



ANALYZING THE CONSUMPTION OF RUSSIAN CULTURAL CONTENT AND CHALLENGES TO STATE CULTURAL POLICY

(REPORT BASED ON FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS)

Introduction

Ukraine's centuries-long status as part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union had a significant impact on the attitudes of Ukrainians toward Russian culture and cultural products created in Russia at large. The Russian cultural content has been, for the most part, accepted by Ukrainians as their own or, at least, something that is very similar. This perception has been reinforced by the fact that most Ukrainians are fluent in Russian, unlike in the languages of other neighboring countries.

The state policy of Ukraine reflects this reality. For a long time, the curriculums of educational establishments heavily emphasized the study of Russian authors, and many Ukrainian artists looked toward the Russian market which had a larger audience and more financial opportunities. The Ukrainian market has been dominated or heavily influenced by the presence of cultural products of Russian authors: cinema, music, literature, TV, and other infotainment.

Before the occupation of Crimea and the start of the war in Donbas in 2014, Russia used to have a significant influence both on the political landscape in Ukraine and on other spheres: identity, popular culture, and creative industries. After 2014, changes took place in the state regulation of various cultural aspects: the processes of de-Communization have been largely aligned with the processes of de-Russification. Besides, the Ukrainian state has changed the educational curriculums and introduced Ukrainian content quotas for radio stations, book publishers, and TV channels. At the same time, these measures have been introduced gradually, and they cannot be considered radical. Russian cultural content is still very much present in Ukraine and its influence has been significant.

The full-scale invasion by Russia that started on February 24, 2022, has likely had a radical effect on the coexistence of Russian and Ukrainian cultural content in Ukraine. Still, there is no consensus in Ukrainian society about the role of Russian culture. More and more activists are convinced that the consumption of Russian content should be strictly limited, including by means of strong state policy and bans. At the same time, many consumers are against those measures and believe that either the market can take care of itself, or the state should instead encourage Ukrainian cultural content.



METHODOLOGY

As part of the research **supported financially by PONARS-Eurasia**, three focus groups were held: two with those who consume Russian cultural content or those who used to do so but no longer do and one with cultural activists that promote or create Ukrainian cultural content.

Focus groups were held both online via videoconferencing and on-site. Focus group took place throughout December 2022, according to the guides corresponding to the two different groups, and participants' confidentiality has been preserved. The audio recording of the focus group discussions has been transcribed in a way that omits personal identification data. The quotes have been slightly modified (depersonalized) to ensure that participants cannot be identified and improve comprehension. All recommendations are based on data collected during the research and do not necessarily reflect the views of the research authors.

The term *Russian cultural content* refers to books, cinema and TV series, music, TV shows, etc. that are produced by Russia or its historical predecessors, such as the USSR and the Russian Empire; the language of such content is typically Russian.



MAIN FINDINGS

THE CONSUMPTION OF RUSSIAN CULTURAL CONTENT

Several focus group participants have made a conscious effort to discontinue the consumption of Russian cultural content since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion. This group no longer finds Russian content acceptable and is unwilling to consume content made by the people or representatives of the state that wages the war against Ukraine. Often, when one discontinues consuming Russian content, one switches to Ukrainian content.

Focus Group 2 participant (in Russian): I started listening to music [in Ukrainian]. I no longer listen to any Russian music. I used to ask my husband who speaks Ukrainian to watch movies [in Russian]... because I perceive the films better if the translation is in Russian... Now I definitely watch movies in Ukrainian. This is my will, there's no compulsion. And I am gradually starting to speak Ukrainian. I speak in surzhyk [an illiterate combination of Russian and Ukrainian]. And that's when a protection mechanism kicks in; I say – if you don't like this, I will switch to German.

Focus Group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): After the war started, I no longer watch Russian movies and TV series. I basically removed them from my watch list. I listen to music rarely. That only happens in a car when the radio is on. So, I do not even know these artists because I do not listen to music often. I know that I like Ukrainian music and that's it. I guess there are some artists I like; for example, Artem Pyvovarov who has some great songs in Ukrainian or the band *Hardkiss*. This band does not have many songs in Ukrainian, but their music is good and known all over the globe. To be honest, I do not know of any trending new artists. But I do know that there are lots of them. Ukrainian music is good and is going to another level. Things are changing. Yesterday, I saw a video in which an old artist Ivo Bobul said that it took a war for people to remember him. And, it's true, no one used to remember him. And you start thinking – why did we listen to Russian artists? Why didn't we listen to the Ukrainian ones? Maybe, because the situation was very different...

Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): As far as Russian content that I watched prior to the war on YouTube is concerned, that's *ЧБД* [Что Было Дальше] on the LABEL.COM channel. On Instagram, I was subscribed to various Russian bloggers, but after the 24th [of February] I unsubscribed. I also used to watch the YouTube channel *D3* that does car reviews, Davidich, for those who know. I unsubscribed from all of them and, in general, I no longer watch any of them. Sometimes, if there's an interesting clickbait, I can take a look at a video, but I pretty much never do. As of now, when it comes to Ukrainian content on YouTube, I watch reports by the *Ukrainian Pravda* [Ukrainian media] and interesting interviews by Zolkin [with captured Russians]. Sometimes, I used to watch Nevzorov [Russian media personality] when the war started, after the 24th. I do read Telegram channels.



Some participants who used Russian content for professional purposes decided to forego it because they found it unpleasant, even though they thought it was useful and of high quality.

Focus group 2 participant (in Ukrainian): Watching YouTube is not my thing. I am subscribed to several channels, but, perhaps, I am old-fashioned in this regard because it does not interest me at all as a source of information. Only when it comes to professional topics, something that I am interested in. Does that make sense? *Professional* is the scientific approach to beauty and I work in the beauty sphere. And I subscribed to them. The topic of mesotherapy was brought up, it's a very womanly topic. I paid for the subscription on February 23, 8.30 p.m. You know, I had to force myself to watch at the end of April because the subscription lasted for two months. But they actually denied access to users from Ukraine at that point. I used VPN to watch it, girls helped me to set it up. You know, I was feeling an internal resistance against this and watched it just because I paid for it. These scientists, this Saint Petersburg, whatever, let's check it out and move on. You know, I just can't...

For some participants, the fact that monetization and profits of Russian content are directly or indirectly used to fund the war against Ukraine was the main reason to forego Russian content. Some participants even made an effort to discuss this matter with their friends and family.

Focus group 2 respondent (in Ukrainian): Due to my influence, none of my friends and family members... I explained to them in broad strokes what monetization is, how it works, as well as what pays for bullets aimed at us and even my mom understood it all. I have a brother, he is 15 and is the most [nationally] conscious member of my family, and he's the person who taught me how I should approach this topic. Mom watches stuff on websites... If I see her watching something, there's going to be a scandal. Our country is warring radically. When I visit home, no one consumes Russian content. My grandpa who works in the cultural sphere very quickly and consciously removed himself from this stuff. He is a bonified cultural worker in the sphere of music and, God bless, things are settled as far as he goes. My father is also very smart. I had big arguments with my mom and my fiancé who used to love this stuff – YouTube, podcasts... He and I even switched to Ukrainian voiceovers of TV shows, even though he was not used to it. As for me, I have always watched [TV shows] only in Ukrainian or English.

At the same time, **some participants limited or completely ceased the consumption of Russian cultural content right after 2014** (the year when Crimea was annexed and the war in Donbas began). Moreover, this refusal often concerned Russian content and not the content in the Russian language, and participants continued consuming translations of literary works to Russian or other cultural products adapted to the Russian language (cinema, video games, etc.).

Focus group 2 participant (in Russian): Since 2014, when this whole thing started, my parents, I, and basically my entire family, at once began discussing the



consumption of any Russian content. They switched to speaking Ukrainian two years ago. And now they are much better at it than I am. My cousin forewent the consumption of content in the Russian language and also switched to speaking in Ukrainian, and now she is much better at it; as if thought she never spoke Russian at all. Unfortunately, at that point, I consumed Russian content on YouTube and listened to [Russian] music, but it was not mainstream music – it was stuff like folk. I watched videos on YouTube, not the political ones – those were mainly gaming channels or channels related to animal life. I also watched movies in Russian. Those weren't Russian movies, but the voiceovers were in Russian. I also read books in Russian, but those books weren't Russian. And when the invasion began, I unsubscribed from most Russian content on YouTube, in particular, those bloggers who did not make their position clear or said “we don't do politics” or supported the war. So, I switched to Ukrainian movies, bought several books in Ukrainian, and am getting used to reading in Ukrainian. Unfortunately, I still watch Russian content, but only those [creators] that are against the war.

Many participants that decided to forego Russian cultural content believe that they could have done this earlier and retrospectively lament the Russification of the Ukrainian cultural market and the influence it had on everyday life and worldview. This concerns music, literature, cinema, and other cultural spheres at large. At the same time, participants encountered much of this content randomly: based on recommendations of social media or acquaintances, compilations, TV and radio broadcasts, etc.

Focus group 2 participant (in Ukrainian): My childhood was in the middle of the [19]90s, and one can guess what kind of content there was on TV. At the time, TV series were hugely popular, and I am now surprised just how blind we were, just how susceptible we were to the content about Soviet soldiers... Later, our society tolerated this whole thing and our cultures were assimilated; take *Blue Lights* [New Year concerts aired since the Soviet period], for instance – this whole thing was on TV, and we perceived this as part of our own culture. Further, I vividly remember my mom and I watching the May 9th [celebrated as Victory Day in Russia] parade in Moscow when I was 9 years old. And we were like: “Yeah, this is our thing. This is ours – the great Victory!”. So, basically, this was so deeply rooted in our society that we could not even draw a line or separate things... Now it's a lot easier to do so because since 2014 people have not really distanced themselves from this stuff that much [before the war]... When I moved to Kyiv, all of my friends used to speak Russian. Those smart people that I found interesting were either natives of Kyiv or lived around Kyiv. I spoke Ukrainian, and it was a bit hard at first, I even felt a bit ashamed because in all establishments... Even when I visited establishments with friends from my hometown, they automatically switched to speaking in Russian. It was very funny Russian too.

Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): You know, I used to watch movies on TV that consisted of several episodes. In Russia, movies that had four episodes were popular, and I won't mention their titles but I did watch them. Now, of course, I would not watch stuff like this because it does not make sense anymore. But I don't think it's the fault of the people who watched this stuff – it's just what we were



offered. You turn on the TV channel *Ukraine*, and it broadcasts Russian films or TV series all day long.

Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): I used to listen to YouTube music mixes. YouTube offers a compilation and I went for it, it offered stuff to me, and I listened to it. These mixes featured many Russian artists. The same goes for TV series. For instance, *Мажор*... Basically, the trendy ones, ones that everyone watched. Someone would recommend stop watching and I did, something like that. But, now, as far as I know, they are still aired, but I no longer watch them. I don't watch Russian TV series.

Some participants who would like to completely forego Russian content find it too difficult to do at the moment, especially if they used to consume it a lot. That is why, they forego it gradually and decrease the number of creators they follow little by little.

Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): Russian music artists, such as *Oxxxymiron*, *Luka*, *Pharaon*, *Morgenstern*, *Endspiel*. I can go on and on. Before the war started, I only listened to this kind of music. And now I am gradually switching to Ukrainian content.

Further, **some participants have foregone content by Russians** who support the war or have not voiced their opinion. At the same time, **they continue the consumption of content by Russian creators who steadily denounce Russian military aggression**.

Focus group participant 1 (in Ukrainian): When it comes to Russian music, I used to listen to Makarevych and Shevchuk. Nothing precludes me from doing so now because their stance towards the war is unchanged. I listen to their music occasionally.

Overall, **the decision to forego Russian cultural content and switch to Ukrainian content is closely related to one's decision to switch to speaking Ukrainian**: at work, in personal life, etc. as well as a switch to reading Ukrainian media and speaking in Ukrainian at public places/places of leisure.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): I think that the fight for the Ukrainian [content] has been rewarding. Many people switch to speaking Ukrainian, and there's a lot less content in Russian. At least, in our local media. The legislation enacted prior to the war that required this change played its part. Now, I notice that many people who are Russian speakers switch to Ukrainian when they are interviewed. They do have an accent, but more and more residents of Odesa are making an effort to speak Ukrainian, which makes me happy. I just don't want to be biased, I do not follow cultural events, but, of course, the performances held in local theatres and other cultural events in Odesa influence the [national] consciousness of Odesa residents and fills them with a bit more patriotism. Because Kyiv theatres visit, theatres from Ivano-Frankivsk used to, and now more and more people have a positive attitude towards these developments and, maybe, become a bit more [nationally] conscious. This is not about Russian content – it's about the Ukrainian language and the Ukrainian vision. That's what I see.



The difficulties of replacing Russian cultural content

Those focus group participants willing to switch from Russian content to Ukrainian or foreign content have faced certain difficulties. **Their primary concern is the lack of niche Ukrainian cultural content.** Content for children is particularly scarce. Further, participants reported the lack of content in the following spheres: video games, literary or virtual universes, etc.

The lack of cultural content for children is the foremost issue. Those participants that have kids reported that the lack of Ukrainian cultural content forces to them to choose Russian content for their kids because their children understand Russian.

Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): She watches *Smeshariki* [Russian cartoon] or something else anyway. Maybe there's not so much Ukrainian content that kids find interesting? It's difficult.

Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): Basically, *Kozaky* is an old cartoon, but the cartoons made in the 1950s are much better than the ones I watched in my own childhood. There are bright, very cool, I believe, cartoons made in between 1951 and 1954, among them *Snihuronka*. One can watch them over and over again. I will say this: she also likes watching *Alenkiye Tsvetochki* [Russian cartoon] because the cartoon is bright. She does not quite like *Kotyhoroshko* and *Koza-Dereza* [Ukrainian cartoons].

Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): This was brought up earlier, but as far as content for children is concerned... My mom works at a kindergarten and she always says that we live in a Ukrainian-speaking region where there are few Russian speakers, but the kids in the kindergarten sometimes talk in Russian. Why does this happen? Because they all watch Russian cartoons. It's *Synii Traktor*, *Masha i Medved*... They listen to these cartoons and reproduce them. I don't know how this works. I don't have kids right now, but, maybe, there aren't enough good Ukrainian cartoons and this is the problem.

Some participants believe that there is a lack of content for video gamers and geeks. There are very few adaptations and translations of video games, which are by default translated into Russian for the countries in the region.

Focus group 2 participant (in Ukrainian): This geek, gaming stuff... yes. Translations of movies and TV shows are available. But it's difficult when it comes to games. For example, I don't own a single game that has a Ukrainian translation. Not a single one. Same when it comes to literature. Well, maybe there's *Witcher* – that's in Ukrainian. But everything else, for instance, fictional universes... I am not particularly interested in manga, but recently there have been more translations, the situation is better in that regard. But there are other fictional universes that, for example, only have one book that was recently translated and I had to wait for almost a week to get it.



Further, there is a shortage of cultural products that are Ukrainian or in the Ukrainian language in spheres adjacent to culture, such as science (popular science and sci-fi). At the same time, participants noted that the situation is improving.

Focus group 2 participant (in Ukrainian): since 1993, when I was starting my PhD, I could only use Ukrainian in speech. Unfortunately, it was almost impossible when it came to science. By and large, all monographs, scientific studies, and this went beyond Russian authors and encompassed the best history, political science, and philosophy researchers, these works were translated in Russia and imported into Russia. From there, they went to Ukraine after they were translated into Russian. I mean to say that this was a big issue for the scientific community [in Ukraine].

There are issues when it comes to other spheres adjacent to culture – business, science, etc. Many spheres have been influenced by Russian terminology, approaches, and methodology.

Focus group 2 participant (in Ukrainian): I can talk a bit more about small businesses. It was very hard for the business related to the beauty industry to switch to employing the Ukrainian language. Take, for instance, the term *microshock therapy* – it was translated in Ukrainian letter for letter, although the word for shock in Ukrainian is *strum* whereas in Russian it is *tok*. I had to make up terminology and insist on their use in this little business environment. Later, the business environment adopted the correct terminology. But there's still a lot of absurd stuff out there... But, again, I used to work as a copywriter and wrote a lot of articles before the war. There were some guys from Kherson who were promoting this stuff. And there were Russian articles and they were awkwardly translated into Ukrainian. There's a lot of work to do – it's really about terminology. It had to be made up. The words had to be put together, promoted, and translated in a way that allows for adequate and corresponding naming.

On the other hand, there are some participants who believe that **the issue of shortage of Ukrainian content is made up, and there is actually enough of it**, and it is about making the effort to find it. Some participants also do not believe that the lack of alternative to Russian content is an important reason to continue consuming Russian content. They believe that there is a sufficient amount of diverse Ukrainian content across the spectrum, but the dominance of Russian communities around this content have made it difficult for similar Ukrainian communities to strive and maintain a large membership.

Focus group 2 participant (in Ukrainian): Do I agree that many people do not switch to Ukrainian content because there's not enough of it? It's a widespread belief. But it is also true that if one does not look for it, one cannot find it. I know people who decided to forego Russian content during the war. They set out to forego it for 27 days because that's how long it takes to form a habit. And then they shared their observations and said they were surprised. They discovered a parallel universe. They did not even realize that there's a load of quality Ukrainian content: music, literature, cinema that is both made in Ukraine and translated to Ukrainian. Likewise, there are a lot of people who want to switch to speaking in Ukrainian, but



they still say that there aren't enough courses that teach Ukrainian for free. But, in my opinion, there's a lot of information about that on TV. One can easily find these courses on the Internet. But very often one has to explain this stuff to lazy people. Or for people who do not really want it. When a person wants something, they look for opportunities to do so, and when they don't, they look for reasons.

Focus group 2 participant (in Ukrainian): As far as Ukrainian content on YouTube goes, when the war started, I unsubscribed from many [Russian] bloggers. But when I looked for an alternative, for instance, bird-caring, I could barely find any. I found a guy on Instagram. He looks after birds and makes short videos. I watch them. It is unfortunate that YouTube still has a lot of Russian content, which makes it difficult to find Ukrainian content. Because I was able to find really cool channels that focus on game reviews – I stumbled upon them almost accidentally. And I thought: why didn't I watch these before? Same goes for music. I found a great girl who sings really well. She makes cover songs on songs from movies and games in Ukrainian. And I think – why didn't I listen to her [music] before? Why did I use to listen to some bullshit from Russia? Why didn't I listen to [the music of] this girl?

Overall, **state regulation, including via the introduction of quotas, has popularized Ukrainian cultural content and increased its mass market share.** Music, TV shows, literature are, perhaps, the foremost examples. Both the quality and quantity of this content increased.

Focus group 2 participant (in Ukrainian): After 2014, things got easier. Especially, when quotas were introduced. Now, there's a lot more Ukrainian music. This completely satisfies my personal needs. There are a lot of quality movies. When one thinks in Ukrainian, it is natural for one to look for literature in Ukrainian. I used Russian at work. I read what I needed to read. On top of that, there's the environment. I am a Kyiv native, and I have a lot of friends, neighbors, parents of my friends who speak Russian, so I spoke Russian to the extent I needed it. What has changed since the war started? Well, I cannot stomach Russian anymore. I listen to podcasts of Russian liberals on YouTube that I need for professional purposes. I try not to listen to anything else [in Russian]. I definitely don't listen to any music [in Russian].

Most participants believe that de-Russification and de-Communization go hand in hand. As part of this process, many media and social communities switch to the Ukrainian language and Ukrainian content reaches previously Russified communities. Sometimes, there is pushback by communities, but it is usually caused by the natural resistance to change.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): Odesa region has always been Russian-speaking, especially its Southern part, Bessarabia. And large local media, such as *Bessarabia*, *Inform*, *Yug Today*, *Bessarabia ua*, the websites that used to produce video content and other content in Russian have now completely switched to Ukrainian. To be more precise, they publish articles in both Russian and Ukrainian. When it comes to video content, however, journalists try to switch to the



Ukrainian language. It's a big deal because the audience mostly speaks Russian – there are a lot of Bulgarians, Gagauz people, Moldovans. They used to be uncomfortable with the Ukrainian language, but now, due to the fact that media switched to Ukrainian, of course, people are more comfortable, they listen, and they feel like they are in Ukraine more so than they used to. I also want to add a bit more about cultural events because I was a bit lost towards the beginning. I am sure you heard about it, there was the discussion about the removal of the monument to [Empress] Katherine [in Odesa]; it is currently fenced. It's a long-lasting dispute, and finally the Odesa City Council decided to listen to all of these civic initiatives and decided to remove the monument. But there's also a lot of renaming going on – streets, alleys. Ones named after Pushkin and Gagarin are being renamed. And there was this one particular case of one of the southern hromadas [territorial unit]. It's located in the Izmail district and called Suvorovska village [hromada], named after the village of Suvorovo [Suvorov was a Russian military commander], the administrative center of this hromada. And they are debating how it should be renamed. One of the options is the old name – *Vstyhaa*. It is a Tatar name of this settlement that is 600 years old. And what I am seeing, I wrote an article about this, it's a wondrous thing – people start thinking. Indeed, why were we called [Suvorovo] for so many years... Some do not want to forego the name Suvorovo because they are used to living in a settlement named that way. But others do write about this, their local historians, the deputies bring this up – do you remember that neighboring villages call you *shekerlitsy*? It's important for them. So, I would say that due to the war and these events people have started realizing that the history of the Soviet period was forced upon us. Now, to break off that historical trail, that historical cultural influence, and to discover the heritage of all these peoples that live here... You know, I am seeing unique things that can be traced back to these scary events that took place here, but these events have moved our people, including in faraway districts that tend to be Russian-speaking and generally more pro-Russian. But, now, when the events impact them directly, when rockets are flying at their children, of course, they start to think differently.

The activists that advocate for Ukrainian content note another issue: **some do not perceive the history of modern Ukrainian as clear and unequivocal**. That is why, some consumers (used to) turn to Soviet and post-Soviet content that they believe has a clear message and cannot be misinterpreted.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): Currently, we are introducing the topic of strategic communications at our university department, which has been how we've been able to research the informational and communication activity as the soft power mechanism. Kirkorov [Russian music artist] is a source of soft power... There's a quote by Peskov [Kremlin's press secretary] who said that Kirkorov is the representative of soft power; not only does he reach our countrymen, his art influences the citizens of states that he visits. That is why Russian content prevails in coffee shops and in buses in the Zaporizhzhia region until this very day. As far as cinema is concerned, our team noticed the following, maybe someone will pick up on this: we talked with university and high school students about cinema as a means of mass communication, soft power tool. And the students said that their



school teachers from Zaporizhzhia told them that only their parents should decide if they see movies, such as *Kiborhy* or *Cherkasy* [pre-2022 Ukrainian movies about war] because this is something serious, something provocative, something patriotic. And, as part of the school activity, teachers offered to watch content about, say, WWII, which is a staple that would not lead to any issues and questions.

The motivation to continue the consumption of Russian cultural content

After the full-scale Russian invasion, some participants still continue consuming Russian content that they consider world classics.

Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): At home, I have a huge library. When I think of classics, I think of Bulgakov, of course. Modern authors do not come to mind.

Some participants are used to the Russian cultural content and continue consuming it, although not as much as they used to.

Focus group 2 participant (in Ukrainian): I want to discuss this – I have some friends in Kharkiv who used to be quite unpatriotic. We've even had some conversations about this. And when on February 24 they were shelled and evacuated to Western Ukraine, they tried switching to speaking in Ukrainian. That's number one. Number two, they forewent any Russian content – music, films – although before that they did not like the Ukrainian language. And, yeah, basically – Kharkiv is a Russian-speaking city and that includes civil servants. That used to amaze me. I do speak Russian ordinarily as well, but I believe that one ought to speak Ukrainian in a professional setting, one should understand both languages. That is because there can be many conflicts having to do with this. But my friends did not think so before the war started. When their father from Mariupol visited them and played Russian music, they asked him – what are you doing? Why do you keep listening to it? And he said: "I support Ukraine, I want Mariupol to be a part of Ukraine, but I don't understand what the problem is." Basically, he couldn't get his head around this for a while, there were conflicts, but later he said: "OK, look, I understand that I am pissing everyone off, so I will not listen to this." That's just a thought. And, when it comes to my own family, I want to say that my mom does sometimes watch Russian TV shows. I watch Russian bloggers that, let's say, are against the war, and there are pretty good psychologists; I keep watching their stuff.

Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): I made some notes. I have lots of ideas and when somebody's talking about something, I think to myself – oh, I like this and I like that. As far as books are concerned, I used to read a lot of Boris Akunin, and there were movies made after his books in Russian. Boris Akunin – for instance, *The Adventures of Erast Fandorin* – big episode. I read it in Russian and watched it in Russian as well.



Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): As far as TV series go, sometimes I do watch the Russian ones, but I recently watched *Wednesday* [Netflix series] and *Ostanni Lastivky* [Ukrainian TV series]. You brought up *Lastivky* earlier, I don't remember the exact name. I also watched Russian TV series. Some of them have not even been completed – *Chernaya Vesna*, *Smychok*, *Trudnie podrostki*, *Zhyzn po vyzovu*. Overall, however, I usually watch English films. I do not like TV series too much because when I start watching one, I cannot stop and watch the stuff all night long... Yeah. But I did completely forego content by some creators who did not express their position clearly at the beginning of the war. For instance – Mikhail Litvin, Ivleeva. I unsubscribed from their Instagram, from the Russian-speaking ones.

Despite the increasing availability in Ukrainian or foreign content translated into Ukrainian, some participants believe there is still a shortage of it, or its quality is poor. Therefore, some participants continue consuming Russian content because they believe it has higher quality.

Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): Overall, I prefer Netflix. I like that since the war started, they started translating foreign content into Ukrainian. Sometimes, the translations are really good and one wants to listen to them. However, unfortunately, it's not always like that. Sometimes, foreign TV series are translated into Ukrainian in a way that distracts one with oddities, and it's impossible to listen to these translations. You turn it off right away because you cannot listen to it. Meanwhile, if you want to watch a TV series, you pop it on in Russian and listen to it just like you did before the war.

Some participants cannot forego Russian content because they are used to it or have positive associations with it. They find this content irreplaceable. It is typically associated with certain life events and bright memories, which is why it is difficult and hurtful to forego this content for such participants.

Focus group 2 participant (in Russian): I have an example. The girl who does my manicure is an internally displaced person from Luhansk. She has been since 2014. And when I come to see her, she always has her phone on the table that plays *Radio Shanson* [associated with (Russian) prison culture]. I once asked her how people typically react to this, the clients. And she said she cannot switch to Ukrainian music. I ask – why? She says: “There are some songs I grew up with, there are things we felt on weddings, birthdays of children, the first day of kids at school. There are irreplaceable songs. I cannot pick stuff that could replace this at the moment.” And she said that unfortunately there's not too much Ukrainian content that, as of now, could sideline this stuff. And she goes: “I am just sitting and enjoying the nostalgia for a certain time.”

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): You know, this content is still around, in part, in the Sumy region, although the Sumy region is fairly nationalist today. But it's still around due to habit, because... Well, we've talked about this over the past years, but a significant part of our territory has been influenced by the Russian informational sphere. The signal does not get through, and there were no relevant



media sources, although the state media, the privatized media, has been published in Ukrainian for a long time. Still, if people... Even in the past couple of years during election cycles there was the so-called Sumy “red belt”. I covered this some while ago because in that place people live in the Russian informational space. Even now our journalists go there to make a movie because that is where rockets strike, and those people say: “Well, you know, there’s more nuance to this. The Ukrainians are the ones that provoke.” Get this, this stuff lives on, the state has not been able to counter it. And it’s important to talk about the reasons for this. You talk about content, and I agree about films and cartoons. Not all parents think like this; I have acquaintances who purposefully look for cartoons in Ukrainian or ones that were dubbed into Ukrainian. They do it purposefully for their children. But not everyone can make an effort like this, not everyone has the time. And when it comes to video content in particular, I think it is often in Russian for different reasons – it really is expensive, considering that the market is not sufficient. Let me think of other spheres. If a university pursues the policy of banning references to Russian works in theses of students and asks students to only reference Ukrainian or Western works, this turns into politics. The thing is, we cannot catch up with this politics. It’s really not about someone volunteering to forego this content and picking an alternative; one needs to consider the larger perspective and steadily work to fill the gaps in this content to help it proliferate. Russian broadcasters should not be cruising along our border and transmitting signals, etc. to our territory. At the same time, our signal is just not there.

Focus group 2 participant (in Ukrainian): I am 54 years old and I remember the Soviet period quite well as well as what happened after that. So, when I heard Russian songs on the radio, it felt unusual, but it was also about memories of my youth, something like that. I began to understand older people: why they feel nostalgic. And then I started analyzing – these are Russian songs, and I should not be listening to them now.

Some participants do not see an adequate alternative to satisfy their cultural needs – this group has not foregone the consumption of Russian cultural content because they like it. It brings them pleasure and such participants are most likely to continue consuming such content in the future.

Focus group 1 participant (in Russian): I still like 50% of Russian content. For instance, the TV series *Epidemiya*. Two seasons. The first season has eight episodes that one can watch in one day. I watched the seasons in one day and one night. God bless, I had a day off. I used to watch *Kadety*, *Papiny dochki* and now I watch *Prokurorskaya proverka*. The Ukrainian content does not have an alternative that could replace *Soldaty*, *Prokurorskaya Proverka*, *Kadety* [shows about Russian enforcers of various state branches]. I like this one Russian blogger. Well, he is no longer Russian. Let me remember. The channel name is *Trans Family* – it’s a guy and his wife who contribute to it. They are from Russia, but they have moved now. So, it’s really not Russian content at this point. I don’t consider this Russian content anymore. I like one entrepreneur, his name is Petr Osipov, he’s been quite famous for a while and has his own business school *Biznes-Molodost*. He recently made a show that has 4 episodes. It’s about watching different people and how they build



businesses – seeing which ones pass and which ones get kicked out. It's not just about business, it's about human nature. For instance, some qualities need to be improved – being a dad, etc. The point is it's very interesting, but I will never be on that show because it's based in Russia, unfortunately. But I like this stuff, it inspires me... Eldar Dzarahov, also Russian. I like his songs; not all of them, of course. I like his songs *Vokzal*, *Vse Naladitsa*. They are about life. I like his rap. He has an old song that resonates with me because I was in a similar situation; it's about age – "... I am 15; I look like I am 15", the lyrics go – something like that.

On the other hand, some participants and activists believe that **Ukrainian society has become less prone to be influenced by the Russian cultural space**, and this process will continue, but it will be gradual.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): I believe that there's this slow inertia that will last for a long time. Let me give a personal example. I stopped watching TV in 2005. In 2005, I switched to Ukrainian exclusively; I am aggressive towards those who start speaking in Russian to me. I am not ready for dialogue if these people live in Ukraine, and I demand that those who live in Ukraine speak to me in Ukrainian, not in Russian. But, since 2014, I have made interesting observations. I almost never hear Russian pop in Kyiv; it's nowhere to be found. I often visit Lviv and, there, the phone ringtone is a national song in 75% of cases, the anthem, etc., but 25% is still in Russian, and now in Kyiv... The ringtones I used to hear in Kyiv were predominantly Russian, and now these ringtones are Ukrainian ones... I hear Ukrainian songs or even the anthem. Sorry, it bothers me a little because this has become the norm only now; it has finally become the norm in Kyiv. For instance, on the train, I hear three young people speaking, and they are speaking in Ukrainian. I feel that they do not speak particularly well, but there's a feeling that they want to switch to Ukrainian. And this has become trendy, some kind of... [sound broke off] ... If you don't mind, I will tell you about my impression – I come from Donbas – about the changes there. I won't tell a long story about the TV channels that operate there and how they [residents of Donbas] feel. Just one example. I received birthday greetings in Ukrainian for the first time this year. My daughter-in-law says: "I called my mom to practice a little bit", and she starts speaking Ukrainian to her. And you know what my mom said to her? Are you doing this because our guys [troops] arrived? That's what's going on.

Overall, **almost all participants and activists agree that the Russian full-scale invasion has convinced many Ukrainians to forego Russian cultural content**. The impact of the invasion is significantly stronger than that of the 2014 events that triggered but did not decisively contribute to the move away from Russia and its cultural content.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): Now, one can clearly see that people are foregoing everything that is Russian. Unfortunately, the circumstances of these decisions are tragic. It took rockets and many victims. Personally, this is something I've been thinking about since the 90s and I noticed that prior to 2014 – again, it took tragic circumstances, the annexation of Crimea, the state did not do anything. Meanwhile, the Russians were spending a [good] portion of the oil revenues on



cinema production. Even watching a foreign film that was translated – that used to be possible only in Russian. In 2006, I went on a vacation to Yaremche [a town located in Western Ukraine], and in the hotel, people were listening to Russian pop. I asked a Ukrainian-speaking girl why she listened to that stuff. She said there is no difference. It was sort of in the background, and it was impossible to prove the opposite because there was no state policy. Here's the most significant problem. Russian culture is by itself secondary and it is not deep. It dates back only 200 years. What they call "great Russian culture" does not have deep roots. A Latin saying illuminates this well: "Bad grass grows fast". Everything that is bad, that is cheap, people tend to like it. At the same time, the Ukrainian [culture] is deep, it goes back a thousand years. These Christmas carols are a thousand years old, researchers that explored Slavic nations in Europe saw that we have a real culture. But *Morgenstern* [Russian rapper] was topping the charts prior to February 24. The only thing I want to say is this – Ukrainization, the process of foregoing the Russian [culture] started in 2014. These quotas on radio and TV, when the state really started to do something about this, Russian pop music lost its influence; it used to be impossible to take public transport because it was everywhere. And there were a lot of scandals. Unfortunately, this Russian mythology, again, it's fake, but it is so deep in us that, indeed, if someone had to fix a car, they would hear from the repairmen: "What kind of Kulibin [Russian mechanic and scientist] fixed your car before this?". Although, the reality is that Kulibin did not have a single patent – it's just a Soviet historiographical myth. There are other examples of the phrases. We employ these old [phrases]...

Some participants consume Russian content for non-typical purposes, such as research. Indeed, **some participants claim that they continue consuming Russian cultural content for research purposes**, including to better understand the enemy.

Focus group 2 participant (in Russian): I am still subscribed to the female branch of the Russian *Comedy Club* on YouTube. Not because I find it particularly funny, but because I sometimes watch Ukrainian comedy shows and I watch how Ukrainian women talk, and I decided to continue watching the Russian alternative for comparison. Why? To get a vivid reminder. They are so harsh, so aggressive, just like tanks. Even their female humor is aggressive. All the time, I look at them and think to myself – Jesus, what kinds of mothers are they? This is to remind me just how different these two peoples [nations] are. And I do like female humor – it's intellectual, soft, and beautiful.

Overall, many participants believe that it is paradoxical for Ukrainians to continue consuming Russian content despite the full-scale war and personal participation of these very people or their relatives in the defense of Ukraine. **Some participants found it paradoxical that sometimes one can both volunteer for the Armed Forces of Ukraine and continue to consume Russian films, music, etc.**

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): It is easier to break ties with the contemporary ones, compared to the heritage and literature of the past. If I'm being honest, what Russia gave us – TV series and shows – it's not really valuable. I don't



believe it was valuable. That people, Ukrainians, do not consume this now, it's only for the better. But, overall, I was pretty shocked. I come from a Russian-speaking region and want to deviate a bit while I remember what I want to say. I now live in Bukovyna [Western Ukraine], and everyone speaks Ukrainian here, but when I go to a shop, I see women watching Russian TV series on the phone. And that feels strange. I went to this shop earlier and they were discussing their boys, their men, from Bukovyna who are now fighting for the Russian-speaking population in Donbas and in the Kharkiv region. But it's interesting that they choose to watch these Russian TV shows and support Russian content.

STATE POLICY TOWARD RUSSIAN CULTURAL CONTENT

The study of Russian authors at schools

As far as schools are concerned, their curriculums have significantly changed over the past couple of years. In the 1990s, Ukrainian schools were inert and emphasized the study of Russian literature and other cultural content, but that has changed. For example, *Russian Literature* is no longer a separate subject – it has been integrated into the subject of *Foreign Literature*. Participants do not have a positive perception of all of these measures and are especially sensitive to the exclusion of authors who are related to Ukraine from the school curriculums.

Focus group 2 participant (in Ukrainian): Here's an example. My youngest is 16 years old, and, two years ago, she had to learn a poem by Pushkin by heart. That was crap, excuse me. I mean, do we really need that here? I know that this curriculum has been significantly changed – a lot was thrown out or, should I say, redacted from the program, in particular, a lot of works in the Russian language. And recently she wrote an essay on one of the works by Ukrainian authors – I don't even know those authors. So, there are a lot of new authors that the school covers. And, yes, my Soviet past, my school where classes were actually taught in Ukrainian, is now shut down. This sphere is changing a lot, despite the conservative nature of school education as an institution. There's no sense in learning Pushkin in Ukrainian, I believe.

Focus group 2 participant (in Ukrainian): I wanted to say that Russian literature is no longer covered by the school curriculum. Only partly – this subject was incorporated into *Foreign Literature* [school subject]. And almost all authors were excluded. But I do not believe that absolutely all Russian authors should be excluded. Take Bulgakov, for instance. He did not approve of Ukraine's independence, but, I guess, those were the times. He wasn't a patriot of Ukraine, but he is still an interesting writer, I believe. As for as Dostoyevsky is concerned, for instance, I believe he should be covered when students grow up a bit. At least when one is 18 years old. Maybe even later. Because it's a very psychological book. It's a very strong book that requires a personality of age that already has some experience. I think it can disorient a child and break their psyche. I mean it. Raskolnikov [Dostoyevsky's character] when you are 14, really? I believe there



needs to be a more thoughtful approach – one cannot just throw everything out and not provide any knowledge about anyone. This needs to be analyzed.

At the same time, **some participants believe that there needs to be more change and that Russian cultural content should be completely removed from school curriculums in Ukraine.** Some believe that it is not acceptable to study this content in the current circumstances, and others do not believe this content has value.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): I am more radical when it comes to this topic because I believe that schools influence children a lot. I see that when looking at my brother. I advocate for not studying any Russian authors at schools for one simple reason. I advocate for an all-around development [of children]. I advocate for the study of what is one's own and what the history of one's people has in stock. When one grows up and is conscious, one, as a formed individual, may want to read Chekhov – please, go ahead. But we live in a free society. One can read [works by Russian authors] outside of class should one want to. But there's no need to stuff the children's heads with what we had stuffed in ours.

Focus group 2 participant (in Russian): I graduated from high school in 2013. And I remember having three subjects: *Ukrainian Literature, Foreign Literature, and Russian Literature*. And, as far as Russian literature goes, I agree, I think it should not be covered by school curriculums at all because... How do I put this – it's all about suffering. People [characters in Russian literature] suffer, they suffer more, and people are proud of suffering. People are proud of the fact that everything around them is bad.

Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): I am in touch with my school teacher and have talked to her and supported her for many years. Here's what she said... She actually used to be a Russian language teacher. But later she learned English and now she teaches English to primary school students. I just want to say that, according to her, Russian authors are, for a long time, no longer covered by school curriculums. At least not to an extent that they were covered in the 1990s, do you understand? They need to be removed [from the curriculum]. As far as monuments [to Russian cultural figures] go, I used to be tolerant of that last year. There used to be a nice monument to Pushkin in our town. I liked it a lot – it was big and beautiful. But I've heard it has been removed. I was ok about it. I get why people wanted to do that. There's no need to have it. We still have a monument to Shevchenko. I want to see another one to Lesya Ukraiynka.

Some participants believe that **Ukrainian school curriculums should not cover Russian authors if Russian school curriculums do not cover Ukrainian authors.**

Focus group 2 participant (in Ukrainian): Before we decided whether Russian authors should or should not be studied, I want to ask something: do they [Russians] study Ukrainian literature? Do they? They don't. Moreover, they hate it. They distort it and they laugh at it. So, if one feels like studying Russian literature, the classics, one can do so at a more experienced age; not when they are at school. I see that literature by Russian authors is no longer studied, even as part of *Foreign Literature*. They [schoolchildren] do not study Russian authors.



Some participants are **generally supportive of the review process concerning the foreign literature studied at schools, but they believe that this should be a slow, non-radical, process.** This carefulness often concerns authors who are related to Ukraine: Gogol (Hohol), Bulgakov, etc.

Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): I have something to say about authors and literature. The line needs to be drawn the right way. For example, this summer I heard that the Ministry of Education recommended not covering Hohol and Bulgakov. To be honest, I don't quite understand this. First of all, both of these authors were born in Ukraine. Hohol wrote about Ukraine. He had beautiful works that I like a lot – *Viy*, *Vechory Na Khutori* – I believe this is good writing. Why cannot it be studied as part of *Foreign Literature* [subject]? Do these works propagate Russian culture or other Russian staples? Not really. If you think about it, Shevchenko died in Russia. So, should we not consider Shevchenko [a key Ukrainian poet]? I just don't get why we should study some but not others. When I used to live in Kyiv, I lived at Osypovskoho Street. He was a Ukrainian mathematician, but he died in Russia and conducted some of his scientific activity in Russia. Now the street is named after Baida Vyshnevetskyi. Again, we have lots of new streets being built. If you want to honor Baida Vyshnevetskyi, why wouldn't you name a new street after him, rather than renaming the Osypovskoho street that has borne this name for 30 years if not more? Why is that? Because this person [Osypovskiy] spent his life in Russia, but he did also work in Ukraine. It was during the Soviet period, a very different time, nobody knew back then that there would be war. Same when it comes to the removal of names of Soviet soldiers from monuments in cities across Ukraine – I don't get it. They weren't Russians – they were Ukrainians. Every city featured names of Ukrainian soldiers whose only "crime" was being a part of the Russian army. Why did they do it? But I started by talking about Hohol being banned, and they also want to ban Bulgakov. Even as part of foreign literature. Why? They explain it this way: they lived in Russia, worked in Russia, and died in Russia. Well, lots of people [authors] worked in Russia. So what? Why would one ban Hohol?

Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): I think both Hohol and Bulgakov must be considered part of Ukrainian literature. We should have started [changing the curriculum] the way Poles did – removing all Soviet authors from the curriculum. Clean things up and start from scratch. We didn't do that. That was the mistake. But we do have *Foreign Literature* [subject] for this purpose. We study all kinds of works: Russian, English, and French. All these authors are studied as part of *Foreign Literature*. Done. Question closed. Thus, we should have space to study Hohol's works in Russia as part of *Foreign Literature*.

However, the contrary opinion is also somewhat popular. Thus, **some participants believe that the Ukrainian state should claim the heritage of artists who come from Ukraine that Russia believes to be its own.** Mostly, Soviet authors or authors who emigrated to Russia in times of the Russian Empire are concerned. This group believes that this would allow for a proactive cultural policy that precludes Russia from "invading" and distorting history.



Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): So, what should be done regarding the Bulgakov museum located at Andriyivskiy Uzviz [street name], 13, which I am sure continues to function? I visited that museum – Bulgakov used to live, work, and study there. I advocate for studying the biography of these people and not allowing Russia to claim these talented Ukrainians. All of that just because they lived in the Soviet Union. Many people lived in the Soviet Union...

State regulation of Russian content

Many participants believe that the Ukrainian authorities should strictly limit the circulation of Russian content in Ukraine. They find it inappropriate to let it proliferate given that Russia uses this content as a soft power tool to justify its imperial ambitions and aggression.

Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): We need to get rid of this stuff. All of it – we need to clean up the informational space. This comes from me – a moksha, a mordvin [Volga peoples], a Russian, a person whose native language is Russian, a person who used to be a political technologist [political campaign manager] in Russia. Get rid of it and leave nothing behind. That's my opinion, and I think that's the right thing to do. There are no good Russians.

Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): Indeed, I am against any Russian content, and I don't want to see it in Ukraine. If there's space for Russian content here, Russians feel entitled to come here and claim that we have Russian speakers whose rights need protecting. And this justifies them starting a war. Russian content should be removed. We are in Ukraine, we have the Ukrainian language and beautiful culture, and we need to help it flourish and tell our kids about it in schools.

Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): I agree that kids should not consume Russian culture since childhood. If they have an ABC book in Ukrainian, only Ukrainian should be spoken at home. Because if they hear Russian, they get lost. Kids become disoriented and do not understand what language they ought to speak. Yeah... My kid is a first grader and they speak in surzhyk. That's just an illustration of my point.

Not all participants agree, especially when it comes to cultural heritage that was produced during the Soviet period or earlier. They believe that **a lot of these cultural products were created by Ukrainians and this cultural heritage is a part of Ukrainian history that should not be discarded for the sole reason of its affiliation with Russia.**

Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): I cannot say that everything should certainly be discarded – it's a big question. These monuments were created by Ukrainians, for instance. And when they are destroyed, I feel bad. In Kharkiv, for instance, there's a subway station named after Pushkin. It's one of the most beautiful ones in the Kharkiv subway because it has a great design and looks good. It's hard to accept, perhaps, because Pushkin has been with me since childhood. His fairy tales – both at home and in kindergarten. It's hard to separate things, especially if the person in question died many years ago. And now we suddenly decided to forego his works. It's hard – one of the participants said that we should



forego Hohol – that’s especially hard. Why would you? Isn’t this ours? It’s Poltava [city in Ukraine Hohol was affiliated with]. I don’t know. It’s hard to understand for me. I believe that some streets do need to be renamed. But there’s no need to rush and go forth without any analysis. If we want to rename something, there needs to be some work done, some analysis. It’s not like if a person had something to do with Russia or lived during the Soviet period that person should be excluded. We shouldn’t just bring down the monuments and estrange them. I regret that the architectural heritage is being torn down. When it comes to Lenin – it’s permissible [to tear down monuments]. I remember visiting Donetsk about 10 years ago and being surprised: Lenin Street, a monument to Lenin. Every city used to have a small or a big monument to Lenin. That has always surprised me. People were saying back then that renaming things is expensive because a lot of documents have to be changed. This is the kind of Soviet stuff we should totally get rid of.

As far as the regulation of literature goes, **participants largely support the limitation on imports of Russian literature to Ukraine.**

Focus group 2 participant (in Russian): As far as the Russian [literature] goes – there needs to be enforcement. I am happy the import of Russian literature was banned. It’s hard to come by these days. The books are in Ukrainian. And that’s good. As far as YouTube goes, what can I say... You cannot tell what to do to an adult person. There’s some explaining to do to people. But I think many have already understood what kind of neighbor we have.

Participants, both the consumers of content and activists that advocate for Ukrainian content, **understand that it is difficult to regulate the circulation of Russian content.** Any bans can be bypassed, and restrictions can only be partial. Still, they believe the regulation is needed to form trends and outline the path forward.

Focus group 2 participant (in Ukrainian): This needs to be done, but I don’t know how to do it. Remember what the eastern and southern regions did when [pro-Russian] TV channels got banned in 2014? They bought satellite devices. Right? The state made the decision, but it wasn’t particularly effective. When we went south for a vacation, and those who went vacationing there know this, when one turned on the TV when one entered a hotel, the first thing one saw were the [pro-Russian] channels...

Focus group participant 3 (in Ukrainian): The state must be able to regulate effectively and come up with a strategy. What was happening after 2014 in the informational space – the Ministry [of Information Policy] was created, but its activity has not been successful. Look at what started happening when Ukrainian YouTube got going – there are interesting channels that gathered millions of views in the past couple of months; they are channels watched by millions. It wasn’t like that before. Maybe there was one channel, I don’t quite remember, that had a million subscribers. So, overall, let’s say that the state has done very little. And it is time to make a real effort to do something about this.



Moreover, cultural activists largely believe that **the Ukrainian state, its representatives in regulatory bodies and local authorities, regulated Russian content highly ineffectively prior to the full-scale invasion.** They believe that the state was not been effective in countering the Russian influence and promoting Ukrainian informational and cultural resources.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): I want to talk about regulations. In my native town of Polohy, which is currently occupied – today this small town is almost demolished to the ground – paid digital TV transmission was not available prior to the full-scale invasion. As a result, residents only watched Russian TV. Russian concerts, Russian news. People still watch Russian content – it's very much unregulated. Unfortunately, a destructive special operation took place – in our region, people were cut off from Ukrainian channels prior to February 24th.

Some activists believe that effective regulation of Russian content requires research and an informed strategy.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): To talk about regulatory policy, one needs to come up with rules for this policy. I think we need to start by talking about the creation of a program of information security, that would control and monitor the information space of Ukraine and make sure it is actually Ukrainian. We can talk a lot about this. The Ministry of Information Policy that was expected to deliver on this never did.

At the same time, some participants believe that **the state should pursue an aggressive policy when it comes to limitations on Russian content and should not encourage the production of Ukrainian content in the Russian language.** They believe that soft information and cultural policy throughout Ukraine's independence has contributed to risks that Russia capitalized on to destabilize the situation in the country, including when preparing for the full-scale invasion.

Focus group 2 participant (in Ukrainian): Our country is a democracy and we have a Law on National Minorities – and it is correct to classify Russians as national minorities – that says that national minorities have a lot of rights: their own literature as well as the satisfaction of cultural and educational needs. But we are at war. And this particular national minority represents a state that wants to destroy us. On top of that, the majority of people who consider themselves a national minority are really just Russified Ukrainians. It's a unique minority that is different from others. It should be treated differently. I think there's no more time to be liberal. We've had independence for 30 years, and even a year ago Russians that were born in Russia and lived in Ukraine for 20 years said they cannot switch to Ukrainian "because it's too sudden, there's no need to rush, let's not force people"...

Focus group 2 participant (in Ukrainian): I would turn to international experience on this matter. Are these questions relevant when it comes to two countries that have been at war? How relevant is the product of the other country? Why are Ukrainians so afraid to hurt Russia and, how do I say this, cancel it? Damn! Why do our websites come in three languages – Ukrainian, Russian, and English? Let's



have two – Ukrainian and English. The presence of Russia is anchored: it's about the little things. Why?

Focus group 2 participant (in Ukrainian): It appears that during the 30 years of independence, Ukraine has not been radical enough. All of these overtures toward TV channels in Russian. The Russian cultural products were banned, and then these hybrids, such as *Dom* [state-sponsored TV channel in Russian] were created. The truth is that those who watched Russian TV installed satellite devices, and they don't watch *Dom*. They say: "Yes, we watch satellite TV because we are used to information in Russian and we need Russian on TV." But they don't watch *Dom*, although it is a channel in the Russian language. They do not watch *Dom* but they do watch Russian propaganda, which has many [negative] consequences, including how these people vote. This hasn't been going on for just one year. I agree with Danilov [head of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine] when he said this about Donetsk and Luhansk: "Why should we accommodate them? They should accommodate us". This should go for the whole country.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): The question is what kind of authorities there are. They should, of course, be [pro-] Ukrainian. I live in Kharkiv and our mayor, for instance, speaks in Russian on state news channels. There was a legal case against him, he was fined, and he said: I will pay 3700 [hryvnias – the amount of the fine] every day. I don't care what you think and, you know, we have decent laws for the most part. And, seemingly, the state is trying to do something, but it does not perform its functions. Earlier, we talked about education. Let me give you an example: almost all private schools in Kharkiv teach in the Russian language. The methodology and the study process are in the Russian language. And when we raise this question, parents say: "We want our kids to study at elite schools with a higher education quality than that of public schools." But they teach in Russian. As far as book publishing is concerned, there is a law. But go to Balka, the book market [in Kharkiv]. It's a complex situation. Take me – I am located 20 kilometers from the Russian border. And it's hard out here in Saltivka [district of Kharkiv that has been heavily shelled], but, before the war, the majority of books, not just the educational ones but also fiction was in Russian. As far as websites go, the youth does not use Facebook as much as we do. They mostly speak Russian. Take the church. There's only one Ukrainian [as opposed to Russia-affiliated church in Ukraine] Orthodox church in Kharkiv. The rest are of the Moscow-affiliated patriarchy. This is literally the "fifth column". What kind of actions should the authorities take? Decisive ones, harsh ones. But they won't do it because our very own mayor positions himself as a supporter of the Russia-affiliated church. Same when it comes to the regional deputies – war has been raging in Kharkiv for 10 months, we are shelled every single day, and the deputies cannot even rename the theatre named after Pushkin and rid it of the Russian [content], even though actors and directors have asked them to do so – the vote has failed twice. There are many examples like this one. There must be a sense that the enforcement of laws is obligatory – the content of laws is largely decent. But more radical actions are needed.

Some have extremely radical beliefs regarding the state regulation of Russian cultural content. Some participants want Ukraine to limit all circulation of Russian cultural content as well as the use of the Russian language. They believe that should



these measures not be enacted, Russia will continue its aggression because it will consider Ukraine part of its geopolitical and cultural space.

Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): We need to get rid of the Russian. There needs to be a state law that requires the use of the Ukrainian language only. If one cannot sing or make Ukrainian songs, one can go and sell [sunflower] seeds. That's all I have to say. I am sorry – the light is off in my building. I support the use of Ukrainian only. We need to get rid of the Russian so that Russians don't dare come. If we have Russian stuff, they will keep coming.

At the same time, **there are those who oppose the strict regulations or bans on Russian content.** These participants believe that the regulation and limitations on such content are inappropriate and the solution is to motivate the production and circulation of Ukrainian content. They believe that an aggressive Ukrainization policy and bans on Russian content would create a backlash – cause resistance to Ukrainization and have unforeseen consequences.

Focus group 2 participant (in Russian): When one is forced to do something, one naturally resists it. This [Ukrainization] needs to be done gradually. Take my grandchild who was born nine days before the war started. He is now nine months old, and we teach him Ukrainian. And he will perceive this language gradually and naturally; he will speak Ukrainian [when he grows up] and will be a real Ukrainian. He will be a patriot just like his grandma, but this needs to happen gradually and naturally. We cannot forego Russian at the moment. A significant part of the Ukrainian population speaks Russian – please, understand, it's a sort of drug.

Focus group 2 participant (in Russian): I think one needs to do things gradually and show a personal example. And I am afraid of things becoming compulsory. I will explain why things should not be compulsory. When I was in Germany, I was amazed that my teacher asked me to repeat what I was saying, even though I did not know the language. Basically, the teacher prioritized the students and said: "I want to understand you; at least say something." If we start forcing people and threatening jail if one does not turn the TV or radio [in Russian] off, there will be a backlash.

Focus group 2 participant (in Russian): I want to pick up on this topic – that it is impossible to ban everything. One needs to start with culture, with spiritual knowledge. This should be taught since kindergarten and in the family from a young age. Psychology, spirituality. True values take time to materialize. I don't know how many generations it will take. One cannot ban everything. Based on my personal experience, one chooses what suits one best. This is not just about Ukraine – this is just how the world works, including Russia. I am against foregoing our history. This is our evolution, our priceless experience. Dostoyevsky made a strong impression on me back in the day – he revolutionized my consciousness, the consciousness of the child's mind. He made me think about life. I have already mentioned that I enjoy spiritual knowledge, psychology, and figuring out the meaning of life and its ways. And there are a lot of good and useful things in Russian movies. I cannot forego Eldar Ryazanov or Gaiday's comedies, I cannot forego Mark Zakharov who made deep movies that spoke the truth. At the same time, there



hasn't been enough Ukrainian content, especially when it comes to movies. All the best movies have been made in Russia; all actors went there. Many singers did as well. Because we've always been a province. One should not forget about that. We were ruled by Russia. And we need to figure out why that happened. Why we lost our independence. And now we are gradually moving away from Russia and gaining our own momentum. We are getting to know our new selves. Basically, we did not know ourselves. I like our music, especially the young performers. It's different from Russian music, and it's better than our old show business industry because it does not grow – it's stale. And we are now moving towards the new based on our old roots.

Some participants believe that **bans are not sufficient to regulate the sphere** because some people are going to ignore restrictions on principle. On the other hand, some participants believe that one's development should be all-rounded and bans would preclude that.

Focus group 2 participant (in Ukrainian): I want to comment on bans – they are not always a good thing. For instance, I have a lot of friends in Mariupol, and they used to say stuff like this: “We are not allowed to speak in Russian and we don't like it. We want to live in Ukraine, but we don't like it when things are banned or forced upon us. We resist. If a theatre's repertoire is in Ukrainian only, we don't like that. We want to have a choice. We don't go to the movies because all of them are in Ukrainian. We want the right to choose, but we do not support Russia. We support Ukraine.” That's what they used to say in 2021. Now, perhaps, they've changed their mind.

Focus group 1 participant (in Russian): I agree – banning Russian movies is not right because people will continue watching them. As far as monuments go, I don't believe there's a problem with authors just because they were born this way [in a certain location or time period]. After all, these authors are dead. It's not about removing the monuments – let them be a part of history. People must experience development and know that these authors existed. It does not matter how they get this information. It's not the authors' fault – it's the fault of one man [Putin] only. Some monuments, such as those to Lenin, I believe, should be removed. We are past this discussion. But the authors covered by the school curriculum should be known. There are lots of interesting authors. Why should they be removed? I don't believe they are at fault. I don't understand why. It's about educating people; it's about development. One must know that there were these authors in Russia and that they wrote there.

When discussing the role of the state, participants argued that **the state does not do enough to support Ukrainian content**. They believe that grant support as well as systematic support for content producers is needed. They argue that such measures would support the Ukrainian culture, especially its elements that are difficult to commercialize.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): Someone brought up the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation. It's a state body [that distributes funds for cultural projects].



One needs to simplify the reporting. Those who have tried applying for grants know that there are lots of papers to fill and one needs to be an expert in several spheres: accounting, taxes, etc. If things became easier, more projects could be brought to life. Second, all of you know how this works: if one wants to organize an arts event, one has to approach the authorities or business. And we all know how difficult it is to talk to the authorities. It's easier to find a sponsor. But cultural projects must become profitable. These people do count the money. Perhaps, they could get tax breaks; perhaps, there are other ways to make it easier for sponsors to fund art projects. Actually, they are ready to support us because the business has felt it, especially after 10 months of the war. Same when it comes to books. If one and the same book costs... say, the book in Russian costs 1000 hryvnias and the book in Ukrainian costs 100 hryvnias, people would buy the Ukrainian book. Financial mechanisms can be employed to "win" because it is as simple as that – competition. If we leave things to the market, which is a Western model, Ukrainians will "lose". Because for 30 years we've been building something different. But if the state does support national [content] producers, there's a lot that can be achieved.

Some activists argue that the legislation that supports Ukrainian cultural content (or related spheres) is decent, but its enforcement is poor, and civil servants responsible for the relevant activities are corrupt.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): Let's get the terminology straight. What is regulation? The most important component of regulation is legislation. Our legislation is mostly alright; for instance, as far as the Law on language [On protecting the functioning of the Ukrainian language as the state language] is concerned. It's great legislation. But the problem is enforcing this law and monitoring its enforcement. Who monitors things? This is where the problem lies – it's supposed to be monitored by state bodies, but state bodies consist of civil servants. There are two issues with that. First, our civil servants are not the most competent and not the smartest people out there. Second, our civil servants are often corrupt. So, the question of monitoring is a difficult one. How would they regulate and monitor YouTube, for instance? It cannot be regulated or controlled. It's not really our territory, although we are represented on that platform, and Ukrainian YouTube is experiencing quality development. That's why it's not a question of control or regulation – it's a question of support. Again, here's a question – who should provide this support to projects that support the Ukrainian idea, have the expertise, and are popular and interesting? We have myriads of great YouTube channels. Again, should the state be responsible for this? We circle back; our civil servants are: 1) stupid, b) corrupt. So, there should exist an independent body that has the financial resources to support certain projects that we believe are of high quality. For instance, the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation has excellent grants. But I cannot benefit from them because I do not know how to do the accounting and all these matters, the paperwork. This should be done by an expert that I cannot hire or pay. At the same time, I know many so-called grant eaters who know how these mechanisms work. But what they produce does not have a soul – they just care about getting funded. That's the problem. We do have acceptable legislation. What we do not have is a body that could effectively regulate this sphere. If the state takes



over such a body, it cannot be trusted, and it should be foregone. One should not even try to take this road. We have to create a special institution that would regulate, control, and promote [cultural projects]. This institution should have the resources to do so. This is hard work, but I believe that this is more than just one of the promising solutions; it's the only promising solution out there that can actually, in the short term, if there's effort invested, result in some real changes.

The role of the state in the promotion of Ukrainian cultural content

Many participants believe that a lot of Ukrainian content has base quality, which does not satisfy the needs of demanding consumers. Participants believe that some of this content may, in fact, be harmful.

Focus group 2 participant (in Ukrainian): So, there's *Kvartal 95*, *Dyzel Show* [comedy shows] — this is a great example of “little-Russian” [as opposed to Ukrainian] content that has corrupted the minds of Ukrainians for years. It's our quote-on-quote favorite president [Zelenskyi used to be the lead of *Kvartal 95*]. My favorite president who danced around and called Ukraine a whore. He also performed for Yanukovich, took part in the production of *Svaty* [a Ukrainian TV show with baser humor] and all the other movies of *Kvartal 95*, and all of this was consumed in Russia. Ukrainians were portrayed as stupid countryside folks who don't know anything, narrow-minded people. That's how Russians saw us: stupid countryside folk.

Other participants oppose this viewpoint. **They believe that content should come in all shapes and sizes, including base content, and satisfy the needs of different populations.** If there's no base Ukrainian content, Russian content would take this niche, they argue.

Focus group 2 participant (in Ukrainian): There should be different content. Let there be *Dzidzio* [Ukrainian pop singer], let there be *Stalker* [game developed by Ukrainians], whatever it is really. The most important thing is that it is Ukrainian, ours. Someone goes to see *Dzidzio*, and someone else is looking for something more intellectually stimulating. I believe that the government should support commercial content in the Ukrainian language. One can find the funds to make a music video, but it is much harder when it comes to funding a movie. I think that these quotas and the state funding of expensive projects should be supported by the [state] budget or available via special [government] funds.

Activists believe that **the lasting and constant influence of Russian cultural content has precluded Ukrainians from accessing classic literature renowned in the rest of the world.** It has been substituted by Russian content that is lower in quality or importance as far as the rest of the world is concerned.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): Not long before the invasion, I had an argument with my daughter, who used to be more tolerant toward Russian stuff. She used to argue that there are classic literary pieces [in Russia]. I lived almost half of



my life in the Soviet Union, but most of my life I lived in Ukraine and I have this much to say: this Russian Soviet and 1990s stuff has, to a certain extent, precluded Ukrainians from accessing the world heritage. Maybe in 10 years, we will go in a different direction, and right now we need to work hard to catch up with this heritage that was stolen from us. It wasn't Popov [Russian scientist] who invented the radio – it was Marconi [Italian inventor]. It's been going on here for 300 years; we need at least 10 years to recover. And I don't think there's anything wrong with the decision to forego all that is Russian. We need to do this; otherwise, we will get behind the global culture.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): It's about stereotypes, do you understand that? We are still trapped by the stereotypes about the so-called great Russian culture. Who actually believes that? The Russians? Aren't other cultures likewise great? To compare which one is the greatest, shouldn't one know all other cultures to make a qualified judgment? Again, what are the criteria for this greatness? They argue their culture is great; so what? Let's take a look at this great culture. Who was its creator? What values does it bring? Why is it so depressive? Whom has it brought up?

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): I'd like to talk about the sphere of music. I conducted a study on this matter in 2015. I authored a publication on the repertoire of the Ukrainian National [Tchaikovsky] Academy of Music and I noticed that Russian repertoire comprised 30-40%. They specialize in operas – Russian, Ukrainian, Italian, and French. The Russian ones were overrepresented, compared to others. Moreover, between 2017 and 2019, there had been more Russian operas introduced. I don't know why that is – the policy of the Ministry [of Culture] or the personal conviction of the conservatory's leadership, but it's a fact. The same was true of opera theaters in Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Dnipro. I don't quite recall the numbers, but it's true. And this is reflected in the sphere of cultural education because many vocal instructors are opera singers. At the opera theatres they work, most repertoire is Russian, and they teach it to their students. But, fortunately, there's been some change since February 24th. The Kyiv opera completely forewent Russian operas. Fortunately, they realized that it is time to do so. The Tchaikovsky Opera Studio [affiliated with the conservatory] made a similar decision. In educational establishments, at least those where I work, there was an official announcement to exclude Russian works from the curriculum. I think this is the right thing to do.

The Russian influence concerns both “low” culture and “high” culture as well as arts education. For a long time, arts education institutions have prioritized Russian authors.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): Prior to 2014, in arts education institutions, there were three history-related subjects: *History of Ukrainian Music*, *History of Foreign Music*, and *History of Russian music*. I ask: why did Russian music have to be so honored as to have a separate subject dedicated to it? It's a rhetorical question, of course. After 2014, our leadership started to think about things – *History of Russian music* was cancelled, and Russian music was studied as part of foreign music. So, the time dedicated to its study decreased a little bit, and there has been more space to study Ukrainian or European music. I think we shouldn't stop there. Russian [music] must be studied to a minimal extent and,



rather, only in universities. There's no need to study it at schools – just the bare minimum. A student must know about the Soviet period when composers were encouraged to write things like odes to Lenin, but this must be studied through a critical lens.

THE CREATION OF CONTENT IN RUSSIAN BY UKRAINIAN ARTISTS

Historically, many Ukrainian artists have created content in Russian. In 2014, this changed, but in 2022 these changes have accelerated. Many participants believe that Ukrainian artists should create in Ukrainian, particularly under current circumstances. They believe so because they argue that language is one of the key factors that allows one to differentiate between Russians and Ukrainians during the war. On the other hand, they approve of content in Russian by Ukrainian authors that targets Russians and Ukrainians who are ambivalent about Russian aggression.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): Here's why it's important to talk about language now and in the future, especially when it comes to popular content. Here's an example: one scrolls through TikTok and sees a video in Russian. You go: "Wait a minute. I need to read the comments. Alright, it's a Ukrainian creator. I can watch them." If you see that they are Russian, you block them. Something like that. And this is very important. After the full-scale invasion, I was surprised to find out that the YouTube channels – I must say, I don't like most of them – that always made apolitical, cute, or techy content in Russian are actually Ukrainian channels made by Ukrainians, and there are a lot of those. By catching some of the words and phrases they used, I was able to understand that they are our countrymen, that we can watch this content. At the same time, a ton of people switched to Ukrainian, and they are struggling, but I support that. I see a lot of mistakes, but, at the same time, I see that they want it, which is why I keep watching them. Back to Ukrainian content in the Russian language – I believe that some people still try to talk to these creators, to shame them at least. Not to change them – to shame them. And I am talking about informational content here that is consciously and purposefully released in Russian. I think it's ok [to shame them].

Participants understand that many Ukrainian authors writes in Russian and target the larger Russian and post-Soviet markets that are larger than the Ukrainian one. **Access to these larger markets used to help creators to find their audience and be more well-off financially.** Now that it is inappropriate, they say, the situation is changing.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): There's the market factor to this. Most Ukrainian authors who wrote in Russian were merely looking for the larger market. The Russian market is considered bigger than the Ukrainian one. And they had these material considerations. But one needs to realize that this market will soon collapse along with the rest of Russia. And if a Ukrainian author writes in Ukrainian, there will be disagreement; Hohol's heritage – whether it belongs to Russia or Ukraine – is a great example. Russians wrote "great Russia poet" on the monument to Taras Shevchenko in Luhansk, so they are ready to steal any aspect of our



culture. They believe that we are Russian. In the future, I don't think that Russian-speaking Ukrainian authors will exist. But there's another problem. It's not just about culture. Some of the people fighting on the frontline, Russian speakers, openly say that one of the reasons they are fighting is their right to speak in Russian in Ukraine. And when they come back home, they will say that they spilt their blood for this right. And I think this is a huge problem. They don't understand that this is the war against Ukrainian identity. That's what one needs to understand.

Some participants cited examples of Ukrainian artists switching from Russian to Ukrainian. These examples are quite numerous; there were some before the full-scale invasion, but now their number has increased. Some of these transitions were financially viable, but not all creators had equal success.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): I'll start with a notable example – the most successful modern Ukrainian author, Andriy Kurkov. He was born in Russia and grew up in Ukraine. He used to write in Russian. And he used to characterize himself as a Ukrainian author who writes in Russian. He used to be quite popular in Russia, and his books were published. He used to be on the jury of various [literary] competitions in Russia. When he supported Maidan in 2014, his activity there was curtailed. And after that... I happen to know him personally; he is my literary godfather... he entered a different stage [of his professional life]. He started translating his works into Ukrainian. And now he writes in Ukrainian, something like that.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): I want to talk a bit more about the music scene. I am sure you are familiar with the composer Valentyn Sylvestrov. During the Soviet period and in the early days of Ukraine's independence, he used to set the texts of Russian authors to music. For instance, his *Tihie Pesni* was inspired by the works of Pushkin and Tutchchev. He changed after the 2004 Orange Revolution. He realized that he is a Ukrainian, a Ukrainian composer. After that, he started setting the texts of Ukrainian authors to music. And after 2014, after the Euro Maidan, he works exclusively with Ukrainian texts. It's a very positive example and it's not singular. It's a question of the composer's conscience. If a composer has a conscience, of course, he will not approach with Russian works.

Many participants question the notions of Ukrainian culture in the Russian language or Russian-speaking Ukrainian artists. They believe that these are artificial categories that does not square with the development of modern Ukrainian culture.

Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): We are Ukrainians and make content in Ukraine. This content must come in Ukrainian because language is an identifier. Say, there's a popular artist who sings in Russian – people think he is Russian. If he sang in Ukrainian, there would be no confusion. I don't think the French want to sing in Polish; likewise, the Poles don't want to sing in German. What I am trying to say is that our content should come in Ukrainian, so that people [abroad] could understand right away that it is Ukrainian. Same goes for us, Ukrainians.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): One needs to make a decision. I don't understand the notion of a Russian-speaking Ukrainian. There's a man and there's



a woman – there's no middle ground. Likewise, there's a Russian and a Ukrainian. Do you understand?

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): I completely agree that language makes up an identity. An author or an artist who employs language does it for a reason – to convey senses or trends. Can one use the Russian language to promote something Ukrainian? I doubt that. Second, it's about reputation. We have to understand that in our realities speaking in Russian and using it in art is unpopular. But then there's another question. A great example of Kurkov was cited. He is a representative of "high culture", but what should we do about "low culture"? For instance, *Potap* [Ukrainian pop music artist] remains quite popular – he used to speak Russian, and now he writes in Ukrainian. It's still shit though. This is a different question, one that will take years to tackle. It's a question of our consciousness as a society, of our culture, of our education, etc. I think it's an important question. Who else could tackle this? We see that artists or those who call themselves artists pay attention to public opinion because we, the society, are their audience – they sell their product to us. The quality of this product, its language – we have to educate them and they have to pay attention to us. This takes a long time, but I am already seeing it, and that makes me more optimistic.

Other participants believe that the freedom of creativity applies to Russian-speaking Ukrainian artists. Still, very few participants believe that the state should support or promote such content. Rather, the authors of such content or their teams must promote it on their own.

Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): There's this Ukrainian musician who hasn't released a song for a while. People were asking him why that is, and he said that he understands that he must write his songs in Ukrainian during the war, but he could not do it. He thinks in Russian, and it is hard for him to write songs in Ukrainian. Music is art, and art is not about the current day. What can you say – he is an artist. It's about what works for him. But the state should regulate this. Recently, *Monatik* [Ukrainian pop music artist] released a song in Russian – I believe he should not be allowed to perform it for large audiences. I mean, he does need to make money somehow. Perhaps, he could post his music on YouTube and distribute it among his fans. I can live without his music; I'm fine with that. Ukraine will be just fine without content by Russian-speaking Ukrainians. After all, we have already foregone content by famous Russian performers, such as Kirkorov, [Iosif] Prigozhin, and *Valeriya*. I think that if Ukrainian creators cannot create in Ukrainian, they should not have access to large audiences.

Focus group 1 participant (in Ukrainian): We don't need fascist bans – it should be about both rewards and punishment. The state should in no way encourage content in Russian; it must be regulated by the market. If one can sell it, and another wants to buy it, let it be. (Of course, I am not talking about fascist, anti-Ukrainian content). But the state should not encourage or sponsor it. It should be treated carefully and gradually removed. Economic enforcement must be used to encourage the creation of content that is not in Russian.



Many participants believe that **the state should not ban Ukrainian content in the Russian language, but it must create incentives to make the creation of content in Ukrainian more advantageous.** These incentives could include fiscal methods.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): There are lots of newspapers in Russian and only a few in Ukrainian. Someone brought this up earlier, and it made me think about something: if one wants to publish in Russian – please, go ahead, but you should pay a high tax. For publications in Ukrainian, there could be no tax or it could be significantly lower. That way, the state could regulate with minimum interference of civil servants, who oppose this whole thing. I repeat: Russia has invested in propaganda and created all kinds of content. We should do that too; after all, this is about our future.

The decrease in the consumption of Ukrainian content in Russian requires knowledge of the Ukrainian language, which is an issue for a small proportion of Ukraine's population. Thus, some participants say they would benefit from free state language courses.

Focus group 1 participant (in Russian): I think it would be great if people had access to free Ukrainian language courses. For instance, if one spoke Russian their whole life and one needs to make a switch, it could be hard. The courses would need to be interesting and engaging. For teenagers, for adults – maybe these courses could cover [the works of] Ukrainian authors. They would need to focus on speaking and specific words. There are many Ukrainian words that are hard to translate – there are not a lot of them but there are some. Maybe some courses that would focus on writing. Maybe some clubs based on interests where club members would converse in Ukrainian. It would need to be a relaxed environment without judgment, and things would not be rushed. Maybe people could read books and discuss them afterwards. These activities would need to be free of charge – not everyone can pay... for instance, the students. If students need to take some exams, they could benefit from courses on orthography. I think this is an interesting and helpful idea.

As mentioned earlier, **most participants are against the state funding Ukrainian content in Russian.** They believe that such funding does not achieve any important goals, especially considering that content in Ukrainian is underfunded.

Focus group 2 participant (in Ukrainian): I want to continue the conversation about funding. I am against the state funding cultural projects in Russian. I just don't want my taxes to be spent that way. If an individual has this burning creative desire, they can go ahead and use their money to fund it. What's the point of funding content in Russian in Ukraine? There's none.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): As far as the state funding of arts is concerned, the state is obliged to support cultural projects. But this funding must be up to high standards. When it comes to the use of the Russian language, there's no notion of high standards; it's just absurd. Of course, the state should fund cultural projects, but these must be in Ukrainian only. Perhaps, the state could fund projects in the [Crimean] Tatar language. Second, as far as counter-propaganda in Russian



is concerned – whom is it supposed to target? If it's supposed to target Russians, it should be done differently. If it's supposed to target Russian-speaking Ukrainians, which is not a term I endorse, then it's not counter-propaganda – it's the multiplier of the enemy's propaganda. These people actually understand Ukrainian quite well, which is why Ukrainian should be employed to communicate with them. If we want to bring them back, both physically, mentally, and ideologically in the Ukrainian space, what language could we use other than Ukrainian? That's what I think. Thank you!

Participants have mixed opinions about the state funding Ukrainian informational resources in Russian, such as the TV channel "FREEDOM". Many participants do not believe that it achieves its goals.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): I recall something relevant: when the Kharkiv region was being freed recently, there was a woman from Iziurm and Kupyansk who said that she missed the Ukrainian language and news. She said she was disappointed when she turned on the TV and saw FREEDOM. FREEDOM was supposed to target foreign audiences, but it has been broadcasted within Ukraine for some reason.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): I often say: if it's in Russian – it's always a trap. I think FREEDOM's hosts, just like most representatives of the sources in Russian, are bland. They cannot put two sentences together or ask a question; I can't watch that. The trap is that many people look towards Russian liberals, Nevzorov and others, that seem to be "good Russians", liberal and honest. I watch them sometimes, and their thinking is full of traps; they hook you with something and then you start believing the whole thing. This hook pulls you and you don't even notice that you've been fooled.

On the other hand, some participants argue that **Ukraine does not actively conduct cultural policy in countries with large Ukrainian communities**. Considering that many Ukrainians found themselves abroad due to the Russian invasion, they believe that this work is urgent and necessary.

Focus group 3 participant (in Ukrainian): I live and work in two countries – Moldova and Ukraine. And I want to steer our discussion outside of Ukraine's border and tell you about my experience. Moldova is a Russian-speaking space, despite the fact that Moldova does not share the border with Russia; it does however share a border with Ukraine and Romania. Their TV channels, radio, and websites are completely Russified and tailored to use by Russian speakers. What amazes me is that there's nothing for Ukrainians – no magazines, no TV shows, no websites – that, despite estimates showing that between 80 and 100 thousand Ukrainians live there. Parents have a huge problem – they have to send their kids to schools that teach in Russian. It's hard to find schools that teach in Ukrainian. It's a huge problem. What I am saying is that Russian propaganda has been working both in Moldova and Ukraine as well as other post-Soviet republics. When it comes to Moldova, I recently heard the news of either the Pushkin museum or the organization of Pushkinists being set up. Again, they are good at masking things...



They are destabilizing Moldova by employing pro-Russian oligarch expats who have interests of their own. Putin is doing his things, and it's hard to look at. Because our state has not done anything in Moldova to promote the Ukrainian language and culture. De facto, it's a time bomb planted right on our border. First, Transnistria [Moldovan territory turned into a separatist republic by Russia] is quite a dangerous region – Russian flags hang next to the Transnistrian ones, and Gagauzia [Moldovan region that received autonomy] is likewise trying to introduce the Russian world. So, I think the state should think beyond its borders and have a cultural space strategy. In Moldova, I have been recently seeing lots of billboards with Loboda [Ukrainian pop singer]. Who represents Ukraine there? They don't know our artists, our music, our authors. I understand that few people speak Ukrainian, but that's not universally true. For instance, in Transnistria, there are lots of Ukrainian villages, but there's no state policy that disseminates this content. Our people there do not know about Ukrainian performers; just having Loboda is not enough. Recently, *Okean Elzy* [Ukrainian rock band] toured there because they are more or less known in Moldova; not too much though. But, for instance, the FREEDOM TV [state-sponsored Ukrainian TV channel in Russian] channel does not do any good. It is in Russian and targets foreign audiences, but Russian propaganda is stronger and more massive. Only now, due to the war, Moldova turned off these channels, but it's too late, unfortunately, and half of the population already has pro-Russian beliefs. It's hard and I have to explain to people that Odesa is Ukraine. Of course, Moldovans have supported Ukrainians, and the EU has stepped in as well to make the lives of Ukrainians in Moldova better and more comfortable. Let's hope Moldova takes something away from this. I haven't yet posted about my experiences, but I am collecting the information little by little and want to talk about this to people. It's a shame our neighbors are not well-informed about us, especially considering that every third person in Moldova has Ukrainian roots.

CONCLUSIONS

- In Ukraine, Russian cultural content has gained ground in many spheres: literature, cinema, TV, music, etc. Ukraine's centuries-long status as part of the Russian Empire and the USSR as well as the long-lasting common informational space are the two factors that largely account for this phenomenon.
- After the full-scale invasion, many Ukrainians decided to forego Russian cultural content or decreased its consumption. Usually, that happens due to the political views of creators, and some participants only continue consuming Russian content that has no Ukrainian alternative. Similar changes took place in 2014, but they were less common at that time.
- Despite the ongoing aggression, some participants are not willing to forego Russian cultural content. Some of them are used to such content and others lack niche alternatives. Notably, there's a lack of content for children as well as video game content.
- Many participants believe that Ukrainian authorities should severely limit the dissemination of Russian content in Ukraine. They argue it is appropriate because



Russia uses such content as a means of soft power, including to justify its imperial ambitions and aggression. Participants believe that the state should adopt a more hawkish policy vis-à-vis the dissemination of Russian content and should not stimulate the production of Ukrainian content in Russian. Not all participants agree, particularly when it comes to the cultural heritage produced during the Soviet period or earlier. They argue that some of this cultural heritage was created by Ukrainians and should not be discarded merely due to the fact, that it was affiliated with Russia.

- Activists largely believe that the Ukrainian state representatives, such as regulatory bodies and local authorities, have managed the regulation of Russian content poorly prior to the full-scale Russian invasion. In particular, the countermeasures to Russian informational influence and the promotion of Ukrainian informational and cultural resources have been weak.
- Many participants question the very notions of Ukrainian culture in the Russian language or Russian-speaking Ukrainian artists. They believe that these are artificial categories that are not relevant to the development of modern Ukrainian culture. At the same time, other participants believe that freedom of creativity justifies the existence of Russian-speaking Ukrainian artists. Still, no participants believe that the state should promote or fund such cultural content. Instead, they argue, these artists should fund it independently.