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FEATURES OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN UKRAINE DURING MARTIAL LAW

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The article explores the transformation of Ukraine's public diplomacy in the context of the full-scale war with the Russian Federation which has been ongoing since 2022. Public diplomacy is considered a critically important tool of foreign policy aimed at shaping a positive image of Ukraine, consolidating international support, mobilizing resources, and countering the information operations of the aggressor state. The author emphasizes the changing nature of diplomatic communication during wartime: from traditional information work to a multi-level dialogue with governments, civil society, media, cultural communities, and international audiences overall. Special attention is paid to the analysis of new formats of public diplomacy that emerged after February 24, 2022. These include the UNITED24 platform, the Ukraine Recovery Conferences (URC), the development of municipal (community-based) diplomacy, and the rise of veteran diplomacy. It is proved that these formats not only represent Ukraine's national interests abroad but also deepen international solidarity, strengthen emotional connections with global audiences, and build long-term partnerships. The article also highlights successful communication practices by official institutions, non-governmental organizations, cultural ambassadors, and military veterans, who have become key actors of Ukraine's public diplomacy. Particular attention is paid to a new direction in public diplomacy – veteran diplomacy, the effectiveness and significance of which are demonstrated by specific examples of its use in contemporary realities. The conclusions emphasize that public diplomacy in wartime is not a secondary activity, but one of the defining factors of Ukraine's international subjectivity, which should remain a priority in the post-war period.

Key words: public diplomacy, international communication, soft power, hybrid war, veteran diplomacy, international image, strategic communication, municipal diplomacy, UNITED24.

Лепська Наталія, Ясьмо Ольга. Особливості публічної дипломатії в Україні в період воєнного стану

У статті досліджується трансформація публічної дипломатії України у контексті повномасштабної війни з Російською Федерацією, що триває з 2022 р. Публічна дипломатія розглядається як критично важливий інструмент зовнішньополітичної діяльності, спрямований на формування позитивного іміджу України, консолідацію міжнародної підтримки, мобілізацію ресурсів та протидію інформаційним операціям держави-агресора. Автори акцентують увагу на зміні характеру дипломатичної комунікації в умовах війни – від традиційної інформаційної роботи до багаторівневого діалогу з урядами, громадянським суспільством, медіа, культурною спільнотою та міжнародною аудиторією загалом. Особливу увагу приділено аналізу нових форматів публічної дипломатії, які виникли після 24 лютого 2022 р., серед яких: діяльність платформи UNITED24, реалізація міжнародних конференцій із відновлення України (URC), розвиток дипломатії територіальних громад, а також феномен ветеранської дипломатії. Доведено, що ці формати сприяють не лише представництву інтересів України, а й поглибленню міжнародної солідарності, посиленню емоційного зв'язку з глобальною аудиторією, створенню довготривалих партнерських зв'язків. Автори також розглядають приклади ефективної комунікації з боку офіційних структур, громадських організацій, культурних амбасадорів та військових, які стали новими акторами публічної дипломатії. Особливу увагу приділено новому напрямку публічної дипломатії – ветеранській дипломатії, ефективність та значимість якої продемонстровано на конкретних прикладах її використання у сучасних реаліях. У висновках наголошується, що публічна дипломатія в умовах війни – це не допоміжна діяльність, а один із визначальних чинників міжнародної суб'єктності України, який має зберігати пріоритетність і в післявоєнний період.

Ключові слова: публічна дипломатія, міжнародні комунікації, м'яка сила, ветеранська дипломатія, зовнішньополітичний імідж, стратегічна комунікація, муніципальна дипломатія, UNITED24.



In current conditions of geopolitical change and shifts in the system of international relations caused by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, public diplomacy has emerged as a critically important tool of a state's foreign policy. In the 21st century, diplomatic communication between countries has gone way beyond official intergovernmental relations. Today, public diplomacy has become a powerful tool for communicating with the international community, targeting not only state structures but also societies, non-state actors, influencers, scientific circles, the journalistic community, and the public sector. In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, Ukraine's public diplomacy is taking on a new quality. It is becoming not only a means of image positioning, but also a tool for fighting for resources, allies, trust, security, and the future of the country. As long as full-scale Russian aggression continues, it is difficult to predict exactly how the process of resolving the war will unfold and how communication with the international community will be structured. However, it is already clear today that influential geopolitical actors such as the US, China, the EU, the UK, France, Germany, and others are promoting themselves as drivers of these processes. Thanks to effective communication at the international level, it has been possible to form a broad coalition in support of Ukraine, increase sanctions pressure on the aggressor, consolidate the political elites of the West, and mobilize financial, military, and humanitarian resources. Undoubtedly, diplomatic settlement is an extremely important factor. And the power of public diplomacy, in synergy with official diplomacy, will significantly strengthen Ukraine's subjectivity in the geopolitical arena, contributing to the reconstruction and restoration of our country.

The issue of Ukraine's public diplomacy has become particularly relevant since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. Domestic and foreign researchers view this sphere as a powerful tool for building international support, consolidating the national narrative, and countering hostile information influences. Among academic studies in this field, an article by M. Dumanska devoted to the transformation of Ukraine's public diplomacy during the war and an analysis of the activities of the Ukrainian Embassy in Germany as an example of an effective communication strategy deserves attention [1]. Studies of cultural diplomacy as a component of public diplomacy attract considerable attention. In particular, O. Fomenko, in an article for the journal *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, considers the use of cultural icons as a means of constructing national identity during wartime [2]. The author emphasizes the importance of cultural narrative and "soft power" in conditions of existential threat. Institutions such as the Ukrainian Institute and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine have also made a significant contribution to the popularization of Ukrainian approaches. They have implemented a number of analytical initiatives and public platforms, including the «Forum of International Cultural Diplomacy» [3], as well as presentations of Ukraine's international image through artistic, linguistic, and historical projects [4]. These analytical developments are not purely academic, but play a key role in shaping the strategic guidelines for public diplomacy. In general, it should be noted that conceptually, Ukraine's public diplomacy, particularly in the context of martial law, has not been fundamentally developed, which indicates that there is an open space for further theoretical reflection and empirical research in this area.

So, **the goal of our research** is to figure out the specifics of public diplomacy in Ukraine during martial law and examine ways of optimizing it in Ukraine's foreign policy image based on the identified prospects for its development in the post-war period. At the same time, important attention is paid to new formats of public diplomacy that were introduced after the start of the full-scale war and to analyzing their effectiveness in both the short and long term, particularly in the context of the post-war recovery of the state.

Research results. It is a well-known fact that every conflict and war ends with the signing of a peace agreement. As of now, there are active discussions in the media about the progress of negotiations between Ukraine and Russia in Istanbul and further support for Ukraine from the US and the EU. After Donald Trump's victory in the US presidential election on November 6, 2024, European leaders began to worry whether they would have enough resources to support Ukraine if the US stopped all aid, since all aid programs for Ukraine signed by Joe Biden ended in June 2025. At one time, US National Security Advisor M. Waltz stated: «The president has made it clear that he wants to bring both sides to the negotiating table. He is focused on ending the war, not continuing it» [5]. On the one hand, European countries have begun to take steps towards negotiations between Russia and Ukraine and to align themselves with the Trump administration on this issue. On the other hand, they are concerned that a quick end to the war could seriously harm Ukraine due to concessions made to the Kremlin. Accordingly, a vital task for Ukraine's public diplomacy is to thoroughly prepare for negotiations with Russia from a position of strength.

The Russian-Ukrainian war has become a catalyst for the transformation of the international security system. After all, there is a restructuring of the geopolitical architecture, a confrontation between the democratic and authoritarian worlds, a struggle for world leadership and resources, and the formation of a new balance of power. Every military conflict and war has negative consequences not only for the countries involved, but also for the whole world: uncontrolled migration flows, economic crisis, rising prices due to sanctions,



the spread of terrorism, etc. By supporting one side or the other in a conflict, a partner state seeks to gain its own benefits (expanding its influence, preventing military action on its own territory, developing trade, etc.).

Victory in the 21st century war depends not only on success on the battlefield, but also on the ability to counter the pro-Russian narrative in the international arena, defend democratic values, and stand up for an image of Ukraine that is the opposite of Putin's. This idea is being rapidly promoted by ex-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine D. Kuleba, who emphasizes: «Public diplomacy is a soft weapon with a wide range of action in the context of hybrid warfare» [6]. Such a «weapon» functions at the intersection of political, humanitarian, informational, and cultural spheres. Therefore, in a geopolitical context, Ukraine's public diplomacy is designed to perform at least the following key strategic functions: (1) explaining to the international community the meaning of the war, its causes, scale, and consequences not only for our country but also for the whole world; (2) forming an international coalition of support, both official and public; (3) ensuring Ukraine's moral advantage and leadership in generating initiatives to achieve victory by demonstrating its democratic aspirations, solidarity, humanism, and courage.

International aid is a fundamental component of Ukraine's stability, reconstruction, and recovery. During his speech at the international forum United for Justice. United for Nature, ex-Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal stated that the total damage to the environment as a result of Russian aggression amounts to over UAH 2 trillion [7]. Realizing that this is far from the final amount, as the war continues and it is impossible to assess the scale of damage in the occupied territories as long as it continues, we understand how necessary it is to expand international ties and encourage investors to invest in the reconstruction and restoration of our country. In addition, there is a growing trend of fatigue from the Russian-Ukrainian war, which has been going on for over 10 years, making it difficult to maintain focus on Ukraine and attract even more resources. In this regard, new formats of communication between local authorities, the public sector, and the international community have appeared in Ukrainian public diplomacy.

Thus, public diplomacy is being implemented through international conferences. For example, due to Ukraine's close cooperation with Germany, a large-scale international event was organized – the Ukraine Recovery Conference (URC2024). The conference was held on June 11–12, 2024, in Berlin under the slogan: «United in defense. United in recovery. Stronger together» [8]. The event was attended by leaders of governments of a number of countries, international organizations, business, and civil society. URC2024 became part of a series of annual high-level events dedicated to the rapid recovery and long-term reconstruction of Ukraine, which have been held since the beginning of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine. The conference was not only an economic event but also an image-building one, as Ukraine declared its readiness for reconstruction, attracting investment, and responsibility for resource management. The next URC2025 conference took place in Rome, Italy, on July 10–11, 2025, thus confirming the strengthening of the systematic nature of this format. Events of this level attract the attention of the international community and engage its representatives, which helps to lobby for Ukraine's interests and expand its network of allies.

A new format of public diplomacy for Ukraine is the UNITED24 fundraising platform, which serves as a digital tool for global support for our country. The meeting between the President of Ukraine and the ambassadors of United24, which took place in Kyiv on May 23, 2024, is an eloquent example of the synergy between diplomacy, culture, sports, and technology [9] and the formation of a strong empathetic emotional connection with a global audience. Representatives from various fields attended the meeting, namely NASA astronaut Scott Kelly, actor Misha Collins, footballers Andriy Shevchenko and Oleksandr Zinchenko, Imagine Dragons cinematographer Ty Arnold, as well as historian Serhiy Plokyh, film director and screenwriter Darius Marder, and director and film producer Doug Liman. It is important that representatives of totally different professional fields are pooling their resources to help Ukraine, which is the result of highly effective public diplomacy. An evidence of the effectiveness of public diplomacy as a tool for Ukraine's recovery is the fact that as of May 2025, the NBU received over \$1.45 billion in contributions from international companies, Ukrainian businesses, charitable organizations, world celebrities, and donors thanks to the UNITED24 fundraising platform [10].

In our opinion, it is necessary to emphasize that public diplomacy in Ukraine is increasingly being implemented at the local level. International partnerships, grant projects, and assistance from international donors are often implemented in local communities as a result of public diplomacy. Local communities have become active centers of international partnership. The essence lies in the fact that a non-governmental structure, public organization, municipal institution, etc. is formed on the basis of a government body (city, town, or village council or military administration). A specific civil society organization sends requests to international organizations about the needs of the community and subsequently receives all the necessary assistance (technical, food, financial, etc.). These can also be agreements on joint implementation of projects, if they are



in the interests of both sides. Undoubtedly, such a mechanism is practical from the point of view that each city, town, or community knows its specific needs, developed economic sectors, level of civic activity, etc., and therefore can directly offer terms and prospects for partnership to another organization or a specific city with similar characteristics. To back this up, it would be reasonable to mention online platforms that were created to find partners abroad: Twinning, Sister Cities International (SCI), Cities4Cities, B2B Italia, and others. Their general mechanism of operation is that Ukrainian cities and communities create a profile where they provide detailed information about themselves (geographical location, historical background, specialization, city public organizations and initiatives, etc.), and the search for sister cities is carried out using the same filters. Thus, the search for partners is based on so-called points of contact, and then communication is established and prospects for cooperation are determined.

Often, civil society organizations or individual citizen activists initiate the partnership agreements between cities. For example, at an international youth forum, a participant from Ukraine talks about their hometown, its history, what it is famous for, and offers the mayor of another European city prospects for cooperation. This approach is particularly effective for temporarily occupied and frontline communities, with which very few international organizations are willing to cooperate directly. To illustrate the difference in the level of international cooperation between frontline and rear regions, here are some statistics on the number of partners in Ukrainian communities: in Volyn Oblast, the number of international partners reaches 98, in Zhytomyr Oblast – 65, in Odesa Oblast – 101, in Kherson Oblast – 2, and in Zaporizhzhia Oblast – 19 [11].

At the same time, it is important to note the following significant point. Since a large part of Ukraine's territory is under occupation, unfortunately, the vast majority of international partners and donors are not willing to cooperate and allocate funds for projects in occupied and frontline territories. This is a serious problem, as the functioning of local self-government bodies, meeting the needs of IDPs, and preparing for de-occupation require considerable material, technical, and human resources. Therefore, Ukrainian political leaders and the public face the task of strengthening their influence in the international arena while working on internal processes (fighting corruption, reforming legislation, fulfilling EU requirements for accession, etc.). This will definitely encourage donors and international partners to pay more attention to the problems in Ukraine, especially when there are signs of fatigue from the Russian-Ukrainian war and distraction by other destabilizing processes in the world.

On February 29, 2024, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine published news about the creation of a page on wartime diplomacy called "Wartime Diplomacy." It tells about Ukrainian military diplomacy during the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war and sums up two years of diplomats' work to strengthen Ukraine, attract international support for the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and open new horizons in the world for the state, business, and citizens [12].

Carefully observing events in Ukraine, we have identified a new direction in public diplomacy that began during Russia's full-scale invasion: veterans' diplomacy. This is a non-institutional but extremely powerful instrument of soft power. Its essence lies in the direct communication of demobilized military servicemen with an international audience, sharing their first-hand experience of war. This communication between military personnel who have been discharged from service due to certain circumstances (injury, age, personal desire, etc.) with an international community aims to highlight the problems and needs of veterans, military families (active, captive, missing, deceased, discharged), as well as countering Russian propaganda abroad.

Currently, veteran diplomacy is developing dynamically, as the veteran movement is rapidly expanding due to the increasing number of demobilized military personnel and the intensification of public activities by their families. This trend has emerged as a result of the numerous problems and unmet needs that remain, namely:

- difficulties with the physical and psychological rehabilitation of military personnel (the state does not cover all expenses or only covers them for a certain period of time);
- financing prosthetics for war-affected persons (the state compensates only for the first prosthesis, and subsequent ones after 2–3 years must be paid for out of pocket);
- legal assistance (not everyone can receive timely quality assistance to protect their rights and the rights of their families);
- the problem of employment (many people who have become disabled cannot find a job with decent pay);
- the issue of establishing memorials in honor of fallen soldiers.

In reality, the list of unresolved issues is much longer, but we have highlighted the most common ones. It is clear that the state cannot resolve all issues with its efforts and resources alone. Therefore, people united by a common idea have created their own organizations to provide the necessary assistance to themselves and others. A striking example is the Veteran Hub organization, which was founded in 2016 to provide psychological support to veterans of the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) and Joint Forces Operation (JFO) and relaunched



its work in March 2022. This organization provides psychological and legal support, personal assistance with employment issues, and help with reintegration into civilian life. In addition, Veteran Hub has also been a research center since 2020, and its website contains research materials on the life paths of veterans [13].

To confirm the effectiveness of veteran diplomacy, we will provide examples of Veteran Hub's cooperation with international partners. In partnership with IREX (an international development and education organization), Veteran Hub has been receiving funding from the US State Department since 2019. Cooperation with the charity organization Help Us Help UA allows Ukrainians abroad to support veterans and their families in overcoming the negative consequences of war. In addition, the Partnership for a Strong Ukraine Fund, which is funded by the governments of the United Kingdom, Estonia, Canada, the Netherlands, the United States, Finland, Switzerland, and Sweden, supports further research on «The Paths of Beloved Soldiers» (how the loved ones of soldiers experience war) and the creation of the «Veteran Hub» analytical center [13].

Often, servicemen become founders of veterans' organizations. For example, Oleksiy Anulia, who spent 10 months in Russian captivity, became a co-founder of the international charitable foundation «The Price of Freedom» after returning to Ukraine. The fund's activities are aimed at providing civil and legal assistance to military personnel and prisoners of war, as well as their families. Oleksiy told about his own diplomatic activities: «I have already had the opportunity to travel to the UN to speak at various events, to Arab countries and to European countries, and to promote the issue of exchange. All this activity has grown into almost a full-time job. I am constantly approached by the families of military prisoners with whom I was in captivity, and others. They ask for help for their families, children, especially those whose parents have been tortured. I helped to return these bodies, and now I believe that we must find a way to support these children at least until they reach adulthood» [14]. This shows that the needs of the military (currently one of the most pressing issues) should be discussed by the military themselves, as only they are aware of the specific type of assistance required. The task of the state and the public is to ensure that their appeals are heard and that there is feedback from the international community. This is the form that effective public diplomacy in current Ukraine will take.

In the context of strengthening the resource of veteran diplomacy, it is necessary to pay attention to the active media presence of military personnel. Combat medics, freed from captivity, demobilized, and current military servicemen maintain their own blogs on social networks, appear as guests on interviews, and participate in television shows. This format of communication allows them to reach a much wider audience, including abroad, which significantly improves public awareness of the lives of military personnel, their pain, needs, and desires. Soldiers constantly raise the issue of war crimes in captivity and the inaction of international organizations in bringing Russians to criminal responsibility for mistreating prisoners of war according to the Geneva Convention. For example, paramedic Kateryna Polischuk (call sign – Ptashka) told journalist Volodymyr Zolkin in an interview about the activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross during her captivity: «They (the Russians) do not comply with the Geneva Conventions. None of the clauses of the Geneva Conventions were observed in the treatment of Ukrainian prisoners of war: neither in terms of conditions, nor in terms of attitude, nor in any other way. And the Red Cross did not ensure this. It should have been the guarantee of compliance, as we see in the treatment of Russian prisoners of war, who are also very strongly protected» [15].

Kateryna also told about a case when representatives of the Red Cross called her and asked if she had any evidence of cruel treatment of Ukrainian prisoners of war. The absurdity lies in the fact that it is impossible to collect physical evidence in captivity, and the words of a person liberated from captivity are not evidence for the Red Cross. Now the task is to hold not only Russia accountable, but also the leadership of the ICRC.

Veteran diplomacy has a significant impact on the formation of Ukraine's foreign policy image. Veterans have a good reputation both in our society and in the international community, which greatly increases the level of trust in them and their words. By constantly emphasizing the fierce struggle of Ukrainians against the aggressor state and Russia's war crimes, and by promoting national values and achievements, veterans shape Ukraine's image through the values of freedom, resilience, and justice.

Conclusions. Thus, public diplomacy in Ukraine has achieved significant results and demonstrated its effectiveness in a relatively short period of martial law. Since February 24, 2022, Ukraine has achieved Russia's removal from more than 25 international organizations and other multilateral cooperation formats. Using public diplomacy tools, in particular the large-scale advertising campaign «Ukraine = Bravery», Ukraine is positioning itself on the international stage as a state that courageously defends European values, freedom, sovereignty, and democracy.

In the context of full-scale war, Ukraine's public diplomacy is not an auxiliary but a key component of its national strategy. At the same time, public diplomacy performs the following crucial functions: (1) it ensures Ukraine's moral leadership in the global space; (2) it forms an emotional connection between the international



community and the Ukrainian people; (3) it activates the mobilization of resources (financial, humanitarian, military); (4) it strengthens Ukraine's institutional position in negotiations, sanctions policy, and the country's reconstruction; (5) it strengthens Ukraine's geopolitical subjectivity. Local community diplomacy and veteran diplomacy are particularly important, representing a new level of public diplomacy that complements official diplomacy. They are capable of overcoming the effects of war fatigue, shifting the international audience's attention to the human dimension of the tragedy, and returning the issues of support and justice to the agenda.

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