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# WINTER IS COMING: HOW TO MAINTAIN THE SUPPORT OF EUROPEAN SOCIETIES FOR UKRAINE?





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# WINTER IS COMING:

## HOW TO MAINTAIN THE SUPPORT OF EUROPEAN SOCIETIES FOR UKRAINE?



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Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has united Europe tremendously and improved the perception of the EU in its member states. The EU's positive image in the eyes of Europeans is now at its highest level since autumn 2009 (50%)<sup>1</sup>. However, after seven months of the full-scale war, European societies are beginning to call for diminishing support to Ukraine<sup>2</sup>. The New Europe Center has decided to examine what issues currently disturb Europeans the most in the war context and to what extent they affect the support to Ukraine from the local societies.

In addition to objective factors, such as economic difficulties and energy problems, the opinion of EU citizens can also be influenced by the Kremlin's hybrid interventions. With that in mind, we have analyzed the effectiveness of Russia's tools in undermining European unity over the past seven months and their potential to destabilize European societies in the future.

Based on the analyzed concerns of Europeans and the risks that currently exist in terms of Europe's shrinking support for Ukraine, as well as an expert survey in the EU<sup>3</sup> conducted by the New Europe Center, the authors of the analysis have prepared a number of recommendations for the Ukrainian authorities and all stakeholders involved in advocacy campaigns regarding ways to maintain EU support at least at the current level.

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<sup>1</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 97 – Summer 2022, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2693>

<sup>2</sup> Yevropeiska pravda, "New anti-government protest in Prague, against EU and NATO membership and support to Ukraine," September 28, 2022, <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/news/2022/09/28/7147686/>

<sup>3</sup> *The New Europe Center expresses its gratitude to the participants of the survey that took place in August–September 2022. Among the experts, who shared their thoughts with the New Europe Center were Marcel Röthig, Resident Representative of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Ukraine; Roland Freudenstein, Vice President, GLOBSEC; Jos Boonstra, Senior Researcher, Centre for European Security Studies; Dr. Rob de Wijk, Founder of HCSS and Professor of International Relations at Leiden University; Dr. Liana Fix, Historian and Political Scientist; Dr. Florent Parmentier, Secrétaire général, CEVIPOF – Centre de recherches politiques de Sciences Po; Sylvie Kauffmann, columnist at Le Monde, fellow of the Robert Bosch Academy in Berlin; Dr. Ian Anthony, European Security Programme Director, SIPRI; Miriam Kosmehl, Senior Expert Eastern Europe and EU Neighbourhood, Programm Europas Zukunft, Bertelsmann Stiftung; Dr. Antonio Villafranca, Director of Studies, ISPI; Dr. Eleonora Tafuro, Research fellow at the Russia, Caucasus and Central Asia Centre, Italian Institute for International Political Studies; Emmanuel Dupuy, President, Institute European Perspective & Security (IPSE); Anastasiya Shapochkina, President of geoeconomics think tank Eastern Circles; Kristi Raik, Director, Estonian Foreign Policy Institute; Dr Daniel Szeligowski, Head of Eastern Europe Programme and Senior Research Fellow on Ukraine at the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM).*

## SECTION 1

# IMMUNITY AGAINST RUSSIAN SPECIAL OPERATIONS

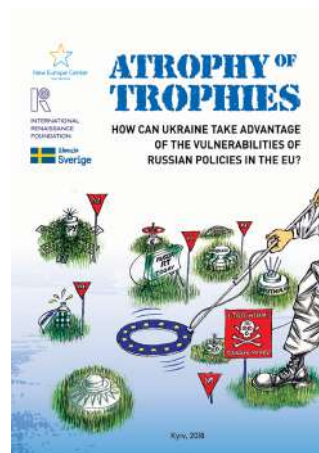
Since the very beginning of Russia's belligerent actions against Ukraine in 2014, Moscow wagered on the weakness and disunity of the European Union. The Russian authorities counted on the business-mindedness of a number of powerful member states, which would not dare to impose harsh sanctions and thus endanger, above all, the well-being of Europeans themselves. Moreover, Russia did not believe that the sanctions policy would be long-lasting, nor did it expect that the EU would dare to provide unprecedented political, economic and especially military support after the outbreak of a new phase of aggression – the large-scale attack on Ukraine in February 2022. Though having set out to weaken the EU, Russia ended up strengthening it. Moscow sought to divide Europeans and Americans but brought about a close transatlantic unity.

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In 2018, the New Europe Center singled out a number of tools that Russia most often resort-



ed to in order to break the political will of the EU countries (*Atrophy of Trophies. How Can Ukraine Take Advantage of the Vulnerabilities of Russian Policies in the EU?*)<sup>4</sup>. Over the past seven months, Moscow has made use of all these levers and invented new ones so as to frighten the Europeans to soften their approaches. However, not only has the EU maintained a coherent and tough policy towards Russia, but it has also demonstrated its readiness to increase the punishment for the aggressor country. We have decided to elaborate on Russians' hybrid intervention tools, which Moscow has resorted to since 2014, separately<sup>5</sup>. Having said that, we have briefly analyzed the extent to which all of these destructive efforts of the Kremlin have worked or failed.

<sup>4</sup> New Europe Center, "Atrophy of Trophies. How Can Ukraine Take Advantage of the Vulnerabilities of Russian Policies in the EU?", 2018, <http://neweurope.org.ua/analytiks/atrofiya-trofeyiv-yak-ukrayina-mozhe-skorystatys-vrazlyvymy-storonamy-rosijskoyi-polityky-u-yes/>

<sup>5</sup> Below you will find our analysis of the tools mentioned in the analytical paper of the New Europe Center titled "Atrophy of Trophies. How Can Ukraine Take Advantage of the Vulnerabilities of Russian Policies in the EU?" (2018). Besides, it has been replenished with new tools that Russia has sought to employ to gain leverage on the EU's support for Ukraine (such as nuclear blackmail).



**Tool:**  
**NUCLEAR BLACKMAIL.**

The use of nuclear blackmail has been the favorite idea of Russian propaganda for a long while. (Influential propagandists of the country threatened to turn the USA into nuclear ash as early as 2014.) Whereas Vladimir Putin had distanced himself from nuclear rhetoric for a long time, with the beginning of the full-scale war against Ukraine, he began giving increasingly distinct hints and eventually spoke directly about the possibility of using weapons of mass destruction<sup>6</sup>. "This is not a bluff," he threatened on September 21, when announcing mobilization to continue the war against Ukraine. The threats were made in pursuit of but one goal – to warn Western countries against committed support to Ukraine and force the US and the EU to exert pressure on Kyiv so that it becomes more willing to negotiate. Although Western countries took the threats seriously, paying attention to the irresponsibility of Putin's nuclear rhetoric, they made it clear they would not quit supporting Ukraine. Although it does not imply that Putin will not eventually resort to the use of weapons of mass destruction, it evinces the determination of the West not to succumb to Russia's traditional methods of intimidating democratic countries.



**Tool:**  
**HIGH-LEVEL CONTACTS.**

For Putin, it is important to demonstrate that he is not in complete isolation and that key Western leaders listen to him. The President of France and the Chancellor of Germany continued to play along with the Kremlin's expectations even during the full-scale aggression (as evidenced by regular calls from Paris and Berlin). However, whereas earlier the Kremlin could position these

negotiations as proof of its clout ("we are reckoned with," "we are feared"), recently the Europeans' negotiations with the Kremlin have mostly surprised observers, since the futility of negotiations with Putin was more than obvious even to negotiators themselves. Another factor that has prevented the Kremlin from playing the propaganda card of "friendship with the Europeans" is that the leaders of the EU countries, without any euphemisms, have finally begun to call things by their names: an aggressor is an aggressor, a war is a war. Information leakage about talks between Macron and Putin has also lifted the veil on the true level of "trust" between the Russian and European elites<sup>7</sup>. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán remains one of the few, if not the only, leaders of EU member states who plays along with Russia's hybrid operation to sow discord among Europeans. However, Orbán's pro-Russian loneliness compels Hungary to demonstrate its servitude to Moscow more cautiously, without exposing the European consensus to serious risks.



**Tool:**  
**BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC TIES.**

Russia expected that European business would put pressure on their governments to ease the sanctions. What Moscow has received instead is not only harsh sanctions but also the exodus of the world's leading companies from the Russian market.

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**The reliance on the alleged total venality of Europeans has turned out to be wrong: the fear of reputational losses due to working in a country that has resorted to genocidal war has proved to be stronger than the fear of losing billions in profits.**

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<sup>6</sup> Meduza, What Putin said about nuclear weapons over last 20 years, September 22, 2022, <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/09/22/putin-postoyanno-ugrozhaet-miru-yadernym-oruzhiem-a-ved-kogda-to-on-podpisyval-dogovor-ossokraschenii-chisla-boegolovok>

<sup>7</sup> Bloomberg, "Russia Slams Macron for Breaching Diplomatic Confidentiality," July 5, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-07-05/russia-slams-macron-for-breaching-diplomatic-confidentiality>



The reliance on the alleged total venality of Europeans has turned out to be wrong: the fear of reputational losses due to working in a country that has resorted to genocidal war has proved to be stronger than the fear of losing billions in profits. As of September 2022, more than 1,000 foreign companies shut down their business in Russia<sup>8</sup>.



Tool:  
**ENERGY LEVER.**

A special aspect of Russia's business and economic influence was the energy component, which was used to put effective pressure on EU member states. However, even high energy prices have not forced the EU to give in to Russian pressure. The EU's warehouses have been filled to the maximum in order to meet the union's needs for the winter period of 2022–2023 and not to succumb to Moscow's energy blackmail. At the end of September 2022, gas storage facilities in the EU were 88% full<sup>9</sup>. Besides, the West has been prone to interpret explosions on the two branches of the Nord Stream as deliberate sabotage carried out in order to affect the EU's energy stability<sup>10</sup>. Nonetheless, Russia currently considers the energy lever as the most important one in inducing Europeans to make concessions. (Propagandistic discourse about the "winter test" for Europe is related to this.)



Tool:  
**SUPPORT FOR PRO-RUSSIAN POLITICIANS.**

Marginal politicians on the extreme right and the extreme left of the political spectrum remain Russia's main linchpin in EU countries. Fringe politicians now mostly count on receiving dividends from economic hardship. In Germany, for instance, there has been a noticeable drop in support for pro-government parties, while the popularity of the far-right Alternative for Germany has risen from 10 to 15% in recent months<sup>11</sup>. The situation is similar in a number of other countries. For example, in Italy, a right-wing coalition alongside parties known as "Putin's friends" won elections to both houses of the parliament on September 25. However, Giorgia Meloni, the leader of the right-wing *Brothers of Italy* party, immediately hastened to assure President Volodymyr Zelenskyy that the latter "can count on loyal support in the cause of freedom of Ukrainian people."<sup>12</sup> In Sweden, the far-right won the election on September 11, which marked a real political turning point in the country that had traditionally gravitated towards left liberalism<sup>13</sup>. That said, it is expected that Stockholm will also continue to support Ukraine. This kind of political upheavals mostly reinforces Vladimir Putin's hopes that nothing is lost so far; therefore, the bet on former fringe politicians can still pay off. The mass anti-government protest in Prague on September 3, where more than 70,000 people gathered to demand, among other things, the resumption of dialogue with Putin, became a real gift for Russian propaganda.

<sup>8</sup> Yale School of Management, "Over 1,000 Companies Have Curtailed Operations in Russia – But Some Remain," September 27, 2022, <https://som.yale.edu/story/2022/over-1000-companies-have-curtailed-operations-russia-some-remain>

<sup>9</sup> Reuters, "Analysis: Russia's Ukraine gas transit sanction threat a fresh blow for Europe," September 28, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/russias-ukraine-gas-transit-sanction-threat-fresh-blow-europe-2022-09-28/>

<sup>10</sup> The Washington Post, "E.U. warns of 'robust' response against sabotage after Nord Stream blasts," September 28, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/09/28/nord-stream-russia-methane-leak-baltic-sea/>

<sup>11</sup> DW, September 27, 2022, "Germany's far-right AfD hopes for a boost in times of crisis," <https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-far-right-afd-hopes-for-a-boost-in-times-of-crisis/a-63252759>

<sup>12</sup> Yevropeiska pravda, "Meloni: Ukraine can count on Italy's support," September 28, 2022, <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/news/2022/09/28/7147637/>

<sup>13</sup> Roman Horbyk, "Far-right breakthrough: will coalition with radicals lessen Sweden's support to Ukraine," September 16, 2022, <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/articles/2022/09/16/7146876/>





Tool:  
**DISINFORMATION VIA MASS MEDIA.**

For a long time, it was Russia's most common weapon in hybrid warfare. However, the EU was all too well informed about this component of Moscow's interventions; thus, Brussels virtually immediately blocked the channels of Russian propaganda. Restrictions against Sputnik and Russia Today (along with its affiliates RT English, RT Germany, RT France and RT Spanish) were introduced on March 2<sup>14</sup>. Another three Russian channels were banned starting from June 4. Russia's information influence was minimized. Efforts to launch information campaigns about the "Nazi regime in Ukraine" or that it is the EU sanctions that are provoking the global food crisis have not have an impact on the sentiment in European countries.

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Tool:  
**TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE EU'S PROCLIVITY TO DIPLOMACY AND COMPROMISE.**

Russia used the EU's attraction to diplomatic solutions as early as during the US military campaign against Iraq in 2003. During this period, the transatlantic unity was going through the most difficult juncture. Moscow turned out to be a key beneficiary of Washington's anti-terror campaign and the focus on diplomacy in Paris and Berlin. Moscow hoped that the EU's com-

mitment to international law, which in Russia is perceived as a sign of weakness, would allow it to deal with Ukraine without serious European backing. At best, the EU was expected to express concern, but all EU countries – even those previously classified as pro-Russian – were unequivocal: Ukraine should receive more than just declarative support. Russia's calculations that EU aid would be enough for just several months also have not come to fruition.

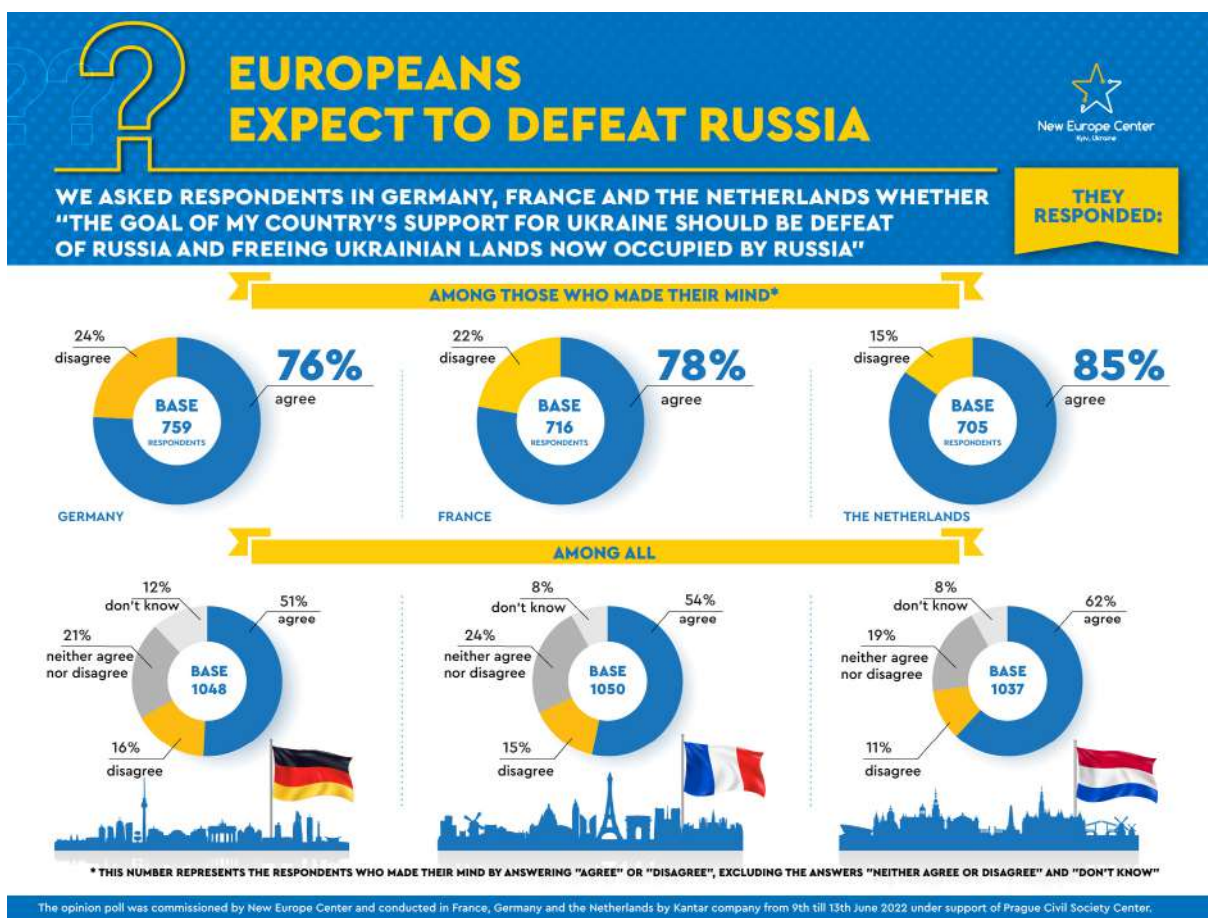


Tool:  
**SPURRING A MIGRATION CRISIS.**

Russia was aware of the vulnerability of EU governments to the influx of illegal migrants. The migration crisis played out by Belarus in 2021 on the border with the EU could have also been aimed at testing the EU's ability to respond adequately and be resilient. The migration issue has long become one of the most sensitive ones for Europeans: quite a few governments in the EU countries have suffered due to the incitement of migration hysteria; many populists have received the highest positions against the background of voters' migration fears. After the outbreak of the full-scale war with Russia, several million Ukrainians left for the EU. Knowing about the EU's previous reactions to inflows of migrants, Moscow could have expected a similar rejection of Ukrainians evacuated due to the war.

Meanwhile, the opposite happened: Europeans have displayed extraordinary humanitarian solidarity. Moreover, it was Ukrainian refugees who became a kind of public ambassadors who could convey the truth about Russian aggression to Europeans. Putin's plan to instigate destabilization in the EU due to the migration crisis have turned into unexpected consequences for the Kremlin: Europeans have become imbued with even greater fondness for Ukrainians, and public demands to governments on

<sup>14</sup> European Council, "EU sanctions against Russia explained," <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/restrictive-measures-against-russia-over-ukraine/sanctions-against-russia-explained/#media>



New Europe Center, "Public opinion in Germany, France and the Netherlands," June 16, 2022

providing even greater support to Ukraine have intensified.

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90% of citizens of EU countries supported the actions of their governments to give shelter to Ukrainians fleeing the war<sup>15</sup>. A poll in Germany, France and the Netherlands, conducted in June 2022 on request of the New Europe Center, showed that the majority of respondents in all three countries supported the idea that Russia should be defeated and the occupied Ukrainian territories should be liberated. Among all respondents, this idea was endorsed by 51% of those surveyed in Germany, 54% in France and 62% in the Netherlands<sup>16</sup>. However, the growing popularity of right-

<sup>15</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 97 – Summer 2022, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2693>

<sup>16</sup> New Europe Center, "Public opinion in Germany, France and the Netherlands," June 16, 2022, <http://neweurope.org.ua/analytcs/en-public-opinion-in-germany-france-and-the-netherlands/>

wing radical movements and parties in some EU countries, which most frequently capitalize on the migration vulnerability of voters in their rhetoric, shows that over time the Russian bet may work. Therefore, the EU should be particularly vigilant about anti-migrant provocations. (Berlin already has some experience with the notorious "Lisa case," which Russians tried to use to destabilize the situation in Germany in 2016.) An information campaign that would show that refugees from Ukraine are a consequence of Russia's aggression is also important; Ukrainians will return to their country as soon as peace is restored back home<sup>17</sup>.

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**Eight years of futile attempts to undermine the EU's will to support Ukraine should have already sobered up Moscow and shown that their special operations lead to backlash.**

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In this context, the well-known saying can be paraphrased: "Everything that did not kill Europeans made them stronger." The current situation, however, seems to be as follows: the more Russia is convinced of the resistance of the West, the bolder its provocations become.

As we can see, Russian hybrid actions in the EU countries in the first seven months of the large-scale war against Ukraine mostly had low effectiveness; in fact, they did not affect the EU countries' support for Ukrainians. Russians can be inspired by the fact that in some countries the support of political forces that until now belonged to the marginal camp (both far-right and far-left) is growing. Out of the eight tools analyzed, only one – *the support of pro-Russian politicians* – yields visible results for Russian efforts.

Nonetheless, at this stage, it is too early to talk about a drastic impact on EU policy in general, since pro-Russian forces won in European countries before (Greece, Italy), but this did not in any way affect EU solidarity – the continuation and strengthening of the sanctions policy against Russia. Eight years of futile attempts to undermine the EU's will to support Ukraine should have already sobered up Moscow and shown that their special operations lead to backlash.

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<sup>17</sup> UNHCR survey finds refugees from Ukraine hope to go home, July 13, 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2022/7/62ce6ad64/unhcr-survey-finds-refugees-ukraine-hope-home.html>

## SECTION 2

## SENTIMENT, FEARS AND VULNERABILITIES OF EUROPEANS

Some people believe that despite Europe's high resistance to Russian hybrid influence, support or at least attention to Ukraine from EU societies may gradually wane for objective reasons, such as energy crisis or economic problems.

Firstly, economy and energy – the obvious concerns of Europeans – are not exhaustive and are likely to vary from country to country. Studying the pressure points that Europeans attribute to the war in Ukraine will help the Ukrainian authorities and the expert community build better external communication and develop a more tailored approach to each country.

Secondly, it remains unclear how strongly these concerns and fears can influence the sentiment and stance of European societies regarding the war in Ukraine. To this end, we have decided to analyze what concerns are voiced by European experts and disseminated by the European media, as well as to what extent they resonate with the public opinion.



### EXPERT COMMUNITY

In September 2022, the New Europe Center asked leading European experts: *"What more can be done to make sure European societies*

*continue expressing support and solidarity with Ukraine despite economic hardships caused by Russia's war against Ukraine?"*<sup>18</sup> Among the main risks and concerns of European societies, to which the experts drew our attention, the following can be distinguished:

- **Economy and energy.** Two issues worrying people are soaring energy prices and inflation caused by energy shortage. This, in turn, leads to a rapid increase in the cost of living and a loss of citizens' well-being. Because of this, Europeans may be more concerned about supporting Ukraine. A process that can be briefly described as "the battle between the TV set and the refrigerator" (heroic resistance vs. damage from sanctions).
- **Reduced attention to the war.** Due to their own economic troubles and a certain "Ukraine fatigue" in European societies, attention to the war is gradually decreasing, while government support remains high.
- **Diminished sense of threat.** Over time, the prolongation of the war and the gradual reduction of attention to it may entail a tendency to see the war as a regional rather than a European one, and Russia as a regional rather than a European threat. There is a risk of Europeans forgetting that Ukraine is fighting not only for its existence but also for the freedom and security of Europe. At the

<sup>18</sup> New Europe Center, "How to maintain European support for Ukraine against the background of economic difficulties?" September 26, 2022, <http://neweurope.org.ua/analytics/yak-zberegty-yevropejsku-pidtrymku-ukrayiny-na-tli-ekonomichnyh-trudnoshhiv/>

same time, now in the context of the nuclear threat, the sense of threat may temporarily intensify again.

- **Attribution error.** The spread of the false opinion among citizens that support to Ukraine, and not the aggression of Russia, allegedly has an adverse effect on the well-being of Europeans. Lack of understanding that economic and energy problems cannot be solved simply by lifting sanctions or ending support for Ukraine's military efforts.
- **Misunderstanding the importance of aid.** Due to improper communication (in the case of some governments – deliberate silence on the scale of aid to Ukraine), Europeans may lack information about how significant their aid is to Ukraine and Ukrainians: what exactly military aid from European countries means, what has become possible thanks to macro-financial aid, etc.
- **Low level of local expertise on Ukraine.** In some European countries, particularly France, there is still a shortage of specialists who would specifically deal with Ukraine, understand the Ukrainian language, history and domestic politics. In the media, expert and political environment of some countries, the discussion about Ukraine is conducted by specialists of a broad profile or sometimes even by Russian experts.
- **Selfishness and indecisiveness of some governments.** Experts highlight risks stemming not only from society but also from the governments of individual European countries, such as selfishness and reluctance to pursue a tougher policy against Russia (Hungary), indecision to provide more powerful military support to Ukraine, e.g. Leopard-2 tanks (Germany).

- **Inadequate communication with European governments.** Blaming Germany, Italy or other countries that pursue a less rigid policy toward Russia may prove counterproductive in the medium term. Their history is different from the history of Poland and the Baltic countries, so Ukraine needs to have realistic expectations from each country.



## MEDIA

The mass media of Italy, Germany and France mainly covered the following topics: Russia's war crimes against Ukraine, sanctions and their consequences, peace negotiations and support to Ukraine<sup>19</sup>. The tone and content of messages on these topics, although sometimes reproducing Russian narratives, were mostly neutral and positive (with understanding and support towards Ukraine).

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Publications with relatively negative messages, according to our observations, did not exceed 20% from the total volume. Attention to Ukraine is still significant; the topics in the publications are constantly changing. One of the reasons is that Russian aggressive actions are constantly

<sup>19</sup> Based on the monitoring carried out by the Ukrainian social start-up LetsData in partnership with the NGO Detector Media, the Center for Strategic Communication and Information Security analyzed the media landscape in Italy, Germany and France from July 1 to 29. <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3565080-so-rozpovidaut-pro-vijnru-rf-proti-ukraini-onlajnmedia-italii-nimeccini-i-francii.html>





accompanied by new provocations. The most stable theme is economic difficulties; how average Europeans will experience the coming months as energy prices continue to rise.

The analytical team of the New Europe Center has analyzed individual publications in the mass media of Italy, France and Germany and identified the most sensitive topics that were covered in September. (Let us emphasize that the range of topics in the mass media is much wider; in general, the publications can be perceived as more pro-Ukrainian; we have chosen the minor topics that may affect Ukraine's support to one degree or another<sup>20</sup>.)

- **Sanctions are harmful.** Russia placed the responsibility for the energy crisis on Europe, claiming it is easy to stop – by launching Nord Stream-2. Separate opposition politicians in Germany (Die Linke, Alternative for Germany) are calling on the government to abandon the sanctions, as they harm the Germans themselves. Hungary, contrary to the policy of other EU countries, is ramping up cooperation with Russia and is even going to increase gas purchases. The impact on unemployment will also be felt. Attention was focused on the increase in energy prices and tariffs.
- **Russia may use nuclear weapons.** Sanctions and international resistance notwithstanding, Russia continues hostilities and ramps up escalation by carrying out pseudo-referendums and resorting to nuclear blackmail. Driven into a corner, Putin may opt for using weapons of mass destruction. (In response to the counteroffensive in Kharkiv region, Russia held pseudo-referendums.) The mass media paid special attention to the shelling of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant.
- **Weapons in coordination.** The German government should be more careful with the supply of military equipment – especially tanks. The federal chancellor should be guided by the principle of solidarity with other Western countries and not supply what others do not. Here is another argument: more weapons means longer war, weapons supply provokes further escalation.
- **Peace talks with Russia.** Sometimes comments are made about the need to resume peace talks with Russia. Moscow insists that it is the Ukrainians who are rejecting peace talks. The mass media also spread Russian sources, which published information about the strikes of the Armed Forces of Ukraine on the occupied territories that resulted in

<sup>20</sup> Analysts of the New Europe Center have analyzed certain publication in leading media outlets of Germany, France, Italy and the Netherlands as of late September 2022.

civilian casualties. Quotes were given about the destructive role of the US, which is not interested in peace talks.

- **Visa ban** (mainly in August). The entry ban for Russians will affect not only Russian tourists but also relatives of Russians living in the EU, students and schoolchildren.
- **Ukrainian corruption.** From time to time, the topic of corruption of Ukrainian elites comes up. In the context of Ukraine's recovery, the issue of control over the relevant funds that will be filled by other countries is raised.



## PUBLIC SENTIMENT

In general, the fears of European societies do correspond to the concerns noted by analysts and partly by the media. According to the latest EU-wide Standard Eurobarometer 97 (June–July 2022), the two key concerns of Europeans at both national and EU level are **rising prices, inflation and the cost of living** (54% and 34%) and **energy supply** (22% and 28%)<sup>21</sup>. Compared to pre-war indicators (January–February 2022), these concerns increased by 10–13%<sup>22</sup>. However, it is indicative that these issues worried Europeans before the war – even before the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine “rising prices, inflation and the cost of living” was a key concern of Europeans at the national level due to the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, we can draw a cautious conclusion that the war in Ukraine has foregrounded these fears, not **caused** them. Other concerns include the international situation, the economic situation, the environment and climate change, health care, etc.

An ever-increasing number of Europeans believe that the state of their national economy (64%) and the economy of Europe (51%) is in a poor condition. However, if to look at how citizens' attitudes on this issue evolved, one can see that the war in Ukraine **has not** actually become the most critical juncture for Europe. During the pandemic, the share of citizens who were critical of the state of the economy was even higher.

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In 2020–2021, 64–69% believed that the state of their national economy was poor; 56–60% said the same about the state of the European economy. Thus, it is fair to say that the pandemic became a sort of a preparatory stage for Europe before the war in Ukraine. The very fact that the Europeans were able to overcome the economic hardship caused by the pandemic certainly plays into the hands of Ukraine – Europe already has relevant experience in overcoming economic crises, so we can hope that the end (a fair ending of the war in Ukraine) will justify the means in the eyes of citizens (sanctions, supply of arms to Ukraine and, consequently, deterioration of their own well-being).

Nonetheless, to what extent do economic and energy difficulties affect the position of EU citizens regarding support for Ukraine?

Regardless of the fact that 88% of Europeans believed (June–July 2022) that the war in Ukraine had serious economic consequences for their

<sup>21</sup> European Union. “Standard Eurobarometer 97 – Summer 2022”, September 2022. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2693>

<sup>22</sup> European Union. “Standard Eurobarometer 96 – Winter 2021–2022”, April 2022. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2553>



country and 62% were of the opinion that the war had serious financial repercussions for them personally, the vast majority of the EU population (86% in June, 85% in April) confidently note that the **EU has to cut its dependence on Russian gas and oil**. In this respect, citizens demonstrated determination and willingness to take responsibility for their own well-being: in the summer, 78% of citizens confirmed they had taken measures to reduce their own energy consumption or planned to do so in the near future.

Meanwhile, despite all that, 55% of Europeans were satisfied with the response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine at the national level, and 57% – at the EU level. As compared to April 2022, this share has slightly increased (1–6%)<sup>23</sup>. Most citizens supported the following EU steps in response to Russia's aggression in Ukraine:



Granting asylum in the EU to people fleeing the war (90% in June-July; 88% in April);



Provision of financial assistance to Ukraine (81% in June-July; 80% in April);



EU economic sanctions against the Russian government, companies and individuals (78% in June-July; 80% in April).

For want of an all-European survey such as Eurobarometer, which would show the sentiment of citizens as of the beginning of autumn, we can only assume that as the economic situation deteriorates, the share of Europeans who are ready to continue supporting Ukraine may decrease. However, three previous polls that touched on the topic of the war in Ukraine (winter, spring and summer Eurobarometers) demonstrated that the

stance of Europeans on this issue did not change much during the spring-summer of 2022; on most issues, there were only minor fluctuations.

In contrast, some national polls contain more recent data on citizens' sentiments and mostly record **a gradual decline in support against the background of economic troubles**.

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For instance, as of September 2022, 72% of the French support sanctions against Russia, whilst also considering them ineffective (74%)<sup>24</sup>. Compared to the symmetrical survey from March this year, this support has slightly decreased (by 8%) in favor of the opinion that the daily life and purchasing power of the French are more important than support for Ukraine. The situation is similar in the Netherlands: six months ago, two-thirds (65%) of the Dutch stood for providing aid to Ukraine, even if it would affect their economic situation in the long term; at the end of September, only 49% of Dutch citizens supported this opinion (a drop of 16%)<sup>25</sup>.

At the same time, when assessing sentiments in a certain country, it is important to take into account the local context, the economic background and the problems that concern citizens the most, as they influence the formation of the society's attitude to supporting Ukraine. For example, as of June-July 2022, 79% of Czechs believed they had problems with the economy, while 65% of the Dutch indicated that their na-

<sup>23</sup> European Union. "EU's response to the war in Ukraine," May 2022. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2772>

<sup>24</sup> BFM.TV. "SONDAGE BFMTV – 7 FRANÇAIS SUR 10 JUGENT LES SANCTIONS CONTRE LA RUSSIE INEFFICACES POUR METTRE FIN À LA GUERRE," 7 September 2022. [https://www.bfmtv.com/international/sondage-bfmtv-7-francais-sur-10-approuvent-les-sanctions-contre-la-russie-mais-les-jugent-inefficaces\\_AN-202209070478.html](https://www.bfmtv.com/international/sondage-bfmtv-7-francais-sur-10-approuvent-les-sanctions-contre-la-russie-mais-les-jugent-inefficaces_AN-202209070478.html)

<sup>25</sup> 1V. "Onvoorwaardelijke steun voor hulp aan Oekraïne neemt af, 'veel Nederlanders zitten deze winter in de kou'," 27 September 2022. <https://eenvandaag.avrotros.nl/panels/opiniepanel/alle-uitslagen/item/onvoorwaardelijke-steun-voor-hulp-aan-oekraïne-neemt-af-veel-nederlanders-zitten-deze-winter-in-de-kou/>

tional economy was in a good condition. These data give us a certain insight into why the anti-government rally with dozens of thousands of demonstrators took place in Prague, and not, say, in the capital of Netherlands. Similarly, survey data show that the war in Ukraine had the greatest impact on the welfare of the ordinary Cypriots, Greeks and Portuguese (96–85%), whereas the financial standing of the Dutch, Finns and Swedes was least affected (33–47%).

On top of that, the **sentiments of European societies are mostly characterized by a certain constancy**. For instance, during the last three Eurobarometers (winter, spring and summer polls), the societies of Bulgaria, Greece and Cyprus demonstrated both the highest level of concern about the national and European economy and the least enthusiasm for supporting Ukraine. It is therefore not surprising that this September, Bulgarian citizens said they considered excessive price upswings to be a more tangible danger (87.9%) than the escalation of the war in Ukraine (56.3%)<sup>26</sup>. Likewise, friends of Ukraine also demonstrate consistency in their support: the Polit Barometer (ZDF) survey showed that the vast majority of German citizens considered it necessary to continue supporting Ukraine, despite the rise in energy prices.

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**The vast majority of German citizens consider it necessary to continue supporting Ukraine, despite the rise in energy prices.**

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Over time, these sentiments did not change with the approach of winter: 70% of citizens expressed their support in July, 71% in August and 74% in September<sup>27</sup>.

Consequently, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the sentiments of European citizens:

- As the economic situation deteriorates, the share of citizens who support Ukraine may decrease, which is already the case at the level of individual countries. That said, as of September–October 2022, this drop is not critical, and the share of the population supporting Ukraine still remains high (higher than the share of opponents).
- Although the positions across societies are different, over time each of them rather held on to their own position than changed it. So friends will be friends, and the Europeans who are more skeptical of supporting Ukraine will become increasingly skeptical. Therefore, a tailored approach and targeted communication with each country are crucial.
- At the all-European level, states with a high level of support for Ukraine make up for the low level of support from those who would like to help Ukraine less, thus equalizing the all-European indicator.

<sup>26</sup> Gallup International. "Българите: заплахите за зимата се реални," September 20, 2022. <https://www.gallup-international.bg/46236/threats-bulgarians/>

<sup>27</sup> Yevropeiska pravda, "70% stand for supporting Ukraine despite soaring energy prices – survey," September 9, 2022. <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2022/09/9/7146494/>

## SECTION 3

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The first seven months of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine demonstrated the unity of European societies. Despite Russia's attempt to undermine this unity with the help of hybrid actions, the level of support for Ukraine among Europeans remained largely intact. However, economic problems and the energy crisis, which currently worry EU citizens the most, are gradually beginning to affect the mood of Europeans regarding support for Ukraine. These changes are more or less pronounced in view of the disparate initial data in different EU member states (state of the economy, well-being of citizens, etc.). In order to conduct an effective communication campaign with the aim of maintaining European support for Ukraine, the Ukrainian side will need to take into account not only the snapshot of sentiments in Europe but also the local context of each country. Having analyzed the concerns and moods of citizens, as well as taking into account the opinions of experts and the topics that were most discussed in European media, we developed the following recommendations for relevant Ukrainian stakeholders, which are aimed at helping maintain the support for Ukraine among European societies.

- **Attracting the maximum number of Ukrainian players** for the promotion of Ukraine abroad. These include the Ukrainian government, parliament, think tanks and a wider circle of non-governmental organizations. At the same time, their messages should not be contradictory.
- **More personal stories.** It is crucial that Ukraine does not recede from public attention; media presence must remain high. It is necessary to convey to the European media more personal stories from Ukraine – stories about real people who were in captivity, under temporary occupation, stories of children who were forcibly deported to Russia and separated from their parents (this, in particular, was noted by colleagues from the Netherlands, the USA, etc.). It can also be speeches by witnesses of war crimes of the Russian Federation both on television and before various interested audiences in key EU countries.
- **Remembering to say "thank you."** Politicians, experts and evacuated Ukrainians should make gestures of gratitude and send signals to foreigners that their help has an impact. For example, a public campaign to post words of gratitude to Europeans on billboards in EU countries could be a good idea.
- **Conveying messages about Russia's true goals in the war.** It is necessary to explain to EU citizens that: 1) economic difficulties are a consequence of Russia's aggressive actions, not the war itself; 2) Russia is purposely trying to jeopardize European societies and economies; 3) Russia's ambitions are not limited to Ukraine and are directed against the West and European societies; 4) Russia's actions are unravelling the order that has provided Europeans with security and prosperity since World War II.
- **Positive signals from Ukraine.** This implies explaining to Europeans the benefits of restoring a stable, democratic and prosperous Ukraine. It is important to show that, while waging the war, Ukrainian citizens are also

fighting for strengthening the rule of law and overcoming corruption. It also means showing the efforts being exerted in Ukraine to speed up the country's EU accession.

- **More active involvement of Ukrainian "civilian ambassadors"** (Ukrainians evacuated abroad), who will tell Europeans not only about the war on the ground but also about Ukraine in general, its history, culture, etc.
- **Targeted work with different groups of Europeans.** Ukrainian officials and non-governmental organizations should consider communication formats with trade union leaders in EU countries regarding explanations for workers most affected by price hikes.
- **Positive wording and balanced communication!** Constant public – and sometimes overtly personalized – accusations from the Ukrainian side against some EU member states (for example, Germany or Italy) of unwillingness to supply Ukraine with certain types of weapons may ultimately prove counterproductive, especially amidst the virtual lack of gratitude for the effort of these countries in general. It is more important that the public and media pressure come from the societies of these countries, not from Ukrainian officials.
- **Tailored approach.** Not all countries can be equally useful in the supply of armaments. It is better to involve individual countries in post-war reconstruction and make use of local initiatives (for instance, through twinning of cities).
- **Detrimental addiction.** Ukraine has to explain to European society the need to maintain the policy of reducing dependence on Russia, which dovetails with the interests of Europeans themselves.
- **Involvement of intellectuals.** Ukraine has to more actively engage European intellectuals for educational work among Western audiences. Historians, philosophers and artists from European countries can become influential representatives of public diplomacy aimed at consolidating support for Ukraine.





## ABOUT NEW EUROPE CENTER

The New Europe Center was founded in 2017 as an independent think-tank. Despite its new brand, it is based on a research team that has been working together since 2009, at the Institute for World Policy. The New Europe Center became recognized by offering high-quality analysis on foreign policy issues in Ukraine and regional security by combining active, effective work with advocacy.

The New Europe Center's vision is very much in line with the views of the majority of Ukrainians about the future of their country: Ukraine should be integrated into the European Union and NATO. By integration, we understand not so much formal membership as the adoption of the best standards and practices for Ukraine to properly belong to the Euroatlantic value system.

More about New Europe Center: [neweurope.org.ua](http://neweurope.org.ua)



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