47%), in sharp

contrast to other regions.¹⁸⁶ The level of penetration of Facebook and Instagram across the cities of Ukraine is the lowest in the south and east of the country.¹⁸⁷ The majority of users of Russian social networks (VKontakte, VK, and Odnoklassniki, OK) live in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine and, in a survey, they confirmed that they intended to continue to use those networks by bypassing the official blocking of them.¹⁸⁸ For example, a significant amount not only of pro-Kremlin propaganda but also internal political agitation was spread by

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Ukrainian VK users.¹⁸⁹ Ukraine's official bodies have repeatedly warned about the security vulnerability presented by VK.¹⁹⁰ For example, from a study in Mykolaiv, the vulnerability of students to unverified information from social networks on political topics was revealed.¹⁹¹ Note that Russian is the dominant language among users of social networks in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine (on average, about 90% of all public posts were written in Russian).¹⁹² As another example, from the

- 180 Factum Group Ukraine, «Проникновение интернета в Украине» [Internet penetration in Ukraine], presentation, March 2019.
- 181 Детектор медіа, «Як змінились уподобання та інтереси українців» [How the preferences and interests of Ukrainians have changed].
- 182 Volodymyr Yermolenko, «How Anti-Western Actors in Ukraine and Russia Are Using Troll Armies to Push Their Agenda», *Ukraine World*, 23 September 2020.
- 183 «У Запоріжжі затримали проросійську активістку, яка в соцмережах закликала створити «народну республіку» - СБУ» [A pro-Russian activist was detained in Zaporizhzhia who had called for the creation of a 'people's republic' on social networks - SBU], *Детектор медіа* [Detector Media], 9 April 2019; «В Одеській області викрили антиукраїнського інтернет-агітатора - СБУ» [In Odesa Region, an anti-Ukrainian Internet agitator was exposed - the SBU], *Детектор медіа* [Detector Media], 6 April 2019; «СБУ заявила про виявлення керованої РФ групи, яка поширила в соцмережах майже 12 тис. антиукраїнських фейків» [The SBU announced the discovery of a group controlled by the Russian Federation which distributed almost 12 thousand anti-Ukrainian lies on social networks], *Детектор медіа* [Detector Media], 12 March 2019.
- 184 «Кто такой Анатолий Шари́й: биография скандального видеоблогера» [Who is Anatolij Sharij: the biography of the scandalous video blogger], *24 Канал* [Channel 24], 3 July 2019.
- 185 IREX, «Special Report: Who Influences Ukrainian Youth on Social Media?», n.d..

- 186 Анна Острікова et al, *Як живе молодь України у час COVID-19?* [How do Ukrainian youth live during COVID-19?] (Lviv: Соціоінформ, Інститут міста та МолоДвіж Центр Львіва [Socioinform, Institute of the City and MoloDvizh Centre of Lviv], 2020).
- 187 RMA, «Чим цікавляться українці у соцмережах (окрім коронавірусу)» [What are Ukrainians interested in on social networks (except coronavirus)], presentation, n.d.; «Как украинцы пользуются Facebook и Instagram - исследование» [How Ukrainians use Facebook and Instagram — a study], *ЛИГА Tech* [LIGA Tech], 12 March 2020.
- 188 Детектор медіа [Detector Media], «Як змінились уподобання та інтереси українців» [How have the preferences and interests of Ukrainians changed]; Дарія Жиленко, «Ставлення українців до продовження блокування російських веб-ресурсів» [Ukrainian attitude to continued blocking of Russian web resources], Kantar, 3 April 2020.
- 189 ««Русский мир» та вибори в Україні: про що говорять у «Вконтакте»» [‘Russian world’ and the elections in Ukraine: what they are talking about on VKontakte], *Інтерньюз-Україна* [Internews-Ukraine], 27 March 2019.
- 190 Media Sapiens, «СБУ закликала Apple і Google зупинити поширення «Вконтакте» в Україні» [The SBU called on Apple and Google to stop the spread of VKontakte in Ukraine], *Детектор медіа* [Detector Media], 8 October 2020.
- 191 Iryna Habro, Liudmyla Vovchuk, and Oleksandr Shevchuk, «Informational and Psychological Influence on Student Youth in the Conditions of the Information-Psychological War», *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 10(1), (2020): 56.
- 192 Артем Захарченко та Анна Комнацька, «Українська мова у соцмережах: оцінка вживання» [Ukrainian language in social networks: assessment of usage], Центр контент-аналізу [Content Analysis Centre], open reports, n.d..

Zaporizhzhya and Kherson regions, it is clear that for more than 80% of residents, the main source of the so-called disturbing information is social networks.¹⁹³ An important trend in

about 65% prefer not to.¹⁹⁶ Only about 5% have seen information materials aimed at combating false news, manipulation, and propaganda over the past month.¹⁹⁷ Meanwhile, about 45% of

Unlike those in other regions, young people (15–34) in the south and east of Ukraine are more passive in discussing issues of national identity, socio-economic opportunities, and civic activism

residents of the south and east of the country do not believe there is a threat of Russian propaganda in Ukraine (purposeful dissemination of the Kremlin’s point of view through the media) which strongly contrasts with opinions in other macroregions of the country.¹⁹⁸ More than 60% (the highest figure for any region of Ukraine) indicate they will not seriously consider the constantly promoted position in the media

social networks is decentralisation. In other words, local pages, blogs, YouTube, and Telegram channels are becoming increasingly popular, including among residents of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine.¹⁹⁴ Their coverage at the local level is often wider than that of the local media. Some local Telegram channels are even among the top channels at the national level in terms of coverage figures.¹⁹⁵

that access to Russian media and websites should be restricted. It is also significant that, standing out among the regions of Ukraine, about 33% of residents of the south and east highlight ‘the closeness of views expressed by the media to my views’ as a key criterion

3.4.3. INFORMATIONAL VULNERABILITIES

About 80% of residents of the southern and eastern regions refrain from watching TV shows, radio programmes, or video blogs that deconstruct fake news and information manipulation

It is important to note that about 80% of residents of the southern and eastern regions refrain from watching TV shows, radio programmes, or video blogs that deconstruct fake news and information manipulation and

for choosing the media they consume. This relatively high indicator clearly contributes to the formation of ‘information bubbles’ and ‘echo chambers’ in the region.¹⁹⁹ From the point of view of communication security, there are certain vulnerabilities in this pattern of media consumption, primarily related to the unverifiability of viral information and misplaced trust in such forms of manipulation. In general, the influence of Russian narratives in the region varies greatly both in intensity and the nature of its distribution. Two main

193 Центр близькосхідних досліджень [Centre for the Middle East Studies], «[Результати трендового соціологічного дослідження «Оцінка стану людської безпеки в умовах пандемії COVID-19» в Запорізькій області](#)» [The Results of the sociological trend study – assessment of the state of human security in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Zaporizhzhia Region], news, 4 July 2020; Центр близькосхідних досліджень [Centre for the Middle East Studies] & Тексти [Texts], «[Чого бояться і кому довіряють українці на кордоні з Кримом. Презентація результатів дослідження](#)» [What are Ukrainians afraid of and who do they trust on the border with Crimea? Presentation of the results of a study], presentation, 7 December 2020.

194 Галина Петренко, Отар Довженко, Оксана Ілюк та Петро Бурковський, [По той бік екрана: аналіз медіа споживання дезінформації в Українському інформаційному середовищі](#) [On the other side of the screen: analysis of media consumption and disinformation in the Ukrainian information environment] (Kyiv: Детектор медіа [Detector Media], 2021).

195 For example, the top 100 most popular Telegram channels in Ukraine include Fucking Odesa (about 210 000 subscribers), Fucking Dnipro (about 174 000 subscribers), Fucking Kharkiv (about 137 000 subscribers), Odesa INFO (about 126 000 subscribers), XC | Kharkiv (about 95 000 subscribers), This is Zaporizhzhia (about 82 000 subscribers). In comparison, the Telegram channel of TSN or the Television News Service of the national channel 1+1 has 300 000 subscribers.

196 Грушецький, Лигачова, Галина та Петренко, [Джерела інформації, медіаграмотність і російська пропаганда](#) [Sources of information, media literacy, and Russian propaganda].

197 An all-Ukrainian sociological survey was conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in February 2019 at the request of Detector Media.

198 StopFake, «[Осведомленность и отношение к дезинформации и пропаганде в СМІ: отчет об исследовании StopFake](#)» [Awareness of and attitude toward disinformation and propaganda in the media: a report on the StopFake study], 12 June 2017.

199 Грушецький, Лигачова та Петренко, [Джерела інформації, медіаграмотність і російська пропаганда](#) [Sources of information, media literacy, and Russian propaganda].

factors contribute significantly to this: the quality of media education in the region and the structure of media consumption on specific topics. It is also important to keep in mind that the region is located relatively close to the occupied territories and the border with Russia. Direct contact with those residents can

Residents of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine are characterised by a sense of deliberate ‘information abandonment’ on the part of the central government

have an impact on the local population which is ready to believe ‘real live evidence.’ One should not write off the influence of the immediate proximity of the military conflict on the one hand and the geographical distance from Kyiv on the other. Vulnerabilities associated with disinformation, damaging information, and psychological influence arise partly due to the fact that residents of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine are characterised by a sense of deliberate ‘information abandonment’ on the part of the central government. This is successfully used by the Russian media, further exacerbating this state of affairs. The current situation and the structure of media consumption indicate the importance of strategic communication in this region. As the example of frontline Mariupol shows, both pro-Russian narratives and some conspiracy theories on the topics of war, politics, and power are widely spread among the local residents.²⁰⁰

3.5. DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS AND QUALITY OF GOVERNANCE

The trust that citizens have in the authorities is one of the factors that shape the country’s resilience. Therefore, it is important to monitor the level of trust in key structures and institutions as this is directly related to the security and well-being of society. It is also

200 Michael Gentile and Yevgeniya Kuznetsova, “Descent into the Mariupol Disinformation Maelström,” *Vox Ukraine*, 3 December 2020.

necessary to measure how citizens assess the ongoing reforms, the quality of governance, and decision-making. According to certain sources, the success of the decentralisation reform depends not only on the socio-economic well-being of citizens but also on many aspects of security both at the regional and national levels.²⁰¹ It is important to note that international donors and partners of Ukraine also consider the success of the decentralisation reform and the strengthening of the role of civil society in local governance as one of the main conditions for a post-conflict solution to the situation in the Donbas.²⁰² In any case, even given the success of a reform like decentralisation, there are sometimes great misunderstandings and serious obstacles between Ukraine’s international partners, the central government in Kyiv, and local governments, some of which are due to the Soviet and post-Soviet mentality.²⁰³

3.5.1. AN ENVIRONMENT UNFAVOURABLE TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Most residents of the south and east of Ukraine identify corruption as a threat to security and, in highlighting how serious they perceive this problem to be, they do not differ on average from residents of other regions of the country.²⁰⁴ The perception of other security threats is described in section 3.3.2. Since the decentralisation reform is associated not only with the practical improvement of governance processes at the local level but also with the general Europeanisation of the regions and the departure from outdated Soviet foundations and post-Soviet practices,²⁰⁵ it is interesting to look at the success of decentralisation in

- 201 Філіпп Флурі та Валентин Бадрак, *Безпекові аспекти політичної децентралізації в Україні: Бачення, реалії та можливі наслідки* [Security aspects of political decentralisation in Ukraine: vision, realities, and possible consequences] (Kyiv: Центру досліджень армії [Centre for the Army Research], 2017).
- 202 Karen Madoian, “Devil in the detail: Local versus regional approaches to peace in Donbas,” Conflict Series Brief 2, EU Institute of Security Studies, February 2020.
- 203 Андрій Голуб, «Буря у громаді» [Storm in the community], *Тиждень* [The Ukrainian Week], 5 April 2021.
- 204 «11 років корупції у сприйнятті та досвіді українців» [11 years of corruption in the perception and experience of Ukrainians], Pact, last accessed 27 June 2021.
- 205 Sergiy Solodkyi, Tetiana Levoniuk, Viktoriya Balasanyan, Maria Dzuryn, Oleksandra Kalashnikova, Yevheniia Kozun, Viktor Bobyrenko, and Yuliya Bidenko, *The Link Between Decentralization and EU Integration* (Kyiv & Berlin: New Europe Center & Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOIS), 2020).

the context of the macroregions of Ukraine. According to the monitoring of local self-government reform in Ukraine, the indicators in the southern and eastern regions are, on

Most residents of the south and east of Ukraine identify corruption as a threat to security. The statistics on the trust that residents of the southern and eastern regions have toward representatives of the central and local authorities are also lower on average than in the country as a whole

average, slightly lower than those in other regions of the country.²⁰⁶ Despite significant resources (more than €150m) and obvious successes at the national level for the European Union's Programme for Local Empowerment, Accountability, and Development (U-LEAD with Europe), the share of participation of local government in the southern and eastern regions is on average less than that in other regions of Ukraine.²⁰⁷ Note that about half of the residents of the south and east of Ukraine claim that they have not felt any changes in the use of budgetary funds since 2015, while 47% of the residents of the eastern regions believe that despite decentralisation, all government was in the hands of local 'knyazki' ('little barons') and 32% of residents of the southern region of Ukraine believe that the devastation of villages, towns, and some cities has accelerated due to decentralisation.²⁰⁸

The statistics on the trust that residents of the southern and eastern regions have toward representatives of the central and local authorities are also lower on average than in the country as a whole and in other macroregions.²⁰⁹ Only 38% of respondents trust the representatives of local law enforcement agencies.²¹⁰ On average, residents of the south and east are less likely to follow the actions of the authorities at the local level in the media, preferring Internet resources instead.²¹¹ It should also be noted that there is no high-quality system of data collection and analytical assessment of the activities of local and regional authorities in Ukraine and the general statistics, which are collected by outdated methods, do not reflect reality, but rather distort it.²¹²

3.5.2. CHALLENGING PROSPECTS

Residents of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine assess the state of affairs and prospects for change at the local level in their region and settlement as more negative than the average for the country or other regions. Yet, they have little interest in labour migration.²¹³ Compared to other regions, on average, residents of the south and east of Ukraine have a more negative assessment of the situation regarding human rights and fundamental freedoms. Furthermore, more than 50% of the population of the southern and more than 40% of the population of the eastern regions of the country do not see improvements in this area.²¹⁴ It is important to remember that a combination of psychological

206 Міністерство розвитку громад та територій України [Ministry for the Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine], «Моніторинг процесу децентралізації влади та реформування місцевого самоврядування (станом на 10 січня 2020)» [Monitoring of the process of decentralisation of government and reform of local self-government (as of 10 January 2020)], presentation, n.d..

207 «Програма «Підтримка реформи децентралізації в Україні/ U-LEAD з Європою: Програма для України з розширення прав і можливостей на місцевому рівні, підзвітності та розвитку»» [Programme 'Support for Decentralisation Reform in Ukraine / U-LEAD with Europe: a Programme for Ukraine on Local Empowerment, Accountability, and Development'], Децентралізація [Decentralisation], last accessed 27 June 2021; U-LEAD with Europe, "U-LEAD with Europe Programme's Support to Improved Administrative Service Delivery: Visual Report 2019–2020," presentation, n.d..

208 Разумков Центр [Razumkov Centre], «Громадська думка населення щодо реформи децентралізації та її результатів (серпень 2020р.)» [Public opinion of the population regarding the decentralisation reform and its results (August 2020)], press-release, 30 September 2020.

209 USAID & Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development, «Довіра до органів влади на сході України (UASCORE 2018)» [Trust in the authorities in eastern Ukraine (UASCORE 2018)], presentation, n.d..

210 Міхеєва et al, *Безпека людини* [Human security].

211 Center for Insights in Survey Research & Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» [Sociological Group 'Rating'], «Суспільно-політичні погляди в Україні» [Socio-political views in Ukraine], presentation, 30-31 July 2020.

212 Павло Федорів, «Що Україна знає про свої міста (спойлер: надто мало)» [What Ukraine knows about its cities (spoiler: too little)], Mistosite, 30 November 2018.

213 Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» [Sociological Group 'Rating'], «Портрети регіонів: підсумки, зведені дані, порівняльний аналіз між областями» [Portraits of regions: results, summary data, comparative analysis between regions], presentation, 26 December 2018.

214 Фонд «Демократичні ініціативи» імені Ілька Кучеріва [Ilko Kucheriv Foundation 'Democratic Initiatives'] & Центр прав людини ZMINA [Human Rights Centre ZMINA], «Оцінка ситуації з дотриманням прав людини» [Assessment of the human rights situation], 2020.

factors, such as lack of social and political trust, perception of discrimination and economic instability, contributes to social destabilisation across entire regions of the south and east of Ukraine.²¹⁵

More than 65% of young residents of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine aged 14–35 negatively assess their experience of

With the exception of Mariupol and Bakhmut, all other major cities and towns in the south and east of Ukraine are by many indicators in the lower-middle section of the urban transparency index

cooperation with local authorities. This is significantly higher than the average in other regions of the country (about 50%). At the same time, in the south and east of Ukraine, less than 9% of young people have heard something about material or non-material assistance for local development, while the national average is twice as high.²¹⁶

With the exception of Mariupol and Bakhmut, all other major cities and towns in the south and east of Ukraine are, by many indicators, in the lower-middle section of the urban transparency index.²¹⁷ This indicates the presence of systematic problems in such areas of municipal life and governance as the availability of information about the work of local self-government, the involvement and participation of citizens, the budget process, personnel issues, anti-corruption policies, professional ethics, education etc. Note that none of the cities in the south or east of Ukraine has a high indicator in the rating of competitiveness of cities and towns and, by many indicators, they are in the lower section

215 Aiden Hoyle, Helma van den Berg, Bertjan Doosje, and Martijn Kitzen, "On the brink: identifying psychological indicators of societal destabilization in Donetsk, Luhansk and Crimea," *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* (2021).

216 Острікова et al, *Як живе молодь України у час COVID-19?* [What is life like for Ukrainian youth during COVID-19?].

217 «Рейтинг прозорості 100 міст України» [Transparency rating of 100 cities in Ukraine], Трансперенсі Інтернешнл Україна [Transparency International Ukraine], last accessed 27 June 2021.

of the evaluation scale.²¹⁸ The southern and eastern regions of Ukraine are also at the bottom of the Regional Doing Business rating.²¹⁹ This scares off potential investors, thereby worsening the already difficult socio-economic situations in these regions. The hopelessness is deepened not only by the low quality of governance decisions in internal socio-economic processes but also by the strategic consequences of Russia's occupation of the Crimea and its actions to block free maritime navigation in the Azov Sea and part of the Black Sea. This has a direct negative impact both on the economic development of the region and on the psychological state of the population which feels a sense of hopelessness and that the situation is at an impasse.²²⁰

Residents of most large cities in the south and east of Ukraine do not share the opinion that things in their city are going in the right direction. They rather negatively assess the quality of municipal services, the state of affairs in the spheres of urban life, opportunities for participation in urban decision-making, prospects for self-realisation at the local level, and various aspects of physical security.²²¹

The acute shortage of qualified managerial personnel, combined with a lack of professionalism, also creates a number of potential vulnerabilities at the local level

Many residents of the frontline cities of eastern Ukraine are dissatisfied with the way the authorities are promoting anti-corruption and judicial reform, as well as reforms in

218 USAID, Інститут економічних досліджень та політичних консультацій [Institute of Economic Research and Political Consultations] & InfoSapiens, «Презентація індексу конкурентоспроможності міст України 2019/2020» [Presentation of the Competitiveness Index of Ukrainian cities 2019/2020], presentation, 16 September 2020.

219 «Не Київ: експерти назвали самый комфортный для ведения бизнеса регион Украины» [Not Kyiv: experts named the most comfortable business region of Ukraine], *Delo.ua*, 1 February 2021.

220 Alina Frolova, Ihor Kabanenko, Oleksandr Khara, Andrii Klymenko, and Andrii Ryzhenko, *Ukrainian Storm Warning: A Grave Danger to Europe in the Maritime Domain* (Kyiv: Centre for Defence Strategies, 2020).

221 Center for Insights in Survey Research & Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» [Sociological Group 'Rating'], «П'яте всеукраїнське муніципальне опитування» [The fifth all-Ukrainian municipal survey].

the areas of health and education.²²² Such dissatisfaction is an important signal: civil society initiatives should take a more dynamic and radical approach to governance reforms in this region. The acute shortage of qualified managerial personnel, combined with a lack of professionalism of the authorities, also creates a number of potential vulnerabilities at the local level, including from the point of view of security.²²³ As a positive, some international partners are working in a targeted manner to develop practical recommendations on how to improve the situation in vulnerable regions of Ukraine.²²⁴

CONCLUSION

The review of the key characteristics and indicators of socio-political and socio-psychological processes in the south and east of Ukraine indicates considerable diversity of this region, while it displays significant differences from other regions of the country. In other words, its internal heterogeneity does not outweigh its overall distinctive features at the national level. This creates a suitable environment for malicious short-term manipulation of and long-term influence over various groups of the population of the south and east of Ukraine by both the Kremlin and its ideological associates, as well as local politically and/or financially motivated figures. Many characteristics of the south and east of Ukraine are justified by the multilayered and complex system processes rooted in the past. Nevertheless, the current socio-political and socio-psychological processes, events, and phenomena have a significant impact on the situation which, together with historical baggage, contribute to the diverse vulnerability of the south and east of Ukraine in terms of information, digital, communication, and cognitive security.

222 Center for Insights in Survey Research, «[Опитування громадської думки в Донецькій та Луганській областях, 27 серпня - 2 жовтня 2020](#)» [Public opinion poll in the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions, August 27 – October 2, 2020], presentation, 16 February 2021.

223 Лариса Лісогор та Віктор Нестеренко, «[Зміцнення управлінського потенціалу територіальних громад](#)» [Strengthening the administrative capacity of territorial communities], Національний інститут стратегічних досліджень [National Institute for Strategic Studies], 2 April 2021.

224 Благодійний фонд «Стабілізешен Сунпорт Сервісез» [Charitable Foundation 'Stabilisation Support Services'], «[Презентація рекомендацій для органів національної та місцевої влади під час COVID-19 у Донецькій області](#)» [Presentation of recommendations for national and local authorities during COVID-19 in the Donetsk Region], 2 April 2021.



4. EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS FROM AND ABOUT THE REGIONS

During turbulent political and socio-economic periods, including electoral campaigns, hostile forces (both internal and external) try to exploit existing gaps in national resilience, as well as create new vulnerabilities in national security. In this way, they seek to slow down the development of society, reduce its defensive capabilities, worsen the perception of security threats by society, distract attention from important strategic problems and strengthen the critical dependence of the state on certain internal and external factors.

People in the region know that there are problems, but they do not understand what to do next to solve them

One of the gaps in the national resilience of Ukraine is the communication gap which covers four interrelated thematic areas: communicational, cognitive, informational, and digital. These are the intersectional spaces where vulnerabilities can be used by hostile forces for malicious purposes. Since hostile influence operations occur consistently both offline and in the virtual environment, it is advisable not to separate the domains but to approach the analysis comprehensively, keeping in mind the current threats to the national security of Ukraine in the information and cyber spheres.²²⁵ It is also worth remembering that disinformation in the so-called traditional media has more influence than in social media.²²⁶

225 *Біла Книга 2021* [White Book 2021] (Київ: Служба зовнішньої розвідки України [Foreign Intelligence Service of Ukraine], 2021).

226 Lennart Maschmeyer, "Digital Disinformation: Evidence from Ukraine," CSS Analyses in Security Policy No 278, Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich, February 2021.

This chapter of the report presents the results of a series of focus groups conducted in the south and east of Ukraine, expert comments from specialists from in-depth interviews, and some additional references to external sources that help to better describe or explain the essence of the problems studied. After analysing all the data collected during the focus groups and in-depth interviews, we made a number of conclusions in the context of communicational, cognitive, informational, and digital security in the south and east of Ukraine. The focus groups identified significant functional illiteracy among most respondents: it turned out that they are familiar with the basic terminology related to the study at different levels (in particular, media literacy, informational security, cybersecurity, and other terms), but many do not have a clear understanding of these phenomena. They do not associate the consumption of information with decision-making or other behaviour, and they look at information and digital hygiene narrowly, as the use of social networks. In other words, people in the region know that there are problems, but they do not understand what to do next to solve them. The expert assessments obtained during in-depth interviews help to identify and explain in more detail the problems described by the participants of the focus groups.

4.1. PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY THREATS

Most of the south and east of Ukraine is still ideologically vulnerable to external destabilisation by Russia, since this part of the country has been left without proper attention from the state for the past seven years. However, pro-Russian attitudes have always been strong there and have not disappeared during this time. After the overthrow of the communist regime in 1991, a value vacuum was formed in the region, and the majority of the population – representatives of working professions and farmers – felt like second-class people.

Physical security is a priority for most focus group participants. They mention the war as the primary potential threat, yet do not call Russia an aggressor. For the most part, the proximity

to the temporarily occupied territories dictates the nature of the feeling of threats, especially in those settlements that, in the event of military operations, would lie along the routes

Physical security is a priority for most focus group participants. They mention the war as the primary potential threat, yet do not call Russia an aggressor

of the likely movement of the armed forces. It is noteworthy that only a small number of more active citizens are ready to personally defend Ukraine in the event of a military threat. Some of them still feel an anxious need to be ready for war and their families still have ‘bug-out backpacks’ that are not well put together, but are occasionally replenished with medicines and food supplies. Most of the local residents are united in the opinion that if war approaches, they will leave their homes and move to safer regions of the country.

There is a natural trend: the farther away from the temporarily occupied territories, the less often respondents identify the war as the primary threat to their physical security. The problems of ecology, economy, corruption, and even packs of stray dogs rank higher. A

similar trend can be traced in a number of other sociological surveys on a national scale.²²⁷ Other serious issues included the deplorable state of healthcare, poor quality of food, insufficient control of allergens, unofficial landfills and the burning thereof, the absence of waste processing plants, poor public transport, and poor lighting of city streets. Despite extensive international assistance, residents of the south and east of Ukraine do not feel that there have been any positive results: ‘Various international foundations and national organisations

227 «Наибольшей угрозой для страны украинцы считают массовый выезд граждан за границу, тогда как полномасштабная война на 5-м месте – опрос» [Ukrainians consider the mass departure of citizens abroad to be the greatest threat to the country, while full-scale war takes 5th place – a survey], *Интерфакс-Украина* [Interfax-Ukraine], 4 February 2019.

endlessly come to pursue a goal, evaluate, and investigate, they then advise someone about it all. But either there are no results on the ground, or we do not see it. It’s like they’ve forgotten about us.’ Among the other factors that give rise to social conflicts, division, disagreements, and civil alienation, residents of the regions remote from Kyiv also identify the introduction of various international and local initiatives that do not take into account the controversies over certain topics in the regions that they highlight.²²⁸

Residents of many cities and townes in the south and east Ukraine consider the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) a threat, particularly those servicemen returning from the ATO/JFO zone. In their opinion, such servicemen can provoke local conflicts due to a variety of psychological problems (due to PTSD, traumatic brain injury etc.). In addition, people are very concerned that, once demobilised, ATO/JFO veterans often lack a job, abuse alcohol and drugs, and resort to domestic violence. There are other social

The farther away from the temporarily occupied territories, the less often respondents identify the war as the primary threat to their physical security. The problems of ecology, economy, corruption, and even packs of stray dogs rank higher

consequences of military actions, including the availability of illegal weapons, as is often discussed in the news in the south and east of Ukraine.²²⁹ According to official data, at the beginning of 2021, more than 405 000 people in Ukraine have the status of a combatant.²³⁰

228 Marina Nagai, *Synthesis Situational Assessment Report. Ukraine: South of Odesa, Kherson and Zakarpattia regions* (Kyiv: International Alert, 2019).

229 «В Мариуполе нашли масштабный схрон оружия: более 1600 гранат, десятки пистолетов – фото» [A large cache of weapons was found in Mariupol: more than 1,600 grenades, dozens of pistols – photo], *ЛІГА.net* [LIGA.net], 4 February 2021.

230 «У Міністерств назвали кількість людей в Україні зі статусом учасника бойових дій» [The Ministry of Veterans named the number of people in Ukraine with the status of combatant], *Радіо Свобода* [Radio Freedom], 18 February 2021.

4.1.1. INABILITY TO INFLUENCE THE SITUATION

Many focus groups admitted that they have been deeply disappointed by the actions of state institutions and the authorities in general. The low level of trust of citizens, in particular, has been confirmed by other sociological surveys.²³¹ Most of the participants in the focus groups believe that even in the event of war, you need to ‘turn to yourself’ for

Most of the participants in the focus groups believe that even in the event of war, you need to ‘turn to yourself’ for support and not to the state

support and not to the state. They talk about their unsuccessful attempts to ‘reach out’ to the authorities: electronic petitions, public hearings, letters, and even meetings. All this is evidence of the inefficiency of the channels of communication with the authorities. Participants in focus groups often shared personal stories about how they unsuccessfully tried to gain access to law enforcement or local government. Many experts complained that a full-fledged culture of communication between the authorities and the citizenry has yet to form in Ukraine, and as a result, the authorities see communication as unidirectional, from them to the people (exclusively about successes and achievements, at that), and the citizenry establishes communication from the position of criticism, demands, and the struggle against the inactivity of the authorities. The lack of direct effective interaction creates a sense of isolation among the citizenry and leads to a crisis of confidence in the institutions of power. Many noted that communication between local authorities, the media, and the citizenry has not been established effectively: the state is usually fenced off by the activities of the press services which are engaged in the one-sided, linear distribution of information (which is

231 Разумков Центр [Razumkov Centre], «Рівень довіри до суспільних інститутів та електоральні орієнтації громадян України» [The level of trust in public institutions and electoral orientations of Ukrainian citizens], press-release, 20 February 2019.

acceptable for the segment of the population with a Soviet and post-Soviet mentality) and do not tailor their messaging to different target audiences. In this regard, for example, training material based on the British expertise or prepared by the USAID (particularly on crisis communication) as well as inspired by the Estonian Government’s approach may prove to be effective for training communications staff.²³²

‘The police, the prosecutor’s office, and all such bodies are atrophied and corrupt, and local business, government, crime, and law enforcement officers have simply become one and the same’ – as described by the residents of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine regarding the threats to their personal security. Since the trust in law enforcement agencies is very low, due to their inefficiency and the connivance of the corrupt local authorities, most residents of the region rely on their own abilities or the help of those close to them. They consider emigration to Russia or, if possible, to the European Union to be the ultimate solution to their problems. A common characteristic feature of the south and east of Ukraine is uncertainty about the future. However, the majority of the population remains passive in terms of defending their civil and political rights.

A common characteristic feature of the south and east of Ukraine is uncertainty about the future. However, the majority of the population remains passive in terms of defending their civil and political rights

Residents of Southern and Eastern Ukraine note that passivity in defending their rights is also a result of their distrust of the judicial and law enforcement systems, since there are no functional tools to restore violated rights.

232 [Практичний посібник для працівників комунікаційних структур в органах влади](#) [Practical guide for employees of communication structures in government bodies] (Kyiv: Інститут масової інформації [Institute of Mass Information], 2016); Лара Мудрак, [Комунікація і криза як громадам протистояти викликам і успішно діяти в період кризи](#) [Communication and crisis: how communities can face challenges and act effectively in times of crisis] (Kyiv: Ukraine Crisis Media Centre & Global Communities, 2020); [Valitsuskommunikatsiooni käsiraamat](#) [Handbook of government communication] (Tallinn: Riigikantselei [State Chancellery], 2018).

Nevertheless, there is some dissonance. On the one hand, respondents believe that people should organise themselves to solve problems and improve their lives, and on the other hand, many are not ready to do so themselves but rather accuse the local, regional, and central authorities of complete inaction. Respondents blame the authorities for the mass migration of young people and the general depression of the region, where criminals and other offenders are most often left without punishment. The mass readiness to emigrate from depressed places is also evidenced in the data from population surveys.²³³

4.1.2. PROBLEMATIC POINTS THROUGH THE EYES OF LOCAL RESIDENTS

According to the citizenry, uncertainty and instability create a sense of futility in all spheres of life in the southern and eastern

Respondents believe that the infantile nature of the region's population makes it more susceptible to manipulation by both internal and external forces

regions of Ukraine: economic, social, political, public, and legal. Among other emotional stimuli, residents of the south and east of Ukraine noted the open advertising of drugs in Telegram channels and in the form of inscriptions on houses and fences.²³⁴

'Our people here are so lazy in this regard. Western Ukraine would have risen long ago with a pitchfork, with anything. And we, little by little are travelling farther from the place where we would like to end up' – this is how the majority of respondents describe the degree of activity of the local population.

The exceptions are some public cultural events (festivals, marathons, literary readings etc.). But these mainly unite citizens for joint leisure activities rather than to deal with important issues. The greatest consolidation of the local community occurs when it is necessary to solve specific problems (for example, raising funds for the treatment of a sick child) rather than general socio-political or economic problems. The low readiness of the population of the region for socio-political protests is also recorded in sociological surveys.²³⁵ Respondents believe that the infantile nature of the region's population makes it more susceptible to manipulation by both internal and external forces. Nonetheless, the local population is ready to participate in rallies only if the organisers offer financial incentives. This is mainly the case with retirees and public sector employees who, under pressure applied through administrative resources, agree to take part in rallies for money. There are very few real civil activists in the region, and most of those are, in some way, already included in the governance structures, so they are not able to overcome local administrative particularities that are directly entwined with the target of their civic activities. Due to the tense atmosphere and polarisation of society, the only thing, according to the activists themselves, that can quickly mobilise significant groups of people is the call 'Our side is being beaten.' But this has the same effect on both pro-Ukrainian and anti-Ukrainian movements and other groups with different views and interests.

Certain groups of the population are deliberately agitated, thus contributing to radicalisation and polarisation. At the same time, the suppression of the activities of civic and public activists is noticeable

233 USAID & Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development, «Мігрувати чи ні? Аналіз чинників схильності до міграції в Донецькій і Луганській областях (SCORE для східної України)» [Migration or not? propensity factors in the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions (SCORE for eastern Ukraine)], 2019.

234 See more on this problem from: Roman Osadchuk, "Anonymous Messenger Apps and Drug Distribution in Ukraine," DFR Lab on Medium, 13 August 2019.

235 Фонд «Демократичні ініціативи» ім. Ілька Кучеріва [Ilko Kucheriv "Democratic Initiatives" Foundation], «[Дух, що тіло ве до бою](#): революційні настрої українців на тлі протестів у Білорусі та Росії» [The spirit that tears the body to fight': the revolutionary moods of Ukrainians against the background of protests in Belarus and Russia], survey, 4 February 2021.

Many participants of the focus groups believe that a serious change of political elites occurred only 'at the top', while 'at the bottom', the local and regional levels remain in a stalemate with the continued domination of the old forces. This results in the outright unwillingness of such structures to become transparent and in the thorough bureaucratisation of many processes. Representatives of the authorities and interested persons with extensive capital are trying to marginalise prominent local activists, who often draw people's attention to problem areas. In the light of the political struggle, the activities of humanitarians and volunteers are devalued.

In the field, certain groups of the population are deliberately agitated, thus contributing to radicalisation and polarisation. At the same time, the suppression of the activities of civic and public activists is noticeable. The focus groups identified cases of harassment of activists by the local authorities, in which the police were also involved. According to the participants of the focus groups, corruption, a sense of social injustice, strong socio-economic stratification, and high unemployment contribute to this. In this regard, Kherson region is a perfect example of how various problematic topics are intertwined, generating deep dissatisfaction among local residents. This, in turn, affects the perception of both the local and central authorities.²³⁶

Separately, the pro-Russian attitudes of residents of some cities and towns were also noted where the majority believes that only Russia can be the true partner of Ukraine. From the results of the focus groups, it can be concluded that recently, residents of the south and east of Ukraine have begun openly expressing pro-Russian views more frequently. This has become noticeable not only on social networks where a combative situation is often provoked by underground anti-Ukrainian groups but also in the everyday communication

among citizens since many local residents continue to actively visit Russia for various reasons (for them, such travel has remained the norm).

From the results of the focus groups, it can be concluded that recently, residents of the south and east of Ukraine have begun openly expressing pro-Russian views more frequently

Patriotic citizens of Ukraine are concerned about the level of infiltration by Russia's agents both at the municipal level and among the military who collect and transmit information to the enemy. In addition, they condemn people who wear traditional Ukrainian embroidered shirts yet go to Russia to talk to the enemy and participate in various debates and television programmes. Only a small number of respondents spoke about the virtual and information environment as a source of possible threats, completely failing to connect it with the hybrid influence of Russia.

4.2. COMMUNICATION AND COGNITIVE SECURITY

Experts note that the majority of residents of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine have always had strong paternalistic expectations from the authorities. On the

Majority of residents of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine have always had strong paternalistic expectations from the authorities

one hand, people are poorly versed in the competencies and powers of authorities at various levels (local, regional, national). On the other hand, they expect that any authority must be strong to make them happy. Most

236 Олександр Северин, «Дороги, бідність, нудьга. Херсонщина через сусідство з Кримом потребує особливої уваги (Соціологія, інфографіка)» [Roads, poverty, boredom. thanks to the fact it neighbours Crimea, the Kherson Region requires special attention (sociology, infographics)], *Громадський Простір* [Public Space], 14 July 2018.

of the corrosive narratives that are focused on distorting the present, merging it with a past of inherent ‘former greatness’, ‘empire’, and ‘huge Soviet Union’, and are fuelled by ‘bonds’ and ‘united Orthodoxy’ are built on placing such excessive expectations on the authorities, fuelling inactivity and tranquillising citizens’ sense of responsibility. The experts interviewed in the study unanimously adhere to the opinion that paternalism is a serious

The effectiveness of pro-Russian narratives in the target region grew in connection with the presidential and parliamentary campaigns in Ukraine

disease in Ukrainian society as such, regardless of the age group. The demand for populist promises to improve life without any personal effort is typical not only of the older generation but also of young people. This may indicate that the older generation shapes the views and attitudes of young people. *‘After the elections, we will see a depressing picture again: citizens are wandering aimlessly through the graveyard of public hopes. People were given without asking and then taken from without being told.’*

The effectiveness of pro-Russian narratives in the target region grew in connection with the presidential and parliamentary campaigns in Ukraine. During this period, one of the major parliamentary parties, the OPFL, and media channels associated with it and its leaders paid for about half of the unmarked advertising materials and distributed pro-Russian narratives. They played on such attitudes peculiar to the south and east of Ukraine as paternalism, patriarchy, strong power, as well as the historically formed neglect and devaluation of the individual’s life and the priority of the public over the personal. Considering that for many residents of the region, freedom, the right to choose, and the right to an opinion have ceased to be values that they actively exercise, this contributed to the perceived collusion of the central government with the regions: the centre closes its eyes to ‘all the outrages’ in the regions in exchange for formal support from the regions. In the minds of residents of the south and

east of Ukraine, the division of the country into an ethnocultural, Ukrainian-centric ‘West’ and a cosmopolitan industrial ‘Southeast’, created in the Soviet time, is firmly fixed, that is, they do not perceive Ukraine as a single homogeneous country. In addition, in the hierarchy of self-determination, local identity is more important for many people than civil or ethnic identity. *‘Such a local identity, first of all, dictates their behavioural models in terms of way of life, the market, petty and everyday corruption, nepotism and so on’* – experts characterise the mental characteristics of the society of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine.

Among the actual threats, the participants of the focus groups most often identified the fake stories and rumours spread in small towns. They also mentioned attempts to downplay the ongoing war and local activists who compulsively spread any kind of information without any preliminary verification. Furthermore, the dominance of a single topic in the information space (elections, war, the economy) forces people to retreat to entertainment in their media consumption.

People with different positions and opinions do not want to conduct a civilised dialogue among themselves while the language issue causes fierce disputes, aggression, and rejection

Residents of the south and east of Ukraine also noted the constant political pressure and the division of the population into us and them. This is partly due to the war, the general demoralisation, and the opposition of Russian-speaking Ukrainians to ethnic Ukrainians. A difficult atmosphere has been created in the region: people with different positions and opinions do not want to conduct a civilised dialogue among themselves while the language issue causes fierce disputes, aggression, and rejection. The respondents also noted complete indifference and lack of sympathy for human tragedies, especially in relation to

immigrants from the temporarily occupied territories and other socially vulnerable groups.

In general, the participants of the focus groups understand that it is necessary to develop and promote Ukrainian culture in the southern and eastern regions, but at the same time,

The Russian presence in the south and east of Ukraine is again felt in various cultural, religious, or other civil manifestations

ethnocentricity and modern methods of popularising national culture cause strong dissatisfaction. *'Ukrainisation in the fashion of tired stereotypes creates a feeling that Soviet officials have remained and continue to believe in the same myth that they worked on in the Soviet Union'* – this is how we can describe the general attitude to the introduction of Ukrainian culture in the south and east of Ukraine. Since the process of creating a political nation in Ukraine is not yet complete, the language issue will remain ideologised and politicised, partly because it forms a major part of Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine.

Most emotional stimuli still follow from physical reality. In cities where a significant number of Russian-speaking citizens live, an informational and cultural 'bubble' is forming: in fact, they consume not Ukrainian but Russian or even Soviet pop culture. Experts note that, since 2014, the general hostility to the aggressor and rejection of everything related to the enemy has significantly decreased, thus, the Russian presence in the south and east of Ukraine is again felt in various cultural, religious, or other civil manifestations that promote values, symbols, the interpretation of modern history, and the world order as a whole. The younger generation is also concerned about talking about the USSR exclusively in a positive way, while the adult generation is deeply worried that Western pop culture will lead to the undermining of family values and the blurring of traditional gender relations.

The results of the focus groups revealed strong factors of apathy that affect the psychological state of the population: alternating situations in which people abruptly switch from unreasonably high trust to disappointment, awareness of the fictitiousness of activities in the field of ideas, betrayal by their closest like-minded people, the presence of defectors to the enemy, fragmentation and the emergence of doubts in the camp of like-minded people, undermining trust in each other, lack of choice and a hopeless situation, as well as injustices that the individual has absolutely no recourse to rectify. This list shows the great vulnerability of those active groups in the south and east of Ukraine that have the potential to positively influence the development of the whole region or of their city or town, but often fall under the indirect or direct destructive influence of internal and/or external forces. *'It's as if everything has changed, but nothing has changed'* – this is how the respondents succinctly characterised the state of affairs in the macro-region.

Russia's soft power is felt in religious institutions where clergymen offer parishioners literature containing political, ideological, and historical narratives of Russia

Some participants of the focus groups noted that Russia's soft power is felt, in part, in religious institutions where clergymen offer parishioners literature not of a purely religious nature but containing political, ideological, and historical narratives of Russia. However, there was no clear understanding among the respondents of the need for a *Tomos* for Ukraine as a whole. Many noted the politicisation of this process which, in their opinion, served as part of the election campaign of Petro Poroshenko. For this reason the *Tomos* is seen as another point of tension in the struggle for local parishes, the redistribution of resources, and the risk of general polarisation in the region with possible negative consequences.

‘Many parishioners do not attach much importance to all this and habitually go to places of worship with which they are most familiar and closer. A particular priest is more important for people than the church. Why should we choose sides?’ – this is how we can summarise the attitude of residents of the south and east of Ukraine on the issues of the Tomos, OCU, and UOC MP.²³⁷ Experts believe that religion is an ideological tool of a hybrid war, not only in the southern and eastern regions but throughout Ukraine, but they believe that the church factor is being overplayed and politicised. At the same time, the state declares itself formally secular and should not interfere in religious affairs. It is also impossible to ignore the fact that while traditional church institutions are absorbed in legal and ideological issues, the influence of neo-Protestant trends is growing in parallel, weakening the position of the traditional Orthodox Church in this region and expanding the religious spectrum.

The responses from the focus group participants showed that residents of the south and east of Ukraine are often inclined to find symbolism in the surrounding urban environment, assigning certain phenomena meaning, including a political meaning, or giving them an emotional colouring. Respondents repeatedly stressed that they are irritated by the ubiquity of political advertising – they referred to billboards as some of the most unpleasant objects in urban public spaces. Local residents have repeatedly pointed out that the ‘neglected’ infrastructural facilities, factory pipes, vandalism, untidy kiosks and booths, as well as the crumbling facades of historical buildings are toxic and unpleasant symbols for them. They often referred to the empty pedestals of Lenin monuments left as a result of decommunisation as ‘toxic’ symbols: for many, they seemed either meaningless or part of an unfinished process. On the other hand, the residents did not experience any negative emotions toward the advertising ‘Travel to Moscow, St. Petersburg, and other cities of Russia’ which was widespread in the cities of the south and east of Ukraine or to the fact that Russia is the most common destination of international transport.

237 OCU – Orthodox Church of Ukraine, UOC MP – Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Many focus groups brought up the cliché that culture and art should be apolitical and any artist or figure of culture or show business can have their own point of view. In general, respondents believe there should be no blanket ban on cultural figures entering Ukraine from Russia, but only on those who have violated any law, publicly questioned the territorial integrity of Ukraine, or conducted other anti-Ukrainian activities. The focus groups showed that in the south and east of Ukraine, there is no universal understanding of the risks associated with the

In the south and east of Ukraine, there is no universal understanding of the risks associated with the involvement of cultural figures in the dissemination of someone else’s ideology and values through entertainment

involvement of cultural figures (public figures) in the dissemination of someone else’s ideology and values through entertainment, attracting attention, and shaping the opinions of fans.

Respondents called the festive events on 1 and 9 May divisive. These days, the majority of the population of cities in the south and east of Ukraine is polarised in relation to these dates. There is currently no conciliatory platform where the different values and views of residents on this can be discussed. Hence, the continuing discussion about the ongoing war and the options for ending it are indicative: for one part of the population, this essentially means capitulation and for the other, a peaceful solution to the issue of disputed territories: *‘We all want peace. Do you really want war? Why do you care about a military victory? If Ukraine does not give the Donbas freedom, then you want our soldiers to be killed there?’* – this is the manipulative narrative of such discussions, popular both in social networks and in the everyday conversations of residents of southern and eastern Ukraine.

The associative series test for focus group participants revealed some semantic vulnerabilities: the meaning of *victory* contains contradictions for the population of the south and east of Ukraine, *stability* has a connotation related to the times of the Soviet Union, uncertainty prevails in the colouring of the *European Union*, and *Russia* is not perceived as an aggressor country.

According to experts, decommunisation has generally been quite successful, but it is still too early to talk about changes in people's beliefs, especially in the south and east of Ukraine: decommunisation was not always perceived positively here, but it became a reality for them. The problem remains in regard to the merging of decommunisation and Ukrainisation which, in fact, are not identical processes. *'Replacing*

Some groups of the population of the south and east of Ukraine have a false impression that decommunisation is the renaming of all Russian names

a conditional Lenin with a conditional Bandera in a conditional city or town in the south or east of Ukraine will not give the expected effect because decommunisation not only means changing toponyms but also a certain way of thinking' – experts summarise the situation. They come to the conclusion that Ukrainisation works in many ways for those people who, in principle, do not want to have anything to do with communism. But there are also people of the post-Soviet mentality who do not necessarily support a nationally oriented approach to the lifestyle of local residents or their conception of symbols. Experts agree that the meaning and historical reasons for decommunisation were extremely poorly explained to the local population. As a result, some groups of the population of the south and east of Ukraine have a false impression that decommunisation is the renaming of all Russian names. In cognitive and communicative terms, the issue of decommunisation, as well as the language issue, is at increased risk because it becomes a convenient target for various forms of manipulation and politicisation. Local political revanchists can use these pain points to

bring the region into opposition to the central government, as, for example, happened in Odesa or Kharkiv. As for those who implement such political decisions in practice, maximum delicacy and full-fledged informational support are required, taking into account the mental attitude of the population of the region, their deep-set socio-political infantilism, the powers and responsibility of local governments, as well as an increased sense of victimisation in the style of *'oh, some Kyiv politicians decided something by the decree of the West, and again, no one asked us here on the ground.'*

Hasty and ill-considered decisions harm the 'soft' Ukrainisation of various spheres of the country's life and prevent the recognition, in the minds of residents of the south and east of Ukraine, of the fact that language is one of the cornerstones of statehood and self-identification of the nation as such. Many experts criticise state strategic communications primarily for the low professional level, the lack of unified approaches to work in this area, and the duplication of powers. It is emphasised that the activities of the press services of various departments and agencies are focused on PR, while at the regional level, communications activities involving different agents of the official information policy are poorly coordinated. Experts consider it expedient to create an interdepartmental institution that will function on a permanent basis, improve the interaction of various departments and coordinate their activities, unify the government's communication plans with the public, be responsible for improving the skills of officials and employees in the field of information and communication, and collect a complete picture at the regional and local levels.

According to the assessment of experts, Ukraine has not been able to build strategic communication regarding its southern and eastern regions, and therefore an inadequate perception of information threats and a mantra about the danger of separatism have taken root in the Ukrainian society. That has shifted the focus of activities and a large part of resources to cover the occupied parts of the Donbas, while leaving other regions of southern and

eastern Ukraine without due attention where the majority of the population has not yet understood the causal relationship between the non-bloc status of Ukraine and the extreme vulnerability of the country to Russia in 2014.

The experts interviewed note that it is necessary to remember the two main sources for the dissemination of Soviet and post-Soviet values and mental attitudes at the regional level. The first source which broadcasts classic Soviet and post-Soviet values and ways of thinking is the

Ukraine has not been able to build strategic communication regarding its southern and eastern regions, and therefore an inadequate perception of information threats and a mantra about the danger of separatism have taken root in the Ukrainian society

generation over 40 years old which most resists new historical assessments, the debunking of myths, and Ukrainian counter-narratives. *'The semantic space of such people is almost completely filled with myth-memes of Kremlin origin, starting from ancient history and ending with a conspiratorial explanation of all current events. The main structural feature of these myths is that they easily connect with each other as part of a common conspiracy picture, in which Russia is the centre of the world's good, attacked by dark forces, and Ukraine is an unfinished country duped by the West and groaning under the power of its own fascists which is waiting for help from Russia.'* Many experts agree that after 30 years of Ukraine's independence, it is finally time to carry out a practical cultural decolonisation of the country from Russian influence,²³⁸ as well as to build an integral identity based on the social cohesion of the nation.²³⁹

238 Тарас Шамайда, «Порядок денний: деколонізація. 7 кроків, які час зробити» [Agenda: decolonisation. 7 steps that it's time to take], *Тексти* [Texts], 30 March 2021.

239 Володимир Лупацій, «Модерна національна ідентичність: соціальна інновація чи ідеологічні гасла?» [Modern national identity: social innovation or ideological slogans?], *Хвиля* [Wave], 2 April 2021.

The second source is the Russian government. It has reinterpreted Soviet and post-Soviet values in its political interests and persistently spreads them not only within Russian society but also outside it. At the same time, it tries to direct and disseminate these narratives and ways of thinking, including among a young audience, through the use of modern technologies. Due to the patriarchal structure of the Ukrainian family, parents, as well as grandparents, have a strong influence on their children/grandchildren. The power of authority and the demand for obedience deforms children's perceptions of the real world which in adolescence manifests itself in the suppression of the desire for independence. This means that in working with young people in the south and east of Ukraine, it is important to create opportunities for them to travel to Western countries as often as possible for various training programmes and exchanges. Communication with peers from European countries will help them improve their knowledge of foreign languages and see the difference in the quality of life and its diversity, as well as help to instil new values and skills for participation in the life of society. Thereby, the younger generation will have a chance to see that the Western way of life and the so-called Western mentality are beneficial and something to aspire to, bringing success and opportunities.

Working with young people in the south and east of Ukraine, it is important to create opportunities for them to travel to Western countries as often as possible for various training programmes and exchanges

According to the experts interviewed, in order to create new competitive and viable meanings and modern Ukrainian myths, it is necessary to study in-depth the archetypes of modern Ukrainians, their values, as well as all significant factors that can affect change in the worldview of Ukrainians both now and in the foreseeable future. The creation of social capital in vulnerable regions and the formation of new moral authorities among national and regional non-political elites is seen by many experts as an important, but long-term process

of strengthening the Ukrainian idea and the national resilience of the country. *‘Politicians, officials, and experts in Kyiv should not only realise but also really proceed in their decisions from the fact that the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine actually live with their own problems and their own mentality. Local factors, the opinion of local leaders, authorities, and heroes, as well as the highly nuanced local context is very important’* – many of the experts interviewed and many respondents of the focus groups agree on this assessment.

The experts interviewed conclude that at least a third of the population of the south and east of Ukraine currently shares, to some extent, values and points of reference that are alien to the current socio-political mainstream. Among these citizens, there are three groups:

1. People with a stable anti-Ukrainian and pro-Kremlin ideology who are absolutely incapable of a rational dialogue about an independent Ukrainian nation.
2. People who do not question the value of the state as such, but who have a strong cultural and emotional connection to the (Soviet) past. A constructive dialogue with this group is possible and necessary – with a focus on strengthening state capacity and guardianship.
3. People without stable ideological beliefs who try to increase their self-esteem by participating in an endless and interesting process, while not having enough means or opportunities to influence anything. Dialogue with them is possible only after their disappointment with the situation and political sobering up, since destructive tendencies arise from illusions.

4.3. INFORMATION SECURITY

As a result of Russia’s occupation of the Donbas and Crimea, the information infrastructure of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine was severely damaged: TV towers, TV studios, and radio stations were destroyed along with their equipment. The restoration of broadcasting by which to better inform the residents of the region has become one of the priorities of the Government of Ukraine since 2014. However, many experts interviewed are critical of the fact that, in the conditions of a hybrid war, the authorities are trying to resolve media infrastructure issues mainly with foreign grants. Moreover, existing infrastructure projects have not been followed by a thorough strategy to create an enriched information flow of high-quality content.

As a result of Russia’s occupation of the Donbas and Crimea, the information infrastructure of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine was severely damaged

According to experts, the transition from analogue television broadcasting to digital is particularly difficult in the regions, as decisions are often made based on the situation in Kyiv and without taking into account local realities.

Focus groups revealed that since the oligarchs control national channels, the public has a significant interest in developing regional independent resources, but so far, the quality of their content leaves much to be desired. In general, the media infrastructure of the region is not sufficiently developed but even now the number of media publications exceeds the resources of advertisers. Regional television media do not have sufficient funding, and therefore, they have to work on outdated equipment, with broadcasts that cover small territories through separate frequencies and at strictly defined airtimes. Neither local TV channels nor radio stations are available in a number of localities and there are not enough resources to switch to digital television,

especially in small cities. Moreover, the closer to the temporarily occupied territories, the higher the probability that a signal from the Russian media will ‘reach’ the populated area.²⁴⁰ The majority of respondents noted that they can watch many Russian TV channels both on the Internet and via satellite. Furthermore, they note the higher quality of Russian content, as well as a relative coherence of messaging that is not found in Ukrainian resources: *‘When one watches Ukrainian channels, they constantly notice a certain chaos, some kind of decline, destructive factors, and all these internal discrepancies of ours. So the ordinary citizen gets a picture of instability. And on Russian channels – everything is clear and unambiguous. And it’s easier for the viewer to comprehend: black and white, good and evil, the truth is on the side of some and the enemies are completely separate, the image of the enemy is very clearly articulated.’*

During the study, the focus group participants noted a total distrust of journalism and even fatigue from it. Some respondents not only noted the unprofessionalism and lack of objectivity of many journalists but also called them ‘outspoken liars.’ According to the respondents, journalism in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine suffers from the

Journalism in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine suffers from the incompetence of journalists and their biases and sustains itself on certain local informal power brokers

incompetence of journalists and their biases and sustains itself on certain local informal power brokers. Some local journalists in the south and east of Ukraine shared their feelings about the freedom of the media: *‘So, on the one hand, we restrict our people’s access to enemy media and on the other – we tightly adhere to the policy of the authorities and power structures in the Ukrainian media. We need*

²⁴⁰ Since the beginning of Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine, more than 70 different Russian TV channels have been banned from broadcasting there. Konstantin Katyshev, «В Україні вже заборонили 73 російські телеканали» [73 Russian TV channels have already been banned in Ukraine], *ZN.UA*, 7 September 2016.

to figure out how to rectify this contradiction.’ During the focus groups, the opinion was often repeated that all Ukrainian media is on the side of protecting the independence of the country and countering information aggression, but all forms of restrictions on the media by the authorities in the conditions of information aggression feed the aggressor’s arguments about a lack of media freedom in Ukraine.

The participants of the focus groups noted that journalists do not adhere to the code of journalistic ethics, in particular, they cover events one-sidedly, imposing their own subjective opinions. In local media and on popular websites, there is a rule that the speed

There is almost no investigative journalism in the regional media of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine

of information submission is more important than its verification. Therefore, the content is mainly reposted from other sites or social networks. There is almost no investigative journalism in the regional media of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine, since the publications cannot afford to devote much time to the detailed development of the topic. Also, according to respondents, there is a lot of negative and unnecessary content in regional news, and in local journalism, there are many commissioned pieces that promote someone’s business interests or exert political pressure and influence. *‘The media in the region is often used for purposes other than communicating with the citizenry. The media controlled by financial and industrial groups talk about filling the city’s budget, about charity and patronage, but no one reports for what purpose such large deductions are made’* – such is how we can summarise the opinion about the state of local media in the south and east of Ukraine. Such media projects, in fact, act as the ‘PR agencies’ of local authorities or oligarchs.

Local information operations and attacks through dependent media mainly serve a certain tactical purpose, but the significance and influence of such media may be more than that of its national counterparts. The

In some parts of society in the cities and towns of southern and eastern Ukraine, a demand for channels and sources of reliable information has taken shape

experts interviewed agree that, as a rule, the analysis should consider the state of the regional economy and big business, since the destabilisation of the financial and economic situation is already part of modern warfare. The southern and eastern regions of Ukraine should also be analysed from the point of view of investment attractiveness, since one of the main threats and risks for the aggressor country is associated with the influx of Western investments into the region. Therefore, the enemy seeks to discredit officials through the media, create other informational obstacles and false ideas about possible disasters and the unfavourability of the environment in this macro-region for doing business.

One of the possible solutions to this problem is the rethinking and strengthening of the public broadcasting system. It should become a serious element of the updated information environment, providing all citizens of Ukraine with high-quality media products and providing verified information on different platforms in a form attractive to different target audiences. In some parts of society in the cities and towns of southern and eastern Ukraine, a demand for channels and sources of reliable information has taken shape, since many are tired of getting confused and constantly doubting the news and want to receive information without having to double-check it later. However, many respondents recognise that both journalists and media consumers need to develop skills in critical thinking, analysis, and argumentation.

Poor-quality work, biased assessments and chaotic coverage of events are associated with the low wages of journalists at independent publications, as well as with a lack of understanding of what professional qualities

and skills a journalist should have. It is noteworthy that the journalists who took part in the focus groups themselves speak negatively about a significant number of their colleagues and their work. The military also noted the complete incompetence of journalists covering the war. They recalled examples when the material published by journalists led to shelling

of military positions of units of the AFU. In general, experts have the impression that, in recent years, the state and society of Ukraine have suffered greatly from such actions of journalists, but few dare to talk about it openly. *'The crisis in the media has reached its peak: many regional publications have turned into local pension funds for aging journalists. Their budget is filled during local election campaigns and for providing information services for local authorities.'*

In general, experts believe that outdated journalistic standards may still be in demand for a lack of alternatives. According to their assessment, not all the main journalistic standards have lost their relevance: accuracy, objectivity in the presentation of information, efficiency, and the separation of facts from judgments are more important than ever. But in the context of a hybrid war, many journalists

In the context of a hybrid war, many journalists cannot cope with new challenges, for example, rather than determining the reliability of information amidst a flood of false news they blur the truth with half-truths

cannot cope with new challenges, for example, rather than determining the reliability of information amidst a flood of false news they blur the truth with half-truths. The interviewed experts see the balancing of opinions as a

journalistic standard that implies the conflict-free presentation of the position of different parties as somewhat questionable. *'In a warring country, we have an absurd situation in which journalists trained in the standards of the BBC have tried and even now try to present the position of the aggressor country and the separatists for the balance of opinions and as the point of view of a balancing party, to which they supposedly have the right'* – this is how media experts describe the situation. Furthermore, according to their words, journalists often show greed and bias in covering information. Distrust of the media is the result of irresponsible journalism and manipulation of journalistic standards when some journalists imagined themselves as fighters on the information front and others silently, idly watch their profession being destroyed. As a solution, experts suggest allocating more resources to the development of technologies that would optimise the verification of information and minimise the human factor. Moreover, it is important that the independent journalistic community is more actively self-regulated with the involvement of experts rather than politicians or businessmen. At the same time, it is very important to educate media consumers themselves, so that, for example, they understand how journalism works, what genres there are, and what poor-quality coverage of an event can lead to.

Taking into account the historically formed loyalty of the local population in the south and east of Ukraine to the Russian theme, their lack of contemporary critical thinking skills, and low level of media literacy,²⁴¹ we can conclude that this region of the country is characterised by a high level of penetration of pro-Russian

This region of the country is characterised by a high level of penetration of pro-Russian propaganda both in traditional media and on social media networks

propaganda both in traditional media and on social media networks. The exceptions include individual representatives of active civil society,

as well as specially trained employees of the public and private sectors. Experts deplore and regret the low level of media literacy not only among the population of the south and east of Ukraine but also among the region's journalists, the editors of regional media, and students of journalism faculties in the cities of the region. Experts believe that the low level of training of students is primarily due to the fact that the teachers do not have modern skills and knowledge about information security or changes in media paradigms in the post-journalistic era. *'When people are asked whether Ukrainian citizens need to study media literacy, about 60% answer that, of course, they should. And on the next question about personal readiness to study such media literacy, the same 60% answer in the negative, believing that they already know everything, but that most children and adolescents need media literacy'* – such is how we can generalise the attitude to new skills and knowledge about media literacy in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine. But there is another view of the problem: *'If we consider information as a product, then there is an overheating of consumer markets where the so-called fight against fake news has turned into a tool that bloggers use to compete.'*

Television is still the main channel of information for the audience over 40 which prefers entertainment content. Experts note that the difference in the method of obtaining information between generations is not so important, since what is seen on the Internet and social networks later finds reinforcement on the television and vice versa between generations. Social networks, particularly Facebook, have become a platform for major political and socially important discussions. The popularity of thematic channels in Telegram and groups in Viber was also noted. There are absolutely no restrictions on the consumption of any information since there are solutions for circumventing all official prohibitions. For example, the younger generation has quickly learned to use VPNs to circumvent prohibitions on visiting Russian resources, and many Internet sites operating from the occupied territories are fully accessible. According to the experts, since there are no real restrictions and the media products from Russia are easily accessible and attractive, many residents of the south and

241 Detector Media, "[Media literacy index of Ukrainians](#)," presentation, March 2018.

east of Ukraine are more exposed to malignant influence and various forms of informational manipulation. *'Today, the authorities are trying to treat the symptoms of inactivity that have remained since the early 90s. After 2014, when they saw the consequences of the information war, they have tried in every possible way to catch up with the lost years of independence'* – respondents often note during focus groups.

Since there are no real restrictions and the media products from Russia are easily accessible and attractive, many residents of the south and east of Ukraine are more exposed to malignant influence

In general, experts rated the regional effectiveness of the state's information security policy as rather low. They explain this weakness as due to a lack of resources, political will, and institutional authority. It is also due to the fragmentation of responsibility for the development of this area among various institutions and a superficial understanding of the problems of various regions of the country. The creation and implementation of a full-fledged information security system is hampered by the authorities' focus on political and electoral objectives. The situation is aggravated by an excessive obsession with traditional tools of communication between the authorities and the media which was described in more detail in previous sections of this report: press events, press briefings, press releases, and the publication of 'dry' information on official websites – without explaining the nuances, prerequisites, and other important details to different target groups. The advantage of modern communication platforms that would help to revive the process and involve wider circles of experts at the horizontal level is poorly taken advantage of in the regions. The example of the Kherson Region presents the problems of information security at the regional level and the factors (such as weak civil society, ineffective communication with local and central authorities, insufficient attention to solving systematic problems) affecting it

have been described in detail.²⁴² According to the experts interviewed, there are a number of traps to avoid in the active interaction between the media and the citizenry. Journalists visiting front-line zones often look for sensational, shocking, and emotionally provoking material in an attempt to draw attention to certain problems on the ground. However, residents of other regions of Ukraine often fail to appreciate this properly and do not want to constantly be exposed to such materials, mainly because of fatigue from the war and military topics. The second trap is that Ukrainian citizens living near the temporarily occupied territories still communicate with the residents of those uncontrolled territories, but if the journalistic material contains something false or wrong from their point of view, this damages their trust in the Ukrainian media as a whole. The third trap lies in the fact that residents of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine often see negative coverage of their region in the national media – and this negative one-sidedness also generates discontent.

According to the experts interviewed, simply informing is not the solution to the existing challenges which in turn indicates a methodological error on the part of the authorities. *'If you choose a methodologically incorrect action, then all your subsequent steps will not bring the expected results, instead possibly even harm. One of the biggest mistakes made at the very beginning of the war in 2014, was the involvement of journalists and media professionals in work with public opinion. It turned out that "the tail wagged the dog"'* – experts give a retrospective conclusion. The data security policy of Ukraine has been unsuccessful because the chosen approach has not worked. Not only have old problems worsened, but also new ones have appeared. Due to the fact that there was no fully fledged deep understanding of all socio-psychological aspects of security, and the journalistic approach dominated, communication was mostly untargeted and

242 Юлія Каздобіна, Анастасія Баровська, Дмитро Дубов та Ірина Петрова, *Інформаційний простір Херсонської області: стан, проблеми та шляхи покращення ситуації* [The information space of the Kherson Region: the state, problems, and ways to improve the situation] (Dnipro: Середняк Т. К. [Serednyak T. K.], 2019).

‘incomprehensible to any target audience’: *‘It’s all the same as if you had started shooting indiscriminately from a weapon in different directions, without aiming at all.’*

Among the positive achievements, it was noted that the obligation to disclose the final beneficiaries of a given media source was fixed at the legislative level, as well as the prohibition of Russian propaganda resources, including the social networks VK and OK. However, this very

The level of public approval of decisions about prohibitions and restrictions has begun to decline, as the feeling among the majority of the population that these informational threats are still relevant has dulled

important step was insufficiently explained and justified, and the responsibility for this lies mainly with the state itself. In recent years, the level of public approval of decisions about prohibitions and restrictions has begun to decline, as the feeling among the majority of the population that these informational threats are still relevant has dulled. A great furore in Ukrainian society was caused by the official prohibition of a number of Ukrainian TV channels and media resources that were under the control of Viktor Medvedchuk who openly promotes a pro-Russian vector in Ukrainian politics. Such a decision was immediately used by various opposing forces to escalate the situation both in the informational environment and physical space.²⁴³ It is noteworthy that 51% of the population of the southern and 59% of the population of the eastern regions of Ukraine do not support this prohibition, while in the country overall this figure is

243 «Учасників акції на підтримку «каналів Медведчука» набирали в «Телеграмі» за 200-400 грн – Суспільне» [Participants of the action in support of the Medvedchuk channels were recruited on Telegram for UAH 200–400 – public], *Детектор медіа* [Detector Media], 8 February 2021.

37%.²⁴⁴ Most of the experts interviewed believe that such decisions should primarily have a legal basis in the form of elaborated laws and other acts, so there is a clear and transparent decision-making procedure: this will avoid abuse, that is, the use of such a tool in any political confrontation within Ukraine.

Experts believe that, to improve information security, it is necessary to create a system for analysing and evaluating informational threats which facilitates warning of, and the timely countering of, special enemy information operations. It is also important to increase and improve the cyber means of protecting the media, to establish at the legislative level the mechanism for prosecuting any media conducting an open or hidden anti-Ukrainian information war and, of course, to restrict the free flow of any information products from the territory of the aggressor state. To build a society resilient to information influence in modern realities, it is extremely important not only to develop response measures but also to conduct preventive activities, including those in education and awareness building on the topics of information hygiene and media literacy.

If we are talking about a young audience, then the solution to the issue lies in the political and organisational domain, since the relevant subjects for teaching key knowledge and skills can be integrated into the formal education

Russian hostile information campaigns have a long-term goal and orientation which means that the response of the Ukrainian state and society should also be constant, and not episodic in character

system. In the case of adult citizens and especially the older generation, the resolution of the issue lies, rather, in the receptiveness of these target audiences and the suitability of the teaching methodology. *‘Superficial projects alone are not enough, as they create a*

244 Соціологічна група «Рейтинг» [Sociological Group ‘Rating’], «Україна на карантині: моніторинг суспільних настроїв, 6-8 лютого 2021» [Ukraine in quarantine: monitoring of public attitudes, 6–8 February 2021], presentation, 10 February 2021.

false assessment of people's abilities. Because of the illusion of knowledge, they begin to think that if they already hear such words as information war, fakes, bots, trolls, then they are already fully protected and need no more training' – experts advocate for quality and longer-term programmes, as today, one of the main vulnerabilities is that, in fact, most of the preventive work is conducted with foreign donor support, which may decrease or disappear altogether. At the same time, Russian hostile information campaigns have a long-term goal and orientation which means that the response of the Ukrainian state and society should also be constant, and not episodic in

The respondents are afraid that there is a risk of stepping over the line between freedom of speech and censorship or prosecution for dissent which can indeed fall upon any political opponent of the current government

character. The experts with which in-depth interviews were conducted admit that the use of decentralised communication channels, that is, those not controlled by one subject or by the state, makes it difficult to combat information attacks and complicates censorship in principle. Accordingly, the fight against manipulation, provocations, and various forms of information attacks should be raised to a new, more intellectual level, and at the same time, critical thinking in civil society must be developed.

According to the opinion of experts, one of the common problems in the information field in Ukraine is the wealth of good initiatives that are poorly implemented. There is another problem: while arguing over the general issues of the security architecture, various departments, agencies, and institutions strive to take a position of mentoring the citizenry, assuming they know and understand all the citizens' interests. However, such agencies rarely think about really protecting the interests of both creators and consumers of information. Experts believe that a useful conclusion can be drawn

from past mistakes: in the conditions of an information war, it is worth attracting specially trained experts, not PR specialists, advertisers, and journalists, to plan and conduct the information operations. The involvement of this latter category in the short term mitigated the informational pressure, but in the end, brought the opposite result, undermining trust in the institution of objective journalism, significantly harming communication in the state-society-citizen triangle. The best way to protect the interests of citizens in the information flow of private media can be to establish three-way responsibility among the state, civil associations, and professional journalistic communities together with human rights organisations. Experts believe that such mutually beneficial cooperation can balance the risks for each of the parties.

The respondents are afraid that there is a risk of stepping over the line between freedom of speech and censorship or prosecution for dissent which can indeed fall upon any political opponent of the current government. At the focus groups, the fear was repeatedly expressed that if the state began to restore order on the Internet, it may lead to excessive regulation which in turn would be perceived as an attack on personal freedom.

Some of the experts interviewed are sure that, in the conditions of a hybrid war, and growing informational threats, all decisions should be considered from the point of view of national security. If information is a weapon, then specialists should have it and fully own it: *'Freedom of speech ends where direct or veiled calls for destabilisation begin to appear in the messaging, the real situation is distorted in favour of the aggressor country and its "fifth column", manifestations of extremism are provoked and encouraged and panic is cultivated.'*

4.4. DIGITAL SECURITY

The situation with cyberthreats is the least studied at the regional level. Practically no thematic regional sociological studies are being carried out, and cyberthreats at the regional level (at the level of regions, cities, or settlements) have not been significantly

reflected in state strategic documents in the field of cybersecurity. Meanwhile, cyberthreats at the regional level are presented in the same volumes and forms, and the level of cybercrime (including identity forgery, illegal use of personal data, and drug sales using digital technologies) generally corresponds to the economic activity and attractiveness of specific regions. The level of digital skills among residents of the south and east of Ukraine is vividly described by a quote from the participants of the focus group: *‘Our grandmothers still keep PIN codes in the same wallet with bank cards. They barely understand what online banking is. But even the more advanced younger generation, for example, still uses fairly easy passwords that are easily cracked.’*

It should be noted that Ukraine lacks both qualitative and quantitative studies assessing the level of digital literacy among the population (including in the regional context). The experts interviewed drew attention to the fact that there are significant risk factors in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine – a large number of critical infrastructure facilities and a high level of digital ignorance of ordinary Internet users: *‘Our government is making many attempts to teach the population digital literacy, but the effectiveness of these efforts is still difficult to assess.’*

Experts noted that Ukraine does not have the highest level of cybersecurity either at the state level or in the private sector, given the threats to the country’s critical infrastructure.²⁴⁵ Outdated requirements for the construction of state data protection systems, significant gaps in the system processes of cybersecurity organisations, and the lack of qualified personnel seriously hinder the full transition to new digital technologies.²⁴⁶ Since Ukraine does not have a system for assessing digital security indicators at the level of macroregions, experts believe it is necessary to base this on external assessments of the overall situation in the country. As such, in the International Telecommunication Union’s 2020 global

Cybersecurity Index, Ukraine took 78th place (39th place in the European region), receiving an average of 65.93 points out of 100.²⁴⁷ Taking into account other indicators of development of this area, this assessment seems to be higher than the average.²⁴⁸ But nevertheless, it speaks of the unrealised potential for the development of digital security, new electronic services, and effective e-governance in Ukraine. Since 2014, digital tools have been used more and more intensively and in a greater variety of ways in the political struggle in Ukraine.²⁴⁹

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hacking of resources, data leaks etc.) associated with the negligence of such officials. To improve the situation, it is necessary to eradicate the principle of *‘Why really set up defences if you can get control of state budgetary funds, and if something happens – to write everything off to all-powerful hackers and cyberwar?’* The main reason for this attitude is the lack of liability when, for example, the penalty for the absence of a comprehensive data protection system is ten times less than the cost of such a system itself. Therefore, the principle *‘why pay more?’* applies. The level of cybersecurity of private companies varies depending on the sector in which they operate, but even here, the gaps are due to the lack of liability for hacking and data leaks, as well as other threats that are more important for business (for example, a corrupt judicial system). That is, the assessment of cyber risks is made on an obsolete basis.

245 Andreas Marazis and Rober Kothe, [“Russian Cyberwarfare Capabilities: Assessing the Threat for Ukraine’s Critical Infrastructure”](#), ENC Analysis, European Neighbourhood Council, September 2018.

246 Estonian Center of Eastern Partnership and CybExer Technologies, [Post-Election Assessment of the Cybersecurity Infrastructure and Interagency Cooperation in Ukraine with Related Recommendations](#) (Tallinn: Estonian Center of Eastern Partnership, 2019).

247 [Global Cybersecurity Index 2020](#) (Geneva: ITU Publications, 2021).

248 [“National Cyber Security Index: Ukraine,”](#) e-Governance Academy Foundation, last accessed 31 May 2021.

249 Jan Surotchak and Geoffrey Macdonald, eds., [Political Parties in the Digital Age: A Comparative Review of Digital Technology in Campaigns Around the World](#) (Washington, DC: Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) and International Republican Institute (IRI), 2020).

For a significant number of the focus group participants, digital security was most often mentioned in connection with telephone and cyber fraud which is often associated with commercial transactions. It is widely believed that cybersecurity is most important for banks, while most do not know what the duties of the cyberpolice are,²⁵⁰ but consider them incompetent: *'They can't get the funds back once they have been purloined by fraudsters.'* Most of the respondents believe that the state,

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and to some extent the Internet provider, are responsible for digital security. Expecting active participation from the state, the respondents nevertheless stated that they did not believe in the actual ability of the state to change anything or help in any way. This position fits into the general pattern of relations between citizen and state, in which distrust of the abilities and capabilities of the state to resolve matters pushes the citizens to rely only on themselves, their abilities, and their immediate environment. The experts interviewed tend to believe that state policy in the field of digital security is unsatisfactory. At the same time, it is very important to note that experts emphasise the personal responsibility of the user in the development and strengthening of personal cybersecurity.

Focus groups displayed a very superficial understanding of individual cyberhygiene: most users do not know what to do to prevent hacking, in the event of an email account or a social network being hacked, or if confidential personal information gets lost. The vast majority of respondents carelessly believe that hacking is not a big deal and that the problem can easily be solved by changing their passwords, thereby

ending the access of third parties to their mail, or by opening a new account. Only a few people knew about two-factor authentication and most had not even thought about the arrays of different personal information stored and accumulated on various platforms and social networks, including photo galleries, geolocation, credit card data etc. The general attitude toward the importance of personal data and their protection can be characterised by the phrases: *'I don't have anything important there anyway'*, *'But what would be the point of hacking me'*, *'Well, I'm certainly of no interest to attackers.'* It is noteworthy that about 70% of teenagers surveyed in 2019 would not turn to anyone for help in the event of a cyberthreat.²⁵¹

A focus group of employees of the AFU revealed that at a certain level, the leadership of the units (mostly junior and middle command staff) does not understand the importance of using secure communication channels not only for themselves as servicemen but also for their family members and others close to them. In particular, they referred to stories about file transfers through Viber, the use of removable data storage devices, the use of unprotected public Wi-Fi access points, and the lack of special working equipment or of

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licensed equipment or software. All of those problems were later confirmed by the experts interviewed. They are also concerned about the safety of personal data in the medical and banking spheres and municipal databases. It is not uncommon for stolen databases to be used for telephone fraud, the victims of which are poorly protected segments of the population (for example, pensioners). Against the background of the ongoing war, all the cases described provide the enemy with various

250 «Вітаємо на офіційному сайті Кіберполіції України» [Welcome the official website of the Cyberpolice of Ukraine], Кіберполіція України [Cyberpolice of Ukraine], last access 31 May 2021.

251 Костянтин Корсун, «Кібербезпека: Тематика захисту дітей в Інтернеті завжди актуальна. І актуальність буде рости» [Cybersecurity: the topic of protecting children on the Internet is always relevant. and the relevance will grow], *Українформ* [Ukrinform], 31 May 2021.

'windows of opportunity' to manipulation and influence operations in the virtual environment.

There are a number of objective cybersecurity risks at the local and regional levels that can seriously affect the state as a whole. An example is the 'leaking' of personal information of the AFU servicemen from their units and

Residents of the south and east of Ukraine do not understand how much damage a potential hack of the databases of state organisations, municipalities, or private firms can cause

the centres of information and psychological operations which were then published on Russian web resources. In general, residents of the south and east of Ukraine do not understand how much damage a potential hack of the databases of state organisations, municipalities, or private firms can cause. A few respondents drew investigative parallels between the physical and virtual worlds. According to the experts interviewed, there is still a lot of work to be done in explaining the essence of such concepts as 'small-scale cybercrime', 'cyberracketeering', 'cyberterrorism', and 'cybersabotage', as well as their real consequences for people.

Focus groups showed that the majority of respondents do not associate the disappearance of the Internet with security issues. For many, complete disconnection from the Internet 'is incomprehensible', and talking about what their reaction to it and further behaviour could be, consumers tend to overlook the essence and consequences of the threat, and consider this hypothetical situation only through the prism of domestic use: *'In our city, time without the Internet will open up more opportunities for leisure, reading books, and personal communication with relatives and neighbours. All of which is sorely lacking now.'*

Only a small number of respondents understand that in the absence of any connection to the Internet, the work of, for example, the banking system will be seriously limited and in many areas of life, it will be difficult to carry out any professional work (such as that of media, commerce, and sectoral registries). The Internet is perceived by most as a source of entertainment. If it is not available, people plan to contact their relatives and friends for information, as well as go out in their cities to the usual places of mass congregation (markets, shopping and entertainment centres, squares etc.) which indicates the potential vulnerability of local communities in the event of the deliberate creation of rumours as part of psychological operations.

Many experts stated the need to convey to the population that the state cannot and should not provide cyberprotection to the private sector and the population if they do not want it. The state is obliged to protect the elements of critical infrastructure by establishing strict requirements for the protection of these resources and monitoring their implementation, as well as to regulate the treatment of personal data of Ukrainian citizens and punish failure to protect them. The

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representatives of the cyberpolice interviewed said that it is necessary to expand their powers so they can carry out offensive preventative cyberoperations. The state can also take on an educational role and teach private business and the population as a whole the rules of safe behaviour in the virtual world, i.e., digital hygiene, since the weakest element in cybersecurity is the human factor: *'In this area, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of modern practical skills. It is important not only to buy technical equipment and software – it must be professionally configured at the*

start and maintained during its entire service life, as cybersecurity is a continuous process.'

Vulnerable groups include the many public servants who use unsecured information transmission channels, as well as representatives of press services and employees of local governments who believe that cybersecurity is a matter exclusively for

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IT departments. Another problem is that unlicensed software is used everywhere, but neither at the level of local councils, nor in new cash machines, has the issue of cybersecurity been raised as a priority. The passive attitude of ordinary people to their own accounts, as well as their lack of understanding what actions are necessary in case of unauthorised access to them, creates many windows of opportunity for both local attackers and cyberattacks from international groups or individual countries. Cybersecurity management can be centralised when all the requirements, approaches, and standards are unified and 'descend' from the top, from a centralised regulator. It can also be decentralised when all the requirements, approaches, and standards are developed and approved at the local level, that is, they are essentially unique in each case. But the best variant is a hybrid one, that is, when the requirements, approaches, and standards are unified at the level of an industry regulator, and each regulator adapts them to its own specific needs (for example, the National Bank of Ukraine for private banks, the Ministry of Defence for military facilities etc.). The experts drew attention to the problem with the practical application of legislative initiatives in the field of cybersecurity in Ukraine, including the lack of innovative scientific and technical developments and tools to stimulate the development of the cybersecurity industry, the lack of industrial cybersecurity management

centres, the lack of real cyberdefence measures in IT infrastructures, and the lack of an established process for training and spreading awareness of cybersecurity issues.²⁵²

If we summarise the analysis of the data from the focus groups and in-depth interviews of experts, we come to the conclusion that the unprofessionalism of personnel and unpreparedness of the population of the south and east of Ukraine, especially vulnerable groups, in terms of the widespread, inevitable digitalisation of many areas of life, is a threat to the national security of the country. The Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine has highlighted the gravity of this problem and possible solutions.²⁵³ Established in the autumn of 2019, the main tasks of this ministry are to form and implement state policy in the fields of innovation, informatisation, electronic

communications, the radio frequency resources of Ukraine, postal communications, and a single digital space. It is also worth noting that the key priority of the ministry up to 2024 is to ensure that 100% of public services to citizens and businesses become available online, as well as to involve about 6 million Ukrainians in digital skills development programmes, thereby

It is particularly the local rather than the national level of governance and management that serves as an easy target for cyber attackers

forming a clear roadmap for the development of digital literacy among the citizenry.²⁵⁴ According to experts in the field of security, it is particularly the local rather than the national level of governance and management that serves as an easy target for cyber attackers

252 Алексей Швачка, «Состояние кибербезопасности в Украине: независимая внешняя оценка» [The state of cybersecurity in Ukraine: an independent external assessment], *Delo.ua*, 15 September 2018; Лана Самохвалова та Оксана Климончук, «Олексій Семеняка, експерт з кібербезпеки Річниця «Петі»: рахуємо збитки та вчимо уроки...» [Oleksii Semeniaka, an expert on cybersecurity at Peti: counting losses and learning lessons...], *Укрінформ* [Ukrinform], 27 June 2018.

253 Валерия Ионан, «Сериалы и библиотеки-хабы. Как Минцифры будет развивать цифровые навыки украинцев» [TV series and library hubs. how the Ministry of Digital Transformation will develop the digital skills of Ukrainians], *НВ [NV]*, 10 February 2020.

254 «Цілі до 2024 року» [Goals up to 2024], last accessed 31 May 2021.

who can create mass unrest and cause threats to the security of citizens not only in a virtual or information environment but also in the physical one.²⁵⁵ Therefore, it is important that the leadership of local governments helps to attract professional personnel, contributes to the allocation of funds for analysing the local situation in the field of digital security, and improving its particular components (standards, technical support, regular training, exercises, and cooperation with neighbours).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis of data from focus groups and in-depth interviews, it can be concluded that the vulnerability of the regions of the south and east of Ukraine is created from a combination of several mutually reinforcing factors. These include a lack of adequate skills among the population and officials to ensure both broad and narrow informational, digital, communicational, and cognitive security; distrust and mental attitudes that hinder effective cooperation between the authorities, civil society, and the business sector; a limited resource base, non-transparency of decisions, and corrupted financial flows. All of this is aimed more at maintaining the status quo in the region, rather than at strengthening the resilience of communities and society. Taking into account the geographical (and in some part, also ideological) remoteness of the region from Kyiv and its proximity to the occupied territories and the border with Russia, such gaps create very favourable conditions for hostile forces.

5. FINDINGS FROM THE WORLD OF SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS

Social media networks have become one of the key tools of political, ideological, and public communication. This allows interaction with narrower target groups based on different principles – from electoral preferences and demography to geography and areas of interest. Political and social technologies adapt to the special features of social networks, seeking to use them both to achieve various goals within the framework of the country’s democratic process and to solve social, cultural, economic, public, and educational tasks. Over the past decade, social networks have become not only information channels for many citizens but also a place of information carnage where, in a hybrid war, some countries are trying to influence the internal politics of others by resorting to propaganda, psychological manipulation, and other elements of soft power. Of course, Ukraine’s information space has not remained aloof from the virtual ideological and political confrontation, the dynamics of which have been observed and studied by many experts.²⁵⁶ It is also noted that bot farms in social networks carried out coordinated and systematic attacks on Ukrainian society on various resonant topics,²⁵⁷

255 Simona R. Soare and Joe Burton, “Smart Cities, Cyber Warfare and Social Disorder,” in *2019 11th International Conference on Cyber Conflict: Silent Battle*, ed. Tomáš Minárik, Siim Alatalu, Stefano Biondi, Massimiliano Signoretti, Ihsan Tolga and Gábor Visky (Tallinn: NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, 2019), 108-124.

256 Vitalii Rybak, “‘People’s Liberation Army’: How Russia Still Uses VK To Influence Ukrainians,” *Ukraine World*, 26 January 2021; Служба безпеки України [Security Service of Ukraine], «СБУ викрила агентурну мережу спецслужб РФ, яка дестабілізувала ситуацію в Україні через Telegram-канали» [The SBU exposed an undercover network of the special services of the Russian Federation which destabilised the situation in Ukraine through Telegram channels], news, 1 February 2021; Media Sapiens, «СБУ заблокувала діяльність мережі інтернет-агітаторів, якими керували з Росії» [The SBU blocked the activities of a network of Internet agitators, which were directed from Russia], *Детектор медіа* [Detector Media], 25 January 2021; «Українские социальные сети наводнены заведомо ложной и недостоверной информацией о COVID-19» [Ukrainian social networks are flooded with deliberately false and unreliable information about COVID-19], *Новости ООН* [News of the UN], 3 March 2021.

257 Тетяна Бодня, «Завдання тролів - ініціювати інфохвилю, до якої масово приєднуються реальні користувачі, яких професійним жаргоном росіяни називають гарматним м'ясом», - Ілля Вітюк, начальник управління, департамент кібербезпеки СБУ» [‘The task of the trolls is to initiate an information wave which will be massively joined by real users, whom the Russians call cannon fodder in professional jargon’, - Illia Vitiuk, Head of the Cybersecurity Department of the SBU], *Цензор.НЕТ* [Censor.net], 30 March 2021.

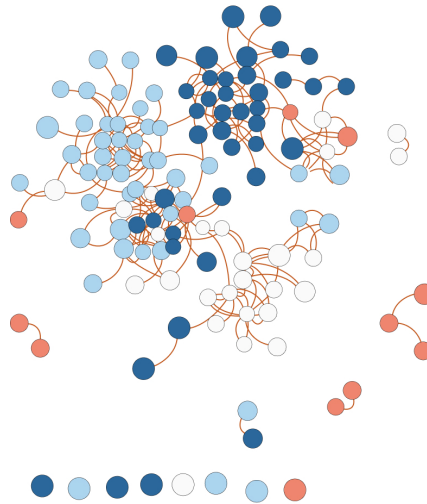
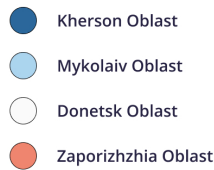


Figure 4. Virtual connections of the most active ideological users on Facebook

including vaccination against coronavirus.²⁵⁸ We analysed the content and structure of public pages on social networks from the region in focus to identify the penetration of malicious narratives into the communication space populated by residents of the south and east of Ukraine. Within the framework of the programme Resilient Ukraine, we used different methods to collect and analyse big data obtained anonymously on the basis of a sample of public records and public profiles, pages, and channels from the most popular social

Most of the ideological posts were made by Facebook users from the Mykolaiv region

networks in Ukraine: Facebook, VK, YouTube, and Instagram. Each of these social networks has a unique architecture and a particular concept of user communication which affects the forms of engagement and opportunities for interaction both between users and with content. The time period selected for the analysis of social networks (December 2018 – May 2019) fell during a pre-election period in Ukraine. This significantly increased the activity of users and politically active citizens, and also attracted those financially motivated to make use of social networks in formulating their own information agenda in the virtual space.

5.1. FACEBOOK

The analysis of open data from this social network was based on 11 447 public profiles of residents of the south and east of Ukraine who had at least one unique post. About 35% of those profiles had at least one ideological post in the feed,²⁵⁹ indicating a high degree of political ideologisation of the public discussions on Facebook. It is worth noting that the authors of ideological posts on Facebook have more virtual friends (on average, 1 423) and subscribers (on average, 539) than ordinary users.

Based on the results of clustering the 11 447 users, we identified three functional clusters: writers (creators) of ideological posts (about 4% of the sample), distributors of ideological content (about 3%), and a cluster of passive information consumers (93%).

Graphs of the connections of the most active ideological users revealed their close virtual connections and the number of common contacts, so, in other words, they are channels for distributing ideological posts among themselves. Separate groups of users were observed in the Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Donetsk regions. The group of active ideological profiles which includes representatives of all four areas was singled out separately, as a distinct information ecosystem. During the period of the analysis, the rhetoric of its most active participants was essentially pro-Ukrainian, but due to the political struggle, the rhetoric in the online environment polarised political profiles and various sympathetic activists.

258 Roman Osadchuk, "Multiple actors attack Ukrainian COVID-19 vaccination efforts," DFR Lab on Medium, 31 March 2021.

259 A public text record that has been automatically filtered for spam and contains keywords on socio-political and historical-political topics.

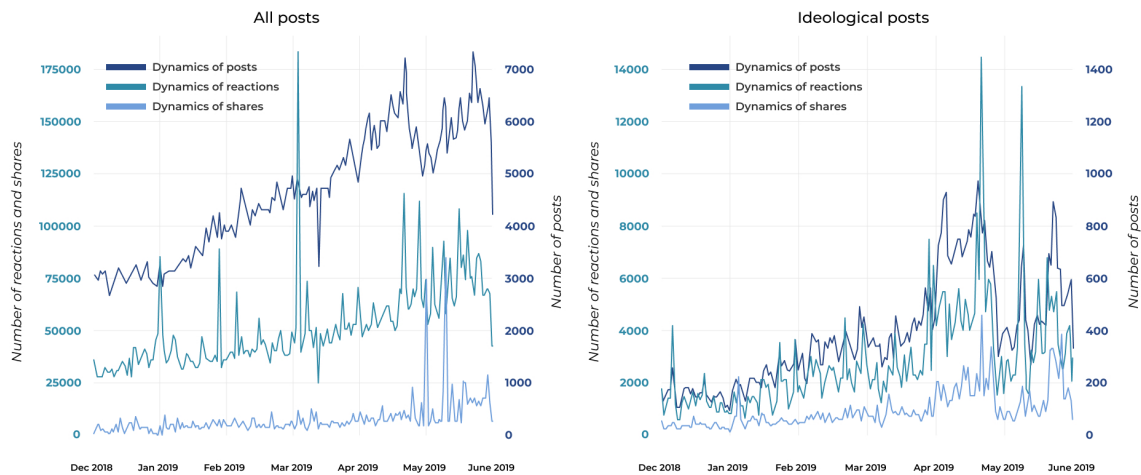


Figure 5. Comparison of the dynamics of all public ideological posts, as well as user reactions

The general structure of public records on Facebook shows that more than half (52%) of the posts contained both text and a picture or video, 26% contained only an image or video, and 22% contained only text. Among posts that contained links to external sources, about 35% led to YouTube, about 30% to the recognised reliable Ukrainian media, and about 20% to dubious sites that mimic news agencies or portals.

After analysing 829 500 public records (posts), we found that about 8.5% of them were ideological. On average, there are about 18 ideological posts per ideologically active Facebook user. It is interesting that most of the ideological posts were made by Facebook users from the Mykolaiv region (38%). The diagram presented in Figure 5 shows distinct peaks reflecting the resonance among Facebook users on electoral topics and events such as the debates of presidential candidates Zelensky and Poroshenko, as well as discussions of events on 8–9 May.

Using neural networks, clustering of more than 70 000 public posts was performed, which identified 61 thematic clusters. Of the posts analysed, 77% were concentrated in the top 20 clusters, the most significant of which is the cluster dedicated to the elections (about 40% of all posts, with 10% thematically related to Volodymyr Zelensky and the Servant of the People party, and 8% related to Petro Poroshenko). This pattern is explained by the influence that the pre-election period has on the topics of public discussions on Facebook. It is noteworthy that, in comparison with others, the most significant thematic cluster had the lowest percentage both of unique posts and

unique authors. This indicates that most of what was written on the topic of the elections (about 70%) came from the same few Facebook profiles. Moreover, the thematic cluster on elections had one of the lowest audience engagement coefficients, referring to the ratio of reactions and reposts to the number of posts. Higher rates of audience involvement were recorded in clusters on the topics of the war in the Donbas, religion (*Tomos*, OCU, UOC MP), the activities of municipal authorities, and the controversy around 9 May. Other less resonant topics on Facebook included: judicial reform in Ukraine, decentralisation, and the ATCs, the activities of the SBU, petitions, Suprun,²⁶⁰ the murder of Gandzyuk,²⁶¹ some holidays (Sobornost Day, Vyshyvanka Day etc.),²⁶² the Ukrainian police, and reforms of the maritime sector of the economy.

5.2. VK

The analysis of open data from this social network was based on 180 113 public profiles of residents of the south and east of Ukraine who had at least one original post. Residents of Mykolaiv, Mariupol, Kherson, Melitopol, and Berdyansk actively use VK. Only about 3% of those profiles had at least one ideological post in the feed which indicates a low degree of political ideologisation of public discussions

²⁶⁰ Uliana Suprun is a Ukrainian public figure and statesman who served as Minister of Health from 2016 to 2019.

²⁶¹ Activist Yekaterina Gandzyuk was killed in 2018 near her home in Kherson. The crime (unsolved as of autumn 2021) was widely reported in Ukraine.

²⁶² Sobornost Day (День соборності України) is a public holiday to commemorate the merger of the Ukrainian People's Republic and West Ukrainian People's Republic to form a unified state of Ukraine on 22 January 1919. Vyshyvanka Day (День вишиванки) is celebrated every year on the third Thursday of May to encourage and preserve the national tradition of wearing *vyshyvanka*, or the embroidered shirt, in daily life.

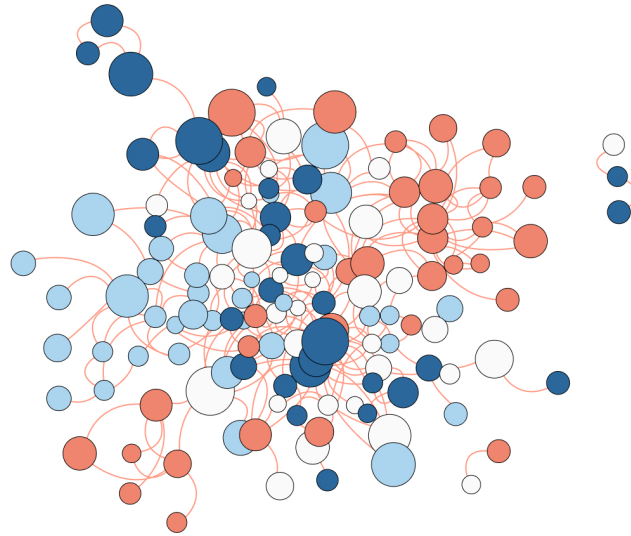
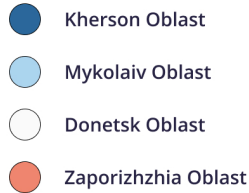


Figure 6. Virtual connections of the most active ideological users of VK

on VK: about 10 times lower than on Facebook. Ideological authors on VK have almost twice as many virtual friends (444 on average) and subscribers (219 on average) than ordinary users. The authors of ideological posts on VK are mainly men aged from 29 to 34 years.

Among ideological users of VK in the south and east of Ukraine, openly pro-Russian accounts predominate: they promote the ideas of the so-called Novorossiya and

0.6% of them can be considered ideological. On average, there are about 0.2 ideological posts per ideologically active VK user. Residents of Donetsk region have the most ideological posts (about 32% of all public posts).

The analysis of the connections of the most active ideological users of the VK did not reveal any natural characteristics for the separation of groups, but did demonstrate close ties and common contacts distributed evenly across all

the regions of Ukraine analysed. The list of the most popular opinion leaders on VK is dominated by openly pro-Russian users: they publish photos with various related symbols (Saint George's ribbon, the coat of arms of the USSR etc.) and make a lot of reposts from online anti-Ukrainian communities.

The general structure of public records on VK reflects that about 70% of posts contain both text and accompanying visual material (a picture or video), 19% have only visual material, and

11% are only text. Posts with links to external sources were to YouTube (18%) or other social networks (16%), 28% of the links led to Ukrainian news sites, 17% to Russian ones, and 21% to resources promoting the ideas of separatism and the so-called Novorossiya. It is noticeable that, on VK, the vast majority of open groups and communities even have an appeal to anti-Ukrainian ideas or a manifestation of the language of hostility in their name.

The diagram in Figure 7 shows the peaks reflecting how the following topics resonate among users of VK: the political and

Among ideological users of VK in the south and east of Ukraine, openly pro-Russian accounts predominate: they promote the ideas of the so-called Novorossiya and distribute content from anti-Ukrainian groups and communities

distribute content from anti-Ukrainian groups and communities. For example, of the 30 most ideologically active users, about a third are open supporters of separatist ideology.

After clustering of 71 298 VK users using a neural network, we identified three functional clusters: writers of ideological posts (0.2% of the sample), active readers of ideological posts (8%), and passive users (91%). Compared to Facebook, in general, VK has more authors of ideological posts, but they produce significantly less ideological content. After analysing 6 172 748 public posts, we determined that only

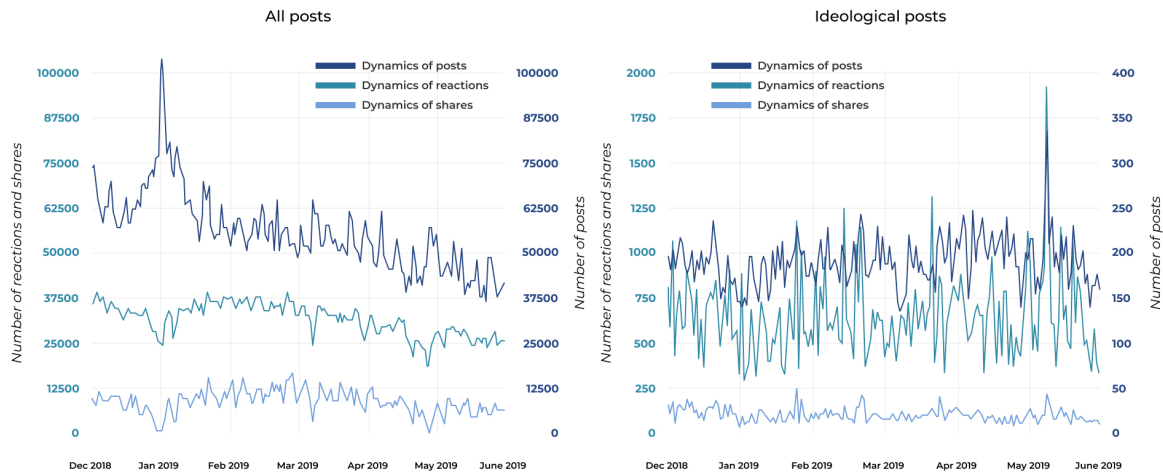


Figure 7. Comparison of the dynamics of all public ideological posts, as well as user reactions

economic situation in Ukraine, the 5th anniversary of the Maidan events, and the commemorative events of 8–9 May.

After clustering 34 413 ideological posts using a neural network, we identified 51 thematic clusters. Of all public posts analysed, 72% fell within the 20 most numerous clusters, the topics of which covered: the political and economic situation in Ukraine, 9 May and the Great Patriotic War, the politics and history of Russia, and the confrontation between Zelensky and Poroshenko. Regarding audience involvement, the topics of politics and the economic situation in Ukraine, and the war in the Donbas, find the greatest response among VK users. The lowest audience participation rate was seen in two thematic clusters, first, Foreign Policy and International Relations, and second, Elections. Those two clusters were also characterised by a low percentage of unique posts and unique authors, indicating the content covering those topics was mostly produced by the same VK users. High percentages of unique posts and unique authors were recorded in clusters, the topics of which caused a lively and broad resonance among VK users: the war in the Donbas, news from the LPR/DPR, and relations between Ukraine and Russia.

5.3. INSTAGRAM

The analysed sample included 78 570 Instagram users from the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine and 310 873 public posts, of which 50% were ideological records. More than half (54%) of the authors posted ideological posts.

On Instagram, the indicators of interaction with the audience, reflecting its involvement, are likes and comments left under posts. On average, ideological posts received 468 likes and 12 comments, while a significant proportion (43%) of ideological posts received no comments.

The diagram in Figure 8 shows that the maximum number of ideological posts per day (6 125) was recorded on 21 April 2019 (the second round of the presidential elections in Ukraine). Sharp jumps are also observed on 31 March 2019 (the first round of presidential elections), 19 April 2019 (the debate between the candidates Poroshenko and Zelensky), and 20 May 2019 (the day of Volodymyr Zelensky's inauguration as the President of Ukraine).

In all the ideological posts analysed, 142 299 hashtags were identified, of which the most common were #зеленский (20%), #порошенко – 13 632 (9%) and #тимошенко (3%). Among the 30 most popular hashtags on Instagram during the period specified, 73% were somehow connected with Volodymyr Zelensky, his political, professional, or creative activities. This testifies to the preservation of the total dominance of the agenda created by Zelensky and the media products of Kwartal 95 Studio on Instagram.²⁶³ The use of a wide range of thematic hashtags made it possible to command an audience looking for everything from entertainment content to the political. On the other hand, the organic popularity of a hashtag sometimes leads to its subsequent use without a specific thematic reference. For example, #зеленский was used on Instagram

²⁶³ Kwartal 95 is a publicly held television entertainment production company created by Volodymyr Zelensky in 2003.

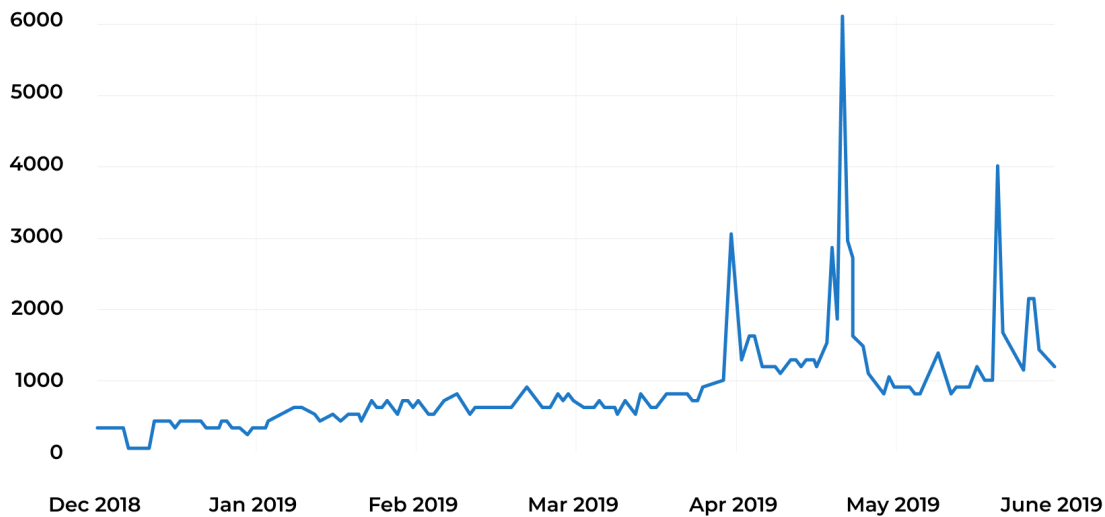


Figure 8. Dynamics of the ideological posts by Instagram users

under posts that were not directly related to Zelensky himself or his entourage. This hashtag could also be found under the posts of online stores or lifestyle bloggers who use popular hashtags to popularise their publications, despite their irrelevance to the content.

5.4. YOUTUBE

To analyse this platform, we selected 10 717 open channels from which 112 068 videos were downloaded. Considering the technical specifics of YouTube, the analysis was carried out using data from the whole of Ukraine. For many users in the south and east of Ukraine, YouTube is clearly a popular source of news, especially about politics, as 66% of all videos analysed were on news and politics. Personal videos of people and blogs occupy second place (21%). All other categories account for no more than 3% of the total content. The diagram in Figure 9 identifies the peaks in video postings that occurred on the following dates:

For many users in the south and east of Ukraine, YouTube is clearly a popular source of news, especially about politics

- 20 December 2018 – 597 videos (Vladimir Putin’s annual big press conference);
- 31 March 2019 – 1 204 videos (the first round of the presidential elections in Ukraine);
- 1 April 2019 – 977 videos (the results of the first round of elections in Ukraine were announced);
- 4 April 2019 – 689 videos (Poroshenko accepted Zelensky’s challenge and agreed to hold a debate at the national stadium);
- 19 April 2019 – 1 023 videos (debates of candidates Poroshenko and Zelensky);
- 21 April 2019 – 1 145 videos (second round of presidential elections in Ukraine);
- 22 April 2019 – 864 videos (the results of the second round of elections in Ukraine were announced);
- 9 May 2019 – 1 268 videos (Victory Day);
- 20 May 2019 – 1 146 videos (the day of Zelensky’s inauguration).

The global Internet has no borders, so the top twenty most viewed YouTube channels in Ukraine include foreign ones: for example, the Russian vDud with channel views averaging 10 million, Criminal Russia with an average of 4 million views, and Alexey Navalny with 3.1 million views on average. Furthermore, one of the most popular videos by number of views for 2019 is a live broadcast of the news on the TV channel Russia 24. A significant share of the audience’s attention in Ukraine is attracted by Russian-speaking

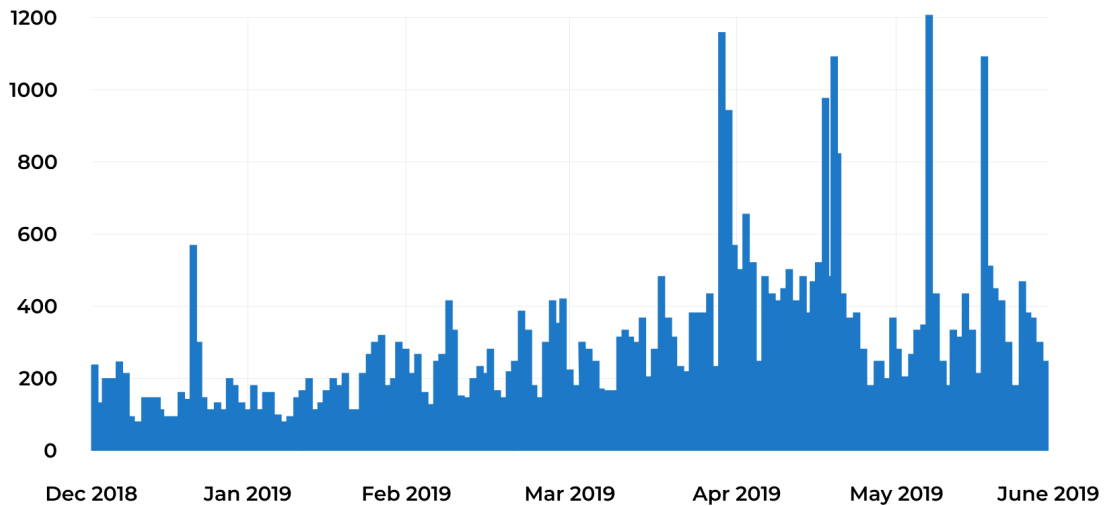


Figure 9. Dynamics of postings of ideological videos on YouTube

(or even Russian) video bloggers (Gordon, Sharij, and Dud)²⁶⁴ who are those most often found in lists of the most popular videos by the number of views and likes. Also, various videos about Zelensky, his performances in Kvartal 95, and their other products (The League of Laughter, Start Laughing etc.) are in the list of the most popular videos by views.

On YouTube, 27 of the 30 most popular search requests were related to the topic of elections or candidates in some way. It is interesting that the search term 'Lukashenko' is popular enough to reach the 15th place on YouTube.

It is safe to say that the vast majority of the content analysed on YouTube from Ukraine is in the Russian language.

CONCLUSION

Despite the significant structural differences among social networks, it is possible to draw general comparative conclusions about resonant topics. To some extent, the same topics are discussed on all four platforms, but users of each of these social networks reflect them from a different angle. Many discussions are devoted to the political processes in the country, the EU, and NATO, as well as public problems, in particular, the prices of utilities and gas. Elections and appointments are widely discussed as, of course, is the war in the Donbas. Among the malicious narratives, it is

necessary to highlight topics related to historical memory, discussion of Putin's activities, the situation in Russia, news from the LPR/DPR, and topics on the USSR and Soviet history. The toxicity of such topics is clearly manifested both on YouTube and on the VK where a few ideologically motivated users operate, creating and distributing content with anti-Ukrainian rhetoric. The public segment of Instagram is highly politicised regarding the domestic Ukrainian agenda. Thematically, most diverse discussions are conducted on Facebook where, in addition to the expected discussions about socio-political and economic problems, there are also hostile narratives being disseminated. However, these are not presented directly and openly but rather disguised as part of one of the resonant topics. One of the reasons for the growing political ideologisation of public discussions on Facebook is that since the official prohibition in Ukraine of the Russian social networks VK and OK, most of the Ukrainian users of these moved to Facebook. There, they continue to express their ideological beliefs, but within the framework of all-Ukrainian discussions and thematic battles.

²⁶⁴ «Авторы: Дмитрий Гордон, основатель проекта» [Authors: Dmitry Gordon, project founder], Гордон [Gordon], last access 7 June 2021; Анатолий Шарий, «Канал Анатолия Шария» [Anatoliy Shariy's channel], YouTube, last access 7 June 2021; вДудь [vDudj], YouTube channel, last access 7 June 2021.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the communication gap in the system of national resilience of Ukraine, we analysed the problems comprehensively, taking the human component into account. At the same time, we understood that to uphold the culture and practices of resilience, citizens must be knowledgeable and value diversity, have strong, reliable institutions and adaptive, self-regulating processes. The array of such components should be laid down by default in any system intentionally, taking into account that resilience does not and cannot have a single primary owner who is solely responsible for developing and strengthening it.

We proceed from the premise that fully fledged cooperation between different interest groups and organisations is one of the primary sources of national resilience of the state. Moreover, we are convinced that there are significant regional and local components in national resilience. Another important element is proper situational awareness which supports and guides decision-making on security issues at various levels of authority. For high-quality situational awareness, it is necessary to build and systematically apply a model of competencies related to communicational,

cognitive, informational, and digital security. At the same time, it is important not to separate and allocate these areas into ‘siloed’ operational environments but to consider them collectively, given that communication and cognitive security implies working with meaning, with the content of narratives, memes, and symbols. This work also touches on the issues of psychological skills and the abilities of information consumers, as well as the relationship between the perception of events and processes, the formation of an ideological worldview, and the actual behaviour. Informational security includes the media sphere, information transmission channels,

Resilience does not and cannot have a single primary owner who is solely responsible for developing and strengthening it

the mass media, and their technical platforms. Cybersecurity involves digital technologies and related skills, software, and infrastructure.

In addition to the aforementioned model of competencies, it is also advisable to conduct a regular audit of situational awareness. This requires developing a set of direct and indirect indicators to assess both the current state of affairs and possible threats, as well as the perception of risks among different groups. This



Figure 10. The functional model of civil-state partnership

will not only allow the existing problems to be resolved but will also contribute to developing a culture of predictive analytics among the experts involved and dovetail with probable scenarios to reduce the risks from future threats and upcoming challenges. A composite index of resilience should serve as one applied tool for assessing the state of play and measuring the effectiveness of its various components. It must take into account both the state of affairs in the regional context, as well as the degree of functional literacy of the population as per the quantitative criteria specified.

As already noted in this report, there is not and cannot be a single agency that would monopolise responsibility for national resilience. A culture of preparedness for possible crises should be developed with

In Ukraine, it is important to insist on the introduction of the Western model of civil society-state partnership because the previous model based on top-down state dominance is not capable of responding to new threats

an intersectoral, interdisciplinary approach at various levels, considering that the most important factor in ensuring security is not strength but an understanding of, and effective action in, the objective situation, vigilance, adaptability, collective problem-solving skills, and a timely awareness of the situation. In Ukraine, it is important to insist on the introduction of the Western model of civil society-state partnership because the previous model based on top-down state dominance is not capable of responding to new threats.

For a qualitative analytical audit of situational awareness, an understanding of the operational background of specific regions, which forms the environment for the implementation of particular security scenarios, is clearly important. And if the general background is formed by both global and national political, economic, and social processes, then it is

possible to assess the components of resilience in the regions through an indirect method that takes into account indicators from different spheres of life. It is important to remember that modern attacks do not always create a visible threat. That is why it is important to find reliable markers of modern threats. When assessing the level of national resilience at the regional and local levels, it is advisable to proceed from a three-dimensional system incorporating the overall characteristics which include:

1. a quantitative analysis of the parameters measured:

- the political activity of the population and its attitude to the state
- mentality and civic self-identification
- geopolitical orientation and perception of security threats
- media landscape and media consumption
- access to resources and involvement in decision-making and management of processes, events, groups of people.

2. identification and description of vulnerable groups (including the opinions of their leaders) and a qualitative in-depth analysis of their pain points from the point of view of the potential for hostile influence and psycho-social manipulation. The vulnerable groups include internally displaced persons, participants of the ATO/JFO and their families, low-income and socially dependent people, migrant workers, citizens who do not comply with the law, as well as some categories of youth and representatives of subcultures.

3. quantitative and qualitative monitoring of the dynamics (origin, spread, reincarnation, extinction, and revival) of conflict-related topics in the cognitive, social, media, and virtual space. Examples of conflict-related topics in Ukraine can include the attitude to diversity (in the broad sense of the word), historical memory,

geopolitical orientation, the language issue, religion, the reintegration of the Donbas and the issue of national reconciliation, policies that provoke polarisation and their effectuation, malicious conspiracy theories, and others.

Residents of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine perceive that the state faces a high level of threat and, in order to avoid personal information vulnerability, minimally identify themselves with it

For the purposes of determining the risks being studied, it is also important to understand that Ukraine as a state and Ukrainians as its citizens are characterised by completely different levels of vulnerability. Residents of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine perceive that the state faces a high level of threat and, in order to avoid personal information vulnerability, minimally identify themselves with it, since most of them are deprived of the practical tools of socio-political self-defence in the form of personal participation in nation-building. In developing the system of national resilience in Ukraine, it is important to keep the following trends in mind, as they have a significant impact on the state of affairs:

- The destruction or deformation of contacts between members of social groups in Ukraine that distorts the topography of the communication space. The set of communicative practices and cultural codes that have developed in Ukraine over the seven years of the war is subject to both strong natural erosion and purposeful destruction.
- The technique of street picketing and the subsequent information support that turned this form of public opinion expression into everyday street scenery. The content of any public action is overshadowed by the number of participants, since it is the latter that demonstrates the financial and organisational capabilities of the

direct beneficiary of such events. Even if a demonstration occurs spontaneously, society has become disinclined to believe in its sincerity.

- During the 30-year period of the country's independence, the basic Ukrainian historical myths were revised with each new government. If such myths could not be put to utilitarian use for a given government's own political propaganda, they were rejected. Utilitarian use involved the transformation of certain historical facts into the format of memes. As a result, citizens have accumulated a large set of memes, from which, as with a mosaic, any convenient construction of the past can be formed. Many residents of the southern and eastern regions are still looking for a possible compromise between Soviet values, Ukrainian identity, and relations based on the principles of free market and individual responsibility.
- Since 2019, managers with a technocratic mindset have dominated, people who do not have any moral obligations to society to solve, in a clear and proper manner, highly sensitive social problems associated, for example, with the sale of land, religious and confessional priorities, the priority of local patriotism over national, or the exclusivity of folkloric culture.
- If the socio-political vocabulary is replete with military and paramilitary terms, this creates the illusion that the citizenry has an increased legal awareness and that everything the authorities do enjoys unconditional legality according to certain

Many residents of the southern and eastern regions are still looking for a possible compromise between Soviet values, Ukrainian identity, and relations based on the principles of free market and individual responsibility

groups of the population of Ukraine, while, on the other hand, generating a will to combat both paramilitary vocabulary and its carriers. Consequently, this leads to an additional polarisation of society where different groups cannot abandon their meaning-forming narratives. In turn, this strong radicalisation helps the Kremlin to realise its geopolitical goals in Ukraine.

- Any mainstream political force in Ukraine will try to shift responsibility for its functional inability or the failure of various reforms to the Kremlin, thereby reinforcing

The information space of the south and east of Ukraine is more conservative and does not adapt to the challenges of the time and therefore, reacts chaotically to any change in the situation

the dangerous myth of the omnipresence, inaccessibility, and impunity of the enemy and the inability to resist its harmful actions.

- The majority of media consumers are losing their once-stable loyalty to the media and forming provisional trust in diverse sources of information. The compartmentalisation (separate thinking) of information channels in various forms depends on their focus (hobbies, entertainment, geopolitics, local news, business, medicine etc.) which is increasingly determined by demand, rather than supply.
- Entertainment has become the dominant way information is experienced, that is, information remains with the consumer not as a semantic impression but as the dominant emotion of the moment. The dominance of entertainment content will form an environment in which the critical thinking of the population declines. Many forms of media are gradually losing out to the blogosphere in terms of the quality of content, and, most importantly, in terms of the speed of response to resonant events. Many virtual platforms have become an

emotional sewer for Ukrainian society where political or ideological narratives are blended.

- The information space of the south and east of Ukraine is more conservative and does not adapt to the challenges of the time and therefore, reacts chaotically to any change in the situation. It practically does not interact with the European information space, in particular because it is limited to the 'Cyrillic sphere.'
- Ukraine's efforts to block visual content from Russia and promote its own (including national film production) have freed the Ukrainian visual segment of the perception it is totally dominated by the Kremlin, but in many border areas of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine, the situation in this regard remains quite critical. Russia is focusing not on regaining its quantitative superiority in visual content but on influencing the system by which viewers decode the values that are formed as a result of the perception of visual signals, which is especially noticeable in social networks.
- In the information space, residents of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine have become noticeably more active in openly expressing pro-Russian views.

Russia is focusing not on regaining its quantitative superiority in visual content but on influencing the system by which viewers decode the values

Moreover, the situation on the ground can be destabilised by underground anti-Ukrainian groups that continue to cultivate a polarising agenda, exploiting the complex cultural diversity of Ukraine.

- The Kremlin and its ideological supporters are more actively introducing the collective labelling of residents of the occupied and unoccupied territories in the information space under the general memes 'the people of Donbas' and 'the people of Southeast Ukraine.' Thus, Moscow has built

artificial identities to expand the reach of its potential audience and is strengthening them in the consciousness and perception of people in Russia itself, as well as in Ukraine and in the Western countries.

- The feeling of remoteness and detachment of the population of the south and east of the country creates not only geographical but also mental deadlock zones, in which some of the local social groups may in fact be situational collaborators of Russia. At the same time, the opposing groups do not have adequate skills, knowledge, or abilities to organise resistance in the informational, communicational, or virtual spaces.
- In shifting the responsibility and obligations to the public to follow the rules of digital, informational, and media literacy, it is necessary to provide users with the appropriate tools (practical knowledge and useful skills). Otherwise, violations of those rules will increase, semi-literacy and false claims of competence will grow, creating an imaginary feeling among people that they know everything and can do it all. This in itself is already a security risk.

The international aspect should be mentioned separately. Inertia in the planning and provision of donor assistance by international organisations and states is causing increasingly severe side effects. They are expressed in inaccurate thematic focuses, in the allocation of resources to solve irrelevant problems, in working according to outdated and inefficient methods, in the habituation of grantees to regular financial flows, in unhealthy competition to implement new ideas, and in intellectual raiding of potential projects. These negative results harm such important components of resilience as openness, cooperation, and professional trust. In addition, the trendiness of the topic of resilience gives rise to groups of pseudo-experts with a dubious reputation in Ukraine who are trying to attract the attention of Western donors and thereby divert important resources from solving the problems studied related to data security, communication, and cognitive and digital spaces.

However, blind adoption of the so-called Western experience can be counterproductive. A general form is adopted which, to meet the requirements of grant-givers or sponsors, is filled with outdated or distorted meanings with no in-depth understanding of the essence of the processes or the desired changes. Yet, this is presented as a new achievement. Such profanations and imitations of reform are essentially a multilateral deception. It reduces not only the effectiveness of social processes but also the level of trust between different groups and stakeholders. In fostering a culture of deep understanding and building

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resilience, it is necessary to prescribe more flexible conditions in programmes and projects to regional partners that promote productive semantic creativity. Instead of large, long-term grant tranches, small, individual, short-term, targeted programmes seem to be more effective. Moreover, with such a limited form, they will not be targets of systemic corruption, and their content and effectiveness can easily be reviewed.

The list of practical recommendations presented below is neither final nor comprehensive. It is designed to encourage further steps that will strengthen various aspects of Ukraine's national resilience, especially among the more vulnerable regions, considering that such processes a priori cannot have a sole owner.

- Give new impetus to developing and implementing a culture of data-driven decisions (conducting analytical research before making informed, transparent decisions on the part of the legislative and executive authorities) and stimulating a culture of ‘open data’ to assist in establishing quality databases in public institutions. This will contribute to a qualitative transition from broadcast mode to communication mode.
 - Expert, political, and public discussions should move away from the perceptual template of ‘information security’ and not be limited only to the protection of the media space but to expand the circle of diverse, involved specialists who have an adequate understanding of the essence of modern threats and have competence in organising measures to enhance communicational, cognitive, informational, and digital security.²⁶⁵
 - For practical (but not declarative) operationalisation and instrumentalisation of resilience, replace abstract and theoretical educational activities with the creation of physical hubs and platforms of resilience where it is possible to discuss and develop security measures in different thematic areas in an intersectoral format.²⁶⁶ Strengthen the development of various crisis scenarios with which to conduct regular civil exercises at the local and regional levels, so that people learn to interact and apply appropriate skills.
 - Regular notification of the population about real security challenges will help create the groundwork for a more adequate perception of threats.²⁶⁷ Based on the constantly updated calendar of situational threats, it is important to
- deploy monitoring systems at the local and regional levels to keep abreast of unwanted and malicious activity in the information, communication, and digital spaces in real time. This notification system will be beneficial to the governmental, commercial, and civic sectors. In this way, users will be anchored not so much by the geopolitical narrative but by the practical narrative of protecting their own assets, values, and way of life.
- Rework the project formats based on short-term training ‘experts for experts’ into a new long-term format ‘expert for a wide range of users’: integrate fully fledged courses on functional, information, media, cognitive and communication literacy into formal (schools, colleges, universities), informal (youth centres, interest groups etc.) and professional training programmes for the development of critical thinking skills and psychological protection among different groups of the population.
 - Continue expert and public discussions to determine the necessary formats and conditions for censorship and restrictions on the media during various crises, as well as mechanisms to protect freedom of speech.
 - Create suitable conditions to develop a balanced media environment: considering modern information and communication threats, the emergence of a truly independent and professional public broadcaster will set the tone for a professional qualification system and contribute to the self-regulation of journalism.
 - The new national sense-making and the creation of stable mental symbols require the more active involvement of the new creative elite of society and a departure from the direct planting of tired Ukraine stereotypes. The latter also harms and oversimplifies the media representation of the process of cognitive transformations

265 The decision to strengthen strategic communications at the state level in Ukraine is welcomed. Two new departments are being established: (1) the Centre for Countering Disinformation as a working body of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, and (2) the Centre for Strategic Communications and Information Security under the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine.

266 One good examples is the NATO-Ukraine Professional Development Programme Resilience Training Initiative.

267 The White Book of the Foreign Intelligence Service of Ukraine can serve as a suitable starting point.

in terms of 'Lenin to Bandera' (i.e. decommunisation). Given Ukraine's cultural diversity, it is important to create several overlapping narrative realities that will be relatable to the residents of individual regions but together will make up a modern Ukrainian macro-narrative. The carriers of the new Ukrainian narratives should be opinion leaders and other successful figures with a good reputation.

- Considering the phenomenon of Ukrainian civil and military volunteerism which is, in many ways, unique and useful for cultivating national resilience, it is important to continue in-depth research in this direction, especially its socio-political and socio-psychological consequences. It is also important to keep this topic on the national agenda.²⁶⁸
- Stimulating the dissemination and use of the Ukrainian language to focus on high-quality products and the possibility of distributing content on various platforms, taking into account preferences for age, social, and ethnic identities. At the same time, it is necessary to position language as a useful resource, and not purely as a national treasure.
- When developing digital infrastructure in the regions, it is important to move away from financing elements of digital security with 'whatever resources are leftover'. It is necessary to focus not only on the technical component but also to think carefully about how to organise work with data and resources, or how to develop and apply a package of standards and regulations for the human component. Moreover, it is necessary to consider the possibility of administrative and criminal liability for non-compliance with standards and rules.

- Countering modern information, communication, cognitive, and cyberattacks requires comprehensive training, both technical, from the point of view of infrastructure, and expert-analytical. It is necessary to improve the understanding of the principles and mechanisms of conducting such attacks, to make a better and more regular analysis of threat indicators. This will help to improve the mechanisms of managerial decision-making at the national, regional, and local levels. It is important to introduce analytical and technical auditing of all means of communication, as well as to create software that can quickly track changes in the multifactor monitoring and analysis system. In addition, it is necessary to ensure maximum protection from external influences and consolidate the activities of government services, civil society, the business environment, and the media in the sphere. This will help to neutralise the negative impact in the context of crises and conflicts.

The socio-psychological situation studied in the south and east of Ukraine is a cross-section presented in the form of a mosaic of existing norms, customs, behavioural practices of the population, as well as macro- and micro-narratives in action. Thanks to this cross-section, a set of destructive factors existing in the conducive informational, social, and political environment of the south and east of Ukraine emerges.

From this point of view, the significance and validity of this analytical study have general importance for entire Ukraine, since the results can be used to predict further threats and risks in the field of informational, communicational, cognitive, and digital security.

268 The actions of some state departments of Ukraine in this direction deserve recognition: Міністерство оборони України [Ministry of Defence of Ukraine], «У Міноборони презентували Книгу пам'яті добровольців. У ній зібрано 71 ім'я полеглих героїв...» [The Ministry of Defence presented a book in memory of the volunteers. It contains 71 names of fallen heroes...], news, 15 March 2021; Міністерство у справах ветеранів України [Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine], «14 березня - День Українського Добровольця» [14 March – Day of the Ukrainian Volunteer], news, 14 March 2021.

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ISSN 2228-0529

ISBN 978-9916-9699-3-9 (PDF)

ISBN 978-9916-9699-2-2 (PRINT)