

Youth Opinion and Opportunities for EU Public Diplomacy: Youth Narratives and Perceptions of the EU and EU-Ukraine Relations in Ukraine and the three Baltic States (E-YOUTH)

June 2020



Policy Brief #2: Findings on youth opinion: survey and q-sort

Youth narratives and perceptions of the EU and EU-Ukraine relations: Q-sort and survey findings from four cities of Ukraine



Ivan Romashchenko, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine.

As a part of the second stage of the E-YOUTH project, the team of researchers from Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv carried out a set of Q-sorts and surveys in four locations of Ukraine: Kyiv, Odesa, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Kharkiv. Students of the following universities participated in the research: Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Odesa I.I. Mechnikov National University, Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University, and

V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University. Besides university students, high school students from the educational complex (gymnasium) “Dominanta”, located in Kyiv, also took part in the study.

Out of 115 university students, who participated in the survey, 13 studied in Kyiv, 11 – in Odesa, 63 – in Ivano-Frankivsk, and 28 – in Kharkiv. In addition to university students, there were 13 high school students who took the survey. Overall, 128 students were surveyed in Ukraine. 113 of them took part in the online survey through the specially designed Google form. Many of them used their smartphones for this purpose. To simplify the process a QR-code with the link to the Google form was printed and disseminated among students. Those students that experienced technical difficulties with the online form were able to run the survey in the “paper and pen” format. 15 students, out of 63 in Ivano-Frankivsk, opted for the latter format of the survey.

As opposed to the surveys, the Q-sorts were conducted among university and high school students exclusively in the “paper and pen” format. Students were provided with

a Q-sort grid and a set of papers with the statements, earlier extracted by media analysis. Respondents had to glue the statements to the respective cells in the grid to show their opinion. We had an impression that students liked this format as it resembled a game to them. 78 university students participated in the Q-sorts: 15 – in Kyiv, 11 – in Odesa, 25 – in Ivano-Frankivsk, and 27 – in Kharkiv. Also, we had 25 high school students in the Q-sort session. In general, 103 students participated in the Q-sorts and in the subsequent discussions after the Q-sorts.

During the focus group discussions following the Q-sorts many students admitted the difficulties in classifying some statements that consisted of several parts. For instance, according to student replies, in some part Ukraine complied with NATO requirements, and in another part failed to reach the necessary level. In addition, many students associated the Baltic states with the Great Duchy of Lithuania, others – with Rzeczpospolita, or with the former USSR. Both survey and q-sorts participants revealed somewhat limited knowledge of Latvia, Lithuania or Estonia, building largely

around geographical indications and associations and the fact that these countries are members of the EU. The difference came into play when participants were talking about personal experiences (work, study, tourism) and family ties.

While overall, young Ukrainians share positive perceptions of the Baltic states and their cooperation with Ukraine, they claim they lack knowledge about these countries. There also appears to be lack of consensus as to the extent, to which the Baltic countries may assist Ukraine on its way to Europe in broader geopolitical terms. The latter overlaps with regional differences in attitudes that are often referenced in Ukraine in large, representative public opinion polls but are also visible among students in our survey and Q-sort sessions. These differences refer to the envisioned models for the future of Ukraine and its capacity, or readiness to be part of the EU and NATO. It appears that the lack of such clear strategic envisioning may accordingly translate in the lack of clear vision of bilateral cooperation with the Baltic countries, be it Lithuania, Estonia, or Latvia.



Funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

In Coverage

- Examining youth opinion: Q methodology and survey
- Youth response to media narratives in Ukraine, Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania
- Attitudes of high-school and university students to bilateral cooperation between Ukraine and the Baltic countries: Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia

Contents

Youth narratives and perceptions of the EU and EU-Ukraine relations: Q-sort and survey findings from four cities of Ukraine.....	1
Findings of q-sort and survey sessions in Latvia.....	2
Perceptions and prospect of cooperation between Lithuania and Ukraine. Lithuanian youth opinion survey. Comparative perspective 2018 – 2019.....	2
Perceptions of Ukraine among Lithuanian youth.....	3
Attitudes towards Ukraine among Estonian students.....	3

Findings of q-sort and survey sessions in Latvia

Ukraine was often seen as corrupt, dangerous, but also European, promising and brave.



Elizabete Vizgunova-Vikmane, Riga Stradins University, Latvia.

In April-May 2019, the team of researchers from the Latvian Institute of International Affairs carried out a set of q-sort and survey sessions in Latvia. **Students** from the Riga Stradins University and Riga

Technical University participated in the research. In addition, high school students participated too: students from Highschool Majori (*Majoru vidusskola*), and students from Jurmala State Gymnasium (*Jurmalas Valsts gimnazija*).

Overall, the research received the following participation rate:

- A total of 112 survey respondents: 84 surveys filled in online and 28 in "paper and pen" format. 15 of the surveys were filled in by high school students, the rest – by university students.

- A total of 44 q-sort respondents. 32 by high school students and the rest – by university students. 32 q-sorts were carried out in "paper and pen" format, as the respondents were enjoying the interactive exercise.

During Q-sort sessions, students were provided with a Q-sort grid and a set of papers with the statements that they needed to sort by gluing/sticking the statements along the grid. Students enjoyed this format, because to them it was as engaging as a game.

Our findings from the above exercises reveal rather high awareness of Ukraine among Latvian youth, as

they claimed they heard about Ukraine relatively often (about once a week). The respondents had a relatively positive opinion about the *relationship between Ukraine and Latvia*. However, a division was visible when it came to Ukraine's *domestic policy*: Ukraine was often seen as corrupt, dangerous, but also European, promising and brave. The respondents were also divided about Ukraine's role in the international events, and Ukraine's potential membership in the EU. At the same time, students expressed relatively positive attitude towards Latvia's role in supporting Ukraine through common interests, civic society and economic cooperation, and often Ukraine's European integration.

Respondents were relatively united when it came to the assessment of Russia's actions as threatening to everyone (especially Ukraine). As such, Latvian students revealed certain compassion and understanding of Ukraine's situation but they were more cautious in their discussion as to how Latvia could assist Ukraine in its troubles.

Perceptions and prospect of cooperation between Lithuania and Ukraine. Lithuanian youth opinion survey. Comparative perspective 2018 – 2019

Lithuanian youth opinion survey took place during May 15-June 15, 2019, and it engaged 60 participants. The survey results are presented below in a comparative perspective with the results of a representative sample of national survey which took place in July 2018.

Survey results of 2019 indicate that the image of Ukraine is heavily affected by post-2014 geopolitical settings. Ukraine is associated with the war/conflict - 26%, occupation - 3%, Maidan events - 3%, annexation of Crimea - 8%. Other perceptions are related to post-Soviet legacy: low prices/weak economy - 6%, corruption - 4%.

Responding to the question about areas in which Lithuania should cooperate with Ukraine more actively, most respondents stressed out soft power areas: economic cooperation, relations in science and culture, support to Ukrainian civil society. Every second respondent would support more active diplomatic involvement, 44% of respondents would support Ukraine's membership in the EU. More financial and military support to Ukraine was supported by every fourth respondent.

Consequent E-YOUTH survey of 2019 reveals similar results. High-school and university students were generally very positive about cooperation with Ukraine. However, military and financial cooperation commitments received less support in comparison with cultural and economic cooperation:

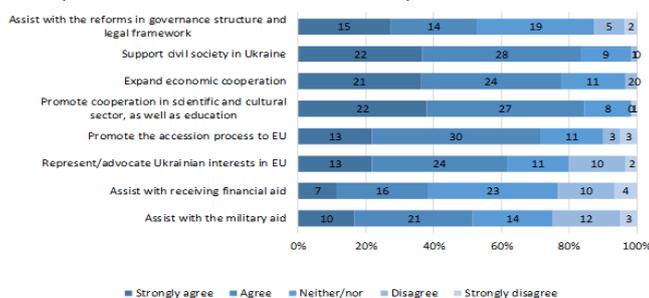


Figure 1. In what areas Lithuania should have a closer cooperation with Ukraine? E-YOUTH (Lithuania), 2019, N=60



Dr. Gintaras Šumskas
Vilnius Institute for Policy Analysis, Vilnius, Lithuania;
Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania.

Russian threat narrative was among the most widely supported among young respondents. The EU's role was perceived as crucial for containing Russian hostile influence. Lithuania was also seen as potential partner in advocating Ukrainian interests:

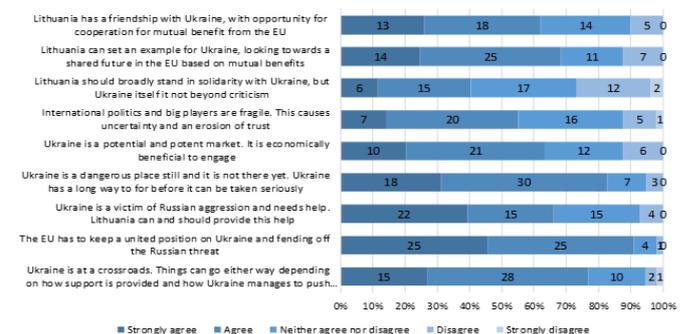


Figure 2. Youth perceptions of selected media narratives, 2019, N=60

Conclusive remarks

Ukraine is primarily associated with war, conflict, and occupation. The image is heavily affected by media where the coverage of the Ukraine-Russia conflict is one of the central topics.

Cooperation with Ukraine is widely supported; however, the forms of cooperation are quite selective. Young respondents prefer the forms of cooperation which require less direct commitment: promoting civil society, economic and cultural cooperation. Military assistance and financial support receive less support among young people.

The EU and Lithuania are regarded as advocates of Ukraine. Young people support the idea that European Union requires a unanimous position for the Ukrainian cause. Lithuania is also seen as potential provided for Ukraine.

Perceptions of Ukraine among Lithuanian youth



Dr Gintaras Šumskas

Vilnius Institute for Policy Analysis,
Vilnius, Lithuania;
Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas,
Lithuania.

Q methodology, often referred to as a “test of subjectivity” (Moree, 2017), was employed in order to measure young people's perceptions of the media narratives. Q-methodology in comparison with traditional survey allows using small samples (a feature of qualitative method) in combination with advanced quantitative techniques (factor analysis). The method combines several layers of information allowing to analyse the distribution and consistency of support/rejection towards the pre-selected statements (media narratives) and to collect additional information during the post-test discussions.

Lithuanian sample for Q-sorts included 29 high school and 31 university students (4 MA and 27 BA students) who took part in the sessions during 15-19 March, 2019.

Agreement/acceptance of media framed narratives

The following statements received quite unanimous support among respondents: *Democracy and good governance are important values for Ukraine, but their*

implementation takes time due to the trauma inflicted by the conflict (4.7). Participants supported the statement unanimously with very little or no objections, especially concerning the time for a change needed.

Ukraine has a long way to go in its reforms and it needs to tackle its corruption. A lot of businesses remain shady, and some individuals are dangerous to engage with (4.1) – general agreement on the corruption situation in Ukraine.

The war has torn apart Ukraine and it is still fragile and broken. It will take a long time to establish normalcy and there is a lot more to be done in Ukraine (4.6).

Disagreement / Rejection of media framed narratives

Four statements received the most strong and unanimous rejection.

Ukraine is resilient (4.4) Very strong (probably strongest) consensus in rejecting the statement. No one from the participants treated Ukraine as a resilient state referencing Ukraine's weaknesses in resisting the annexation of Crime, East Ukrainian war zones, and Black Sea military vessel incidents.

Ukraine is crucial for Europe. There cannot be a Europe without Ukraine (2.3). Students quite widely rejected this statement claiming, ‘there are more influential countries’, ‘Ukraine has never been a core country of Europe’.

Ukraine is a potential and potent market for Lithuanians (5.1), Ukraine should be considered a site for investment for Lithuanians (5.2). Some students questioned the idea that cooperation with Ukraine gives many economic opportunities to Lithuanians, ‘Ukraine is an agrarian country with not many possibilities’, ‘Ukraine is corrupt’.

Inconsistent / divisive statements

Some media narratives were extensively disputed in the youth audiences.

Ukrainians are decent people, but they have a different culture to Europe (4.2)

The majority of participants agreed that there were not many cultural differences between the two nations, but several respondents stated that Ukraine belonged with the Slavic culture realm.

Complex geopolitical arguments are also perceived with a big variance of opinions. *The European Union is fragile and it needs to take care of itself, and this implies that less attention will be paid to Ukraine (6.3).* Many agreed that the EU is weakened by the financial and migration crisis, the lack of leadership and unity, but only few mentioned that it might be a cause for abandoning Ukrainian case.

Everyone is out for themselves. Lithuania needs to watch out for itself (6.4). Many students supported a pragmatic way (“watch out for our own interests first”) of implementing politics. Others argued that staying away from international problems is a very short-sighted strategy which would lead to bad geopolitical consequences.

History is a cycle that repeats itself. We are dealing with a new Cold War that has brought fragility into the international context (6.5). Some respondents rejected the idea that we are dealing with some global political shifts. As in some other statements, they argued that regional conflicts should be resolved by conflicting sides.

Concluding remarks

Ukraine is a victim of external aggression. The primary all-binding narrative is perceiving Ukraine as a victim of unfortunate circumstances

(Soviet legacy, aggressive neighbour country) and needs the support of external actors. The unanimous support was given to the statement that Ukraine is a victim of Russian aggression and Lithuania is in a position to provide necessary help. The EU's role in the conflict resolution is also crucially important, however the unanimous position is necessary.

Russia is perceived as a common threat. There was a general agreement that Russia is a constant threat. Some respondents argued that this statement is exaggerated (“there's no Russian threat”, ‘Russia already made a point with Ukrainian case’).

Lithuanian-Ukrainian cultural and historical closeness. The metaphor as brothers referring to Lithuania and was also widely accepted (students mainly used historic past arguments). The brotherhood notion was mostly supported by the university students; however, some younger high-school students also challenged the statement that Ukraine is politically (non-EU country) and culturally different.

Lithuania is in a good position to be a mediator in solving the crisis. Respondents regarded Lithuania as a mediator in the Ukrainian-Russian conflict. Still, there were some concerns about the limited possibilities to change the course of development: ‘too small’, ‘not influential’, ‘Lithuania is vulnerable itself’.

Disagreements on geopolitical narratives. The majority of statements on global geopolitical situation were very dividing which suggest that young respondents lacked experience and knowledge to evaluate complex issues. Controversially, simple “down-to-earth” statements received more consistent evaluations.

Attitudes towards Ukraine among Estonian students

More than 40 participants took part in Estonian Q-sort sessions and more than 100 – in surveys throughout May-June, 2019. All participants were university and high-school students from capital city Tallinn. Perhaps, the most unexpected outcome of the Q-sort/survey-associated segment of research in Estonia was impressive level of knowledge about Ukraine, which the respondents shared with us. For example, the variety of ‘Estonian’ answers we collected on “When you hear the word Ukraine what three thoughts come to your mind?” was, arguably, the most diverse out of all four countries in focus. It could be suggested that this factor represents another angle of what had already been detected during the media monitoring (when country-bound narratives were

determined). On a concrete note, the following correlation has been established, and it can be a good subject for further research. Within the media segment, Estonians, in general, prefer relying on locally-produced news content, which should also have a local ‘touch’. At the same time, while giving their opinions on Ukraine as well as the specified range of narratives, it was not always a straight-forward exercise for both Q-Sort and survey participants to establish their view on how to judge Ukraine-associated matters – however, it was not because they did not know much about Ukraine; instead, they knew plenty about Ukraine, but their knowledge was always interlinked with Estonia and whether or not their country could be

of help for Ukraine in the process of solving yet another difficult issue.

In terms of evaluation of media narratives, Estonian young people were also the most critical when compared to students in other locations in this study. Once again, their criticism was based on the abundance of sources they claimed was there to consider to and knowledge they possessed regarding Ukraine, its relations with Russia and struggles in domestic reform. Our Estonian participants clearly demonstrate that young people live in a very vibrant information environment and they source and filter information they are given to shape their own opinions.



Vlad Alex Vernygora, Tallinn
University of Technology, Estonia.

[Estonian] participants knew plenty about Ukraine, but their knowledge was interlinked always with Estonia