



USAID
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UKRAINE'S REGIONAL SOFT POWER

**CHANGES DURING
THE PRESIDENCY
OF VOLODYMYR ZELENSKYI**

**CASE STUDIES OF BELARUS, GEORGIA,
MOLDOVA, KAZAKHSTAN AND RUSSIA**

Discussion paper
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Concept: Alyona Getmanchuk,
Director, New Europe Center

Author: Anna Medvedeva,
Research Fellow, New Europe Center

Chief reviewer: Sergiy Solodkyy,
Deputy Director, New Europe Center

Reviewers: Evgeniy Zhovtis,
Director, Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights
and Rule of Law

Kornely Kakachia,
Director, Georgian Institute of Politics

Leo Litra,
Senior Research Fellow, New Europe Center

Vadim Mojeiko,
Analyst, Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS)

Translators: Anna Medvedeva
Serhiy Horbunov
Sylvester Nosenko

Proofreading: Markian Kuzmowycz

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1. INTRODUCTION



Alyona Getmanchuk,
Director, New Europe Center

"Look at us — everything is possible!"¹ — It is with this appeal that Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed the residents of other post-Soviet countries in the moments following the announcement of the exit poll results, showing his landslide victory of 72.7% in the second round of voting of the presidential election.

This laconic and rather spontaneous appeal actually bore much more meaning than it might have seemed at the time of Zelenskyy's victory. Ukraine's presidential runoff featured — for the first time — a political neophyte, a Russian-speaking comedian well-known in many post-Soviet countries. Experts, politically-engaged citizens, and the general public alike were interested in the process of electing the new President of Ukraine^{2,3}. Zelenskyy accumulated interest and attention in his election from two important perspectives for the audience of post-Soviet countries: as an outsider to the political system and as a television and film celebrity.

Since Zelenskyy's election, Ukraine has gained new opportunities. With an effective and well-thought-out strategy and successful transformations in Ukraine itself, Zelenskyy's presidency could help distinguish Ukraine from other post-Soviet countries and the Russian-speaking world in general (not to be confused with "Russkiy mir" / "Russian world") in three important ways. First, by nurturing interest and curiosity about Ukraine and the events taking place inside it, and not only within the context of Russia's war against Ukraine. Secondly, the transformation of Ukraine into a center of gravity alternative to Moscow and into an attractive model of development for other post-Soviet countries to emulate. Finally, Zelenskyy's popularity in the Russian-speaking world and non-traditional political background offer him an opportunity to speak not only to citizens of Ukraine, but also to become a kind of competitor to Vladimir Putin for Russian-speaking citizens of the world. Combined, these goals could help strengthen Ukraine's soft power in a number of post-Soviet countries.

We have tried to answer these ambitious questions with the help of a study based on the concept of soft power proposed by Harvard University professor Joseph Nye. The definition of soft power refers to the ability of a state to achieve its goals through its own attractiveness, not coercion⁴. According to Nye, the primary sources of soft power are political values, foreign policy and culture⁵.

This is not the first work of this kind for us. In 2011, analysts of the New Europe Center addressed this topic in their paper "Ukraine's soft power in the region:

1 Зеленський до пострадянських країн: Подивіться на нас — усе можливо. (2019, квітень 21). Укрінформ. Режим доступу <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-elections/2685936-zelenskij-do-postradanskih-krain-podivitsa-na-nas-use-mozливо.html>

2 Walker, S. & Roth, A. (2020, March 7). Volodymyr Zelenskyy: 'My White House invitation? I was told it's being prepared'. The Guardian. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/07/volodymyr-zelenskyy-tv-comic-who-became-ukraine-president-trump-putin>

3 Тогузбаев, К. (2019, квітень 22). Усе можливо? Взгляд из Казахстана на выборы в Украине. Радио Азаттык. Режим доступу <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/kazakhstan-ukraine-election-zelenskyy-poroshenko/29896772.html>

4 Nye J. (1990). Bound to Lead: the changing nature of American power. New York: Basic Books.

5 Nye, J. (2008). Public diplomacy and soft power. Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, No 616.

An instrument for the effective foreign policy⁶". The author of the soft power concept, Dr. Joseph Nye, approved at that time the methodology developed by our analytical team.

This new study draws upon the methodological and analytical findings from our research and examines Ukraine's soft power in five post-Soviet countries: Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova and Russia. As with the previous study, it was made possible by the generous support of USAID / ENGAGE and PACT, for which we are very grateful.

Our previous study, conducted almost 10 years ago, concluded that Ukraine's main source of soft power is its democracy. We can suggest that a democratic Ukraine, focused on integration with the European Union, remains most attractive to its neighbors today. This is true even for those of our neighbors who are oriented toward other geopolitical centers of influence. Ukraine is not interesting and attractive as a little Russia or a big Belarus. Ukraine's appeal in the post-Soviet space is as rather a trendsetter of democratic and European integration processes. It is important for Ukrainian authorities to understand this fact, as they still have the potential to turn Zelensky's presidency into a driver of Ukraine's soft power in the post-Soviet area.

⁶ Гетьманчук, А., Єнін, Є., Зарембо, К., Пилявець, О., Озимок, І., Солодкий, С., Шинкарук, К. (2011). М'яка сила України в регіоні: інструмент ефективної зовнішньої політики. Режим доступу <http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Myaka-syla-Ukrayiny-v-regyone.pdf>

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology draws upon the triangulation principle⁷, that combines the following research methods:

1 **Quantitative method.** A survey was conducted among 55 experts working in the fields of political analysis, international relations, culture and business using 13 indicators, which were developed on the basis of three sources of soft power (Table 1). The category "Popularity of Ukrainian products» was added to investigate the economic dimension of how Ukraine is perceived in the targeted countries. Each of the indicators is evaluated by foreign experts according to the 10-point scale, where the highest score indicates the best, highest level of soft power perception. The soft power index is an average that is calculated from the total number of scores divided by the number of indicators.

Table 1. Soft power indicators

Parameters	Average score according to the 10-point system
1. Political values	
1.1. Reform implementation, progress of democratic transformations	
1.2. The Volodymyr Zelensky's "phenomenon"	
1.3. Ukraine's ability to contribute to the resolution of the conflict in Donbas	
2. Foreign policy	
2.1. Ukraine's ability to be a consistent and predictable partner	
2.2. Ukraine's commitment to European and Euro-Atlantic integration	
2.3. Ukraine in Ukrainian-Russian relations including the issue of conflict resolution in Donbas	
2.4. Ability to attract allies and counter challenges in foreign policy	
2.5. Activities of the Embassy of Ukraine	
2.6. Impact of the Ukrainian community	
3. Popularity of Ukrainian products	
4. Popularity of Ukrainian culture	
4.1. Education	
4.2. "High" art (literature, cinema, theater, painting, photography)	
4.3. Mass culture (television series, pop music)	
Soft power index	

2 **In-depth interviews.** Comprehensive interviews were conducted among 38 experts who gave their assessment of Ukraine's soft power according to the indicators listed in the table 1. Priority in the discussions was given to the category "political values" to more thoroughly explore Ukraine's attractiveness in the context of political transformation the country has experienced in 2019–2020. Experts compared Ukraine's soft power before the 2019 presidential election (from late 2013 to early 2019) and after the election campaign (May 2019 — June 2020).

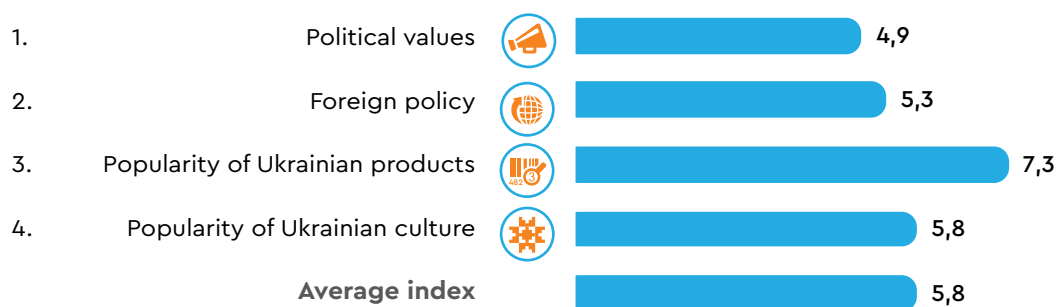
3 **Discursive analysis of media content.** The amount of media coverage on Ukrainian events and their chosen rhetoric was analyzed. The sample consists of 5–8 media resources from each of targeted countries.

⁷ Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (2000). The handbook of qualitative research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, p. 443.

3. UKRAINE'S SOFT POWER IN BELARUS: ORDNUNG MUSS SEIN¹

Ukraine's soft power index in **Belarus:**

5,8 / 10



The attitudes of most Belarusians towards Ukrainians can be viewed through the concept of "order," which Aliaksandr Lukashenka likes to invoke, in particular, when comparing Belarus and Ukraine. Post-Maidan Ukraine, with its political and security instability, is often portrayed by Belarusian authorities as a realm of chaos born through the reboot of the political elite. This association of change of power with disorder is also used by many in Belarusian media to scare Belarusian citizens away from any possible intentions of shaking up their own political system.

Ukraine's presidential and parliamentary elections of 2019 were praised by the Belarusian opposition and the expert community. These audiences were attracted by the democratic electoral process and the opportunity for non-systemic politicians to come to power. However, there was also an opinion in Belarusian society that the election of comedian Volodymyr Zelenskyy as President was further evidence of the chaos that exists in Ukraine. The Ukrainian state could enhance its own soft power in Belarus by demonstrating success in building effective systems of interaction between citizens and the government. Through such accomplishments, Belarusians will be able to see that democratic transformations can create a new order of life. In a broader context, a democratic Ukraine has a chance to become a new center of influence in the post-Soviet space.

Belarus

¹ German proverbial expression: "There must be order."

1. UKRAINE AFTER THE REVOLUTION: "THE CHAOS"

According to Freedom House, Belarus is a "not free state"² with a consolidated authoritarian regime³. Aliaksandr Lukashenka came to power in 1994 proposing to restore order and stability lost in the first years of Belarusian independence⁴. Since then, the idea of "bringing order"⁵ remains one of the major filters through which the Belarusian President sees social processes. The image of revolutionary and post-revolutionary Ukraine as a land of chaos⁶ and disorder⁷ emerges in this very context. "Better Belarusian Ordnung than the total Ukrainian corruption,"⁸ wrote a Belarusian journalist, commenting on the behavior of Ukrainian border guards. The perception of Ukraine as a corrupt⁹ state, less law-bound than Belarus¹⁰, is quite common.

The idea of "bringing order" remains one of the major filters through which the Belarusian President sees social processes.

Against the backdrop of post-revolutionary chaos in Ukraine, Belarusian media emphasized their signature domestic stability. In this atmosphere of intimidation, the Ukrainian Maidan provided Belarusian authorities with a mandate to disperse its own potential "Ploshcha."¹¹ In such unfavorable conditions for active protest, opposition-minded Belarusians who supported the Ukrainian Revolution resorted to monitoring the

developments of their neighbor, hoping that Ukraine would succeed in its democratic reforms and could later become an attractive role model for Belarus as well¹². Failure to generate lasting change would only strengthen the position of the Belarusian government and demotivate those Belarusians who seek more democratic governance. It has been suggested that if this time (unlike in 2004), Ukraine succeeds in improving governance and implementing necessary reforms, Belarusian civil society would only benefit as a result^(ibid).

2 Freedom House. Freedom in the World. Belarus 2020. Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/belarus/freedom-world/2020>

3 Freedom House. Nations in transit rating 2018. Belarus. Retrieved from <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b3cc29aa.html>

4 Carnegie Moscow Centre. (2018, April 12). Shraibman, A. The house that Lukashenko built: the foundation, evolution, and future of the Belarusian regime. Retrieved from <https://carnegie.ru/2018/04/12/house-that-lukashenko-built-foundation-evolution-and-future-of-belarusian-regime-pub-76059>

5 Президент А. Лукашенко актуализирует образ сильного лидера на фоне украинских событий. (2016). Belarus in Focus. Retrieved from <https://belarusinfocus.info/by/socym-i-palityka/prezident-lukashenko-aktualiziruet-obraz-silnogo-lidera-na-fone-ukrainskih-sobytyi?page=7>

6 Что думают о Евромайдане в постсоветских странах. (2014, февраль 25). BBC. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2014/02/140224_ukraine_fsu_reaction

7 Продвижение «русского мира» идет через белорусские ТВ-каналы — БАЗ презентовал мониторинг пророссийской пропаганды. (2019, февраль 22). Белорусская ассоциация журналистов. Retrieved from <https://baj.by/ru/analytics/prodvizhenie-russkogo-mira-idet-cherez-belorusskie-tv-kanaly-bazh-prezentoval-monitoring>

8 Дмитрий Гурневич: Лучше «белорусский ордунг», чем тотальная украинская коррупция. (2018, ноябрь 22). Наша Ніва. Retrieved from <https://nn.by/?c=ar&i=221024&lang=ru>

9 Гордиенко, П. (2015, март 10). Не самый русский мир. События в Украине заставили белорусов задуматься о национальной идентичности. Retrieved from <https://nv.ua/publications/ne-samyy-russkiy-mir-sobytiya-v-ukraine-zastavili-belorusov-zadumatsya-o-nacionalnoy-identichnosti-38248.html>

10 Гриневич, Е. (2017, сентябрь 13). Почему не следует сравнивать современную Беларусь и Восточную Германию. Наша Ніва. Retrieved from <https://nn.by/?c=ar&i=197356&lang=ru>

11 Шрайбман, А. (2014, июль 29). Майдан дал белорусским властям мандат на разгон Плошчы. Naviny.by. Retrieved from https://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2014/07/29/ic_articles_112_186156

12 Что думают о Евромайдане в постсоветских странах. (2014, февраль 25). BBC. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2014/02/140224_ukraine_fsu_reaction

There is a lack of coverage of Ukrainian events in Belarusian media, including the reform agenda¹³. Quite often, information reaches the public with a delay, losing its relevance. Scandalous and controversial events in Ukraine are discussed most frequently in the Belarusian media space, which helps create a negative impression of the changes taking place. It is likely due to the lack of information that most Belarusians are not very aware of Ukraine's reform environment; Ukrainian reforms are not a popular topic for discussion in Belarusian society. Relevant discussions in Belarusian media mostly demonstrate skepticism about the success and effectiveness of changes in Ukraine¹⁴. The results of Ukraine's fight against corruption are often perceived in Belarus as insufficient or insignificant. Ukraine, in particular, is even dubbed "a classic case of oligarchy in the post-Soviet space."¹⁵ Moreover, this image of a corrupt Ukraine is more reflective of personal, anecdotal experiences of Belarusians visiting Ukraine than the influence of any media, foreign or domestic¹⁶.

Minsk positioned itself neutrally following the annexation of Crimea and the start of war in Eastern Ukraine. Belarusian authorities are trying to balance the interests of Ukraine and Russia, in particular, by providing a negotiating platform for parties to the conflict over Donbas¹⁷. Regarding societal attitudes, as of 2015, 68.7% of Belarusians approved of the annexation of Crimea by Russia, and 72.2% of Belarusians considered the Maidan a "coup d'état."¹⁸ The support for pro-Russian positions may be due to the significant influence of the Russian media in Belarus. A 2015 study found that Russian propaganda in Belarus was 60% effective, compared to Ukraine's 25.5%¹⁹.

The Belarusians' attitude toward Ukraine's capability to resolve the Donbas conflict should be viewed as influenced by both the Belarusian government's view of Ukrainian events as well as Russian propaganda. Officially, Minsk supports, albeit cautiously, Ukraine's position, but also tries to present arguments from the Russian perspective. This affects how war in Eastern Ukraine is viewed by the segment of the population that trusts the Belarusian government (in 2019, 52% of Belarusians trusted their President)²⁰. This audience is characterized by a less radicalized perception of Ukraine; they sympathize with Ukrainians and wish them to achieve peace in their country as soon as possible. On the other hand, citizens who get news from Russian outlets tend to condemn the actions of Ukrainians in Donbas, considering them a manifestation of aggression against

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¹³ Dzianis Melyantsou, Coordinator of the Belarus's Foreign Policy Programme, Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations, interview dated 28/2/2020

¹⁴ Andrei Yahorau, Senior Research Fellow, Centre for European Transformation – Belarus, interview dated 8/5/2020

¹⁵ Сехович, В. (2016, декабрь 13). «Белорусские олигархи»: призраки, рудименты или будущее? Tut.by. Retrieved from <https://news.tut.by/economics/523543.html>

¹⁶ Dzianis Melyantsou, Coordinator of the Belarus's Foreign Policy Programme, Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations, interview dated 28/2/2020

¹⁷ Українська призма. Рада зовнішньої політики. (2020, березень 5). Максак, Г. Україна-Білорусь: що очікувати від команди Зеленського в українсько-білоруських відносинах? Retrieved from <https://cutt.ly/GtYH7KT>

¹⁸ Белорусы мечутся между россиянами и украинцами. (2015, август 18). Белорусский партизан. Retrieved from <https://belaruspartisan.by/politic/314478/>

¹⁹ Вардомацкий, А. (2015, ноябрь 4). Индекс воздействия российских СМИ: Россия, Беларусь, Украина. Media Sapiens. Retrieved from <https://ms.detector.media/mediadoslidzhennya/post/14672/2015-11-04-indeks-vozddeistviya-rossiiskikh-smi-rossiya-belarus-ukraina/>

²⁰ Белорусы церкви доверяют больше, чем власти? (2019, ноябрь 18). Белорусский партизан. Retrieved from <https://belaruspartisan.by/politic/482530/>

their compatriots. Due to the fact that some of these audiences intersect, these two visions (Russia as an aggressor nation and that of a blameless Russia) often coexist²¹; as a result, Ukraine can be simultaneously criticized for its participation in hostilities in Donbas and subject to sympathetic views due to the ongoing occupation of Ukrainian territory.

Belarusians also believe that both Russia and Ukraine are not doing enough to end the war²². It is noteworthy that in the first years of war in Ukraine, Belarusians lost the willingness to protest and change the government, "amid the events in Ukraine, Belarusians assess their local realities as better [than in Ukraine] and fear a social explosion that could lead to war."²³ The opposition community is aware that Ukraine is trying to repel the aggressor, and it is also believed that Kyiv should negotiate more decisively with Russia and defend its position in a more firm manner²⁴.

The European integration aspirations declared by the Ukrainian Revolution were interpreted by Belarusian authorities as a victory of the West over Russia, while Ukraine was portrayed as a battlefield for these two forces²⁵. Belarusian opposition believed that Maidan was a manifestation of the political maturity of the Ukrainian people and a mechanism for Ukraine's return to a European integration path, which then-president Viktor Yanukovich had tried to abandon²⁶. Statements by opposition political parties expressed hopes that first Ukraine and then Belarus would be able to become democratic European states^(ibid).

The attitudes of Belarusians towards Ukrainians are somewhat worse than the perception of Belarusians by Ukrainian citizens. As of 2015, 33% of Belarusians held amiable views of Ukrainians²⁷, while in Ukraine, the share of those who view Belarusians positively reached 55%²⁸.

The surge in popularity of Belarusian language and culture in Belarus, especially among the youth may also be explained by the influence of revolutionary events in Ukraine.

Since 2014, sociologists have noted a gradual trend of declining hostility of Belarusians towards the United States (from 54% in 2014 to 41% in 2016) and EU member states (for example, to Germany: from 19% to 14%) and linked these trends with Ukraine's pivot towards Europe²⁹ and the fact that pro-European sentiments are growing

21 Dzianis Melyantsou, Coordinator of the Belarus's Foreign Policy Programme, Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations, interview dated 28/2/2020

22 Zmicier Mickiewicz, journalist of Belsat TV channel, analyst of Belarus Security Blog, editor of Varta almanac, interviews dated 28/2/2020 and 7/5/2020

23 Мельничук, Т. (2016, март 30). Почему Лукашенко потерял доверие половины белорусов. BBC. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2016/03/160325_belarus_lukashenko_falling_rating

24 Zmicier Mickiewicz, journalist of Belsat TV channel, analyst of Belarus Security Blog, editor of Varta almanac, interviews dated 28/2/2020 and 7/5/2020

25 Сайт Президента Республики Беларусь. (2014, октябрь 17). Пресс-конференция Президента Республики Беларусь. Retrieved from http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/press-konferentsija-prezidenta-respubliki-belarus-aglukashenko-zhurnalistam-rossijskix-regionalnyx-sredstv-10025/

26 Белорусская оппозиция солидарна со сторонниками евроинтеграции в Украине. (2013, декабрь 2). Naviny.by. Retrieved from https://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2013/12/02/ic_news_112_429001

27 Независимый институт социально-экономических и политических исследований. (2015). Национальный опрос в марте 2015 г. Retrieved from <http://www.iiseps.org/?p=303>

28 Thinktanks.by. (2015, декабрь 8). Какое отношение к белорусам у жителей соседних стран. Retrieved from <https://thinktanks.by/publication/2015/12/08/kakoe-otnoshenie-k-belorusam-u-zhiteley-sosednih-stran.html>

29 Евразийский банк развития. (2016). Интеграционный барометр ЕАБР-2016. Retrieved from https://eabr.org/upload/iblock/083/edb_centre_2016_report_40_1_edb_integration_barometer_rus.pdf

in Belarusian society³⁰. The surge in popularity of Belarusian language and culture in Belarus, especially among the youth may also be explained by the influence of revolutionary events in Ukraine³¹.

2. UKRAINIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS OF 2019: "THERE IS NO ORDER INDEED!"³²

The Ukrainian presidential election was also perceived by many Belarusians in the context of Belarusian "order." For some Belarusians, the victory of comedian Volodymyr Zelenskyy was further evidence that chaos reigns in Ukraine, as even a "clown" can become the President^(ibid). Pro-government press complained that instead of taking politics seriously, Ukrainians were playing an endless vaudeville with rules dictated by an actor³³.

Neither the presidential nor parliamentary elections in Ukraine attracted much attention among Belarusians. However, due to their comparative unpredictability Belarusians monitored Ukrainian elections with greater interest than they usually do Belarusian elections³⁴. Residents of Belarus were attracted by "real competition" and intrigue, "when there is no politics in your country, you involuntarily start watching what is going on in other countries."³⁵ Those residents of Belarus who were familiar with "The Servant of the People" ("Sluha Narodu") TV series were interested in the presidential campaign primarily because actor Volodymyr Zelenskyy decided to follow in the footsteps of his on-screen character, while his political program remained unknown to most Belarusians. Belarusians polled by "Radyio Svaboda" with the question, "which President would be better for Belarus, Petro Poroshenko or Volodymyr Zelenskyy?" were mostly negative towards Poroshenko ("cheat," "thief," "time to say goodbye to the past")³⁶. Attitudes towards Zelenskyy ranged from skeptical ("an actor should not be President," "new-fashioned") to neutral ("promises to end the war").

Due to their comparative unpredictability Belarusians monitored Ukrainian elections with greater interest than they usually do Belarusian elections.

Independent media regarded Zelenskyy's popularity as a consequence of disappointment with the previous government, which failed to achieve

³⁰ В Беларуси начали расти проевропейские настроения и уменьшаться поддержка России. (2015, январь 3). 1+1. Retrieved from <https://tsn.ua/ru/svit/v-belarusi-nachali-rasti-proevropeyskie-nastroeniya-i-umenshatsya-podderzhka-rossii-403915.html>

³¹ Гордиенко, П. (2015, март 10). Не самый русский мир. События в Украине заставили белорусов задуматься о национальной идентичности. Retrieved from <https://nv.ua/publications/ne-samyy-russkiy-mir-sobytiya-v-ukraine-zastavili-belorusov-zadumatsya-o-nacionalnoy-identichnosti-38248.html>

³² Interview with a Belarusian expert on confidentiality terms (26/2/2020)

³³ Бакеренко, Ю. (2019, апрель 5). Перцов: выборы в Украине — это удивительный политический процесс. СБ. Беларусь сегодня. Retrieved from <https://www.sb.by/articles/percov-vybory-v-ukraine-eto-udivitelnyy-politicheskiy-protsess.html>

³⁴ Авсеюшкин, Я. (2019, февраль 2). Кто есть кто на украинских выборах. Фавориты гонки. Naviny.by. Retrieved from <https://naviny.by/article/20190202/1549090775-kto-est-kto-na-ukrainskih-vyborah-favority-gonki>

³⁵ Студзінская, І. (2019). Параўнаньне, спагада, зайздрасць? Чаму беларусаў цікавяць прэзыдэнцкія выбары ва Ўкраіне. Радыё Свабода. Retrieved from <https://www.svaboda.org/a/29874664.html>

³⁶ Які прэзыдэнт Украіны лепшы для Беларусі: Зяленскі ці Парашэнка? (2019). Радыё Свабода. Retrieved from <https://www.svaboda.org/a/29892387.html>

significant transformations in the country³⁷. Zelenskyy was not expected to considerably change Ukraine's foreign policy or to be more flexible in talks with Russia on Donbas³⁸. The intentions of the new head of the Ukrainian state to modernize the Minsk Agreements and resume talks with Russia on the conflict around Donbas have been often mentioned in Belarusian media. One Belarusian journalist recalled the story of Mikhail Yevdokimov, a Russian actor who abandoned his acting career to become Governor of the Altai Krai region but failed to liberalize the rules in Russian politics, and suggested that the same fate could befall the inexperienced Ukrainian President³⁹. The conditions which brought about Zelenskyy were also compared in media to those of Belarus in 1994, as both he and Aliaksandr Lukashenko came to power in a wave of populism and public frustration, declaring their intention to fight endemic corruption⁴⁰. Pro-Russian media in Belarus often mentioned that neither Ukraine's domestic policy nor its foreign policy course would change under the new President, arguing that a large portion of Zelenskyy's electorate shares "the basic principles of post-Maidan politics."⁴¹

"The opportunity for a non-professional politician to come to power and gain broad public support and fair elections are parts of the positive image of Ukraine in Belarus."

Belarusian opposition circles reacted to Zelenskyy's peaceful rhetoric with reserve. Zelenskyy gave the impression of a person who, unlike Petro Poroshenko, could pursue an excessively soft and compliant policy in negotiations with Russia. However, in general, the opposition community praised Ukrainian elections⁴² for bringing new people and parties to power, and allowing the Ukrainian people to peacefully express their frustration with the previous President's policies^{43,44}. Zelenskyy also impressed opposition-minded citizens simply due to his outsider status. "The opportunity for a non-professional politician to come to power and gain broad public support and fair elections are parts of the positive image of Ukraine in Belarus."⁴⁵ Human rights activist Ales Bialiatski noted that free and fair presidential elections are an accomplishment of the entire Ukrainian political system, a

37 Дракахруст, Ю. (2019). Зяленскі — прэзыдэнт Украіны. Што далей? Радыё Свабода. Retrieved from <https://www.svaboda.org/a/29894907.html>

38 Семь фактов о Владимире Зеленском, шестом президенте Украины. (2019, апрель 22). Tut.by. Retrieved from <https://news.tut.by/economics/634802.html>

39 Жданко, В. (2019). Што бывае, калі комік становіцца губэрнатарам. Радыё Свабода. Retrieved from <https://www.svaboda.org/a/29885765.html>

40 Дракахруст, Ю. (2019). Чым падобныя Зяленскі і Лукашэнка. Радыё Свабода. Retrieved from <https://www.svaboda.org/a/29870374.html>

41 Ищенко, Р. (2019, апрель 23). Украинские выборы: новый формат власти под диктовку? Sputnik Беларусь. Retrieved from <https://sputnik.by/politics/20190423/1040903235/Ukrainskie-vybory-novyy-format-vlasti-pod-diktovku.html>

42 Zmicier Mickiewicz, journalist of Belsat TV channel, analyst of Belarus Security Blog, editor of Varta almanac, interviews dated 28/2/2020 and 7/5/2020

43 Лебедько, А. (2019, апрель 23). Правый взгляд. Почему Лу невзлюбит Зе. Naviny.by. Retrieved from <https://naviny.by/article/20190423/1556012692-anatoliy-lebedko-pravyy-vzglyad-pochemu-lu-nevzlyubit-ze>

44 Класковский, А. (2019, апрель 8). Лукашенко сто лет не нужен «местный Зеленский». Naviny.by. Retrieved from <https://naviny.by/article/20190408/1554741243-lukashenko-stolet-ne-nuzhen-mestnyy-zelenskiy>

45 Zmicier Mickiewicz, journalist of Belsat TV channel, analyst of Belarus Security Blog, editor of Varta almanac, interviews dated 28/2/2020 and 7/5/2020

process that depends not so much on individuals as on a well-established democratic foundation⁴⁶.

During the Ukrainian presidential election, Belarusian President Lukashenka called on Ukrainians who have already gone through "such a difficult political path" to vote for Poroshenko in an interview with Anadolu Agency⁴⁷. The incumbent Poroshenko was seen by Lukashenka as a more stable alternative to the unknown Zelenskyy and as a leader who could maintain at least the relative order that had been established in Ukraine. In the attitude of Belarus's long-serving president towards his counterpart, one could detect greater apprehension for the unknown Zelenskyy than sincere personal support for Poroshenko⁴⁸. Zelenskyy's unpredictability could perhaps set a dangerous example for the Belarusian population and a new threat to the political order, for which Aliaksandr Lukashenka views himself as its only guarantor.

Zelenskyy was also compared by some in Belarusian media to a "cat in the sack."⁴⁹ Elections without predetermined outcomes and the democratic transference of power are scenarios that may make Europe's longest-serving head of state wary. It is no wonder then, that since the 2004 Orange Revolution, Belarusian authorities have used fear of Ukrainian-style "chaos" as justification to suppress popular protests. Since Zelenskyy's appeal to other post-Soviet countries that "anything is possible!" could be heard in Belarus, where presidential elections are scheduled for August 2020, Lukashenka was not too enthusiastic about Zelenskyy's victory. Perhaps, he decided to wait and see if his Ukrainian counterpart was able to keep his election promises and, if not, use this trump card to offer Belarusians his signature "order" once again, in contrast to the Ukrainian reality with so many variables.

Before the Belarusian elections to the House of Representatives and the Council of the Republic, Aliaksandr Lukashenka called on all candidates to contend honestly and competitively, but "without any nonsense like giving a sample of blood for analysis, holding debates in stadiums, etc."⁵⁰ — a clear reference to the Ukrainian presidential elections-2019. Interestingly, when compared to the leaders of other countries, Ukrainians have held the most positive attitudes towards the Belarusian President for a long time⁵¹. Moreover, according to the 2019 New Europe Center poll ahead of Ukrainian presidential elections, 13% of Ukrainians believed that the future president should use the political style of the Belarusian leader (the highest rating compared to other leaders) as a role model⁵².

46 Студзінская, І. (2019). Параўнаньне, спягада, зайздрасць? Чаму беларусаў цікавяць прэзыдэнцкія выбары ва Украіне. Радые Свабода. Retrieved from <https://www.svaboda.org/a/29874664.html>

47 Сайт Президента Рэспублікі Беларусь. (2019, апрель 8). Інтэрв'ю турецкаму інфармагентству «Анадолу». Retrieved from http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/intervju-turetskomu-informagentstvu-anadolu-20849/

48 Класковский, А. (2019, апрель 8). Лукашенко сто лет не нужен «местный Зеленский». Naviny.by. Retrieved from <https://naviny.by/article/20190408/1554741243-lukashenko-stolet-ne-nuzhen-mestnyy-zelenskiy>

49 Горбачев, Р. (2019, декабрь 30). Потрясение года: приход к власти «комика-диктатора». Салідарнасць. Retrieved from <https://gazetaby.com/post/potryasenie-goda-prihod-k-vlasti-komika-diktatora/159466/>

50 Лукашенко хоче вибори 7 листопада й «без дурі» з аналізами і стадіоном. (2019, квітень 19). Українська Правда. Retrieved from <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2019/04/19/7212744/>

51 Найкраще українці ставляться до очільника країни-сусіда – опитування. (2019, листопад 11). Українська Правда. Retrieved from <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2019/11/11/7231650/>

52 Центр «Нова Європа». (2019). Зовнішня політика майбутнього президенту України. Retrieved from http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Survey_Pr_ukr1.pdf

Independent Belarusian media noted the openness of Verkhovna Rada elections, which elevated new political forces to influential positions charting the course of the country. Journalists, comparing the parliamentary elections in Ukraine and Belarus, noted that since 2000, only a single political party has been newly registered in Belarus, while in Ukraine over the same time period, there had been 293⁵³. They also wrote that the Ukrainian political system does not create impassable obstacles for new political parties, and that the process of registration of political forces is constantly being simplified. At the same time, the diversity of political parties in Ukraine is not always linked to a particular ideology, as parties are bought and sold and often represent the narrow interests of their owners rather than the demands of certain social groups^(ibid). A widespread opinion among Belarusian pro-government media was that the results of the Ukrainian parliamentary elections reflected public demand for fresh politicians, and the victory of the presidential party "The Servant of the People" would help Zelenskyy restore peace in Donbas as soon as possible⁵⁴.

3. UKRAINIAN "LAND OF FREEDOM"

When discussing the course of the Ukrainian elections, some Belarusians expressed a desire to "have the right to choose," to consider various political alternatives and to influence the life of their country through the electoral process⁵⁵. There were also opinions that only a democratic Ukraine could become an alternative to the Kremlin and all other authoritarian regimes in the post-Soviet space^(ibid). However, in this case, as in the post-Maidan period, Belarusians chose a wait-and-see attitude. Only when reforms regain traction and election promises are fulfilled by real changes, will the Ukrainian example become more attractive to Belarusians.

Only a democratic Ukraine could become an alternative to the Kremlin and all other authoritarian regimes in the post-Soviet space.

Local experts interviewed do not tend to believe that Ukraine's example of democratic renewal of the government would inspire many Belarusian citizens to take similar action in Belarus, because there have been similar moments in Ukraine's recent history⁵⁶, including the revolutions of 2004 and 2014, which did not lead to significant progress reforming the Ukrainian state. Some Belarusians believe that Ukraine and Belarus are too different to draw on the experience of one country to transform the other⁵⁷. There are also persistent concerns that social unrest could anger Russia as well, and along with the hopes for a better democracy, Belarusian

⁵³ Літвінава, А., Карней, І. (2019). Хочаце, каб было як ва Ўкраіне? Тлумачым, чаму Рада не Палата і за што плацяць украінскім партыям. Радыё Свабода. Retrieved from <https://www.svaboda.org/a/30073580.html>

⁵⁴ Кононович, Е. (2019, июль 26). В Украине кардинально изменился политический ландшафт. СБ. Беларусь сегодня. Retrieved from <https://www.sb.by/articles/novye-radnye-vozmozhnosti.html>

⁵⁵ Лебедько, А. (2019, апрель 23). Правый взгляд. Почему Лу невзлюбит Зе. Naviny.by. Retrieved from <https://naviny.by/article/20190423/1556012692-anatoliy-lebedko-pravyi-vzglyad-pochemu-lu-nevzlyubit-ze>

⁵⁶ Interview with a Belarusian expert on confidentiality terms (26/2/2020)

⁵⁷ Dzianis Melyantsou, Coordinator of the Belarus's Foreign Policy Programme, Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations, interview dated 28/2/2020

citizens will face intense economic backlash from the Russian authorities or even, at worst, war⁵⁸.

Anatol Liabedzka, a Belarusian politician who has been in opposition since the 1990s, recently tried to adopt Zelenskyy's communication style, recording a video address to the Belarusian President demanding answers to his questions within 24 hours⁵⁹. The categoricalness and the format of this speech reminded many Belarusian journalists how Zelenskyy invited the incumbent President Poroshenko to a debate at the Olimpiyskiy Stadium. Liabedzka himself agreed that he had made this video influenced by a Ukrainian politician's address. He explained that he was trying to reach a wider audience t, and therefore turned to an approach that seemed effective to him⁶⁰.

For some Belarusian businessmen, Ukraine is viewed as a kind of "land of freedom," "Wild South," anarchy; a country where chaos can offer not only uncertainty about tomorrow, but also new opportunities^{61,62}. Such entrepreneurs think that doing business in Ukraine is easier, as most bureaucratic procedures are more streamlined than Belarusian algorithms of working with the authorities (including through corruption, which in this context is seen as an opportunity rather than a threat). "In Ukraine, you can hustle, and some Belarusians like it."⁶³ It is noteworthy that certain Belarusian companies are relocating part of their businesses to Ukraine⁶⁴, as they believe that it is easier to do business in the Ukrainian setting⁶⁵.

4. PERCEPTION OF UKRAINE THROUGH CULTURE

During the presidential election, several Belarusian media outlets⁶⁶ reviewed Zelenskyy's acting work to introduce their audience to the Ukrainian presidential candidate, who at that time had a significant chance of winning. Some media even published descriptions of "The Servant of the People" episodes with plot analysis and drew parallels with real political events

⁵⁸ Carnegie Moscow Centre. (2018, April 12). Shraibman, A. The house that Lukashenko built: the foundation, evolution, and future of the Belarusian regime. Retrieved from <https://carnegie.ru/2018/04/12/house-that-lukashenko-built-foundation-evolution-and-future-of-belarusian-regime-pub-76059>

⁵⁹ Проста як Зяленскі. Лябедзька запрасіў Лукашэнку на размову ў жывы эфір. ВІДЭА. (2019). Радыё Свабода. Retrieved from <https://www.svaboda.org/a/29885882.html>

⁶⁰ Справа не ў Зяленскім. Лябедзька расказаў, чаму кінуў выклік Лукашэнку. (2019). Радыё Свабода. Retrieved from <https://www.svaboda.org/a/29886299.html>

⁶¹ Zmicier Mickiewicz, journalist of Belsat TV channel, analyst of Belarus Security Blog, editor of Varta almanac, interviews dated 28/2/2020 and 7/5/2020

⁶² Dzianis Melyantsov, Coordinator of the Belarus's Foreign Policy Programme, Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations, interview dated 28/2/2020

⁶³ Zmicier Mickiewicz, journalist of Belsat TV channel, analyst of Belarus Security Blog, editor of Varta almanac, interviews dated 28/2/2020 and 7/5/2020

⁶⁴ Паливода, А. (2018, декабрь 5). Минск – Киев. Почему белорусы переезжают жить и работать в Украину? LB. Retrieved from https://lb.ua/world/2018/12/05/414137_minsk-kiev_pochemu_belorusi.html

⁶⁵ Andrei Yahorau, Senior Research Fellow, Centre for European Transformation — Belarus, interview dated 8/5/2020

⁶⁶ Кино с президентом. Главные фильмы Владимира Зеленского. (2019, апрель 23). Аргументы и Факты в Беларуси. Retrieved from https://aif.by/timefree/cinema/kino_s_prezidentom_glavnye_filmy_vladimira_zelenskogo

in Ukraine⁶⁷. One of these publications concluded that it is unknown what kind of politician Zelenskyy will be (and whether he will become one at all) but using a TV series for his election campaign was a good idea^(ibid). Commenting on the presidential candidate's campaign, Aliaksandr Lukashenka said that he did not know Zelenskyy as a politician and that he had only seen him on television⁶⁸. After a barrage of criticism for calling on Ukrainians to support Poroshenko, the Belarusian leader stated that actor Zelenskyy could still be a president, "like Reagan."⁶⁹

Zelenskyy's image as an actor sometimes precedes the perception of his personality as a politician in Belarus⁷⁰. This may be explained, in part, by the influence of Russian media, because in Russia, Zelenskyy's series, movies, and shows are quite popular. As of 2019, 49% of programs broadcasted in prime time on Belarus's mandatory public TV package were Russian made⁷¹. Moreover, in November 2019, the state TV channel "Belarus-1" began showing "The Servant of the People" in prime time⁷².

Beside "The Servant of the People" and the TV series "The In-Laws" ("Svaty"), created with Zelenskyy's participation, are considered popular in Belarus⁷³. The "Kvartal 95" studio show is also well known⁷⁴. Belarusians' admiration of the works of the band "Okean Elzy" is also noteworthy⁷⁵; local media mostly covered Svyatoslav Vakarchuk — "Okean Elzy's" frontman — return to politics and the accession of his political party to Parliament in a neutral or positive manner⁷⁶. They also covered the "Okean Elzy" concert in Minsk, as well as the band's performance at a Belarusian company's corporate party⁷⁷. Belarusian media noted that fans of Okean Elzy from Russia, where the band is prohibited from holding concerts, also attended the Minsk concert in 2019⁷⁸.

67 Маханьков, М. (2019, март 30). «Слуга народа — 3»: фильм, который может повлиять на результаты украинских выборов. Наша Ніва. Retrieved from <https://nn.by/?c=ar&i=227945&lang=ru>

68 Сайт Президента Республики Беларусь. (2019, апрель 8). Интервью турецкому информагентству «Анадолу». Retrieved from http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/intervju-tureckomu-informagentstvu-anadolu-20849/

69 Лукашенко о выборах в Украине: «Если ты не знаешь, за кого голосовать, — не голосуй». (2019, апрель 9). Телеканал ОНТ. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHR5INoMVEk>

70 Interview with a Belarusian expert on confidentiality terms (26/2/2020)

71 Продвижение «русского мира» идет через белорусские ТВ-каналы — БАЖ презентовал мониторинг пророссийской пропаганды. (2019, февраль 22). Белорусская ассоциация журналистов. Retrieved from <https://baj.by/ru/analytics/prodvizhenie-russkogo-mira-idet-cherez-belorusskie-tv-kanaly-bazh-prezentoval-monitoring>

72 Телеканал «Беларусь 1» покажет сериал «Слуга народа». (2019, ноябрь 4). Беларусь 1. Retrieved from https://www.tvr.by/company/novosti-kompanii/telekanal-belarus-1-pokazhet-serial-sluga-naroda/?sphrase_id=1465852

73 Съёмки сериала «Сваты-7» начались под Минском. (2020, февраль 2). Телеканал ОНТ. Retrieved from <https://ont.by/news/suemki-seriala-svaty-7-nachalis-pod-minskom>

74 Zmicier Mickiewicz, journalist of Belsat TV channel, analyst of Belarus Security Blog, editor of Varta almanac, interviews dated 28/2/2020 and 7/5/2020

75 Касперович, Л. (2019, сентябрь 21). Чтобы приехать на концерт в Минск, Вакарчук сбежал с заседания Рады. «Океан Эльзи» собрал полную арену. Tut.by. Retrieved from <https://afisha.tut.by/news/culture/654285.html>

76 Вакарчук представил «Голос». Лидер «Океана Эльзы» идет на выборы со своей партией. (2019, май 16). Tut.by. Retrieved from <https://news.tut.by/world/637831.html>

77 Вакарчук выступил на корпоративе в Минске. Угадайте у кого? (2019, декабрь 23). Белорусский партизан. Retrieved from <https://belaruspartisan.by/life/485868/>

78 Касперович, Л. (2019, сентябрь 21). Чтобы приехать на концерт в Минск, Вакарчук сбежал с заседания Рады. «Океан Эльзи» собрал полную арену. Tut.by. Retrieved from <https://afisha.tut.by/news/culture/654285.html>

Belarusian experts surveyed rated Ukrainian mass culture's popularity in Belarus at 7.4 points out of 10, highest of all countries covered by this research. However, it is believed that, even with significant potential in the creative industry, Ukraine does not exercise this cultural soft power effectively in the region⁷⁹. Only isolated commercial projects manage to find their way in the Belarusian market on their own. The Ukrainian state could promote these cultural initiatives under the umbrella of the creative cluster and enhance its regional soft power.

With significant potential in the creative industry, Ukraine does not exercise this cultural soft power effectively in the region.

Belarusians interested in art and culture are aware of Ukraine's active support of domestic film production, resulting in many recent high quality works⁸⁰. Some Belarusians visit Ukraine for professional graphic design, entertainment, advertising, and marketing training, as there is a lack of such educational events in Belarus. Belarusians within the creative community are familiar with the works of the advertising firm, "Banda Agency": "In terms of soft power, this creative agency has done much more for Ukraine than the state itself."^(ibid)

Ukrainian contemporary art is well known to a narrow circle of cultural experts within Belarusian civil society. The works of Ukrainian artists are highly valued among this audience and provide an opportunity to learn more about Ukrainian events, such as the Revolution of Dignity, the ongoing war in the East of Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea, etc. Ukrainian artists regularly participate in local discussions, in particular on the role of culture in conflict⁸¹, present their performances⁸² and translations of their works into Belarusian⁸³.

The song "Warriors of the Light" by the Belarusian band "Lyapis Trubetskoy" became the anthem of the Maidan and a symbol of Ukraine's resistance to Russian aggression⁸⁴. The real story of the performance of this song on the last Ukrainian warship in Crimea has been included in the 2019 Ukrainian film, "Cherkasy"⁸⁵. In 2015, former lead singer of "Lyapis Trubetskoy" Siarhei Mikhalok and the band's producer, Anton Azizbekyan received permanent residency in Ukraine, where they see more opportunities to fulfil their creative potential than in Belarus or Russia⁸⁶. Mikhalok said, "we are now sitting in Odesa, in Ukraine, and for Minsk, this is already the future. And here, there is already more Vilnius, Prague, more Germany than Syktyvkar or Kemerovo."⁸⁷

⁷⁹ Andrei Yavorau, Senior Research Fellow, Centre for European Transformation — Belarus, interview dated 8/5/2020

⁸⁰ Viktoriya Zakrevskaya, analyst, interview dated 13/5/2020

⁸¹ Arcimović, T. (2016, January 5). ISOLYATSIA: art against arms. Partisan. Retrieved from <https://partisanmag.by/?p=13406>

⁸² Meeting with Alevtina Kakhidze. (2015, November 5). Partisan. Retrieved from <https://partisanmag.by/?p=12621>

⁸³ Україна Freedom! (2017, February 11). 34. Retrieved from <https://34mag.net/post/ukraina-freedom>

⁸⁴ Шеремет, П. (2015, май 15). Михалок: Я рад каждой секунде своей жизни. Белорусский партизан. Retrieved from <https://belaruspartisan.by/life/304670/>

⁸⁵ Воїни світла прем'єра фільму Черкаси. (2020, лютий 28). MMD UA. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZltFDwP94>

⁸⁶ Сергей Михалок получил вид на жительство в Украине. (2015, май 25). Белорусский партизан. Retrieved from <https://belaruspartisan.by/politic/305697/>

⁸⁷ Шеремет, П. (2015, май 15). Михалок: Я рад каждой секунде своей жизни. Белорусский партизан. Retrieved from <https://belaruspartisan.by/life/304670/>

5. PERCEPTION OF THE PERFORMANCE OF THE UKRAINIAN AUTHORITIES

The attitude of Belarusian authorities towards Volodymyr Zelenskyy improved alongside Zelenskyy's growing chances of becoming the new President of Ukraine⁸⁸. After Zelenskyy's presidential victory, during the II Forum of Regions in Zhytomyr, where Ukrainian and Belarusian presidents met for the first time, the Belarusian leader treated his Ukrainian counterpart as an equal⁸⁹. This positively influenced the perception of Zelenskyy by those Belarusians who viewed the Ukrainian President as primarily an actor⁹⁰. Moreover, according to an expert⁹¹, after a joint "standup" of the two Presidents during the Zhytomyr Forum⁹², Belarusian citizens somewhat improved their attitudes toward the Ukrainian head of state. For the Belarusian President, the behavior of the new Ukrainian government was no longer completely unpredictable and incomprehensible. By the time of the Forum, Parliamentary elections had been held in Ukraine, Zelenskyy had been in office for five months, and the vast turnover in the political class did not lead to changes in either the country's foreign policy or Ukrainian-Belarusian relations. With his support for Zelenskyy's speech (and applause in response to the statement of his Ukrainian colleague that Crimea and Donbas are parts of Ukraine)⁹³ Lukashenka legitimized Zelenskyy as a politician and a president in the eyes of many Belarusians. According to the quantitative survey conducted among local experts, Zelenskyy's popularity in Belarus was rated at 6.6 points out of 10.

It is noteworthy that during the Belarusian presidential campaign of 2020, Lukashenka once again referred to Ukraine as an example of destabilization and called on Belarusians to maintain order. He also stated that he would not allow any activities of the "Maidanites" and that Belarus does not have its own "Zelenskiys."⁹⁴

In the expert community, Zelenskyy was expected to make progress in the fight against corruption and oligarchs and effectively implement other reforms^{95,96}. Some Belarusians who have visited Ukraine in recent years for tourism or shopping purposes noted that there has been a gradual

⁸⁸ Класковский, А. (2019, май 20). Лукашенко — на мерседесе, а Зеленский — пешком. Naviny.by. Retrieved from <https://naviny.by/article/20190520/1558366746-lukashenko-na-merседесе-zelenskiy-peshkom>

⁸⁹ Лукашенко о Зеленском: ему никаких советов не надо — он прекрасно знает, что делать. (2019, октябрь 4). Белта. Retrieved from <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-o-zelenskom-emu-nikakih-sovetov-ne-nado-on-prekrasno-znaet-cto-delat-364571-2019/>

⁹⁰ Interview with a Belarusian expert on confidentiality terms (26/2/2020)

⁹¹ Dzianis Melyantsou, Coordinator of the Belarus's Foreign Policy Programme, Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations, interview dated 28/2/2020

⁹² В Житомире Александр Лукашенко провел переговоры с Владимиром Зеленским. (2019, октябрь 6). Телерадиокомпания Республики Беларусь. Режим доступа https://www.tvr.by/news/glavnyy-efir/v_zhitomire_aleksandr_lukashenko_provel_peregovory_s_vladimirom_zelenskim/

⁹³ Видеофакт. Лукашенко аплодирует словам Зеленского про украинские Крым и Донбасс. (2019, октябрь 4). Naviny. By. Retrieved from <https://naviny.by/new/20191004/1570195830-videofakt-lukashenko-aplodiruuet-slovam-zelenskogo-pro-ukrainskie-krym-i>

⁹⁴ Лукашенко: майданов в Беларуси не будет. (2020, июнь 1). Белта. Retrieved from <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-majdanov-v-belarusi-ne-budet-393014-2020/?fbclid=IwAR3TSjmV-N5OqOisOel-jDPo-czCZ88ICAvxPO9JlIK40s-32D13v2XmwUk>

⁹⁵ Горбачев, Р. (2019, декабрь 30). Потрясение года: приход к власти" комика-диктатора". Салідарнасць. Retrieved from <https://gazetaby.com/post/potryasenie-goda-prihod-k-vlasti-komika-diktatora/159466/>

⁹⁶ Почему Зеленский стал вызовом для Лукашенко. (2019, май 20). Хартия-97. Retrieved from <https://charter97.org/ru/news/2019/5/20/334740/>

improvement in the fight against corruption⁹⁷. The number of bribery and extortion cases declined, and the level of service improved. Belarusians living in the south of the country, who often cross the border to shop for groceries in Ukrainian border towns, also noted an improvement in the quality of roads^(ibid). However, these accomplishments should be seen as a cumulative effect of the activities of many politicians, rather than achievements of the new government. At the same time, many Belarusians, including those who have moved to Ukraine, believe that the Ukrainian state has unresolved security issues, attributed to the weakness of state institutions⁹⁸. Comparing crime rates in both countries, they claim that living in Belarus is much safer⁹⁹.

Regarding the assessment of the results of the new President and Parliament, Belarusian media noted isolated successes in the fight against corruption, the adoption of several important laws, and attempts to enact land market reforms^{100,101}. News from the Parliament and the Office of the President are closely monitored by journalists of the channel "Belsat" (an independent TV station broadcasting in Belarusian)¹⁰², often highlighting certain accomplishments of the new Ukrainian establishment, such as the abolition of parliamentary immunity¹⁰³, an initiative to reduce the number of MPs¹⁰⁴, protection of whistleblowers¹⁰⁵, among others. In one Belsat-produced piece, journalists compared decentralization in Ukraine and Belarus and emphasized the fact that Ukrainian communities are more self-sufficient and financially independent from the center than their Belarusian counterparts¹⁰⁶. Certain Belarusian analysts criticized the resignation of Oleksiy Honcharuk's government, noting that such a rapid change of ministers plays into the hands of those who portray Ukraine as a land of chaos¹⁰⁷. Some journalists warned that too much power is concentrated in Zelenskyy's hands¹⁰⁸.

97 Zmicier Mickiewicz, journalist of Belsat TV channel, analyst of Belarus Security Blog, editor of Varta almanac, interviews dated 28/2/2020 and 7/5/2020

98 Viktoriya Zakrevskaya, analyst, interview dated 13/5/2020

99 Olga Pavlova, Software testing engineer, Kyiv-Minsk, interview dated 12/5/2020

100 Горбачев, Р. (2019, декабрь 30). Потрясение года: приход к власти "комика-диктатора". Салідарнасць. Retrieved from <https://gazetaby.com/post/potryasenie-goda-prihod-k-vlasti-komika-diktatora/159466/>

101 Веренич, А. (2019, декабрь 12). Успехи и провалы президента Зеленского. UDF.BY. Retrieved from <https://udf.by/news/world/203485-uspehi-i-provaly-prezidenta-zelenskogo.html>

102 Данейко, Е. (2019, май 3). За что власти Беларуси преследуют телеканал «Белсат»? Deutsche Welle. Retrieved from <http://tiny.cc/bblopz>

103 Шлигов, Д. (2019, сентябрь 3). В Украине пришел конец неприкосновенности депутатов. Белсат. Retrieved from <https://belsat.eu/ru/programs/v-ukraine-prishel-konets-neprikosnovennosti-deputatov/>

104 Решетняк, О. (2019, декабрь 18). Депутатов станет меньше? КСУ поддержал президентский законопроект. Белсат. Retrieved from <https://belsat.eu/ru/programs/deputatov-stanet-menshe-ksu-podderzhal-prezidentskij-zakonoproekt/>

105 Соколова, А. (2019, сентябрь 17). В Украине хотят защитить разоблачителей коррупции. Белсат. Retrieved from <https://belsat.eu/ru/programs/v-ukraine-hotyat-zashchitit-razoblachitelej-korrupcii/>

106 Чаму беларуская вёска жабруе? | Почему белорусская деревня нищая? (2020, март 12). Белсат. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgkNwr86Me8&feature=emb_logo&fbclid=IwAR30j23Fc8OLNj2KkIw2aePNFJw3nwpeJ4qKRXQviDGR33nZYXfy-62j5kc

107 Andrei Yahorau, Senior Research Fellow, Centre for European Transformation — Belarus, interview dated 8/5/2020

108 Горбачев, Р. (2019, декабрь 30). Потрясение года: приход к власти "комика-диктатора". Салідарнасць. Retrieved from <https://gazetaby.com/post/potryasenie-goda-prihod-k-vlasti-komika-diktatora/159466/>

Local press in Belarus has not ignored the unsolved case of Pavlo Sheremet,¹⁰⁹ the Belarusian-born journalist who was killed in a 2016 car bomb attack in Kyiv. The opposition community monitors the trial and has criticized the current results of the investigation as unacceptable¹¹⁰. The media resource "Belarusian Partisan", founded by Sheremet, has a special column which collects news on the investigation into his assassination¹¹¹. For the most part, these publications highlight the position of Ukrainian civil society which demands more evidence and accountability from Ukrainian law enforcement agencies.

According to experts interviewed within this research, the current capability of Ukraine to resolve the conflict with Russia, is evaluated at 3.9 points out of 10. Belarusian state media cover the peacekeeping efforts of the new Ukrainian government in a quite restrained manner, generally without any statements on the issues that could disrupt Belarusian balancing between Russia and Ukraine¹¹². More independent media believe that Zelenskyy lacks a clear understanding¹¹³ of how to resolve the conflict, that he seems to be testing different approaches, but no strategy can be seen behind it. The previously expressed willingness of Ukrainian authorities to incorporate the "Steinmeier formula" into Ukrainian legislation and their inability to ensure the withdrawal of troops are sometimes attributed by journalists as mistakes of the new president^(ibid), while not always attributing responsibility to Russia for aggression against Ukraine. At the same time, these media sources mention the reboot of the Normandy Format and the return of Ukrainian sailors from Russian captivity among the accomplishments.

Ukraine is a pro-Western country, except for the episode with Yanukovych.

According to the survey conducted, the consistency and predictability of Ukraine in foreign policy can be rated at 5.4 points out of 10. The Belarusian expert community believes that since independence, the Ukrainian state has had a more or less stable foreign policy strategy¹¹⁴. Accordingly, its course towards integration into the EU and NATO is perceived as permanent. As stated by one expert, "it has always seemed to us that Ukraine is a pro-Western country, except for the episode with Yanukovych. Besides, Russia has recently pushed Ukrainians away by military aggression in Donbas so hard, that we should not expect Ukraine to return to its orbit."¹¹⁵ According to an expert, without issuing judgment on the merits of this choice, many Belarusians see Ukraine as the "most pro-Western" country in the post-Soviet space^(ibid). The results of the first year of the new Ukrainian government has not changed this perception, both because its actions did not contradict Ukraine's European integration and

¹⁰⁹ Убийство Павла Шеремета. Naviny.by. Retrieved from <https://naviny.by/plot/ubiystvo-pavla-sheremeta>

¹¹⁰ Zmicier Mickiewicz, journalist of Belsat TV channel, analyst of Belarus Security Blog, editor of Varta almanac, interviews dated 28/2/2020 and 7/5/2020

¹¹¹ Убийство Павла Шеремета. Белорусский партизан. Retrieved from <https://belaruspartisan.by/hottopics/?tid=377152>

¹¹² Лукашенко уверен в успешном мирном урегулировании конфликта в Донбассе. (2019, октябрь 4). БелТА. Retrieved from https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-uveren-v-uspeshnom-mirnom-uregulirovanii-konflikta-v-donbasse-364554-2019/?utm_source=belta&utm_medium=news&utm_campaign=accent

¹¹³ Веренич, А. (2019, декабрь 12). Успехи и провалы президента Зеленского. UDF.BY. Retrieved from <https://udf.by/news/world/203485-uspehi-i-provaly-prezidenta-zelenskogo.html>

¹¹⁴ Interview with a Belarusian expert on confidentiality terms (26/2/2020)

¹¹⁵ Dzianis Melyantsou, Coordinator of the Belarus's Foreign Policy Programme, Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations, interview dated 28/2/2020

because Belarusians realize that this choice is supported by the majority of Ukrainians. Ukraine's commitment to EU and NATO integration was evaluated by experts at 5.8 points out of 10.

6. EMBASSY ACTIVITIES AND THE IMPACT OF THE UKRAINIAN COMMUNITY

Local experts rate the activities of the Ukrainian Embassy at 6.5 points out of 10. In addition to the Ukrainian Embassy in Minsk, Ukraine also maintains its Consulate General in Brest and two Honorary Consulates in Grodno and in Vitebsk as well.

The Embassy of Ukraine is quite active and visible in Belarusian public life¹¹⁶, and its activities could be strengthened by focusing on new topics of mutual interest. For example, environmental issues should be discussed; amber mining in Ukraine harms Belarusian rivers, and the consequences of the often ineffective fight against forest fires in Ukraine are evident in Belarus as well¹¹⁷. Expert opinions on the Embassy's communication style differ; some experts believe that the Ukrainian ambassador may criticize Belarusian authorities too much¹¹⁸, while others consider his statements, as well as the activities of the diplomatic mission in general, quite balanced¹¹⁹.

The influence of the Ukrainian community in Belarusian public life was evaluated at 3.9 points out of 10. Ukrainians are the fourth largest ethnic group in Belarus (158,723, or 1.67% of the total population)^{120, 121}. 12,000 Ukrainians residing in Belarus registered to vote in the 2019 presidential elections. In the first round, most of them voted for Volodymyr Zelenskyy¹²². Among the organizations representing the interests of the Ukrainian diaspora, the activities of the "Vatra" association of Ukrainians are the most notable. Its main areas of activity are national and cultural revival of Ukrainians in Belarus, preservation and development of Ukrainian culture, folk traditions, language, and historical memory¹²³. A festival of national cultures is held in Grodno biannually, and "Vatra" takes part in it, representing Ukraine.

Ukrainian language courses are open in Belarus and attended by both Ukrainians and Belarusians¹²⁴, with teaching provided by volunteers. With

¹¹⁶ Arsen Sivitski, Director, Center for strategic and foreign policy studies, interview dated 12/5/2020

¹¹⁷ Zmicier Mickiewicz, journalist of Belsat TV channel, analyst of Belarus Security Blog, editor of Varta almanac, interviews dated 28/2/2020 and 7/5/2020

¹¹⁸ Interview with a Belarusian expert on confidentiality terms (26/2/2020)

¹¹⁹ Arsen Sivitski, Director, Center for strategic and foreign policy studies, interview dated 12/5/2020

¹²⁰ Дракахруст, Ю., Ваннек, Л. (2019, жовтень 16). Демографічний портрет українця Білорусі та його відмінність від портрету росіянина. Радіо Свобода. Retrieved from <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/30219904.html>

¹²¹ «Родина там, где хорошо». Зеленский зовет украинцев возвращаться домой. Что думают об этом переселенцы? Tut.by. Retrieved from <https://news.tut.by/society/666021.html>

¹²² Кандидатов — целый метр. Украинцы в Минске выбирают президента. (2019, март 31). Naviny.by. Retrieved from <https://naviny.by/article/20190331/1554025677-kandidatov-celyy-metr-ukraincy-v-minske-vybirayut-prezidenta>

¹²³ Білорусі нас підтримують – голова української громади Білорусі. (2016, березень 17). Радіо Свобода. Retrieved from <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/27619641.html>

¹²⁴ На курсы украинского языка в Минске записалось 80 человек. (2018, октябрь 22). Наша Ніва. <https://nn.by/?c=ar&i=217897&lang=ru>

the assistance of the Ukrainian embassy, Ukrainian language courses have been launched at the universities of Minsk and Brest¹²⁵.

The Ukrainian foreign broadcasting channel UA|TV has been included, since 2009, among the lineups of Belarusian cable networks¹²⁶. However, only two experts interviewed were aware of the channel's presence in Belarus. In 2020, this channel stopped broadcasting live. Since then, it broadcasts archival recordings of the UA|TV and programs of the DOM channel, created on its platform¹²⁷.

7. UKRAINIAN BRANDS

Ukraine is an important and reliable economic partner for Belarus. Since 2016, the trade turnover between the two countries has consistently increased by 16–20% per annum¹²⁸, totalling 5.2 billion USD in 2019¹²⁹. However, Ukrainian goods are not as popular in Belarus as Belarusian goods are in Ukraine. Belarusian brands, in particular cosmetics and dairy products, are in high demand in Ukraine. There are also numerous cases of forgery and even stylization by Ukrainian manufacturers of their products "to make them look Belarusian." In Belarus itself, not all residents have a high opinion of the quality of local products, thus their popularity among Ukrainians sometimes surprises Belarusians¹³⁰. Bilateral trade issues as well as cooperation in the energy sector are covered in the Belarusian media mostly positively¹³¹. In the past, Ukraine and Belarus had brief trade conflicts and near-conflict situations^{132, 133}.

Ukraine imports more from Belarus than it supplies goods and services to its neighbor¹³⁴. This trade imbalance can be explained by the fact that Belarus is the main supplier of fuels and lubricants to Ukraine. Exports from Ukraine

¹²⁵ В Беларусі український язык теперь можно будет изучать в школах. (2018, березень 16). УНІАН. Retrieved from <https://www.unian.net/society/10044689-v-belarusi-ukrainskiy-yazyk-teper-mozhno-budet-izuchat-v-shkolah.html>

¹²⁶ Мовлення UA|TV у Білорусі сприятиме розумінню реальної ситуації в Україні — посол. (2019, березень 15). Укрінформ. Retrieved from <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/2660635-movlenna-uatv-u-bilorusi-spriatime-rozuminnu-realnoi-situacii-v-ukraini-posol.html>

¹²⁷ Телеканал UA|TV припинив мовлення у прямому ефірі. (2020, січень 13). Укрінформ. Retrieved from <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/2854671-telekanal-uatv-pripiniv-movlenna-v-pramomu-efiri.html>

¹²⁸ Украина и Беларусь три года подряд увеличивают товарооборот. (2019, березень 22). Укрінформ. Retrieved from <https://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-economy/2665325-ukraina-i-belarus-tri-goda-podrad-uvelicivaut-tovarooborot.html>

¹²⁹ Державна служба статистики України. Географічна структура зовнішньої торгівлі товарами у 2019 році. Retrieved from <http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/>

¹³⁰ Zmicer Mickiewicz, journalist of Belsat TV channel, analyst of Belarus Security Blog, editor of Varta almanac, interviews dated 28/2/2020 and 7/5/2020

¹³¹ Viktoriya Zakrevskaya, analyst, interview dated 13/5/2020

¹³² Крапивина, Л. (2012, май 3). Беларусь снимает ограничения на импорт украинского пива, а Украина — на белорусскую мясо-молочную продукцию. Tut.by. Retrieved from <https://news.tut.by/economics/287284.html>

¹³³ Петровская, Г. (2015, ноябрь 30). Беларусь-Украина: на пороге торгового конфликта. Deutsche Welle. Retrieved from <http://tiny.cc/u9jopz>

¹³⁴ Державна служба статистики України. Географічна структура зовнішньої торгівлі товарами у 2019 році. Retrieved from <http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/>

to Belarus are slowly increasing within the food, transport, and electronics industries¹³⁵.

In 2018, local manufacturing of the Ukrainian alcohol holding company "Global Spirits" (vodka brands "Morosha" and "Khortytsia") was launched in Belarus¹³⁶. The products of the brandy brand "Tisa" and sweets by Ukrainian brands "AVK" and "Roshen" (especially the "Kyiv cake") are also in high demand¹³⁷. Belarusian stores also sell "Chumak" ketchups, "Sandora" juices, "Karpatska Lichnytsya" herbal teas, and beers produced by "Obolon," "Lvivske," and "Chernihivske" brands¹³⁸. Due to the fact that in Ukraine, vegetables and fruits ripen earlier, they are among the first to enter the Belarusian market and are considered by some Belarusians to be tastier than local products¹³⁹. Belarusians often travel to Ukraine for food and medicine supplies, especially drugs that are prescription-only in Belarus^(ibid). It is difficult to get vaccinated against chickenpox in Belarus, so Belarusians sometimes seek this service in Lithuania or Ukraine^(ibid). Ukrainian beauty and cosmetology industry events also attract Belarusian specialists¹⁴⁰.

Ukraine is one of the most attractive tourist destinations for Belarusians¹⁴¹. In 2017, 91,234 Belarusians visited Ukraine¹⁴², while Russia was visited by half as many Belarusian citizens during the same period^(ibid). In summer, Belarusians most frequently visit the Odesa and Kherson regions and the city of Lviv, and in winter, travel to the Carpathian Mountains is most popular. Travel agencies report that Zatoka in the Odesa Region has replaced Crimea as a popular tourist destination of Belarusians¹⁴³. There are also many Belarusians among the foreign tourists vacationing at the Bukovel ski resort¹⁴⁴. Residents of Belarus like to visit Ukraine because they feel that Ukrainians are friendly towards them¹⁴⁵, while also appreciating the quality and variety of Ukrainian restaurants^(ibid).

Among some Belarusians working in political analysis, Ukraine, especially after 2014, is considered an attractive place to work, as "unlike Belarus and

¹³⁵ Украина и Беларусь три года подряд увеличивают товарооборот. (2019, березень 22). Укрінформ. Retrieved from <https://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-economy/2665325-ukraina-i-belarus-tri-goda-podrad-velicivaut-tovarooborot.html>

¹³⁶ Шаршуков, С. (2018, август 15). Крупный украинский алкогольный холдинг начал производство в Беларуси. Где и что будут разливать? Tut.by. Retrieved from <https://news.tut.by/economics/604445.html>

¹³⁷ Zmicier Mickiewicz, journalist of Belsat TV channel, analyst of Belarus Security Blog, editor of Varta almanac, interviews dated 28/2/2020 and 7/5/2020

¹³⁸ «Шалёная пчолка» супраць расейскай акупацыі. (2014, квітень 14). Салідарнасць. Retrieved from <https://gazetaby.com/post/shalyonaya-pcholka-supracz-rasejskaj-akupacyi/72835/>

¹³⁹ Olga Pavlova, Software testing engineer, Kyiv-Minsk, interview dated 12/5/2020

¹⁴⁰ Viktoriya Zakrevskaya, analyst, interview dated 13/5/2020

¹⁴¹ В 2019 году белорусы чаще ездили отдыхать в Египет, Турцию и Украину. (2020, март 03). Telegraf.by. Retrieved from <https://telegraf.by/obshchestvo/v-2019-godu-belorusy-chashhe-ezdili-otdyhat-v-egipet-turciju-i-ukrainu/>

¹⁴² Гелогаев, А. (2018, октябрь 7). Белорусские туристы впервые после начала войны на Донбассе стали чаще посещать Украину, чем Россию. Белсат. Retrieved from <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/beloruskie-turisty-vpervye-posle-donbassa-stali-chashhe-poseshat-ukrainu-chem-rossiyu/>

¹⁴³ Савченко, Т., Овсяник, В. (2018, июль 27). Белорусы упорно едут в Украину из-за цен. Turprofi. Retrieved from <http://turprofi.com.ua/novosti/2431-belorusy-uporno-edut-v-ukrainu-iz-za-tsen>

¹⁴⁴ Замість росіян до України приїжджають поляки та білоруси – директор Центру розвитку туризму. (2017, грудень 25). Радіо Свобода. Retrieved from <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/28937504.html>

¹⁴⁵ Olga Pavlova, Software testing engineer, Kyiv-Minsk, interview dated 12/5/2020

Russia, politics exists in the Ukrainian state."¹⁴⁶ For professionals involved in political issues, Ukraine is the most promising country in the post-Soviet space^(ibid). A similar process is observed in the non-governmental sector. Belarusians pushing for social change, who are unable to do so in Belarus due to restrictions on the activities of international organizations often find employment in Ukrainian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), however this trend has declined recently¹⁴⁷. Among the opportunities that attract Belarusian professionals are also those in media and journalism, as Ukrainian media is larger and freer than in Belarus¹⁴⁸. Furthermore, Belarusians in creative professions sometimes choose Ukraine as their place of residence, as they believe that they will be able to fulfil their potential better there than in Belarus¹⁴⁹.

Belarusians in creative professions sometimes choose Ukraine as their place of residence, as they believe that they will be able to fulfil their potential better there than in Belarus.

While many Ukrainian engineers and IT specialists moved to Belarus following the start of Russian aggression in Donbas, today some of these professionals are returning to Ukraine¹⁵⁰.

¹⁴⁶ Viktoriya Zakrevskaya, analyst, interview dated 13/5/2020

¹⁴⁷ Arsen Sivitski, Director, Center for strategic and foreign policy studies, interview dated 12/5/2020

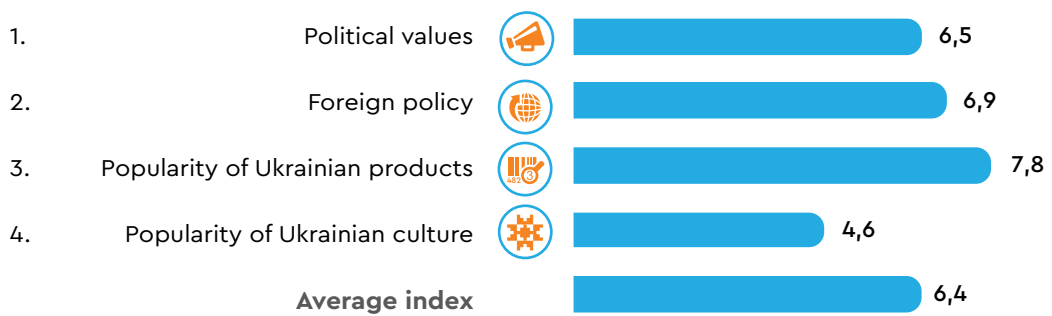
¹⁴⁸ Паливода, А. (2018, декабрь 5). Минск – Киев. Почему белорусы переезжают жить и работать в Украину? LB. https://lb.ua/world/2018/12/05/414137_minsk-kiev_pochemu_belorusi.html

¹⁴⁹ Viktoriya Zakrevskaya, analyst, interview dated 13/5/2020

¹⁵⁰ Arsen Sivitski, Director, Center for strategic and foreign policy studies, interview dated 12/5/2020

4.UKRAINE'S SOFT POWER IN GEORGIA: PERCEPTION THROUGH THE SECURITY DIMENSION

Ukraine's soft power index in **Georgia:** **6,4/10**



The openness of the 2019 Ukrainian elections, the election of an outsider politician as president, and the opportunity for new political forces to enter Parliament were seen by many Georgians as proof of Ukraine's healthy democratic process. Hopes for more effective reforms in the country, including anti-corruption measures, were linked to the new political establishment. At the same time, there was a concern in Georgian society that the new president would resort to an unacceptably lenient policy toward Russia and would cede state interests in favor of the Russian government.



1. UKRAINE AFTER THE REVOLUTION: THE DEMAND FOR REFORMS AND RUSSIAN AGGRESSION

According to Freedom House, Georgia, as well as Ukraine¹, is a "partially free country."² Both countries are considered states with a transitional/hybrid political system³⁴. According to opinion polls from 2015, Ukraine (9% support), along with the United States (21% support) and Azerbaijan (7% support), is consistently among the top three states in the world which Georgians consider friendliest towards their country⁵. The majority (37%) of Georgians who consider Ukraine "Georgia's number one friend" are aged 18 to 35⁶. Ukrainians demonstrate reciprocal sympathies for the Georgian people: almost 82% of Ukrainians have a positive attitude towards Georgia⁷.

Georgian experts hoped openly that Ukraine would become an engine to accelerate European integration processes in Georgia itself.

Georgian media covered the 2014 Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity closely. Politicians, activists, and experts expressed their support for Ukrainian civil society. This audience believed that the goals of the Ukrainian Revolution were to introduce radical reforms and ensure the country's integration in the European Union⁸. Ukraine's determination in the foreign policy course, brought by the Revolution, was generally welcomed in

Georgia. Ukrainians' European integration aspirations were regarded in the context of the national liberation movement, as an attempt to rid Ukraine of Russia's influence on its domestic and foreign policies. A Georgian journalist visiting Kyiv during the Maidan wrote that due to its geographical location, Ukraine should understand the benefits and disadvantages of possible EU integration better than Georgia^(ibid). Given that in 2014, the attention of Western countries was focused closely on Ukrainian events, certain Georgian experts hoped openly that Ukraine would become an engine to accelerate European integration processes in Georgia itself⁹. The expert community also hoped that Ukraine would intensify its efforts to integrate into NATO. Many Georgians read Russia's aggression in Donbas as an attempt to destabilize Ukraine's European integration and Euro-Atlantic course, in much the same way that the Russian authorities tried in Georgia in 2008¹⁰.

1 Freedom House. Freedom in the World. Ukraine 2020. Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ukraine/freedom-world/2020>

2 Freedom House. Freedom in the World. Georgia 2020. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/georgia/freedom-world/2020>

3 Freedom House. Nations in transit rating 2018. Georgia. Retrieved from <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b3cc28d4.html>

4 Freedom House. Nations in transit rating 2018. Ukraine. Retrieved from <https://www.refworld.org/country,,,,UKR,,5b3cc262a,0.html>

5 Caucasus Barometer Georgia. Main friend of the country. 2015. Retrieved from <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2015ge/MAINFRN/>

6 Caucasus Barometer Georgia. Age Group by Main friend of the country. 2019. Retrieved from <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2019ge/AGEGROUP-by-MAINFRN/>

7 Опитування показало ставлення українців до Росії, США та низки інших країн. (2016, березень 11). Український тиждень. Retrieved from <https://tyzhden.ua/News/160512>

8 მაიდანის კრემლის წინააღმდეგ. (2014). Tabula.ge. Retrieved from <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/78824-maidani-kremlis-tsinaaghmddeg>

9 Что думают о Евромайдане в постсоветских странах. (2014, февраль 25). BBC. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2014/02/140224_ukraine_fsu_reaction

10 Teimuraz Kancheli, Tbilisi State University, Head of IT-Department, interview dated 27/2/2020

During the Russian-Georgian war, Ukraine sided with, and actively supported Georgia¹¹. In 2014, Tbilisi's official position on the annexation of Crimea and Russia's occupation of Donbas was quite restrained due to its "policy of dialogue with Moscow," relevant in Georgia at that moment¹². However at the same time, Georgians held rallies in support of Ukraine, sent humanitarian aid¹³, and some even joined the fighting in Donbas in support of Ukraine¹⁴. Georgian experts argued that the Russian attack on Ukraine became possible due to the insufficiently decisive reaction of Western states, including NATO members, to the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008¹⁵. Experts also noted that the West responded to Russian aggression in Ukraine more adequately than to Russia's occupation of a part of Georgian territory¹⁶.

The results of interviews with Georgian experts, as well as the monitoring of Georgian news and analytical materials, suggest that Ukrainian political events are often perceived in Georgia through the prism of security. This is not surprising, given the similarities between the two countries' recent conflicts with Russia¹⁷. "A significant part of society, especially people with at least a minimal interest in politics, expressed a high degree of solidarity with Ukraine in the context of its conflict with Russia."¹⁸ The solidarity of the Georgian society with Ukrainians can be traced in sociological data: while in November 2013, only 36% of Georgians considered Russia to be a hostile country, in 2014, after the annexation of Crimea, this figure increased to almost 50%¹⁹. Moreover, by 2014, 46% of Georgian citizens preferred their country officially support Ukraine more vocally^(ibid). After their own defeat in the war with Russia, some Georgians hoped that Ukraine would be able to repel the occupying forces. In 2014, Irakli Alasania, then Georgia's Defense Minister, said: "If they [Ukraine] survive this crisis, the future will be possible for all countries in the region that share a border with Russia."²⁰

"If they [Ukraine] survive this crisis, the future will be possible for all countries in the region that share a border with Russia."

11 Gaidai, D. (2016, November 11). Foreign Policy Audit. Ukraine and Georgia are friends, but no longer allies. Euromaidan Press. Retrieved from <http://euromaidanpress.com/2016/11/22/foreign-policy-audit-ukraine-and-georgia-are-friends-but-no-longer-allies/>

12 Кравченко, В. (2015, січень 16). Мрії і реалії Грузії. Дзеркало тижня. Retrieved from <https://dt.ua/international/mriyi-i-realiyi-gruziyi-.html>

13 PONARS Eurasia. (2019, September). Kakachia, K. The Ukraine crisis: repercussions for Georgia. Retrieved from <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/ukraine-crisis-repercussions-georgia>

14 Братушак, О. (2017, квітень 5). «Грузинський Легіон»: дії Кремля аналогічні, що в Грузії, що в Україні. Українська Правда. Retrieved from <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2017/04/5/7140350/>

15 ჯენსენი: 2008 წელმა აშშ-საქართველოს ურთიერთობები შეცვალა. (2016). Amerikiskhma. Retrieved from <https://www.amerikiskhma.com/a/donald-jensen-on-2008-russia-georgia-war/3451744.html>

16 Ахметели, Н. (2015, август 8). Уроки российско-грузинской войны: семь лет спустя. BBC. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2015/08/150807_georgia_russia_war_anniversary

17 PONARS Eurasia. (2019, September). Kakachia, K. The Ukraine crisis: repercussions for Georgia. Retrieved from <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/ukraine-crisis-repercussions-georgia>

18 Interview with a Georgian political analyst, on confidentiality terms (2/3/2020)

19 NDI. (2014). Navarro, L. Public attitudes in Georgia: Results of April 2014 survey. Retrieved from https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Georgia_April_2014_Survey_English.pdf

20 International Republican Institute. (2014, May 14). Keerbs, A. Who's next? Retrieved from <https://www.iri.org/resource/iri%E2%80%99s-andrea-keerbs-looks-russia%E2%80%99s-provocations>

The Mikheil Saakashvili factor can be considered a certain driver influencing Ukrainian-Georgian relations. Tbilisi's official attitude toward Ukraine changes depending on how he — the former Georgian president turned controversial Ukrainian political actor — is received by the Ukrainian authorities²¹. The position of the Georgian government, in the end, also affects the perception of Ukraine by Georgian residents²². While in 2017, amidst the beginning of the warming of official relations between the two countries, Ukraine was considered a "friend" by 7% of Georgians²³, two years later, the share of citizens who supported this opinion has increased to 10%²⁴. In addition to Saakashvili's temporary expulsion from the Ukrainian political process, Ukrainian-Georgian relations might have been affected by Russia's more aggressive policy towards Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the trade of these unrecognized republics with the "L/DPR."²⁵ Common security challenges with Ukrainians help many Georgians better understand what is happening in Ukraine and increase the level of support for Ukrainians in Georgia²⁶.

Ukrainian reforms were perceived by some Georgian politicians as among the most important measures for strengthening national security²⁷. Georgians had additional interest in the Ukrainian reform agenda due to the "export" of reformers from Georgia to Ukraine during the first years of Petro Poroshenko's presidency²⁸. Despite the fact that Georgians' attitudes toward those reformers are polarized²⁹, Georgian journalists closely followed the attempts of their Ukrainian counterparts to recreate the "Georgian miracle" on Ukrainian soil. Saakashvili's relations with Ukrainian authorities have lasted longer than other Georgian reformers' cooperation with Ukraine. Through his case, Georgians have also had access to information about events in Ukraine: "Misha's personal path in Ukraine and the questions he raises shed harsh light on the complex process that is going on in the country. After all, is it possible to overthrow the oligarchy? And if so, then how?"³⁰

In the first years after the victory of the Revolution of Dignity, Georgians continued to follow reforms in Ukraine, but later, this interest diminished³¹. While Georgia and Ukraine may face similar problems, Georgians have not

21 Єрмоленко, В. (2017, березень 27). Україна та Грузія: дружба чи прихильність на відстані? Громадське. Retrieved from <https://hromadske.ua/posts/ukraina-ta-hruziia-druzhba-chy-trykhylnist-na-vidstani>

22 Interview with a Georgian political analyst, on confidentiality terms (2/3/2020)

23 Caucasus Barometer Georgia. Main friend of the country. 2017. Retrieved from <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2017ge/MAINFRN/>

24 Caucasus Barometer Georgia. Main friend of the country. 2019. Retrieved from <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2019ge/MAINFRN/>

25 Єрмоленко, В. (2017, березень 27). Україна та Грузія: дружба чи прихильність на відстані? Громадське. Retrieved from <https://hromadske.ua/posts/ukraina-ta-hruziia-druzhba-chy-trykhylnist-na-vidstani>

26 IWPR. (2014, April 30). Yundt, H. Georgians see parallels with Russia-Ukraine conflict. Retrieved from <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/georgians-see-parallels-russia-ukraine-conflict>

27 Марченко, Ю. (2015, март 17). Эка Ткешелашвили: «В РФ хотят держать всю Украину в заложниках из-за малой ее части». Platforma. Retrieved from <https://platfor.ma/magazine/text-sq/re-invent/eka-tkeshelashvili/>

28 I Interview with a Georgian political analyst, on confidentiality terms (4/3/2020)

29 Кравченко, В. (2015, січень 16). Мрії і реалії Грузії. Дзеркало тижня. Retrieved from <https://dt.ua/international/mriyi-i-realiyi-gruziyi-.html>

30 Genté, R. (2018, January 8). Misha and the oligarchs. Civil.ge. Retrieved from <https://civil.ge/archives/218966>

31 Teimuraz Kancheli, Tbilisi State University, Head of IT-Department, interview dated 27/2/2020

been very interested even in their domestic political agenda in recent years³². The lack of awareness among Georgians of Ukrainian reforms can also be explained by insufficient media coverage of Ukrainian events³³. In general, many in Georgia perceive that reforms in Ukraine have lost traction^(ibid).

2. UKRAINIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS OF 2019: REFORMS AND SECURITY

Georgian citizens who monitored Ukraine's presidential election could do so for two reasons. First, Volodymyr Zelenskyy was not from the professional political class, and it was interesting to watch the fate of this "outsider."³⁴ Certain experts linked the emergence of a non-systemic candidate to the fact that Ukrainian society grew tired of the country's ineffective fight against corruption, in doing so entrusting the fate of the country to a person without any political expertise^{35,36}. Some Ukrainian residents of Georgia who voted in the presidential election hoped that Zelenskyy, as a person with no political baggage of his own, could improve the situation in Ukraine³⁷. Second, many Georgians continue to follow Mikheil Saakashvili's political career, and his fate — and to some extent the fate of Georgian-Ukrainian relations — was dependant on the new Ukrainian President. After Zelenskyy promised to allow for Saakashvili's return to Ukraine, the level of interest in Ukrainian elections increased³⁸.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy's participation in the presidential election was welcomed by many Georgians, as his candidacy was seen as "new political blood, a young and motivated person, a representative of a new generation of politicians."³⁹ The attention paid to Zelenskyy grew into interest in other candidates and the course of the Ukrainian election process in general. In Georgian society, the debates between Ukrainian presidential candidates, political competition, and the very nature of transfer of power were often perceived as evidence of the democratic changes in Ukraine⁴⁰. Local politicians used Zelenskyy's case to draw parallels with Georgian events. For example, the leaders of the "United National Movement" party believed that the defeat

In Georgian society, the debates between Ukrainian presidential candidates, political competition, and the very nature of transfer of power were often perceived as evidence of the democratic nature of changes in Ukraine.

³² Survey in Georgia: 41% support opposition, 23% ruling party Georgian Dream. Other stats. (2019, November 11). JAM news. Retrieved from <https://jam-news.net/survey-41-support-opposition-23-georgian-dream-other-stats/>

³³ Interview with a Georgian political analyst, on confidentiality terms (2/3/2020)

³⁴ თორნიკე შარაშენიძე. (2019). უკრაინის არჩევნები — ვინ ვინ არის სინამდვილეში. Liberali.ge. Retrieved from <http://liberali.ge/articles/view/44177/ukrainis-archevnebi-vin-vin-aris-sinamdvilesi>

³⁵ «ხალხის მსახურის» ტრიუმფი უკრაინის საპარლამენტო არჩევნებში. (2019, July 24). Civil.ge. Retrieved from <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/314618>

³⁶ პრეზიდენტის როლიდან პრეზიდენტობამდე. (2019). Amerikishma. Retrieved from <https://www.amerikishma.com/a/from-playing-president-to-presidency-ukrainian-elections/4886800.html>

³⁷ Унаниянц, В. (2019, апрель 1). Грузия выбирает себе украинского президента. Эхо Кавказа. Retrieved from <https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/29855027.html>

³⁸ თორნიკე შარაშენიძე. (2019). უკრაინის არჩევნები — ვინ ვინ არის სინამდვილეში. Liberali.ge. Retrieved from <http://liberali.ge/articles/view/44177/ukrainis-archevnebi-vin-vin-aris-sinamdvilesi>

³⁹ Interview with a Georgian political analyst, on confidentiality terms (2/3/2020)

⁴⁰ Interview with a Georgian political analyst, on confidentiality terms (4/3/2020)

of the "Ukrainian oligarchy" would give strength to the Georgian opposition to fight the local one⁴¹. The attitude of the "Georgian Dream" party towards Zelenskyy was "neutral and friendly"⁴² and "normal."⁴³ "Finally, Ukraine does not need a revolution to change the government. Ukrainians have renewed the power (the President and the Parliament) in a civilized way, as Europeans should^(ibid).

According to a street poll conducted by Georgian journalists, many Georgians believed that the Ukrainian elections were free and fair, as the previous government did not use administrative resources and did not prevent new politicians from trying their hand at governance⁴⁴. While reflecting on the alternation of power in Ukraine and comparing it to the process of renewing the political establishment in Georgia, a Georgian expert argued that Ukrainian elections are freer. However, this phenomenon is not due to Ukrainian democracy, but to a "polyoligarchic" system that allows a certain level of freedom through the competition of different oligarchic interests⁴⁵. The noticeable influence of the oligarchs on politics is a common phenomenon for both Ukraine and Georgia⁴⁶. In this context, the concern expressed in the Georgian expert community about the possible influence of oligarch Igor Kolomoisky on Volodymyr Zelenskyy is understandable: "Zelenskyy's team is quite heterogeneous, there are different groups of influence. Can the Ukrainian President be considered independent?"⁴⁷ According to former member of Saakashvili's reform team Khatia Dekanoidze, as spoken to the "Echo of the Caucasus," before Zelenskyy's victory, most people in Ukrainian politics had been there since the 1990s and had a corresponding background⁴⁸. The coming of a non-professional politician to power can be considered a democratic phenomenon. However, will he be able to work effectively within the system that was formed before his presidency and reform it?^(ibid)

Georgian analysts did not expect Zelenskyy to significantly change Ukraine's pro-Western course⁴⁹. Some analysts believed that Zelenskyy's approach to talks with Russia on Donbas could be too soft and indecisive⁵⁰. At the same time, other experts expressed the opinion that Ukraine has chosen a clear course towards the EU and NATO, and therefore no critical concessions from Zelenskyy in his talks with Russia should be feared⁵¹. Representatives of the "Georgian Dream" party also shared the view on the permanence of Ukraine's foreign

41 Паресишвили, М. (2019, апрель 22). Украинская мечта Михаила Саакашвили. Эхо Кавказа. Retrieved from <https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/29897204.html>

42 Giorgi Kanashvili, Civic Idea, Georgian think-tank, interview dated 8/5/2020

43 Interview with a Georgian parliament member (Georgian dream party), on confidentiality terms (14/5/2020)

44 Словинская, А. (2019, апрель 1). «Рейган тоже был актером, но каким президентом стал?». Эхо Кавказа. Retrieved from <https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/29855018.html>

45 Аблотия, Т. (2019, апрель 22). Украина — Грузия: парад инвалидов. Эхо Кавказа. Retrieved from <https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/29897003.html>

46 Genté, R. (2018, January 8). Misha and the oligarchs. Civil.ge. Retrieved from <https://civil.ge/archives/218966>

47 Interview with a Georgian political analyst, on confidentiality terms (2/3/2020)

48 Унанянц, В. (2019, апрель 25). Второе украинское дыхание Саакашвили. Эхо Кавказа. Retrieved from <https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/29903836.html>

49 პრეზიდენტის როლიდან პრეზიდენტობამდე. (2019). Amerikiskhma. Retrieved from <https://www.amerikiskhma.com/a/from-playing-president-to-presidency-ukrainian-elections/4886800.html>

50 Interview with a Georgian political analyst, on confidentiality terms(4/3/2020)

51 Avdaliani, E. (2019, April 22). Zelenskyy's Presidency is unlikely to change Ukraine's foreign policy. Georgia Today. Retrieved from <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/15344/Zelenskyy%E2%80%99s-Presidency-is-Unlikely-to-Change-Ukraine%E2%80%99s-Foreign-Policy>

policy course⁵². While analyzing the statements of Zelenskyy and his entourage, some Georgian media wrote that the new Ukrainian President positions himself as a supporter of Ukraine's European integration and Euro-Atlantic aspirations and realizes that without the assistance of the West, reclaiming and restoring Donbas will be an impossible task⁵³.

In the context of Ukraine's foreign policy course, Georgian experts mentioned once again the Ukrainian "polyoligarchic" system: "Is Ukraine's choice irreversible? Unfortunately, this may depend on how beneficial Ukraine's partnership with the West is for Ukrainian oligarchs. How effectively Russia will advance its interests, including through Ukrainian oligarchs, will also affect Ukraine's European future."⁵⁴ Ukraine's resistance to Russian aggression and the ability of the Ukrainian state to implement reforms continue to be perceived by some experts as factors able to strengthen the security of the country⁵⁵.

Pro-Russian narratives did not have a significant impact on the image of the Ukrainian elections in Georgia. In 2019, Russia was perceived as a political threat by 79% of Georgians, while 57% considered it an economic threat⁵⁶. Only 6% of Georgians use Russian media as a news source⁵⁷, while the vast majority of the population reads and watches Georgian media. And although there exist outlets which promote the Russian agenda, the Kremlin's information influence in Georgia is only rated at 53 points out of 100^(ibid). Russian and pro-Russian Georgian media generally reflected the Russian authorities' expectations associated with the changes in the Office of the Ukrainian President. The image of Volodymyr Zelenskyy as a peaceful antithesis of "nationalist" Petro Poroshenko was a popular theme across these media sources⁵⁸. Describing the presidential election, such outlets wrote about Ukrainian politics as something caricatured or provincial ("the elections on a farm near Dykanka"), something that does not reach the level of "civility" of Russian political life^(ibid).

The Ukrainian parliamentary elections were covered by the Georgian media less than the presidential campaign, and most Georgians were much less informed about these events. The parliamentary elections were perceived as a continuation of Zelenskyy's victory, as it was his party, "The Servant of the People" ("Sluha Narodu", SN), that managed to win a majority of seats in the

Ukraine's resistance to Russian aggression and the ability of the Ukrainian state to implement reforms continue to be perceived by some experts as factors able to strengthen the security of the country.

⁵² Interview with a Georgian parliament member (Georgian dream party), on confidentiality terms (14/5/2020)

⁵³ Владимир Зеленский — известный комик, который может стать президентом Украины через месяц. (2019). For.ge. Retrieved from <https://for.ge/view/162374/vladimir-zelenski-cnobili-komikosi-romelic-erT-TveSi-SeiZleba-ukrainis-prezidenti-gaxdes.html>

⁵⁴ Interview with a Georgian political analyst, on confidentiality terms (2/3/2020)

⁵⁵ Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies. (2019). Batashvili, D. An inescapable struggle: Russia, the West and Ukraine's battle for survival. Retrieved from <https://www.gfsis.org/files/library/opinion-papers/117-expert-opinion-eng.pdf>

⁵⁶ International Republican Institute. (2019). Public Opinion Survey Residents of Georgia. May 20 — June 11, 2019. Retrieved from https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/georgia_poll_2.pdf

⁵⁷ Detector Media. (2017). Kremlin Influence Index 2017. Retrieved from https://ms.detector.media/content/files/dm_iik_engl_pravka-compressed.pdf

⁵⁸ Мамонтов, В. (2019, апрель 18). Все как у Гоголя, или Второй тур президентских выборов на Украине. Sputnik Georgia. Retrieved from <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/reviews/20190418/244978462.html>

Verkhovna Rada⁵⁹. Some Georgian media considered this election unique due to the fact that the Ukrainian parliament underwent a significant renewal through the victory of completely new parties ("The Voice" (Holos) and the SN)⁶⁰. It was widely believed among Georgian politicians that after the election of so many new faces to Parliament, Zelenskyy would have an unprecedented mandate to implement reforms rapidly: "This is a serious opportunity to radically change the country, but it should be done immediately after the election, while public confidence in the government is high, and Ukrainians are still ready to tolerate the reform measures that are not always pleasant."⁶¹

Could the Ukrainian presidential election become a lesson for the Georgian society? Some Georgian experts share the opinion that in this context, parallels between Ukraine and Georgia may not be entirely appropriate. Despite the dissatisfaction with the current government⁶², many Georgians, including young people, consider politics a "dirty business," which does not contribute to the emergence of new and non-systemic leaders⁶³. Moreover, unlike Ukraine, Georgia's political system is centralized and controls most state structures⁶⁴. This situation hampers the activities of non-systemic politicians and makes the emergence of a "Georgian Macron" or a "Georgian Zelenskyy" seem unlikely at present⁶⁵.

3. PERCEPTION OF UKRAINE THROUGH CULTURE

Probably due to the fact that Ukrainian mass culture is not very well known in Georgia (4.6 points out of 10, one of the lowest indicators in comparison with other countries covered by this research), Volodymyr Zelenskyy was perceived by Georgians primarily as an extraordinary politician, not as an artist⁶⁶. The "Servant of the People" TV series did not gain much popularity in Georgia, thus Zelenskyy's campaign was read by many Georgians primarily as a story of the election of an ordinary person as the Ukrainian president, and not through the image of his onscreen persona, Holoborodko. When providing the background of the future Ukrainian President to their readers, local media usually explained that Volodymyr Zelenskyy is popular in Ukraine⁶⁷ and Russia⁶⁸ as an actor and a producer of the "Kvartal 95" show.

59 Interview with a Georgian political analyst, on confidentiality terms (4/3/2020)

60 რას გვასწავლის უკრაინის საპარლამენტო არჩევნები. (2019). Radiotavisupleba. Retrieved from t.ly/S4f5

61 Interview with a Georgian parliament member (Georgian dream party), on confidentiality terms (14/5/2020)

62 Georgia convulsed by anti-government protests. (2019). The Financial Times. Retrieved from <https://www.ft.com/content/da40ecfe-107a-11ea-a225-db2f231cfeae>

63 Мониава, Д. (2019, апрель 15). Кто и от кого защищает Грузию? Эхо Кавказа. Retrieved from <https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/29882014.html>

64 Аблотия, Т. (2019, апрель 22). Украина — Грузия: парад инвалидов. Эхо Кавказа. Retrieved from <https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/29897003.html>

65 Мониава, Д. (2019, апрель 15). Кто и от кого защищает Грузию? Эхо Кавказа. Retrieved from <https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/29882014.html>

66 Паресишвили, М. (2019, апрель 22). Украинская мечта Михаила Саакашвили. Эхо Кавказа. Retrieved from <https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/29897204.html>

67 Kinichny, Y. (2019.) უკრაინის საპრეზიდენტო არჩევნები: ვინ იყრის კენჭს? Radiotavisupleba. Retrieved from <https://cutt.ly/2tQG0g4>

68 ზელენსკი სააკაშვილზე: თუ ადამიანს ჩამოართვეს მოქალაქეობა, მას აუცილებლად უნდა დაუბრუნონ (2019). Tabula.ge. Retrieved from <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/146610-zelenski-saakashvile-tu-adamians-chamoartves-moqalaxeoba-mas-aucibleblad-unda-daubrunon>

Regarding Ukrainian mass culture in general, experts noted a paradox. Despite the perception of Russia as an unfriendly country, Georgians do not refuse to consume Russian mass culture and Russian performers regularly visit Georgia with their tours and shows⁶⁹. Ukrainian cultural figures, however, are not as frequent visitors to Georgia. While Georgian cultural events are held regularly in Ukraine, often with the support of the Embassy of Georgia, similar events initiated by representatives of the Ukrainian community occur much less frequently in Georgian cities⁷⁰.

An artist who participated in Georgia's submission to the Venice Biennale in 2015 noted the lack of Ukrainian cultural products in the Georgian state⁷¹. Most Georgians know little of Ukrainian popular culture or about contemporary Ukrainian art. However, demand for Ukrainian cultural products still exists in Georgia^(ibid). Among the domains of Ukrainian culture that are known in Georgia, cinema is particularly important. In 2018, screenings of Ukrainian films were hosted in Tbilisi and received positive feedback from the audience⁷². This festival presented the film "Cyborgs" by Ahtem Seitablayev and the works of the winners of the Odesa International Film Festival⁷³.

4. PERCEPTION OF THE PERFORMANCE OF THE UKRAINIAN AUTHORITIES

Ukrainian news still does not attract much attention from the Georgian media, and this contributes to a lack of awareness in Georgia about politics in Ukraine⁷⁴. The extraordinary nature of Ukraine's presidential and parliamentary elections did not especially motivate Georgian interest in the new Ukrainian government's platform and reform promises. Recently, Georgians' attention has shifted to domestic political events in advance of its parliamentary elections scheduled for autumn 2020⁷⁵.

At the beginning of his presidency, during a meeting with Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili, Volodymyr Zelenskyy affirmed the importance of eradicating corruption for the Ukrainian government and noted that he considers Georgia a role model in this fight⁷⁶. However, according to Georgian experts interviewed, Ukraine continues to be perceived as a

Ukraine continues to be perceived as a corrupt country, as its new government has yet to demonstrate significant accomplishments in the fight against corruption.

⁶⁹ Teimuraz Kancheli, Tbilisi State University, Head of IT-Department, interview dated 27/2/2020

⁷⁰ Центр «Нова Європа». (2016). Дарія Гайдай. Аудит зовнішньої політики: Україна-Грузія. Retrieved from http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Audyty-zovnishnoyi-polityky_Ukr_Gruzyya_ukr_inet.pdf

⁷¹ Rusudan Khizanishvili, artist, interview dated 26/2/2020

⁷² Giorgi Kanashvili, Civic Idea, Georgian think-tank, interview dated 8/5/2020

⁷³ Ministry of culture and sport of Georgia. (2018, April 26). უკრაინული კინოს ფესტივალი «უკრაინა ფოკუსში». Retrieved from <http://mcs.gov.ge/News/ukrainuli-kinos-festivali-ukraina-fokusshi.aspx>

⁷⁴ Teimuraz Kancheli, Tbilisi State University, Head of IT-Department, interview dated 27/2/2020

⁷⁵ Interview with a Georgian political analyst, on confidentiality terms (4/3/2020)

⁷⁶ Грузинський досвід боротьби з корупцією є прикладом для України — Зеленський. (2019, травень 20). Укрінформ. Retrieved from <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/2704343-gruzinskij-dosvid-borotbi-z-korupcieu-e-prikladom-dla-ukraini-zelenskij.html>

corrupt country, as its new government has yet to demonstrate significant accomplishments in the fight against corruption.

Experts from other post-Soviet countries sometimes compared the Ukrainian President to Georgia's own ex-President: "He broke the old format. Just like Saakashvili once did."⁷⁷ This comparison is not widespread in the Georgian media discourse, however, and local experts agree that it is not entirely relevant. These politicians might be similar in spirit, but they work differently: "Saakashvili was much more energetic and was able to suppress corruption in a few months."⁷⁸ Despite the inapt comparison of Saakashvili and Zelenskyy, some Georgians still expected the Ukrainian President to be livelier and more radical as a reformer⁷⁹, i.e. to demonstrate features that were rather inherent to the former Georgian head of state⁸⁰. Even while realizing that Saakashvili and Zelenskyy are different, some Georgian supporters of Saakashvili would still prefer to see Ukraine repeat their success story and reboot the system rapidly.

Quantitative surveys conducted within this research measured Ukraine's ability among Georgians to facilitate the resolution of the conflict in Donbas at 6.5 points on a ten-point scale. Experts believe that the Ukrainian authorities are expending effort to resolve the conflict, but Russia's actions significantly hamper their ability to resolve the Donbas issue⁸¹. A representative of the "Georgian Dream" party believes that Ukrainians and Georgians should cooperate more actively on security issues: "We must say together, clearly and loudly, who exactly occupied our lands."⁸² He adds that in regards to Donbas, the Ukrainian President should look for opportunities to reach an agreement with Putin while avoiding any "red lines."^(ibid)

Georgian and Ukrainian servicemen regularly take part in joint military trainings⁸³. Notably, in 2019, the Ukrainian military participated in a multinational exercise held in Georgia aiming to strengthen security in the Black Sea region⁸⁴. As the Ukrainian military has more practical wartime experience, their expertise could be in demand during further exercises, where Ukrainians could act not only as participants but also as coaches for their Georgian colleagues.

77 Meruert Makhmutova, Director, Public Policy Research Center, interview dated 24/2/2020

78 Teimuraz Kancheli, Tbilisi State University, Head of IT-Department, interview dated 27/2/2020

79 Interview with a Georgian businessman on confidentiality terms (26/2/2020)

80 Марченко, Ю. (2015, март 17). Эка Ткешелашвили: «В РФ хотят держать всю Украину в заложниках из-за малой ее части». Platforma. Retrieved from <https://platfor.ma/magazine/text-sq/re-invent/eka-tkeshelashvili/>

81 Interview with a Georgian businessman on confidentiality terms (26/2/2020)

82 Interview with a Georgian parliament member (Georgian dream party), on confidentiality terms (14/5/2020)

83 Defense visual information distribution service. (2018, March 8). Georgian Army, Ukrainian Marines conduct urban ops training for Noble Partner 18. Retrieved from <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/287203/georgian-army-ukrainian-marines-conduct-urban-ops-training-noble-partner-18>

84 У Грузії стартують багатонаціональні військові навчання Agile Spirit 2019 за участю України. (2019, липень 27). УНІАН. Retrieved from <https://www.unian.ua/weapons/10632702-u-gruziji-startuyut-bagatonacionalni-viyskovi-navchannya-agile-spirit-2019-za-uchastyu-ukrajini.html>

Except for reports of a meeting between Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Vladimir Putin⁸⁵ and news about the "Steinmeier formula,"⁸⁶ Georgian journalists have recently paid little attention to the peace building process in Donbas and the role of the new Ukrainian government in it. Georgian society welcomed the news of the mutual release of prisoners between Ukraine and Russia. Some Georgians see this humanitarian move as an accomplishment by Zelenskyy in the context of security policy⁸⁷.

Experts believe that the Ukrainian authorities are expending effort to resolve the conflict, but Russia's actions significantly hamper their ability to resolve the Donbas issue.

The renewal of political power in Ukraine did not create the feeling in Georgia that Ukraine's foreign policy had undergone significant changes. Ukraine's adherence to its European and Euro-Atlantic course is rated by experts at 7.5 points out of 10. The Ukrainian state's ability to be a consistent and predictable partner in foreign policy is rated almost as highly (7.9 points out of 10). "Travel and personal contacts between the two peoples have contributed to the fact that Ukraine is often considered a reliable partner in Georgia."⁸⁸ Some Georgians believe that Ukraine should owe the preservation of its foreign policy orientation not to specific individuals in politics, but to the choice made by Ukrainians in 2014⁸⁹. Georgian experts believe that Ukraine remains a pro-Western country because the European Union and the United States help keep the Ukrainian state from returning under Russian influence⁹⁰. Some young Georgians share the opinion that Ukraine is currently more oriented towards the West than Georgia is⁹¹. However, local analysts do not rule out that in the absence of significant reform progress, Ukrainians' support for European integration and Euro-Atlantic processes may decline.

In the year since the election Ukraine's new president, Georgian media have reported that Zelenskyy's actions fit perfectly into Ukraine's foreign policy paradigm and did not change it. The scandal surrounding the impeachment of Donald Trump was also covered⁹², depicted primarily as the US President pressuring Zelenskyy in order to increase his own chances in the next election⁹³. Most Georgian media covered Zelenskyy neutrally in this scandal; the Ukrainian President was portrayed as a politician who inadvertently became involved in the domestic affairs of another state⁹⁴.

⁸⁵ Avdaliani, E. (2019, April 22). Zelenskyy's Presidency is unlikely to change Ukraine's foreign policy. Georgia Today. Retrieved from <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/15344/Zelenskyy%E2%80%99s-Presidency-is-Unlikely-to-Change-Ukraine%E2%80%99s-Foreign-Policy>

⁸⁶ Interview with a Georgian political analyst, on confidentiality terms (3/3/2020)

⁸⁷ Interview with a Georgian businessman on confidentiality terms (26/2/2020)

⁸⁸ Interview with a Georgian political analyst, on confidentiality terms (2/3/2020)

⁸⁹ Interview with a Georgian businessman on confidentiality terms (26/2/2020)

⁹⁰ Interview with a Georgian political analyst, on confidentiality terms(4/3/2020)

⁹¹ Interview with a Georgian political analyst, on confidentiality terms (3/3/2020)

⁹² რას ცვლის ტრამპის აღიარება, რომ ზელენსკის ჯო ბაიდენზე ესაუბრა? (2019). Radiotavisupleba. Retrieved from t.ly/XIYH

⁹³ ტრამპის იმპიჩმენტის გზამკვლევი: რა შუაშია უკრაინა და რა შანსები აქვთ დემოკრატებს. (2019). Tabula.ge. Retrieved from <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/157492-trampis-impichmentis-gzamkvlevi-ra-shuashia-ukraina-da-ra-shansebi-aqvt-demokratebs>

⁹⁴ გიორგი არონია. (2019). გადაურჩება თუ არა იმპიჩმენტს დონალდ ტრამპი? Liberali.ge. Retrieved from <http://liberali.ge/articles/view/46251/gadaurcheba-tu-ara-impichments-donald-trampi>

Georgian media covered Ukraine's newly-elected Parliament mainly in connection with its legislative activity, providing brief information about the adopted laws⁹⁵.

Ukraine became a story in Georgia again in Spring 2020, when Mikheil Saakashvili was appointed Chairman of the Executive Committee of the National Reform Council under the President of Ukraine. The Georgian Government, where the majority is represented by Saakashvili's political opponents ("Georgian Dream"), responded by recalling the Georgian Ambassador from Ukraine for consultations⁹⁶. There was no talk of severing diplomatic relations, but many politicians (and not only from the ruling party) perceived Saakashvili's appointment as an unfriendly gesture on Ukraine's part⁹⁷. There are also alternative readings of this gesture: even within the "Georgian Dream" party, there are politicians who believe that Ukraine should decide for itself who to appoint to public offices, and therefore "the decision of the Georgian Foreign Ministry to recall the Ambassador was rather technical than political."⁹⁸ On the other hand, for the opposition, including members and supporters of the "United National Movement," Saakashvili's return to Ukrainian politics was an opportunity to point out that the current Georgian government is not an authority for Kyiv⁹⁹. After Saakashvili's appointment, the Ukrainian government's communication style with its Georgian counterparts was viewed as derogatory rather than constructive^(ibid). While Tbilisi's official reaction to the appointment of Saakashvili by Zelenskyy was sharper than it was in 2015, when Saakashvili was appointed governor of Odesa region, this time the news from Ukraine did not resonate widely in the Georgian society. Domestic events have turned out to be more important for Georgians at the moment, and Saakashvili's issue lost its novelty and urgency¹⁰⁰.

5. ACTIVITIES OF THE EMBASSY AND THE IMPACT OF THE UKRAINIAN COMMUNITY

According to the quantitative survey results, the activities of the Embassy of Ukraine in Georgia were evaluated at 7 points out of 10, while the influence of the Ukrainian community in Georgia was rated 4.3 points out of 10.

Most of the experts interviewed believe that the activities of the Ukrainian Embassy could be enhanced through additional events in the field of business, culture, and civic initiatives. The Ukrainian embassy in Tbilisi regularly expresses support for Georgia's position on Russian-occupied territories of South Ossetia

⁹⁵ უკრაინის პარლამენტმა პრეზიდენტის იმპიჩმენტის შესახებ კანონპროექტი მიიღო. (2019). Liberali.ge. Retrieved from <http://liberali.ge/news/view/46131/ukrainis-parlamentma-prezidentis-impichmentis-shesakheb-kanonproehti-miigho>

⁹⁶ Панченко, Ю. (2020, травень 10). Друге прищестя Саакашвілі: навіщо Україна пішла на конфлікт зі стратегічним партнером. Європейська правда. Retrieved from <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2020/05/10/7109738/>

⁹⁷ Giorgi Kanashvili, Civic Idea, Georgian think-tank, interview dated 8/5/2020

⁹⁸ Interview with a Georgian parliament member (Georgian dream party), on confidentiality terms (14/5/2020)

⁹⁹ Панченко, Ю. (2020, травень 10). Друге прищестя Саакашвілі: навіщо Україна пішла на конфлікт зі стратегічним партнером. Європейська правда. Retrieved from <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2020/05/10/7109738/>

¹⁰⁰ Giorgi Kanashvili, Civic Idea, Georgian think-tank, interview dated 8/5/2020

and Abkhazia, publishes statements against "borderization,"¹⁰¹ and hosts documentary screenings and exhibitions on the Donbas war and the conflict in Georgia¹⁰². As part of cooperation with Georgian authorities, the Ukrainian Embassy organized free vacations for children from Donbas to Georgian recreational facilities.

Regarding the Ukrainian diaspora, respondents noted that they were aware of cases when Georgian activists supported Ukrainian protests, but they had heard much less about actions of solidarity of the Ukrainian community with their Georgian compatriots¹⁰³. According to 2015 data, 7,000 Ukrainians live in Georgia¹⁰⁴. One of the oldest organizations representing the interests of the Ukrainian diaspora is the Association of Ukrainian Residents of Georgia¹⁰⁵; its activities are dedicated to cultural and educational events, organization of Ukrainian language courses and Sunday school, etc. Ukrainian language and literature are studied at Tbilisi and Sukhumi state universities^{106,107}. Georgian language and literature are taught at the Kyiv Cultural and Educational Center "Iberia."¹⁰⁸

The Ukrainian foreign broadcasting channel UA|TV has been included in the main TV channel package of a popular Georgian internet provider¹⁰⁹, but none of the experts interviewed referred to this resource as a source of proper information about events in Ukraine.

6. UKRAINIAN BRANDS

Recognition of Ukrainian products in Georgia is evaluated at 7.8 points out of 10. Among the popular Ukrainian brands, experts mentioned dairy products, sweets (especially "Roshen"), juices, vodka, and construction materials (wood and doors). There are also Ukrainian restaurants in Georgia. The purchase of Ukrainian "Bohdan" buses by the Tbilisi City Hall deserves special attention. While the brand itself is perceived neutrally or positively, the technical state of the fleet,

¹⁰¹ Посольство України в Грузії. (2019). Коментар Посольства України в Грузії у зв'язку з відновленням так званої «бордеризації» на окупованих територіях Грузії. Retrieved from <https://georgia.mfa.gov.ua/news/10842-komentar-posolstva-ukrajini-v-gruziji-u-zvjazku-z-vidnovlenniam-tak-zvanoji-borderizaciji-na-okupovanih-teritorijah-gruziji>

¹⁰² Посольство України в Грузії. (2018). Культурно-гуманітарне співробітництво між Україною та Грузією. Retrieved from <https://georgia.mfa.gov.ua/posolstvo/393-kulyturno-gumanitarne-spivrobitnictvo-mizh-ukrajinoju-ta-gruzijeju>

¹⁰³ Interview with a Georgian businessman on confidentiality terms (26/2/2020)

¹⁰⁴ Українці в Грузії. (2015, червень 30). Міграція. Режим доступу <http://migraciya.com.ua/news/ukrainian-abroad/ua-ukrainians-in-georgia/>

¹⁰⁵ Посольство України в Грузії. (2016). Урочистий захід Культурно-освітнього центру Асоціації українців- мешканців Грузії. Retrieved from <https://georgia.mfa.gov.ua/news/46023-urochistij-zahid-kulyturno-osvitnyogo-centru-asociaciji-ukrajinciv-meshkanciv-gruziji>

¹⁰⁶ ივანე ჯავახიშვილის სახელობის თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი. უკრაინული ენა. Retrieved on May 20, 2020, from https://www.tsu.ge/ge/government/administration/departments/III/courses/au5yrmtqs_9d-p_ow/2yhuewmq42sjqxcko/

¹⁰⁷ სოხუმის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი. დამტკიცებულია ცვლილებებით სოხუმის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტის აკადემიური საბჭოს მიერ (აკადემიური საბჭოს დადგენილება № 05/01- 351, 17.07.2017). Retrieved on May 20, 2020, from https://www.sou.edu.ge/images/file/1530603942-2017_sabakalavro_slavuri-filologia.pdf

¹⁰⁸ Буцко, Д. (2019, серпень 11). Грузини України. Хто вони? Ukrainer. Retrieved from <https://ukrainer.net/gruzyny/>

¹⁰⁹ UA|TV тепер і в Грузії. (2016, березень 24). Укрінформ. Retrieved from <https://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-society/1988013-uatv-teper-i-v-gruzii.html>

which has not been renewed for many years by the authorities, can irritate the city residents and affect perceptions of the brand¹¹⁰.

In 2019, the trade turnover between Ukraine and Georgia amounted to 573 million USD (-7% compared to 2018)¹¹¹. Exports of Ukrainian goods to Georgia amounted to 392 million USD (-20% compared to 2018), imports — 182 million USD (+36% compared to 2018). Ukraine supplies more to Georgia than it imports (the trade surplus reached 210 million USD). The share of Georgian goods in the total volume of Ukrainian exports was 0.8%; for imports, the respective figure was 0.3%^(ibid). The tourist flow to Georgia from Ukraine increased from 169 thousand Ukrainian tourists in 2018 to 200 thousand in 2019¹¹².

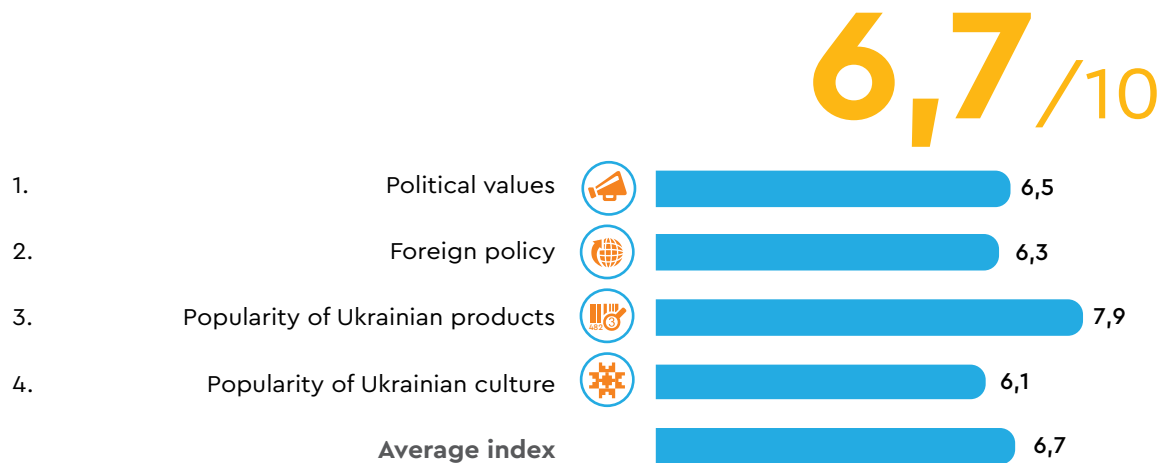
110 Misha Robaqidze. (2019, март 6). Осторожно, «Богдан». Старые автобусы из Украины доживают свой век в Тбилиси. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5NZUBJ6l8M>

111 Державна служба статистики України. Географічна структура зовнішньої торгівлі товарами у 2019 році. Retrieved from <http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/>

112 Грузія 2019 року встановила туристичний рекорд. (2020, січень 2). Укрінформ. Retrieved from <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-tourism/2848836-gruzia-2019-roku-vstanovila-turisticnij-rekord.html>

5. UKRAINE'S SOFT POWER IN MOLDOVA: A REFLECTION OF MOLDOVAN HOPES FOR CHANGE

Ukraine's soft power index in **Moldova:**



Among the countries researched, Ukraine's soft power scored highest in Moldova. This can be explained by a combination of factors; first, both countries have already declared their intentions to integrate into the European Union and have signed the relevant Association Agreements with the E U. Second, Ukraine and Moldova are neighbors with a common border 1,222 km in length hosting similar hybrid conflicts on their territory as well. Third, between 2014 and 2019, Ukrainian-Moldovan relations have become quite constructive, seen particularly in improved cooperation resolving the Transnistrian conflict¹.

It is noteworthy, however, that Ukraine's relatively high soft power in Moldova, based on the data from a survey of experts differs from the perception of Ukraine by ordinary Moldovans. Among the latter, 51% consider relations between Ukraine and Moldova good, while only 15% see Ukraine as a political partner and 18% as an economic partner².

Almost 40% of Moldovans perceived the Ukrainian Revolution of 2014 as a demonstration of public demand for change and a manifestation of Ukraine's vibrant democracy. Newly elected politicians were expected to implement reforms, particularly in the fight against corruption.

Ukraine's 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections of 2019 were perceived by many Moldovans as another attempt by Ukrainians to restart their political system and replace the government that failed to fight corruption with new politicians from outside of the system.

¹ Центр «Нова Європа». (2016). Бетлій О. Аудит зовнішньої політики: Україна-Молдова. Retrieved from http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Audyt-zovnishnoyi-polityky_Ukr_Moldova_ukr_inet.pdf

² International Republican Institute. (2019) .Public Opinion Survey. Residents of Moldova. November 16 — December 8, 2019. Retrieved from https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/iri_poll_-_december_2019_for_publishing.pdf

1. UKRAINE AFTER THE REVOLUTION: UKRAINIANS AHEAD OF MOLDOVANS

According to Freedom House, Moldova is a "partially free country"³ with a transitional/hybrid political system⁴. In 2014, 66% of Moldovans considered relations between Ukraine and Moldova "good," while 50% saw relations with Russia as friendly⁵.

At the onset of Russian aggression in Crimea, then Prime Minister of Moldova Iurie Leancă paid a working visit to Kyiv, which was interpreted in the Ukrainian capital as a timely show of support for Ukraine and specifically for its aspirations to integrate into the European Union that were one of manifestations of the 2014 Revolution⁶. Moldovan attitudes towards the events of 2014 in Ukraine were varied. In 2014, 38% of Moldovans approved of the overthrow of the Yanukovich regime, but 20% did not support the idea⁷. Nearly half of Moldova's population (46%) condemned Russia's annexation of Crimea, while 29% viewed this event positively. The Ukrainian events of 2014 reinvigorated the concept of the "Russkiy Mir / Russian world" in Moldova, which was promoted through local media and organizations⁸. Moldovan supporters of this idea viewed Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic integration in a negative light.

Ukrainians are the largest ethnic group in Moldova (6.6% in 2014⁹; 181,035¹⁰) after Moldovans. A large majority of Ukrainians in Moldova reacted negatively to Maidan and tended to support pro-Russian positions^{11,12}. Some Ukrainians living in Moldova believe that one of the reasons for this situation is Ukraine's insufficient efforts interacting with and engaging its diaspora¹³. In the 2014 extraordinary presidential election, Petro Poroshenko and Serhiy Tihopko, who both have some ties to Moldova, won the most votes among ethnic Ukrainians living in the Republic of Moldova¹⁴.

3 Freedom House. Freedom in the World. Moldova 2020. Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/moldova/freedom-world/2020>

4 Freedom House. Nations in transit rating 2018. Moldova. Retrieved from <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/1429175.html>

5 International Republican Institute. (2014). Public Opinion Survey. Residents of Moldova. June 7–27, 2014. Retrieved from <https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2014%20July%2025%20Public%20Opinion%20Survey-Residents%20of%20Moldova,%20June%207-27,%202014.pdf>

6 Центр «Нова Європа». (2016). Бетлій О. Аудит зовнішньої політики: Україна-Молдова. Retrieved from http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Audyty-zovnishnoyi-polityky_Ukr_Moldova_ukr_inet.pdf

7 International Republican Institute. (2014). Public Opinion Survey. Residents of Moldova. June 7–27, 2014. Retrieved from <https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2014%20July%2025%20Public%20Opinion%20Survey-Residents%20of%20Moldova,%20June%207-27,%202014.pdf>

8 NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. (2017). The Moldovan information environment, hostile narratives, and their ramifications. Riga, Latvia.

9 Ukrainian Prism. (2018). Curararu, A. Moldova: Disinformation Resilience Index. Retrieved from <http://prismua.org/en/9069-2/>

10 New Europe Centre. (2020, January 28). Litra, L. Looking in the mirror: What Transnistria tells us about Donbas? Retrieved from <http://neweurope.org.ua/en/analytics/dzerkalne-vidobrazhennya-shho-prydnistrov-ya-mozhe-pidkazyty-nam-pro-donbas/>

11 Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. (2017). Gerasymchuk, S., & Gramada, A. Ukraine-Moldova: competition, cooperation and independence. Retrieved from <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/ukraine/14040.pdf>

12 Rosian Vasiloi, colonel (ret.), Security and military analyst, former Head of the Border Police (Republic of Moldova), interview dated 13/05/2020

13 Марченко, О. (2015, червень 29). Несвої і не чужі. iPress. Retrieved from https://ipress.ua/articles/ne_svoi_i_ne_chuzhi_129729.html

14 Центр «Нова Європа». (2016). Бетлій О. Аудит зовнішньої політики: Україна-Молдова. Retrieved from http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Audyty-zovnishnoyi-polityky_Ukr_Moldova_ukr_inet.pdf

Until 2014, Moldova was regarded as leading Ukraine in the context of civil and political rights, as well as European integration progress¹⁵. Later, the momentum generated by Maidan turned the Ukrainian state into a regional leader in the eyes of pro-European Moldovans¹⁶. The Ukrainian Revolution, committing Ukraine's course toward EU integration, sparked the expectations of democratic reforms in this audience, including concrete steps towards de-oligarchization and intensifying the fight against corruption. Since Maidan, Moldovan analysts have been closely following developments in Ukraine noting some of Ukraine's accomplishments, such as its introduction of an electronic public procurement system, Prozorro¹⁷. Analysts also note the effectiveness of civil society to push back on the state: "There is a feeling that democracy is working in Ukraine, and that this country is currently ahead of Moldova, where mechanisms that resist change are often triggered."¹⁸

The average Moldovan is not well informed about political events in Ukraine. Experts believe that local media lack proper coverage of Ukrainian events¹⁹. However, news about Ukraine's fight against corruption was covered quite actively²⁰ in local media, as this topic is relevant to the concerns of Moldovan citizens. In 2014, 25% of Moldovans considered corruption their country's most important problem²¹, and in 2016, this figure reached 39%²². The scope of this problem became much more difficult to ignore for a larger part of the population, when in 2015, 1 billion USD disappeared from Moldovan banks, and in 2019, it was discovered that the ultimate beneficiary of this theft was Moldovan oligarch Vlad Plahotniuc²³.

The momentum generated by Maidan turned the Ukrainian state into a regional leader in the eyes of pro-European Moldovans.

Overall, anti-corruption activities in Ukraine were perceived by many Moldovans as unsuccessful. Among Moldovans, Petro Poroshenko bore most of the blame²⁴. His alleged involvement in corruption schemes has repeatedly become the subject of investigative journalism in Moldova²⁵. It is noteworthy that Moldovan journalists sometimes refer to the experience of Ukrainian colleagues

15 Vladislav Kulminski, expert, Institute for Strategic Initiatives, former Foreign Policy Adviser to the Prime Minister, interview dated 2/4/2020

16 Natalia Stercul, Programme Director, Department Eastern Studies: Ukraine and Russia, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova, interview dated 25/2/2020

17 Iulian Groza, Executive Director, Institute for European Policies and Reforms, interview dated 2/2/2020

18 Natalia Stercul, Programme Director, Department Eastern Studies: Ukraine and Russia, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova, interview dated 25/2/2020

19 Vladislav Kulminski, expert, Institute for Strategic Initiatives, former Foreign Policy Adviser to the Prime Minister, interview dated 2/4/2020

20 Спасители ММЗ: как Филип и Порошенко помогли Приднестровью заработать миллионы. (2019, апрель 30). Rise Moldova. Retrieved from shorturl.at/bcvAN

21 International Republican Institute. (2014). Public Opinion Survey. Residents of Moldova. June 7–27, 2014. Retrieved from <https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2014%20July%2025%20Public%20Opinion%20Survey-Residents%20of%20Moldova,%20June%207-27,%202014.pdf>

22 International Republican Institute. (2016). Public Opinion Survey. Residents of Moldova. September 2016. Retrieved from https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/iri_moldova_september_2016_moldova_poll_for_review.pdf

23 Центр «Нова Європа». (2016). Бетлій О. Аудит зовнішньої політики: Україна-Молдова. Retrieved from http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Audyt-zovnishnoyi-polityky_Ukr_Moldova_ukr_inet.pdf

24 După ani de amănări, Tribunalul Anticorupție al Ucrainei și-a început activitatea. (2019, September 6). JurnalTV.md. Retrieved from <https://www.jurnaltv.md/news/a61cbccafd1bd8e3/dupa-ani-de-amanari-tribunalul-anticoruptie-al-ucrainei-si-a-inceput-activitatea.html>

25 Спасители ММЗ: как Филип и Порошенко помогли Приднестровью заработать миллионы.

as an example to follow: "In Ukraine, investigative journalists do not compromise with any politicians, neither from the government nor from the opposition."²⁶

Almost half of Moldovan citizens follow Russian media and tend to see images of Ukraine and Ukrainian reforms presented in a biased light²⁷. Russian propaganda aims, in particular, to discourage Moldovans from traveling to Ukraine because of "Russophobia, environmental and military risks, and intimidating border guards."²⁸ Meanwhile, among foreign nationalities, Moldovans rank first in terms of the number of total visits to Ukraine²⁹.

Regarding the negotiated settlement of Donbas, many Moldovans felt (and still feel) insulted by Ukraine because of its neutral position on Transnistria until 2014³⁰. The beginning of Russian aggression in Ukraine was perceived by this audience as retribution to the Ukrainian authorities for flirting with Russia in the past and insufficient support for Moldova's territorial integrity at a time when it was needed³¹. Since 2014, Ukraine has acted more constructively in the Transnistrian conflict resolution process³² and has taken a number of steps welcomed by Moldovan authorities³³. Ukraine's more serious attitude to the Transnistrian issue as well as the alleged partnership between Petro Poroshenko and Moldovan oligarch Vlad Plahotniuc³⁴, who has held outsized political influence in Moldova for years³⁵, also contributed to the warming of Ukrainian-Moldovan relations.

It is notable that in the midst of improved official bilateral relations³⁶, the number of Moldovan citizens who considered relations "good" decreased: the respective figure was 66% in 2014, 49% in 2015³⁷, 56% in 2017³⁸, 54% in 2018³⁹, and 51% in

26 Денис Бигус: «Из-за журналистских расследований и революции происходят...» (2019, апрель 25). Rise Moldova. Retrieved from shorturl.at/eiGKX

27 Портников, В. (2019, июнь 25). Республика Молдова: новая власть. Радио Свобода. Retrieved from <https://www.svoboda.org/a/30017083.html>

28 Вацяк, Я. (2017, октябрь 2). Чем пугают молдаван: почему страшно в Киеве и в Украине. Українські новини. Retrieved from <https://ukranews.com/news/521777-chem-pugayut-moldavan-pochemu-strashno-v-kyeve-y-v-ukrayne>

29 Прикордонники підраховали, хто найчастіше відвідує Україну. (2018, січень 29). Кореспондент. Retrieved from <https://ua.korrespondent.net/ukraine/3934248-trykordonnyky-pidrakhuvaly-khto-naichastishe-vidviduie-ukrainu>

30 Sergiu Gaibu, Programme Director of Expert-Grup, interview dated 14/05/2020

31 Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. (2017). Gerasymchuk, S., & Gramada, A. Ukraine-Moldova: competition, cooperation and independence. Retrieved from <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/ukraine/14040.pdf>

32 Центр «Нова Європа». (2016). Бетлій О. Аудит зовнішньої політики: Україна-Молдова. Retrieved from http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Audyt-zovnishnoyi-polityky_Ukr_Moldova_ukr_inet.pdf

33 Botnaru, V. (2014). Igor Boțan: „Atitudinea Ucrainei față de conflictul transnistrean s-a schimbat radical». Radio Europa Liberă Moldova. Retrieved from <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/26647060.html>

34 Єгошина, В. (2019, травень 1). Брухт для Придністров'я. Як Порошенко посприяв молдовському олігарху Плахотнюку всупереч інтересам України. Радіо Свобода. Retrieved from <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/schemes/29914379.html>

35 Центр «Нова Європа». (2018). Літра, Л. Пастки Придністровського врегулювання: як нам їх уникнути? Retrieved from http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Policy-Brief_Pastky-Prydnistrovskogo_ukr.pdf

36 Попов, В. (2019, март 14). Посол Иван Гнатишин: для Украины, как и для Молдовы — стабильное будущее только в европейском союзе. Infotag. <http://www.infotag.md/interview/273587/>

37 International Republican Institute. (2015). Public Opinion Survey. Residents of Moldova. September 29 — October 21, 2015. Retrieved from https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/2015-11-09_survey_of_moldovan_public_opinion_september_29-october_21_2015.pdf

38 International Republican Institute. (2017). Public Opinion Survey. Residents of Moldova. February-March, 2017. Retrieved from https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/iri_moldova_poll_march_2017.pdf

39 International Republican Institute. (2018). Public Opinion Survey. Residents of Moldova. September 11 — October 16, 2018. Retrieved from https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2018-11-15_moldova_poll.pdf

2019⁴⁰. Although communication between the two countries has increased over the Transnistrian conflict, this issue is more important to the authorities than to the citizens of Moldova who consider the Transnistrian issue not even among the most important 15 priorities for Moldovans. Meanwhile, as of March 2020, 56% of Ukrainians described their attitude towards Moldovans as "good."⁴¹

Regarding the Donbas conflict, Moldovan society does not demonstrate a common understanding of the causes of the war in Eastern Ukraine. On one hand, the popularity of Russian narratives may explain this⁴²; while many of a more informed public (mostly the middle class)⁴³ tend to support Ukraine more often. This audience sees similarities in the origins of conflicts in Donbas and Transnistria, and with this context can better evaluate Ukraine's peacekeeping efforts. Furthermore, the events in Donbas do not attract much Moldovan media attention, so updates on the status of fighting and negotiations are not well covered^(ibid). The Moldovan expert community has noted the increased capacity of the Ukrainian army due to the need to defend its territory from Russian aggression^(ibid) and that Ukrainians are able to unite in the event of serious threats⁴⁴.

More informed public sees similarities in the origins of conflicts in Donbas and Transnistria, and with this context can better evaluate Ukraine's peacekeeping efforts.

Ukraine is often perceived by many Moldovans as a country which seeks to impose its agenda on Moldova, to be a mentor in relations rather than an equal partner⁴⁵. "Sometimes, the Ukrainian authorities can behave like Russia, insisting on their own way."⁴⁶ Despite the concerns of Moldovan (and Ukrainian) environmentalists and contrary to some of its own agreements with the Moldovan government, Ukraine has not stopped building new hydroelectric power plants on the Dniester River, which flows into Moldova⁴⁷. The unwavering position of the Ukrainian authorities on this issue is perceived by some Moldovans as ignoring their interests, which significantly undermines the effectiveness of Ukrainian soft power in Moldova.

Ukrainian relations with Moldova are expected by Moldovans to be characterized by a more neighborly, friendly attitude, without abusing its size and capabilities⁴⁸. This could be facilitated dialogue at the expert level from both

40 International Republican Institute. (2019) .Public Opinion Survey. Residents of Moldova. November 16 — December 8, 2019. Retrieved from https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/iri_poll_-_december_2019_for_publishing.pdf

41 Research & Branding Group, проект Rubicon. (2020, березень 13). Ставлення українців до національностей держав-сусідів. Retrieved from <http://rb.com.ua/uk/blog-uk/omnibus-uk/stavlennja-ukrainciv-do-nacionalnostej-derzhav-susidiv/>

42 NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. (2017). The Moldovan information environment, hostile narratives, and their ramifications. Riga, Latvia.

43 Iulian Groza, Executive Director, Institute for European Policies and Reforms, interview dated 2/2/2020

44 Natalia Stercul, Programme Director, Department Eastern Studies: Ukraine and Russia, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova, interview dated 25/2/2020

45 Ukrainian Prism. (2016, August 16). Gerasymchuk, S. Ukraine-Moldova: complicated but promising relations. Retrieved from <http://prismua.org/en/ukraine-moldova-complicated-promising-relations/>

46 Iulian Groza, Executive Director, Institute for European Policies and Reforms, interview dated 2/2/2020

47 Sergheev, N. (2019). Iuliana Cantaragiu: Ucraina vrea să mai instaleze trei turbine la complexul hidroenergetic Dnestrovsk. Europa Liberă Moldova. Retrieved from <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/iuliana-cantaragiu-ucraina-vrea-s%C4%83-mai-instaleze-trei-turbine-la-complexul-hidroenergetic-dnestrovsk/30034667.html>

48 Vladislav Kulminski, expert, Institute for Strategic Initiatives, former Foreign Policy Adviser to the Prime Minister, interview dated 2/4/2020

countries on joint water resource management⁴⁹. Moreover, there is an opinion among many analysts that Ukraine should recognize the unconstructiveness of its attitude to the problem of separatism in Moldova pre-2014, for example, by making an official statement on the issue⁵⁰. This recognition would mitigate any remaining feelings of insult among Moldovans and help Ukraine distance itself from an image it sometimes carries as the "second Russia," as admitting mistakes and apologizing is not seen as typical of the Russian Federation.

"In 2014, when Ukrainian citizens stood up in defense of their country, they also protected us, the Republic of Moldova." For if the so-called "Novorossiya" ("New Russia") project (which also covered Odesa region) succeeded, it would come down to us."

At the same time, neighboring Ukraine contributes to an improved security situation in Moldova. Ukrainian territory, separating Moldova from Russia physically deters any possible efforts by Russia to gain full control of the Moldovan state. "In 2014, when Ukrainian citizens stood up in defense of their country, they also protected us, the Republic of Moldova. For if the so-called "Novorossiya" ("New Russia") project (which also covered Odesa region) succeeded, it would come down to us."⁵¹ Ukraine's role as a driver of European integration processes for Eastern Partnership countries is also

important for Moldova⁵². The expert community expects that the Ukrainian state will continue supporting Moldova, deepening sectoral cooperation with European countries. In the energy sector, Ukraine is also considered a reliable partner that provides the opportunity to import European natural gas through the Ukrainian Natural Gas Transit System (NGTS) and offers support in natural gas storage.

2. UKRAINIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS OF 2019: AN EXAMPLE THAT CAN INSPIRE

The 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections attracted the attention of many Moldovans, primarily due to the protest nature of Ukrainian voting. Ukrainians' frustration with the incumbent Poroshenko's policies, which contributed to Volodymyr Zelenskyy's victory, was understandable to Moldovans because of their own dissatisfaction with the regime established in Moldova by oligarch and Poroshenko ally Vlad Plahotniuc⁵³. In early 2019, 71% of Moldovans described their attitude to Plahotniuc as "bad."⁵⁴ In spring of the same year, an investigation revealed a scheme of illegal scrap metal trade between Ukraine and the Moldovan Metallurgical Plant (MMZ) through a company associated with Plahotniuc, and also established that later, Petro Poroshenko facilitated the

49 Rosian Vasiloj, colonel (ret.), Security and military analyst, former Head of the Border Police (Republic of Moldova), interview dated 13/05/2020

50 Sergiu Gaibu, Programme Director of Expert-Grup, interview dated 14/05/2020

51 Експрем'єрка Молдови Санду: Донбас, як і Придністров'я, намагаються використовувати для перетворення України та Молдови на держави з обмеженим суверенітетом. (2020, травень 12). Gordon.ua. Retrieved from t.ly/sTwD

52 The European Union Institute for Security Studies. (2019). Secieru, S., & Saari, S. (Eds.). The Eastern Partnership: a decade on. With contributions from Chkhikvadze, V., Groza, I., Hovhannisyan, M., Litra, L., Melyantsou, D., Shiriyev, Z., & Zarembo, K.

53 Centre for Eastern Studies. (2016, April 11). Całus, K. Moldova: from oligarchic pluralism to Plahotniuc's hegemony. Retrieved from <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2016-04-11/moldova-oligarchic-pluralism-to-plahotniucs-hegemony>

54 International Republican Institute. (2019). Public Opinion Survey. Residents of Moldova. December 5, 2018 — January 16, 2019. Retrieved from https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/iri_moldova_poll_december_2018-january_2019.pdf

lifting of sanctions against this plant⁵⁵. This news, tying the Ukrainian leader to a locally disliked oligarch, intensified the negative attitude towards Poroshenko among many Moldovans.

Amid the prolonged Moldovan political crisis of 2019 that provoked Plahotniuc's flight abroad, demand for a change of approaches and faces in Moldovan politics has increased⁵⁶. Many Moldovans viewed the elections in Ukraine as an example that could inspire change in their own country as well. The election of Zelenskyy as President had an almost sensational effect in Moldova, as a newcomer to politics was able to overcome the political heavyweight Poroshenko "and deprive an oligarch of power through elections."⁵⁷ The Moldovan expert community perceived the election of a non-systemic politician with no corrupt past as a confirmation of Ukraine's democratic capacity^(ibid). Volodymyr Zelenskyy's position was presented as markedly opposed to Petro Poroshenko in the media, both in the context of fighting corruption and in terms of their positions on resolving the conflict in Donbas^(ibid).

Many Moldovans viewed the elections in Ukraine as an example that could inspire change in their own country as well.

Many Moldovans also liked the image of a "self-made" man, believing that if a candidate was able to succeed in business, he had a better chance to drive transformational change at the national level⁵⁸. Zelenskyy's communication style also resonated with Moldovans, as the speeches of the future president did not resemble traditional political speeches and contained promises that were clear and important to many people: "If Zelenskyy ran for President in Moldova, he would win."⁵⁹

In the Moldovan expert community, both the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2019 in Ukraine were mostly considered free and fair. This contrasted with the domestic situation, where "the current Parliament is not representative, and the elections can hardly be called fair."^(ibid) The main expectation of local analysts and independent media towards the new Ukrainian government was that it would intensify the fight against oligarchy and corruption^{60,61}. Journalists often linked their hopes for lasting change in Ukraine with new political forces, both "The Servant of the People" (Sluha Narodu, SN) and "The Voice" (Holos). Some pointed out that the lack of experience of new politicians should not be considered a disadvantage, and that it was more important that new officials

⁵⁵ Єгошина, В. (2019, травень 1). Брухт для Придністров'я. Як Порошенко посприяв молдовському олігарху Плахотнюку всупереч інтересам України. Радіо Свобода. Retrieved from <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/schemes/29914379.html>

⁵⁶ Портников, В. (2019, июнь 25). Республика Молдова: новая власть. Радио Свобода. Retrieved from <https://www.svoboda.org/a/30017083.html>

⁵⁷ Johann, B. (2019, April 22). Comentariu: Ucraina alege un nou început politic cu un comediant la cârmă. Deutsche Welle. Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/ro/comentariu-ucraina-alege-un-nou-%C3%AEnceput-politic-cu-un-comediant-la-c%C3%A2rm%C4%83/a-48430249>

⁵⁸ Natalia Stercul, Programme Director, Department Eastern Studies: Ukraine and Russia, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova, interview dated 25/2/2020

⁵⁹ Vladislav Kulminski, expert, Institute for Strategic Initiatives, former Foreign Policy Adviser to the Prime Minister, interview dated 2/4/2020

⁶⁰ Țicudean, M. (2019). Favoriții alegerilor parlamentare din Ucraina. Europa Liberă Moldova. Retrieved from <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/favori%C8%9Bii-alegerilor-parlamentare-din-ucraina/30060424.html>

⁶¹ Goncharenko, R. (2019). Ucraina între un nou început și revenirea la trecut. Deutsche Welle. Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/ro/ucraina-%C3%AEntre-un-nou-%C3%AEnceput-%C8%99i-revenirea-la-trecut/a-49644747>

were not corrupt themselves⁶². The election of all-new political forces to the Verkhovna Rada promised "an unprecedented renewal of elites in Ukraine, where the political scene is still dominated by Soviet-era politicians."⁶³

Moldovan experts expected the new Ukrainian government to reform the Prosecutor's Office and the Ministry of Interior⁶⁴. Several media outlets (both independent and pro-Russian) warned against the possible influence of oligarch Igor Kolomoisky on the new Ukrainian President^{65,66}. Pro-Russian media have indicated that the president will rely on the parliamentary majority, and thus will not be able to justify his potential failures by disagreements with the lawmakers⁶⁷. Moldovan franchises of Russian media wrote about the alleged American origin of the "Voice" party, which, unlike the "Opposition Platform — For Life" (Opozytsyyna Platforma — Za zhyttya, OPZZ), is aimed at severing Ukraine's ties with Russia^(ibid).

The Pro-Russian audience in Moldova expected significant concessions from the new Ukrainian government in its negotiations with Russia on Donbas⁶⁸, "tempering the banderite zeal," and more democratic behavior compared to Petro Poroshenko⁶⁹. The Moldovan pro-European audience looked at Ukraine's new president with some caution, expecting him to make compromises with Russia over Donbas that could be called excessive. The intention of the incoming president to put the issue of joining NATO to a referendum caused a wave of skepticism among Moldovan analysts, who mentioned that such expressions of will could be manipulated, as was the case in the annexation of Crimea.

At the same time, Zelenskyy's desire to focus on the humanitarian dimension of peacebuilding was generally accepted positively in the Moldovan expert community. Whether Zelenskyy would continue the line of cooperation with Moldova on security on the Transnistrian part of the Ukrainian-Moldovan border was an unknown at the time of his election⁷⁰. Analysts hoped that the new government's approach would maintain the policy initiated by Poroshenko, and that Zelenskyy would not prioritize humanitarian issues and communication with

⁶² Ucrainenii își aleg astăzi Rada Supremă, în cadrul alegerilor anticipate: Fenomenul Zelenski s-ar putea repeta. (2019). Jurnal.md. Retrieved from https://www.jurnal.md/ro/news/d0a3b375fd0e2902/ucrainenii-isi-aleg-astazi-rada-suprema-in-cadrul-alegerilor-anticipate-fenomenul-zelenski-s-ar-putea-repeta.html?fb_comment_id=2670774986266647_2670798079597671

⁶³ Criza din Ucraina. LiveBlog (Dan Alexe). (2019). Europa Liberă Moldova. Retrieved from [https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/criza-din-ucraina-liveblog-\(dan-alexe\)/25197808/lbl1bi179337.html](https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/criza-din-ucraina-liveblog-(dan-alexe)/25197808/lbl1bi179337.html)

⁶⁴ Vladislav Kulminski, expert, Institute for Strategic Initiatives, former Foreign Policy Adviser to the Prime Minister, interview dated 2/4/2020

⁶⁵ Johann, B. (2019, April 22). Comentariu: Ucraina alege un nou început politic cu un comediant la cârmă. Deutsche Welle. Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/ro/comentariu-ucraina-alege-un-nou-%C3%AEnceput-politic-cu-un-comediant-la-c-%C3%A2rm%C4%83/a-48430249>

⁶⁶ Голованов, Р. (2019, июль 22). Киевский политолог Михаил Погребинский: «Американцы боятся, что Зеленский пойдет на разговор с Москвой». Комсомольская Правда в Молдове. Retrieved from <https://www.kp.md/daily/27005/4067472/>

⁶⁷ Голованов, Р. (2019, июль 22). Киевский политолог Михаил Погребинский: «Американцы боятся, что Зеленский пойдет на разговор с Москвой». Комсомольская Правда в Молдове. Retrieved from <https://www.kp.md/daily/27005/4067472/>

⁶⁸ Valeria Suruceanu, the Director of the Museum of History of Chisinau, interview dated 27/2/2020

⁶⁹ Голованов, Р. (2019, апрель 21). Что ждать России и Донбассу от президента Зеленского? Комсомольская Правда в Молдове. Retrieved from <https://www.kp.md/daily/26969.5/4024957/>

⁷⁰ Ursu, V. (2019). Angela Grămadă: „Există potențial de a dialoga cu Ucraina pe diferite dimensiuni». Radio Europa Liberă Moldova. Retrieved from <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/angela-gr%C4%83mad%C4%83-ucraina-%C8%99i-a-c-%C3%A2%C8%99tigat-propriul-drept-la-a-%C8%99i-sanc%C8%9Biona-elita-politic%C4%83-/29901177.html>

Moldova's separatist region over security⁷¹. The likelihood of such a scenario was seen as low, as the president of a country whose population condemns the annexation of Crimea and Russian aggression in Donbas would be unlikely to take steps to legitimize Transnistria's status. In Tiraspol, the new Ukrainian President was expected to fulfill the commitments made by the previous administration in the Transnistrian peacekeeping process, in particular to play the role of an impartial mediator within the framework of the negotiations in the "5+2" format⁷².

Neither independent nor pro-Russian media expected radical changes in Ukraine's foreign policy under the new president. At the same time, journalists on both sides believed, either cautiously⁷³ or hopefully⁷⁴, that the new configuration of forces in the Verkhovna Rada could reorient the country's foreign policy toward a thaw with Russia. Moldovan pro-Russian media hoped that the OPZZ party that took second place in terms of the number of seats^(ibid) would assume an active role in this process. Not all Moldovan experts agreed with this thesis on the possibility of changing priorities in foreign policy. For example, some of them had reason to believe that Zelenskyy would not change Ukraine's foreign policy, and his narratives, praised by both pro-Russian and pro-European Ukrainians, were only based on a desire to reach the widest possible electorate⁷⁵.

3. THE REGIONAL LEADER IN DEMOCRATIC TRANSFORMATION?

As mentioned, in Moldova, Ukraine is sometimes viewed as a country that imposes some power on its smaller neighbor. However, can Ukraine's democratic example be attractive on its own, without any need for coercion?? That this research is considering Ukraine's soft power validates the fact that the Ukrainian state (at least its expert community) is aware that it can be a regional leader and role model⁷⁶.

After Zelenskyy's inaugural speech, Moldovan MP Maria Ciobanu criticized Igor Dodon⁷⁷. She noted the democratic nature of the Ukrainian President's behavior and asked the Moldovan head of state if he would ever become a

71 Johann, B. (2019, April 22). Comentariu: Ucraina alege un nou început politic cu un comediant la cârmă. Deutsche Welle. Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/ro/comentariu-ucraina-alege-un-nou-%C3%AEnceput-politic-cu-un-comediant-la-c%C3%A2rm%C4%83/a-48430249>

72 Grău, L., & Ursul, S. (2019). Transnistria poate spera la rezultate bune în stabilirea relațiilor cu noua Ucraină». Radio Europa Liberă Moldova. Retrieved from <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/cum-v%C4%83d-exper%C5%A3i-de-la-tiraspol-victoria-lui-zelenski-la-preziden%C5%A3ialele-din-ucraina-/29900868.html>

73 «Zelenski promovează o politică mai echilibrată față de Rusia». Comentator moldovean, despre alegerile din Ucraina. (2019). Agora.md. Retrieved from <https://agora.md/stiri/55807/zelenski-promoveaza-o-politica-mai-echilibrata-fata-de-rusia-comentator-moldovean-despre-alegerile-din-ucraina>

74 Алексей Чеснаков: Теперь активным меньшинством, влияющим на политику Украины, будут не бандеровцы, а пророссийская оппозиция. (2019, июль 27). Комсомольская Правда в Молдове. Retrieved from <https://www.kp.md/daily/27005/4067356/>

75 Ursu, V. (2019). Angela Grămadă: „Există potențial de a dialoga cu Ucraina pe diferite dimensiuni». Radio Europa Liberă Moldova. Retrieved from <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/angela-gr%C4%83mad%C4%83-ucraina-%C8%99i-a-c%C3%A2%C8%99tigat-propriul-drept-la-a-%C8%99i-sanc%C8%9Biona-elita-politic%C4%83-/29901177.html>

76 Natalia Stercul, Programme Director, Department Eastern Studies: Ukraine and Russia, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova, interview dated 25/2/2020

77 Deputata Maria Ciobanu, impresionată de discursul lui Vladimir Zelenskyy: „Este conștient și responsabil de această onoare acordată. Al cui președinte este Igor Dodon?». Unimedia. Retrieved from <https://unimedia.info/ro/news/631b7343b64ac85c/deputata-maria-ciobanu-impresionata-de-discursul-lui-vladimir-zelenskyy-este-constient-si-responsabil-de-aceasta-onoare-acordata-al-cui-presedinte-este-igor-dodon.html/%7B%7Burl%7D%7D>

"people's President," and demanded he report what, except regular meetings with Russian figures, he had accomplished for the country. Later, in autumn 2019, Alexandr Nesterovschi, a candidate for Mayor of Bălți, released a promotional video, in which Moldovan journalists saw a reference to the election video of Volodymyr Zelenskyy and noted the similarity of style and rhetoric of the two works⁷⁸. Igor Munteanu, an MP and former Ambassador of the Republic of Moldova to the United States, believes that the Ukrainian presidential election is a lesson for the post-Soviet space and a signal to undemocratic leaders that their rule is not eternal. Even access to the administrative resource does not make it possible to fully control public sentiment, especially in a situation of citizens' dissatisfaction with the state of reforms and the fight against corruption⁷⁹.

The Ukrainian presidential election is a lesson for the post-Soviet space and a signal to undemocratic leaders that their rule is not eternal.

Despite attempts by pro-European Moldovan politicians to gain more influence over the political processes in Moldova and to pursue more democratic governance, 2019 has shown how difficult it is to renew the local political elite. Besides, while in post-Maidan Ukraine, an oligarch handed over power to his successor legally, in Moldova, a similar leader simply fled abroad. No wonder a Moldovan analyst notes that focusing on Ukraine's

experience may be a good idea for Moldovans, but they should also consider how different the two countries are⁸⁰. The pro-European audience in Moldova sometimes views Ukraine as a model, a state that, through its own success, will be able to inspire change in their country as well. Former Prime Minister of Moldova Maia Sandu notes: "What happens in Ukraine is very important to us. It is vital that everything works out for you; otherwise, it will weaken us, Moldova, as well."⁸¹

4. PERCEPTION OF UKRAINE THROUGH CULTURE

According to quantitative surveys conducted among Moldovan experts, Volodymyr Zelenskyy's popularity in Moldova is rated at 7 points out of 10. His visibility among the general public could be explained by the fact that many Moldovans knew of "The Servant of the People" TV series and perceived Zelenskyy's election campaign as a sequel. This series could be watched in 2017 on the local TV channel Canal 3⁸², associated with the Democratic Party

⁷⁸ Vrea să câştige alegerile ca Zelenski: Cum un candidat PSRM la primăria din Bălți a plagiat clipul electoral al preşedintelui Ucrainei. (2019, September 24). Unimedia. Retrieved from <https://unimedia.info/ro/news/3b3470c2fa328b92/video-vrea-sa-castige-alegerile-ca-zelenski-cum-un-candidat-psrm-la-primaria-din-balti-a-plagiat-clipul-electoral-al-presedintelui-ucrainei.html>

⁷⁹ Johann, B. (2019, April 22). Comentariu: Ucraina alege un nou început politic cu un comediant la cârmă. Deutsche Welle. Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/ro/comentariu-ucraina-alege-un-nou-%C3%AEnceput-politic-cu-un-comediant-la-c%C3%A2rm%C4%83/a-48430249>

⁸⁰ Expert: «Alegerile din Ucraina, lecție utilă pentru Moldova. Oligarhii pot fi scoși de la putere în mod democratic». (2019, April 22). Agora.md. Retrieved from <https://agora.md/stiri/56377/expert-alegerile-din-ucraina-lectie-utila-pentru-moldova-oligarhii-pot-fi-scosi-de-la-putere-in-mod-democratic>

⁸¹ Експрем'єрка Молдови Санду: Донбас, як і Придністров'я, намагаються використовувати для перетворення України та Молдови на держави з обмеженим суверенітетом. (2020, травень 12). Gordon.ua. Retrieved from t.ly/sTwD

⁸² Premieră! Serialul ucrainean de comedie politică «Slujitorul poporului», la Canal 3. (2017). Canal 3. Retrieved from https://www.canal3.md/ro/sluga-poporului-la-canal3_40929.html

of Moldova⁸³. The products of the "Kvartal 95"⁸⁴ and the KVN⁸⁵ are also well known. Zelenskyy was so famous as an actor that he is still primarily seen in Moldova as a creative personality, not a politician⁸⁶.

Local experts evaluate the popularity of Ukrainian mass culture by 7.1 points out of 10. Among the sources of information about the state of Ukrainian music, they name "Eurovision"⁸⁷. "The League of Laughter" (Liga smikhu) a show hosted by Zelenskyy, is known in Moldova, in particular because a Moldovan team "Stoianovca" participated, and won the championship. Before his tour in the USA, a member of this team said that this Ukrainian show "taught him a lot" and made him popular and financially successful in Moldova⁸⁸.

There is also a demand for contemporary Ukrainian art in Moldova⁸⁹, which is rated 6.1 points out of 10. In 2015, a joint project of the national committees of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) of Ukraine and Moldova "Museums on the frontline: a step from a victim to a peacemaker" was implemented in Chisinau. This event was attended by museum experts from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, as well as representatives of IZOLYATSIA Foundation and the documentary cinema platform #BABYLON13⁹⁰. In 2019, the National Museum of Art of Moldova, with the support of the Embassy of Ukraine, hosted an exhibition of Ivan Marchuk's works. Locals.md reported that the artist's unique works function as public diplomacy, while confirming Ukraine's place within Europe⁹¹.

Ivan Marchuk's unique works function as public diplomacy, while confirming Ukraine's place within Europe.

Popular Moldovan musician and singer Dan Balan currently works extensively in Ukraine. He was a member of the jury of the music competition "The Voice of the Country" (Holos krainy), which is also popular in Moldova⁹², and even recorded a song in Ukrainian⁹³. The video for this particular song, in which Balan sings together with the winner of the show Oksana Mukha, even reached 10+ million views on YouTube in just five days. Moldovan media regularly write about Balan's

⁸³ NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. (2017). The Moldovan information environment, hostile narratives, and their ramifications. Riga, Latvia.

⁸⁴ Natalia Stercul, Programme Director, Department Eastern Studies: Ukraine and Russia, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova, interview dated 25/2/2020

⁸⁵ Valeria Suruceanu, the Director of the Museum of History of Chisinau, interview dated 27/2/2020

⁸⁶ Natalia Stercul, Programme Director, Department Eastern Studies: Ukraine and Russia, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova, interview dated 25/2/2020

⁸⁷ Natalia Stercul, Programme Director, Department Eastern Studies: Ukraine and Russia, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova, interview dated 25/2/2020

⁸⁸ Иван Люленов о «Лиге Смеха», судьбе «Стояновки» и предстоящем концерте. (2020, январь 29). Diez. Retrieved from <https://ru.diez.md/2020/01/29/video-ivan-lyulenov-o-ligi-smeha-sudybe-stoyanovki-i-predstoyashtem-kontserte/>

⁸⁹ Valeria Suruceanu, the Director of the Museum of History of Chisinau, interview dated 27/2/2020

⁹⁰ ICOM. (2015). #BABYLON' 13 and IZOLYATSIA in Chisinau. Retrieved from <http://network.icom.museum/icom-moldova/news/detail/article/babylon-13-and-izolyatsia-in-chisinau/L/10/>

⁹¹ IVAN MARCHUK. EXPOZIȚIA «VOCEA SUFLETULUI MEU». (2019). Locals. md. Retrieved from <https://locals.md/2019/ivan-marchuk-expozitia-vocea-sufletului-meu/>

⁹² Valeria Suruceanu, the Director of the Museum of History of Chisinau, interview dated 27/2/2020

⁹³ Dan Balan #ВСЕПРОБАЧАТИ feat.Oksana Mukha (Official video). (2020, травень 15). Dan Balan. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2s-VZm4yoUE>

work in the Ukrainian music scene⁹⁴ and thus contribute to the popularization not only of this show, but also of the Ukrainian music market and Ukraine in general. Balan was simultaneously offered to join the jury of a similar music show in several countries around the world, but he chose Ukraine. In 2019, Pasha Parfeni, the singer who represented Moldova on the "Eurovision 2012", also took part in the "Voice of the Country"⁹⁵.

5. PERCEPTION OF THE PERFORMANCE OF THE UKRAINIAN AUTHORITIES

Over a year since elections, attitudes toward the new Ukrainian government in Moldova did not change significantly⁹⁶. This may be due to a lack of awareness of the Ukrainian political process; after the elections concluded, Moldovan media turned their focus to other news. Most of the media analyzed in this research (all except for the pro-Russian "KP in Moldova" and "Sputnik")⁹⁷ wrote about the new Ukrainian authorities neutrally or approvingly during the year following elections. Some of those articles contained reposts from Ukrainian sites, including publications by "Ukrainska Pravda," LIGA.net, and "Ukrinform." After the signing of legislation on the lifting of parliamentary immunity⁹⁸, Moldovan independent media reported that the Ukrainian president had kept his word and that such initiatives were important given the public demand to reduce the level of corruption in the country⁹⁹.

In the context of reforms, news about the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Court received the most attention as a long-awaited event for Ukrainians, initiated by the previous government under pressure from Western partners and implemented despite the significant pushback¹⁰⁰. Moldovan media also wrote about the benefits and disadvantages of Ukraine's ongoing decentralization process¹⁰¹. Pro-Russian media predictably represented the views of the Russian government, arguing that the Ukrainian President and Parliament cannot change the situation in the country for the better, focusing their messages on scandals and conspiracy theories instead¹⁰².

94 Show must go on: Dan Balan a adunat participanți din mai multe colțuri ale lumii. Vezi echipa cu care intră în etapa de dueluri la Vocea Ucrainei. (2020, March 6). Unimedia. Retrieved from <https://unimedia.info/ro/news/f13d24677ab8bb19/show-must-go-on-dan-balan-a-adunat-participanti-din-mai-multe-colturi-ale-lumii-vezi-echipa-cu-care-intra-in-etapa-de-dueluri-la-vocea-ucrainei.html>

95 Pasha Parfeni a ajuns la Vocea Ucrainei (VIDEO). (2019, February 25). Noi.md. Retrieved from https://noi.md/md/showbiz/pasha-parfeni-a-ajuns-la-vocea-ucrainei-video?fbclid=IwAR08c5IQw6qdYQMKpr4_NmABaX6xMMe3-l0D6kDJSz-5ie00-VIP-mQXN4w

96 Vladislav Kulminski, expert, Institute for Strategic Initiatives, former Foreign Policy Adviser to the Prime Minister, interview dated 2/4/2020

97 Перелік проаналізованих медіа: Radio Europa Liberă Moldova, Newsmaker.md; KP.md; Jurnal.md; Deschide.md; agora.md; Sputnik.md; Unimedia; Publika TV; Moldova 1

98 Верховна Рада України. (2019, вересень 3). Закон «Про внесення змін до статті 80 Конституції України (щодо недоторканності народних депутатів України)». Retrieved from <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/27-20>

99 Zelenski s-a ținut de cuvânt. Imunitatea parlamentarilor ucraineni a fost oficial ridicată de la 1 ianuarie.(2020). Unimedia. Retrieved from <https://unimedia.info/ro/news/6555716b8cb88991/zelenski-s-a-tinut-de-cuvant-imunitatea-parlamentarilor-a-fost-oficial-ridicata-incepand-cu-1-ianuarie.html>

100 După ani de amânări, Tribunalul Anticorupție al Ucrainei și-a început activitatea. (2019, September 6). JurnalTV.md. Retrieved from <https://www.jurnaltv.md/news/a61cbccaf1bd8e3/dupa-ani-de-amanari-tribunalul-anticoruptie-al-ucrainei-si-a-inceput-activitatea.html>

101 Preașcă, D. (2019). Soluția Ucrainei pentru dezvoltarea democrației. Moldova.org. Retrieved from <https://www.moldova.org/descentralizarea-solutia-ucrainei-pentru-dezvoltarea-democratiei/>

102 Гамов, А. (2019, октябрь 24). «Полиграф брехни» Зеленский спустит на тормозах. Комсомольская Правда в Молдове. Retrieved from <https://www.kp.md/daily/27046/4111757/>

In the analytical community, Volodymyr Zelenskyy has a rather positive image of a politician who is still trying to fight corruption¹⁰³. Certain experts praised the work of former Prosecutor General of Ukraine Ruslan Ryaboshapka^(ibid), as well as the adoption¹⁰⁴ of legislation on the circulation of agricultural land¹⁰⁵ and consideration of a project of the Law to guarantee the non-return of bankrupt banks to their previous owners by the Verkhovna Rada¹⁰⁶.

At the end of 2019, Zelenskyy was trusted by about 42% of Moldovans, 33% did not trust him, and 9% did not know who he is¹⁰⁷. In terms of popularity, Zelenskyy is slightly behind Vladimir Putin, who is trusted by 55.6% of the Moldovan population¹⁰⁸. Many Moldovan media wrote about Volodymyr Zelenskyy's New Year's address to Ukrainians, noting that it was emotional and that this video message was popular among Ukrainians¹⁰⁹.

In terms of popularity, Zelenskyy is slightly behind Vladimir Putin.

On the issue of Donbas, experts rated the Ukrainian government's peacebuilding efforts at 6.7 points out of 10. This community may sometimes perceive Ukraine's position on negotiations with Russia as unreasonable, suggesting the authorities may lack strategic understanding of the settlement of conflict¹¹⁰. Experts also believe that Ukrainian officials should learn about Moldova's experience with frozen conflicts and explore the challenges and benefits of repeating such a scenario in Ukraine¹¹¹. The news on Zelenskyy's readiness to meet with President Igor Dodon was criticized by independent media on the grounds that the Moldovan President, known for his loyalty to Vladimir Putin, supported the annexation of Crimea¹¹². However, it is important to note that as of early 2020, this meeting has not yet occurred.

Pro-Russian media in Moldova reflected a change in Russia's attitude towards the new Ukrainian government, calling Zelenskyy a "little Poroshenko" who did not live up to expectations of a speedy settlement of the conflict on terms

¹⁰³ Vladislav Kulminski, expert, Institute for Strategic Initiatives, former Foreign Policy Adviser to the Prime Minister, interview dated 2/4/2020

¹⁰⁴ Valeria Suruceanu, the Director of the Museum of History of Chisinau, interview dated 27/2/2020

¹⁰⁵ Верховна Рада відкрила ринок землі. (2020, березень, 31). Економічна правда. Retrieved from <https://www.epravda.com.ua/news/2020/03/31/658713/>

¹⁰⁶ Верховна Рада. (2020, березень 30). Проект Закону про внесення змін до деяких законодавчих актів України щодо удосконалення деяких механізмів регулювання банківської діяльності. Retrieved from http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_1?pf3511=68492

¹⁰⁷ Republic of Moldova Public Opinion Barometer. Retrieved on April, 15, 2020 from <http://bop.ipp.md/en>

¹⁰⁸ Vladimir Putin remains the most popular foreign politician in Moldova. (2019, December 31). A-TV.md. Retrieved from <http://a-tv.md/eng/index.php?newsid=73051>

¹⁰⁹ Un altfel de discurs la trecerea dintre ani: Zelenski a schimbat clasicul mesaj politic pe unul „de suflet» (VIDEO). (2020, January 1). Agora.md. Retrieved from <https://agora.md/stiri/65341/un-altfel-de-discurs-la-trecerea-dintre-ani-zelenski-a-schimbat-clasicul-mesaj-politic-pe-unul-de-suflet-video>

¹¹⁰ Natalia Stercul, Programme Director, Department Eastern Studies: Ukraine and Russia, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova, interview dated 25/2/2020

¹¹¹ New Europe Centre. (2020, January 28). Litra, L. Looking in the mirror: What Transnistria tells us about Donbas? Retrieved from <http://neweurope.org.ua/en/analytics/dzermalne-vidobrazhennya-shho-prydnistrov-ya-mozhe-pidkazaty-nam-pro-donbas/>

¹¹² Ивашкина, И. (2019, май 15). «А он спросил Додона, чей Крым?» Как в Украине Зеленского раскритиковали за разговор с президентом Молдовы. Newsmaker.md. Retrieved from <https://newsmaker.md/rus/novosti/a-on-sprosil-dodona-chey-krym-kak-v-ukraine-zelenskogo-raskritikovali-za-razgovor-43514>

favorable to the Russian government¹¹³. Another Russian narrative that remains popular is about "good Zelenskyy and bad nationalists" who prevent him from establishing peace in Donbas¹¹⁴.

A widely held opinion in the expert community is that Ukraine is capable to defend its national interests ("We would be happy to be that persistent in our fight for Transnistria!")

A widely held opinion in the expert community is that Ukraine is capable to defend its national interests ("We would be happy to be that persistent in our fight for Transnistria!")¹¹⁵. Moreover, Ukrainian society is able to mobilize in the event of controversial decisions (e.g. the "Steinmeier formula") and put pressure on authorities, warning them of "red lines," as in the case of the eve of the Normandy Four summit in Paris¹¹⁶. The results of the talks between the heads of the four states were mostly

positively assessed by Moldovan analysts, as Zelenskyy managed to reach an accord on the bilateral release of prisoners and attempted to initiate changes in the text of the Minsk Agreements¹¹⁷.

Ukraine's adherence to its European and Euro-Atlantic integration course was evaluated at 7.1 points out of 10. Local experts explain this high rating by the fact that Ukraine continues to reorient its foreign policy toward the West and is perceived in Moldova as having made an irreversible choice. After a year under a new president and parliament, this perception was unchanged. However, predictability and consistency in Ukraine's foreign policy was rated slightly lower by local analysts, at 5.7 points out of 10: "The Ukrainian state lacks long-term vision of relations with other countries. You should not prioritize attempts to understand the personalities who run foreign policy; it would be better to take into account the geopolitical strategies of the respective countries."¹¹⁸ Experts add that there is a lot of spontaneity in Ukrainian-Moldovan relations as well and that both countries contribute to this chaos¹¹⁹.

Pro-Russian media used the situation surrounding the possible impeachment of Donald Trump to promote a favorite topic about the failure of the Ukrainian state. For example, a Moldovan website affiliated with the pro-Russian "Our Party" built its narrative of Trump's conversation with Zelenskyy in such a way as to focus on Ukrainian corruption, ignoring the rest of a complex story¹²⁰. More independent Moldovan outlets covered this case from different perspectives,

113 Реброва, М. (2019, июль 7). Записки киевлянки: Как быстро Зеленский превратился в «маленького Порошенко». Комсомольская правда. Retrieved from <https://www.kp.md/daily/26999/4061255/>

114 Иванов, Б. (2020, март 14). «Господа соврамши» из команды Зеленского отказались от диалога с Донбассом. Комсомольская правда. Retrieved from <https://www.kp.md/daily/26999/4061255/>

115 Natalia Stercul, Programme Director, Department Eastern Studies: Ukraine and Russia, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova, interview dated 25/2/2020

116 Ucraina | Mii de manifestanți în stradă împotriva „capitulării” față de Rusia. (2019, December 8). Radio Chisinau. Retrieved from <https://radiochisinau.md/ucraina-mii-de-manifestanti-in-strada-impotriva-capitularii-fata-de-rusia-100198.html>

117 Ursu, V. (2019, декабрь 16). Владимир Сокор: «У России в мире два проекта с особым статусом — Молдова и Украина». Radio Europa Liberă Moldova. Retrieved from shorturl.at/fuzN4

118 Natalia Stercul, Programme Director, Department Eastern Studies: Ukraine and Russia, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova, interview dated 25/2/2020

119 Iulian Groza, Executive Director, Institute for European Policies and Reforms, interview dated 2/2/2020

120 Трамп заморозит военную помощь Киеву из-за коррупции. (2019, сентябрь 24). 1news.md. Retrieved from <https://1news.md/politica/74973-tramp-zamorozit-voennuyu-pomosch-kiyevu-iz-za-korrupcii.html>

mentioning that the Ukrainian President was involved in the internal political struggle between American politicians¹²¹.

6. ACTIVITIES OF THE EMBASSY AND THE IMPACT OF THE UKRAINIAN COMMUNITY

According to quantitative surveys, the activities of the Embassy of Ukraine in Moldova are evaluated at 5.7 points out of 10. The work of the diplomatic mission is noticeable, and the Embassy regularly holds educational and cultural events¹²². However, the Embassy does not give many the impression of an active participant in the social and cultural life of Moldova¹²³. Among the events that took place in 2019 with the support of the Embassy are the All-Ukrainian National Unity Dictation¹²⁴, the New Ukrainian Cinema Days¹²⁵, and an excursion for students of Chisinau schools studying Ukrainian language to historical sites in Moldova related to the history of Ukraine¹²⁶.

The Ukrainian Embassy tries to convey Ukraine's position on the Russian aggression to Ukrainians living in Moldova. The diplomatic mission regularly publishes statements condemning the illegal actions of the Russian Federation in Ukraine (including the passportization of residents of the occupied part of Donbas¹²⁷, illegal visits of Russian officials to Crimea¹²⁸, etc.).

The influence of the Ukrainian community was evaluated at 4.9 points out of 10. The diaspora's interest in maintaining communication with Ukraine is quite low, as demonstrated by a decrease in the number of Ukrainian language lessons in schools and low voter turnout for Ukrainian elections. Due to a small number of students willing to study Ukrainian language and literature, Moldovan schools where teaching was conducted

The diaspora's interest in maintaining communication with Ukraine is quite low.

121 Zelenski neagă orice șantaj din partea lui Trump prin intermediul ajutorului militar. (2019). Jurnal.md. Retrieved from <https://www.jurnaltv.md/news/df60f1ced6b309c4/zelenski-neaga-orice-santaj-din-partea-lui-trump-prin-intermediul-ajutorului-militar.html>

122 Natalia Stercul, Programme Director, Department Eastern Studies: Ukraine and Russia, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova, interview dated 25/2/2020

123 Valeria Suruceanu, the Director of the Museum of History of Chisinau, interview dated 27/2/2020

124 Посольство України у Республіці Молдова. (2019, листопад 12). День української писемності та мови в Молдові. Retrieved from <https://moldova.mfa.gov.ua/news/75894-deny-ukrajinskykoji-pisemnosti-ta-movi-v-moldovi>

125 Посольство України у Республіці Молдова. (2019, листопад 8). Дні нового українського кіно у Молдові. Retrieved from <https://moldova.mfa.gov.ua/news/75809-dni-novogo-ukrajinskykogo-kino-u-moldovi>

126 Посольство України у Республіці Молдова. (2019, жовтень 21). Учні українських ліцеїв Молдови знайомляться з історією України. Retrieved from <https://moldova.mfa.gov.ua/news/75471-uchni-ukrajinskykh-licejiv-moldovi-znajomlyatysya-z-istorijeju-ukrajini>

127 Посольство України у Республіці Молдова. (2019, липень18). Заява МЗС України у зв'язку з черговим провокативним рішенням Російської Федерації щодо незаконної паспортизації громадян України, що мешкають в Донецькій і Луганській областях. Retrieved from <https://moldova.mfa.gov.ua/news/10683-zayava-mzs-ukraini-u-zvyazku-z-chergovim-provokativnim-rishennyam-rosiyskoi-federatsii-shchodo-nezakonnoi-pasportizatsii-gromadyan-ukraini-shcho-meshkayut-v-donetskiy-i-luganskiy-oblast>

128 Посольство України у Республіці Молдова. Заява МЗС України у зв'язку з незаконним візитом президента РФ В.Путіна до тимчасово окупованої РФ території України — Автономної Республіки Крим та м.Севастополь. (2020, січень 10). Retrieved from <https://moldova.mfa.gov.ua/news/11229-zajava-mzs-ukrajini-u-zvyazku-z-nezakonnim-vizitom-prezidenta-rf-vputina-do-timchasovo-okupovanoji-rf-teritoriji-ukrajini-avtonomnoji-respubliki-krim-ta-msevastopoly>

in Ukrainian are now being closed¹²⁹, while the Ukrainian Studies program at Alecu Russo Bălți State University is no longer in demand due to the lack of interested students¹³⁰. Amidst the fight against the "Romanianization" of the population, Ukrainian has official language status in Transnistria and is taught in most Transnistrian schools. However, textbooks that local students receive from Ukraine are often censored by the authorities of the unrecognized republic in favor of Russian perspectives^(ibid). The drop in the number of people interested in studying Ukrainian may also be related to the declining Ukrainian population living in Moldova (from 282,406 in 2004 to 181,035 in 2014)¹³¹.

Ukraine has recently introduced scholarship programs for Moldovan citizens to study in Ukrainian universities (80% of spots are provided to ethnic Ukrainians). For 2019–2020, 22 scholarships for higher education, 10 scholarships for master's programs and 2 scholarships for doctoral studies have been awarded¹³².

In 2019, Moldova was home to 50,000 Ukrainian citizens eligible to vote in Ukraine's national and presidential elections. About 90% of them were living on the left bank of the Republic of Moldova¹³³. Usually about 2–3 thousand Ukrainians participate in the elections, at least in Chisinau^(ibid). The turnout of Ukrainian voters is traditionally low; In the 2014 presidential election, out of almost 70,000 registered voters, only 770 voted¹³⁴. This may indicate a lack of integration of the Ukrainian diaspora in the political processes in Ukraine. Given this fact and the predominance of pro-Russian views among Ukrainians in Moldova, the Ukrainian authorities cannot reliably count on this audience as a source of national soft power in Moldova.

The Ukrainian community regularly organizes events to celebrate national holidays. For example, in 2019, the Lesya Ukrainka Library in Chisinau hosted celebrations dedicated to the International Mother Language Day¹³⁵. While paying tribute to the preservation of Ukrainian traditions, we should note that such events do not reach a wide audience and prioritize the conservative component of the image of Ukraine, ignoring contemporary Ukrainian culture all together.

129 Под сокращение попали ещё восемь молдавских школ. (2017, июль 11). Point.md. Retrieved from <https://point.md/ru/novosti/obschestvo/pod-sokrashchenie-popali-eshchio-vosem-moldavskikh-shkol>

130 Центр «Нова Європа». (2016). Бетлій О. Аудит зовнішньої політики: Україна-Молдова. Retrieved from http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Audyty-zovnishnoyi-polityky_Ukr_Moldova_ukr_inet.pdf

131 New Europe Centre. (2020, January 28). Litra, L. Looking in the mirror: What Transnistria tells us about Donbas? Retrieved from <http://neweurope.org.ua/en/analytics/dzerkalne-vidobrazhennya-shho-prydnistrov-ya-mozhe-pidkazaty-nam-pro-donbas/>

132 Ministerul Educației, Culturii și Cercetării. (2019). Burse de studii oferite cetățenilor Republicii Moldova în instituțiile de învățământ superior din Ucraina. Retrieved from https://mecc.gov.md/ro/content/burse-de-studii-oferite-cetatenilor-republicii-moldova-instituțiile-de-invatamant-superior-1?fbclid=IwAR24b2wHY1UVcO-aOV_7JxHckamMzXHbQDGEgNsH7xl-7pOJPDm7UTtgfJNo

133 Grâu, L. (2019). „Despre deschiderea în Transnistria a unor secții de votare pentru alegerile din Ucraina nici nu poate fi vorba». Europa Liberă Moldova. Retrieved from <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/alegeri-ucraina-sectii-votare-moldova-transnistria/29805114.html>

134 Центр «Нова Європа». (2016). Бетлій О. Аудит зовнішньої політики: Україна-Молдова. Retrieved from http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Audyty-zovnishnoyi-polityky_Ukr_Moldova_ukr_inet.pdf

135 Посольство України у Республіці Молдова. (2020, лютий 24). День рідної мови в українській бібліотеці. Retrieved from <https://moldova.mfa.gov.ua/news/den-ridnoyi-movi-v-ukrayinskij-biblioteci>

The Association of the Ukrainian Youth "Zlagoda" has been operating in Moldova for over 15 years¹³⁶. The Ukrainians.md website is an important media resource that informs Ukrainians in Moldova about the life of the diaspora^(ibid).

7. UKRAINIAN BRANDS

The popularity of Ukrainian products scored 7.9 points out of 10. Experts note the popularity of Ukrainian sweets, including Poroshenko's "Roshen" brand, mineral water, juices produced by "Ecosphere TM", and products for people with diabetes¹³⁷. The "Kvas Taras" beverage (manufactured by Carlsberg Ukraine) is also well known in Moldova and appreciated for its homemade kvass taste¹³⁸. Despite periodic "milk wars" with Ukraine, Moldova remains one of the main importers of Ukrainian cheeses, butter, milk, cream, and sour milk products¹³⁹. There is a demand for Ukrainian cuisine in Moldova, particularly among those who have visited Ukraine and tasted local dishes. In Chisinau, Ukrainian cuisine is not well represented¹⁴⁰.

Moldova is among the top 30 trading partners and top 20 most promising markets for Ukraine¹⁴¹. In 2019, the trade turnover between the two countries amounted to 828 million USD, 9% less than in 2018 (907.4 million USD)¹⁴². Moldova's share in Ukrainian trade is insignificant: 1.5% of Ukraine's exports (-8% compared to 2018) and 0.1% of its imports (-13% compared to 2018), respectively.

Due to the efforts of the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM), the amount of contraband goods moving between Ukraine and Transnistria has been reduced significantly, although it is still too early to declare the cessation of illicit trade complete¹⁴³. In 2018, an investigation into the illegal trade between Ukrainian and Transnistrian companies was published. The top 10 senders of goods, in addition to "Roshen", included Ukrainian offices of such global giants as "Coca-Cola" and "Nestle"¹⁴⁴. The volume of imports of one of the major Transnistrian companies from Ukraine amounted to 40 million USD in 2015, 31 million in 2016, and more than 20 million in 2017^(ibid).

¹³⁶ Голова Асоціації української молоді в Молдові «Злагода» провів робочу поїздку по півночі Республіки.(2020, березень 1). Ukrainians.md. Retrieved from t.ly/M1te

¹³⁷ Natalia Stercul, Programme Director, Department Eastern Studies: Ukraine and Russia, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova, interview dated 25/2/2020

¹³⁸ Городской эксперимент: самый вкусный квас в Молдове. (2016, июнь 27). Locals.md. Retrieved from <https://locals.md/2016/gorodskoy-eksperiment-samyiy-vkusnyiy-kvas-v-kishinyove/>

¹³⁹ R. Moldova rămâne printre principalii consumatori de produse lactate din Ucraina. (2019). Radio Chisinau. Retrieved from <https://radiochisinau.md/r-moldova-ramane-printre-principalii-consumatori-de-produse-lactate-din-ucraina-84575.html>

¹⁴⁰ Rosian Vasiloj, colonel (ret.), Security and military analyst, former Head of the Border Police (Republic of Moldova), interview dated 13/05/2020

¹⁴¹ Україна і Молдова планують довести товарообіг до \$1 мільярда за рік — Гройсман. (2018, листопад 24). Укрінформ. Retrieved from <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ekonomy/2586662-ukraina-i-moldova-planuut-dovesti-tovaroobig-do-1-milarda-za-rik-grojsman.html>

¹⁴² Державна служба статистики України. Географічна структура зовнішньої торгівлі товарами у 2019 році. Retrieved from <http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/>

¹⁴³ European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine. (2019). Annual Report. Retrieved from http://eubam.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/200327_EUBAM-Annual-Report-2019-EN-final-spreads.pdf

¹⁴⁴ Украинские бизнес-партнеры республики Шериф. (2018, февраль 16). Rise.md. Retrieved from t.ly/jSdf

Ukraine remains a popular vacation destination for Moldovans.

Ukraine remains a popular vacation destination for Moldovans¹⁴⁵. Tourists from Moldova frequent primarily the Carpathians in winter¹⁴⁶ and the Odesa region in summer¹⁴⁷. A significant number of tourists travel independently, without using the services of travel agencies. These travelers noted that it was difficult for them to find verified and comprehensive information on the rules of stay in Ukraine, data on tourist routes, conditions of visiting protected areas, etc.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Молдаване устроили туристический бум в Украине. (2018, март 12). ExpertTur. Retrieved from <https://experttur.com/ukraine/201803/moldavane-ustroili-turisticheskij-bum-v-ukraine.html>

¹⁴⁶ Жители Молдовы предпочитают проводить зимний отпуск в Украине, Румынии и Болгарии. (2018, октябрь 27). Point.md. Retrieved from <https://point.md/ru/novosti/obschestvo/zhiteli-moldovy-predpochitaiut-provodit-zimnii-otpusk-v-ukraine-rumynii-i-bolgarii>

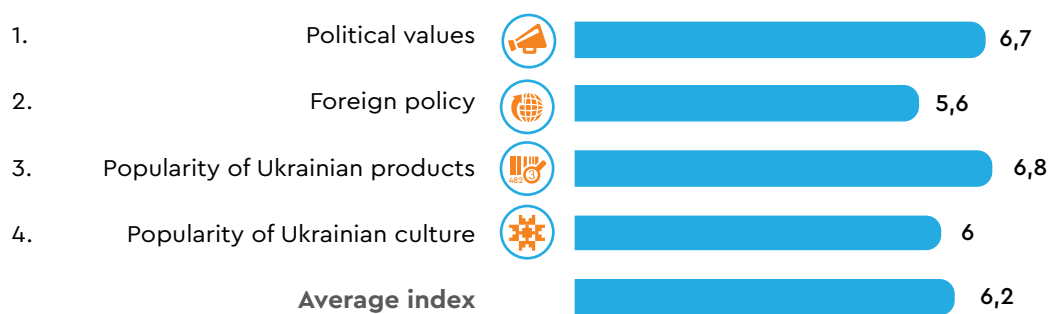
¹⁴⁷ Отдых 2017: молдаване оккупировали Затоку, а украинцы выбирают Турцию. (2017, август 8). Деньги.ua. Retrieved from <https://dengi.ua/budget/1810900-otdyh-2017-moldavane-okkupirovali-zatoku-a-ukraincy-vybirajut-turciju>

¹⁴⁸ Sergiu Gaibu, Programme Director of Expert-Grup, interview dated 14/05/2020

6. UKRAINE'S SOFT POWER IN KAZAKHSTAN: STABILITY-FILTERED

Ukraine's soft power index in **Kazakhstan:**

6,2/10



Perception of Ukraine should be seen in terms of the stability principle that Kazakhstan has adhered to in its policy over the past thirty years. After the Ukrainian Revolution of 2013–2014, Kazakhstani authorities referred to the events in Ukraine as an example of destabilization that should not be followed. Both Russian and pro-Russian media alike contributed to this narrative, and it was widely believed by Kazakhstanis that the predictability of political life in Kazakhstan was better than the chaos of wholesale change in Ukraine.

However, in recent years, Kazakhstan has experienced such challenges to its own stability as growing protest sentiments, increased outmigration and declining welfare of Kazakhstanis. In 2019, the "semi-transition" of power from Nursultan Nazarbayev began to his handpicked successor, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. Against the background of fading stability, protest movements in Kazakhstan have intensified and the demand for democratic societal transformations has grown. The Ukrainian presidential election campaign of 2019 attracted the attention of many Kazakhstanis; it took place in parallel with the presidential election in Kazakhstan and was drastically different from the latter in transparency terms. The Ukrainian elections' unpredictability and the victory of Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a non-systemic politician and actor, were praised by many politically active citizens of Kazakhstan. The Ukrainian elections were perceived as a signal that, despite a certain degree of instability, democratic practices could also lead to progress in country's transformation.

Kazakhstan

1. UKRAINE AFTER THE REVOLUTION: A BAD EXAMPLE AND A THREAT TO STABILITY

According to Freedom House, Kazakhstan is a “non-free”¹ country with a consolidated authoritarian regime². Over almost thirty years of President Nursultan Nazarbayev’s rule, the political process was completely subordinated to the president, who positioned himself as a guarantor of stability and preservation of interethnic and interregional peace in Kazakhstan³. Kazakhstan has also sought to pursue a consistent and predictable foreign policy by adhering to principles of multivectorism⁴.

Since the Maidan protests in 2004, Kazakhstani authorities have often portrayed Ukraine as a problem child of the post-Soviet area.

Since the Maidan protests in 2004, Kazakhstani authorities have often portrayed Ukraine as a problem child of the post-Soviet area⁵. In particular, Kazakhstani political elites spoke negatively about the “color revolutions” in an attempt to discredit civil society in Kazakhstan⁶. Taking into account the Revolution of Dignity, the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of war in Donbas, the events of 2013–2014 in Ukraine were

also mentioned by the Kazakhstani authorities mostly in a negative light, as examples of what could be in store for Kazakhstan in case of its deviation from a stability-focused regime⁷. The Kazakhstani authorities have used the case of the “Ukrainian crisis” to warn citizens against any attempt to destabilize the political situation in Kazakhstan, by pointing out, in particular, that protests could make the country vulnerable to Russia’s irredentist ambitions. The threat of Russian destabilization was clear to the people of Kazakhstan, home to 3.5 million Russians⁸. Since the annexation of Crimea, Russian politicians, including Vladimir Putin, have repeatedly made statements questioning Kazakhstan’s statehood and alluded to a “return” of Kazakhstan’s northern regions to Russia⁹.

The perception of Ukraine as a country suffering from permanent instability was also facilitated by Russian media, which cover about 90 percent of the

1 Freedom House. Freedom in the World 2020. Kazakhstan. Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kazakhstan/freedom-world/2020>

2 Freedom House. Nations in transit 2018. Kazakhstan. Retrieved from <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b3cc288a.html>

3 Декларация 25-летия Независимости Республики Казахстан. (2016, ноябрь 25). Информбюро. Режим доступа <https://informburo.kz/stati/deklaraciya-25-letiya-nezavisimosti-respubliki-kazahstan-.html>

4 Волков, В. (2018, июнь 15). Грозит ли Астане охлаждение отношений с Москвой? Deutsche Welle. Режим доступа <http://tiny.cc/hbz6kz>

5 Interview with a Kazakhstani political analyst, on confidentiality terms (27/2/2020)

6 Лиллис, Д. (2019). Политические и гражданские свободы и права человека. Доклад Chatham House. Казахстан: испытание «транзитом власти». Бор, А., Брауэр, Б., Гулд-Дэвис, Н., Касенова, Н., Лиллис, Д., Маллинсон, К., Никси, Д. и Сатпаев, Д. Режим доступа <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/CHNJ8054-RUSSIAN-Kazakhstan-Report-FINAL.pdf>

7 Назарбаев о Крыме, об Украине. (2014, март 25). Alex St. Режим доступа <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgKVNAAD6oA>

8 Трубачева, Т. (2019, июль 14). Как изменилась численность представителей разных этносов в Казахстане. Forbes Kazakhstan. Режим доступа https://forbes.kz/process/otlichitelnyie_chertyi_1562921245/

9 Троценко, П. (2019, апрель 3). Досым Сатпаев: «Внешняя политика Казахстана по отношению к России будет иметь инерционный характер». Радио Азаттык. Режим доступа <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/kazakhstan-almaty-politolog-docum-satpaev-o-predskazuemosti-politiki-tokaeva/29858151.html>

information space in Kazakhstan¹⁰, while a majority of urban Kazakhstanis and a major share of the rural population primarily speak Russian¹¹. With the beginning of the Revolution in Ukraine, Russian propaganda, focused both domestically and abroad, intensified its work portraying Ukraine as a failed state¹², in part to suppress the appetite for popular protest and prevent the “destabilizing” toppling of authoritarian regimes in other former Soviet Union countries. Many Kazakhstani publications repeat uncritically the rhetoric of local authorities while independent media are increasingly shuttering. Only online space can be called relatively free — the authorities are willing to tolerate discussions on the internet, although freedom of speech is not universal and individuals can — and do — face prosecution for statements made online¹³. According to 2016 data, 23 percent of Kazakhstanis considered Ukraine to be the least friendly country in the world to Kazakhstan (for comparison: 24 percent of Kazakhstani respondents considered the United States unfriendly, and 22 percent voiced similar concerns about China)¹⁴.

Many individuals critical of both the Kazakhstan government's rhetoric and Russian media formed a different view of Ukraine after 2014¹⁵. Access to alternative (often foreign) media outlets as well as private and business contacts have contributed to a better understanding and an improved perception of events in Ukraine. This part of the Kazakhstani population tended to approve of the changes that have taken place in Ukraine since the overthrow of the Yanukovich regime^(ibid). Although the Kazakhstani public may not be entirely aware of the details of democratic reforms in Ukraine, there was a general understanding that Ukraine was undergoing a serious transformation process: “The Ukrainian experience is valuable for the entire post-Soviet space. It is important for us that Ukraine make progress in democratic processes. Then, its success will set an example for all of us.”¹⁶

“The Ukrainian experience is valuable for the entire post-Soviet space. It is important for us that Ukraine make progress in democratic processes. Then, its success will set an example for all of us.”

Nonetheless, along with the impression that reforms in Ukraine were ongoing, Kazakhstanis also witnessed a “devaluation of expectations” among Ukrainians as well as their disappointment that a revolution had not yet led to desired

¹⁰ Кириллова, К. (2018, сентябрь 9). Казахстанские СМИ повторяют российскую пропаганду — оппозиционный журналист. Крым. Реалии (Радио Свобода). Режим доступа <https://ru.krymr.com/a/kirillova-kazakhstanskie-smi-povtoryayut-rossiyskuuyu-propagandu/29479967.html>

¹¹ Панфилов, О. (2014, вересень 3). Назарбаев і «русский мир». Радіо Свобода. Режим доступу <https://ua.krymr.com/a/26564595.html>

¹² Троценко, П. (2018, ноябрь 21). Уроки украинского: Евромайдан и казахстанское общество. Радио Азаттык. Режим доступа <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/ukraine-euromaidan-2014-kazakhstan/29612134.html>

¹³ Лиллис, Д. (2019). Политические и гражданские свободы и права человека. Доклад Chatham House. Казахстан: испытание «транзитом власти». Бор, А., Брауэр, Б., Гулд-Дэвис, Н., Касенова, Н., Лиллис, Д., Маллинсон, К., Никси, Д. и Сатпаев, Д. Режим доступа <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/CHNJ8054-RUSSIAN-Kazakhstan-Report-FINAL.pdf>

¹⁴ Евразийский банк развития. (2016). Интеграционный барометр ЕАБР-2016. Режим доступа https://eabr.org/upload/iblock/083/edb_centre_2016_report_40_1_edb_integration_barometer_rus.pdf

¹⁵ Казахский политолог: «В Украине решается судьба не только ее самой, но и всего постсоветского мира». (2014, ноябрь 26). УНИАН. Режим доступа <https://www.unian.net/politics/1014258-kazahskiy-politolog-v-ukraine-reshaetsya-sudba-ne-tolko-ee-samoy-no-i-vsogo-postsovetskogo-mira.html>

¹⁶ Interview with a Kazakhstani political analyst, on confidentiality terms (27/2/2020)

transformations¹⁷. Even among the liberal audience, Ukraine's perception as a corrupt country prevailed, an image formed through personal contacts with Ukrainian border guards, interactions with authorities influencing business processes in Ukraine, and through private communication while visiting Ukraine, etc¹⁸.

The Ukrainian revolution brought to prominence Ukraine's foreign policy. Kazakhstan's expert community largely supported the European integration aspirations of Ukrainian society, seeing them as a form of opposition to Russia's imperialist encroachment. Maidan was perceived as a farewell of the Ukrainian state to the "family of [post-Soviet] fraternal peoples." (ibid). This foreign policy motion was welcomed not only by analysts but also by a wider audience¹⁹. Some consumers of Russian media content in Kazakhstan have condemned Ukraine's policy of joining the EU and later NATO, believing the choice to be imposed on Ukraine by Western countries.

2. UKRAINIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS OF 2019: UKRAINE AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE POTENTIAL FOR CHANGE

From 2014 to 2019, Kazakhstan underwent several momentous changes shaking somewhat the country's stability. Mass unauthorized protests against land sales took place²⁰, the country faced a new wave of emigration²¹, while general living standards decreased²². The "semi-transition" of power from Nursultan Nazarbayev to his successor Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, which began on March 19, 2019, also gave impetus to the "transition of consciousness"²³ and the public's growing demand for democratic change²⁴.

The Ukrainian presidential campaign sparked a wave of debate about the development of democracy in Ukraine.

The presidential elections held in Kazakhstan on June 9, 2019 were not inclusive, and the outcome of the race was known in advance. In comparison to Kazakhstan's less than free election, Ukraine held a more transparent presidential campaign. Public activists and opposition

17 Троценко, П. (2018, ноябрь 21). Уроки украинского: Евромайдан и казахстанское общество. Радио Азаттык. Режим доступа <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/ukraine-euromaidan-2014-kazakhstan/29612134.html>

18 Meruert Makhmutova, Director, Public Policy Research Center, interview dated 24/2/2020

19 Gaziz Abishev, Political observer, interview dated 24/2/2020

20 Kazakhstan's land reform protests explained. (2016, April 28). BBC. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36163103>

21 Ергалиев, Г. (2018, сентябрь 6). «Все идет к тому, что Казахстан из многонациональной страны превратится в мононациональную». Zona KZ. Режим доступа <https://zonakz.net/2018/09/06/vse-idet-k-tomu-chto-kazakhstan-iz-mnogonacionalnoj-strany-prevratitsya-v-mononacionalnyuy/>

22 Земельный бунт и революция в Казахстане: сколько продержится Назарбаев. (2016, май 25). News 24 Online. Режим доступа <https://newsonline24.com.ua/zemelnyj-bunt-i-revolyuciya-v-kazaxstane-skolko-proderzhitsya-nazarbaev/>

23 Год полутранзита. Казахстан-2019 глазами Досыма Сатпаева. (2019, декабрь 25). Forbes Kazakhstan. Режим доступа https://forbes.kz/process/expertise/god_polutranzita_kazakhstan-2019_glazami_dosyima_satpaeva/

24 Стабільність vs зміни. Чому перша за 30 років зміна президента в Казахстані спровокувала протести. (2019, червень 15). НВ. Режим доступу <https://nv.ua/ukr/world/countries/stabilnist-vs-zmini-chomu-persha-za-30-rokiv-zmina-prezidenta-v-kazhstani-sprovokovala-protesti-50026908.html>

figures in Kazakhstan closely monitored its pace.²⁵ These elections helped draw the attention of Kazakhstan's civil society to a broader range of issues — the Ukrainian electoral process and competition among candidates, sparking a wave of debate about the development of democracy in Ukraine. The extraordinary nature of Volodymyr Zelenskyy's campaign also piqued the interest of a broader Kazakhstani audience in the Ukrainian presidential elections²⁶.

The Ukrainian election campaign was viewed by Kazakhstani activists and the opposition as an extraordinary event of real significance for the political process in Ukraine²⁷. "For many in Kazakhstan, it was a sign that something was changing in Ukraine."²⁸ The transparency of the election process, its lively debate and the opportunity for a political neophyte to run contrasted with the election of Tokayev in Kazakhstan and bolstered Ukraine's image as a state demonstrating democratic progress. Unlike Ukraine, in Kazakhstan a pre-requisite for presidential candidates is to have worked in government or elected positions for at least five years. The victory of Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a Russian-speaking Ukrainian of Jewish descent who was elected in the second round by an overwhelming majority of Ukrainian citizens, also helped soften the impact of Russian propaganda in Kazakhstan and complicate its portrayal of Ukraine as a hotbed of radicals and nationalists.

The Zelenskyy "factor" or "phenomenon" is often discussed in media in various contexts^{29,30,31}. According to a survey of experts, in Kazakhstan this "phenomenon" can be explained through two recurrently overlapping aspects — the creative (campaign framework) and democratic (a non-systemic politician elected by the majority in free elections) dimensions.

The framework of Zelenskyy's campaign drew a special interest and attention among young Kazakhstani activists, coming away with several lessons³². First, that young people do not prioritize political stability as an issue, and given the choice between wide-scale change and living with stability, can show more openness to change than their parents' generation. Second, Zelenskyy used up-to-date communication methods by reaching his electorate through social media³³. Commenting on Zelenskyy's campaign, each of the six Kazakhstani experts interviewed noted that he was "young" — both in comparison with Kazakhstani presidents and in general in his style of behavior.

25 Мамашулы, А. (2019, апрель 3). Зеленский заставил восторжениться казахстанских активистов? Радио Азаттык. Режим доступа <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/kazakhstan-zelenskiy-zastavil-vstrepenutsya-kazakhstanskikh-aktivistov/29858284.html>

26 Aigul Zharylgassova, former Advocacy Manager, People in Need, interview dated 29/2/2020

27 Мамашулы, А. (2019, апрель 3). Зеленский заставил восторжениться казахстанских активистов? Радио Азаттык. Режим доступа <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/kazakhstan-zelenskiy-zastavil-vstrepenutsya-kazakhstanskikh-aktivistov/29858284.html>

28 Interview with a Kazakhstani journalist, on confidentiality terms (2/3/2020)

29 Ржеутская, Л. (2019, апрель 2). Феномен Зеленского: шоумен объединил Украину? Deutsche Welle. Режим доступа <http://tiny.cc/bd9jlz>

30 The Zelensky phenomenon. (2019, July 31). Eurozine. Retrieved from <https://www.eurozine.com/the-zelensky-phenomenon/>

31 Carnegie Moscow centre. (2019, January 28). Skorkin, K. How a comedian will change Ukraine's election. Retrieved from <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/78218>

32 Aigerim Seitenova, Head of Programmes, PF Wings of Liberty, interview dated 4/3/2020

33 Дорош, С. (2019, квітень 11). «Чорне Зе!» Чому і як перемагають технології на виборах-2019. BBC. Режим доступу <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-47851688>

In Kazakhstan, the "Zelenskyy phenomenon" gained special popularity amid a surge of domestic protest sentiment, which was also supported by a part of Kazakhstani youth.

Zelenskyy's campaign is an example of a successful use of social networks for modern day presidential campaigns^(ibid), so Kazakhstani activists likely saw in him

the embodiment of modernity that their own local politicians lack³⁴. In Kazakhstan, the "Zelenskyy phenomenon" gained special popularity amid a surge of domestic protest sentiment, which was also supported by a part of Kazakhstani youth³⁵. Despite the fact that a majority of young people in Kazakhstan can be considered as politically indifferent³⁶, the survey shows that a large share — 60% — of Kazakhstan's young generation would like to influence the development of their country³⁷.

Young Kazakhstani activists probably turned out to be receptive to Zelenskyy's communication also because, "in education Kazakhstan set a course for westernization in 1993 already."³⁸ In this year, the state introduced the Bolashak Program designed to promote education in Western universities, which has awarded over 13,000 scholarships to Kazakhstani students already³⁹. In addition, young people tend to travel internationally more, and may be involved in various international projects and educational programs, some of which are implemented in Ukraine⁴⁰.

The Ukrainian presidential campaign also drew the attention of Kazakhstanis who usually follow politics and seek to obtain information from various sources. For such residents of Kazakhstan, Facebook is an important platform for communication⁴¹; they hold mostly positive discussion around Zelenskyy's campaign and expressed a desire to bring in a new class of political elites based on the Ukrainian model⁴². The reference to the "Ukrainian experience" was a disguised form of condemnation of the Kazakhstani establishment, which is not always safe to criticize openly⁴³.

In contrast to politically active Kazakhstanis, a majority of Kazakhstan's population did not pay much attention to the election campaign in Ukraine. This can be attributed to the fact that an overwhelming majority of Kazakhstanis are disinterested in politics all together, as they do not believe the political process

34 Стабільність vs зміни. Чому перша за 30 років зміна президента в Казахстані спровокувала протести. (2019, червень 15). НВ. Режим доступу <https://nv.ua/ukr/world/countries/stabilnist-vs-zmini-chomu-persha-za-30-rokiv-zmina-prezidenta-v-kazahstani-sprovokovala-protesti-50026908.html>

35 Досым Сатпаев. Поствыборные тезисы. (2019, июнь 11). Forbes Kazakhstan. Режим доступа https://forbes.kz/life/opinion/dosyim_satpaev_postvyibornyie_tezisy/

36 Meruert Makhmutova, Director, Public Policy Research Center, interview dated 24/2/2020

37 Ebert Foundation Kazakhstan. (2016). Umbetaliyeva, T., Rakisheva, B., & Teschendorf, P. Youth in Central Asia: Kazakhstan. Almaty. (pp.137-138; p. 147). Retrieved from <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/kasachstan/13343.pdf>

38 Gaziz Abishev, Political observer, interview dated 24/2/2020

39 Omirgazy, D. (2018, April 27). Kazakhstan's Bolashak Programme has awarded 12,831 scholarships in 25 years. The Astana Times. Retrieved from <https://astanatimes.com/2018/04/kazahstans-bolashak-programme-has-awarded-12831-scholarships-in-25-years/>

40 Global Campus of Human Rights. Retrieved from <https://gchumanrights.org/about-us/venues/caucasus.html>

41 Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting. (2019, июнь 7). Султан, А. О чем говорят протестные настроения в Казахстане? Режим доступа <https://cabar.asia/ru/o-chem-govoryat-protestnye-nastroeniya-v-kazahstane/>

42 Мамашулы, А. (2019, апрель 3). Зеленский заставил встрепетаться казахстанских активистов? Радио Азаттык. Режим доступа <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/kazahstan-zelenskiy-zastavil-vstrepenutsya-kazahstanskikh-aktivistov/29858284.html>

43 Урналиев, С. (2019, март 19). Подавление активности ради «стабильности»? Радио Азаттык. Режим доступа <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/citizen-activism-in-kazahstan/29827916.html>

can have an impact on the life in the country⁴⁴. When asked "why don't you want to get involved in politics?" 58 percent of Kazakhstanis in 2017 responded that politics should be left to politicians^(ibid). Therefore, it is unlikely that the apolitical population sought and compared information about Ukrainian elections in the international media. More likely, a significant part of this audience found itself under the influence of the Russian media, which portrayed Zelenskyy in a rather understated tone. Attitudes toward him were neutral rather than overtly negative. Specifically, Kazakhstan's Russian media franchises portrayed Zelenskyy as a less radical alternative to Petro Poroshenko and expected him to pursue a more moderate foreign policy⁴⁵.

The reference to the "Ukrainian experience" was a disguised form of condemnation of the Kazakh-stani establishment, which is not always safe to criticize openly.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy's foreign policy program was predominantly perceived by respondents as a continuation of Ukraine's course towards integration into the EU and NATO. Kazakhstani experts saw this landmark as irreversible, as there was a feeling that the new Ukrainian leadership also supported the integration process and would develop relations with other countries in the way the previous administration did⁴⁶. Continuity in foreign policy strategy was expected with the possibility of changes only in the tactics of the new government⁴⁷. Regarding Russian relations, some Kazakhstani experts have been skeptical about Zelenskyy's ability to confront Putin and the arsenal of propaganda technologies possessed by Russian politicians⁴⁸.

Zelenskyy's efforts to resolve the conflict in Donbas were not sufficiently covered in the Kazakhstani media, however. In general, the Ukrainian presidential election sparked the interest of the civil society of Kazakhstan more for the openness of the election process than the content of the candidates' political programs, though many agreed the fight against corruption would feature prominently. According to Kazakhstani experts⁴⁹, Ukrainian corruption continues to be perceived as endemic, and hopes have been laid that the new Ukrainian government will be able to reduce it.

Kazakhstan's civil society was not as active monitoring elections to the Verkhovna Rada. First, due to the fact that the Ukrainian and Kazakhstani presidential campaigns took place almost simultaneously and allowed parallels between these elections to be drawn in real time, while elections to the Kazakhstani parliament are scheduled to be held only in 2021. Second, the election to the Verkhovna Rada was not as exciting and entertaining as the presidential race, and, therefore, the Kazakhstani media paid less attention to it than to the presidential elections. However, several local media outlets covered the process of remaking the composition of the Ukrainian parliament⁵⁰ by noting that the popularity of "The

⁴⁴ Казахстанцы и политика: жизнь в параллельных вселенных. (2017, май 4). Forbes Kazakhstan. Режим доступа https://forbes.kz/stats/kazahstantsyi_i_politika_jizn_v_parallelnyih_vselennyih/

⁴⁵ Стешин, Д. (2019, апрель 24). Почему украинцы проголосовали за Зеленского. Комсомольская Правда в Казахстане. Режим доступа <https://www.kp.kz/daily/26971.3/4025816/>

⁴⁶ Interview with a Kazakhstani political analyst, on confidentiality terms (27/2/2020)

⁴⁷ Кушкумбаев, С. (2019, май 6). Куда Зеленский поведет Украину: взгляд из Казахстана. Евразия Эксперт. Режим доступа <https://eurasia.expert/kuda-zelenskiy-povedet-ukrainu-vzglyad-iz-kazakhstana/>

⁴⁸ Gaziz Abishev, Political observer, interview dated 24/2/2020

⁴⁹ Interview with a Kazakhstani journalist, on confidentiality terms (2/3/2020)

⁵⁰ В Украине проходят выборы в Раду. Почему это важно. (2019, июль 21). Forbes Kazakhstan. Режим доступа https://forbes.kz/news/2019/07/21/newsid_204118

Servant of the People" (Sluha Narodu, SN) could be explained by the same factors that helped Zelenskyy become president — namely the desire of Ukrainians to restart their political system⁵¹. Kazakhstani media also covered the participation of new political forces in the election, including the "The Voice" (Holos), the greater political diversity, and the fact that citizens had the opportunity to influence candidate selection on the SN electoral list⁵². Kazakhstani experts praised the fact that the incumbent government did not set insurmountable obstacles for its political rivals, despite having the means to do so⁵³.

3. A REPETITION OF THE UKRAINIAN EXPERIENCE?

The 2019 Ukrainian presidential election coincided with the strengthening of opposition and protest sentiment in Kazakhstan, which took place against the backdrop of a change in Kazakhstani leadership⁵⁴. Of 100 videos searchable on Youtube containing the words "Zelenskyy Kazakhstan," ten videos are devoted to discussing the possibility of repeating the Ukrainian experience in Kazakhstan. The titles of some videos speak for themselves: "Tokayev vs Zelenskyy. New Year's greetings. Comparison. Feel the Difference,"⁵⁵ "Can Kazakhstan Have Its Own Zelenskyy?,"⁵⁶ "Nazarbayev Has Gone: Should Kazakhstan Wait for Its Own Zelenskyy?,"⁵⁷ etc.

Of 100 videos searchable on Youtube containing the words "Zelenskyy Kazakhstan," ten videos are devoted to discussing the possibility of repeating the Ukrainian experience in Kazakhstan.

The Ukrainian example has given Kazakhstani activists and the political opposition the hope that the elections could take place with more vigorous popular participation as well as the involvement of new politicians. During the presidential election in Kazakhstan, the program and slogan of the main opposition leader Amirzhan Kosanov repeated the style and rhetoric of Volodymyr Zelenskyy's campaign⁵⁸. For Kazakhstanis who, since 2014, sympathize with Ukraine, the 2019 presidential election became a success story of Ukrainian democracy. Encouraging

following the example of Ukraine, the political scientist Dosym Satpayev wrote that, "despite all the political storms and risks, the same Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Armenia or Georgia are already head and shoulders above us in terms of political

51 «Слуга народа» лидирует на парламентских выборах в Украине. (2019, июль 22). 24.kz. Режим доступа <https://24.kz/ru/news/in-the-world/item/329772-sluga-naroda-lidiruet-na-parlamentskikh-vyborakh-v-ukraine>

52 Нурланова, Ж. (2019, июль 18). Тамара и лидер «Океана Эльзы»: кто хочет стать депутатом Рады в Украине. Tengrinews. Режим доступа <https://tengrinews.kz/article/tamada-lider-okeana-elzyi-hochet-stat-deputatom-radyi-1231/>

53 Тогузбаев, К. (2019, апрель 22). Усе можливо? Взгляд из Казахстана на выборы в Украине. Радио Азаттык. Режим доступа <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/kazakhstan-ukraine-election-zelenskiy-poroshenko/29896772.html>

54 Лиллис, Д. (2019). Политические и гражданские свободы и права человека. Доклад Chatham House. Казахстан: испытание «транзитом власти». Бор, А., Брауэр, Б., Гулд-Дэвис, Н., Касенова, Н., Лиллис, Д., Маллинсон, К., Никси, Д. и Сатпаев, Д. Режим доступа <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/CHHJ8054-RUSSIAN-Kazakhstan-Report-FINAL.pdf>

55 Токаев VS Зеленский. Новогоднее Поздравление. Сравнение. Почувствуй Разницу. (2020, январь 1). Бай Мемлекет. Режим доступа <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dhMdPJrefY>

56 Может ли в Казахстане появиться свой Зеленский? (2019, апрель 1). За нами уже выехали. Режим доступа <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMuK8B19XqU>

57 Уход Назарбаева: ждать ли Казахстану своего Зеленского? (2019, апрель 23). BBC. Режим доступа https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4HO_18ezHA

58 Лукаш, И. (2019, июнь 12). Что происходит в Казахстане и при чем тут Зеленский. Главред. Режим доступа <https://glavred.info/opinions/10076639-cto-proishodit-v-kazahstane-i-pri-chem-tut-zelenskiy.html>

development because they are still trying to move forward all the way up their bumpy roads."⁵⁹ In the expert community, the Ukrainian election was often perceived as a wake-up call for Kazakhstanis to liberalize their political life⁶⁰.

Less upbeat assessments also exist. Though investing a great deal of effort to democratize Kazakhstan, liberal-minded citizens often understand that the changes that have taken place in Ukraine are unlikely in an "Asian country where people will always yearn for a strong hand."⁶¹ At the same time, politically active Kazakhstanis sometimes view Ukraine as one of the countries they would like to live in⁶², due to common history, the opportunity to communicate in Russian and the feeling that Ukraine is a relatively free country⁶³. Some Kazakhstani opposition members have moved to Ukraine due to harassment by local authorities, and in their new home they sometimes face difficulties in obtaining political refugee status⁶⁴. When asked why he opted for Ukraine, Ermek Narymbai, an opposition figure, replied: "The entire [Kazakhstani] opposition has been fighting for Ukraine for the last three or four years. We have defended you, we have suffered, we have rooted for you." (ibid)

The Ukrainian election was often perceived as a wake-up call for Kazakhstanis to liberalize their political life.

4. PERCEPTION OF UKRAINE THROUGH CULTURE

At the outset of the presidential campaign, many Kazakhstanis who followed the Ukrainian election mostly saw Volodymyr Zelenskyy as an artist and a showman⁶⁵. "Donald Trump's victory has already prepared the minds of Kazakhstanis for the emergence of such a politician in the post-Soviet area."⁶⁶ Kazakhstanis who knew Zelenskyy thanks to his work on television and in film industry treated him with interest and humor. "Irony has become the foundation of love for Zelenskyy," as noted in the video channel "Za nami uzhe vyyekhali" (En Route to Grab Us)⁶⁷. Zelenskyy was included in the list of personalities who "surprised Kazakhstan" in 2019⁶⁸. After Zelensky took office, many Kazakhstanis were no longer seeing him

⁵⁹ Мамашулы, А. (2019, апрель 3). Зеленский заставил встать на ноги казахстанских активистов? Радио Азаттык. Режим доступа <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/kazakhstan-zelenskiy-zastavil-vstrepenutsya-kazakhstanskikh-aktivistov/29858284.html>

⁶⁰ Тогузбаев, К. (2019, апрель 22). Все возможно? Взгляд из Казахстана на выборы в Украине. Радио Азаттык. Режим доступа <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/kazakhstan-ukraine-election-zelenskiy-poroshenko/29896772.html>

⁶¹ Interview with a Kazakhstani journalist, on confidentiality terms (2/3/2020)

⁶² Ергалиев, Г. (2018, сентябрь 6). «Все идет к тому, что Казахстан из многонациональной страны превратится в мононациональную». Zona KZ. Режим доступа <https://zonakz.net/2018/09/06/vse-idet-k-tomu-cto-kazakhstan-iz-mnogonacionalnoj-strany-prevratitsya-v-mononacionalnyu/>

⁶³ Interview with a Kazakhstani journalist, on confidentiality terms (2/3/2020)

⁶⁴ Ромалийская, И., Денисенко, Л. (2017, март 10). Казахстанским оппозиционерам не дают политическое убежище в Украине. Громадське радіо. Режим доступа <https://hromadske.radio/ru/podcasts/kyiv-donbas/kazhstanskim-opozicioneram-ne-dayut-politicheskoe-ubezhishche-v-ukraine>

⁶⁵ Фатьянова, У. (2019, декабрь 30). Назарбаев, Дорн и Зеленский. Люди, которые удивили нас в 2019 году. ИнформБюро. Режим доступа <https://informburo.kz/stati/nazarbaev-dorn-i-zelenskiy-lyudi-kotorye-udivili-nas-v-2019-godu.html>

⁶⁶ Gaziz Abishev, Political observer, interview dated 24/2/2020

⁶⁷ Может ли в Казахстане появиться свой Зеленский? (2019, апрель 1). За нами уже выехали. Режим доступа <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMиK8B19XqU>

⁶⁸ Фатьянова, У. (2019, декабрь 30). Назарбаев, Дорн и Зеленский. Люди, которые удивили нас в 2019 году. ИнформБюро. Режим доступа <https://informburo.kz/stati/nazarbaev-dorn-i-zelenskiy-lyudi-kotorye-udivili-nas-v-2019-godu.html>

exclusively as a performer⁶⁹. Winning the election gave him political clout, but perceptions of the Ukrainian president as primarily a performer is still widespread.

In Kazakhstan, Ukraine is already widely perceived as a creative nation, and the modern methods of communication of Volodymyr Zelenskyy were able to strengthen this image of a "creative Ukraine."

In Kazakhstan, Ukraine is already widely perceived as a creative nation, and the modern methods of communication of Volodymyr Zelenskyy were able to strengthen this image of a "creative Ukraine."⁷⁰ The Ukrainian president's New Year's address drew the attention of many Kazakhstanis who shared and discussed the video on social networks, noting its quality and emotion⁷¹.

Many in Kazakhstan were familiar with Zelenskyy as an actor as the TV series "The Servant of the People" was broadcast on a Kazakhstani TV channel. Local media also mentioned that in an episode of "Kvartal 95", Volodymyr Zelenskyy made fun of Kazakhstan Senator Byrganym Aitimova by comparing her speech with Kyiv mayor, champion boxer, Vitalii Klitschko's style of communication⁷². Kazakhstani media also covered the fact that Kazakhstanis were working in the election headquarters of the future president of Ukraine: "According to the candidate [Zelenskyy], creative youth, including comedians from Russia and Kazakhstan, are reaching out to Ukraine."^(ibid) It is noteworthy that pro-Russian media described Zelenskyy as a "comedian and Russian-Ukrainian businessman,"⁷³ as if trying to attribute part of Ukraine's soft power to Russia.

According to quantitative surveys conducted in this study, the perception of Ukrainian mass culture in Kazakhstan is quite highly rated by experts, earning seven points out of ten. Cultural products from Ukraine, especially music, enter the Kazakhstani market and become popular if they are in Russian (for example, Ivan Dorn, Monatik, Potap and Nastia Kamenskykh)⁷⁴. At the same time, the show "The Voice of the Country" (Holos krainy), in which several Kazakhstani performers have appeared, has become very popular in Kazakhstan. One of Kazakhstani singers performed a song by the band "Hardkiss" in Ukrainian during the competition⁷⁵. The video with her song garnered 4.5 million views and hit Youtube trends. "We have a lot of people watching this show in Kazakhstan."^(ibid) The songs of Ukrainian-singing band "Okean Elzy" are also quite popular⁷⁶.

In 2018, a Ukrainian-Kazakhstani horror film "Qarakoz" was released, contributing to broader Ukrainian cultural awareness.⁷⁷

⁶⁹ Interview with a Kazakhstani political analyst, on confidentiality terms (27/2/2020)

⁷⁰ Aigul Zharylgassova, former Advocacy Manager, People in Need, interview dated 29/2/2020

⁷¹ Токаев VS Зеленский. Новогоднее Поздравление. Сравнение. Почувствуй Разницу. (2020, январь 1). Бай Мемлекет. Режим доступа <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dhMdPJrefY>

⁷² Исаев, А. (2019, март 15). Украину возглавит комик Владимир Зеленский? Экспресс К. Режим доступа https://express-k.kz/news/politekonomiya/ukrainu_vozglavit_komik_vladimir_zelenskiy-138260

⁷³ Филимонова, А. (2019, март 30). Выборы на Украине может выиграть шоумен Зеленский. Уральская неделя. Режим доступа <https://www.urskweek.kz/2019/03/30/vybory-v-ukraine-mozhet-vyigrat-shoumen-zelenskij/>

⁷⁴ Interview with a representative of Ukrainian- Kazakhstani creative agency, on confidentiality terms (13/5/2020)

⁷⁵ Индира Едильбаева — «Мелодія» — выбор вслепую — Голос страны 10 сезон. (2020, лютый 2). 1+1. Режим доступу <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B9zYj24ZAm0&feature=share>

⁷⁶ Interview with a Kazakhstani expert in tourism, on confidentiality terms (13/5/2020)

⁷⁷ Страшные истории для рассказа у костра. Yocity. Режим доступа <https://yocity12.com/afisha/kino/strashnye-istorii-dlya-rasskaza-u-kostra/>

Local attitudes toward Taras Shevchenko are also of interest. During his ten-year exile on the Mangyshlak peninsula in Kazakhstan, the Ukrainian poet spent a lot of time with many locals and dedicated many paintings and drawings to them⁷⁸. After his release, legends spread about the descendants he was alleged to have left in Kazakhstan⁷⁹. When the city of Aktau was renamed after Shevchenko in 1964, it was speculated that one of the poet's distant relatives had initiated the renaming⁸⁰. The city's name reverted back to Aktau in 1991. "Akin Tarazi"⁸¹ (Kazakhstani for "poet Taras") is still respected, and some Kazakhstanis consider Shevchenko part of their culture⁸².

5. PERCEPTION OF THE PERFORMANCE OF THE UKRAINIAN AUTHORITIES

The Zelenskyy "phenomenon" generated a great deal of buzz on the internet in Kazakhstan, but coverage of his presidency has not garnered as much popularity. Some experts believe this can be explained by a lack of Russian-language news from Ukraine covering Ukrainian politics⁸³. During the electoral campaign, Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Russian-language messages were widely shared across Kazakhstan's digital and social media, in effect offering an alternative to Russian propaganda and the ability to present another version of events in Ukraine. After assuming the presidency, Zelenskyy, who used both Russian and Ukrainian during the campaign, switched to the official Ukrainian. Some experts argue that after Zelenskyy's Russian-language messages disappeared from Kazakhstan's information space, their void was filled once again by Russian propaganda, which portrayed Ukraine in a way that was beneficial to Russia.

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Analysis of 22 links to Kazakhstani media searchable in Google by entries "Zelenskyy Kazakhstan" from March to August 2019 shows that during the simultaneous election campaigns in Ukraine and Kazakhstan, Kazakhstan's media mostly analyzed the possible impact of the "Zelenskyy phenomenon" on Kazakhstan⁸⁴, how bilateral relations could change⁸⁵ and whether a political outsider could ever rise to power in Kazakhstan⁸⁶. A similar number of search

⁷⁸ Дорошенко, Е. (2017, январь 25). Об истории актауских памятников Тарасу Шевченко и Владимиру Ленину. Тумба.kz. Режим доступа https://tumba.kz/vse-o-mangistau/57-vse-o-mangistau/23051-pamyatniki_leninu_i_shevchenko.html

⁷⁹ Interview with a Kazakhstani expert in tourism, on confidentiality terms (13/5/2020)

⁸⁰ Дорошенко, Е. (2017, январь 25). Об истории актауских памятников Тарасу Шевченко и Владимиру Ленину. Тумба.kz. Режим доступа https://tumba.kz/vse-o-mangistau/57-vse-o-mangistau/23051-pamyatniki_leninu_i_shevchenko.html

⁸¹ «Акын-Тарази» — «поэт Тарас». (2017, апрель 15). Qazaqstan tarihy. Режим доступа <https://e-history.kz/ru/publications/view/3036>

⁸² Interview with a Kazakhstani expert in tourism, on confidentiality terms (13/5/2020)

⁸³ Interview with a Kazakhstani political analyst, on confidentiality terms (27/2/2020)

⁸⁴ Мамашулы, А. (2019, апрель 3). Зеленский заставил встать на сторону казахстанских активистов? Радио Азаттык. Режим доступа <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/kazakhstan-zelenskiy-zastavil-vstrepenutsya-kazakhstanskikh-aktivistov/29858284.html>

⁸⁵ «Украина устремлена в Европу»: изменятся ли отношения Казахстана и Украины при президентстве Зеленского. (2019, апрель 23). Караван. Режим доступа <https://www.caravan.kz/news/ukraina-ustremlena-v-evropu-izmenyatsya-li-otnosheniya-kazakhstana-i-ukrainy-pri-prezidentstve-zelenskogo-535494/>

⁸⁶ Аскар, А. (2019, апрель 9). Может ли в Казахстане появиться свой Владимир Зеленский? Капитал. Режим доступа <https://kapital.kz/gosudarstvo/77335/mozhet-li-v-kazakhstane-poyavit-sya-svoy-vladimir-zelenskiy.html>

results over the next six months, September 2019 to March 2020, reveal that after the first months of his tenure, Kazakhstani media primarily covered President Tokayev and Zelenskyy's meetings, the Ukrainian president's participation in the Normandy Four talks, and Nursultan Nazarbayev's proposal to transfer negotiations on the settlement of the conflict in Donbas to Kazakhstan, etc. After Volodymyr Zelenskyy's election victory, Kazakhstani journalists shifted coverage of Ukraine mainly toward foreign policy and paid little attention to specific reforms of the new government.

A year after the election of Zelenskyy, Ukraine is viewed by many residents of Kazakhstan as a country that remains committed to its Europeanization process⁸⁷. Kazakhstanis view Ukraine's definitive course towards integration into both the EU and NATO as understandable, given that in 2014 the Ukrainian people made their choice; as such, politicians must heed this decision⁸⁸. Kazakhstani media also covered the possible impeachment of Donald Trump, while sometimes noting the difficult situation in which Zelenskyy found himself and the likelihood he would seek to maintain neutrality and protect Ukraine's interests⁸⁹. Some Kazakhstani media also cover Ukraine as an important potential energy partner; Kazakhstan has a state interest in continuing gas supplies to Ukraine, which were suspended in 2019 due to Russian sanctions⁹⁰.

The average Kazakhstani is only slightly informed about Ukraine a year after following presidential and parliamentary elections. Experts interviewed offered several opinions: "If Ukrainians are disappointed in the policy of the new government and the president, this news has not yet reached Kazakhstan" (*ibid*); "The Ukrainian president needs time to resolve internal problems, it is too early to draw conclusions. You need to act more decisively on Donbas, without compromise, and repel the Russian enemy"⁹¹; "We do not hear much about Ukrainian events; the main channels of information are communication on Facebook and "Radio Azattyk" publications. The conflict in Donbas is perceived as frozen, but many people have heard about the bilateral release of prisoners."⁹² "It is noticeable that there is still no continuity of reforms in Ukraine. The new government repeats what they did, in particular, during Yushchenko's time."⁹³ On Facebook, a video went viral in Kazakhstan in which Zelenskyy kicked the Boryspil City Council secretary out of a meeting⁹⁴. Some activists viewed the incident as a demonstration of Zelenskyy's ability to resolve issues without excessive formality⁹⁵.

People are generally less informed about Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada in Kazakhstan, which again can be explained by the lack of coverage of Ukrainian

87 Aigerim Seitenova, Head of Programmes, PF Wings of Liberty, interview dated 4/3/2020

88 Aigul Zharylgassova, former Advocacy Manager, People in Need, interview dated 29/2/2020

89 Миллер, К. (2019, сентябрь 23). Политические баталии в США и «опасное» положение Зеленского. Радио Азаттык. Режим доступа <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/amid-trump-biden-tug-of-war-anxious-ukraine-ponders-how-to-proceed/30178792.html>

90 Interview with a Kazakhstani journalist, on confidentiality terms (2/3/2020)

91 Interview with a Kazakhstani political analyst, on confidentiality terms (27/2/2020)

92 Aigerim Seitenova, Head of Programmes, PF Wings of Liberty, interview dated 4/3/2020

93 Meruert Makhmutova, Director, Public Policy Research Center, interview dated 24/2/2020

94 «Вийди звідси, розбійник ти. Погано чуєш?» — Зеленський вигнав з наради секретаря міськради Борисполя — відео. (2019, липень 10). Радіо Свобода. Режим доступу <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/video/30048193.html>

95 Aigerim Seitenova, Head of Programmes, PF Wings of Liberty, interview dated 4/3/2020

news. Kazakhstani media reported^{96, 97} on the adoption of laws on the abolition of parliamentary immunity⁹⁸ and the impeachment of the president⁹⁹, as well as land market reform¹⁰⁰ and the resignation of the Prime Minister¹⁰¹.

Some civil society activists in Kazakhstan have drawn attention to Ukraine as potentially violating human rights in the context of non-compliance with Article 33 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees¹⁰², which prohibits the deportation of refugees to a country where their life or liberty is in danger. Some Kazakhstani opposition members living in Ukraine — perceived to be facing similar danger — are threatened with refoulement to Kazakhstan¹⁰³.

6. ACTIVITIES OF THE EMBASSY AND THE IMPACT OF THE UKRAINIAN COMMUNITY

Kazakhstani experts believe that the presence of the Embassy of Ukraine in Kazakhstan is not very noticeable and currently does not significantly contribute to Ukraine's soft power. Experts surveyed rated the Embassy's performance at only 4.2 points out of ten. On its website, the Embassy regularly publishes statements on the Donbas conflict and the annexation of Crimea and organizes events aimed at promoting Ukrainian business and culture. The Embassy's efforts to maintain interest in Ukrainian history and culture are indeed important. However, it is unlikely that the types of events the embassy organizes, such as a Taras Shevchenko poetry reading contest¹⁰⁴ and folk art festivals¹⁰⁵ will help promote the image of Ukraine as a modern country. Rather, ethnocentric approaches may lead to the conservation of the image, which no longer corresponds to modern-day Ukraine and its contemporary culture.

⁹⁶ Парламент Украины ограничил депутатскую неприкосновенность. (2019, сентябрь 3). Радио Азаттык. Режим доступа <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/30144161.html>

⁹⁷ Парламент Украины принял закон о продаже земли. (2020, март 31). Радио Азаттык. Режим доступа <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/30519250.html>

⁹⁸ Верховна Рада України. (2019, вересень 3). Закон «Про внесення змін до статті 80 Конституції України (щодо недоторканності народних депутатів України)». Режим доступу <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/27-20>

⁹⁹ Верховна Рада України. (2019, вересень 23). Проект Закону про особливу процедуру усунення Президента України з поста (імпичмент). Режим доступу http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_1?pf3511=66240

¹⁰⁰ Верховна Рада відкрила ринок землі. (2020, березень, 31). Економічна правда. Режим доступу <https://www.epravda.com.ua/news/2020/03/31/658713/>

¹⁰¹ Премьер-министр Украины написал заявление об отставке. (2020, март 4). Forbes Kazakhstan. Режим доступа https://forbes.kz/news/2020/03/04/newsid_220336

¹⁰² Верховна Рада України. (2002). Конвенція про статус біженців. Режим доступу https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_011

¹⁰³ Казахстанська журналістка просить статусу біженця в Україні попри відмову. (2020, березень 19). Укрінформ. Режим доступу <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/2855024-kazahstanska-zurnalistka-prosit-statusu-bizenca-v-ukraini-popri-vidmovu.html>

¹⁰⁴ Посольство України в Республіці Казахстан. (2020, лютий 24). В український недільній школі «Рідне Слово» відбувся конкурс читців віршів Шевченка. Режим доступу <https://kazakhstan.mfa.gov.ua/news/v-ukrayinskij-nedilnij-shkoli-ridne-slovo-vidbuvsya-konkurs-chitciv-virshiv-shevchenka>

¹⁰⁵ Самобытная украинская культура. (2019, октябрь 29). Вечерняя Астана. Режим доступа <http://vechastana.kz/samobytnaya-ukrainskaya-kul-tura/>

As of 2017, ethnic Ukrainians in Kazakhstan made up 2.1 percent of Kazakhstan's population¹⁰⁶. Experts surveyed scored the influence of the Ukrainian community at 3.2 points out of 10. In an interview with a local newspaper, the chairman of the Council of Ukrainians of Kazakhstan stated that Ukrainians' influence on Kazakhstan's public life was largely through ethnocultural groups and folk art¹⁰⁷. The Ukrainians of Kazakhstan Association brings together dozens of non-profit organizations and regularly organizes "republican gala concerts," publishes Ukrainian newspapers and supports the work of Sunday schools¹⁰⁸. This activity is indeed significant for the Ukrainian diaspora, but it has a rather minor impact within Kazakhstan.

The professionalism of Ukrainians living in Kazakhstan or working at Kazakhstani companies can be seen as an important component of Ukraine's soft power.

At the same time, the professionalism of Ukrainians living in Kazakhstan or working at Kazakhstani companies can be seen as an important component of Ukraine's soft power. Kazakhstan values Ukrainian professionals in the restaurant, marketing and advertising industries in particular¹⁰⁹. There is a special demand for top managers who develop business and have strong expertise in technology and understanding of processes: "It is the fact that Ukrainians in Kazakhstan often work as senior executives that shapes the image of the [Ukrainian] nation."¹¹⁰ Many Ukrainian IT experts are employed in Kazakhstan or work at Kazakhstani companies remotely¹¹¹. Ukrainians are perceived as professionally responsible and reliable business partners¹¹². However, one journalist noted several stories about the dissatisfaction of Kazakhstani corporations with the level of professionalism of Ukrainian top managers hired to work in Kazakhstan¹¹³.

Ukrainian labor migration of high-skilled workers to Kazakhstan intensified in 2014 but has slowed down in recent years. The Kazakhstani labor market is tight while even large Kazakhstani companies have suffered from recent economic downturns¹¹⁴. Ukrainians working in the creative sector may also be less likely to move to Kazakhstan for work as Ukraine's domestic film production and book publishing industries surge^(ibid).

In 2020, the Kazakhstani TV channel TDQ42 began to broadcast the UA | TV program about prominent Ukrainians¹¹⁵.

106 Посольство України в Республіці Казахстан. (2017, январь 31). Украинская диаспора. Режим доступа <https://kazakhstan.mfa.gov.ua/ru/embassy/5010-jetnichni-ukrajinci-v-kazahstani>

107 «Как и чем живут украинцы Казахстана? (2015, март 25). Central Asia Monitor. <https://camonitor.kz/15728-kak-i-chem-zhivut-ukraincy-kazahstana.html>

108 Посольство України в Республіці Казахстан. (2017, січень 16). Асоціація «Українці Казахстану». Режим доступа <https://kazakhstan.mfa.gov.ua/posolstvo/4995-asociacija-ukrajinci-kazahstanu>

109 Aigul Zharylgassova, former Advocacy Manager, People in Need, interview dated 29/2/2020

110 Полянська, Я. (2015, жовтень 9). Успішна кар'єра в Казахстані: є попит на топ-менеджерів з України. Радіо Свобода. Режим доступа <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/27297408.html>

111 Meruert Makhmutova, Director, Public Policy Research Center, interview dated 24/2/2020

112 Aigerim Seitenova, Head of Programmes, PF Wings of Liberty, interview dated 4/3/2020

113 Interview with a Kazakhstani journalist, on confidentiality terms (2/3/2020)

114 Interview with a representative of Ukrainian- Kazakhstani creative agency, on confidentiality terms (13/5/2020)

115 Детектор медіа. (2020, квітень 13). Програми каналу іномовлення UATV показуватимуть у Казахстані. Режим доступа <https://detector.media/rinok/article/176334/2020-04-13-programi-kanalu-inomovlennya-uatv-pokazivatimut-u-kazahstani/>

7. UKRAINIAN BRANDS

The visibility and reputation of Ukrainian products in Kazakhstan were rated at 6.8 points out of 10. In Kazakhstan, Ukraine is sometimes associated with vodka and lard, while Ukrainian dairy products are sold in many Kazakhstani stores¹¹⁶. During Petro Poroshenko's presidency, there were many "Roshen" (Poroshenko's chocolate company) billboards in Kazakhstan, and the brand remains popular among locals¹¹⁷. One expert interviewed regrets that Ukraine International Airlines (UIA) has suspended flights to Almaty: "One can say that the airline has become Ukraine's ambassador: while reading UIA magazine during the flights, I had an opportunity to learn about Ukrainian goods and services, business and cultural events."¹¹⁸ For many Kazakhstanis as well, football is a brand that is often associated with Ukraine, in particular, well-known football clubs Shakhtar and Dynamo¹¹⁸. "In my youth, I imagined playing like [former Dynamo and Soviet Union striker] Oleh Blokhin," said the expert¹¹⁹.

Some Kazakhstanis associate Ukraine with its commercial healthcare industry, especially dental and maternity clinics¹²⁰, offering opportunities for continued development of medical tourism from Kazakhstan to Ukraine.

Since 2013, the trade turnover between Ukraine and Kazakhstan has significantly decreased. The end of 2019 saw an almost twofold reduction in trade between the countries and a 50-percent decline of Ukraine's share in Kazakhstan's foreign trade¹²¹.

In 2019, the trade turnover between the two countries amounted to 817 million US dollars (2 percent less compared to 2018)¹²². The largest share of Ukrainian exports to Kazakhstan are food, pharmaceuticals, agricultural machinery, and rubber products¹²³. Due to restrictions imposed by Russia in 2016 on the transit of Ukrainian products to Central Asia¹²⁴, Ukraine has suspended exports of sunflower oil, cane sugar and poultry to Kazakhstan.

In 2019, imports from Kazakhstan to Ukraine amounted to 450 million US dollars (2 percent less compared to 2018)¹²⁵. The number of joint ventures increased from 600 in 2016 to 1,000 in 2019¹²⁶. Experts explained that it is profitable for Ukrainians to own joint ventures in Kazakhstan because such businesses opens

¹¹⁶ Interview with a Kazakhstani political analyst, on confidentiality terms (27/2/2020)

¹¹⁷ Meruert Makhmutova, Director, Public Policy Research Center, interview dated 24/2/2020

¹¹⁸ Interview with a Kazakhstani expert in tourism, on confidentiality terms (13/5/2020)

¹¹⁹ Interview with a Kazakhstani political analyst, on confidentiality terms (27/2/2020)

¹²⁰ Interview with a Kazakhstani expert in tourism, on confidentiality terms (13/5/2020)

¹²¹ Малтабаров, А. (2019, сентябрь 27). Казахстан — Украина: инвентаризация интересов. Капитал. Режим доступа <https://kapital.kz/economic/81540/kazakhstan-ukraina-inventarizatsiya-interesov.html>

¹²² Державна служба статистики України. Географічна структура зовнішньої торгівлі товарами у 2019 році. Режим доступу <http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/>

¹²³ Малтабаров, А. (2019, сентябрь 27). Казахстан — Украина: инвентаризация интересов. Капитал. Режим доступа <https://kapital.kz/economic/81540/kazakhstan-ukraina-inventarizatsiya-interesov.html>

¹²⁴ Покидаев, Д. (2019, сентябрь 13). Как Украина собирается восстанавливать экспорт в Центральную Азию. Курсив. Режим доступа <https://kursiv.kz/news/vlast-i-biznes/2019-09/kak-ukraina-sobiraetsya-vosstanavlivat-eksport-v-centralnuyu-aziyu>

¹²⁵ Державна служба статистики України. Географічна структура зовнішньої торгівлі товарами у 2019 році. Режим доступу <http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/>

¹²⁶ Малтабаров, А. (2019, сентябрь 27). Казахстан — Украина: инвентаризация интересов. Капитал. Режим доступа <https://kapital.kz/economic/81540/kazakhstan-ukraina-inventarizatsiya-interesov.html>

the door to conduct business in other countries in the region (including China, Iran, etc.)¹²⁷. Many Kazakhstani businesspeople are interested in greater access to European Union markets, which was made possible for Ukraine by its Association Agreement with the EU.

“In terms of development, such areas as design, marketing, fashion and event-making, and the restaurant and beauty industries in Ukraine are ahead of the Kazakhstani market by several years.

Since 2016, there have been several trips to Ukraine by Kazakhstanis engaged in the creative field. They participated in themed tours devoted to design, marketing, fashion and event-making, and the restaurant and beauty industries¹²⁸. Such niche tours are in demand because “in terms of development, these areas in Ukraine are ahead of the Kazakhstani market by several years. Moreover, European experience would have to be transformed to meet our regional realities. Meanwhile, Ukrainian experts [in the above mentioned spheres] have already adapted global practices to the specificities of our region.”^(ibid) Ukraine also has a potential in event tourism — Kazakhstanis have already come here to attend the UEFA Champions League final, Eurovision song contest and Atlas Weekend festival ^(ibid).

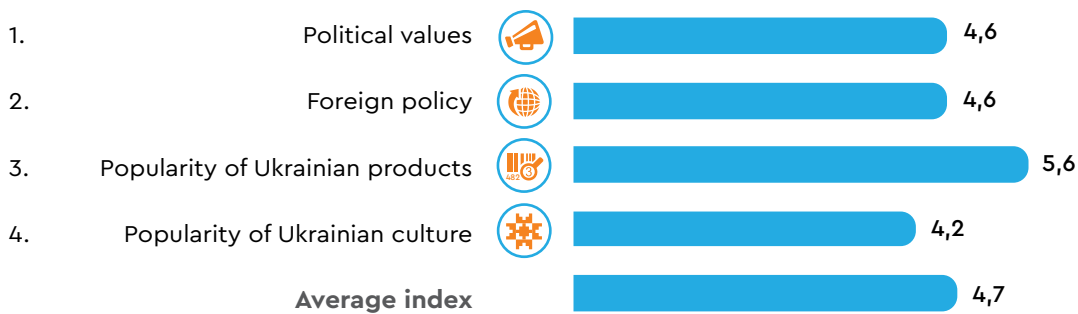
¹²⁷ Покидаев, Д. (2019, сентябрь 13). Как Украина собирается восстанавливать экспорт в Центральную Азию. Курсив. Режим доступа <https://kursiv.kz/news/vlast-i-biznes/2019-09/kak-ukraina-sobiraetsya-vosstanavlivat-eksport-v-centralnuyu-aziyu>

¹²⁸ Interview with a Kazakhstani expert in tourism, on confidentiality terms (13/5/2020)

7. UKRAINE'S SOFT POWER IN RUSSIA: VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY'S CALMING EFFECT

Ukraine's soft power index in **Russia:**

4,7 / 10



In Russia, Ukraine scored lowest in terms of attractiveness among the countries examined. Following the outbreak of aggression against Ukraine in 2014, the attitude of Russians towards Ukrainians has deteriorated. Due to the influence of the Russian media reproducing narratives of the Russian government, for most Russians, post-Maidan Ukraine represents a political and economic catastrophe and is perceived as perpetuated by aggressive policies that do not allow the conflict in Eastern Ukraine to subside. In the Russian opposition community, Ukraine's image is associated more with democratic change. Such Russians recognize some of Ukraine's reform achievements and would prefer to see the neighboring state as a role model for change in Russia.

The results of the Ukrainian presidential election in 2019 had a somewhat reassuring effect on Russian society. Volodymyr Zelenskyy's intentions to restore peace in Donbas, dialed down patriotic rhetoric, and communication in Russian were able to soften the image of Ukraine created by Russian propaganda and help improve the perception of Ukrainians by many Russians. In the opposition community, the freedom and transparency of Ukraine's presidential and parliamentary election were seen as confirmation that Ukraine was capable of becoming more democratic and transferring power a new class of political leaders peacefully.



1. UKRAINE AFTER THE REVOLUTION: TWO EXTREMES IN PERCEPTION

According to Freedom House, Russia is a "non-free country"¹ with a consolidated authoritarian regime². After the Revolution of Dignity, after which Ukraine markedly pivoted away from the Russian orbit, Russia annexed Crimea and launched a hybrid war in Eastern Ukraine³. The sharp criticism of Ukrainian authorities in Russian media has worsened the attitude of Russians towards Ukrainians⁴. While in September 2013 only 3 percent of Russians described their attitude to Ukraine as "very bad", in May 2014 this figure increased to 16 percent, and in November 2018 it reached a record high of 29 percent⁵. The reaction of Russian authorities to the Ukraine's revolutionary and post-revolutionary events made it possible to achieve in Russia a "conservative reconsolidation of society around the power elite" and to mobilize patriotism by disapproving the image of Ukraine created by the local propaganda machine⁶. In May 2014, 70 percent of Russians believed that newscasts on federal television channels objectively covered events in Ukraine⁷.

According to an expert, in Russia there are two extremes in the perception of Ukraine⁸. For most Russian citizens, the Ukrainian state is a cautionary tale of what could befall a country allegedly run by radicals and Western "pen-holders." Reforms in the post-Maidan Ukraine are perceived to have been unsuccessful, as the state has been unable generate lasting change. Ukraine's EU and NATO integration policy is portrayed as imposed upon Ukrainians by the West and not supported among a majority of Ukrainians. Most local media have and continue to portray Ukraine's military response to the Russian occupation of Donbas as a belligerent policy pursued by the Ukrainian government towards its Russian-speaking citizens⁹. The Russian media has also portrayed Ukrainian politicians who came to power in 2014 mostly as nationalists who established a Russophobia regime^(ibid).

A minority view in Russia, primarily in opposition-minded Russians¹⁰, is that the Ukrainian revolutionary events of 2014 can be seen as an overthrow of an authoritarian regime paving the way for more democratic relations between the government and society¹¹. Ukraine's foreign policy choice in favor of European

1 Freedom House. Freedom in the World. Russia 2020. Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/russia/freedom-world/2020>

2 Freedom House. Nations in transit rating 2018. Russia. Retrieved from <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/1429203.html>

3 Гудков, Л. (2014). Путинский рецидив тоталитаризма. *Pro et Contra*, 3-4 (63). Украинский кризис и Россия. (стр. 129 — 147). Режим доступа https://carnegieendowment.org/files/ProEtContra_63_all.pdf

4 Червоненко, В. (2016, январь 18). Украинцы vs россияне: революция или эволюция отношений? BBC. Режим доступа https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/ukraine_in_russian/2016/01/160118_ru_s_ukraine_russia_attitude_change

5 Левада-центр. (2020). Российско-украинские отношения. Режим доступа <https://www.levada.ru/2020/02/13/rossijsko-ukrainskie-otnosheniya-7/>

6 Гудков, Л. (2014). Путинский рецидив тоталитаризма. *Pro et Contra*, 3-4 (63). Украинский кризис и Россия. (стр. 129 — 147). Режим доступа https://carnegieendowment.org/files/ProEtContra_63_all.pdf

7 Левада-центр. (2014). Российский медиа-ландшафт: телевидение: пресса: интернет. Режим доступа http://www.levada.ru/sites/default/files/levada_report_media_0.pdf

8 Leonid Ragozin, journalist, interview dated 13/3/2020

9 VoxUkraine. (2015). Ukraine's information war: tactics (part I). Режим доступа <https://voxukraine.org/en/ukraines-information-war-tactics-and-strategy/>

10 Leonid Ragozin, journalist, interview dated 13/3/2020

11 Ворожейкина, Т. (2014). Украина: неутраченные иллюзии. *Pro et Contra*, 3-4 (63). Украинский кризис и Россия. (стр. 6 — 25). Режим доступа https://carnegieendowment.org/files/ProEtContra_63_all.pdf

integration processes was perceived as a way for Ukrainians to create transparent political and economic institutions that would be accountable to society and not to oligarchs ^(ibid).

Some opposition figures would rather see Ukraine as a role model for democratic change, which Russia could potentially follow¹². Ukrainian reforms such as police reform¹³, decommunization and open access to public information, including KGB archives¹⁴, have been praised by opposition-minded Russians. Decommunization in this community is considered a fundamental reform which has changed the outlook of Ukrainians: "You have no idea

Some opposition figures would rather see Ukraine as a role model for democratic change, which Russia could potentially follow.

what happiness it is to cross the Ukrainian-Russian border, to realize that there are thousands of kilometers ahead without any mentions of Lenin, Dzerzhynskyi, etc."¹⁵ In general, the processes initiated by Ukrainian civil society, including the Revolution of Dignity and reforms, are a potent resource for Ukraine's soft power in Russia¹⁶. However, experts note that Ukraine does not use its potential effectively, although it could compete with Russia in this regard¹⁷. Furthermore, Ukraine has an attractive and viable social ideology, which differs from the Kremlin's policy in its "anthropocentrism" as opposed to Russia's prioritization of the state's role in the life of the individual. However, the Ukrainian state fails to leverage this resource for increasing its influence in the region ^(ibid).

Modern democratic processes in Ukraine remind some opposition-minded Russians of the brief period of emancipation that Russia experienced in the 1990s: "In those days, Russian civil society was more vigorous, and journalists were freer than they are now. But corruption was pervasive."¹⁸ At the same time, there is an opinion among some members of the opposition that Ukraine has failed to implement its anti-corruption program and has been unable to achieve the goals set by the Maidan: "The revolution has taken place, people have died and are dying, but no significant changes have taken place in the state."¹⁹ In regard to the Donbas conflict, the Russian opposition mostly supported Ukraine's official position. In particular, members of the opposition urged Russia to withdraw its troops from Ukraine's "southeastern regions" and put an end to anti-Ukrainian propaganda²⁰. The issue of Crimea splits the opposition-minded audience into those who avoid making statements, who recognize the peninsula as Ukrainian and those who support the annexation^{21,22}.

12 Leonid Ragozin, journalist, interview dated 13/3/2020

13 Victoria Ivleva, journalist, interview dated 14/05/2020

14 Sergey Krivenko, board member of the International Memorial Society, interview dated 2/3/2020

15 Victoria Ivleva, journalist, interview dated 14/05/2020

16 Grigory Frolov, Vice-president, "Free Russia Foundation", interview dated 15/06/2020

17 Atlantic Council. (2019, May 2). Frolov, G. Time for Ukraine to compete with Russia. Retrieved from <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/time-for-ukraine-to-compete-with-russia/>

18 Sergey Krivenko, board member of the International Memorial Society, interview dated 2/3/2020

19 Leonid Ragozin, journalist, interview dated 13/3/2020

20 Резолюция Марша Мира 21 сентября. (2014, сентябрь 16). Эхо Москвы. Режим доступа <https://echo.msk.ru/blog/echomsk/1400978-echo/>

21 Рыковцева, Е. (2016, ноябрь 22). «Его не любят даже в маске Путина». Радио Свобода. Режим доступа <https://www.svoboda.org/a/28133178.html>

22 Сбитый фокус. (2014, октябрь 15). Эхо Москвы. Режим доступа <https://echo.msk.ru/programs/focus/1417522-echo/>

2. UKRAINIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS OF 2019: OPPOSING POROSHENKO WITH ZELENSKYY

Experts noted that the impact on Russians of "hysterical propaganda" concerning Ukraine has peaked already²³. Popular interest in news from Ukraine is waning among Russians, whose media space is already saturated on this topic²⁴. However, it would be incorrect to say that there is a complete lack of interest, as confirmed by the Ukrainian presidential election in 2019: 68 percent of Russians followed the campaign, and 30 percent of them paid special attention to it²⁵. Russians' interest in the Ukrainian election can be explained by the extraordinary nature of the campaign. In particular, because Vladimir Zelenskyy was participating in the election, a popular actor in Russia, whose main opponent in the election race was Petro Poroshenko, known among Russians for the extremely negative image that the Russian media have created for him. Russian propaganda focused on criticizing Poroshenko and generally supported Zelenskyy^(ibid). The independent international Russian-language channel "Current Time" (Nastoyashcheye vremya)²⁶ broadcast the debate between Zelenskyy and Poroshenko live and with a Russian translation²⁷. Alexei Navalnyy also broadcast the debate on his Youtube channel^(ibid).

One-third of Russian citizens considered Volodymyr Zelenskyy's election victory more beneficial for Russia than the re-election of Petro Poroshenko would have been²⁸. Politicians ranging from Vladimir Zhirinovskiy to Sergei Lavrov expressed support for then-candidate Zelenskyy, whom they knew through his acting work and whom they liked because of his stated intentions to restore peace to Eastern Ukraine²⁹.

Russians who blamed Poroshenko for the deterioration in Ukraine-Russia relations also supported Zelenskyy's plans to resolve the conflict in Donbas, seeing him as a "dragon slayer" who would balance and soften sensitive issues for both countries³⁰. Zelenskyy's statements — more universal than patriotic — appealed to many Russians and were perceived as less aggressive towards them. His background as a Russian-speaking Ukrainian also convinced many Russians that he would better understand the people of Eastern Ukraine and how to improve the situation in Donbas.

Russian opposition figures praised the presidential election, the free and fair electoral process and emphasized that that a change of power is possible in Ukraine, while the victory of a non-systemic candidate speaks volumes about the

23 Руденко, Є. (2019, жовтень 21). Російський політолог Морозов: Порошенко був цвяхом у черевіку в Путіна. Українська правда. Режим доступу <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2019/10/21/7229435/>

24 Konstantin Skorkin, journalist, author, Carnegie Moscow Centre, interview dated 25/2/2020

25 СМІ Росії: «победитель дракона» Зеленский симпатичен россиянам. (2019, апрель 29). BBC. Режим доступу <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-48089194>

26 Новинні програми телеканалу "Настоящее время" зібрали понад 100 млн переглядів. Канал працює для російськомовної аудиторії РФ, країн Центральної й Східної Європи, а також Центральної Азії. — Настоящее время. Режим доступу https://www.currenttime.tv/about_us

27 Atlantic Council. (2019, May 2). Frolov, G. Time for Ukraine to compete with Russia. Retrieved from <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/time-for-ukraine-to-compete-with-russia/>

28 СМІ Росії: «победитель дракона» Зеленский симпатичен россиянам. (2019, апрель 29). BBC. Режим доступу <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-48089194>

29 Кто и зачем поддерживает Владимира Зеленского в России? (2019, квітень 11). Радио Свобода. Режим доступу <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29875331.html>

30 СМІ Росії: «победитель дракона» Зеленский симпатичен россиянам. (2019, апрель 29). BBC. Режим доступу <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-48089194>

liveliness of Ukrainian democracy³¹. Some local opposition figures sympathized with Zelenskyy and celebrated his victory because the transfer of power, unlike in 2014, was legal and not the result of revolution³². Although Petro Poroshenko was elected legally, Russians sometimes believe that he became president on a wave of revolution and did not represent all Ukrainians. An opinion in the Russian expert community was that Zelenskyy's campaign had shown the world that this race was a modern-day struggle against Soviet legacy and oligarchy. "The potential impact of Zelenskyy's soft power on the population of Russia and the post-Soviet area is boundless. But will he use it when he takes office?"³³

A change of power is possible in Ukraine, while the victory of a non-systemic candidate speaks volumes about the liveliness of Ukrainian democracy.

According to a Russian expert, Zelenskyy's speeches promoting peace caused anxiety among a certain part of the opposition that the Ukrainian president might become pro-Russian and make unacceptable compromises on the issue of Donbas to Russia³⁴. Such Russians often supported Poroshenko's followers on social networks and distributed their media product on their pages. A Russian analyst who has lived in Kyiv for several years, noted that popularity of Zelenskyy, whose TV career is well known in the occupied territories of Ukraine, could encourage many Ukrainians from Donetsk, Luhansk and Crimea to move to government-controlled regions³⁵. This analyst suggested that Vladimir Putin intensified the issuance of passports in the Russian-occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions to prevent Ukrainian citizens from moving from occupied territories to those under government control (ibid).

Notably, neither the results of in-depth interviews nor the media monitoring data suggest that a significant number of young Russians entertained democratic hopes for the "Zelenskyy phenomenon". This can be explained by a high level of political indifference among young people of whom 60 percent are not interested in politics³⁶, unfavorable conditions for the formation of protest momentum in the country and the high popularity of Vladimir Putin among young Russians³⁷.

During the election campaign, Zelenskyy was an antipode to Poroshenko, primarily on issues related to the conflict in Donbas³⁸. However, in general, neither his political program nor his personality were well understood by Russian society. Seeking to predict the agenda of the new Ukrainian leadership, Russian journalists analyzed Zelenskyy's remarks. In particular, a popular program on the

31 Барышева, Е. (2019, апрель 22). Реакции в РФ на победу Зеленского: «Нормальная демократия для нас как чудо». Deutsche Welle. Режим доступа <http://tiny.cc/2x43lz>

32 Konstantin Skorkin, journalist, author, Carnegie Moscow Centre, interview dated 25/2/2020

33 Atlantic Council. (2019, May 2). Frolov, G. Time for Ukraine to compete with Russia. Retrieved from <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/time-for-ukraine-to-compete-with-russia/>

34 Konstantin Skorkin, journalist, author, Carnegie Moscow Centre, interview dated 25/2/2020

35 Atlantic Council. (2019, May 2). Frolov, G. Time for Ukraine to compete with Russia. Retrieved from <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/time-for-ukraine-to-compete-with-russia/>

36 Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. (2019–2020). Российское «поколение Z»: установки и ценности. Режим доступа <https://www.fes-russia.org/pokolenie-z/>

37 Злобин, А. (2020, январь 9). Поколение Путина: Financial Times рассказала о взглядах россиян, выросших при действующем президенте. Forbes. Режим доступа <https://www.forbes.ru/obshchestvo/390839-pokolenie-putina-financial-times-rasskazala-o-vzglyadah-rossiyan-vyrosshih-pri>

38 Перцова, В., Сивашенков, А. (2019, апрель 1). Порошенко vs Зеленский: что показали выборы на Украине и кто победит во втором туре. Forbes. Режим доступа <https://www.forbes.ru/obshchestvo/373915-poroshenko-vs-zelenskiy-cto-pokazali-vybory-na-ukraine-i-cto-pobedit-vo-vtorom>

Russia-1 TV channel concluded that the new Ukrainian president would likely continue the reforms that had been initiated before him and would not change the fight against corruption and language policy³⁹.

Other propaganda media reported that the new Ukrainian government should not be expected to change its foreign policy — partnership with the EU and NATO will remain a priority, while a thaw in Ukraine's relations with Russia should not be expected⁴⁰. Although the new Ukrainian president was seen as the opposite of Poroshenko with regards to his tone and rhetoric on the conflict in Donbas, the Russian media often mentioned that Zelenskyy supported the Euromaidan and later the Anti-Terrorist Operation in Eastern Ukraine⁴¹. It therefore followed that apart from communication style, significant deviations from the principles professed by Ukraine in domestic and foreign policy could not be expected from the new government.

In Russian society there was also a widespread negative attitude towards Zelenskyy and Ukraine, which combined traditional clichés about Ukraine as a «failed state» and contempt for the lack of political experience of the new leader of the neighboring country.

The expectations that Russian citizens placed on Zelenskyy's activities as President of Ukraine contributed to the growth of their affinity to Ukrainians — from 34 percent in February 2019 to 56 percent in September 2019⁴². It is worth noting that in Russian society there was also a widespread negative attitude towards Zelenskyy and Ukraine, which combined traditional clichés about Ukraine as a "failed state" and contempt for the lack of political experience of the new leader of the neighboring country. For example, many of the pro-government media portrayed the Ukrainian president as a "non-independent clown."⁴³ As of 2019, 26 percent of

Russian citizens listed Ukraine among the top three countries which could threaten Russia with a military attack⁴⁴.

Elections to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine did not receive the attention that was attached to the presidential campaign. In the Russian expert community, the parliamentary election, along with the presidential race, was portrayed as the first sweeping change of the new leadership in Ukraine (the "first revolution"), which took place in a completely legal way⁴⁵.

39 Рощина, В. (2019, апрель 19). «Игра в анализы»: российские СМИ — о предстоящих дебатах кандидатов в президенты Украины. Hromadske.ua. Режим доступа <https://hromadske.ua/ru/posts/igra-v-analizy-rossijskie-smi-o-predstoyashih-debatah-kandidatov-v-prezidenty-ukrainy>

40 Бовдунов, А., Онищук, Е., Комарова, Е. (2019, апрель 19). «Даже ближайшее окружение уверено в поражении Порошенко»: чего ожидать от второго тура президентских выборов на Украине. RT. Режим доступа <https://russian.rt.com/ussr/article/622857-ukraina-vybory-prognoz-zelenskii-poroshenko>

41 Поляков, В. (2019, январь 14). Кто такой Владимир Зеленский, кандидат в президенты Украины? Аргументы и Факты. Режим доступа https://aif.ru/politics/world/kto_takoy_vladimir_zelenskiy_kandidat_v_prezidenty_ukrainy

42 Левада-центр. (2020). Российско-украинские отношения. Режим доступа <https://www.levada.ru/2020/02/13/rossijsko-ukrainskie-otnosheniya-7/>

43 Руденко, Є. (2019, жовтень 21). Російський політолог Морозов: Порошенко був цвяхом у черевіку в Путіна. Українська правда. Режим доступу <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2019/10/21/7229435/>

44 ВЦИОМ. (2019). Друзья и враги. Режим доступа <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=9971>

45 Московский центр Карнеги. (2019, июль 26). Касьянов, Г. Первая революция. Как изменится Украина после парламентских выборов. Режим доступа <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/79571>

Russian press stressed the importance of the pro-Russian party "Opposition Platform — for Life" (Opozytsyyna Platforma – Za zhyttya) gaining the second-most seats in the Verkhovna Rada. This indicator was supposed to show Russian society how Ukrainians actually treat Russians: "If the presidential election is a battle of individuals, the election to the Rada is a battle of meanings, when it becomes clear what real values and ideological patterns exist in Ukrainian society, including those concerning Russia."⁴⁶

In the propaganda media, the pro-Russian party's result in the parliamentary election was also interpreted as a demand by Ukrainians for peace and normalization of relations with Russians⁴⁷. These media outlets compared Volodymyr Zelenskyy, whose party won a majority in the Verkhovna Rada, to Vladimir Putin, who also relied on a parliamentary majority during his first presidential term, believing that the Russian president's 2000 version should be "ideal" for his Ukrainian counterpart ^(ibid). Some Russian economists have argued that the new Ukrainian government has a unique opportunity to destroy the oligarchic system and establish the rule of law in Ukraine⁴⁸.

3. A LESSON FOR RUSSIANS?

After Zelenskyy's victory, Russian authorities realized that his example could damage the stability of Russian policy and become potentially attractive for Russians, who may want freer elections and more open-minded leaders⁴⁹. "The Servant of the People" (Sluha Narodu) series was taken off from the TNT channel a few days after Putin's meeting with Zelenskyy in Paris, after broadcasting only three episodes⁵⁰. Following Zelenskyy's victory, "The Guardian" reported: "After Zelenskiy's election, activists in Russia were asking: could Ukraine hold lessons for us? Why can't Russians also experience a wave of out-with-the-old, in-with-the-new?"⁵¹

Local experts believe that Zelenskyy can inspire Russians to seek democratic change in their country, where there is also a demand for a transfer of power, elections with unpredictable results and with the participation of candidates representing diverse political platforms^{52,53}. During the election, the Russian opposition felt a surge of enthusiasm. Like the opposition-minded audience,

"Could Ukraine hold lessons for us? Why can't Russians also experience a wave of out-with-the-old, in-with-the-new?"

46 Чунова, А. (2019, июль 22). Выборы в Верховную раду. Главное. Ведомости. Режим доступа <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2019/07/22/806962-vibori-glavnoe>

47 Захаров, М. (2019, июль 24). Слуги народа из ниоткуда. Газета.ru. Режим доступа <https://www.gazeta.ru/column/zakharov/12516013.shtml>

48 Кравченко, Е. (2019, июль 23). «Это дает возможность разрушить олигархическую систему»: последствия выборов в Раду для украинской экономики. Forbes Russia. Режим доступа <https://www.forbes.ru/biznes/380511-eto-daet-vozmozhnost-razrushit-oligarhicheskuyu-sistemu-posledstviya-vyborov-v-radu>

49 Konstantin Skorkin, journalist, author, Carnegie Moscow Centre, interview dated 25/2/2020

50 Russian TV pulls plug on Ukrainian President's comedy series one day after premiere. (2019, December 12). Radio Free Europe. Retrieved from <https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-state-tv-pulls-plug-on-ukraine-president-s-comedy-series/30321157.html>

51 Nougayrède, N. (April, 25 2019). Zelenskiy's election proves Ukraine is a healthy democracy. Putin hates that. The Guardian. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/apr/25/zelenskiy-ukraine-putin-russian>

52 Барышева, Е. (2019, апрель 22). Реакции в РФ на победу Зеленского: «Нормальная демократия для нас как чудо». Deutsche Welle. Режим доступа <http://tiny.cc/2x43lz>

53 Илларионов, А. (2019, апрель 22). Главные итоги украинских выборов для России и Беларуси. Эхо Москвы. Режим доступа <https://echo.msk.ru/blog/aillar/2412411-echo/>

ordinary Russians were excited to see how Ukraine can — democratically — get rid of politicians who have compromised themselves⁵⁴. After Zelenskyy was elected president, several Russian comedians expressed political criticism against the authorities including Maxim Galkin and Timur Batrudinov⁵⁵. Comparing himself to Zelenskyy, Galkin said that he would not be able to repeat the experience of his Ukrainian colleague in show business: "We are not in Ukraine, they will shoot us even before the inauguration."⁵⁶

Zelenskyy's 2020 New Year's address to Ukrainians was widely viewed in Russia as well, both among the opposition and adherents of Putin. The contrast of the Ukrainian president's emotional speech with what was regarded as a comparatively dry greeting by the Russian head of state was all too overt⁵⁷. In contrast to Putin's address, Zelenskyy's New Year's address lent the impression that he remained an ordinary person willing to talk to his fellow citizens⁵⁸.

According to the Levada Center's "Man of the Year 2019" ratings, Volodymyr Zelenskyy ranked second among Russians with 7 percent support trailing only Vladimir Putin with 31 percent⁵⁹. Despite the novelty of Zelenskyy, Putin — and the political stability he provides — remains broadly popular. 46 percent of Russians would like to see him as president after 2024 (although 40 percent of Russians do not approve of this idea)⁶⁰, and 72 percent of Russia's population does not want to take part in protests⁶¹. Moreover, in Boris Yeltsin era, which reminds some Russians of modern Ukraine, the opposition sees, first and foremost, civil liberties, while for many Russians this period is associated with chaos and instability that has not significantly improved their lives⁶².

Volodymyr Zelenskyy has helped dial back the perception of Ukraine as radical in Russia. Most Russians saw Zelenskyy as one of their own who seeks peace in Donbas and focuses on humanitarian, not nationalist, issues. Russian opposition figures consider Zelenskyy's election as part of Ukraine's overall democratic process and a testament to its neighbor's ability to change for the better. However, it is unlikely that in the foreseeable future the first group will want, and the second will be able to be inspired by the example of the

⁵⁴ Leonid Ragozin, journalist, interview dated 13/3/2020

⁵⁵ Ragozin, L. (2020, January 12). How Ukraine's Zelenskyy is winning hearts and minds in Russia. Al Jazeera. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/ukraine-zelensky-winning-hearts-minds-russia-200112151615079.html>

⁵⁶ У нас не Украина, пристрелят еще до инаугурации: Максим Галкин ответил, готов ли сменить Путина (видео). (2019, ноябрь 30). Факты. Режим доступа <https://fakty.ua/326284-u-nas-ne-ukraina-pristreljat-ecshe-do-inauguracii-maksim-galkin-vyskazalsya-o-prezidentskih-ambiciyah-video>

⁵⁷ Ragozin, L. (2020, January 12). How Ukraine's Zelenskyy is winning hearts and minds in Russia. Al Jazeera. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/ukraine-zelensky-winning-hearts-minds-russia-200112151615079.html>

⁵⁸ Новорічне привітання президента України Володимира Зеленського. (2019, грудень 31). Режим доступу <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4it6q-hQZL4>

⁵⁹ Левада-центр. (2019, декабрь 26). События и человек года. Режим доступа <https://www.levada.ru/2019/12/26/sobytiya-i-chelovek-goda/>

⁶⁰ Левада-центр. (2020). Обнуление президентских сроков. Режим доступа <https://www.levada.ru/2020/03/27/obnulenie-prezidentskih-srokov/>

⁶¹ Левада-центр. (2020). Протестный потенциал. Режим доступа <https://www.levada.ru/2020/03/12/protestnyj-potentsial-11/>

⁶² Atlantic Council. (2019, December 19). Soltys, D. Putin's Russia is stagnating but there will be no «Moscow Maidan». Retrieved from <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/putins-russia-is-stagnating-but-there-will-be-no-moscow-maidan/>

2019 Ukrainian election enough to believe that, in the words of Zelenskyy, "everything is possible!"⁶³

Among opposition-minded Russians there is a demand for information from Ukraine in Russian: "Russian-language content from Ukraine would signal that Ukrainians, instead of abandoning those Russians who support them alone with the totalitarian regime of Russia, are willing to keep in touch."⁶⁴ Communicating with this audience in Russian, without intermediaries in the form of the Russian media, could also help Russians better understand which examples of Ukraine's transformational experience they can follow and, conversely, which unsuccessful decisions to avoid.

4. PERCEPTION OF UKRAINE THROUGH CULTURE

Among Volodymyr Zelenskyy's supporters there is a category of Russians who first knew him as an actor⁶⁵ and star of the TV series "The Servant of the People" (Sluha Narodu) and the film "Love in the Big City" (Kohannia u velykomu misti), producer of "In-Laws" (Svaty) and KVNivets (KVN Player), and co-founder of the "Kvartal 95" show⁶⁶. In the first half of 2019, "The Servant of the People" joined "Game of Thrones" and HBO's "Chernobyl" as one of the three most popular series on streaming platforms in Russia⁶⁷. "The Servant of the People" could show Russians that Ukraine has freedom of expression, humor and creativity because Ukrainians can produce films criticizing the government⁶⁸.

Ukrainian TV series are perceived positively in Russia if they are devoid of national color and embody an average cultural product⁶⁹. Moreover, for some Russians, the actor Zelenskyy is considered as one of their own, part of a common cultural space with Russia⁷⁰. In the eyes of those Russians who see the current Ukrainian president solely as an actor, Zelenskyy was elevated to the status of a politician during the Normandy Four summit, when Vladimir Putin spoke with Vladimir Zelenskyy as the head of another state, an equal politician^(ibid). The popularity of Zelenskyy as an actor contributed to his attractiveness as a presidential candidate — at least among those Russians who were familiar with his entertainment career. But whether such recognition through culture can be considered a manifestation of Ukraine's soft power is questionable, given that the showman Zelenskyy is often perceived by some Russians as one of their own. As will be shown below, Russian residents who supported Zelenskyy have come subsequently to realize that he is not so close to Russians, and his popularity in Russia has correspondingly declined.

⁶³ Зеленський до пострадянських країн: Подивіться на нас — усе можливо. (2019, квітень 21). Укрінформ. Режим доступу <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-elections/2685936-zelenskij-do-postradanskih-krain-podivitsa-na-nas-use-mozливо.html>

⁶⁴ Konstantin Skorkin, journalist, author, Carnegie Moscow Centre, interview dated 25/2/2020

⁶⁵ СМИ России: «победитель дракона» Зеленский симпатичен россиянам. (2019, апрель 29). BBC. Режим доступа <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-48089194>

⁶⁶ Хоменко, С. (2019, февраль 11). Кто такой комик Зеленский и как он стал фаворитом выборов на Украине. BBC. Режим доступа <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-47095458>

⁶⁷ Ragozin, L. (2020, January 12). How Ukraine's Zelenskyy is winning hearts and minds in Russia. Al Jazeera. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/ukraine-zelensky-winning-hearts-minds-russia-200112151615079.html>

⁶⁸ Grigory Frolov, Vice-president, "Free Russia Foundation", interview dated 15/06/2020

⁶⁹ Konstantin Skorkin, journalist, author, Carnegie Moscow Centre, interview dated 25/2/2020

⁷⁰ Leonid Ragozin, journalist, interview dated 13/3/2020

According to a quantitative survey, experts scored the popularity of Ukrainian mass culture in Russia at 5.6 out of 10. This is a fairly high score, as in other categories Ukraine's soft power in Russia averages 4.5. Russian citizens have a positive attitude not only towards the work of Volodymyr Zelenskyy but also towards other Ukrainian artists provided that they do not make political statements⁷¹. For example, one of the reasons why Oleksandr Rodnianskyi, the Ukrainian-born producer and film director had a successful career in Russia may have been because he gave up any ambitions related to his Ukrainian citizenship^(ibid). In this regard, the popularity of Ukrainian music star and frontman of the group "Okean Elzy", Sviatoslav Vakarchuk in Russia is noticeable^{72,73}. Vakarchuk sings in Ukrainian and does not hide his political positions, yet many Russians do not perceive him as hostile⁷⁴. This can be explained by the fact that, unlike Russian-speaking Ukrainian performers, it is difficult for Russians to accept Vakarchuk as one of them^(ibid). The leader of "Okean Elzy" is seen more as a European who is associated with the western Ukrainian Halychyna region and even Poland; a person for whom it is quite natural not to speak Russian. "If he had been born and brought up in a Russian-speaking region of Ukraine, his pro-European political views and speaking Ukrainian could have been perceived in Russia as a betrayal of his identity."^(ibid)

However, the case of "Okean Elzy" is but one exception to the perception of Ukrainian music in Russia, when Ukrainian identity is interpreted as European and, therefore, does not cause a negative reaction. In general, no matter how powerful can be creative projects conducted by Ukrainians in Russia, their quality will only be widely appreciated if the message of the work is devoid of nationalist characteristics and does not emphasize its connection with Ukraine⁷⁵.

At the same time, among a narrower audience of Russians in the creative sector Ukrainians are often associated with success and innovation in media, marketing and public relations^(ibid). In this community, Ukrainian advertising campaigns are sometimes seen as inspiring cases: "Given that Ukraine does not have as tight regulation of the advertising sector as Russia, we can consider examples of how freely and accurately Ukrainian creative agencies integrate their campaigns into the public space and how the viewer interacts with such advertising."^(ibid)

Many Russian artists, critics and curators view Ukrainian culture favorably — especially its contemporary art.⁷⁶ This community, though small, mostly sympathizes with the democratic processes in Ukraine and does not support the Russian occupation of Crimea and Donbas⁷⁷. One of the works of the artist Anna Engelhardt is dedicated to the reflection on the Crimean bridge as a symbol of the colonial policy of the Russian Federation⁷⁸. Many Russian

71 Konstantin Skorkin, journalist, author, Carnegie Moscow Centre, interview dated 25/2/2020

72 Касперович, Л. (2019, сентябрь 21). Чтобы приехать на концерт в Минск, Вакарчук сбежал с заседания Рады. «Океан Ельзи» собрал полную арену. Tut.by. Режим доступа <https://afisha.tut.by/news/culture/654285.html>

73 Anna Shopina, Media Buyer, interview dated 18/05/2020

74 Konstantin Skorkin, journalist, author, Carnegie Moscow Centre, interview dated 25/2/2020

75 Anna Shopina, Media Buyer, interview dated 18/05/2020

76 Elena Konyushihina, curator and author specialized in arts texts, interview dated 22/05/2020

77 Katya Krylova, independent curator, lecturer, Higher School of Economics, interview dated 22/05/2020

78 Анна Энгельхардт. Крымский мост. Режим доступа <https://crimeanbridge.info/intro-1>

artists respect the work of their Ukrainian counterparts, expecting them to “protest and make political statements through art,”⁷⁹ however language occasionally acts as an obstacle to a better understanding of Ukrainian art^(ibid). Translation of curatorial texts, catalogs, subtitling of movies in Russian would facilitate the perception of Ukrainian contemporary art in Russia⁸⁰. Members of the Russian artistic community are aware of the Ukrainian resource “BirdInFlight”⁸¹, which provides a trilingual (in Ukrainian, Russian and English) account of news in Ukrainian and world art.

No matter how powerful can be creative projects conducted by Ukrainians in Russia, their quality will only be widely appreciated if the message of the work is devoid of nationalist characteristics and does not emphasize its connection with Ukraine.

A recent scandal surrounding the design of the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center⁸² has been a subject of discussion in both Ukraine and Russia. It is noteworthy that the creator of the controversial idea of conducting social experiments on museum visitors, Illia Khrzhanovskiy, is rarely called a Russian in Russian press, which often mentions that he is of Ukrainian origin⁸³. A similar situation exists in Ukraine, where in the Ukrainian media Khrzhanovskiy is depicted as a Russian, and his Ukrainian roots are mentioned only in passing. Due to the fact that many experts do not accept Khrzhanovskiy's methods of work, neither Ukraine nor Russia prefer to include him in the resources of their soft power.

The situation is different with Russian-speaking performers from Ukraine, who often tour in Russia and receive complimentary feedback from state-sponsored media⁸⁴. Such Ukrainian artists are used by Russia to strengthen propaganda narratives, in particular, that the only obstacle to the restoration of friendship between Ukrainians and Russians is the unwillingness of Ukrainian politicians to negotiate — while failing to mention Russian aggression in Ukraine.

5. PERCEPTION OF THE PERFORMANCE OF THE UKRAINIAN AUTHORITIES

The first year in office of Ukraine's new president and parliament has not led to drastic changes in the perception of Ukrainians by Russians⁸⁵. The number of Russians with a positive attitude towards Ukraine fell from 56 percent in September 2019 (the fifth month of Zelenskyy's tenure) to 42 percent in January 2020 (the ninth month of Zelenskyy's presidency)⁸⁶.

79 Elena Konyushihina, curator and author specialized in arts texts, interview dated 22/05/2020

80 Katya Krylova, independent curator, lecturer, Higher School of Economics, interview dated 22/05/2020

81 BirdInFlight. Режим доступу <https://birdinflight.com/uk/>

82 Бабин Яр. Музей жахів режисера Хржановського. (2020, квітень 27). Історична правда. Режим доступу <https://www.istpravda.com.ua/articles/2020/04/27/157398/>

83 Katya Krylova, independent curator, lecturer, Higher School of Economics, interview dated 22/05/2020

84 Голубченко, А., Оганджанов, І., Чурсина, М. (2018, март 3). «Нелепо, чудовищно, необ'яснено»: чому українським артистам хотять заборонити виступати в Росії. RT. Режим доступу <https://russian.rt.com/ussr/article/488353-ukraina-zakon-artisty-zapret>

85 Барышева, Е. (2019, апрель 22). Реакции в РФ на победу Зеленского: «Нормальная демократия для нас как чудо». Deutsche Welle. Режим доступа <http://tiny.cc/2x43lz>

86 Левада-центр. (2020). Российско-украинские отношения. Режим доступа <https://www.levada.ru/2020/02/13/rossijsko-ukrainskie-otnosheniya-7/>

For comparison: in early 2020, 54 percent of Ukrainians defined their attitude to Russia as "good" or "very good."⁸⁷ Some experts believe that the recent deterioration in Russians' attitudes toward Ukrainians can be explained by the fact that no significant compromise has been reached between Ukraine and Russia on Donbas⁸⁸. Zelenskyy's novelty, which benefited him in the first months of his presidency, converting supporters in Russia, later lost its momentum ^(ibid).

Russian media are becoming increasingly critical towards Zelenskyy, stressing his unwillingness to make significant concessions to the Kremlin on the issue of Donbas, and even accusing him of adopting Poroshenko's behavior⁸⁹. Media monitoring conducted as part of this study reveals that pro-Kremlin media have assessed Zelenskyy's first year in office rather negatively. In particular, some state-supported media write that in 2019 "various analysts" were wrong in saying that the "Zelenskyy factor" could inspire changes in the Russian political life because during the first year of his work, the Ukrainian president was not able to fulfill any promise other than opening the land market⁹⁰.

"Both the pro-Putin majority and the anti-Putin minority perceive the Ukrainian president more positively."

However, at the same time, many Russians have maintained a more friendly attitude towards Zelenskyy than to his predecessor: "Both the pro-Putin majority and the anti-Putin minority perceive the Ukrainian president more positively."⁹¹ An expert poll shows that in Russia the positive rating of Zelenskyy stands at 6.3 points out of 10. Despite the loss of his novelty

effect, the Ukrainian president continues to create news opportunities for the Russian media: 36 percent of Russian media about Ukraine are devoted to Zelenskyy and his presidency⁹². His New Year's address to Ukrainians earned new admiration from Russians⁹³, who viewed him as playing the role of a peacemaker and saw him as a politician capable of "uniting the country." ^(ibid)

Russian media devote an average of 10 percent of all news on Ukraine to the situation in Donbas.⁹⁴ According to an expert poll, Ukraine's ability to resolve the conflict is perceived by Russians at 3.5 points out of 10. In the opposition community, it is widely believed that despite challenging

87 Вінкельмаер, А. (2020, квітень 27). Опитування: українці краще ставляться до росіян, ніж росіяни — до українців. Deutsche Welle. Режим доступу <https://www.dw.com/uk/opytuvannia-ukraintsi-krashche-stavliatsia-do-rosiian-nizh-rosiiany-do-ukraintsiv/a-53162315>

88 Левада-центр. (2020). Соціологи зазначили ухвалення відносин росіян до українців. Режим доступу <https://www.levada.ru/2020/02/13/sotsiologi-zametili-uhudshenie-otnosheniya-rossiyan-k-ukraine/>

89 Соловьев, В., Черненко, Е. (2019, декабрь 19). Владимир Зеленский сделал ход Петром. Коммерсант. Режим доступу <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4188951>

90 Корнилов, В. (2020, май 19). "Фактор Зеленского". Почему России больше не ставят его в пример. РИА Новости. Режим доступу <https://ria.ru/20200519/1571632512.html>

91 Leonid Ragozin, journalist, interview dated 13/3/2020

92 Інститут Массової Інформації. (2020, січень 31). Голуб, О. Російський погляд на події в Україні. Режим доступу <https://imi.org.ua/monitorings/rosijskyj-poglyad-na-podiyi-v-ukrayini-i31476>

93 Ragozin, L. (2020, January 12). How Ukraine's Zelenskyy is winning hearts and minds in Russia. Al Jazeera. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/ukraine-zelenskyy-winning-hearts-minds-russia-200112151615079.html>

94 Інститут Массової Інформації. (2020, січень 31). Голуб, О. Російський погляд на події в Україні. Режим доступу <https://imi.org.ua/monitorings/rosijskyj-poglyad-na-podiyi-v-ukrayini-i31476>

domestic and geopolitical circumstances, Ukraine is able to competently defend its interests: "You have resisted such an enemy for six years!"⁹⁵ It is noteworthy that Russian independent observers credit this successful resistance (as well as any success achieved in reforms) less due to the actions of specific politicians and more a result of the system of government-to-citizen relations that has developed in Ukraine^(ibid). At the same time, some respondents interviewed in our survey expressed the opinion that some Russian opposition figures would prefer to see a firmer stance by Zelenskyy and a more aggressive defense of state interests in negotiations with Putin on Donbas⁹⁶.

Experts have rated the success of Ukraine's reforms at 4.2 out of 10. Opposition-minded Russians monitor Ukraine's reforms, including some of Volodymyr Zelenskyy's initiatives⁹⁷. According to an expert^(ibid), this community's members view potential amendments to the Ukrainian Constitution regarding decentralization⁹⁸, introducing the idea of appointing prefects in the regions as more similar to the practice of "overseers."

It is hardly surprising that most Russians are hostile to any issues related to the development of the Ukrainian nation. However, at times their opinion is supported by members of the opposition-minded audience. According to experts^{99,100}, some citizens who do not approve of Putin's policies have a negative opinion about two Ukrainian laws, namely the Ukrainian Law on the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language¹⁰¹ and the Law on Education¹⁰². Although these laws were approved during Poroshenko's tenure, discussions on violations of the rights of Russian-speaking Ukrainians are ongoing in Russia. Zelenskyy did not abolish these laws and is therefore also associated with their allegedly negative impact on minorities. "Ukraine's image among Russians (including the opposition-minded audience) will improve if Ukrainians change their current language policy. Liberalizing the status of the Russian language will show Russians that things are not as bad in Ukraine as propaganda says."¹⁰³ It should be noted that not all opposition figures (especially those who have visited Ukraine and seen the situation firsthand)¹⁰⁴ share the view that the rights of Russian-speaking Ukrainians suffer as a result of these laws or due to other state policies.

Besides the status of the Russian language, another issue that is negatively perceived by most Russians, including the opposition, is the existence of

⁹⁵ Victoria Ivleva, journalist, interview dated 14/05/2020

⁹⁶ Konstantin Skorkin, journalist, author, Carnegie Moscow Centre, interview dated 25/2/2020

⁹⁷ Sergey Krivenko, board member of the International Memorial Society, interview dated 2/3/2020

⁹⁸ Зеленський відкликав власний законопроект про децентралізацію. (2020, січень 16). Радіо Свобода. Режим доступу <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-zelenskyj-detsentralizatsija-vidklykannya/30380679.html>

⁹⁹ Leonid Ragozin, journalist, interview dated 13/3/2020

¹⁰⁰ Interview with a Russian expert, on confidentiality terms (14/5/2020)

¹⁰¹ Верховна Рада України. (2019, квітень 25). Закон «Про забезпечення функціонування української мови як державної». Режим доступу <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2704-19>

¹⁰² Верховна Рада України. (2017, вересень 5). Закон «Про освіту». Режим доступу <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2145-19>

¹⁰³ Interview with a Russia expert, on confidentiality terms (14/5/2020)

¹⁰⁴ Victoria Ivleva, journalist, interview dated 14/05/2020

radical right-wing groups in Ukraine¹⁰⁵. "For Russians, the main pillar of identity is victory in the Great Patriotic War. Based on this, any hint of the rehabilitation of fascism is outrageous for Russian society." ^(ibid) It bears mentioning that in the expert community there is an understanding that the scale of activities of radical groups is significantly inflated by the Russian media¹⁰⁶. However, Ukraine's attempts to combat the images created by propaganda are not very successful^(ibid), and during the new government's first year in office no progress was made on this issue. According to "Kommersant", Zelenskyy's statements regarding World War II were an obnoxious emotional event for Moscow last year: "The Kyiv's attempts to share responsibility for the outbreak of World War II between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were painfully felt in the Kremlin."¹⁰⁷

In general, some opposition believe that Ukraine's information policy toward combatting Russian propaganda is not effective enough¹⁰⁸. For example, Ukrainian authorities do not push back on figures whom Russian journalists present as "Ukrainian experts," who regularly provide comments and participate in propaganda shows in Russia¹⁰⁹. These "experts" often legitimize Russian narratives with little official push-back from Ukraine. The lack of reaction from the Ukrainian authorities is perceived by some as a manifestation of the weakness of the Ukrainian state¹¹⁰. Besides, the Ukrainian media should do more to advertise the achievements of the last six years, and not simply recount its failures, as such positive stories could undermine Russian "horror stories" about Ukraine.

According to opposition-minded Russians, Ukraine's foreign policy continues to evolve in line with the principles of European and Euro-Atlantic integration¹¹¹. Ukraine's ability to follow this path was assessed by experts at 5.0 points out of 10. During the new government's first year in power, there was no significant warming of relations with Russia and, in general, Ukraine's return to the Russian sphere of influence is considered unlikely. Consistency and predictability of Ukrainian foreign policy, according to experts, amounted to 3.9 points out of 10.

Zelenskyy's participation in the Normandy Four meeting in Paris was met with muted coverage in Russian media¹¹². Vladimir Putin noted that the conversation with his Ukrainian counterpart turned out to be constructive and refrained from criticizing him¹¹³. Russian journalists wrote that Zelenskyy retained the position of Poroshenko, making significant trade-offs in agreements on Donbas unlikely. Media also reported that Zelenskyy could be open to dialogue with Moscow, but other politicians, including the

¹⁰⁵ Leonid Ragozin, journalist, interview dated 13/3/2020

¹⁰⁶ Interview with a Russian expert, on confidentiality terms (14/5/2020)

¹⁰⁷ Юсин, М. (2020, май 19). Зеленский боится конфликта с «патриотическим лагерем». Коммерсант. Режим доступа <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4348808>

¹⁰⁸ Victoria Ivleva, journalist, interview dated 14/05/2020

¹⁰⁹ Фахрутдинов, Р. (2019, октябрь 24). «Чуть не умер на днях»: украинский политолог попал в реанимацию. Газета.ru. Режим доступа <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2019/10/24/12775634.shtml>

¹¹⁰ Victoria Ivleva, journalist, interview dated 14/05/2020

¹¹¹ Sergey Krivenko, board member of the International Memorial Society, interview dated 2/3/2020

¹¹² Konstantin Skorin, journalist, author, Carnegie Moscow Centre, interview dated 25/2/2020

¹¹³ Песков рассказал о впечатлении Путина от Зеленского. (2019, декабрь 10). Известия. Режим доступа <https://iz.ru/952780/2019-12-10/peskov-rasskazal-o-vpechatlenii-putina-ot-zelenskogo>

so-called "hawks," would not allow him to reach a compromise on terms favorable to Russia¹¹⁴.

The scandal surrounding the impeachment of Donald Trump was predictably used by many pro-government Russian journalists to confirm the alleged dependence of Ukrainian politicians, including Zelenskyy, on the United States¹¹⁵. The media coverage of the two presidents' talks was portrayed by Russian media as disrespectful to the Ukrainian president, as if the scandal were intended to undermine Zelenskyy's image in the international community¹¹⁶. Particular attention by state-sponsored media was given to the erroneous mention of Zelenskyy by Trump as President of Russia. One Russian senator, in particular, considered this a confirmation that even the US president sees Russia and Ukraine as belonging to a common "Russian world."¹¹⁷

News from the Verkhovna Rada were often covered through the prism of comments by Ukrainian pro-Russian politicians Vadym Rabinovych¹¹⁸, Viktor Medvedchuk¹¹⁹ and Yurii Boiko¹²⁰, who have been quick to criticize the Zelenskyy government for any reason and have repeated the narratives of Russian propaganda. With small exception¹²¹, most publications in Russian press did not focus on the the legislative activity of the Verkhovna Rada and its impact on the lives of Ukrainians. Articles of pro-government media outlets prioritized scandalous statements and heated discussions¹²² and pointed out that the new government has been unable to enact legislation to generate drastic change in the country¹²³.

114 Аваков, А. (2019, декабрь 4). Порошенко и Тимошенко объединились ради войны на Донбассе. МК. Режим доступа <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2019/12/04/poroshenko-i-timoshenko-obedinilis-radi-voyny-na-donbasse.html>

115 Евстигнеев, А. (2019). Скандал с Трампом и Зеленским: Порошенко послал сигнал Байдену. Вести. Режим доступа <https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=3194040>

116 Поплавский, А. (2019, ноябрь 11). «Самый важный»: раскритикован первый разговор Трампа с Зеленским. Газета.ru. Режим доступа https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2019/11/15_a_12814592.shtml

117 Пушкин оценил оговорку Трампа о Зеленском и России. (2019, октябрь 29). Известия. Режим доступа <https://iz.ru/937319/2019-10-29/pushkov-otcenil-ogovorku-trampa-o-zelenskom-i-rossii>

118 Депутат Рады заявил, что украинская власть страдает от «абсолютной импотенции». (2020, февраль 26). Газета.ru. Режим доступа https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2020/02/26/n_14083993.shtml

119 На Украине заявили о гибели промышленности. (2020, февраль 11). Рамблер. Режим доступа <https://finance.rambler.ru/economics/43654998-na-ukraine-zayavili-o-gibeli-promyshlennosti/?updated>

120 Горшенин, К. (2019, сентябрь 19). В Госдуме оценили призыв Бойко к Киеву пойти на компромисс по Донбассу. RT. Режим доступа <https://russian.rt.com/ussr/news/669768-gosduma-boiko-donbass>

121 Мусафирова, О. (2019, сентябрь 12). Зеленый турборежим в Верховной раде. Новая Газета. Режим доступа <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2019/09/12/81943-zelenyy-turborezhim-v-verhovnoy-rade>

122 Фахрутдинов, Р. (2020, март 2). «Швырнуть» бомбу на Москву: в Раде рассказали о войне. Газета.ru. Режим доступа <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2020/03/02/12986437.shtml>

123 Латышев, А., Медведева, А., Онищук, Е. (2019, сентябрь 12). «Ярко выраженный популизм»: к каким последствиям может привести снятие неприкосновенности с депутатов Рады. RT. Режим доступа <https://russian.rt.com/ussr/article/667545-zelenskii-rada-neprikosnovennost>

6. ACTIVITIES OF THE EMBASSY AND THE IMPACT OF THE UKRAINIAN COMMUNITY

Polling conducted for this study rated the effectiveness of the Ukrainian Embassy's activities in Russia at 3.4 points out of 10. The Ukrainian diplomatic mission in Russia regularly publishes allegations of illegal actions by Russian authorities in Crimea¹²⁴ and Donbas¹²⁵, condemns violence against peaceful protesters in Moscow¹²⁶, and supports Ukrainian "prisoners of the Kremlin"¹²⁷, etc. Given the current political environment, the embassy does not hold large-scale events and usually celebrates national holidays without many visitors¹²⁸. In 2014, Ukraine withdrew its ambassador to Russia, and has no plans to appoint a new one until the end of Russian aggression in Ukraine. Recently, discussions regarding ending diplomatic relations with Russia, active during Poroshenko's presidency, have subsided.

The influence of the Ukrainian community in Russia is estimated at 4.4 points out of 10. According to various data, the number of Ukrainians living in Russia ranges between three¹²⁹ and five million¹³⁰, making it the largest Ukrainian expatriate community in the world, and a community that continues to grow through the issuance of Russian passports to Donbas residents. In addition to the political component, Russia may be issuing Russian passports to people from Eastern Ukraine (and Ukrainians from other regions) to solve its own demographic problems¹³¹.

The Ukrainian community in Russia is not homogeneous and has differing opinions about events in Ukraine. Ukrainians who have preserved their national identity and choose to display it often face disrespectful and aggressive behavior on the part of Russians or pro-Russian Ukrainians¹³². Following Zelenskyy's electoral victory, representatives of the Ukrainian expatriate community appealed to the President of Ukraine, welcoming the free and fair elections and linking Zelenskyy's election to the continuation of the Revolution of Dignity. This letter also urged the president to support

¹²⁴ Посольство України в Російській Федерації. (2019, квітень 19). Заява МЗС щодо незаконних засуджень та затримань кримських татар в тимчасово окупованому Криму. Режим доступу <https://russia.mfa.gov.ua/news/10196-zajava-mzs-shhodo-nezakonnih-zasudzheny-ta-zatrimany-krimsykih-tatar-v-timchasovo-okupovanomu-krimu>

¹²⁵ Посольство України в Російській Федерації. (2019, листопад 8). Коментар МЗС України щодо чергового т.зв. «гуманітарного конвою» РФ. Режим доступу <https://russia.mfa.gov.ua/news/11038-komentar-mzs-ukrajini-shhodo-chergovogo-tzv-gumanitarnogo-konvoju-rf>

¹²⁶ Посольство України в Російській Федерації. (2019, липень 28). Коментар МЗС України стосовно придушення мирних протестів у Москві. Режим доступу <https://russia.mfa.gov.ua/news/10757-komentar-mzs-ukrajini-stosovno-pridushennya-mirnih-protestiv-u-moskvi>

¹²⁷ Посольство України в Російській Федерації. (2019, липень 24). Заява МЗС України щодо рішення Верховного суду РФ у справі громадянина України Павла Гриба. Режим доступу <https://russia.mfa.gov.ua/news/10736-zajava-mzs-ukrajini-shhodo-rishennya-verkhovnogogo-sudu-rf-u-spravi-gromadyanina-ukrajini-pavla-griba>

¹²⁸ Посольство України в Російській Федерації. (2019, листопад 21). Відзначення Дня Гідності та Свободи. Режим доступу <https://russia.mfa.gov.ua/news/76107-vidznachennya-dnya-gidnosti-ta-svobodi>

¹²⁹ Скільки українців живе в Росії: Клімкін назвав цифру. (2018, квітень 23). 24 Канал. Режим доступу https://24tv.ua/skilki_ukrayintsiv_zhive_v_rosiyi_klimkin_nazvav_tsifru_n956786

¹³⁰ Бутко, К. (2019, липень 13). Росія може ввести штрафи і відкрити провадження за причетність ГО до Світового конгресу українців. ТСН. Режим доступу <https://tsn.ua/interview/rosiya-mozhe-vvesti-shtrafi-i-vidkriti-provazhennya-za-prichetnist-go-do-svitovogo-kongresu-ukrayinciv-1377624.html>

¹³¹ Гончаренко, Р. (2019, травень 29). «Нові росіяни», або Чи витягнуть українці Росію з демографічної ями. Deutsche Welle. Режим доступу <http://tiny.cc/t8i2mz>

¹³² Матусова, О. (2015, вересень 16). Українці в Росії: життя на тлі війни. Радіо Свобода. Режим доступу <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/27251430.html>

the diaspora, oppressed by the Russian authorities: "Recently, the Union of Ukrainians of Russia, the Ukrainian Educational Center, and Russia's only Library of Ukrainian Literature were liquidated."¹³³

In 2019, the Russian authorities added the The Ukrainian World Congress (UWC) in Russia to the list of "undesirable organizations" for "discrediting the country's leadership and creating Russia's image as an aggressor state."¹³⁴ According to UWC leader Pavlo Hrod, Russia attempts to intimidate vocal citizens: "This move demonstrates Russian President Vladimir Putin's fears that the democratic principles professed by the Ukrainian people could lead to the destruction of his kleptocratic regime."¹³⁵ Reflecting on the religious rights of the Ukrainian expatriate community, the former co-chair of the Union of Ukrainians of Russia notes that the Russian authorities continue to hinder the establishment of the Ukrainian national church¹³⁶.

Vladimir Putin fears that the democratic principles professed by the Ukrainian people could lead to the destruction of his kleptocratic regime.

In the first half of 2019, 164,000 Ukrainians came to work in Russia, and another 13,700 Ukrainians came to study¹³⁷; Ukraine ranked third in terms of the total number of workers who entered the Russian Federation since the beginning of 2019. While, prior to 2013 Ukrainian labor migrants preferred Russia, after Euromaidan Poland emerged as the main destination for Ukrainian laborers¹³⁸. After 2014, the number of entries and exits of Ukrainians to and from Russia decreased from 11 to 8 million annually, while the number of Ukrainian-Polish border crossings increased by 40 percent (from 14 to 20 million per year)¹³⁹.

Some Russians working in the field of IT and media are migrating to Ukraine¹⁴⁰. Pundits, human rights activists and historians are also moving, and interviews with such Russians are routinely published by both

¹³³ Діаспора в Росії привітала Зеленського та нагадала про складне становище українців у РФ. (2019, квітень 25). Укрінформ. Режим доступу <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-diaspora/2689515-ukrainska-diaspora-rosii-privitala-zelenskogo-ta-nagadala-pro-skladne-stanovise-ukrayinciv-u-rf.html>

¹³⁴ Кудрін, О. (2019, вересень 5). Тривожна ситуація з українською діаспорою у Росії. Відкритий лист. Укрінформ. Режим доступу <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-world/2773986-trivozna-situacia-z-ukrainskou-diasporou-u-rosii-vidkritij-list.html>

¹³⁵ Бутко, К. (2019, липень 13). Росія може ввести штрафи і відкрити провадження за причетність ГО до Світового конгресу українців. ТСН. Режим доступу <https://tsn.ua/interview/rosiya-mozhe-vvesti-shtrafi-i-vidkriti-provazhennya-za-prichetnist-go-do-svitovogo-kongresu-ukrayinciv-1377624.html>

¹³⁶ Семененко, В. (2020, січень 13). Як українцям відчувати себе українцями в Росії. Українська Правда. Режим доступу <https://www.pravda.com.ua/columns/2020/01/13/7237165/>

¹³⁷ Одні з лідерів: ФСБ порахувала кількість українських заробітчан і студентів у Росії. (2019, серпень 19). УНІАН. Режим доступу <https://www.unian.ua/society/10656171-odni-z-lideriv-fsb-porahovala-kilkist-ukrajinskih-zarobitchan-i-studentiv-u-rosiji.html>

¹³⁸ Ковальов, М. (2018, лютий 22). Українські заробітчани міняють Росію на Польщу. Український інтерес. Режим доступу <https://uain.press/articles/ukrayinski-zarobitchany-minyayut-rosiyu-na-polshhu-719474>

¹³⁹ Український кризовий медіа-центр. (2018, квітень 25). 4 мільйони українців працюють за кордоном — дослідження Центру економічної стратегії. Режим доступу <https://uacrisis.org/uk/66428-research-on-labor-migration-ces>

¹⁴⁰ Grigory Frolov, Vice-president, "Free Russia Foundation", interview dated 15/06/2020

Ukrainian¹⁴¹ and Russian media outlets¹⁴². Russian human rights activists who migrated to Ukraine have reported the difficulty or impossibility to carry out activities in Russia due to harassment by the authorities^(ibid). Some Russian migrants believe that Ukraine has a healthier democracy and is generally freer: "There is a different attitude to the government, so it is normal to criticize the government, protest and express one's opinion here."^(ibid) At the same time, according to the expert, the Ukrainian state does not create the proper conditions for migration of Russian-speaking professionals (not only from Russia, but also from the region as a whole)¹⁴³. The migration service has not been reformed, the rules for crossing the border are rather vague and can therefore be interpreted in each case at the will of officials¹⁴⁴.

7. UKRAINIAN BRANDS

According to experts, the popularity of Ukrainian brands in Russia stands at 5.6 points out of 10. Despite the ban on importing Ukrainian goods to Russia¹⁴⁵, Ukrainian products can still be found on the shelves of Russian stores. Although hard to find, "Roshen" sweets are still in high demand¹⁴⁶. In addition to sweets, experts also noted the popularity of Ukrainian cleaning products¹⁴⁷. In Moscow, there is a restaurants network Korchma "Taras Bulba," which exploits in its interior Soviet stereotypes about Ukraine¹⁴⁸.

Since 2014, Russia's trade turnover with Ukraine has decreased almost threefold¹⁴⁹. Ukraine is no longer one of Russia's top trading partners, and Ukrainian producers are gradually reducing their dependence on the Russian market. In 2019, the trade turnover between the countries amounted to 10.1 billion US dollars (13 percent less compared to 2018)¹⁵⁰. Exports of Ukrainian goods to Russia reached 3.2 billion US dollars (11 percent less compared to 2018). Ukraine imported goods totaling 6.9 billion US dollars from Russia (11 percent below the level of 2018). The negative balance of Ukrainian-Russian trade is 3.7 billion US dollars^(ibid).

141 Симакова, Т. (2018, декабрь 12). Москвичи, переехавшие в Киев. The Village. Режим доступа <https://www.the-village.ru/village/people/people/334817-moskvichi-uehavshie-v-kiev>

142 Мурашов, С. (2017, май 11). «Причина моего переезда — не Путин и не система, а само общество». Россияне о своей эмиграции в Украину. Сноб. Режим доступа <https://snob.ru/selected/entry/124311/>

143 Atlantic Council. (2019, May 2). Frolov, G. Time for Ukraine to compete with Russia. Retrieved from <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/time-for-ukraine-to-compete-with-russia/>

144 Grigory Frolov, Vice-president, "Free Russia Foundation", interview dated 15/06/2020

145 Ембарго на українські товари в Росії: чого домігся Путін. (2019, січень 20). Сьогодні. Режим доступу <https://www.segodnya.ua/ua/economics/enews/embargo-ukrainskih-tovarov-v-rossii-chego-dobilysya-putin-1208016.html>

146 Konstantin Skorkin, journalist, author, Carnegie Moscow Centre, interview dated 25/2/2020

147 Sergey Krivenko, board member of the International Memorial Society, interview dated 2/3/2020

148 Tripadvisor. Корчма Тарас Бульба. Режим доступа https://www.tripadvisor.ru/Restaurant_Review-g298484-d799205-Reviews-Korchma_Taras_Bulba-Moscow_Central_Russia.html

149 Россия больше не крупнейший торговый партнер Украины — НБУ. (2019, вересень 27). ЛІГА.net. Режим доступу <https://biz.liga.net/ekonomika/all/novosti/rossiya-bolshe-ne-krupneyshiy-torgovu-partner-ukrainy-nbu>

150 Державна служба статистики України. Географічна структура зовнішньої торгівлі товарами у 2019 році. Режим доступу <http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/>

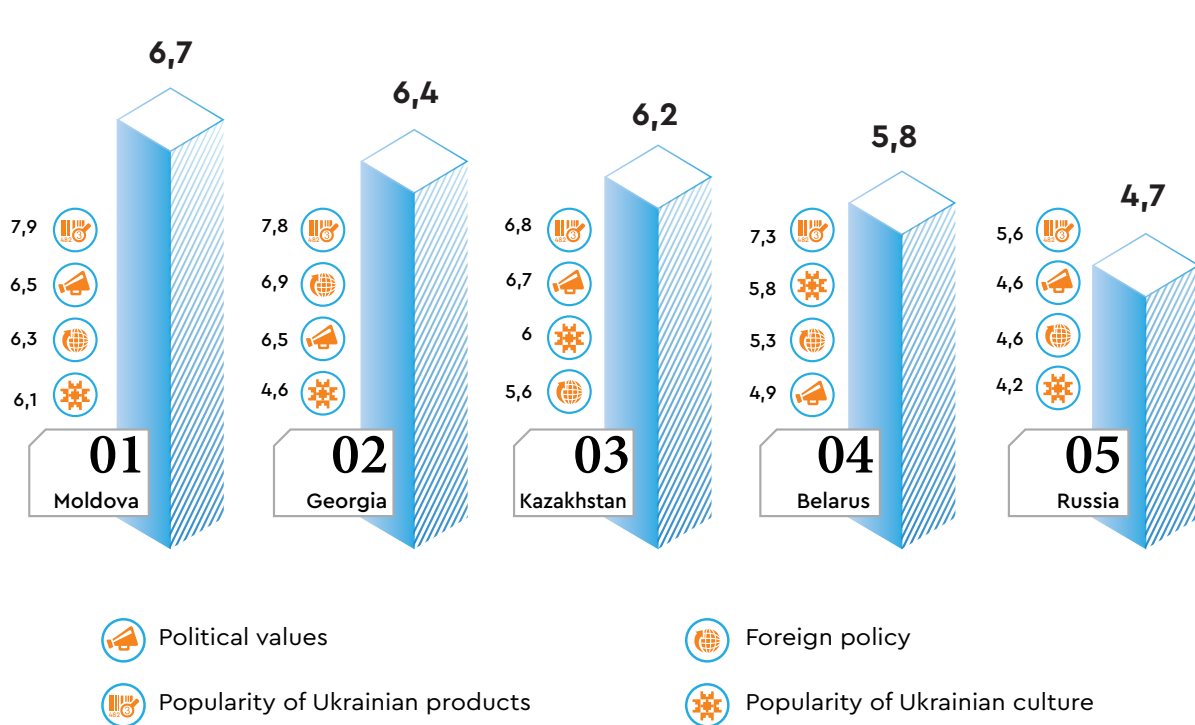
Despite the fact that in June 2019 restrictions were imposed on the supply of Russian coal and oil products to Ukraine, in January and February 2020, Russia's share in imported supplies of thermal coal to Ukraine stood at 61 percent¹⁵¹. In May 2020, Ukraine imposed a 65 percent duty on electricity and coal imports from Russia, with the exception of anthracite, bituminous and coking coal.

¹⁵¹ Захарова, А. (2020, березень 18). Імпорт електроенергії та вугілля з Росії: Україна вводить спеціальне мито. 24 Канал. https://24tv.ua/import_elektroenergiyi_ta_vugillya_z_rosiyi_ukrayina_vvodit_spetsialne_mito_n1299751

8. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the research conducted in "Ukraine's regional soft power. Changes during the presidency of Volodymyr Zelenskyy: Case studies of Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Kazakhstan and Russia" lead to the following conclusions.

- 1 President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has generally contributed to Ukraine's attractiveness in all targeted countries.** At the same time, this effect proved to be the most pronounced during his presidential election campaign and was not properly reinforced during the first year of Zelenskyy's presidency. Ukraine's attractiveness in the region improved through the engagement of various elements of soft power in different countries.
 - **Creativity: Belarus.** While following Volodymyr Zelenskyy's election campaign, Belarusians had the opportunity to see how a vibrant political system functions — with creative communication with voters, lively debates, two rounds of elections and a convincing and overwhelmingly democratic victory of a presidential candidate. The election of Zelenskyy as president strengthened the perception of Belarusians that Ukrainian politics is built not only around individuals, but also on certain well-established approaches that allow for the renewal of political elites.
 - **Election of a political outsider: Georgia.** For many Georgians, Volodymyr Zelenskyy is a representative of a new generation of Ukrainian politicians whose career did not begin in the 1990s; Zelenskyy was able to enter the political system as a neophyte, declaring his intention to change it. Zelenskyy's presidential victory underscores the desire of Ukrainians to reset the post-Soviet political establishment and develop a more democratic system of government.
 - **Anti-corruption rhetoric: Moldova.** Many Moldovans associate Zelenskyy with his commitment to fighting corruption and de-oligarchization — challenges that are a top priority for the Moldovan population as well. The Ukrainian president's anti-corruption rhetoric reinforces Ukraine's image as a country seeking democratic change.
 - **Youth: Kazakhstan.** It is not so much about biological as about political youth — Zelenskyy impresses many citizens of Kazakhstan because of his non-bureaucratized approaches, an informal communication style, and his stated preference for wide-scale reform over stability. These characteristics of the Ukrainian president strengthen the vision of Ukraine as a country that is able to break old political tradition and change itself.
 - **Peacemaking rhetoric: Russia.** Russian-speaking Volodymyr Zelenskyy's remarks about restoring peace in Donbas have somewhat softened the image of Ukraine created by Russian propaganda and helped improve the perception of Ukrainians held by many ordinary Russians. Zelenskyy's popularity in the Russian Federation as an actor has also played an important role. The involvement of this element of his soft power has strengthened some narratives about Ukraine, including the perception of Ukraine as a country where freedom of speech and criticism of the government are possible.

Graph 1. Rating of Ukraine's soft power in Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Kazakhstan and Russia

According to expert surveys conducted by the New Europe Center, in Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Kazakhstan and Russia, the highest index of Ukraine's soft power can be observed in the Republic of Moldova: 6.7 points out of 10. It is noteworthy that according to the findings of previous research ("Ukraine's soft power in the region: An instrument for the effective foreign policy") conducted by our analysts almost 10 years ago, Ukraine was also perceived best in Moldova. Meanwhile, in Georgia, Ukraine's attractiveness is estimated at 6.4 points, and in Kazakhstan 6.2. In neighboring Belarus, this figure was 5.8 points, with Ukraine having the lowest perception index in Russia, with 4.7 points.

2 In a number of post-Soviet countries, Volodymyr Zelenskyy may be perceived as a **democratic alternative to authoritarian leaders**, including Vladimir Putin. The main competitive advantages of the Ukrainian president are his status as a political outsider, distance from post-Soviet political elites and more open communication with citizens. For Zelenskyy, his success as a regional leader will depend on the extent to which he will be able to meet the expectations placed on him by both Ukrainians and citizens of post-Soviet countries.

3 In the targeted countries, **interest in Ukrainian events** increases sharply during significant political developments in Ukraine, such as last year's presidential and parliamentary elections. The wholesale change of the Ukrainian political establishment in 2019 was often perceived as another revolution, except this time conducted at the ballot box and not in the streets. The victory of Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the presidential election and the emergence of new parties in the Verkhovna Rada showed citizens of Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Kazakhstan and Russia that political life in Ukraine is dynamic and not easily usurped by a single political force, while competition between candidates motivates politicians to communicate more creatively.

The victory of Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a well-known actor and film producer in the post-Soviet area, also strengthened the image of Ukrainians as a creative nation. Opposition members, pro-European citizens and the expert community were the audiences that viewed Zelenskyy most positively in the targeted countries. The interest in Ukrainian elections can be explained by the fact that the same challenges Ukraine faces are relevant for some of the researched countries as well: an aggressive Russian foreign policy, security issues, anti-corruption activities, de-oligarchization, etc.

4 The new Ukrainian government (and Volodymyr Zelenskyy personally) is expected to be able to respond to these common challenges — for the benefit not only of Ukraine but of the entire region. The security of other countries in the region depends on the ability of the Ukrainian state to resist Russian aggression, and democratic changes in Ukraine can set the tone for transformations throughout the post-Soviet space. Experts, opposition members and pro-European citizens hope that if the challenges are successfully addressed, **the Ukrainian state will take over the role of regional leader from Russia and become an attractive role model for their own states.** The study findings show that in the perception of the citizens of Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Kazakhstan and Russia, Ukraine already has serious achievements in the context of soft power. These elements of Ukraine's soft power are an active civil society, free media, an open political system, liberalization of business conditions, attractiveness for tourism and a progressive creative industry. At the same time, Ukraine does not fully use these successes and its considerable potential to strengthen its influence in the region.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

CHANGES IN THE COUNTRY

- Only a democratic, reformed Ukraine will fully realize its soft power potential in the perception of the citizens of the region. Ukrainian political elites need to understand that high expectations of change in Ukraine are not just limited to Ukrainian citizens. Ukraine's success combating corruption, de-oligarchizing, and resisting Russian aggression can turn the state into a model of political behavior for other countries. No matter how outdated and unrealistic a recommendation for decisive transformation of the Ukrainian state may seem, it is the key to the formation of an effective soft power of the state. Ukraine's soft power potential lies not in cosmetic updates, but in the radical restructuring of the country.
- One of the first, and most visible, signs of change for foreign visitors will be a change in approach to the work of border guards and customs officers. In the targeted countries, it is not uncommon to hear about rude Ukrainians at the border, who may sometimes demand bribes.
- In its communication to external audiences, Ukrainian leadership should pay attention to the changes which have already taken place, and the impact of the transformations that have already occurred. Many post-Soviet states today can only dream of the advantages Ukrainians enjoy: citizens have the right to freely express their will in elections; Ukrainians have considerable influence on policy-making; citizens are not afraid to take responsibility and force out corrupt rulers; Ukrainians have managed to gain considerable support from the the global community both for internal change and for countering Russian aggression.

SECURITY

- Ukraine should maintain leadership in the region to counter Russian aggression, possibly through the creation of various platforms, including governmental, parliamentary, and high ministerial levels. This is especially relevant for those states that have themselves become the targets of Russian aggression including Georgia and Moldova. A dialogue for security issues between Kyiv, Tbilisi and Chisinau can take place in the context of the Eastern Partnership. Kazakhstan and Belarus, although Moscow's formal allies, are no less interested in such a dialogue (or informal exchange of information), as they have reason to be wary of military provocations from Russia.
- Ukraine needs to make more active use of the influence it may have to the resolution of conflict in Georgia and Moldova. For example, in the case of Chisinau, Kyiv should raise the issues of joint control on the Transnistrian part of the border and cooperation to combat smuggling in the Transnistrian region. Anything that weakens Russia's influence contributes to broader regional security.
- Ukrainian politicians need to take a more delicate approach to decision-making and public statements that may alienate Kyiv's allies. Carelessness and reckless arrogance breeds distrust, and weakens all countries that are on the path of democratization and must counter Russian aggression daily. Ukrainian authorities should take into account the criticism that "Ukrainian politicians sometimes choose the tone of statements more typical of Russians" heard from experts in Moldova and Georgia. In particular, Chisinau

calls on Kyiv to minimize the negative impact of the Ukrainian hydroelectric power plant on the Dniester on Moldova's water resources. By ignoring the pleas of its ally, Kyiv undercuts its own regional soft power.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

- Ukrainian journalists, analysts, and bloggers should communicate more regularly and in a more informal setting with counterparts from its neighbors and allies; Embassies could take a lead in building such communities. Regular, informal meetings between embassies and opinion leaders will be instrumental in distributing more comprehensive information about Ukrainian realities. These discussions could cover issues of interest not only to Ukrainians but partners from other countries (whether it is the Chernobyl disaster, which also affected Belarus; or modern readings of Taras Shevchenko heritage honored in Kazakhstan).
- Study visits for influential media representatives, analysts, bloggers or activists are an important tool for introducing Ukraine to external audiences. By promoting visits and first-hand narratives, foreign audiences that are heavily influenced by Russian propaganda can receive alternative narratives about Ukraine.
- Political leaders, and most of all the president, should take part in press briefings not only for well-known European and North American media, but also for journalists of the region. Citizens of the former Soviet Union are very interested in the events in Ukraine and often perceive the state as the regional leader, but also sometimes feel a certain indifference from Kyiv officials in maintaining a dialogue. It is important to communicate with journalists who actively cover Ukrainian events (for example, "Belsat" and "Current Time").
- The Ukrainian government can offer small grants to its diaspora, aimed at spreading news about Ukraine, and supporting civic journalism and blogging among the Ukrainian diaspora.

BUSINESS

- In some countries in the region, Ukraine already has a reputation as a country with loose and liberal conditions for running one's own business because its system is much less bureaucratized than, for example, that of Belarus. Study visits for businessmen, bilateral and multilateral business forums, and trade exhibitions could be another way to attract investment from foreign entrepreneurs. Areas that may interest foreign businessmen most are IT, tourism, medical services, cosmetology, events industry, advertising, and design.
- The government of Ukraine should promote the creation of an internet resource that would collect comprehensive information for foreign tourists (in at least three languages — Ukrainian, English, and Russian). The event and medical tourism industries are becoming increasingly popular among the citizens of the region. Event tourism involves attending major events in sports or music (such as "Euro 2012" or "Eurovision"). The high quality of medical services in private clinics is also becoming part of Ukraine's soft power which should be actively promoted by the Ukrainian state.

CREATIVE INDUSTRY

- Changes in Ukraine could be best showcased by creative initiatives. Traditional, bureaucratized cultural events only reinforce the image of a typical post-Soviet country reluctant to change. There is a contrast between the image of Ukraine represented by the ethnocentric activities of embassies and the impression of foreigners who have visited Ukraine or worked with Ukrainians as a creative and trendsetting nation. The considerable achievements of Ukrainian cinema in recent years remain little known to regional audiences. Ukrainian films (as part of the Weeks of Ukrainian Movies), vocal performances, and other art initiatives would help to create the image of a dynamic European country.
- Creativity should not be limited to art: Ukraine's soft power also includes its cuisine, which is well-regarded regionally. Gastronomic and culinary festivals are an excellent opportunity to capitalize on one of Ukraine's strengths. In particular, modern Ukrainian cuisine, which has long been of great interest to foreigners visiting the Ukrainian capital, offers great potential. Such projects could be implemented by embassies with the support of the Ukrainian diaspora and businesspeople interested in promoting their brands.

New Europe Center»
<http://neweurope.org.ua/>



info@neweurope.org.ua



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 <http://neweurope.org.ua/>
 info@neweurope.org.ua
 <https://www.facebook.com/NECUkraine/>
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