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Constructing Crises in Europe: Multifaceted Securitisation in Times
of Exception

Ukraine at War: Resilience and Normative Agency

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Abstract

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has transformed all aspects of life in the country, including societal attitudes, national politics and Ukraine's agency on the international arena. The article seeks to discuss and conceptualise how practices of resilience create discursive spaces for producing and shaping Ukraine's agency. In other words, how do experiences of resilience in four different spheres (societal, institutional, communicative and subregional) affect Ukraine's capacity not only to cope with the intervention and survive as a nation, but also to contribute to the future of international security order. The author argues that by containing the Russian army, Ukraine can be viewed as a co-producer of European security, which is particularly acknowledged by European countries bordering on Russia. Ukraine's agency, as unfolded in 2022, addresses Western countries with an insistent demand to perceive Ukraine as a part of the European normative order.

Keywords: *Russia's war in Ukraine, agency, resilience, EU integration, productive power*

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Introduction

For decades Ukraine was often perceived in the West as a weak, Russia-dependent and peripheral country (See for example Gil, 2015) that did not much resist the annexation of Crimea and failed to prevent the occupation of Donbas in 2014. However, after the restart of the Russian invasion on 24 February 2022 this state of affairs has significantly altered: Ukrainian society has shown a determination to fight back against the more resourceful invader, which boosted Ukraine's positions both in the battlefields and in relations with its international partners. Moreover, it turned out that major issues that the Ukrainian state was negatively associated with – corruption and the oligarchic structure of the Ukrainian economy, critical attitudes to the leadership, and cultural distinctions between eastern and western regions – did not lead to the collapse of the Ukrainian state. Instead, such novel topics as the robustness of Ukrainian society, the scale of the volunteer movement and the functionality of Ukrainian public institutions, were placed in the limelight of public discourses.

From an academic perspective, these changes and their transformative effects can be approached from the viewpoint of two interrelated concepts – *agency* and *resilience*. Ukraine's agency is a multifaceted phenomenon that is primarily grounded in the strong resistance of the Ukrainian Armed Forces that, starting from the very beginning of the intervention, were capable of thwarting the Russian army and thus created the solid and enduring basis for resistance. Yet in the meantime agency has other non-hard-security components as well: politically it is manifested in the persistent strategy of decoupling the country from the 'post-Soviet' legacy, breaking with the externally imposed constructs of 'Eurasia' and the 'Russian world', and consistently moving towards reasserting Ukraine as a full-fledged European nation paying the dearest price for being accepted in this capacity. From the practical vantage point, Ukraine's agency is the fulcrum for building enduring partnerships with its allies, and integrating with the institutional structure of the broadly defined Euro-Atlantic community. From the international perspective, key was the decision of the European Commission to open the membership procedure for Ukraine, which is crucial for boosting Ukraine's agency.

This is exactly why the idea of resilience becomes an appropriate reference point. Ukraine's agency is to a large extent grounded in the ability and determination of Ukrainian society to withstand the Russian aggression, consolidate human and material resources for resistance and thus provide a solid ground for patriotic mobilisation and future de-occupation of the annexed territories. This approach follows the logic of the critical tradition of international studies through refocusing the security agenda from states and governments to societal sources of agency, with such operational characteristics as ability to act, visibility, recognition and acceptance by other members of international society.

In my previous publications (Kurnyshova & Makarychev 2022) I have introduced the concept of *hybrid resilience* which can be expanded and readjusted to the present research. More specifically, I single out four spheres – societal, public institutional, communicational and local – where practices of resilience unfold as preconditions for Ukraine’s agency, both domestically and internationally. Therefore, the nexus of agency and resilience is key to my analysis. The research question I am going to address is how practices of resilience create discursive spaces for producing and shaping Ukraine’s agency. In other words, how do resilience in four different spheres affect Ukraine’s capacity not only to cope with the intervention and survive as a nation, but also to contribute to the future of the international security order?

My basic argument is two-fold. I argue that Ukraine’s agency is grounded in different yet interconnected types of resilience, which conflate and reinforce each other, particularly in institutional and communicative domains. In the meantime, agency, as an intersubjective construct, builds upon resilience and due to its normative compatibility and consonance with the principles of democratic governance opens prospective avenues for Ukraine’s eventual integration with the Euro-Atlantic institutional and normative structures as a power capable of contributing to common security.

My methodological approach is grounded in the traditions of critical discourse analysis claiming that ‘narratives of international politics are not simply reflections of reality but also constituting elements in their own right’ (Fazendeiro 2016: 497). I agree with Theiry Balzacq’s assertion that ‘discourse is part of agency in that it instantiates a sphere of action wherein agents dealing with defined questions operate’ (Balzacq 2005: 187). The emphasis on the discursive production of agency in no way denies the centrality of practices and experiences of resilience; it means to affirm that these practices form a basis of people’s attitudes to public authorities of different levels and information producers. Beyond discourse resilience might remain less visible and noticeable for a broader audience; it might not be properly reflected, timely communicated and discussed as inherent components of agency-making. In the works of constructivist and post-structuralist scholars this is called performativity, or an ability to practically activate the discursive resources of agency through speech acts and other practices of communications (Wodak 2001). From this theoretical standpoint, foreign policy is not simply a field where pre-given subjects operate and react to the geopolitical and normative environments, ‘but the means through which a particular mode of subjectivity is reproduced’ (Laffey 2000: 430-431). Along these lines, Ukraine discursively builds its agency through reflecting upon and assessing practices of resilience, and translates them into specific policies aimed at prospective integration with European and Euro-Atlantic normative spaces.

My empirical base consists of two types of primary sources. One is the discourses of top Ukrainian decision- and opinion- makers. Evidently, the key speaker exemplifying Ukrainian agency is President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who after the full-scale invasion delivered a massive body of speeches (more than 300) for the internal and foreign audiences. Yet I also refer to other key public figures and decision-makers. Another source of data is of sociological background, including opinion polls conducted by the most trustworthy Ukrainian polling companies: Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives, Razumkov Centre, Rating Group and Gradus Research.

Structurally, the article is divided into three parts. I start with an analytical overview of the academic literature that touches upon connections between agency and resilience, and inscribe the case of Ukraine into the existing theories, which requires some critical reexamination of certain scholarly approaches. Then I turn to four domestic facets of resilience and relate them to Ukraine's agency. Finally, I discuss external reverberations of the resilience-agency nexus and argue that it is largely framed and shaped by the normative principles constitutive for the EU and Euro-Atlantic political community in a broader sense.

Resilience and agency: A conceptual nexus

The concept of agency is approached differently by major international relations theories. For realism, agency is derived from the possession of physical and material resources, primarily military might. While for theories of liberal background, agency implies a co-production of international mechanisms of promoting freedom, democracy and the rule of law. From the constructivist perspective that I am sympathetic with, agency is an intersubjective construct that involves constant communication and interaction between producers of essential discourses and the audience (Côté 2016: 554). I tend to agree that 'agency entails "being" and "doing", implying a "self" defined by an identity, articulated through a narrative and performed through practice and action, which is continuously regrounded as a reflexive project' (Flockhart 2016: 813).

Within this framework, the spectrum of the most discussed academic questions is quite broad – from what constitutes actors' agency and (metaphorically speaking) 'who should sit at the table?' (Hofferberth 2019: 129) to 'which qualities enable the agents in the self-governing processes to engage in reflection and to undertake the action that is needed to remain fit for purpose?' (Flockhart 2020: 218). Agency has as its condition a 'purposive behavior' (Carlsnaes 1992: 246), but extends far beyond that to embrace such categories as the ability to make a difference, to intervene in international relations, to influence and to exercise control – even if partially – over other actors. Agency might connote

free will of political subjects and the capability of triggering meaningful changes (Berenskötter 2016: 273) within the normative order. By the same token, 'agency denotes the ability to choose among different courses of action, to learn from previous experience, and to effect change' (O'Neill, Balsiger & VanDeveer 2004: 155).

Of particular importance for my study is the idea of critical agency rooted in post-colonial thinking that looks at how 'the sum of disaggregated, uncoordinated and fragmented, hidden, disguised and marginal agencies represents a significant totality' and 'how the "powerless" engage in politics and international relations?' (Richmond 2011: 434). I agree with those scholars who argue that 'pre-war Ukrainian discourse was based not so much on the realization of national interests, as on the low self-esteem, with constant eye on Moscow's opinion, and thus excluded the possibility of any major conflict with neighbor' (Parahonsky 2022: 10). At the same time, it would be fair to say that Ukraine's critical agency, reinvigorated by Russia's invasion and overlooked by many in the world, is based on the traditions of mass-scale emancipatory protests against injustice and autocracy exemplified by the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity. In this respect Ukraine's agency is grounded in the previous experiences of building and fighting for national independence and sovereignty against the former imperial hegemon.

Critical agency implies emancipation and resistance to imperial impositions, which makes Oliver Richmond's words of 2011 quite applicable to today's Ukraine: 'Without incorporating critical agency and resistance into its conceptual, theoretical and methodological discourses, without recognizing its dynamics, abilities, impacts and legitimacy, any peace that emerges will be a crude or subtle victor's peace' (Richmond 2011: 436). In other words, any peace agreement without due consideration of a full-fledged agency of Ukraine won't last and will hardly make any practical sense. This understanding of critical agency drastically challenges the logic of 'resolving the conflict' within the great power management frame, as exemplified by Henry Kissinger, John Mearsheimer, Richard Sakwa, Marlene Laruelle and some other scholars.

In a constructivist logic, 'agency emerges from relations and is always "performed" within loose and ever-changing configurations' (Hofferberth 2019: 138) of policies and discourses. To put it bluntly, there is no agency prior to, without or beyond performativity. Consequently, the state has to be approached as one that 'a discursively produced structural/structuring effect that relies on constant acts of performativity to call it into being... (A)gents (like the state) are always effects of discourse and should be "decentred" rather than made the starting point for theory' (Dunn 2010: 80). In other words, the state, usually being the most visible manifestation of agency, is not a well-fixed, constant or

pre-given unit, but a result of multiple discursive practices that require the government, the presidency, the parliament and other institutions to operate in a particular way.

This approach suggests looking more attentively at how agency is performed, enacted and empowered. For that, in my analysis I turn to the concept of resilience that I find highly relevant for understanding the dynamic and the logic of Ukraine's agency. In the academic literature resilience is referred to as a process of societal adaptation to complex shocks; it implies partnerships and self-reliance, and envisages the 'shifting of responsibility onto communities and promotion of reflexive self-governance through strategies of awareness, risk management and adaptability' (Humbert & Joseph 2019: 216). Consequently, individuals and groups are ultimately becoming responsible for their own adaptability vis-à-vis external transgressions and crises.

Since resilience operates through many practices, this article focuses on constructivist interpretations of how they arise out of existing 'webs of discourse' (Bleiker 2003: 38). Key is that practices are 'embedded in discourse(s) which enable particular meaning(s) to be signified' (Doty 1997: 377). Thus, practices might be differently named, and resilience relates them to specific meanings and interpretations. Examples of the usage of resilience in various spheres are multiple: in Western assistance programmes it is related to Ukrainian agriculture, the civilian security sector, reconstruction of the destroyed civilian infrastructure, and many others¹. From a constructivist viewpoint, by applying the concept of resilience Ukraine's partners wish to reach beyond charity or technical help; the language they use puts an emphasis on strengthening Ukraine's ability to protect itself in the future against Russia, whose behaviour is much harder to predict and deter than to empower Ukraine. A similar logic applies to my characterisation of local self-governance as local resilience, information management as information resilience, institution building as institutional resilience and social capital as societal resilience. Through this wording I want to underline the strategy of self-reliance in an inevitable struggle with external aggression that is impossible to prevent.

However, the case of Ukraine deploys the concept of resilience in an explicit hard security context, which differs from the bulk of the existing literature that generally discusses resilience in non-military or soft security categories. For example, some authors deem that 'resilience and social inclusion are of greater

1 EU Resilience Programmes Examples in Ukraine: <https://www.euam-ukraine.eu/news/euam4ukraine-now-wholly-redeployed-euam-experts-continue-building-resilience-with-their-ukrainian-counterparts/>; <https://www.euam-ukraine.eu/news/euam4ukraine-now-wholly-redeployed-euam-experts-continue-building-resilience-with-their-ukrainian-counterparts/>; <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/news/forum-iz-ekonomichnoi-stiikosti-ta-vidbudovy-ukrainy-frantsiia-dopomozhe-ukraini-z-povsinym-materialom>

significance in maintaining and enhancing national security than are defense and law enforcement systems” (Behm 2010: 60), while others assume that resilience requires ‘adaptability and flexibility, rather than strength’ (Giske 2021: 5). Obviously, these recipes do not fully apply to Ukraine, which opens a wide space for a discussion on how the Russian military interference might change the way resilience is understood and academically problematised.

Some authors assume that in times of violent conflicts resilience produces different forms of power (Korostelina 2020: 3), yet other scholars still suggest that resilience is rarely discussed from the viewpoint of power and agency (Béné et al. 2012: 13). One of the possible ways to relate resilience to agency is through the Foucauldian concept of *productive power* as a key element of the governmentality paradigm. The productivity of power was highlighted by Michel Foucault as an opposite to its oppressive functions, and implied incentives on the side of the state and responsibility on the side of society. In this respect the case of Ukraine appears to support those scholarly voices who reject the detachment of governmentality from sovereignty: to a large extent the two overlap and intersect, producing other forms of power. Institutional power is grounded in the vitality and efficacy of public institutions as producers of norms and regulations with a high degree of legitimacy and acceptance in society. Another – and closely related – is communicative power as ‘a form of power being generated by communicative action’ (Flynn 2004: 445). As Manuel Castells (2013: 1) claimed, power relationships and ‘the foundations of institutions that organize societies are largely constructed in people’s minds through the communication process’. The effective functioning of communicative power presupposes a ‘non-despairing, non-cynical, and non-pessimistic’ discursive mode (O’Mahony 2010: 70), which seems to be confirmed by the Ukrainian experience of information resilience to be discussed below.

The following three perspectives are tied to my discussion on Ukraine’s resilience. First, the non-state-based concept of resilience seems to be too radical for Ukraine, since it was the state that generated prerequisites for resilience through reforming state institutions, including the military sector and decentralisation reform. The case of Ukraine does not support the idea that ‘resilient peoples do not look to governments to secure and improve their wellbeing because they have been disciplined into believing in the necessity to secure and improve it for themselves’ (Reid 2018: 648). When it comes to resilience during military conflicts, the dichotomic distinction *state–society* does not seem to be plausible: in Ukraine, the functionality of the government, the consolidation of political elites and the professional communication and information management boosted the legitimacy of the state as a security provider and simultaneously inspired resilience within society.

Second, I disagree with authors who believe that resilience ‘discourages active citizenship’, and even puts ‘into jeopardy the concept of public space’ (Juntunen & Hyvönen 2014: 196). On the contrary, the Ukrainian experience proves that resilience is deeply political since it ‘seeks to empower people to be agents of their own vulnerability reduction in order to make the proper choices and avoid mal-adaptation in an emergent environment’ (Grove 2014: 244). Therefore, practices of everyday resilience ‘create subjects’ (Cavelty, Kaufmann & Kristensen 2015: 9) – civil society organisations, grass-roots groups and networks as key sources of the life-saving strategy of survival and safeguarding human security.

Third, another flaw in the extant body of academic literature concerns the interpretation of resilience as an opposite to various forms of interventionism. In David Chandler’s opinion, central is the differentiation between the resilience paradigm and liberal internationalism: the former ‘puts the agency of those most in need of assistance at the center, stressing a programme of empowerment and capacity-building, whereas the (latter - Author) puts the emphasis upon the agency of external interveners, acting post hoc to protect or secure the victims of state-led or state-condoned abuses’ (Chandler 2012: 216). Therefore, for resilience ‘the emphasis is on prevention rather than intervention, empowerment rather than protection, and work upon the vulnerable rather than upon victims’ (Chandler 2012: 217). This interpretation highlights a structural change within the Western political order towards ‘the post-liberal approach to resilience that emphasizes the ongoing participatory and self-organizing empowerment of local agents’ (Natorski 2022: 4).

Yet the case of Ukraine demonstrates that interventionism, rather than disappearing, takes multiple forms which, again, largely depend on and is constructed by discourses. I share the view that resilience-driven programmes ought to be linked with arms supply and other forms of military assistance (Hamilton 2022). Resilience, in other words, ought to ‘be seen as an integrated element of national security’ (Fjäder 2014: 123). The insufficient interventionism exhibited by the Western partners after the war started in 2014 might be among the root causes of the further conflict dynamics. However, what makes a difference in 2022 is that Ukrainian leadership, building on the ability of the Ukrainian Army to withstand and deter the superior Russian forces during the first months of the full-scale invasion, persuaded western partners to unblock weapons delivery, in some cases altering the existing skepticism regarding the matter. As a result, the Ramstein Contact Group on the defence of Ukraine was created, the law on land lease was adopted in the US and the supply of American Patriot systems was approved. Thus, the provision of external resources (being military or not) is embedded in the resilience, but its acquisition is not assured until Ukraine’s agency is performed and duly communicated. Furthermore, as it was underscored by

President Zelenskyy, 'the provided military aid is not a charity but an investment in global security', and Ukraine, consequently, is a contributor to global security (Zelenskyy 2022b).

Based on these three critical points, I conceptualise resilience as a set of performative practices that conflate and constitute the foundation for Ukraine's agency. In the next section I will specifically focus on four dimensions, or facets, of this phenomenon and relate them to different types of power (productive, institutional and communicative). The four types of resilience are connected and synergetically reinforce each other. Thus, information resilience creates a sense of national unity which is indispensable for the society's resoluteness to go through the ordeals of the war. By the same token, local resilience, largely stemming from decentralisation reform, operates hand in hand with the mechanism of societal determination to thwart the Russian invasion. In its turn, institutional resilience is a precondition for the effective functioning of the state at both central and local levels, which serves as a major reference point for the Ukrainian media and an inspiration for multiple social groups (volunteers, fundraisers, urban activists, etc.).

Ukraine's resilience: Four domestic facets

As seen from the outside, resilience is viewed as defiance despite occupation, sieges, energy blackouts and Russian war crimes including systematic sexual violence, forced deportations and mass killings (Mefford 2022). Domestic sociological data (Rating Group 2022c) indicated a high level of resilience among Ukrainians – 3.9 points out of a possible 5. In this rating, resilience consists of two indicators: physical health and psychological well-being and comfort, including interest in life, feeling of usefulness, ability to make decisions and plans for the future and lack of regret for the past. In my view, this is valuable empirical material that can be interpreted in a constructivist way. I suggest expanding this spectrum and singling out four facets of resilience to be tackled below.

Societal resilience

The resumption of the war produced a strong anti-imperial momentum in Ukrainian society. It implied an exponential growth of negative attitudes towards the Russian state that had already been quite explicit since 2014. Both the annexation of Crimea and the proxy war in Donbas had a major impact on public opinion. Thus, since December 2021 polls showed that about three quarters of Ukrainians perceived Russia as a hostile state (KIIS 2021; Rating Group 2022f). Since the restart of the war the numbers have risen significantly to almost 100%. By the same token, the shift in attitudes was even more dramatic in the case of

Belarus: the number of Ukrainians who saw this northern neighbour as a hostile country jumped from 22% in late 2020 to 84% after the invasion in 2022 (Rating Group 2022h; Ilko Kucheriv 2022a).

Until the beginning of the invasion in February 2022, the south-east of Ukraine demonstrated less animosity towards Russia, but the numbers of those who saw Russia as an enemy were already high enough. Socioeconomic ties of the south-east with Russia – exemplified by integrated supply chains and trans-border economics – were damaged years ago. Since 2014 Ukraine and Russia have gradually lowered their economic interdependence. If in 2013 bilateral trade counted for almost \$40 billion, by 2019 it had dropped to \$10 billion (Zachmann 2020). These cuts left the alleged affinity to Russia in the predominantly Russophone regions of Ukraine without a strong material basis. The first days of the full-scale invasion clearly showed that even in the largely Russian-speaking areas no support for invasion existed, and in the areas that Russian troops put under their control they were perceived as an occupation force. The vast majority of the population in the south (90%) and in the east (85%) of Ukraine have a negative attitude towards Russia (KIIS 2022a).

What changed indeed was the attitude towards Russians. Prior to the war Ukrainians tended to make a distinction between the Russian state (seen as the perpetrator of the conflict), and the Russian society, which was usually perceived as friendlier or at least neutral to Ukrainians. The restart of the war and the realisation of the fact that a majority of Russians support it, wiped out this distinction in Ukrainian public opinion. Now Ukrainians equally blame both the Russian leadership and Russian people (Ilko Kucheriv 2022a), and almost 70% of Ukrainians have negative feelings towards Russians (Rating Group 2022d). The absolute majority of Ukrainians now are point-blank rejecting the idea that Ukrainians and Russians are the same people, neither ethnically nor politically. Only 8% of respondents still raise their voice in support of this Russian political narrative, while less than a year ago, in August 2021, almost 40% somehow accepted it (Rating Group 2022c). The invasion of 2022 resulted in the rise of a general anti-Russian mood in Ukraine, while massive pro-Russian sentiments among the general public vanished much earlier.

The transformation of the public perceptions of Russia and Russians denotes a further shift in the identity politics of Ukraine. Alienation from associations with Russia became a universal trend. Since the restart of the war Ukrainians revisited their views of common history and culture, moving apart from the Russian state and society. The most notable shifts included the symbolic downgrading of the Soviet era May 9 celebration: nowadays only a small number of Ukrainians treat it as 'victory day', thus distancing themselves from the Russian historical narrative. Earlier attempts by the Ukrainian government to substitute

the Soviet era May 9 with the Day of Europe on May 8, undertaken since 2014, initially faced massive opposition within society, not only in the south-east, but even in the centre of Ukraine (Rating Group 2019). But since February 2022 what was seen as a government-imposed narrative turned into a consensually accepted approach as the majority of Ukrainians voluntarily drifted away from the Soviet/Russian interpretation of WWII.

Analysis of local electronic petitions allows us to monitor the changing attitudes and perceptions within the society. In 2022 the petitions most supported in numbers demanded getting rid of Russian and Soviet cultural and political legacy (Pidenko 2022). More than ever before, Ukrainian people do not want to live on streets named after Russian notables and writers, affiliate with the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate or tolerate monuments to the Russian imperial past. Similar shifts occurred with the linguistic self-identification: according to the polls, the number of Ukrainians using the Russian language decreased from 26% in 2021 to 15% in late spring 2022 (Rating Group 2022d; KIIS 2022c). After the start of the invasion many Russian-speaking Ukrainians switched to Ukrainian in daily life. For them this was a political gesture, as they were keen to demonstrate the affinity to Ukraine and to break up ties with Russia. For many Ukrainians this trend further developed into a personal rejection of Russian culture and references to it in their lives: this is manifested in calls to cancel classes in Russian literature in school curricula, demands to ban Russian popular culture (songs, books, movies) and massive support for removal of Russian and Soviet memories from Ukrainian toponymics (Hunder 2022).

This reactive negation of the Russian world ideology is, however, productive. A poll conducted at the very start of the Russian intervention showed that 82% of Ukrainians were sure that it would be repelled (Gradus Research 2022a). After Ukrainian forces withstood the first Russian assaults, confidence in the victory grew even further (95% in late March 2022 and January 2023 (Rating Group 2022b; KIIS 2023)). After months of fierce fighting and devastation Ukrainians still remained positive that they will prevail – to such an extent that any territorial concession to Russia is seen by 89% of Ukrainians as an unacceptable price for peace, which is a push factor for eventually retaking the territories of Donbas and Crimea occupied in 2014 (KIIS 2022d). Lack of overtly pessimistic attitudes in public narratives also drives the dominant political narrative: as society does not show demand for peace at any cost, there is no space for political actors with explicit pacifist attitudes, or proponents of immediate peace talks with Russia.

Thus, at the end of the 2022, 82% of Ukrainians believed that things in Ukraine were going in the right direction, compared to only one fourth of respondents who agreed with that prior to the war (Rating Group 2022i; KIIS 2023). Amid

worsening economic, social and security situations this poll reflects not a lack of critical thinking among Ukrainians, but rather their readiness to accept hardships in order to secure independence and a democratic future. Since the start of the war collective interests of national survival, freedom and sovereignty have prevailed, which has turned out to be the socio-political foundation for resilience. More than half of the population (56.9%) were physically and financially involved in volunteering (Reznik 2022). Indicatively, in the words of the head of the Central Bank of Ukraine, societal resilience translates into a financial and economic asset due to adaptability and flexibility of the Ukrainian labour force, even during the war (Verbyany 2022).

By the same token, the war displayed mechanisms through which social capital and family networks became helpful elements of resilience, including new incentives for collective actions, solidarity and mutual aid. Ties between relatives, neighbours and communities serve as a critical engine in resilience-building: thus, according to a survey, the number of Ukrainians who trust the residents of their locality almost doubled (from 35% to 62%), two-thirds of citizens (67%) trust neighbours and people living nearby and as many as 80% of the respondents declare that they trust their acquaintances (Gradus Research 2022b). Members of large families from the war-torn regions have found refuge in the western part of Ukraine. Neighbourhoods, where residents relied on mutual help and assistance, could better overcome shared problems (Opanasenko 2022). These practices of grass-roots resilience are substantial components of Ukraine's development as a networked society where the middle class has proven capable of taking social and financial responsibility in times of previous crises, including the Maidan Revolution, protection of doctors at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19 and now the war with Russia.

My analysis shows that the war enhanced the attraction of Ukrainian and European cultural identity for most Ukrainians, while elements of Russian-oriented self-identification are vanishing from the national mindscape. Ukraine's agency is not elite-driven, but rests on strong grass-roots components. This agency implies the erasure of a Russia-promoted narrative of a split within Ukrainian identity and the allegedly unbridgeable gaps between different parts of the country. Ukraine's agency in this respect is explicitly anti-post-Soviet in the sense that the country does not wish to position itself within the geopolitical cage of 'former Soviet republics', and preferred a long-term strategy of cultural and normative association with Europe. The productive negation of path dependence on Russia might be seen as a form of power that drives Ukraine in the direction of the Euro-Atlantic security community, which requires an institutional backup to be discussed next.

Institutional resilience

The war didn't just overshadow every other issue of political relevance in the country – it literally 'silenced' political life compared to the one before the invasion. All of public politics is almost entirely focused on supporting the common cause of defeating the aggressor, and foreign, economic, financial and legislative policy agendas are significantly streamlined in accordance to this priority. Undoubtedly, the functionality of the main public institutions is conditioned by the military efficacy of the Ukrainian Army that during the first phase of the war managed to repel superior Russian forces and regain control over some territories. This created preconditions and facilitated the coping of Ukrainian public institutions with numerous challenges with IDPs, relocation of enterprises and operation of social and economic systems; later on, when Russia resorted to the tactic of missile attacks against energy infrastructure, public authorities' efforts were focused on repairing the damage and sustaining basic heating and water supplies during the winter season.

From an institutional viewpoint, a number of shifts happened due to the war. President Zelenskyy became an icon of Ukrainian resistance both at home and abroad. His robust leadership style won a predominant support of almost 90% of Ukrainians, with his political reputation index at an all-time record of 77% (Gradius 2022a; Ilko Kucheriv 2022b). Zelenskyy's model of leadership encouraged Ukrainian society to self-mobilise for the sake of shared goals, encouraging everyone 'to do their part from their place', as they see fit to achieve victory (Pisano 2022: 11). The high approval rating of Zelenskyy is handing him huge authority to lead the changes in the country, even bigger than he had after the landslide victory in the 2019 presidential election. He is now in the position to define the direction of Ukraine's reconstruction and reforms, and has enough reputational resources to revamp both his party and the presidential office.

After the first month of the war, when the Ukrainian Army withstood the initial assault by the Russian troops, many Ukrainians found another national hero in the Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, with whom the leadership in strategic planning is associated (Romanyuk 2022). In public opinion Valeriy Zaluzhny is perceived as the only figure – besides the President – who can share the glory of successful leadership during this war (Rating Group 2022g; Razumkov 2023).

In some Ukrainian regions too, military commanders responsible for the successful defense and counter-offensive gained trust and support from the local population and are considered as potential runners-up for regional public offices. One example is Major General Viktor Nikoliuk, the key figure in the defense of Chernihiv. Additionally, some veteran organisations have already shown themselves as political actors in recent years, and with many more vet-

erans coming home after the current phase of the war, these groups can be even more influential than before – both as grass-roots movements and as national NGOs.

The high level of trust in the President and the army can be attributed to the rally- round-the-flag effect, which for Ukraine, where society has been traditionally critical of authorities, is a novelty. At the same time, it should not gloss over the fact that the high level of society–state unity and almost entire absence of internal critique – 82% of respondents believe that things in Ukraine are going in the right direction (Rating Group 2022i; KIIS 2023) – are wartime conditional only, and can barely be suitable for a post-war democratic society. As research literature suggests, such vertical social cohesion is usually bolstered by external physical threats and has the increased demand for decisive military response as its flip side (Lambert et al. 2010).

The Verkhovna Rada clearly confirms this argument. Earlier a backbone of pluralism as any parliament in a democratic society, it currently functions as the ‘legislative department of the President’ (Rahmanin 2023). The actorship of most political parties presented there have diminished during the war. A number of parties designated as pro-Russian collaborators were banned by the decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine on 18 March 2022, and approved by the majority of Ukrainians (Rating Group 2022d). But the presidential party is also facing a challenge when appealing to the wide public: while still the most popular among voters, ‘The Servant of the People’ with an approval rating of only 45% (NDI 2022) is lagging far behind its leader. Since parliament is a key actor to enable reforms, it should be a respected force on its own, capable of forming coalitions necessary for constitutional changes and of developing a long-term strategy even beyond the (potential) second term of Zelenskyy. Yet the weakness of the presidential majority in the Rada lies in the low level of trust in the parliament. For Ukrainians it is one of the least respected political institutions, trusted by only a quarter of the population (IRI 2022; Ilko Kucheriv 2022b). A potential political landscape with a highly popular president and a much less popular Rada could be a cause of institutional destabilisation as there might be a temptation to preserve such a disposition in order to enable resilience-laden reforms and to secure their support among Ukrainians.

The overall functionality of the Ukrainian state apparatus and public institutions under the dire conditions is a key factor defining Ukraine’s agency grounded in what might be dubbed ‘democratic resilience’, or the ability of a political regime to prevent or react to challenges without losing its ‘democratic character’ (Merkel 2023: 4). The legitimacy of the state apparatus and the ensuing institutional power builds upon effective management during the war, its resoluteness and strategic communication with society. The war catalysed major changes in

the nature of relations between the state and society in a more trustful and supportive way. It created a mobilised environment during the war, but also raised expectations for the post-war transformation of the state, rather than a return to the old practices. This implies building socio-political relations without oligarchy, corruption and inefficient bureaucracy, further expanding the rights of citizens and opportunities of communities, and the eventual membership in the EU and NATO. As the key representative of Ukraine, President Zelenskyy performs as both an incarnation of a functional institutional apparatus and a communicative leader of international scale. I will dwell upon this in the last part of this section, but before that let me show how Ukrainian subnational units contribute to resilience and boost Ukraine's agency.

Local resilience

In pre-war Ukrainian politics the central government usually respected the established regional balances of power and avoided reshuffling regional elites. Yet since the restart of the war the President has appointed new cadres to key positions at subnational level. Under the martial law *oblast* administrations were transformed into military-civil administrative units tasked with organisation of defence and logistics for the military. In some cases governors were substituted by high-ranking military officers.

Overall, public institutions have remained functional in regions, including those most affected by Russia's military attacks. One third of local authorities in Ukraine never halted their operations, almost half of them returned to normal functioning two weeks after the invasion or liberation, and a majority (72%) haven't stopped providing administrative services (Keudel 2023).

The key prerequisite for this is decentralisation reform which was among the most successful transformations in Ukraine in recent years, and during the war it paid off a lot. It consolidated and empowered local governance through a combination of local amalgamation and fiscal decentralisation. All the amalgamated territorial communities were given independent budgets and direct access to inter-budgetary relations with the central budget (Romanova 2022).

Even though at the initial stage of the invasion local self-governance in *hromadas* (communities) often were left on their own, in most cases they coped fairly well with taking care of infrastructure and meeting daily demands of the population (Local 2022). Most of the local authorities (92%) had emergency plans (Keudel 2023). The findings of a wide specialised research attest to their ability to deal with such major shocks of the war as unexpectedness of the full-scale invasion, missile strikes, disinformation and psychological operations of the enemy, mass-scale influx of IDPs and threats to economic stability and critical infrastructure (Rabinovich 2022).

Local authorities, businesses and social networks have been particularly essential to resilience at the grass-roots level. In the first months of Russia's invasion, local governments and volunteers, rather than the central government or international responders, were in the limelight of practical resilience. They provided vital humanitarian aid, especially in remote and frontline areas, and helped communities to remain resilient during Russian occupation when access to aid and public services was typically cut off. After the liberation of the occupied parts of Kyiv, Sumy and Chernihiv, oblasts, local communities and volunteers were helpful in restoring destroyed houses and transporting humanitarian aid to the population. The role of local actors was particularly salient given that international organisations (including the UN, Doctors Without Borders and the International Committee of the Red Cross) were absent on the ground during the first months of the invasion (Costa-Kostritsky 2022).

The experience of communities shows that local self-governance gained a much higher public confidence due to the successful management of the war consequences both in the occupied/affected *hromadas* and elsewhere. What is even more valuable for the development of local self-governance is people's high level of confidence – up to 56% – in these institutions, which is higher than public support for the Ukrainian government and the majority of national level public institutions (KIIS 2022b). This gives local governance much popular credit for a more active involvement with the nationwide politics of resistance and post-war reconstruction to be largely funded from international sources, which in the meantime might create competing claims over control and management of financial flows between the central government and local/regional authorities.

Therefore a potential rise of local self-governance from mostly administrative to more political roles is another trend affecting Ukraine's resilience at sub-national level. A decades-long balance of interests between different regions in Ukraine has ultimately changed, and a search for a new balance is about to emerge. The major split in this regard is not cultural, linguistic or religious, but economic. Since the massive privatisation of heavy industries in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union, two distinct economic models have been established in two macro-regions of Ukraine. The industrial south-east was developing predominantly along export-oriented lines to sell low added value products abroad, thus seeking cheap workforce and being interested in strong national currency. Regional economies in the west, north and – to certain extent – the centre of Ukraine rather consisted of large import-oriented companies (mostly retailers), as well as small and middle businesses. These actors were economically more liberal, keen to establish a sizable internal consumer market and a weaker national currency. As the interests of the two models diverged, their

lobbying efforts led to a similar confrontation in politics in which identity and historical memories were meticulously used to alienate one part of the country from the other and to establish a reliable and long-lasting electoral foundation to sustain each model's interests. This disbalance may not live further because of the changes caused by the war. Heavy industries of the southeast are damaged or destroyed (World Bank 2022), mass migration is watering out a cheap workforce (IOM 2022) and the conservative political camp is losing both its electorate and economic foundations.

A large-scale movement within the country has a particular imprint on the mass resilience of Ukrainians. The displacement of one-third of the country's population within Ukraine is a unique phenomenon with potentially positive repercussions, as despite mutual prejudices and stereotypes existed before the war, residents of different regions had to cooperate and get to know each other. This experience of domestic integration of residents of different regions will hopefully contribute to an even greater consolidation of the nation and a crystallisation of collective identity.

Therefore, the efforts undertaken by local governments and civil society were an example of how decisions on responding to threats are made at the lowest possible level, which corresponds to the principle of subsidiarity effectively operational in Western federations. This is especially noteworthy given that Ukraine lacked strong traditions of local self-government prior to the war. Local resilience contributed to the ability of local governments, volunteers and population to deal together with the shocks of war. The horizontal cooperation of various local actors with clearly defined roles and responsibilities serves as a basis for Ukrainian agency both in the sense of domestic coherence and consolidation, and in terms of consonance with an EU-promoted emphasis on reliance on local resources and ownership for building resilient societies (Joseph & Juncos 2020). The success of the decentralisation reform in Ukraine was already acknowledged by the EU (von der Leyen 2022) and served as a building block for granting Ukraine the status of candidate for EU membership.

Information resilience

The fact that the full-scale invasion was preceded by a hybrid war with Russia has helped Ukraine to gain experience in countering Russian propaganda. Russian television channels in Ukraine were banned (2014), access to the popular Russian social networks was halted (2017) and the broadcasting of several Ukrainian TV channels, which systematically disseminated messages of Russian disinformation, was stopped (2021). At the same time, it was important for Ukraine that the EU countries perceive it as a part of their big family, so a lot of effort has been made to explain that these decisions about blocking propaganda re-

sources do not limit freedom of speech. In contrast to Russia, Ukrainian media were characterised by diversity and pluralism of opinions before the war. This remained in effect after the invasion, although media coverage sometimes suffers from over-optimism (Dan'kova 2022).

As has been shown earlier, amid the Russian invasion all major political forces in Ukraine publicly demonstrated unity and willingness to contribute to the defense of the country. A set of meetings on 23-24 February 2022 in Rada resulted in the coordination of legislative activities to put aside previous political contradictions. No formal agreement was signed, but the *de facto* political armistice was agreed upon from that moment and is mostly respected by key political forces. This convention was widely promoted in the media space: many politicians, especially those in opposition, were keen to underline their positive input to the internal consensus by praising their restraint from criticising the head of the state (Rahmanin 2023).

The first test to the unity of political actors was set in March 2022, when the government pushed for unified information policy in the media space to further consolidate public politics in Ukraine. A major element of those efforts was the introduction of a unified information policy by the National Security and Defense Council decision of 18 March 2022 to set a single frame for news coverage and political analysis as long as the martial law is in place. All-national TV channels were to abide by the policy, while the presidential team effectively limited national television broadcasting to one channel (United News), whose information policy is under control of the President's office (Dan'kova 2022). Also, Ukrainian journalists signed a joint statement on maintaining a balance between press access to events and state security and acknowledged their compliance with the Commander-in-Chief's order on the rules of journalists' work in the area of hostilities (DetectorMedia 2022).

While centralisation of information management was justified by the ongoing information warfare, there were concerns over its implications for democracy and freedom of speech. Some politicians openly criticised this decision. The opposition also instigated an anti-presidential campaign (primarily, in the social media), whose main target was the President and his team's failure to properly heed to the United States' warnings about the imminent Russian invasion, communicated to Zelenskyy in December 2021–January 2022. The aim of this campaign was specifically to discredit the President's ability to properly react to the war threat, and thus to blame him for the losses and to devalue his merits in resistance to Russia. This outburst of political fight in late May 2022 soon calmed down, but demonstrated the true state of diversity in the Ukrainian political landscape and attempts to find a balance between national unity and factional political interests.

Ultimately, a November 2022 poll has shown that 84% of Ukrainian viewers trust the United News (Ukrainian media 2022). The uniformity of the information space contributed to the cohesion of society and improved attitudes towards state institutions and the President. This was influenced by both the war and the lack of opposition channels, which earlier criticised the authorities and Zelenskyy personally. On the other hand, the monotony of the official telecast pushed viewers to turn more often to the Internet and social networks in search for more diversity (Korba 2022).

To summarise my findings, information resilience is a powerful booster to Ukraine's agency. Three points are particularly important here: one is public trust in media sources which was a major basis for preserving a high morale in society and maintaining confidence in the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Another important characteristic is the self-sufficiency of Ukrainian mediascape that cut off Russian (dis)information sources and made them irrelevant even for Ukraine's Russophones. One more facet of information resilience is the voluntary responsibility of journalists, opinionmakers, media celebrities and cultural producers: their consolidated position was instrumental in sustaining a consensual coverage of the Russian invasion and in diminishing the importance of domestic contradictions between different fractions of political elite.

Ukraine's normative agency: External manifestations

Multiple forms of resilience in Ukraine would not have been possible without the prolonged support from the EU that produced and promoted resilience discourses and practices to the entire neighbourhood area, facilitating reforms and creating favourable conditions for resilience. The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement of 2014 was the most comprehensive one that the EU has signed with any other third country. Ukraine has received an unprecedented level of financial support, which became an important contribution to the reification of practices of resilience defined by the EU as the ability of states and societies 'to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises' (Shared 2016). Therefore, it would be fair to say that EU-promoted resilience acts within the logic of the 'power of attraction' through grant-based assistance programmes aimed to boost civil societies of recipient countries, including Ukraine (Lebrun 2018: 5).

In 2020 the EC presented the Eastern Partnership Policy 'Reinforcing Resilience - an EaP that delivers for all', which emphasised the positive results achieved in three out of four priority areas (stronger economy, stronger connectivity and stronger society) in the work plan for reforms '20 Deliverables for 2020'. As regards the stronger governance priority area, the document advocated for 'the need to significantly improve results' in the governance sphere connect-

ed with anti-corruption efforts and empowerment of civil society (European Commission 2020).

The decentralisation and self-governance reform in Ukraine has been one of the pillars of this process. Besides, the EU assistance is instrumental in the support of civil society, free media and grassroots activism in Ukraine, including facilitation of 'local ownership' and 'bottom-up' engagements with the whole society, which allows Ukraine to remain on the right policy track for prompt post-war recovery based on European norms of democracy, transparency and good governance.

Against this background, the EU candidacy status is an important gain to enhance Ukraine's resilience and political agency. The overwhelming support for EU membership among Ukrainians turned out to be one of the few consensual elements in Ukrainian politics since long ago. Approval rating for EU membership was around 70% prior to the war, but since February 2022 it skyrocketed to 80% (Burkovsky 2022). What's important is that in 2022 Ukrainians' perception of the EU was much more pragmatic and responsible than ever before. With a clear understanding that further reforms are a precondition for eventual membership, many Ukrainians are ready to make sacrifices for the sake of ensuring the ultimate success of the required transformations. Almost 70% of Ukrainians support the idea that the necessary reforms are to be implemented regardless of the war, with almost half of those believing the war must not impede even the pace of the reforms (Gradus Research 2022c). Most political actors sustain these popular sentiments for a strong support for the pro-EU reforms.

The EU's contribution to boosting Ukraine's resilience attests to the importance of the structure of international relations within which agency is practiced and effectuated. It is the Euro-Atlantic political community that serves as the major point of attraction and gravitation for Ukraine. Agency within this community is possible only on the basis of internalisation of democratic norms that ought to be accepted and instrumentalised (Sending 2016: 67). Thus, Ukraine builds its agency by incorporating it into a broader structure of the international normative system. The Orange Revolution (2004) and the Revolution of Dignity (2013), along with the implementation of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, as well as the newly acquired candidate status for a prospective EU membership can be identified as the key milestones of Ukraine's pathway to normative agency that denotes an ability to act and develop specific policies in accordance with values, principles and rules of the Western democratic tradition. It is a normative agency that makes Ukraine a full-fledged subject of international politics, particularly in the security domain. For example, cross-society resilience implied the adaptation of NATO's best practices of armed forces transformation and mobilisation of net-

works of reservists (Shelest 2022), which in the future might become a valuable asset for Ukraine's integration with the North Atlantic Alliance in the capacity of a country that, as the German Foreign Ministry acknowledges, 'is defending Europe's freedom' (Federal Foreign Office 2022).

The concept of productive power (Barnett 2005) that I briefly touched upon earlier might be instrumental for my analysis of the resilience-grounded normative agency which significantly differs from the status of Ukraine as merely a victim of foreign aggression. Two points are particularly important to underline in this respect. First, when it comes to resilience as a meaningful part of the EU-Ukraine agenda, it results in a 'joint venture' aggregating European experiences and financial means, on the one hand, and Ukrainian practices of grass-roots self-management and the institutional resources of governance on the other. Moreover, by containing the Russian Army, Ukraine can be viewed as a co-producer of European security, which is particularly acknowledged by European countries bordering on Russia. Ukraine's agency, as unfolded in 2022, addresses Western countries with an insistent demand to avoid negotiating Ukraine without Ukraine (Yermak 2022), and to perceive military assistance to Ukraine as an investment in common security, as opposed to charity toward the victim of aggression.

Second, this co-productive power is grounded in normative foundations. Ukraine is fully aware of the fact that its road to Europe is paved with normative commitments that require adherence to common and shared practices of democratic governance, checks and balances, the rule of law, strong civil society and local self-government as preconditions for a resilient society.

However, both points require further problematisation. Chandler's interpretation of resilience as part of the post-interventionist paradigm helps to better understand Ukraine's agency as co-produced by multiple Western investments in its resilience infrastructure. He also makes clear that assistance with resilience does not guarantee protection; moreover, it may imply a shift from the 'responsibility to protect' to a post-interventionist paradigm of empowering vulnerable countries to secure themselves. This shift triggered by the crisis of the liberal interventionism of the first post-Cold War decade explains the hesitancy of many Ukraine's partners to quickly supply the weapons requested by the Ukrainian government, and reluctance to make steps that the Kremlin might consider provoking further escalation. The hesitation of NATO members to include a military component in any negotiated solution, dating back to the previous experiences of US engagement with the issues of Ukrainian security avoiding military options, looks quite illuminating in this respect.

Therefore, the structural circumstances of the Euro-Atlantic security order are beneficial for strengthening Ukraine's agency-through-resilience, yet in the meantime they prevent major Western powers from playing a role of interven-

ing and securing actors, at least not to the extent that Ukraine might need it. This ambiguity is core for the intersubjective understanding of agency and the role of communication between Ukraine and its key partners: the former appeals to the agency of Western governments in containing Russia to secure the Euro-Atlantic liberal order, while the latter praise Ukraine's resilience and incrementally integrate it in their practical security measures.

Conclusion

Ukraine demonstrated several important features of resilience that were not sufficiently visible before the war and that define Ukraine's agency. Ukrainian society is characterised by a high level of self-organisation, social horizontality and self-control. Ukrainian public institutions have largely remained functional, including in the regions most affected by Russia's military activities. The popularity of Zelenskyy handed him a huge authority to lead the country, but also put the major question of whether he will be able to use the popular trust to continue crucial reforms in much more complicated circumstances. Even though all political forces in Ukraine publicly demonstrate unity, oppositional political interests have not disappeared. New political actors – either from war heroes or renowned activists – will most certainly find their way to the political scene, and regional elites may join the ranks of national party politics.

The article contributed to scholarly debate in international relations in a number of ways. It showed the nexus of resilience and agency as two sides of the same coin, and discussed how agency functions as productive negation in a sense that rejection of compromises with the Kremlin-promoted 'Russian world' served as a basis for state- and nation-building in Ukraine. I also demonstrated that agency is grounded in different types of productive power, which conflate and reinforce each other, particularly in institutional and communicative domains. As my next step, I posited that this power might be dubbed co-productive since it was largely stimulated by multiple Western assistance programmes that before the war prepared Ukraine for a resilient agency, including effective resistance to Russian encroachments. Finally, my last argument concerned the concept of normative agency that treats resilience as a strategy of self-reliance that in the meantime due to its normative compatibility and consonance with the principles of democratic governance opens prospective avenues for Ukraine's eventual integration with the Euro-Atlantic institutional and normative structures as a power capable of contributing to common security. Ukraine's success in this long pathway will largely depend on whether and how its normative agency will be accepted and translated into specific policies and decisions of the EU and NATO as two main pillars and gravitation polls for Ukraine in the foreseeable future.



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