

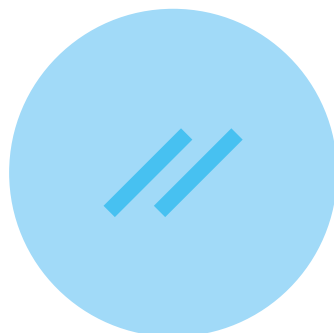
STABILITY VS. INSECURITY

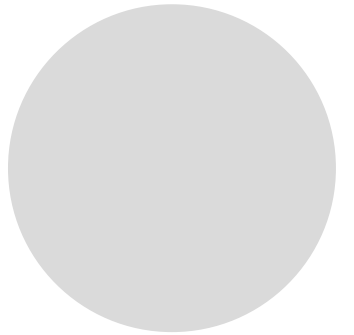
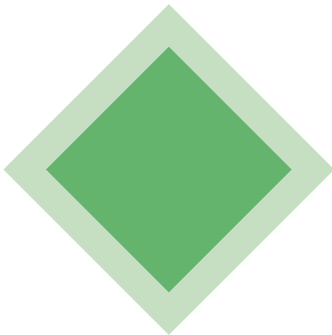
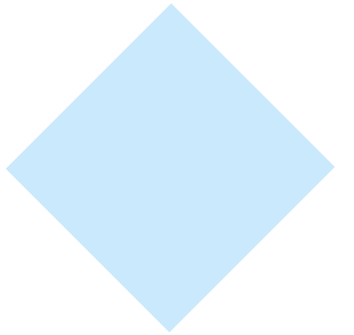
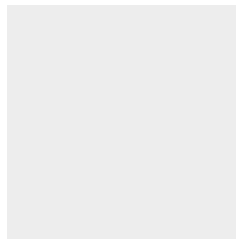
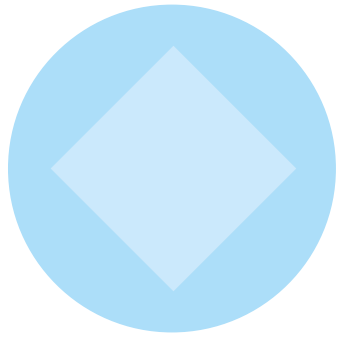
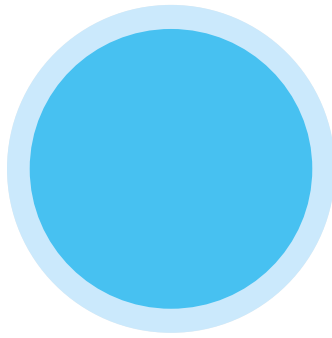
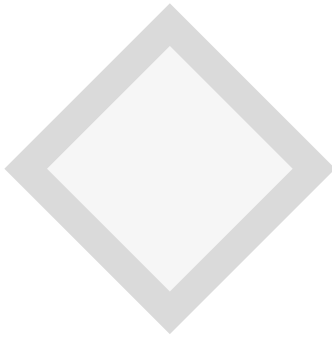


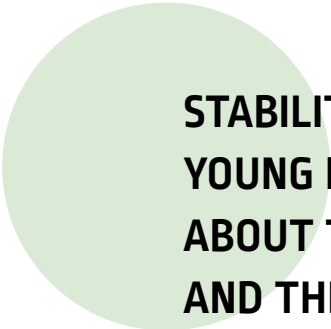
Warsaw 2024

Comparative report from studies
of Polish and Ukrainian youth

YOUNG POLES AND UKRAINIANS ABOUT THEMSELVES AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS








STABILITY VS. INSECURITY YOUNG POLES AND UKRAINIANS ABOUT THEMSELVES AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS

Comparative report from studies of Polish and Ukrainian youth
conducted by ARC Rynek i Opinia and Info Sapiens
for the Mieroszewski Centre



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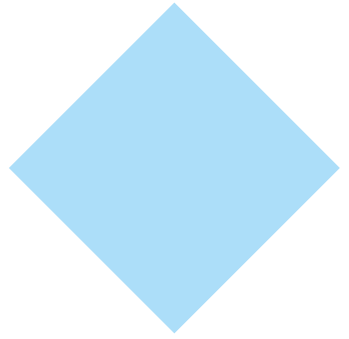
1. Introduction

Towards the end of 2023, two parallel opinion surveys were conducted on behalf of the Mieroszewski Centre: one in Poland and one in Ukraine. The respondents were young people, aged 16–26. Each project involved a quantitative part (an online survey on a sample of N=500) and a qualitative component (four focus group interviews). The detailed results of each study can be found in separate reports prepared respectively by ARC Rynek i Opinia (for the Polish part) and Info Sapiens (for the Ukrainian part). At the core of the entire project lied a fundamental research question: what is the impact of the different security situations of Poland and Ukraine on the attitudes, views and values professed by young people in both countries, and how do contacts between Polish and Ukrainian youth under these particular circumstances influence their mutual perceptions?

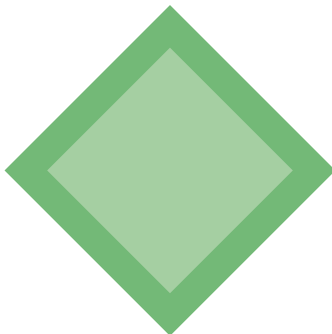
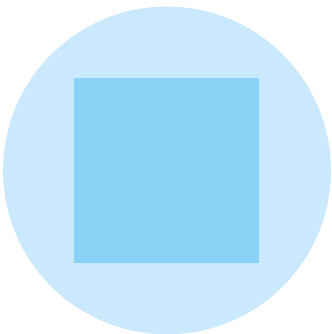
The answers are important for the future Polish-Ukrainian relations, which will be shaped by the respondents of the two studies and their peers.

This report aims to compare the findings obtained in Poland and Ukraine, while focusing on the crucial similarities and differences in a number of key areas covered in the study, namely:

- Sense of security
- Patriotic attitudes
- Willingness to emigrate
- Level of interest in national and international affairs
- Level of interest in national history
- Perception of neighbouring countries
- Attitudes towards Ukraine's integration into the EU and NATO



Sense of security



While young Poles feel that their country's security is ensured by membership in the Western political and military structures, young Ukrainians are already showing some signs of habituation: they seem used to living under the threat or even accustomed to the war. Of course, Ukrainians are well aware of the consequences of the war in their country. Nevertheless, it was sometimes clear from respondents' accounts that the existing threat is gradually becoming the 'new normal' in their everyday live, probably due to the physical distance from the frontline, at least in focus group locations (Kyiv and Lubny).

When talking about security, young Ukrainians—much like their Polish peers—preferred to talk about their immediate environment, i.e. the family, rather than the security of the country in the broader sense. For many people, the family is the greatest value, and security of the family equals material and financial well-being rather than the absence of imminent life threat.

“The national security, because we don't have it now. I'm already used to having no security.”

“The family is the most important thing, it's our first environment, it's closest to us.

And the security of your family is always something to give you support so that you can support your family back.”

“I think national security is the most important thing we have now. I would like us to live in peace, to build a healthy, peaceful country. And security of the family is closely related to that, too.”

“Peaceful skies over my head. A life without war, I think. That's crucial. That's because many people are dying: relatives and non-relatives alike. That's the most important thing.”

National security, i.e. the value that is directly related to current events in Ukraine, is placed at the lowest end in terms of importance among young Poles. This choice is justified by their sense of security, which is based both on their daily observations (“nothing bad is happening in Poland”) and on the awareness that Poland is a member of Western structures, i.e. NATO and the European Union.

The low position of national security in the ranking of values is observed both in the youngest and the older Polish groups. Therefore, this is not an attitude that changes with the respondents' age, or at least we can draw this conclusion based on the entire age range represented in the survey (16–26 years).


“National security is important to me, but there are more important things.”

“National security would probably be higher because it would be important if we were in a country with a war going on, but I feel safe and maybe that's why this is not important to me, I'm not judging it.”

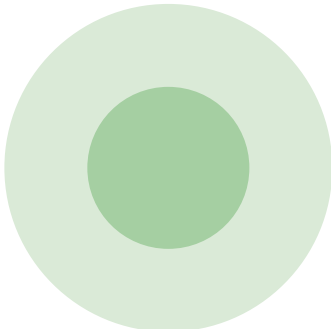
“What I meant was that if something were to happen in our country, I would have no qualms of conscience about going somewhere with my family. It would be more important to keep my family safe than to have everything OK in my country.”



3



Patriotism and
readiness for
personal involvement
in a situation
of aggression



The understanding of patriotism

A total of **64%** of Poles and significantly more, i.e. **81%**, of Ukrainians describe themselves as 'patriots'. Undoubtedly, therefore, the war situation has an impact on the manifestation of patriotic attitudes, at least at this basic declarative level.

↓ FIGURE 1:

Self-perception as a patriot

Poland



Ukraine



■ Yes, definitely

■ No, probably not

■ Not sure/don't know

■ Yes, probably

■ No, definitely not

Most young Poles see patriotism as a complex mosaic of values, dominated by love, loyalty and pride in the country and its national symbols. It also involves efforts to ensure the welfare and development of the country, fulfilling civic duties and respecting community values. There is also a fairly large number of people who view patriotism as the cultivation of historical memory and active participation in the celebration of national holidays, turning them into an opportunity to reflect on national identity and cultural heritage. Furthermore, some young people see patriotism as willingness to make sacrifices, and even to fight for

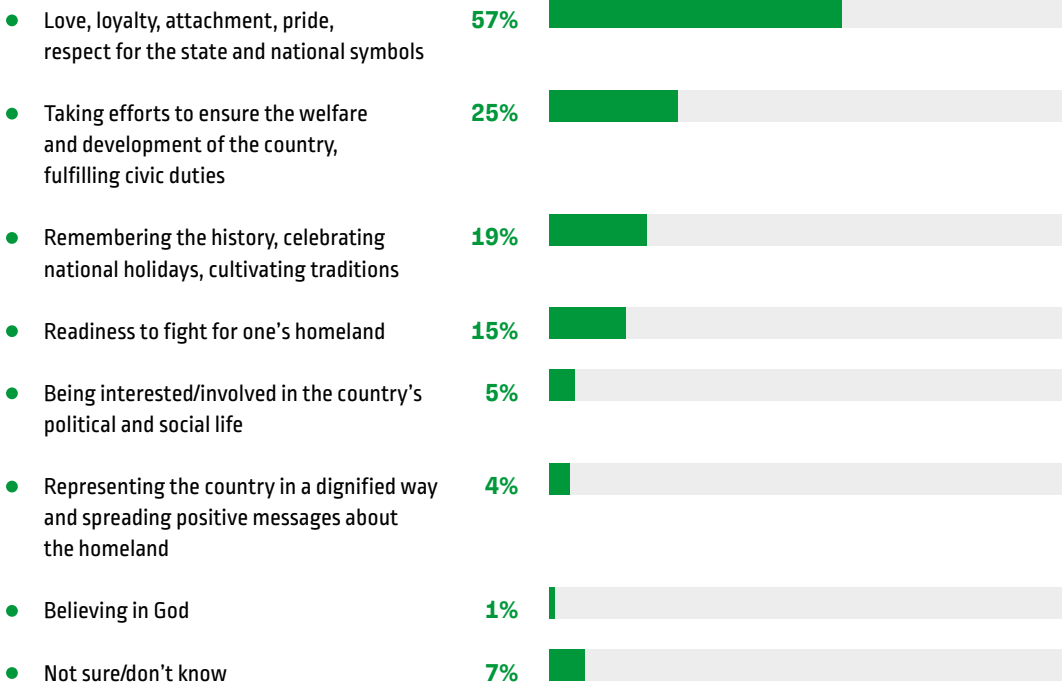
one's homeland, and readiness to represent one's country in a dignified way on the international arena.

As regards young Ukrainians, patriotism is also perceived as a combination of strong feelings: love for the country as well as loyalty and devotion to the state. For them, actively helping to build a better future for Ukraine is an important component of patriotic identity. There are also many young Ukrainians who understand patriotism as fighting for the integrity of their country and as a commitment to its development through respect for their mother tongue and efforts to improve its command.

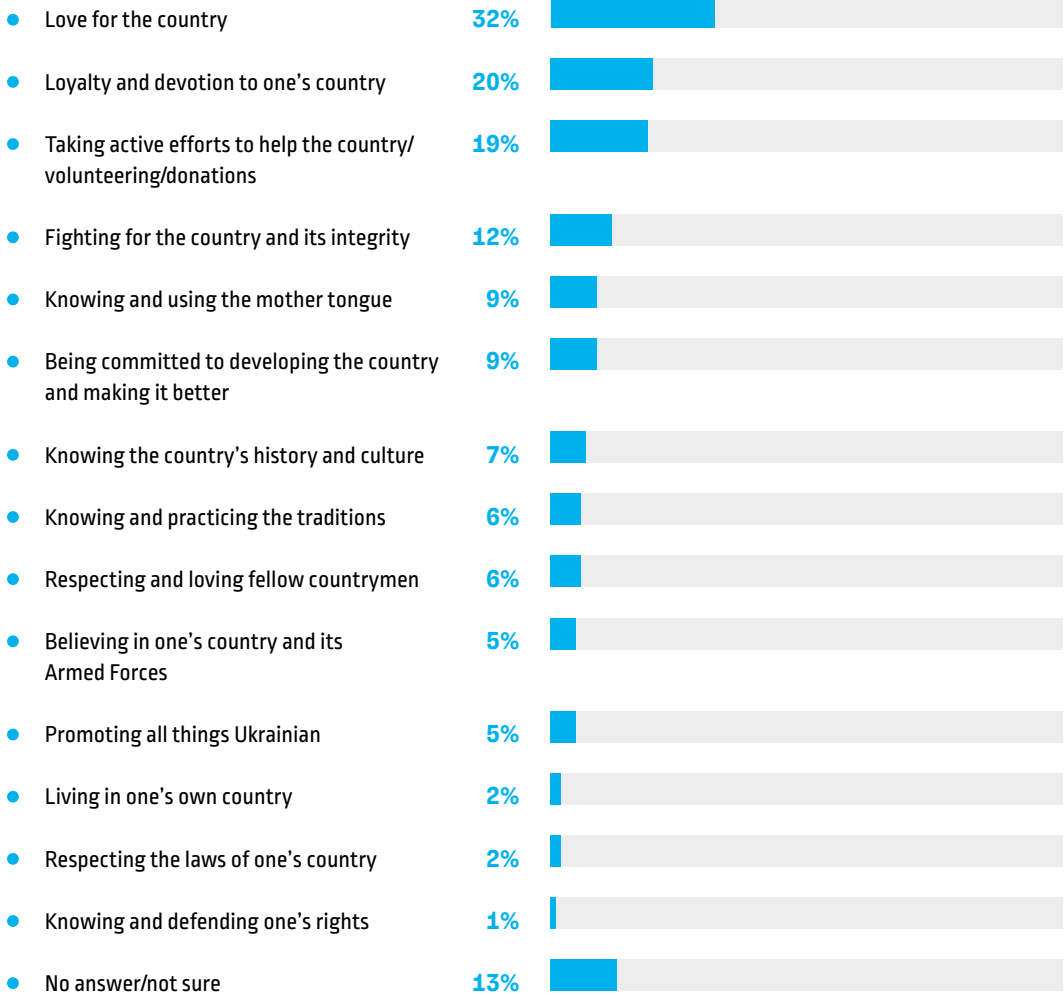
↓ FIGURE 2:

Understanding of patriotism

Poles



Ukrainians



Quite a few young Ukrainians express opinions that may indicate a certain degree of fatigue with the sustained patriotic elation. Ukrainians notice that patriotism is being commercialised. They fear that, as a society, they are being manipulated by the authorities who may strive to militarise patriotism based on the claim that “patriotism is the ability to lay your life down for your country.” Young Ukrainians often make spontaneous straightforward declarations: “I wouldn’t like to give my life for my country.”

“But, on the other hand, I suppose ... I think there are too many of these T-shirts and various toys, it looks very artificial. They’re making money from it and that’s also manipulation etc. It’s strange and a bit inappropriate.”

“Really, when I see all these T-shirts featuring Patron the Dog... Well, when I see such people, I just get the impression that this person has too many chromosomes.”

In Ukraine, patriotism is quite often mentioned in opposition to a favourable attitude towards Russia: you are either a patriot or a supporter of Russia.

“If you ask me, patriotism is very common. You don’t consume Russian art, you don’t speak Russian. You don’t support the Russian language and art. You know you are Ukrainian and you show it in some way. Not publicly, like ‘look at me, I’m Ukrainian, I love my country’, but simply.... well, in a way that can be seen from the outside.”

“It’s when you realise that you are in favour of a particular country. That you are either in favour of Ukraine or of Russia. You don’t have to live in Ukraine to think that you are ... that you have to be in favour of Ukraine.”

A very interesting theme was observed in discussions with younger focus group participants in Ukraine. While this kind of deliberation was not recorded among Polish youth at all, some young Ukrainians explicitly said that what Ukraine needs is nationalism rather than patriotism.

“In fact, the concept of patriotism cannot exist because absolute love for your homeland is impossible, for objective reasons. Instead, patriotism is some kind of manipulative narrative etc. The existence of patriotism is really a phantom concept. What exists is a love for your country because of its certain aspects.”

“I don’t think there is patriotism in Ukraine, first of all. Secondly, I believe that what we need in Ukraine is not patriotism, but nationalism. It’s the pursuit of the national idea, the protection of your country, efforts to build a healthy, rich, cultured country. And when it comes to the language issue, I believe that we shouldn’t divide people into Russian- and Ukrainian-speaking folks. I mean, some kind of comparisons between the two. At the same time, I think we shouldn’t ignore it and turn a blind eye to it because preserving the Ukrainian language is also very important.”

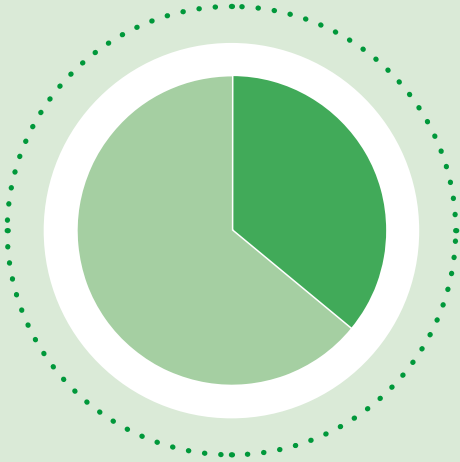
“Nationalism is a good thing, actually. It’s simply a love for your country, a desire for easy Ukrainisation. A desire for unity, national unity.”

Today, young people in Poland are more likely to understand patriotism as a daily concern for the welfare of the state (working honestly, paying taxes, fulfilling civic duties) as well as a set of behaviours in the symbolic sphere (remembering the country’s history, cultivating its traditions, celebrating national holidays) rather than the readiness to fight and lay down one’s life for the homeland.

“Nowadays, patriotism is about fighting for your country, not necessarily about sabre tossing, it’s about taking care of our land, our territories. Not closing yourself up in your own world, but showing solidarity with your compatriots.”

“Love for a particular group you belong to. It doesn’t necessarily have to be a nation because, to me, patriotism is more about local patriotism, which is completely independent of the idea of a nation.”

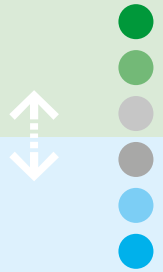
Willingness to join the army to defend one's country against attack



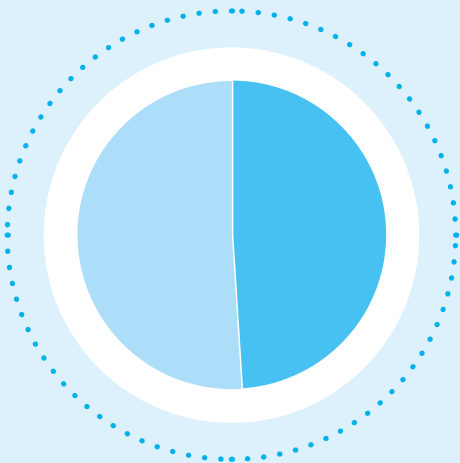
Total Poland:

Yes, definitely/Yes, probably

36%



Willingness to join the army to defend one's country against attack



Total Ukraine:

Yes, definitely/Yes, probably

49%

Readiness for personal involvement in a situation of aggression

Although patriotism is most commonly viewed simply as love for and devotion to one's homeland, it is also understood as the readiness to make sacrifices in its defence in case statehood is threatened by an external attack.

It is worth noting that the level of declared readiness for such sacrifices varies between Poles and Ukrainians. As many as **50%** of the surveyed young Ukrainians declare their readiness to join the army to protect their country, while a similar declaration was made only by **36%** of young Poles, and more than half admitted that they were not ready for such a step at all. The disproportion in the

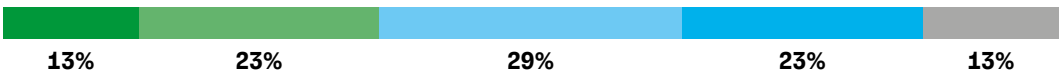
degree of readiness to defend their homeland between the young citizens of the two countries is an obvious effect of the differences in the current security situation.

When analysing the data by gender, we can see that there is a greater disparity in the readiness to join the military in an emergency situation among women from the two countries. In Poland, only **28%** of female respondents declare their readiness to join the army, while almost **60%** are not ready to do so. In contrast, the percentage of young Ukrainian women willing to make such a sacrifice is by **20 percentage points (p.p.)** higher.

↓ FIGURE 3:

Willingness to join the army to defend one's country against attack

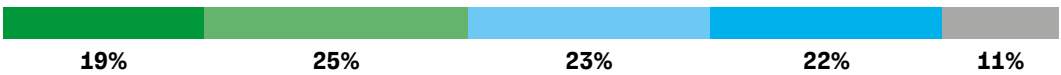
Total Poland



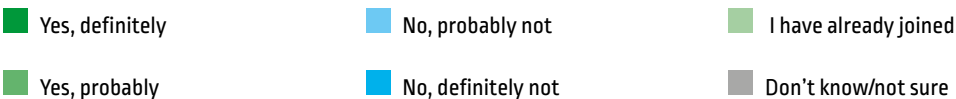
Total Ukraine



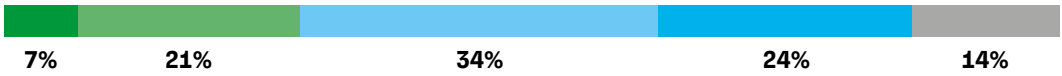
Men Poland



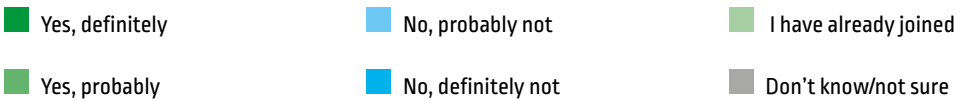
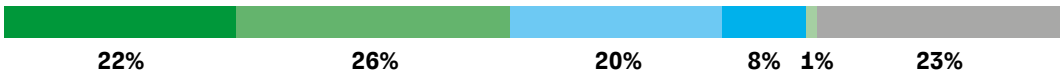
Men Ukraine



Women Poland



Women Ukraine



When asked about their willingness to provide assistance to the army in an attack, young citizens of both countries declared much higher readiness. However, the considerable disproportion between young Ukrainians and Poles is worth noting also in this case.

As many as **90%** of the surveyed Ukrainians declare their readiness to provide such assistance in the event of

an enemy attack (which, in fact, is probably largely a reflection of the current situation rather than a declaration of future behaviour). The degree of such readiness is by **35 p.p.** lower among the Polish respondents.

In terms of gender, we notice a greater disparity in the case of declared willingness to help the army among female respondents.

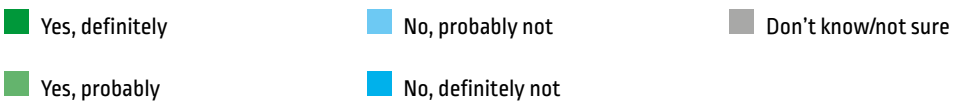
↓ FIGURE 4:

Willingness to help the army in case of enemy attack

Total Poland



Total Ukraine



Men Poland



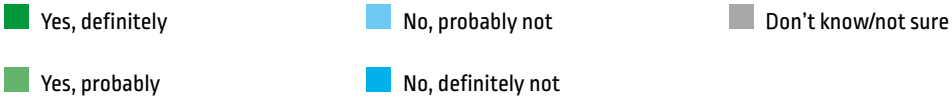
Men Ukraine



Women Poland



Women Ukraine



Young Ukrainians very often send assistance, including financial aid, to their friends, also those fighting at the front-line. In this context, Ukrainians express direct accusations regarding corruption, which is as destructive to society as armed aggression.

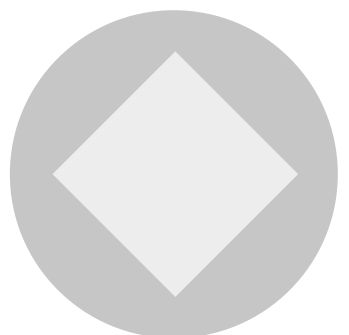
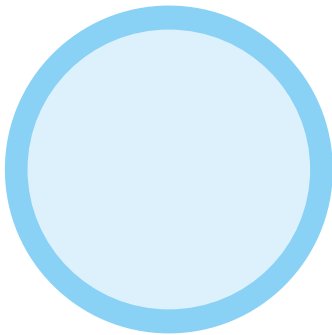
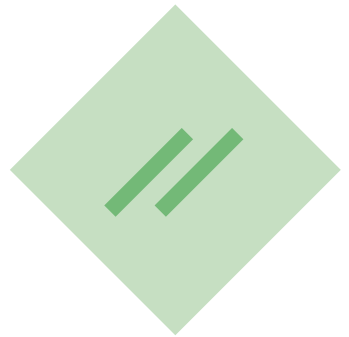
“I watch the news a lot and it seems to me that this whole war is just one big jigsaw puzzle, and that’s it! One way or another, it’s going to end at some point. So I don’t want to get involved. And in terms of finances, I only help my friends, I mean people whom I know personally. If they

need something on the frontline, I help them. I don’t pay money into various funds out there.”

“Nowadays, it’s possible, or even necessary, to fight against corruption, through some demonstrations or other things. We need to do it now because it may be too late later! And perhaps we might even lose this war because of corruption.”



Future life at home or abroad?



Despite living in a country which has seen a brutal war for two years, young Ukrainians are less likely than Poles to imagine living permanently outside their country. As many as **59%** of Ukrainians participating in the survey exclude the possibility of emigrating forever. The respective share of young Poles is as much as **18 p.p.** lower. In the case of

Ukrainians, the lower propensity to leave their homeland is undoubtedly related to a greater sense of duty towards their country at war. In contrast, when considering the prospect of leaving their country in relative safety, young Poles are less burdened by a sense of guilt about leaving their homeland in need.

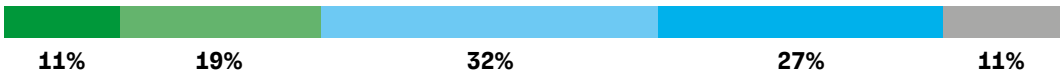
↓ FIGURE 5:

Accepting the option to live outside one's country permanently

Poland



Ukraine



Yes, definitely

No, probably not

Don't know/not sure

Yes, probably

No, definitely not

What is particularly noteworthy, young Ukrainians are more optimistic than Poles about the future of their country. Only 27% of the Polish respondents positively assess the future of their country, while the percentage of such responses from young Ukrainians is twice as high. Greater optimism among Ukrainian citizens may be related to

the much more negative perception of the initial situation compared with that of Poland.

Overall, 35% of young Poles surveyed assess their country's future neutrally, which, in turn, may suggest a relatively high degree of uncertainty.

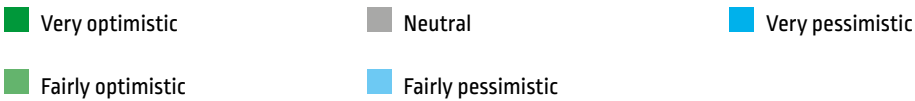
↓ FIGURE 6:

Assessment of the country's future from the perspective of people similar to the respondents

Poland



Ukraine



At the same time, young Poles display greater pessimism regarding the future of their country, with 61% wanting to stay in their homeland, but more than a half not believing they will have the opportunity to fulfil their plans there. Nearly a half of the young Poles surveyed are considering a life abroad.

When we analyse Ukrainian respondents' answers to a similar question, the picture of young patriots strongly

attached to their homeland becomes even more clear. A stunning 75% of them want to stay in Ukraine despite all odds, and only 20% agree that settling abroad is a better choice in the current situation. At the same time, as many as 70% of young Ukrainians believe in the prospect of a better fate for their homeland in the future. Notably, this result is fundamentally different from that obtained in the Polish part of the study.

↓ FIGURE 7:

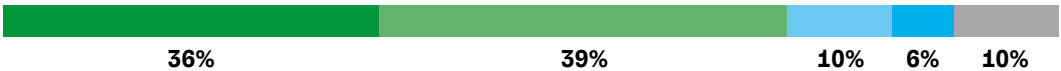
Perception of one's own future and the country's future

- Despite all the difficulties, I would like my future to be linked with Poland/Ukraine

Poland



Ukraine

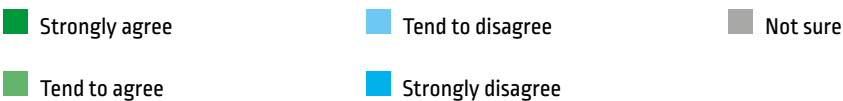
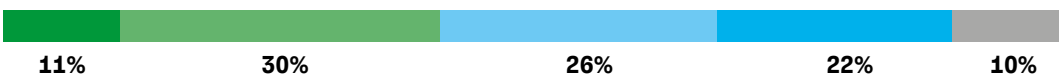


- I do not believe that I will be able to fulfil all my plans in Poland/Ukraine

Poland

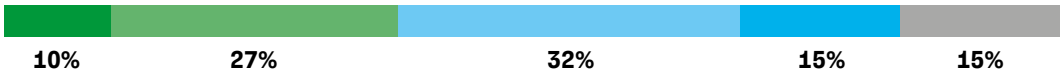


Ukraine

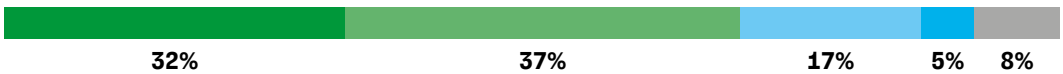


- I think a very good time lies ahead for Poland/Ukraine and I cannot imagine living outside Poland/Ukraine

Poland



Ukraine

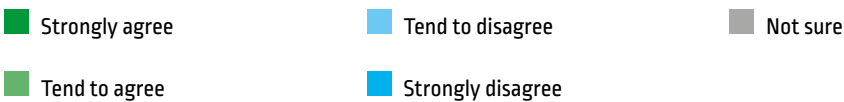


- Even if Poland/Ukraine has good living conditions in the future, I would still prefer to live abroad permanently

Poland



Ukraine



Topics related to future plans, i.e. willingness to stay in the country versus leaving it, also emerged during the group discussions. Those interviews confirmed that young Ukrainians who have not left their country yet mostly do not see themselves as emigres and would not like to leave their homeland. Some mentioned the cultural distance as the underlying reason: for example, unfamiliarity with the language, customs and people, even in a country as close as Poland. Others, on the other hand, justify their

reluctance to emigrate by invoking patriotic values and love for their country.

“My mother has a friend who lives in Poland. She visits us and always says that things are easier out there. Well, things may be easier but you have to learn Polish. And my mother tells me: “Let’s go if they come close”.... The other day [it was Sunday night, I think] we

heard explosions. She said the easiest thing we could do is to go to Poland. But I don't want to go. I don't want to go abroad at all. I'm not attracted. Everyone tells me life is easier out there, but.... That woman has a daughter and she even said life is harder out there. Things are easier in Ukraine. Even if there is a war."

"You have a lot of friends here, you know your mother tongue and you know what you're doing. You know where you live, who you live with. You know everything. And out there, in another country, you know absolutely nothing. You don't know where to go, what to say, you don't know anyone."

"To be honest, I'd prefer to live in Ukraine. I like the culture, the language, the national heritage. In fact, our landscapes are very beautiful. But, unfortunately, most of the landscapes and cultural heritage are being destroyed now. The language is also being destroyed. And if there is still war in Ukraine by the time we become adults, the same brutal war, and if the same people stay in power, who only know how to steal money, and if our country does not develop but remains the same as it is now, then frankly, I wouldn't like to live in such a setting. If this is the case, then.... But my heart is in Ukraine."

"I think our future is in Ukraine. Well, if you get a job, it's easier to communicate as opposed to a situation when you don't know any other languages."

"Probably in Poland, but I wouldn't rule out moving to another country. I don't like to change my place of residence, but maybe I'd be tempted by some job offer because you can earn a better salary abroad, for example if you are a doctor." [older respondents, Warsaw]

"It would be hard for me to leave the country permanently or for a longer period of time because I was born in Poland, in Warsaw, and in a few years, even if, God forbid, some stuff were falling from the sky on my head, it would still be hard because I can't imagine living in another country, I'm used to mine." [younger respondents, Warsaw]

"In Poland, definitely, because my family is here and I can't imagine my parents living in Poland and myself living X number of kilometres away where we see each other very rarely." [older respondents, Warsaw]

"I'd like to stay in Poland, but if the current political situation does not change, I will strive to leave Poland and make a life for myself elsewhere." [younger respondents, Toruń]

"Most of the people in our society are looking into the future and they want to create the best life they can. When they look at Poland and our economy, they can't see how they can earn money, and that's why most people choose to go abroad." [younger respondents, Toruń]

When considering emigration, young people in Poland most often mention economic factors as the reason: wanting to find a job, earn a higher income, achieve financial stability and security. In this context, Polish respondents never mentioned a sense of insecurity in Poland against the background of the war in Ukraine or even a sense of threat in view of current international events.

On the other hand, some young Poles did not accept the current political situation in the country (during the fieldwork period): for them, this was a sufficient reason to consider emigrating and settling permanently outside Poland in the future.



Interest in national and international affairs



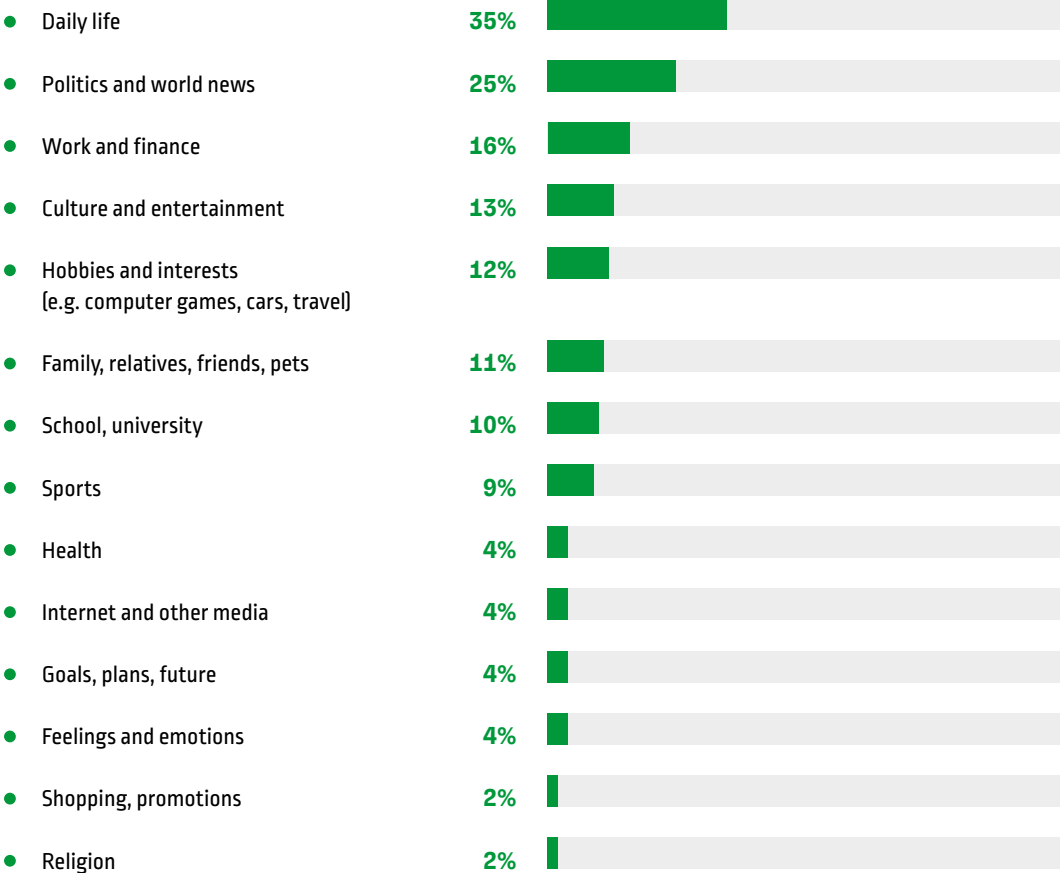
The different realities of everyday life in Poland and Ukraine can be illustrated by a comparison of topics most frequently raised by young respondents in conversations with their peers. Young Poles are more preoccupied with topics related to everyday life whereas young Ukrainians

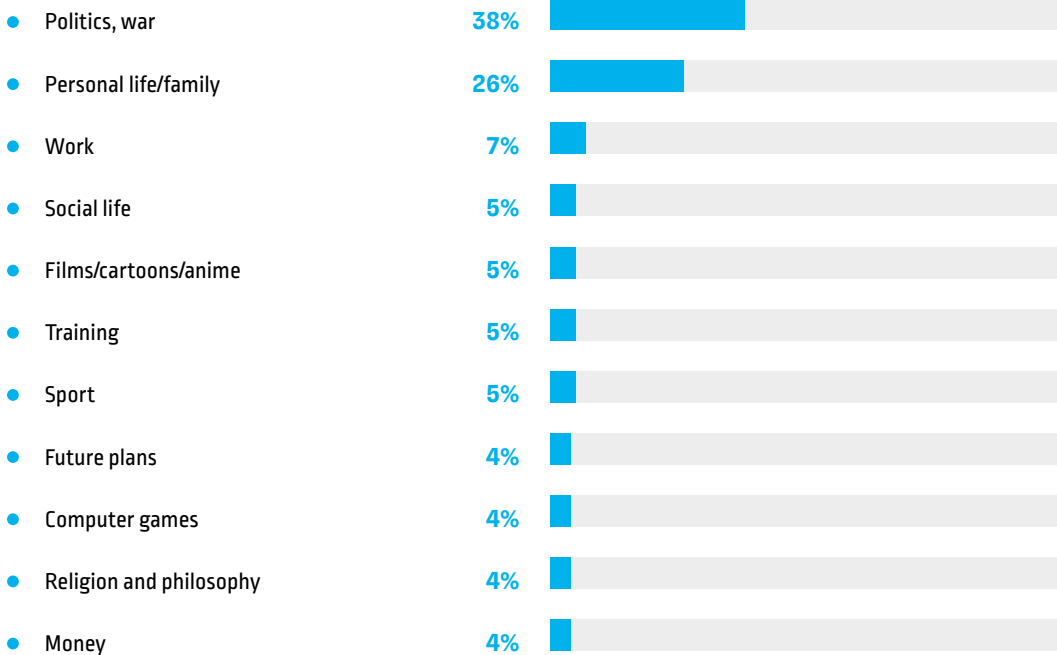
talk primarily about politics and the war as they are living in the shadow of hostilities. Conversations about culture, entertainment, hobbies and interests are mentioned by around **12%** of young Poles, while these kinds of issues get the attention of only **5%** of their Ukrainian peers.

↓ FIGURE 8:

Topics of conversations with peers

Poles



Ukrainians

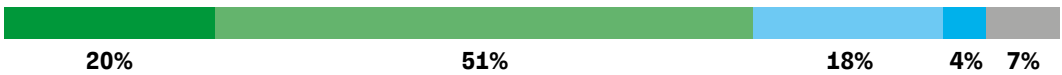
Interest in the current situation in their respective countries and in international affairs remains at a similar level in the compared groups. However, the group of Ukrainians keenly interested in the political situation of their country

is by **15 p.p.** greater in comparison with the same group surveyed in Poland. At the same time, young Ukrainians are significantly less interested than young Poles in world-view-related disputes.

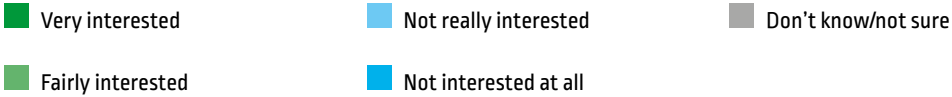
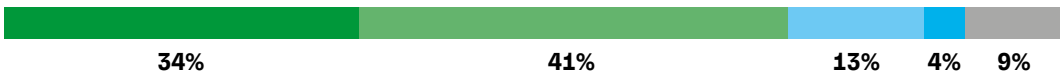
↓ FIGURE 9:

Interest in the political situation in the country

Poland



Ukraine



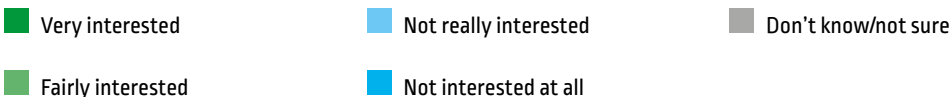
↓ FIGURE 10:

Interest in international affairs and situation around the world

Poland



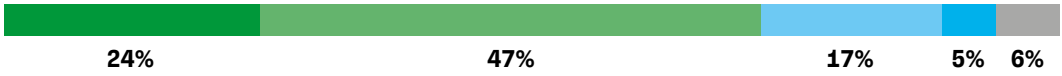
Ukraine



↓ FIGURE 11:

Interest in disputes about worldview

Poland



Ukraine



- Very interested
- Fairly interested
- Not really interested
- Not interested at all
- Don't know/not sure

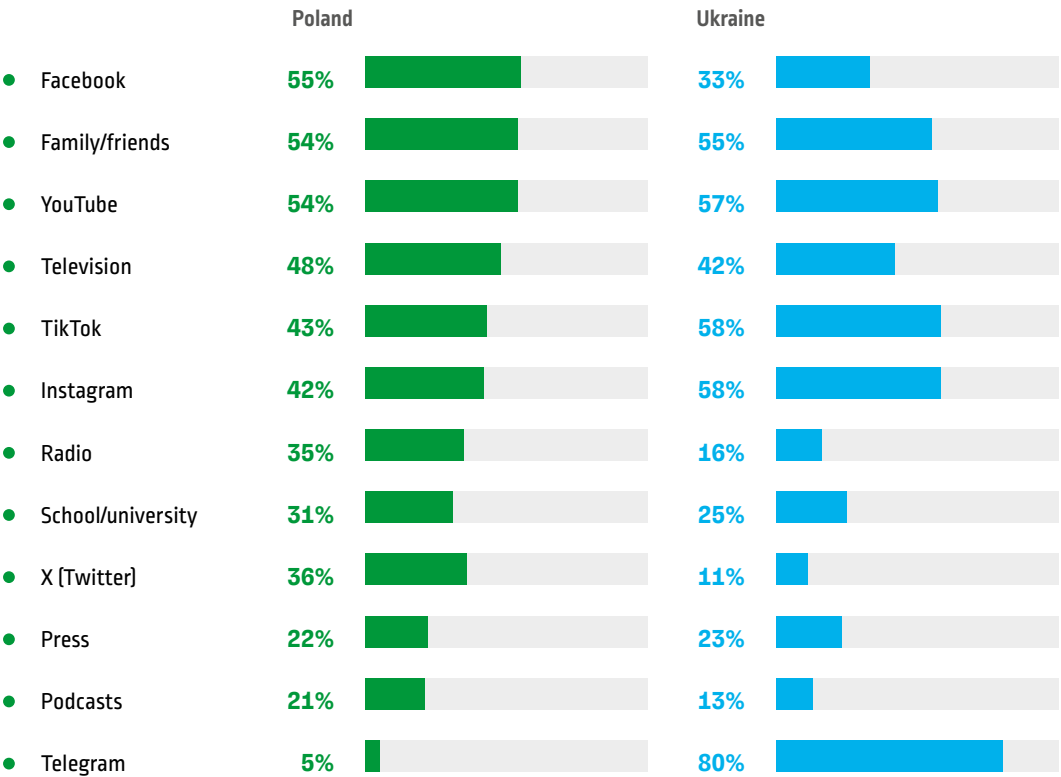
Significant differences in findings between young people from Poland and Ukraine can also be observed in the question on sources of news about events at home and abroad. Young Poles are most likely to get their news via Facebook, communication with family and friends and YouTube. Young Ukrainians, on the other hand, mostly get their news on these topics from Telegram channels, with 80% of the surveyed young Ukrainians using this source

of information. In contrast, Telegram was mentioned only by 5% of the Polish respondents.

At the same time, both surveyed groups signalled a departure from traditional news sources such as television, press or radio, shifting towards online sources such as social media, news sites or mobile apps. This, of course, reflects the evolution of news consumption that has been happening on a global scale.

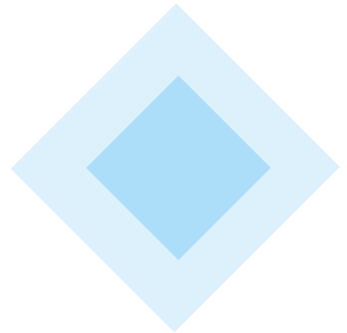
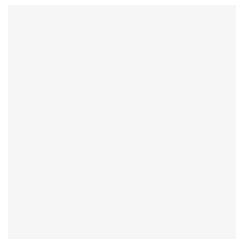
↓ FIGURE 12:

Sources of news on national and international events





Interest in national history



Young Ukrainians demonstrate a stronger connection with the cultural heritage of their country, understood as the degree of interest in its history. As many as four fifths of the respondents expressed interest in the history of Ukraine, with a half of them declaring a significant degree of interest. In the case of young Poles, the declarative level of interest in the history of their own country is by **17 p.p.** lower.

Interest in history may be driven by a variety of reasons, including a sense of national identity, a desire to understand one's roots and traditions, and an awareness of the importance of history for the national and social identity. For Ukrainians, a higher interest in the past may indicate a stronger need to find a historical context for the current situation of their country.

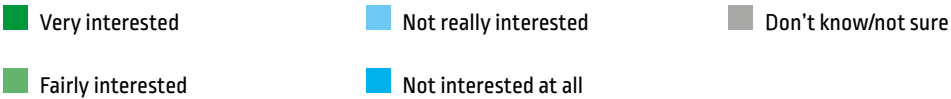
↓ FIGURE 13:

Interest in the history of one's own country

Poland



Ukraine



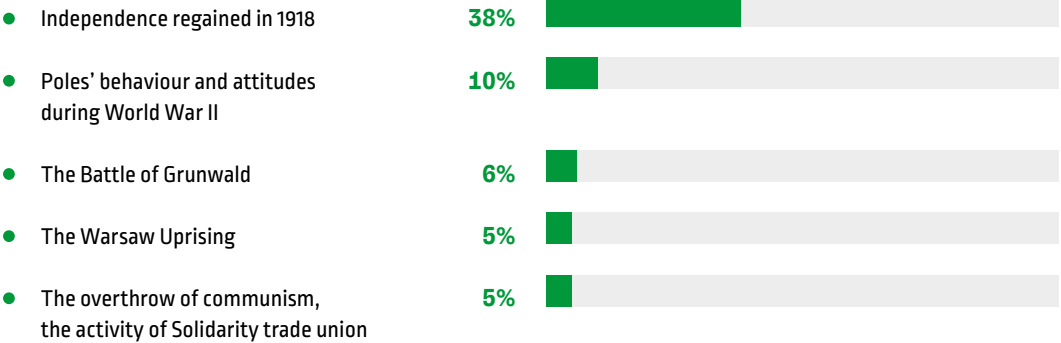
For both Poland and Ukraine, the historical events that were most frequently mentioned by young people as a source of pride are connected with the independence of their respective countries. The regaining of Poland's

independence in 1918 was spontaneously invoked by **38%** of young Poles taking part in the study. In the case of Ukraine, the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1991 topped the list, with 37% of mentions.

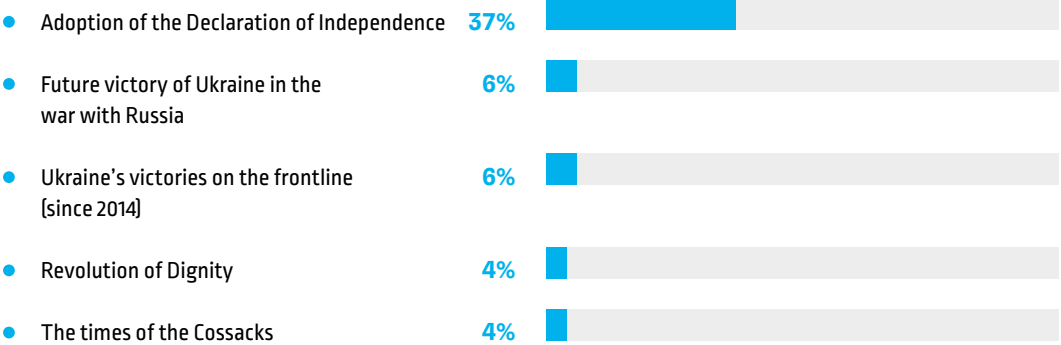
↓ FIGURE 14:

What can we be proud of in the history of our country (Top 5)

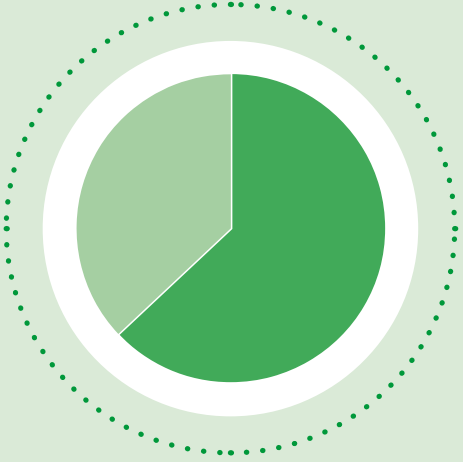
Poles



Ukrainians



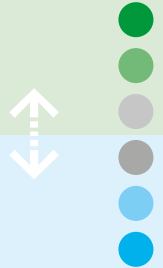
Interest in the history
of one's own country



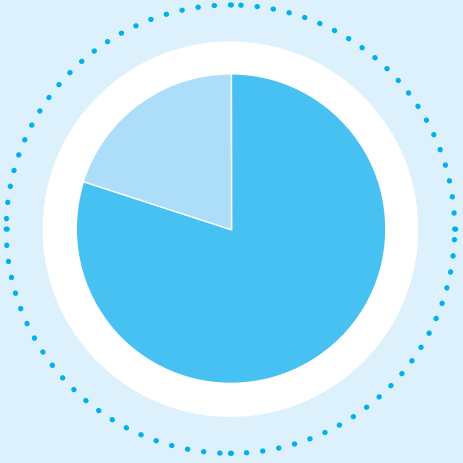
Poland:

Very/fairly interested

63%



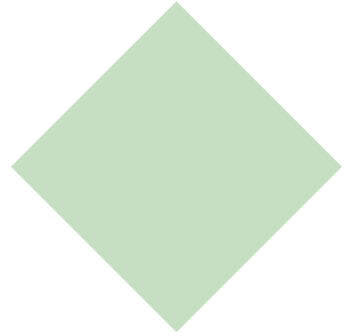
Interest in the history
of one's own country



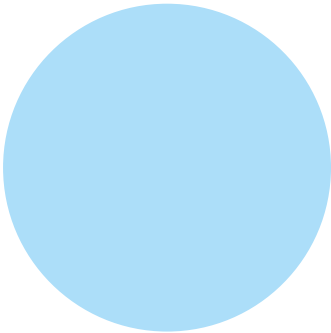
Ukraine:

Very/fairly interested

80%



Perception of the neighbouring countries

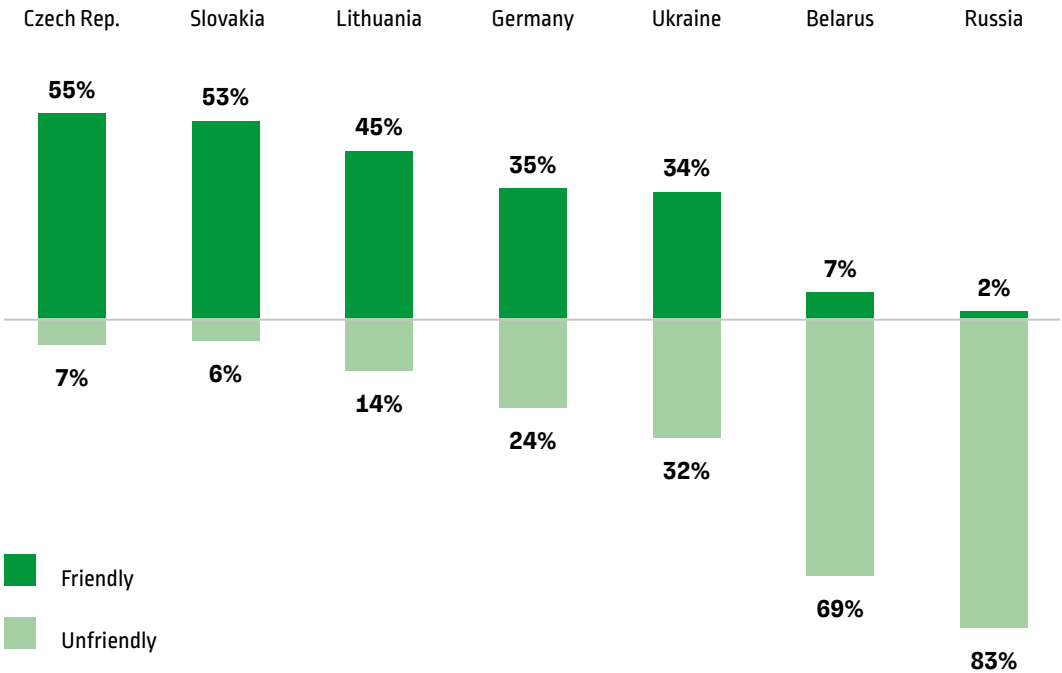


Both Poles and Ukrainians see Russia and Belarus as unfriendly countries. Notably, Ukrainians are much more likely to view Poland as a country that is friendly towards Ukraine in comparison with the share of Poles considering Ukraine as a friendly country in relations with Poland.

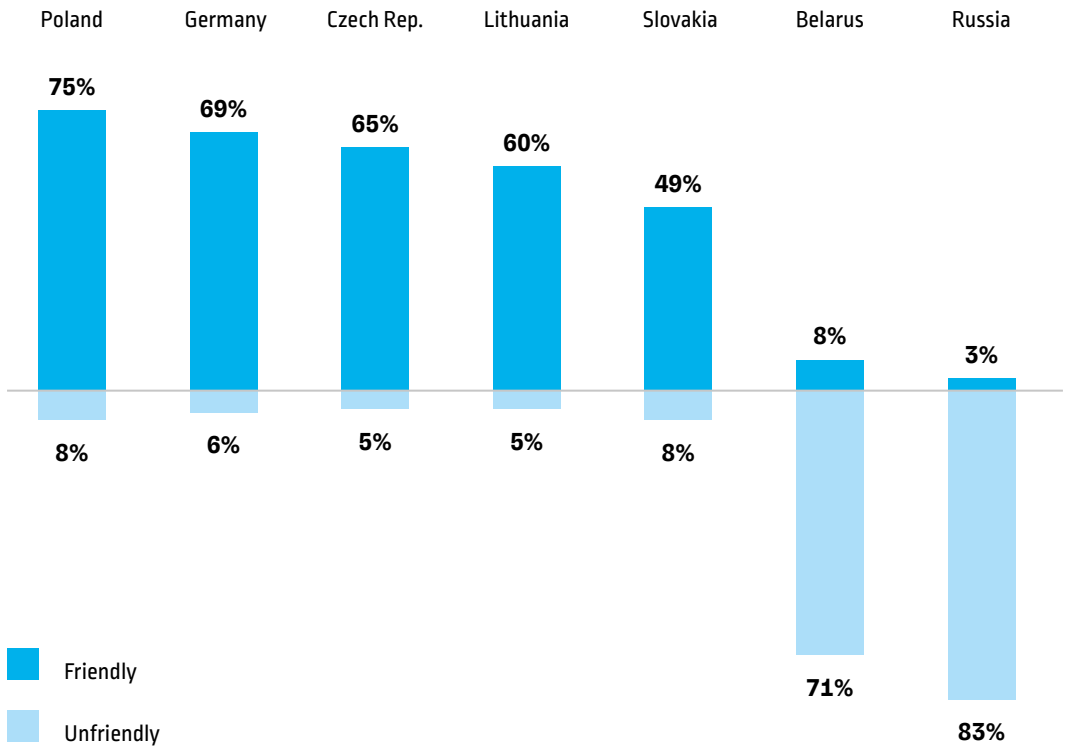
↓ FIGURE 15:

How do you perceive other countries' attitudes towards your country?

Poles



Ukrainians



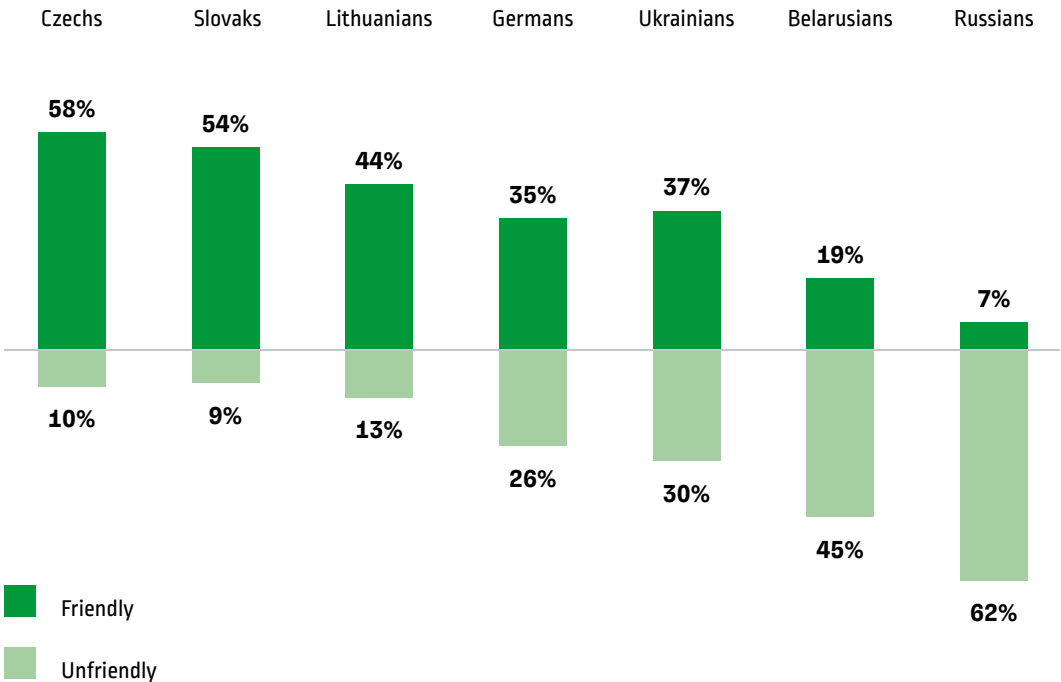
The perception of attitudes displayed by nations is similar to those shown by countries. Again, Poles are considered by Ukrainians to be the most friendly nation. On the other hand, Poles perceive Ukrainians differently, mentioning the Czechs, Slovaks and Lithuanians as the friendliest nations, with Ukrainians being positioned behind the Germans.

Therefore, we can observe a noticeable disparity in mutual perceptions: its origins may lie in communication problems as well as in the historical context.

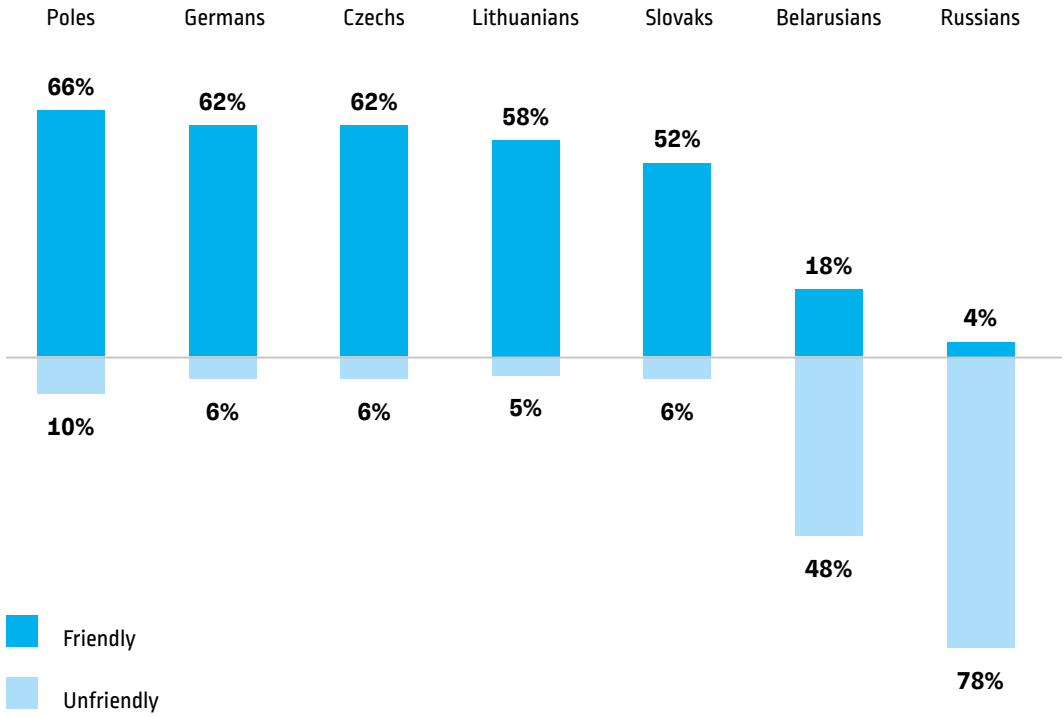
↓ FIGURE 16:

. How do you perceive other nations' attitudes towards your country?

Poles



Ukrainians



Poland/Ukraine: Mutual perceptions

The disparity between the opinions expressed by young Poles and young Ukrainians is noticeable not only in attitudes, but also in mutual perceptions of the neighbouring

country. Ukrainians assess Poland clearly better in all aspects in comparison with how Poles perceive Ukraine.

↓ FIGURE 17:

Image of Ukraine/Poland

Image of Ukraine among Poles

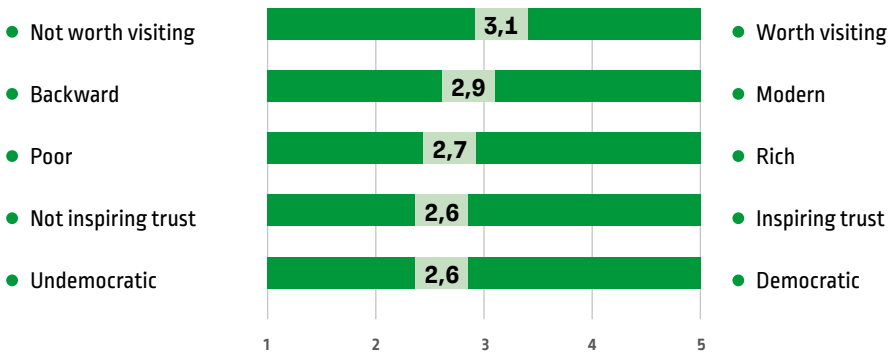
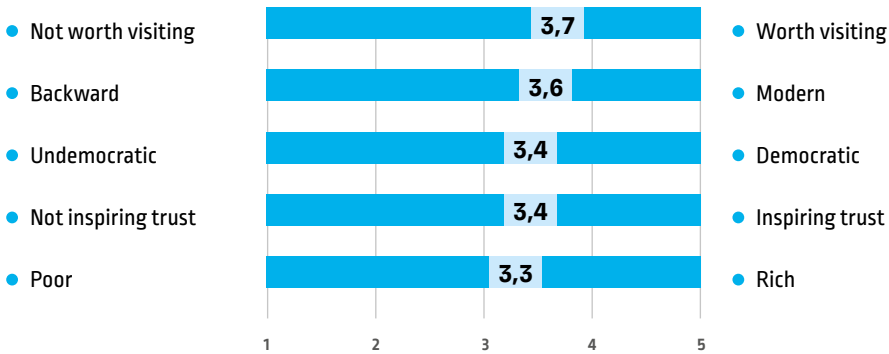


Image of Poland among Ukrainians

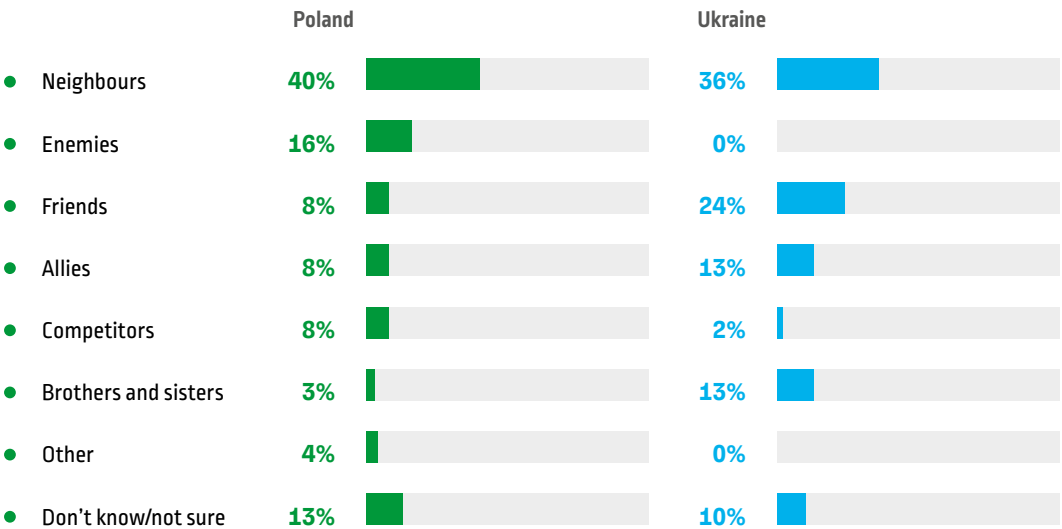


Another disparity in mutual perceptions between Poles and Ukrainians is reflected in the answers to the question on labels we can use to speak about our neighbours. It turns out that **24%** of Ukrainians refer to Poles as 'friends', while only **8%** of Poles use the same term with reference

to Ukrainians. Also, Ukrainians are much more likely than Poles to refer to the other nation as 'brothers and sisters'. At the same time, the term 'enemy' is used in mutual relations only by Poles: **16%** of them use this label with reference to Ukrainians.

↓ FIGURE 18:

How Ukrainians/Poles are perceived

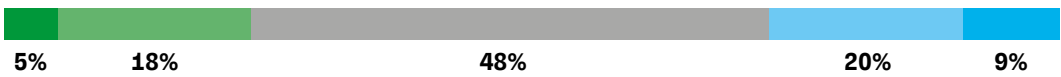


Overall, **48%** of Ukrainians see Polish-Ukrainian relations as good or very good. Poles are slightly more sceptical: only **23%** of them assess these relations positively. Interestingly, as many as **48%** of Poles express a neutral opinion about the status quo in these relations.

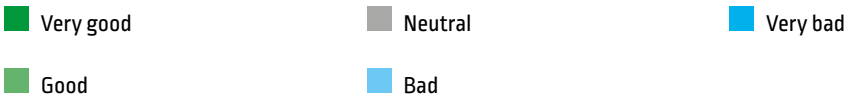
↓ FIGURE 19:

Assessment of Polish-Ukrainian relations

Poland



Ukraine



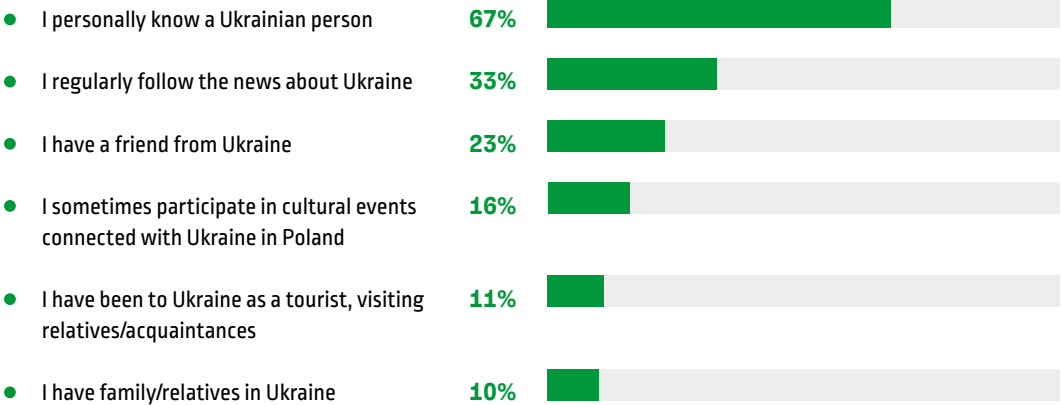
For natural reasons, more Ukrainians than Poles can boast to have personal relations with citizens of the neighbouring

country. This might also explain the more friendly attitudes towards Poles among Ukrainians.

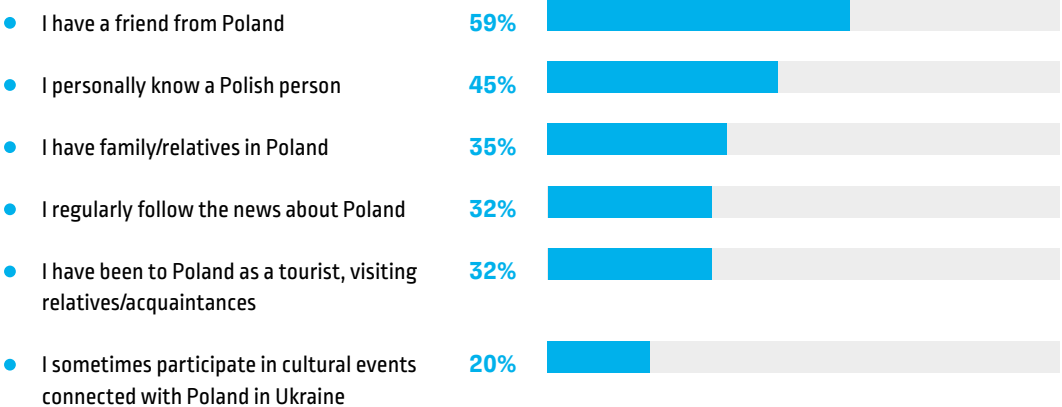
↓ FIGURE 20:

Personal experience related to...

Ukraine and Ukrainians – among Poles



Poland and Poles – among Ukrainians



Ukrainians also see more similarities than differences between themselves and their Polish peers. They see common traits and values that unite them with their Polish neighbours.

Young Poles, in turn, present a more neutral attitude. Some are more inclined to see similarities between Poles

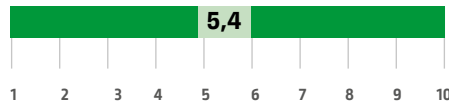
and Ukrainians, noticing the qualities and values that unite the two nations. Others tend to accentuate cultural and historical differences that divide the two nations.

↓ FIGURE 21:

Perceptions of peers...

from Ukraine – among Poles

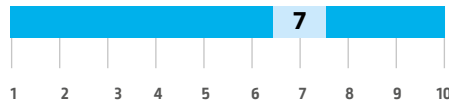
- I can see more differences than similarities between peers from Ukraine and Poland



- I can see more similarities than differences between peers from Ukraine and Poland

from Poland – among Ukrainians

- I can see more differences than similarities between peers from Ukraine and Poland



- I can see more similarities than differences between peers from Ukraine and Poland

During the focus group interviews, young Ukrainians also emphasised that they occasionally felt some kind of dislike from Poles, often linking this impression to conflicts that have recently emerged at the border (grain, transport). In general, however, statements made by young Ukrainians are, above all, filled with gratitude towards Poles and even understanding of their changing attitudes.

“At first, our people arrived in fear and dismay thinking ‘it’s over, my home is gone, I’ve got nowhere to live, no reason to be alive’. We were naked, barefoot and hairless, as they say. And then they were out there... Someone helped them out there. They got a job. They felt some freedom of speech. And they started pumping some stuff of their own. And, of course, Poles have a reason not to like it, either. And Poles now think the same about us. And it’s harder to ‘take root’ there, to put it brutally. It has become harder now to find a job or a flat. Overall, this whole business has become a bit more difficult all over Europe.”

“However, many Poles dislike Ukrainians. For example, when my friend came to Poland, Poles treated her very badly. Because of this thing about Bohdan Khmelnytsky.... Well, we also had conflicts with them very often in our history. But now they are ... well, friendly, they are.”

“Well, Polish people treated us well since the beginning of the invasion. But after the recent quarrels something started to go wrong. They started treating us badly. Well, most of them.”

In the opinion of focus groups participants in Poland, our eastern and southern neighbours are culturally closest. According to some views, it depends on the region of Poland because Poles also vary quite significantly within their own country.

“Poland is culturally divided in terms of who ruled this part of Poland in the past, and it shows. Things are very different in Silesia versus Podlasie. Silesians are more like

Germans while people from Podlasie are more like... closer to Belarus or Ukraine, or Russia.”

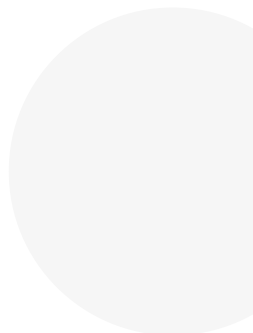
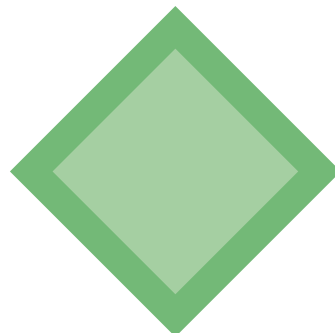
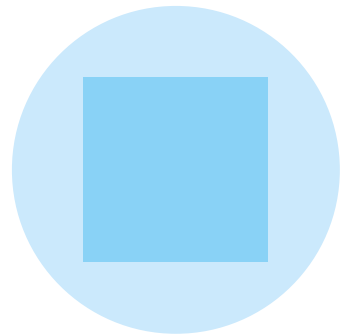
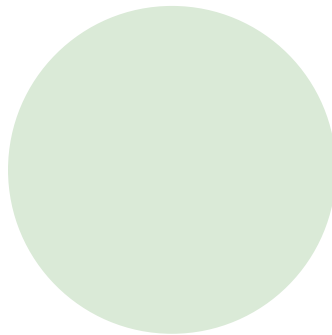
“I would probably mention eastern countries, maybe Belarus or Ukraine for the most part. Or, possibly, countries in the south, like Slovakia or Czechia. I would point to Slovakia and Czechia as a midpoint.”

When talking about Ukrainians in this context, Poles were more likely to mention proximity and similarities rather than significant differences. This reflection was also repeated when young Poles compared themselves to their Ukrainian peers while moving from one topic to another during the discussion.

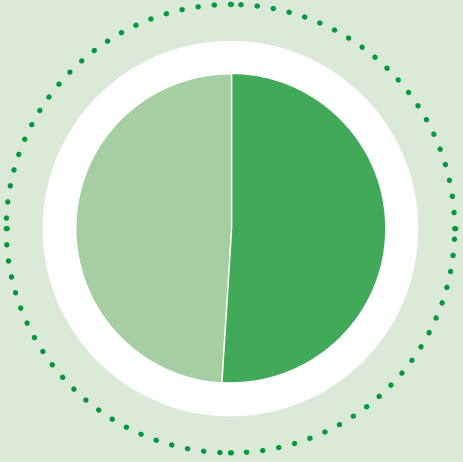
“Poland has made more progress than Ukraine, but we’re similar in terms of language and attitudes. When I worked with Ukrainians, it was similar.... if it wasn’t for the accent, I’d say they were Poles.”



Ukraine's integration into the EU and NATO



Support for Ukraine's
accession to UE

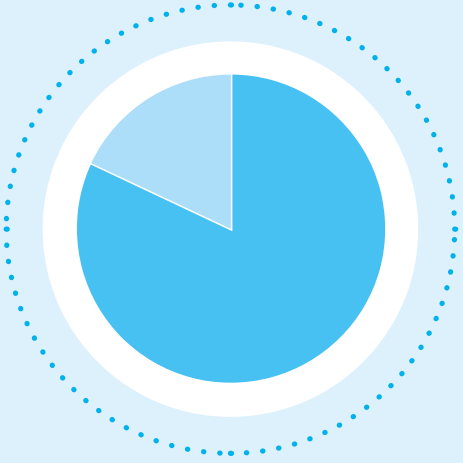


Poland:

Yes, definitely/Yes, probably

51%

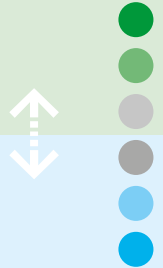
Support for Ukraine's
accession to UE



Ukraine:

Yes, definitely/Yes, probably

82%



Ukraine's desire to join the European Union and NATO is clear and strong, as reflected in the results of the two surveys, with **82%** and **85%** of Ukrainians respectively declaring support for such steps. They see membership of these organisations as an opportunity to reinforce Ukraine's ties with Western Europe and to strengthen their country's security in the face of Russian aggression.

As regards Poles, the acceptance for Ukraine's membership in the EU and NATO is not so unambiguous. There is still a significant group of Polish respondents who are in favour of this scenario, with **51%** accepting the admission of Ukraine to the EU and **54%** saying so in the context of NATO. However, the differences between the responses given by Poles and Ukrainians are very vivid.

↓ FIGURE 22:

Support for Ukraine's accession to UE

Poland



Ukraine



■ Yes, definitely

■ No, probably not

■ I have already joined

■ Yes, probably

■ No, definitely not

■ Don't know/not sure

↓ FIGURE 23:

Support for Ukraine's accession to NATO

Poland



Ukraine



- Yes, definitely
- Yes, probably
- No, probably not
- No, definitely not
- I have already joined
- Don't know/not sure

9. Summary

Based on their declarations, young respondents from Poland presented themselves as beneficiaries of the stable situation in their country despite the surrounding threats and tensions. This can be seen as the key finding from the Polish part of the project. Polish youth turned out to be generally free of the fears that were (and probably still are) part of the mentality of the older generations. Brought up with Poland as a member state of the EU and NATO, young Poles view the current reality as well-established and natural. It is worth emphasising that the narrative about the momentous importance of Western political and military structures, which has been present in the Polish media and public debate for many years, has proven to be very effective among the young generation of Poles.

This worldview entails specific attitudes to values and identity issues. Young Poles place the greatest emphasis on individual development and well-being, attaching importance to harmony and appropriate balance between education, work and leisure. This is one of the reasons why young Poles are so very willing to pursue their dreams and plans in other countries. At the same time, however, young people in Poland demonstrated great interest in national and international developments, especially those related to the war in Ukraine.

“The further west you go, the longer you can remain a child. The further east you go, the faster you have to reach adulthood.”

This quote from one of the Polish respondents taking part in a focus group discussion aptly captures the fundamental difference in the situation of Poles and Ukrainians. The study carried out in Ukraine confirms this diagnosis. Young Ukrainians demonstrate a much greater political awareness since they were forced by circumstances to get immersed in events outside the private sphere. Deprived of the privileges of ‘worry-free young years’, they have become, in a sense, ‘more adult’. What draws attention is that their judgments seem more mature and their understanding of complex phenomena seems deeper.

An element vividly emerging from this Polish-Ukrainian comparison is the strong morale of the young Ukrainians, their deep belief that their country is fighting for the

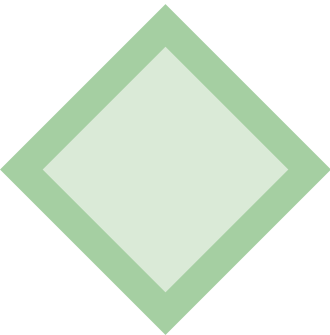
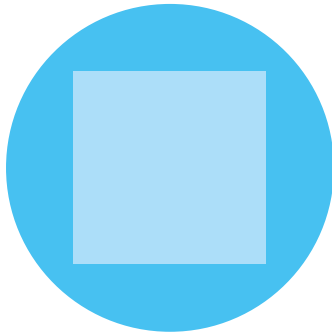
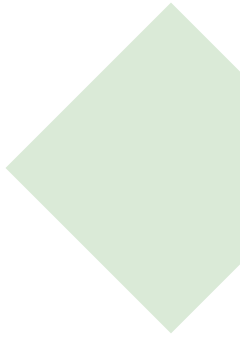
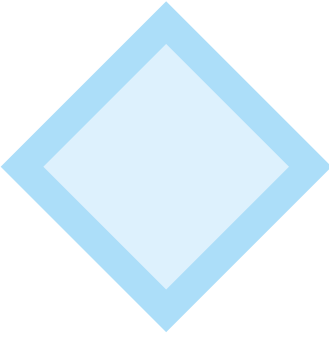
right cause, and, most significantly, their belief in the future of Ukraine. Patriotic attitudes with a strong emotional charge, which could be considered almost nationalistic under different circumstances, are very much present here. Somewhat paradoxically, young Ukrainians see the future of their war-torn country in brighter colours than their Polish peers imagine the future of their own homeland. Understandably, the temperature of patriotic feelings among young Poles is also different, not heightened by the context of war that forces more clear-cut and unambiguous declarations and attitudes.

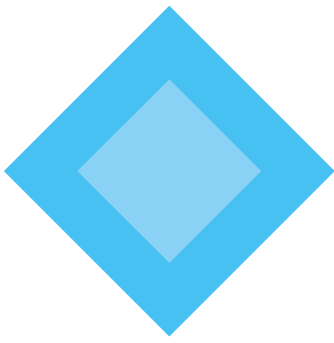
Young people’s perspectives on the neighbouring country and its inhabitants are also different. The study revealed a certain ambivalence in attitudes towards Ukraine and Ukrainians among young Poles. There is a noticeable dissonance between the positive experiences from direct contact with Ukrainian peers and the not-always-favourable narratives about Ukraine from the mainstream media, social networks or, in some cases, also from the messages coming from respondents’ relatives and personal networks. This is an important finding, especially in the context of the widespread liking for Poland and Poles that emerges from the declarations made by Ukrainian respondents. It could be said that young Ukrainians see things more unambiguously since the war context blurs nuances, rendering a clear division into friends and enemies. Thus, the Ukrainian study revealed a significant potential for public liking for Poland, with only a minor distortion caused by the current economic disputes. The Polish perspective, on the other hand, is more focused on current differences in interests, unresolved historical issues, the complexity of Ukraine’s potential integration into European structures, etc.

It is probably fair to say that the different security situation surrounding the lives of Polish and Ukrainian respondents impinges on their overall views and attitudes, lifestyles, interests, rationales and emotions experienced in daily life. While this conclusion seems obvious, one needs to look beyond the appearances. The boundary situations created by the ongoing war, its reality and tangibility – all of this introduces entirely new contexts into the lives of individuals and groups. The presence of the war in the lives of young Ukrainians and its remoteness in the case of young

Poles is a variable that intervenes very strongly in their awareness and identity. From the standpoint of young inhabitants of a stable and still relatively safe country such as Poland during the fieldwork period, and from the perspective of people who have no direct or even mediated experience of the war threat, the Ukrainian perspective remains inaccessible and distant. In contrast, young Ukrainians are all too familiar with both realities: the peaceful one, where one can 'remain a child' for longer, and the wartime one, which forces youths to grow up at an accelerated pace.

However, regardless of the numerous differences revealed by the two studies, what remains common is the experience of Polish-Ukrainian contacts, friendships and interactions, as well as the strengthened presence of both countries and peoples in each other's awareness. Exactly this finding should be seen as the source of the greatest potential for future relations between Poland and Ukraine.





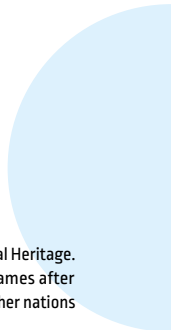
While young Poles feel that their country's security is ensured by membership in the Western political and military structures, young Ukrainians are already showing some signs of habituation: they seem used to living under the threat or even accustomed to the war. Of course, Ukrainians are well aware of the consequences of the war in their country. Nevertheless, it was sometimes clear from respondents' accounts that the existing threat is gradually becoming the 'new normal' in their everyday life, probably due to the physical distance from the frontline, at least in focus group locations (Kyiv and Lubny).



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The Mieroszewski Centre is a Polish state institution established by the Polish Parliament and supervised by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. Our mission is to run and support projects aimed at building dialogue between Poles and the nations of eastern Europe. The Centre is named after Juliusz Mieroszewski, one of the most prominent Polish political writers of the 20th century. He championed cooperation between Poles and other nations suffering under Russian and Soviet imperialism.