UKRAINE'S PERCEPTION REPORT
IN EUROPE

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The analysis of Ukraine's perception in Europe consists of four pillars:

- **Ukraine-related search trends.** What topics and events are capturing public interest in Ukraine on Google.

- **Public opinion about Ukraine.** The general sentiment and perceptions held by the public towards Ukraine, as reflected in trustworthy social surveys.

- **Ukraine's coverage in local news media.** How Ukraine is represented in news outlets, including the most popular Ukraine-related topics.

- **Interviews with five experts per region.** Analysis of opinions from researchers and experts for a deeper understanding of key trends and the context of Ukraine's perception.

Using the insights from Expert interviews, we have been able to further validate our initial findings**.** Experts' quotes that either supported or challenged findings from preliminary desk-based research are presented in each section of the report in order to provide a deeper understanding of the results.

LIMITATIONS

This regional analysis was conducted on a limited number of countries representing Europe. While we acknowledge that perceptions of Ukraine may vary across different countries within the region, time and resource constraints led us to focus our analysis on the most influential countries, including the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Poland. These countries were chosen because they represent some of the largest and strongest economies in the region, which in turn affects their strength on the international stage. The selection is also based on their significant influence on European politics, economy, and the information space.

Our media analysis was conducted over a specific, limited time frame (from August to October 2024). A longer period would require more resources for a comprehensive analysis. Nevertheless, we believe that the data provided offers a foundational understanding of how Ukraine is covered in local media.

To identify the genuine interest of the regional audience in specific topics, we conducted a study of search queries using Google Trends and Ahrefs. Given the distinct functionalities of these analytical tools, we selected different timeframes for query analysis. For Google Trends, the analysis covered January 2022 to October 2024, while for Ahrefs, it spanned October 2023 to October 2024. Both tools provided data for the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Poland. This research enabled us to assess the resonance of various events among audiences in the selected countries.

According to our analysis of data from Ahrefs and Google Trends, the most common reasons for the rising search interest in the "Ukraine" topic in Europe during the period from January 2024 to October 2024 were as follows (see Figure 1).

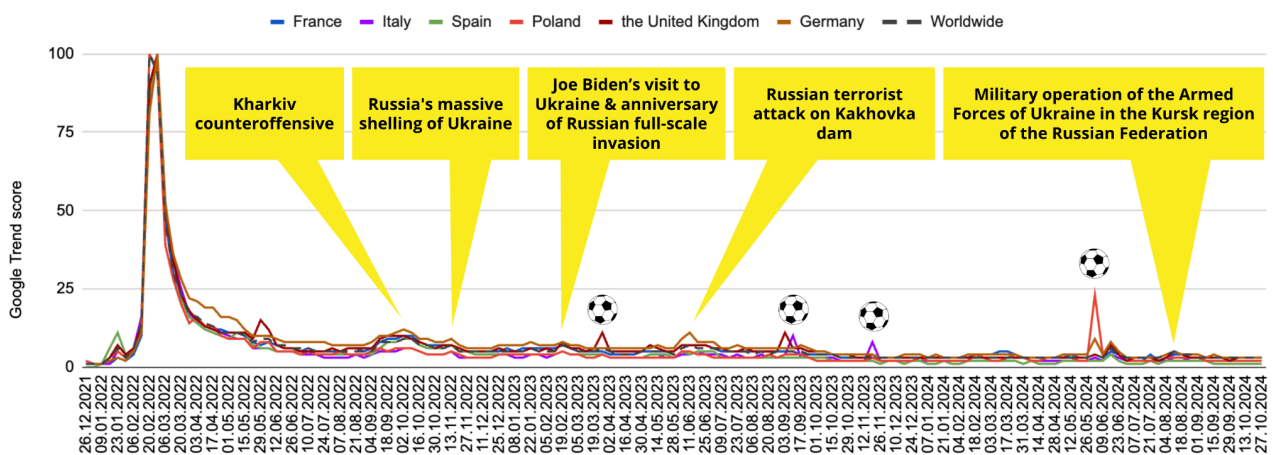### Dynamics of the search activity for "Ukraine" query on Google

Figure 1. Trend of "Ukraine" search query on Google in Europe & worldwide.
Source: Google Trends

Major Military Actions and Acts of Terror. Events related to large-scale military operations or terrorist attacks, such as the Kharkiv counteroffensive and the attack on the Kakhovka Dam, led to noticeable increases in search volume across Europe. This is particularly evident in Poland, where attention to military actions near its border is heightened.

High-Profile Diplomatic Visits. Visits by global leaders, such as Joe Biden's trip to Kyiv, had a significant impact on the interest of European countries in the topic of Ukraine. These events highlight the international concern regarding Ukraine and its role in European politics and security.

Ukraine's involvement in football matches. In Europe, where football enjoys widespread popularity, there was an increase in interest in Ukraine during international football matches involving the Ukrainian team. This reflects the cultural interest of European audiences in Ukraine and is an atypical factor compared to other regions, where interest is predominantly driven by military or political events.

"All the changes happened in 2022. From complete ignorance about where it is and why it matters, to immense solidarity with Ukraine through the war. Becoming acquainted with Ukraine no longer means a once-a-month report from Kyiv but a daily feature in television headlines and newspapers. Ukraine stays on the front pages of the press, and every shelling, if not the top story, is the second topic on public television news watched by millions. [...] Ukraine is known, understood, and supported. Over the past year, Ukraine has become part of society, especially with a million Ukrainians living here." (Expert 3)

According to data from Ahrefs and Google Trends, the war is the most common Ukraine-related search topic in Europe (see Figure 2).

Trending queries in the context of Ukraine on Google

Figure 2. Trending queries in the context of Ukraine on Google (October 2023 – October 2024).
Source: Ahrefs (data for the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Poland)

Russia's war in Ukraine remains the primary search topic in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Poland. Popular queries include *"Russian advance in Ukraine", "Ukraine war casualties", and "death toll Ukraine war"*. People are also interested in the current state of the war, with frequent searches for "current front line in Ukraine", and "Ukraine counteroffensive today".

Football also appears among popular topics, with searches like *"Spain U21 — Ukraine U21", and "Italy — Ukraine qualifiers",* reflecting a continued interest in sports events featuring Ukraine.

Another common topic is Ukraine's position in Europe, with searches like *"is Ukraine in the EU", and "Ukraine aid",* showing engagement with Ukraine's political and economic ties with the region.

CONCLUSIONS

- **High initial interest with subsequent significant spikes:** Immediately following Russia's full-scale invasion, interest in the topic of Ukraine surged to record levels across Europe. Over time, the search volume declined, but periodic spikes in interest continued, particularly during major military events, diplomatic visits, and terrorist attacks on critical infrastructure.

- **Strong interest in key countries:** The search trends indicate that countries like Poland, Germany, the United Kingdom, and France show a sustained interest in Ukraine, especially during significant political or military events. Poland, as a neighbouring country, exhibits particularly high attention, reflected in its consistent interest in Ukraine-related developments.

- **Dependence on international events and local concerns:** European users respond actively to international incidents and high-profile events. For example, Joe Biden's visit to Ukraine, the terrorist attack on the Kakhovka Dam, and cross-border attacks on Russian territories garnered substantial attention from various European countries. This interest underscores the importance of Ukraine in the European context of security and stability.

PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT UKRAINE

European response to Russia's war in Ukraine highlights a complex but predominantly supportive public opinion, driven by shared values of solidarity and security. While humanitarian aid and economic sanctions maintain strong approval across member states, military and financial assistance reveal more nuanced perspectives.

European citizens overwhelmingly back humanitarian aid, economic sanctions against Russia, and military support for Ukraine, reflecting a unified stance on addressing the perceived security threat posed by the Russian war in Ukraine.

■ According to Eurobarometer, 87% of Europeans support providing humanitarian aid to those affected by the war in Ukraine, with 71% advocating for economic sanctions against the Russian government and companies (see Figure 3). Financial assistance to Ukraine garners 68% approval, and 60% of respondents support granting Ukraine candidate status for EU membership. Notably, 58% back EU financing for the purchase and supply of military equipment to Ukraine.

■ Russia's war in Ukraine remains the EU's most pressing issue, with 31% of respondents prioritizing it, and 76% perceiving Russia's aggression as a direct threat to European security.
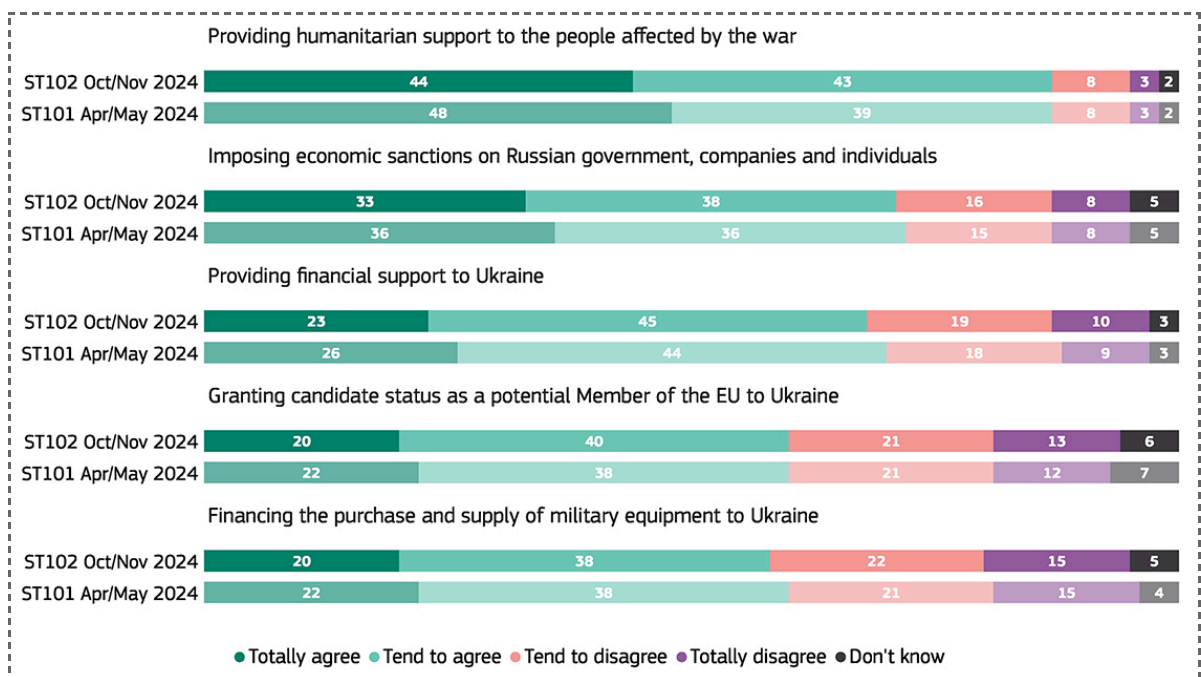

Figure 3. The EU has taken a series of actions as a response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. To what extent you agree or disagree with each of these actions taken? (October 2024).
Source: Standard Eurobarometer 102, Autumn 2024

"It seems to me that we should propose collaboration in areas where we can compete on an equal footing. However, this does not imply that all issues concerning our integration into the EU will be resolved after the war's conclusion." (Expert 3)

However, public sentiment reveals growing complexity. While 38% of Europeans feel their governments focus excessively on the war, another 38% believe the balance of attention is appropriate (see Figure 4). This divide underscores the challenges European leaders face in sustaining long-term public engagement amidst shifting priorities and economic pressures.
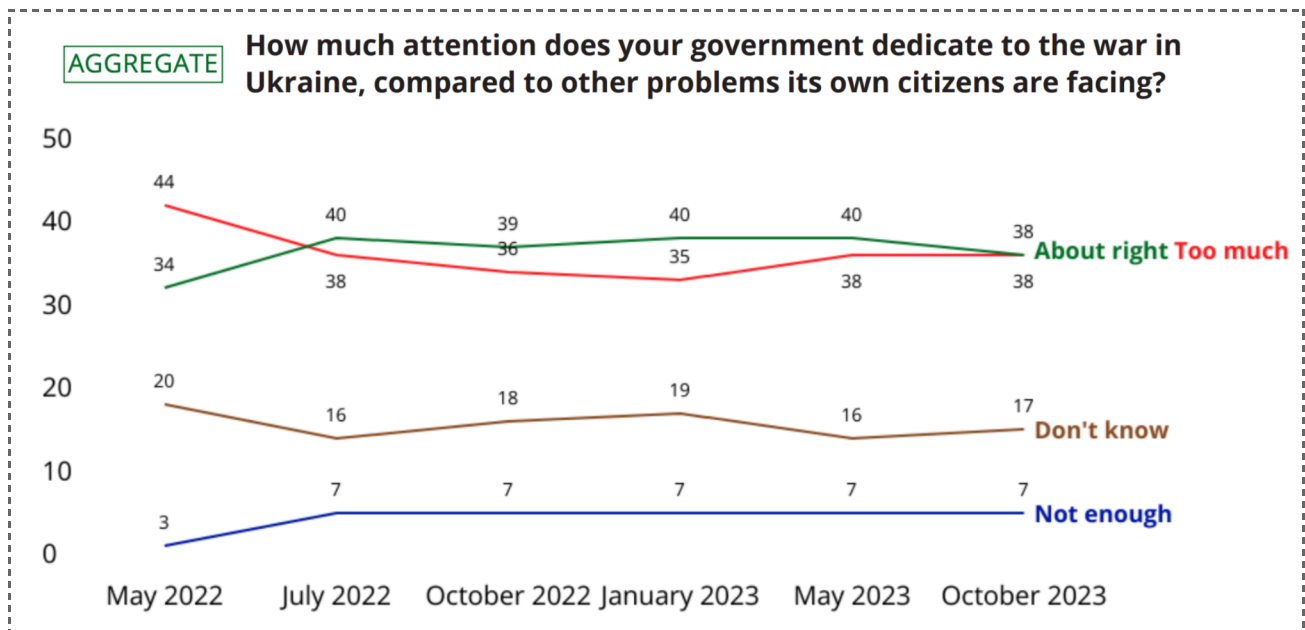
Figure 4. How much attention does your government dedicate to Russia's war in Ukraine, compared to other problems its own citizens are facing? (October 2023).
Source: ZOGBY, European attitudes toward Russia's war in Ukraine

Ukraine's standing in international public opinion remains moderate. In the UK's Most Popular Countries (Q3 2024) ranking, Ukraine holds the 24th position, with 58% of British respondents expressing a positive opinion. This indicates moderate favorability and recognition of Ukraine within British public opinion, though it trails behind top-rated countries like the United Kingdom itself, Australia, and New Zealand (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. The Most Popular Countries (ranking in the UK, Q3, 2024).
Source: YouGov

According to the [DG COMM's Public Opinion Monitoring Unit](), public support for Ukraine across Europe remains relatively strong, although some variations and challenges are evident.

The data highlights that **89% of EU citizens** endorse humanitarian aid, while **84% support refugee assistance**, and **72% back financial aid** for Ukraine. Military support, while slightly decreasing, still holds a majority at **55%** across the EU. However, this level of support varies significantly by country.

For instance, in **Germany**, there is growing scepticism regarding financial aid, with **41%** of respondents considering it excessive and only **28%** believing that Ukraine can achieve victory, while **64%** remain doubtful. In **Hungary**, opposition to further financial support is particularly high, with **74%** expressing disapproval of additional funding. Meanwhile, **Italy** exhibits more divided opinions, as **40%** support Ukraine, but a significant **51%** prefer a neutral stance.

The survey also reveals broader concerns about the duration and potential outcome of the war. A large portion of Europeans feel pessimistic, with **47%** believing the war will not end in 2024, and **37%** expecting the war to conclude through a negotiated settlement rather than a clear victory.

Despite these challenges, support for Ukraine's potential EU membership remains notable, with **60%** of EU citizens expressing approval. Yet some member states, such as Poland, suggest delaying integration until the war concludes.

Economic concerns also play a significant role in shaping public opinion. **59%** of Europeans view Ukraine's reconstruction as a potential economic burden, while **41%** see it as an opportunity for growth.

Despite decreasing enthusiasm in some areas, Europe largely remains supportive of Ukraine, particularly in terms of humanitarian aid and future EU integration, though economic concerns and war fatigue are growing in certain regions.

> *"Yes, there is a war fatigue, even if I don't like the term. And I don't know if we can separate the war fatigue induced by Russian communication or let's say genuine audience war fatigue." (Expert 2)*

> *"So there are many of these implicit cultural conceptual assumptions in a country like Italy, and you meet them every day. So the media discussion in a country like Italy is very different from a media discussion in Spain or France or many other European countries. Probably this is the difference between northern and Southern Europe, or maybe northern and southeastern Europe, where there is more Russian influence for whatever reason." (Expert 2)*

PERCEPTION OF UKRAINE: SOFT POWER AND ASSOCIATIONS

According to the Ukraine Message Testing Research Social Survey in 12 countries conducted by Zink Network for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine in 2023, in Europe, the perception of Ukraine's soft power is perceived above average in governance, international relations, culture, media, and values, but lags in business, education, and sustainability (see Figure 6).

Ukraine's assessment by various attributes of soft power
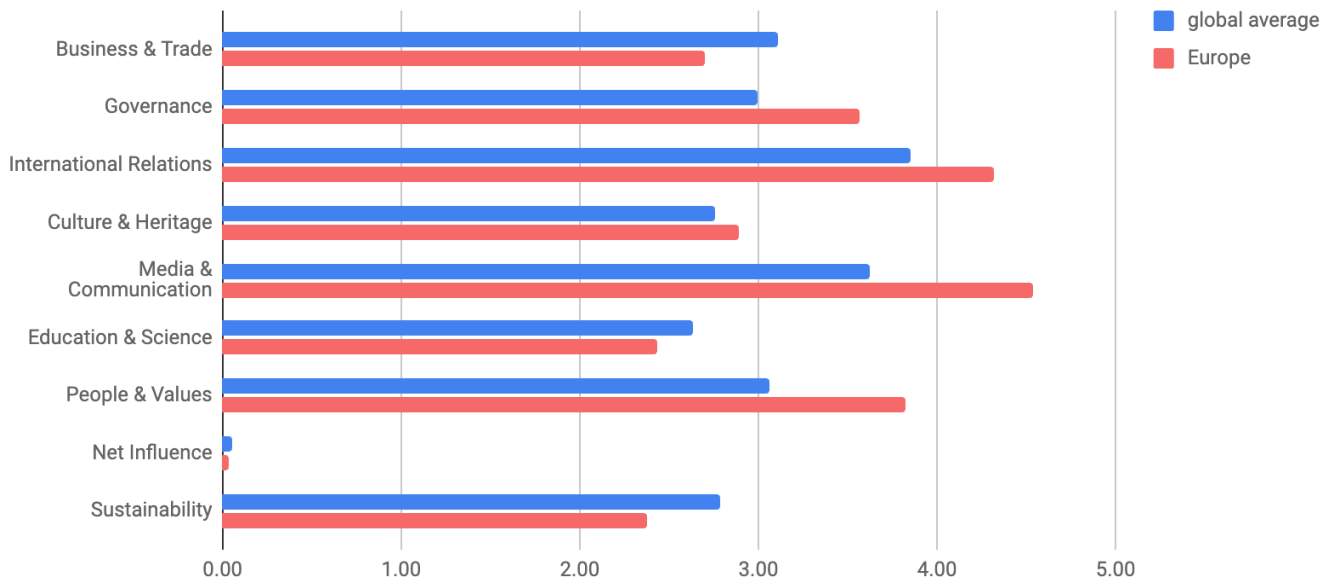
Figure 6. Ukraine's assessment by various attributes of soft power (maximum possible score 10). Source: Brand Finance, Global Soft Power Index 2024

Ukraine is positively perceived in Europe in spheres of education and science, media and communications, and people-related criteria (see Figure 7). The Global Soft Power Index highlights key strengths and weaknesses in Ukraine's soft power perception among European nations. Ukraine is viewed favourably in education and science, recognized for its strong educational system, as well as in media and communications, particularly through the criterion "Affairs I follow closely". Additionally, Ukrainians are often seen as friendly, contributing to positive perceptions in human traits.

**Perception of Ukraine's "Education & Science"
as a soft power component, across various countries**
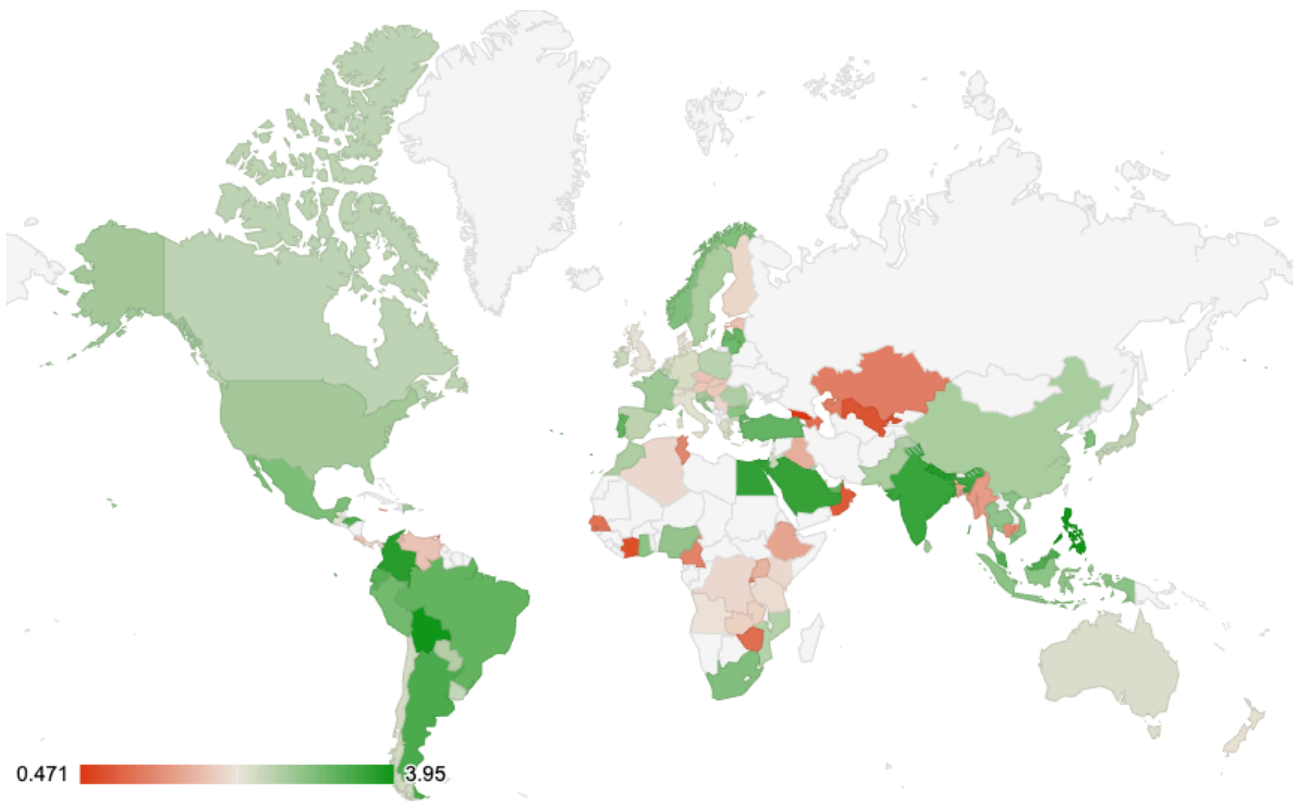
Figure 7. Perception of Ukraine's "Education & Science" as a soft power component, across various countries.
Source: Brand Finance, Global Soft Power Index 2024

Nevertheless, Ukraine faces significant challenges in overall recognition of the region, particularly in France (see Figure 8). Ukraine scores poorly in "Culture and Heritage" as a soft power pillar, despite high regional appreciation for its rich cultural heritage. Awareness of Ukrainian artists and athletes remains limited across Europe.

In the "Business and Trade" as a soft power component, Ukraine is perceived as having a relatively weak economy, with low scores in the "Products and brands the world loves" criterion, reflecting limited familiarity among Europeans with Ukrainian products and brands.

Perception of Ukraine's "Familiarity" as a soft power component, across various countries
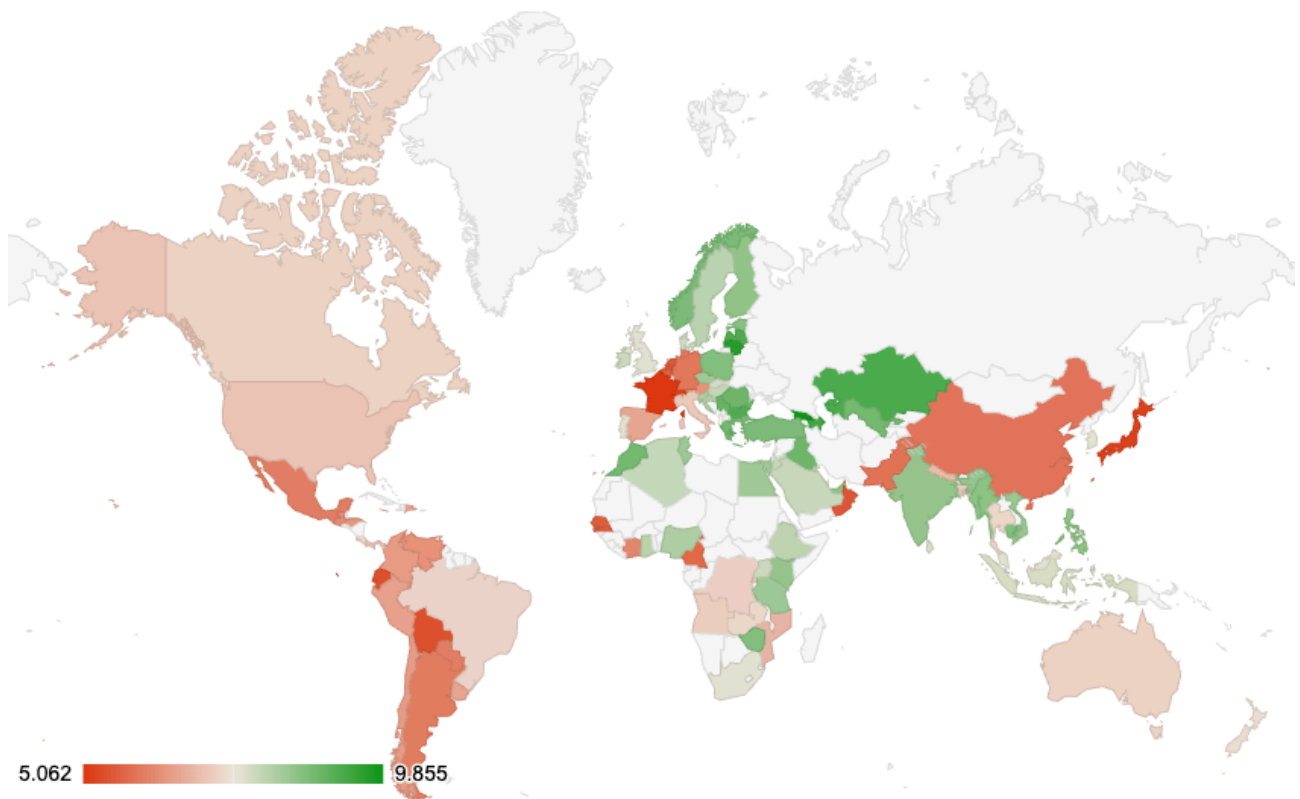
Figure 8. Perception of Ukraine's "Familiarity" as a soft power component, across various countries.
Source: Brand Finance, Global Soft Power Index 2024

The UK public predominantly views Ukraine through the lens of its courage, resilience, and steadfast defence against external aggression. These attributes resonate strongly with the UK's own historical narrative of resilience during World War II. Additionally, Ukraine's alignment with European values reinforces its image as a part of Europe's cultural and political landscape (see Figure 9). While the UK demonstrates overwhelming support, certain negative perceptions persist. These include the tragic human and economic costs of the war and lingering concerns over Ukraine's perceived issues with corruption.

An expert elaborated on the historical and cultural factors underpinning the UK's pro-Ukrainian stance:

> *"I would still describe the mood in the UK as generally very pro-Ukrainian, and surveys confirm that the UK tends to be one of the most pro-Ukrainian countries in Europe, aside from Poland or the Baltic States, which often surpass us. I think it's partly because the UK sees itself in Ukraine. Our history and popular culture foster a specific view of our role in World War II, and Ukraine is perceived as a smaller, resilient country standing up to an 'empire of evil.' British people resonate with this narrative because of how we've been taught our own history."* (Expert 1)

Associations with Ukraine in UK

Figure 9. Associations with Ukraine in UK (September 2023).
Source: social survey in 12 countries conducted by Zink Network for MFA of Ukraine

In Germany, Ukraine is positively associated with its bravery in defence and European identity. Another unique aspect is the emphasis on Ukraine's agricultural potential (see Figure 10), reflecting the importance of Ukraine's resources in global and regional contexts.

Negative perceptions in Germany are more pronounced and multifaceted. While war-related devastation is a key theme, criticisms extend to perceptions of corruption, inefficiency, and political stereotypes. Terms such as "lying", "greedy", and "arrogant" reflect deep-seated scepticism. Political biases, including references to "Nazi" or "warmonger", underscore the challenges Ukraine faces in countering specific stereotypes.

"Overall, society holds a very positive attitude towards Ukrainians. It's important to distinguish between perceptions of Ukraine as a country, including its authorities, and Ukrainians as people. Given that Germans are typically quite reserved and highly value their personal boundaries — maintaining a certain distance even in everyday interactions — this level of openness is unprecedented. They didn't just open their doors; they welcomed millions of people into their homes." (Expert 4)

Associations with Ukraine in Germany

Figure 10. Associations with Ukraine in Germany (September 2023).
Source: social survey in 12 countries conducted by Zink Network for MFA of Ukraine

Impact of statements on public favorability towards Ukraine in the UK.

In the UK, support for Ukraine is driven by moral and ethical arguments, with the most positive responses to statements about independence, democracy, and defence against Russian aggression, while economic themes have less impact (see Figure 11).

Support for Ukraine in the UK is driven by moral and ethical values, especially those tied to independence, democracy, and resisting aggression. Messages emphasizing these principles resonate far more than economic arguments, reflecting a values-based rather than pragmatic approach. Strengthening this support requires highlighting shared democratic ideals and the global importance of defending them.

To what extent do these statements make you feel more or less favourable towards Ukraine? - UK

■ Less favourable ■ More favourable

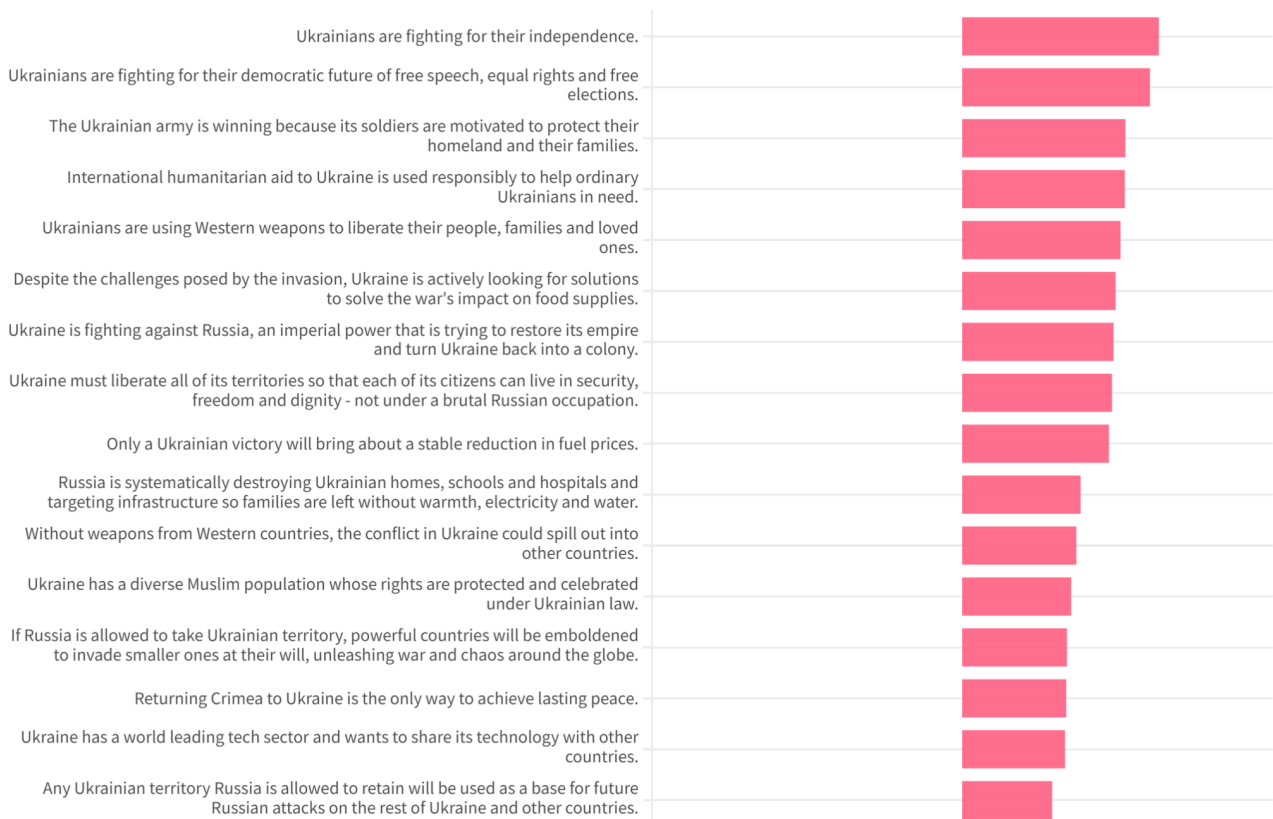| Statement	
Ukrainians are fighting for their independence.	
Ukrainians are fighting for their democratic future of free speech, equal rights and free elections.	
The Ukrainian army is winning because its soldiers are motivated to protect their homeland and their families.	
International humanitarian aid to Ukraine is used responsibly to help ordinary Ukrainians in need.	
Ukrainians are using Western weapons to liberate their people, families and loved ones.	
Despite the challenges posed by the invasion, Ukraine is actively looking for solutions to solve the war's impact on food supplies.	
Ukraine is fighting against Russia, an imperial power that is trying to restore its empire and turn Ukraine back into a colony.	
Ukraine must liberate all of its territories so that each of its citizens can live in security, freedom and dignity - not under a brutal Russian occupation.	
Only a Ukrainian victory will bring about a stable reduction in fuel prices.	
Russia is systematically destroying Ukrainian homes, schools and hospitals and targeting infrastructure so families are left without warmth, electricity and water.	
Without weapons from Western countries, the conflict in Ukraine could spill out into other countries.	
Ukraine has a diverse Muslim population whose rights are protected and celebrated under Ukrainian law.	
If Russia is allowed to take Ukrainian territory, powerful countries will be emboldened to invade smaller ones at their will, unleashing war and chaos around the globe.	
Returning Crimea to Ukraine is the only way to achieve lasting peace.	
Ukraine has a world leading tech sector and wants to share its technology with other countries.	
Any Ukrainian territory Russia is allowed to retain will be used as a base for future Russian attacks on the rest of Ukraine and other countries.	

Figure 11. Impact of statements on public favorability towards Ukraine in the UK (September 2023). Source: social survey in 12 countries conducted by Zink Network for MFA of Ukraine

Impact of statements on public favorability towards Ukraine in Germany

In Germany, support for Ukraine is driven mainly by moral and value-based arguments, with the strongest resonance for statements on independence, democratic rights, and defence against Russian aggression (see Figure 12).

This focus on ethical and humanitarian themes shows the German audience's prioritization of the war's moral aspects. Economic and geopolitical arguments, like fuel price stability or deterring Russian expansion, have less impact, indicating that German support is rooted more in principles of human rights and freedom than in pragmatic interests.

To what extent do these statements make you feel more or less favourable towards Ukraine? - Germany

■ Less favourable ■ More favourable

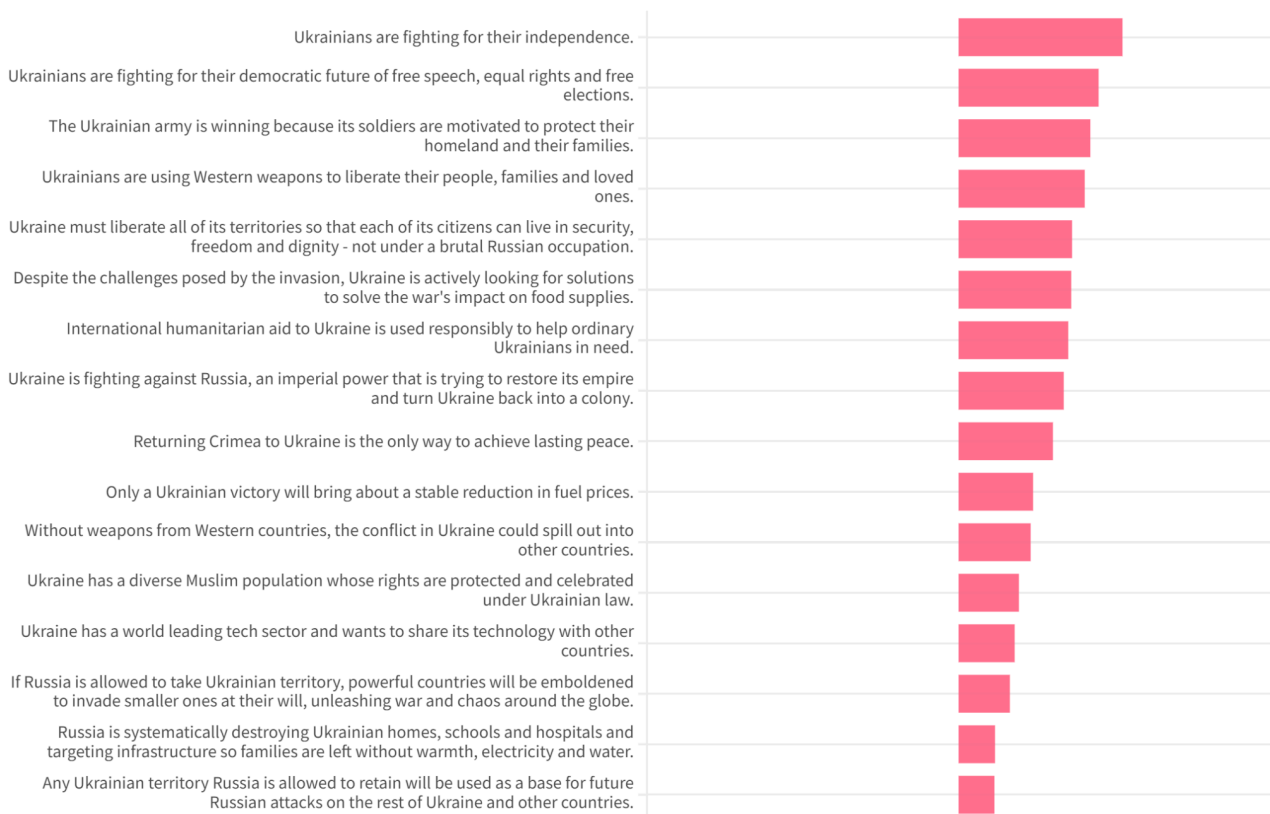| Statement	
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Russia is systematically destroying Ukrainian homes, schools and hospitals and targeting infrastructure so families are left without warmth, electricity and water.	
Any Ukrainian territory Russia is allowed to retain will be used as a base for future Russian attacks on the rest of Ukraine and other countries.	

Figure 12. Impact of statements on public favorability towards Ukraine in Germany (September 2023). Source: social survey in 12 countries conducted by Zink Network for MFA of Ukraine

European public opinion strongly supports Ukraine, condemning Russia's invasion, recognizing Ukraine's independence in decision-making, and endorsing humanitarian aid even at taxpayers' expense. Statements that justify Russia or question Ukraine's future receive minimal support, indicating solid solidarity with Ukraine (see Figure 13).
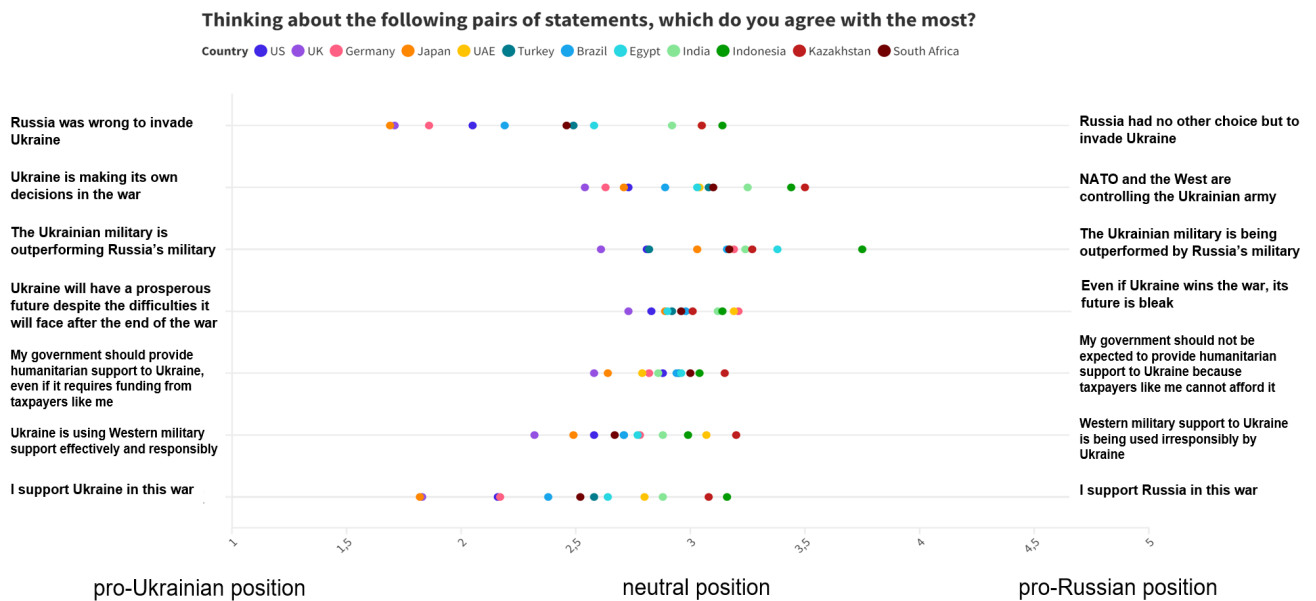

Figure 13. Global perspectives on Ukraine: pro-Ukrainian vs. pro-Russian views (September 2023).
Source: social survey in 12 countries conducted by Zink Network for MFA of Ukraine

CONCLUSIONS

- **Moral and ethical support as primary drivers:** Public support for Ukraine in Europe is rooted predominantly in moral and ethical values, with a strong resonance for themes around Ukraine's independence, democracy, and resilience against Russian aggression. Statements that appeal to these values have the most significant positive impact, especially in countries like Germany and the UK, where humanitarian arguments resonate more than economic or strategic ones.

- **Widespread solidarity with humanitarian and financial Aid:** The majority of Europeans remain supportive of their governments' response to the war, with high levels of endorsement for humanitarian aid (89%) and assistance for refugees (84%). Financial support for Ukraine is also widely accepted, though support for military assistance shows variation, maintaining a majority of approval at 55% but with decreasing enthusiasm in certain regions.

- **War fatigue and economic concerns rising:** Growing war fatigue and concerns over economic impact are evident, with 38% of Europeans feeling their governments are overly focused on the war. Additionally, 59% view Ukraine's future reconstruction as a potential economic burden, although some see it as an opportunity. The persistence of the war without a foreseeable resolution intensifies these sentiments, with nearly half of Europeans sceptical of an early end and a preference for a negotiated settlement over outright victory.

- **Support for Ukraine's European integration:** Ukraine's aspirations for EU membership are increasingly recognized as aligning with shared European values of democracy, freedom, and economic collaboration. While the public may view Ukraine as part of Europe culturally and geographically, concerns about corruption and administrative readiness remain. Highlighting Ukraine's economic and security contributions to the EU narrative can foster broader acceptance of its integration efforts.

To assess Ukraine's perception through the lens of the media, we analysed coverage of Ukraine in the largest news outlets across the region.

According to SimilarWeb data, the leading media platforms in the studied countries include *BBC, Daily Mail, The Guardian, Mirror Online, Telegraph, Bild, Der Spiegel, Welt, El Mundo, El País, La Vanguardia, Le Figaro, Le Monde, Quest-France, and others.* The analysis focused on the period from August to October 2024, examining 1 000 articles published in English, German, French, and Spanish.

In the analysed period, local media published the highest number of articles on August 19, when Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that the Kursk operation was aimed at creating a buffer zone on the territory of Russia (see Figure 12).

Other peaks of search interest included such topics:

- Putin's visit to Mongolia,

- The massive Russian shelling of Ukrainian cities,

- Ukraine's possible involvement in the assassination attempt on Trump,

- Volodymyr Zelenskyy's visit to the U.S.,

- Lloyd Austin's visit to Ukraine.

Daily dynamics of publications and key topics about Ukraine

Figure 14. Daily dynamics of publications and key topics about Ukraine (August-October 2024).
Source: Looqme media monitoring database.

"When I look at the news, if Ukraine is in the headlines, the top stories usually involve grim events like the use of an intercontinental ballistic missile in Dnipro, North Korean troops, or devastating civilian strikes. For instance, the strikes on Lviv were particularly shocking since Lviv isn't often targeted, and the attack on the children's hospital in Kyiv was another harrowing example of civilian suffering." (Expert 1)

"What I notice, though, is that many people turn away — I think this is a systemic issue across Europe. They either don't want to watch, switch the channel when horrors are shown, or look away when shown photos. I've observed this phenomenon quite often." (Expert 3)

From August to October, Western media continued to focus on the Ukrainian military operation in the Kursk region, which began on August 6 (see Figure 13). Share of voice is calculated as the % of articles dedicated to a particular topic among all the publications about Ukraine in the biggest news media. We believe the analysed sample of sources represents the general trends in major media of Europe.

Key topics about Ukraine in terms of the % of published articles

Topic	Share of Voice
Military operation by the Armed Forces of Ukraine in Russia's Kursk region	13%
International support and Western weapons for Ukraine	9%
North Korea's troop deployment in the Russia's war against Ukraine	7%
Russian shelling of Ukrainian cities	5%
Russian offensive	4%
Discussions on allowing Ukraine to use Wester weapons to strike targets on Russian territory	3%
Ukraine's Victory Plan	3%

Figure 15. Key topics about Ukraine in terms of the % of published articles (August-October 2024). Source: Looqme media monitoring database.

"I think the depiction of Ukraine in the news right now is quite grim. It's largely seen as a country on the defensive. That initial optimism — Ukraine defending Kyiv, pushing Russia back from northern territories, the counteroffensive in Kherson — all that joyous coverage of Ukrainians standing up to what was thought to be one of the world's best armies has faded. People now recognize that while it's large, it's far from the best. The tone has shifted, and coverage has become more limited. If Ukraine is in the news, it's often bad news." (Expert 1)

"I think there is some fatigue, but I can say that, for example, on all their television channels — ZDF, ARD, these major central ones — Ukraine has been and remains at the top. Constantly, there's Scholz visiting here, Zelenskyy saying something, or some initiative being announced, or reports of someone being shot. It's not just about events that directly concern both Ukraine and Germany, but about Ukraine in general. Ukraine is widely discussed in their political, independent talk shows. Especially now, as they have their political campaigns leading up to elections, this topic is very much a subject of debate." (Expert 4)

To gain a deeper understanding of the nuances in local media coverage, we conducted a narrative analysis of the largest topic. European media approach the coverage of Ukraine's military operation in Russia's Kursk region with particular

attention to aspects that could directly impact the stability and security of the European Union itself. In their reporting, they often consider the geopolitical risks involved, as well as how such operations could affect European security policy and relations with Russia.

The analysis identified several key narratives in Europe media coverage of Ukraine's military operation in the Kursk region:

- **Escalation and strategic risks.** European media, such as Le Monde and Der Spiegel, regularly emphasize the strategic risks associated with the escalation of the war on Russian territory, noting that such actions by Ukraine could complicate Europe's diplomatic efforts to contain the war. Notably, European media typically portray these events as having the potential to increase tensions and provoke unpredictable reactions from Moscow.

- **Symbol of Ukrainian resolve.** At the same time, the media highlight that the operation in Kursk symbolizes Ukraine's resolve to act independently and protect its own interests, even on the territory of the aggressor state. However, some European leaders express caution, recognizing that the Ukrainian military operation in Russia's Kursk region could undermine European efforts to seek a peaceful resolution.

- **Humanitarian concerns and refugee crisis.** In European publications, the humanitarian aspect of reporting is among the central focuses. The evacuation of Russian civilians and the potential rise in refugee numbers due to ongoing combat amplify concerns over a possible humanitarian crisis. European media highlight the potential impact of this on Europe and express readiness to respond to avoid destabilization in the region.

  "But yeah, I think the kind of depiction of Ukraine currently in the news is quite grim. […] If it's in the news, it's normally bad news for Ukraine." (Expert 1)

  "Maybe an alternative story could be to show the resilience of people during the war, but not as people like, oh, we are depressed, but we carry on with our life." (Expert 2)

- **Support for Ukraine with calls for caution.** In covering this topic, European media clearly support Ukraine's right to self-defence, though this support is tempered with calls for caution. Many publications, including Germany's Der Spiegel, Spain's El Mundo, and France's Le Monde, seek to frame the war as something that must remain under control. Particular attention is given to discussions about the use of Western weapons on Russian territory and NATO's role, aiming to prevent excessive tension on the continent.

This next part presents an analysis of the key figures most frequently quoted in Europe media when covering Ukraine-related topics. The analysis highlights how these figures are portrayed and the context in which their statements are used, shedding light on the narratives being constructed around Ukraine's military operations, international relations, and the broader geopolitical landscape.

Key figures quoted in media articles on Ukraine in Europe between August and October 2024:

- **Volodymyr Zelenskyy** — emphasizes Ukraine's need for international support, positioning the country as a defender of European values and sovereignty.

- **Olaf Scholz** — focuses on European solidarity and energy security, advocating for stronger sanctions against Russia.

- **Vladimir Putin** — often quoted with aggressive rhetoric, positioning Russia as a threat to European security.

- **Joe Biden** — U.S. support for Ukraine is highlighted as crucial for European allies' security.

- **Lloyd Austin** — noted for discussions on military aid to Ukraine and strengthening EU-U.S. defence cooperation.

- **Boris Pistorius** — German defence minister, stressing European defence and military aid to Ukraine.

- **Emmanuel Macron** — balances diplomacy with support for sanctions and military aid to Ukraine.

CONCLUSIONS

- **Energy crisis and economic impact:** European media emphasize the issue of energy dependence on Russia and the war's impact on the EU economy. Reports highlight efforts to diversify energy sources and combat inflation driven by rising energy prices.

- **Humanitarian dimension:** European media provide detailed coverage of the humanitarian crisis, including the reception of Ukrainian refugees and the challenges of integration. Stories of Ukrainian families who found refuge in the EU have become a recurring theme in European news.

- **EU support and the stance of individual states:** Articles focus on the role of the European Union, its sanctions policy against Russia, and economic assistance to Ukraine. The positions of key countries, such as Germany and France, are considered separately, as they seek to support Ukraine while avoiding escalation.

- **Multifaceted coverage and countering disinformation:** European media, striving to maintain balance, present various perspectives, including Russian narratives, but with a clear analytical approach. This helps preserve audience trust and avoids accusations of propaganda.

EXPERT OPINIONS ON MESSAGES ABOUT UKRAINE'S IMAGE IN THE REGION

To gain a deeper understanding of Ukraine's perception in different regions, we conducted interviews with five experts per region. Contacts were identified using a snowball sampling method, asking ENGAGE program partners for recommendations on knowledgeable experts. This ensured a diverse pool of participants.

The interviews followed a semi-structured, in-depth approach, combining the flexibility to explore emerging themes with a framework based on prior desktop research. This method allowed us to gain detailed qualitative insights while ensuring comparability across interviews.

EXPERT DESCRIPTION:

- **Western Researchers:** Scholars from Western institutions with an interest in Ukraine, capable of reflecting on how news and events related to Ukraine are perceived in the region.

- **Ukrainian Experts and Communicators:** Practitioners engaged in Ukraine's external communications in the U.S. or Europe, offering insights into the effectiveness and specifics of such efforts.

- **Soft Power Contributors:** Individuals involved in cultural, economic, and experiential exchanges, relevant for discussions on Ukraine's soft power.

Using qualitative methods, we have focused on developing communication messages**.** Extracting expert recommendations for refining communication strategies tailored to specific regional contexts.

Based on the analysis of these interviews, we can outline the following communication messages:

Strengthening resilience narratives to address war fatigue

Focus on highlighting the resilience of the Ukrainian people and institutions, showcasing their ability to adapt and thrive even in adversity. This approach helps combat war fatigue by shifting the narrative toward positive examples of innovation, recovery, and international cooperation.

- Emphasize stories of everyday resilience, such as communities rebuilding, businesses adapting, and citizens demonstrating creativity.

"I saw twice on television this video about a girl playing a piano in Rivne. Her dad died, and it really touched me because I'm a human being and could feel her emotions. But at the same time, I was thinking, this is still the first season... maybe now is the moment to focus on producing more positive stories and vibes." (Expert 1)

"Maybe an alternative story could highlight the resilience of people during the war, not as in, 'Oh, we're depressed, but we carry on.' No. Instead, show how strong Ukraine is — growing even amid the invasion. Show how people are running businesses, what Ukraine is learning

during the war, and how innovations, even in defence technologies, are being exported to other countries." (Expert 2)

- Regularly update audiences on progress in reconstruction, international partnerships, and Ukraine's achievements in technology and defence.

- Counter uncertainty by highlighting Ukraine's capacity for recovery, innovation, and long-term success.

"I think positive stories will always resonate more. Not just about how we are suffering, but about how we can grow even during the war." (Expert 3)

"People switch channels when they hear about the war. But they are interested in how Ukraine helps them or what it is creating, and that's the key to shifting their focus." (Expert 4)

"There needs to be a dual push: increasing belief that Ukraine can win and is motivated to win in the long term, paired with a sense of realism that, I think, the Ukrainian government hasn't fully embraced yet. There's still a lot of talk about victory, but not necessarily about achieving it in three, four, or five years' time." (Expert 1)

Promoting Ukraine as a strategic and economic ally

Frame Ukraine as a valuable partner in global security, technology, and innovation.

- Showcase success stories of international collaborations in defence, technology, and education.

- Develop targeted campaigns to demonstrate the economic opportunities Ukraine presents, particularly in green energy and digital transformation.

"Perhaps this is a good opportunity to explore how cooperation in the field of green energy or infrastructure restoration could work. It benefits everyone, and that's exactly the message I'd like to hear more often." (Expert 3)

"Even under such conditions, we see that Ukraine's tech sector is functioning and creating something that can be useful for other countries." (Expert 4)

Leveraging cultural diplomacy

Position Ukrainian culture as vibrant, dynamic, and globally relevant, appealing to both traditional and modern tastes.

- Collaborate with international artists and institutions to reinterpret traditional Ukrainian art in modern contexts.

- Promote Ukrainian music, cinema, and literature at global festivals and through partnerships with international streaming platforms.

"I think modern performers resonate much better. However, it's important not to lean into clichés but to present modern collaborations." (Expert 4)

"There is a demand for stories about freedom, about justice, about defending the international order, and culture can play a significant role in delivering these messages." *(Expert 2)*

"I really like how orchestras from Ukraine, such as the Ukraine Freedom Orchestra, showcase Ukraine on major stages. This is the best way to present us as part of global culture." *(Expert 4)*

"I think Ukraine slightly underestimates the aspects of its culture that could appeal to people. For example, the work of Ukrainian cultural organizations often focuses on opera, ballet, film, and art — forms of high culture that naturally attract an elite London audience. But I believe Ukraine should also explore broader cultural elements, as culture is always relative." *(Expert 4)*

Reframing EU integration discussions

Shift conversations from *"helping Ukraine"* to *"Ukraine as an integral part of the European project".*

- Use data and stories to show Ukraine's alignment with EU values and economic practices.

- Engage influencers and leaders who support Ukraine's EU integration to advocate for its benefits to the European public.

"I think there is a gradual realization through arguments and practical examples. The idea that Ukraine is already in the EU resonates well. How? Ukrainians have the right to work, Ukrainian goods are sold duty-free, and all Ukrainians who could have moved to the EU — like Poles did after joining — have already moved. There's no reason to fear this integration. In essence, we are already here." *(Expert 3)*

"They don't see us as equals due to historical experiences and long-standing narratives. However, within political circles, there is recognition that Ukraine has effectively become part of the European project through economic integration and the shared fight for security." *(Expert 4)*

"Ukraine is the first battle line in this process. If new negotiations arise, it's critical to frame them properly. There's a risk they'll be framed as Russia taking what it wanted, Ukraine losing agency, and being pushed into talks by Western partners. But there's an alternative framing: Ukraine, against all odds, standing up to Russia, defending the vast majority of its territory, and continuing to pursue NATO and European ambitions." *(Expert 1)*

Strengthening Unified Narratives to Counter Disinformation

Proactive communication strategies that highlight Ukraine's achievements and partnerships are more effective than reactive approaches to combating disinformation. Ensuring a strong and unified narrative across European nations is critical to maintaining support and countering false narratives effectively.

- Invest in localized narratives that resonate with diverse European audiences, appealing directly to those already inclined to support Ukraine.

- Highlight positive Ukrainian contributions globally, offering alternatives for audiences seeking "anti-Western" narratives. Showcase how Russia's actions harm not only Ukraine but also broader European interests, emphasizing Ukraine's role as a constructive and innovative partner.

"I think there needs to be a dual push to build belief that Ukraine can win and is motivated to win in the long term. This must come with a sense of realism but also needs to be paired with messaging in Europe about the impact of any Russian victory on European and global security. A combination of positive messaging around Ukraine's ability to win and fear-based messaging about the consequences of Ukraine not winning is really important." (Expert 1)

"Russian influence is strong in many European countries, particularly where the media are weaker. In countries with financially stronger media and better resources, Russian disinformation has less capacity to reach the front pages of major outlets." (Expert 2)

"It's almost become a fetish: fighting Russian propaganda, which spawns grants, PhDs, and research papers. In reality, Russian narratives often spread by default rather than through deliberate state efforts. I wouldn't say there's currently a colossal campaign by the Russian state apparatus, but there are traditional influences: intelligence operations targeting political parties and work with newspapers that are either bought or ideologically aligned." (Expert 3)

"We've moved to another level by creating and promoting our own narratives in a strong and measured way. Everyone agrees propaganda needs to be countered, but the key is to focus on strong stories of our own rather than reacting to every fake Russia puts out." (Expert 3)

"I'm not sure if it's worth investing so many resources in reacting to Russian narratives. It's far more important to craft messages that resonate with Western audiences. Highlighting Ukrainian successes, sharing stories of our people and businesses, and showcasing our culture, economy, and readiness to cooperate changes perceptions much more effectively than reacting to every Russian disinformation campaign." (Expert 4)

CONCLUSIONS

- **Perceptions of resilience and navigating war fatigue:** Ukraine is widely admired for its resilience and courage, with stories of everyday perseverance strongly resonating across diverse European audiences. This admiration forms a cornerstone of Ukraine's positive image in the region. However, the challenge of war fatigue highlights the need to shift narratives toward Ukraine's long-term recovery and integration into Europe. Positive, forward-looking stories that emphasize reconstruction, innovation, and progress can reinvigorate support and maintain engagement with European audiences.

- **Ukraine as a European partner:** Ukraine is already de facto a member of the European family, both strategically and culturally. This narrative highlights Ukraine's shared values and economic potential while emphasizing its crucial role in ensuring Europe's stability and security. Potential advantages and risks in this partnership should be addressed collaboratively through dialogue and joint efforts, reflecting the practices of close European allies. Such an approach underscores the mutual trust and interdependence that define Ukraine's integration into the European community.

- **Cultural diplomacy's role:** Modern Ukraine's cultural and creative initiatives remain pivotal in strengthening ties with European audiences. Projects that showcase Ukraine's creativity and diversity, while aligning with local interests, can foster deeper connections and highlight its role as a vibrant and progressive nation.

- **Addressing disinformation:** Addressing disinformation in Europe presents a specific challenge due to the protection of media spaces by European law. However, the issue in this region often extends beyond traditional media to the networks of influence maintained by Russian agents and sympathizers. These networks operate through academic institutions, cultural initiatives, and economic ties, creating a complex web of hybrid threats. Countering such disinformation requires Ukraine to collaborate closely with European countries to develop unified approaches. This involves creating joint strategies to expose and neutralize these influence networks, emphasizing shared values and trust. Proactive communication that highlights Ukraine's achievements and partnerships, combined with coordinated efforts to dismantle hybrid threats, is critical to ensuring a strong and consistent narrative across Europe.

- **Ukraine's offering:** Ukraine's potential extends beyond traditional sectors. Highlighting its thriving tech industry and emerging opportunities in green energy positions Ukraine as a forward-thinking and innovative partner. These areas underscore Ukraine's role in driving Europe's technological and environmental transformation.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of European perceptions of Ukraine reveals both challenges and opportunities in shaping the country's image across diverse contexts. The findings emphasize the importance of targeted communication strategies and leveraging unique narratives to strengthen Ukraine's position in the region.

- **European support for Ukraine: a moral obligation in need of reframing.** European public opinion largely associates support for Ukraine with a moral obligation. However, as surveys and expert interviews reveal, the humanitarian narrative, which initially dominated, is losing traction. Increasingly, there is a shift towards framing Ukraine as a strategic partner essential for European security and economic stability. This transition underscores the need for messaging that positions Ukraine not only as a recipient of aid but as a contributor to shared European values and goals.

  Opportunity: Highlight Ukraine's alignment with EU values, such as democracy and resilience, while emphasizing its contributions to security, technology, and green energy innovation.

- **War fatigue and the importance of sustaining engagement.** While direct involvement in the war is minimal for European citizens, "virtual fatigue" from constant exposure to war-related narratives is evident. Expert insights suggest that many audiences disengage from stories of suffering, turning instead to topics that offer hope or progress.

  Recommendation: To combat disengagement, focus on human stories that highlight resilience, solidarity, and the impact of European support on the lives of Ukrainians. Emphasize narratives of reconstruction and innovation, showcasing Ukraine's progress in technology, education, and economic adaptation despite the ongoing war. Incorporating a human touch helps maintain emotional connection and fosters continued engagement with Ukraine's cause.

- **Media influence and Russian disinformation.** The strength of Russian disinformation varies significantly across Europe, with weaker media ecosystems in some countries more susceptible to manipulation. For example, in Southern and Eastern Europe, narratives that frame Ukraine as escalating the war resonate more strongly than in Western Europe, where robust media institutions provide greater resilience against such influence.

  Recommendation: Invest in localized media strategies to counter disinformation and amplify authentic Ukrainian voices. Collaborate with European journalists, influencers, and institutions to disseminate credible human-centered stories that emphasize Ukraine's resilience, legitimacy, and democratic values. Develop joint approaches with European partners to expose and neutralize hybrid influence networks, focusing on coordinated actions across media, cultural, and academic spheres.

- **Cultural diplomacy as a bridge to broader understanding.** Ukraine's cultural identity is a powerful yet underutilized tool in reshaping perceptions. While traditional elements such as Vyshyvanka and Pysanky resonate with audiences, modern cultural expressions, including contemporary art, tech-driven creativity, and digital communication, hold untapped potential.

  Opportunity: Develop initiatives that blend traditional and modern Ukrainian culture, leveraging international collaborations to bring Ukrainian art, music, and film to global audiences. Focus on narrative-driven cultural diplomacy to connect Ukraine's heritage with its current struggles and aspirations.

- **Challenges and opportunities for Ukraine's image.** A recurring challenge is scepticism about Ukraine's ability to manage post-war reconstruction independently. Concerns around governance and corruption persist among European stakeholders, posing barriers to trust and investment.

  Opportunity: Frame Ukraine as an emerging tech and innovation hub, demonstrating its potential for rapid recovery and growth. Highlight success stories of governance reforms and international partnerships to address concerns and build confidence. Additionally, emphasize the significant opportunities Ukraine's recovery presents for businesses from other European countries. These partners have a vested interest in ensuring large-scale reconstruction begins sooner rather than later, fostering economic collaboration and mutual benefits across the region. By focusing on these opportunities and narratives, Ukraine can position itself as a leader in innovation and recovery, strengthening its ties with European businesses and solidifying its role in the European community.

Ukraine's image in Europe is undergoing a transformation, shaped by its resilience, cultural dynamism, and aspirations for closer integration with the EU. By focusing on strategic, authentic narratives that resonate with European audiences, Ukraine can consolidate its role as an integral part of the European community while fostering long-term solidarity and support.