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## MORE DIFFERENT THAN NOT: DIVERGENCE OF VALUES IN UKRAINE'S AND RUSSIA'S SOCIETIES AMIDST THE FULL-SCALE INVASION

**Background.** *Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which started on February 2022 and had been preceded by years of more limited warfare, has again brought to the fore the question of a civilisational split between the two countries. While Ukrainians have clearly opted for European and Euro-Atlantic integration, Russians have repeatedly sought to assert their influence over the former Soviet countries – Ukraine included – denying their right to freely choose their alliances and creating their own version of "civilisation" rooted in Orthodox Christianity and the Russian language. While, by all appearances, the difference between the two could not be any starker, various myths and analyses have persisted portraying Russia and Ukraine as "one people" or culturally approximate societies. The paper seeks to elucidate the role of values – a vague concept which is at the same time instrumental in self-identities and orientations of political actors – in explaining the differences in Ukrainian and Russian societies, in particular following the Russian full-scale aggression of February 2022. It looks at different approaches to defining values, particularly in the (geo)political context of Russian aggression against Ukraine, and explores their dynamics in both countries following the events of February 2022.*

**Methods.** *The authors have employed discourse analysis, context analysis, and analysis of official statements, as well as study of relevant sociological data and historical and comparative methods.*

**Results.** *The authors have demonstrated that the divergence of values between Ukrainian and Russian societies – notably following Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine – seems to have been growing unalterably, with Ukraine manifesting European values and portraying its fight against Russian aggression as an existential conflict for the entire European project and Russia propounding its constructed myths of the "Russian world", a loosely defined community of Russian-speaking people, and "traditional values" as juxtaposed to Western and European ones in an attempt to court non-Western countries.*

**Conclusions.** *The clear-cut axiological distinction between Ukraine and Russia bears implications not only for their respective foreign policy courses but also for the entire international system, splitting into two blocs regarding on whose side is taken in the global confrontation between democracy and autocracy. Therefore, the current stage of Russian-Ukrainian war could be a harbinger of a more profound global changes, in which values are prone to play an important role – and which are subject to further research.*

**Keywords:** *values, Russia's war against Ukraine, "clash of civilisations", Russia, Ukraine.*

### Background

The impact of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has been, without doubt, global, permeating the international system and international security, and sending shockwaves all over the world. The hostilities in Ukraine are still ongoing, with the Ukrainian forces waging an offensive operation in the southern direction as these words are being written. However, ample literature and publications have already been produced exploring the historical roots and implications of, as well the underlying reasons and possible prospects for, the ongoing conflict.

A notable portion of such analyses centred on exploring the premise for the invasion propounded by Russian President Vladimir Putin: The "one-people" thesis, or, more specifically, the cultural proximity of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples to the extent that Ukraine's Western aspirations pose a threat to Russia. From the historical and political perspectives, the thesis has been exposed as a construct devised in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian Empire to justify its policies towards suppressing, if not subjugating, a nascent Ukrainian national identity (Plokhly, 2023). Another side to the argument, however, is less historical and is pertinent to whether, over the last four centuries, Ukrainians and Russians have indeed become culturally close – to the extent that Putin's claims have any foothold.

The ongoing full-scale war against Ukraine is, *inter alia*, that of an ideational nature, that is, not pertinent to material forces but rather symbols – including language, culture, and statehood. This makes the current conflict truly global

in nature, representing the clash of two incompatible worldviews – "a battle between democracy and autocracy, between liberty and repression, between a rules-based order and one governed by brute force", as US President Joe Biden put it in a speech in Warsaw just a month after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion (Remarks by President Biden..., 2022). A year and a half later, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy speaks of global support for Ukraine as "reflecting their (world's) own values", adding that "Putin attacks not only Ukraine but this very values space, one which will eventually hold accountable all the terrorists and murderers, all the aggressors" (For many in the world, Ukraine is now a personal moral choice..., 2023).

This brings to the fore the importance of exploring this ideational – to be more specific, values dimension of Russia – Ukraine relations. Its importance lies not only in the nature of the ongoing full-scale war or the political rhetoric of those involved, but also in the nature of Ukraine's policies over the last decade, having seen it slowly ridding itself of Russia's cultural influence. Domestically, this includes asserting the status of and promoting the Ukrainian language in social life; the encouragement of local cultural products; and limitations on Russia-related cultural products, particularly those used to deny the very existence of Ukrainian statehood. And in foreign policy, Ukraine's drifting away from Russia's sphere of influence could not have been made clearer by its decision to abandon the fictitious "neutrality" status (which

never prevented the 2014 annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia and Russia-inspired hostilities in the east of Ukraine that followed) and setting the course towards NATO and European Union integration. Those two organisations are not only markedly portrayed as antagonistic to Russia but also are based on a distinct values plane, which includes support for democracy and human rights – to the extent that Russia's National Security Strategy of 2021 directly takes confrontation with the West (to) the realm of values (Timofeev, 2021), and in 2022, Putin issued a separate decree on "protection and affirmation of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values" (Pavliuk, 2023).

Therefore, the paper seeks to elucidate the role of values – a vague concept which is at the same time instrumental in self-identities and orientations of political actors – in explaining the differences in Ukrainian and Russian societies, in particular following the Russian full-scale aggression of February 2022. It looks at different approaches to defining values, particularly in the (geo)political context of Russian aggression against Ukraine, and explores their dynamics in both countries following the events of February 2022.

**Aim.** This research attempts to contribute to the study of Ukrainian and Russian societies' values by using more up-to-date data taken from local surveys, as well as drawing on the previous research to outline the historical tendencies behind them. While it might be argued that for some time, the values profile of Ukrainian and Russian societies was rather convergent, it is now not the case due to shifts in both countries towards supporting democratic and pro-EU, and autocratic and seclusive values.

#### Methods

Since there is little sociological data pertaining to the study of values of Ukrainian and Russian societies post-2022 – a method most researchers on the topic have employed most widely – the authors resort to discourse and context analysis, as well as analysis of official statements to single out the policies shaping the societal value orientations in the countries under discussion. In addition, the historical method has been used to find the relevant context in which the said value orientations have come to be formed. Finally, the comparative method is at the heart of the paper, helping emphasise how contrasting value orientations of Ukrainian and Russians societies are.

#### Results

The authors show that Ukraine and Russia have come to represent two different value systems, namely that of Western, liberal and democratic values, on the one hand, and the exclusive, purportedly "civilizational" and anti-Western, on the other. While Ukraine has clearly declared its intention to be part of the European world and its values system, Russia has sought to impose – including with brute force, in contravention of all principles of international law – its own vision of an identity shared by Ukrainian and Russian societies and their alleged convergence. It could be further argued that this divergence is an indication of a wider geopolitical fissure between liberal-democratic and illiberal-autocratic societies, one that merits additional research and discussion.

**Why values?** It is unsurprising that a spark of interest in the culture-related part of Russia – Ukraine relations coincided with Russian aggression – first in 2014 and then in 2022, not to neglect or deny the importance of research made prior to that. Of particular interest are those publications related to the cultural differences / proximities

of Ukrainian and Russian societies as an underlying factor in Russia's ongoing aggression.

Most of the authors researching Ukrainian and Russian societies' values (Reeskens, 2022) resort to the World Values Survey, a multi-year project "aimed to analyse people's values, beliefs and norms in a comparative cross-national and over-time perspective" (World Values Survey, n. d.). It is arguably the most authoritative data set on values orientations worldwide to date, traced back from 1981 and by now encompassing seven "waves" of surveys of 120 world countries and societies.

In this regard, well-grounded research by Akaliyski and Reeskens (2023) is notable in that it appears to be the first comprehensive attempt at analysing the values inherent in Ukrainian society as opposed to Russian or that of EU states. Without prejudice to the research, the authors themselves recognise that the data from the surveys they employ is limited to the year 2020, well before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, and thus might be irrelevant in some respects.

The paper is organised as follows. First, the authors will provide the theoretical framework for their research, including their understanding of the concept of "values" and its role in society. It will be followed by an outline of the role of values in the political discourse of Ukraine and Russia, highlighting its difference as Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine unfolded. Finally, conclusions and considerations regarding the values divergence in Ukrainian and Russian societies shall be provided.

**Theoretical framework.** To answer "What is values?" might be as difficult as describe what makes one happy: While it is easy to describe what it is like, giving a precise definition would be challenging. It is extremely difficult to study values *per se*. As a concept most often associated with cultural differences between peoples, it is loosely defined and abstract. In the broadest sense, there are two common interpretations of the word "value": the one associated with economy and the other associated with culture – and, understandably, it is the latter that is the focus of the research.

For a long time, "values" have been regarded by prominent scholars as central to social science. By accident, those have come to be the defining criteria of culture and a means of measuring differences between them.

Arguably, one of the first attempts at coming up with a complex values theory comes from the American scholar Robert Inglehart. In his seminal work, *The Silent Revolution*, Inglehart draws on Abraham Maslow's theory of needs to describe a shift in political values occurring as a result of progress and development – from "Materialist" values concerned with economic and physical security to "Postmaterialist" ones, related to personal freedom and self-expression. This value change was later found to have more profound implications, such as in shifting political alignments or even contributing to the global spread of democracy (Abramson, & Inglehart, 1995, p. 1–2). Later, Inglehart together with the German political scientist Christian Wetzel improved the theory, introducing a two-dimensional cultural map that measures cultures along the "Traditional versus Secular" and 'survival versus Self-expression' axes (Findings and Insights, n. d.). The World Values Survey underlying the map has been briefly mentioned above.

A pioneer in the field of quantitative research of culture, the Dutch researcher Geert Hofstede defined values as "general tendencies to prefer certain circumstances" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 9). In the culture onion model later

developed by Hofstede (What do we mean by "culture"? n. d.), values are the core element of culture, surrounded by rituals, heroes, and symbols. Per the onion model, it is the values that people resort to when they feel uncertain about their culture, peeling away more superficial layers.

On a more complex level, the Israeli social psychologist Shalom Schwartz has proposed the value theory which relates both to individual as well as culturally shared values (Schwartz, 2012). Defining values broadly as "what is important to us in life", Schwartz singles out their six defining features: (1) values are beliefs linked inextricably to affect; (2) values refer to desirable goals that motivate action; (3) values transcend specific actions and situations; (4) values serve as standards or criteria; (5) values are ordered by importance relative to one another; and (6) the relative importance of multiple values guides action. He additionally defines ten individual and seven country-related basic values that are inherent in any given culture, such as self-direction, security, universalism, etc., explaining complex relationships between them (Schwarz, 1999).

Interestingly, Inglehart, Hofstede and Schwartz have developed models and / or surveys that employ their understanding and distinction of values, with that of Inglehart and Wetzels recognised as the most comprehensive so far. Despite differences in their approaches, they have convincingly shown the importance that values play in a society and, coincidentally, at the individual level.

To sum up, values are relatively stable – albeit subject to change under certain circumstances – and culturally-induced features of a society or individual, which make for a useful tool in studying and comparing different cultures.

*The Role of Values in Theoretical Perspectives.* In the context of societal values, four theoretical perspectives as defined by Akaliyski and Reeskens (2023) may be of use. Those are the "Clash of Civilisations" thesis; the Social Identity theory; Modernization and Human Development theories; and the Nation Building thesis, which are briefly described below.

The "Clash of Civilisations" thesis – arguably one of the most consequential for International Relations – was proposed by the late American scholar Samuel Huntington in an eponymous article and book published in the 1990s (Huntington, 2011). Huntington argued that the international system was best described as divided into seven (later eight) civilisations, defined by both subjective (supranational identities) and objective elements, including religion, tradition, culture, and values.

Contrary to popular belief, Huntington's "Clash of Civilisations" thesis accounts for a change in civilisational borders. Some of the countries were construed by him as "torn" – that is, divided between two civilisational identities; and "cleft", meaning they are split within their territory. Coincidentally, Russia was described by Huntington as a torn country, vacillating between the Slavic-Orthodox and Western European civilisations. Ukraine, in turn, is a cleft country per Huntington, with the split dividing its western and eastern regions between the same two civilisations. At the same time, both Ukraine and Russia in the "Clash of Civilisations" theory constitute a core of the Slavic-Orthodox civilisation – a view propounded by Russia's current ideology as justifying its current aggression against Ukraine.

The Social Identity theory, proposed by the British social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, looks at the values as conducive to shaping collective identities. The premise of the theory is that "individuals define their own identities with regard to social groups and that such identifications work to protect and

bolster self-identity" (Islam, 2014). Such identification with one's social group comes as opposed to other social groups ("Us versus Them"), whereby the group to which one belongs is viewed with a positive bias.

In terms of societal values, the Social Identity theory helps explain how social identities can be weaponised – as is the case with Russia, which proclaims its overt opposition, even antagonism, towards Western values. Conversely, for Ukraine, the profession of Western, or to be more precise, EU values means it identifies with the European Union on an ideational level, thus setting a clear distinction with Russia. It might be further argued that EU integration leads to the "uploading" of EU values into candidate countries and new Member States, bringing them ever closer to a supranational European identity.

From a more materialistic perspective, Modernisation and Human Development theories look upon values change as dependent on socio-economic development – an argument close to the original one posited by Inglehart. Therefore, more advanced Western societies would be more supportive of "Post-materialistic" values of personal freedom and self-expression, while Ukraine and Russia, which both belonged in the Soviet bloc for a long time and failed to implement swift market reform, are falling behind, placing emphasis on traditional, "Materialistic" values rooted in tradition and religion. In the current context, that argument seems to make a point: Ukrainians would, first of all, have to worry about safety and security amidst Russian full-scale aggression, while Russia, under colossal sanctions pressure, would not expect its prosperity to rise and thus appeal to "traditional values".

Finally, the Nation Building thesis considers nations as political entities whose cultural influences act as a gravitational force, thus bringing citizens in line with predominant social values (Akaliyski et al., 2021). In a way, national culture here plays a socialising role, contributing to national unity and uniformity.

It is argued that Ukraine and Russia's cultural proximity, observed in World Values Surveys, might come down to their shared experiences within the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union (Akaliyski, & Reeskens, 2023). A reservation that is important to bear in mind here, however, is that Russia and Ukraine were in the same political entity not on equal terms, with Russia acting as superior. A new line of thinking posits that Russia – Ukraine relations in this context are to be viewed as colonial – neo-colonial even, given that after 1991, when the Soviet Union ceased to exist and Ukraine restored independence, Russia continued to exert significant influence – including cultural – on Ukrainian society. Indeed, for Ukraine, the invasions by Russia in 2014 and 2022 served as an impetus for promoting its own culture and limiting the impact of the Russian cultural domain, which has been shown to play a colonising role (Synhaievskaya, & Sheiko, 2022; Homilko, 2023). Conversely, Russia's current fervent promotion of "traditional values" is perceived as integral to not only its foreign policy – as an effort to enlist support of Global South countries opposed to the West – but also its domestic policy of consolidating the Russian people (Pavliuk, 2023).

#### **Values in Ukrainian and Russian Political Discourse.**

Given the cultural nature of the notion of "values" coupled with their importance in shaping both social and individual, it is no surprise that values have been widely used in the political discourse as well. In this context, it is worth having a look – albeit too general – at how this discourse has been constructed by both Ukraine and Russia in the context of Russian full-scale aggression against Ukraine.

The Inglehart-Wetzel culture map, often cited in academia, would suggest Ukrainian and Russian cultures are somewhat close, with the high level of survival (as opposed to self-expression) values and a slight preference for secular (as opposed to traditional) values (The Inglehart-Wetzel World Cultural Map 2023, 2023). Even compared to most Eastern European states that are members of the European Union, Ukraine lags far behind in terms of self-expression values.

Russian aggression against Ukraine, however, forced both societies to express their alignment with the conservative or liberal values in the European discourse (Kaplan, 2022). The full-scale invasion was "the death knell to a common Ukrainian – Russian identity" (Kolstø, 2023), overcoming the disputes, if any, around a separate Ukrainian identity.

#### **Ukraine: Firmly Accepting Western Values.**

Ukrainians irreversibly opted for European and Euro-Atlantic integration, which had enjoyed popular support long before February 2022 and had been enshrined in the Constitution of Ukraine as a state strategic policy (Constitution of Ukraine, 2020). Indeed, according to one of the most recent surveys, 92 percent of Ukrainians said that they want for Ukraine to become a member state of the European Union, and 89 percent, for Ukraine to become a member of NATO, which is an all-time high (Ukrainian Support for NATO..., 2023). Additionally, in the same survey, 73 percent of Ukrainians said that they entrusted international organisations, Western countries, or international businesses in overseeing Ukraine's reconstruction process – a sign of strong support for Western institutions and values.

A closer look should be paid to Ukraine's aspirations to join the European Union project, described as a "community of values" or a "values entrepreneur". Some scholars go as far as to say that values are "increasingly entangled in the geopolitical competition of winning the hearts and minds of people and governments in Europe" (Akaliyski, 2019, p. 5). The EU's founding act, the Treaty on the European Union (TEU), even contains a set of those values, including "respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights"; moreover, it is stressed that "(t)hese values are common to the (EU) Member States" (Consolidated Version..., 2012) and that their promotion is akin to the EU's *modus vivendi*. Furthermore, Article 49 of the TEU states that "(a)ny European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union" (Consolidated Version..., 2012).

Judging by the letter of the law, the compatibility of values – curiously enough – seems to be the defining criterion for the EU to consider granting membership to an aspiring state. Indeed, in a statement issued in June 2022, European Commission's President Ursula von der Leyen began speaking about Ukraine's prospective EU candidate status by stressing that, "(i)n the view of the Commission, Ukraine has clearly demonstrated the country's aspiration and the country's determination to live up to European values and standards" (Statement by President von der Leyen..., 2022). Less than two weeks later, Ukraine was granted the candidate status – something that many observers believed to have been impossible before the full-scale invasion by Russia.

The EU has noted Ukraine's progress in implementing EU rules and standards even in the conditions of a *de facto* war. Ukraine's ability to preserve a functional democracy

and demonstrate its willingness in protecting against external threats has also received acclaim both in the EU and other democracies (Bohlen, 2022), often serving as an argument for continued military, economic, and humanitarian support (Romanyshyn, 2023). On a visit to Kyiv in May 2023, when the Europe Day is celebrated, von der Leyen stressed that "Ukraine is on the front line of the defence of everything we Europeans cherish: our liberty, our democracy, our freedom of thought and of speech. Courageously, Ukraine is fighting for the ideals of Europe that we celebrate today", adding that "(i)n Russia, Putin and his regime have destroyed these values" (Press statement by President..., 2023).

In turn, Ukrainian officials and politicians have also placed strong emphasis on sharing values with the European Union. Just to take one example: Speaking to a European Council meeting in October 2022, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made the case for Ukraine's integration in the EU, stressing that "for most Europeans, Ukraine is an integral part of the European space. The space of freedom, democracy, social development, and fundamental values that unite us all" (We must never stop..., 2022).

Kyiv's ambitious aim of being prepared for EU entry in two years from the opening of the accession negotiations (Ukraine will be ready for EU membership in 2 years – official, 2023) is deemed rather unrealistic (Bastasin, 2023), but at the same time it demonstrates that Ukraine is more than determined to fully accommodate the values at the core of the European Union project, with all the necessary political, economic, and social changes it entails. While a comprehensive overview would merit a separate paper, several developments that have stood out are worth mentioning.

In June 2022, Ukraine took a decisive step towards ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, known as the Istanbul Convention – more than eleven years after signing the document. The Istanbul Convention, regarded as bringing Ukraine in line with European standards in combatting gender-related violence, had been fiercely opposed by religious and conservative groups due to the politicised nature of the word "gender", associated with the LGBTQ+ community (Sorokowski, 2022; Slavinska, 2022).

The attitude towards LGBTQ+ people has also been a moot point in Ukrainian society, due to "both traditional clericalism and a lingering Soviet mentality" (Rybachok, 2016). While Ukraine was the first former Soviet country to decriminalise homosexuality back in 1991, the negative perception of LGBTQ+ lingered. This, however, has drastically changed over the past years. A survey conducted in May 2022, after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, showed that 38,2 % of Ukrainians had a negative attitude towards LGBTQ+ – a 1,5-times decrease compared to 2016 (60,4 %); the number of those with a positive attitude towards LGBTQ+ people quadrupled, from 3,3 % to 12,8 %; and of those indifferent to LGBTQ+ – increased from 30,7 % to 44,8 % (Ukrainians Have Dramatically..., 2022). A follow-up survey conducted a year later, in May 2023, confirmed the observation, with 15,5 %, 33,9 % and 45,3 % saying they fell positively, negatively, and indifferently to the LGBTQ+ community (Ukrainians improved..., 2023). This data paints a strikingly different picture from that inferred from the World Values Survey/European Values Survey, where "tolerance towards homosexuality" is similar to that of Russia (Reeskens, 2022).

In addition, in 2023, the Ukrainian parliament started discussing a bill that would provide for civil partnerships, a way of legalising same-sex relationships in Ukraine. The initiative was partly driven by the fact that LGBTQ+ people who are fighting in the Ukrainian army currently have no legal means of transferring their property to partners in the event of their death on the battlefield (Lawmaker submits..., 2023). Interestingly, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy referred to "the three three fundamental values of the Council of Europe – democracy, rule of law, and human rights" and "European law" in a response to a petition on legalising same-sex partnerships (Zelenskyy responds..., 2023).

While those are only two examples, they by themselves demonstrate an important values shift in Ukrainian society, expedited by Russia's full-scale invasion, towards European values of democracy, human dignity, freedom, and self-expression. This trend is now clearly observable in surveys and, at least for now, does not seem to be subsiding, strongly correlating with Ukraine's progress towards EU and, to some extent, NATO membership.

The above does not imply that the acquisition of EU/Western values of democracy, freedom of self-expression, and human rights in Ukraine has been without conflict. On the contrary, a rather slow progress in implementing the seven recommendations of the European Commission issued in conjunction with the granting of the candidate country status to Ukraine is indicative of the challenges persisting on the levels of Ukrainian political elites and society to that end (European Commission..., 2023). Still, the impact of European and Euro-Atlantic integration on Ukraine has already been significant, and it has been observed that Russia's full-scale invasion has been conducive thereto.

**Russia: A Decisive Turn to "Traditional Values".** A different picture is painted in Russian society, whose political discourse employs the notion of "values" in a markedly counterprotesting manner, juxtaposing "wrong" Western and "right" Russian values systems. In this regard, the full-scale aggression of February 2022 but exacerbated the polarisation between Ukraine and Russia, including in terms of values orientation (Kaplan, 2022). In fact, it could be argued that the full-scale aggression is part of Putin's promise of an overhaul of the international system away from Western/American dominance – "genuinely postcolonial, solicitous of conservative values, and robustly multipolar" (Kimmage, & Notte, 2023).

In March 2022, Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church delivered a sermon claiming that the full-scale invasion of Ukraine was down to "a principled rejection of the so-called values that are being offered today by those who claim world power" – or, in other words, the Western world demanding that loyal countries embrace "gay parades" (Patriarchal Sermon..., 2022). A year later, Kirill went on to say that Russia "is following and standing up for traditional spiritual and moral values" (Patriarch Kirill..., 2023). The 2022 sermon, pronounced as Russian soldiers committed war crimes in the-then occupied towns and cities in the Kyiv region of Ukraine, could not have better signalled an irreversible turn by Russia to so-called "traditional values" – a cornerstone of its state policy and ideology.

The divergence in Russian and Western values was observed as far back as mid-2000s (White, Light, & McAllister, 2005), as Russian President Vladimir Putin came to power and started nurturing a sense of resentment towards the West. This roughly coincides with the

emergence and use of the notion of "traditional values" by Russian political elites and academia.

"Traditional values" is ill-defined concept, ostensibly rooted in Orthodox church practices and the geopolitical ideas of Eurasianism (Pavliuk, 2023). In the most general sense, it indicates a society's conservative preferences as opposed to liberal ones, and calls for respect of particular cultural tradition by rejecting universalism (Promoting human rights and fundamental..., n. d.). From the Russian perspective, however, traditional values take on a more concrete substance, based upon the idea of a "traditional family" (that is, the one constituted by man and woman), faith in God, and patriotism. The "faith in God" part does not necessarily indicate religious devotion and might – as is likely in the case of Russia – be a mere simulation thereof, with an attempt at legitimising one's actions by reference to divine power (Cherenkov, 2019). The notion of "traditional values" was coupled with another ideological tool, the "Russian world" concept, declaring Russia as a unique civilisational space defined mostly by language and entitled to protect Russian speakers worldwide – a sort of 'sharp power', combining both cultural influence and coercion.

"Traditional values" (or "spiritual bonds", *dukhovnye skrepy*) has been used as part of Russia's ideological push against the "collective West" in order to win over the so-called Global South. It, first of all, relates to portraying the West as destroying the ("traditional") roles of man and woman and encouraging 'sexual deviations / perversion' (protecting the rights of LGBTQ+). It is precisely what Russian President Vladimir Putin was referring to in his latest address to the Federal Assembly in January 2023, accusing the West of "destroying the family, cultural and national identity" and forcing clergy and priests "to bless same-sex marriages" (Message of the President..., 2023).

The years 2022 and 2023 saw "traditional values" cemented not only in Russia's political discourse but also on the legal plane. It first appeared in an official document back in 2018 in Russia's State National Policy Strategy until 2025 (On Approval of the Basics..., 2022). Per the Strategy, the "traditional values" include "patriotism, serving the Homeland (sic!), family, creative labour, humanism, social justice, mutual respect, and collectivism". Notably, in 2021, the term emerged in Russia's National Security Strategy, with the clearly declared goal of "defending traditional spiritual and moral values" against "the crisis of the Western liberal model" and the discrediting of Russia in the West (On the National Security Strategy..., 2021).

Lastly, in November 2022, Vladimir Putin signs a decree approving the Basics of State Policy on Preserving and Affirming Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values, which contains the first official definition of "traditional values". It is worth quoting in full:

"...moral guidelines shaping the worldview of Russian citizens, passed down from generation to generation, underlying the all-Russian civic identity and the country's common cultural space, strengthening civic unity, and finding their unique, original manifestation in the spiritual, historical, and cultural development of the multinational people of Russia" (On Approval of the Basics..., 2022).

Here, "traditional values" are overtly described as (1) belonging exclusively to a Russian identity and thus playing the consolidating role in its shaping; (2) historically rooted, which corresponds with the understanding of values as relatively stable cultural traits; and (3) juxtaposed – indirectly in the definition, but more explicitly in the remainder of the document – against Western liberal

values, seen as a threat to Russia's *modus vivendi*. Furthermore, it is directly stated that Russia "considers traditional values as a basis for Russian society, making it possible to protect and strengthen Russian sovereignty" – a direct statement of weaponizing the abstract concept to justify aggression.

The "traditional values" listed in the Basics of State Policy on Preserving and Affirming Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values is worth quoting in full as well:

"...life, dignity, human rights and freedoms, patriotism, citizenship, service to the Homeland and responsibility for its destiny, high moral ideals, strong family, creative work, priority of the spiritual over the material, humanism, mercy, justice, collectivism, mutual assistance and mutual respect, historical memory and continuity of generations, unity of the peoples of Russia" (On Approval of the Basics..., 2022).

Notably, there is no mention of "democracy", "the rule of law" (or anything related to "equality before the law"), or "personal freedom" (not to be confused with "human rights and freedoms"), a cornerstone of Western/EU values as noted before. Ironically, in the latest wave of the World Values Survey, 74 % of Russians said they believed that democracy was important (as did 82 % of Ukrainians) (Tamilina, 2022). Also, the emphasis is placed on communitarian and security values at the expense of self-expression and individualism inherent in the Western/EU values system.

While there is no recent survey data to support the observation akin to the World Values Survey, some conclusions could be drawn from an opinion poll conducted in August 2023 by the Russian consultancy Russian Field. When the respondents were given an open question to name "traditional Russian values", 43 % said "family", 18 % named "patriotism and love", 11 % named "religious values", 8 % named "respect for elders", and another 7 %, "children". Only 2 % of the Russians surveyed named "friendship", "freedom", or "justice" (Kornia, & Vinokurov, 2023). Understandably, more data would be needed to observe the reception of "traditional values" in Russian society; however, it is unclear when – and how – such a survey could be carried out in the country that attacked its neighbour, and whether it might affect the honesty of the respondents' answers.

### Conclusions and discussions

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022 – the first such major conflict in Europe since World War Two – has led to global repercussions, affecting the international system as a whole. It has been portrayed as a battle between democracy and autocracy, or the competing values systems – Western liberal and democratic and Russian "traditional" and ultraconservative.

Most research concerning values of Ukrainian and Russian societies relied on the World Values Surveys/European Values Surveys, and while it is indeed a quality source of relevant data, it is not correspondent to the current situation. But even then, scholars argued that Ukraine exhibited cultural values different from those of Russia, arguably as a result of its rapprochement with the European Union and, to a lesser extent, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Moreover, it has been argued that the EU has had the impact of shifting the values of the Member States and the countries that have opted for European integration, bringing them more and more in line with its own. In this regard, Ukrainian society's values combine the Nation Building and Social Identity theory perspectives, serving as a means of consolidating a national identity and associating itself with the family of European nations.

Of course, the process of Ukraine's full alignment with the EU values would take a considerable amount of time (Horchynska, 2022). But in the case of Ukraine, there is more than enough arguments to make a case for it irreversibly opting for a supranational European identity with the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, as enshrined in the Treaty on the European Union. In 2022, Ukraine was granted by the EU the candidate country status, and it seems likely that by the end of 2023, the EU will agree to begin the negotiations on its entry, meaning European integration will be set on a more systematic and determined course.

The Russian Federation, on the contrary, has declared Western liberal values a threat to itself and come up with the alternative "traditional values" system, which professes communitarianism and securitisation over personal freedoms and self-expression. Citing NATO expansion as one of the reasons to invade Ukraine in February 2022 and later rejecting Ukraine's right to join the European Union, Vladimir Putin stressed his aversion to the Western values system which not only, in his view, undercut the role of "traditional family" but meant Ukraine's irreversible separation from the Russian values discourse. Russia clung onto the "Clash of Civilisations" thesis arguing that both it and Ukraine belonged to the same cultural domain and used "traditional values" as a means of consolidating its civic identity. It remains to be seen whether such efforts would prove successful against the background of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the incurring costs, although some surveys seem to show that is the case.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine is, therefore, also a clash of two competing and incompatible worldviews and value systems. Its outcome – be it one side's victory or a negotiated compromise – might determine what direction the international system will take in the years to come.

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## МІФ ПРО "ОДИН НАРОД": ЦІННІСНИЙ РОЗКОЛ СУСПІЛЬСТВ УКРАЇНИ ТА РОСІЇ НА ТЛІ ПОВНОМАСШТАБНОГО ВТОРГНЕННЯ

**Вступ.** Повномасштабне вторгнення Росії в Україну, що розпочалося в лютому 2022 р. і якому передували роки географічно обмеженої війни на сході України, знову висунуло на перший план питання цивілізаційного розколу між двома країнами. Тоді як українці чітко обрали європейську та євроатлантичну інтеграцію, росіяни неодноразово намагалися утвердити свій вплив на колишні радянські країни включно з Україною, заперечуючи їхнє право вільно обирати союзи та створюючи власну версію "цивілізації", що ґрунтується на православному християнстві та російській мові. І хоча відмінність між цими двома проєктами є разючою, різні міфи й розвідки продовжують зображати Росію та Україну як "один народ" або культурно близькі суспільства. У статті зроблено спробу розкрити один з аспектів такого мислення, досліджуючи цінності – розпливчасте поняття, яке водночас відіграє важливу роль у самоідентифікації й орієнтаціях політичних акторів, – і те, як вони виявляються в українському та російському суспільствах. Розглянуто також різні підходи до визначення цінностей, особливо в (гео)політичному контексті російської агресії проти України, та досліджено їхню динаміку в обох країнах після подій лютого 2022 р.

**Методи.** Автори використовували дискурс-аналіз, контекстний аналіз, аналіз офіційних заяв, а також вивчення відповідних соціологічних даних та історичний і порівняльний методи.

**Результати.** Продемонстровано, що розбіжності в цінностях між українським і російським суспільствами, надто після повномасштабної агресії Росії проти України, невпинно зростають: тоді як Україна демонструє європейські цінності та зображує боротьбу з російською агресією як екзистенційний конфлікт для всього європейського проєкту, Росія просуває сконструйовані міфи про "русский мир" (рос.), нечітко окреслену спільноту російськомовних людей і "традиційні цінності" на протипагу західним і європейським, намагаючись схилити на свій бік незахідні країни.

**Висновки.** Чітке аксіологічне розмежування між Україною та Росією має наслідки не лише для їхніх зовнішньополітичних курсів, але й для всієї міжнародної системи, що розколюється на два блоки з огляду на те, на який бік стають її актори в глобальному протистоянні між демократією та автократією. З огляду на це нинішній етап російсько-української війни може бути передвісником глибших глобальних змін, у яких цінності можуть відігравати важливу роль і які можуть стати предметом подальших досліджень.

**Ключові слова:** цінності, війна Росії проти України, "зіткнення цивілізацій", Росія, Україна.

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