KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG

Ukrainians Abroad: Preservation of Identity, Prospects of Return and Countering Russian Influence

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2026

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Summary

At the end of 2025, 4.35 million people who had left Ukraine held temporary protection status in the European Union; by mid-2026 that figure had risen to 4.41 million (Eurostat). This is one of the largest waves of forced displacement in Europe since the Second World War and the largest in the history of the EU temporary protection mechanism. It is at the same time a unique strategic resource that Ukraine has so far barely used systematically. In July 2026, the Council of the EU adopted an extension of temporary protection until March 4, 2028, and it is precisely this period that opens a window for active work on retaining identity and encouraging return.

The empirical basis of this note is a qualitative study by the Institute for National Resilience and Security (INRS): 100 in-depth interviews in Belgium, France, Italy, Germany and Poland conducted in February–April 2026 (see the methodological note for details). Despite the differences between countries, several patterns recur everywhere. For the overwhelming majority of respondents, emigration did not weaken Ukrainian identity but strengthened it, to the point of forming a parallel "survival infrastructure" of schools, civil society organizations and cultural centers that de facto substitutes for absent state policy. Intentions to return are meanwhile polarized along the age axis: people under 30 and part of the men are oriented toward staying, whereas the middle and older generations declare an intention to return. The critical period is the third to fifth year of residence, when the "anchors" in the host country begin to outweigh the "anchors" in Ukraine and the "point of no return" arrives. Finally, Russian influence operates not as a set of separate actions but as a single networked system of six interconnected channels: from the institutional one (parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) of the Moscow Patriarchate and its satellites) to the digital (Storm-1516, Voice of Europe) and the everyday.

The most underinvested area remains countering influence at the infrastructure level. The asymmetry between the presence of the ROC sphere (~270–295 structures in the five focus countries) and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU; 15 communities in two of the five focus countries; outside the five, a chaplaincy mission has also operated in the Czech Republic since 2025) is systemic in nature, and, according to the study's findings, none of the host states is addressing it substantively. The note sets out twelve recommendations for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Ukraine. The key ones are: activating the "diaspora resource" through the Mission of Ukraine to the European Union; initiating a dialogue with the Ecumenical Patriarchate on the provision of the 2019 Tomos that limits the jurisdiction of the OCU to the territory of Ukraine, in order to give Ukrainian parishes abroad legal standing; systematic funding of Saturday schools and Ukrainian-language psychological support; and launching a single coordination mechanism for diaspora policy.

Methodological Note

The empirical basis of this note is 100 in-depth interviews with Ukrainian refugees in Belgium, France, Italy, Germany and Poland, conducted by an INRS research team in February–April 2026[1]. Respondents were recruited by snowball sampling. The study design is qualitative: it makes it possible to capture the structure of phenomena, the types of adaptation strategies and the mechanisms of influence, but it does not yield statistically representative shares. Formulations such as “the overwhelming majority” describe the sample, not the general population. The most isolated groups – people outside communities and digital networks – are underrepresented in the sample; this is an expected consequence of snowball sampling and the study’s main limitation. The primary interview materials (audio recordings, transcripts, coding) are internal INRS documents and are not for publication; the generalized results are presented in the Institute’s reports[2][3][4].

The five focus countries were selected on a combination of three criteria: the scale and structure of the Ukrainian presence (the new wave of 2022 and/or an established older diaspora), documented activity of Russian influence channels, and the research team’s access to respondents through partner networks. Together the five cover a spectrum of integration models – from the Polish one (linguistic proximity, high employment) to the Belgian one (state funding of recognized religions).

The interview materials were triangulated with open data from European state bodies (the French VIGINUM – the vigilance and protection service against foreign digital interference under the SGDSN, the Belgian State Security Service VSSE, the Italian External Intelligence and Security Agency (AISE), and the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees BAMF) and monitoring organizations (NewsGuard, the Alliance for Securing Democracy of the German Marshall Fund ASD/GMF, the Bratislava-based think tank GLOBSEC and the EUvsDisinfo project of the European External Action Service (EEAS)); macro indicators are taken from official statistics (Eurostat, the German Institute for Employment Research (IAB), the OECD, the National Bank of Poland (NBP)). A conservative principle was applied to the attribution of Russian influence: every channel described is confirmed by at least two independent pieces of evidence and/or documented by state bodies of the host countries. The quantitative estimates of infrastructure given in the text as ranges (for example, ~270–295 structures of the ROC sphere) are INRS expert estimates based on diocesan data and public registers; the range format reflects the impossibility of an exact count and should be read as an estimate rather than an established statistical fact.

I. Assimilation, Identity and Prospects of Return

1.1. Scale and structure of Ukrainian presence in EU

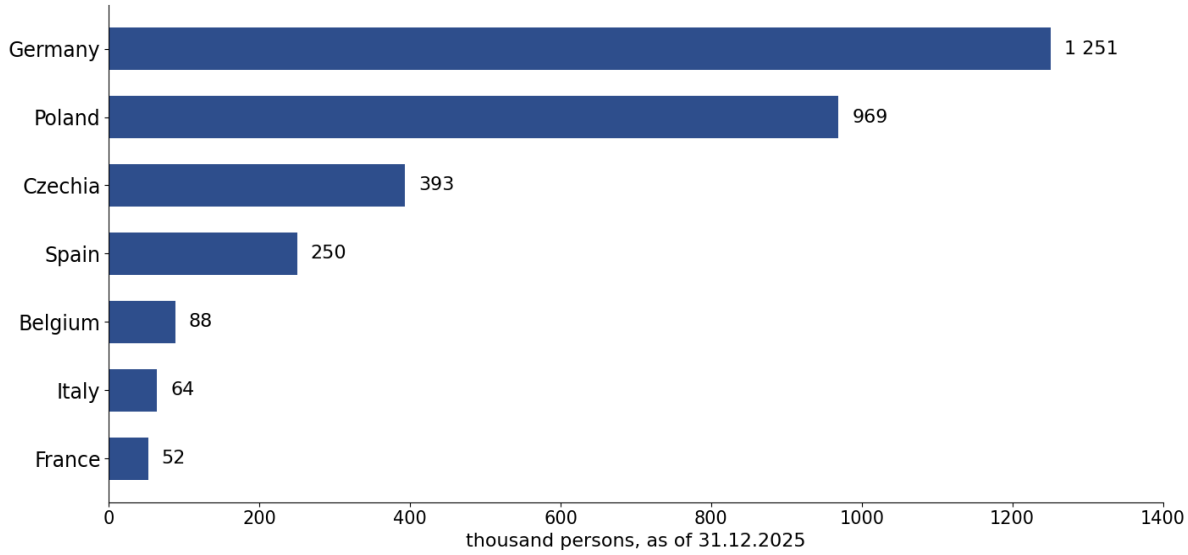
According to Eurostat, as of December 31, 2025, 4.35 million people who had left Ukraine held temporary protection in the EU[5][6], and as of mid-2026 the figure was around 4.41 million[7]. The distribution between countries is sharply asymmetric (Table 1, Figure 1); outside the five focus countries, the largest communities have formed in the Czech Republic (around 393,000) and Spain (over 250,000). The headline figure does not, however, reflect strategic weight. Italy, with a relatively small current wave, has the largest established Ukrainian labor migration diaspora in Western Europe, dating from the 1990s and 2000s: according to official data, around 230,000–250,000 people, and estimates including informal employment reach half a million[8] (predominantly women working as carers). This older diaspora is structurally inseparable from the new wave and constitutes a resource rather than a vulnerability – a critical mass for deploying Ukrainian church, educational and cultural infrastructure.

Table 1. Temporary protection and employment in five focus countries

Country	Under temporary protection, thousands of people (Eurostat, December 31, 2025[9])	Refugee employment, %	Source and period of employment data
Germany	1,251	37	Bundesagentur für Arbeit, February 2026[10]
Poland	969	69	Deloitte / UNHCR, 2024[11]; NBP, 2025[12]
Belgium	88	15	OECD, 2024[13]
Italy	64	n/a	–
France	52	32	OECD, 2024[14]

Employment indicators are not fully comparable between countries because of different calculation bases, coverage of self-employment and measurement dates; they are given as a guide rather than a ranking. The data for Belgium and France are the latest available international comparisons and may not reflect the dynamics of 2025–2026.

Figure 1. Ukrainians under temporary protection in EU, thousands of people



Source: Eurostat, migr_asytpsm, as of December 31, 2025[15].

The legal status of most refugees remains temporary[16]. EU countries gave political agreement to extend it until March 4, 2028 on July 15, 2026, and on July 30 the Council adopted Implementing Decision (EU) 2026/1912, in force from August 5, 2026[17]. Under Article 2 of that decision, temporary protection is henceforth granted only to persons who comply with military service obligations under Ukrainian law (with confirmation where required); the requirement does not apply to those who already held protection as of July 30, 2026 and have maintained it continuously. The framework for the next stage is set by the Council Recommendation of September 16, 2025 on a coordinated transition out of temporary protection – through a move to other legal statuses (work, study, family grounds) or sustainable voluntary return; Decision 2026/1912 refers to it as well[18]. None of the five focus countries has yet translated this recommendation into an agreed national strategy for transition to permanent residence. The result is a regime of prolonged legal uncertainty – "permanent temporariness", in which a person extends their status six or eight times in a row without receiving either a full integration package or a clear legal prospect. This regime is in itself a risk factor: it holds people in a state of unfinished choice and increases their vulnerability to manipulative narratives.

The practical content of temporary protection is meanwhile diverging more and more between countries, and for Ukrainians this means different life trajectories for 2026–2028. Germany is moving toward tougher activation: people who arrived after April 1, 2025 receive benefits under the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act (around 441 euros as against 563 euros under the previous system), and from July 1, 2026 the Bürgergeld was replaced by the Grundsicherung, with an obligation to accept any feasible work and stricter monitoring of savings[19]. Poland has tied social support to integration behavior: from 2026, the 800+ payment for Ukrainian citizens requires formal employment of one of the parents, the child's attendance at a Polish school and actual residence in the country, with automatic monthly verification by the Social Insurance Institution of Poland (ZUS)[20]. The Czech Republic was the first to open a regulated exit from temporariness: a special long-term residence permit (ZDP) for economically self-sufficient persons, in which 56,500 people expressed interest in 2026[21]. The common vector is that host states are moving from unconditional humanitarian support to conditional support tied to employment and children's education. For the retention of identity this is a double-edged process – it accelerates integration and thereby makes the "anchors" in the host country still heavier.

1.2. Assimilation or strengthening of identity: empirical picture

One of the key results of the INRS study[22] is that it refutes the thesis that "dissolution" into European societies is the dominant trajectory for Ukrainians. For the overwhelming majority of respondents in all five countries, emigration strengthened rather than weakened Ukrainian identity. The most visible manifestation is the mass switch to the Ukrainian language, recorded even among people from Odesa, Kharkiv and the Donetsk region who until recently spoke Russian. To this are added the active construction of "third places" (Saturday schools, cultural centers, civil society organizations, Ukrainian-language theater groups) and their own formats of civic and cultural presence in the societies of the host countries. By the character of their identity, three types were distinguished in the sample: "conscious Ukrainians" – the largest group, for whom identity is a deliberate choice; the "awakened", who switched to Ukrainian only after going abroad (most strikingly in Poland); and the "ambivalent and depoliticized", who are the most vulnerable to Russian propaganda.

The risk of assimilation is instead concentrated by age. For primary school children without a Ukrainian-language environment, complete assimilation is possible within 2–3 years, according to their parents, and Saturday schools alone do not halt this dynamic. For young people aged 18–25, European universities and the labor market become natural "anchors". Older people close themselves into a family "cocoon" because of the language barrier. In terms of adaptation strategies, six cross-cutting types recur from Poland to Belgium: "active builders" (integration through language and skilled work), "transit passengers" in a state of "permanent temporariness", "institutional leaders" – the founders of civil society organizations and the core of the parallel infrastructure, "young integrators" at risk of assimilation within one and a half generations, the "ambivalent" and the "isolated". The core of vulnerability consists of the last two types. The sharpest intersection in the sample is a young man in social isolation, and the most resilient core is active middle-aged women.

1.3. Intentions to return: polarization by age and gender

According to the seventh wave of the UNHCR survey "Lives on Hold" (fieldwork: December 2025 – January 2026)[23], 49% of refugees hope or plan to return, as against 61% in 2024. Tellingly, the intention depends sharply on the scenario for ending the war: if territorial integrity is restored, 65% state that they are likely to return, whereas without the return of the occupied territories the figure is only 32%. The INRS data allow this picture to be refined. There is a systematic gap between declaration and behavior, and the intention itself is polarized: four positions were distinguished in the sample. Firm return is characteristic of the 55+ generation and of entrepreneurs with assets in Ukraine. Return depending on circumstances is the largest group, a state of "active waiting". Firm staying is declared predominantly by young people aged 18–30 and by women with small children who have completed a full integration cycle (school, work, housing). A separate position is the "cycle across countries", typical of some entrepreneurs and workers in seasonal sectors.

In the interview materials from all five countries, the phenomenon of the "School Rubicon" recurs: after 2–3 years of a child's integration into the local school system, the family effectively takes the decision not to return "on behalf of the parents". The child becomes the strongest predictor of the subsequent trajectory: if the child is fully adapted to a European school, the parents are not prepared to break that experience. The priority instruments are therefore precisely those that work with the "child" dimension – Saturday schools, Ukrainian-language educational platforms and distance programs of Ukrainian schools.

The second temporal marker is the “point of no return”, which according to the interviews arrives at around the third to fifth year of residence. This is a notional threshold rather than a hard law: the moment when the combined weight of the “anchors” here (work, social capital, children’s school, housing) exceeds the weight of the “anchors” in Ukraine (property, family, social ties). Once this point has been passed, the cost of any return rises sharply, and policies that try to bring people back encounter resistance that is existential rather than political in nature.

Over the 2026–2028 horizon a new factor is added – naturalization and transitional statuses. For part of the 2022 wave, the periods of residence required to acquire citizenship or permanent residence in EU countries will begin to expire precisely within this window, and mechanisms such as the Czech ZDP create a direct bridge to it[24]. The Ukrainian context has meanwhile changed fundamentally: since January 16, 2026, Law No. 4502-IX has been in force, legalizing multiple citizenship and allowing the acquisition of the citizenship of partner states without loss of Ukrainian citizenship[25]. This shifts the question from the frame of “will they return or not” to the frame of “will they retain or lose their connection with Ukraine”: a host-country passport no longer means an automatic break, and the task of policy becomes to turn multiple citizenship into a channel for maintaining that connection – through voting rights, economic participation and children’s education – rather than into the final full stop of emigration.

1.4. Attitudes to war and RF: dominant position and risk zones

The dominant position of respondents everywhere in the sample is unequivocally pro-Ukrainian and anti-Russian. The absolute majority express rejection of the Russian Federation’s (RF) war against Ukraine, support for the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) and reservations about the idea of “peace at any price”. Ukrainians have become active agents of advocacy: rallies, hearings in the European Parliament, work with municipalities.

At the same time, the study recorded a number of zones of vulnerability. The most visible is the “depolarizing effect” of emigration: some respondents note that after moving, their perception of the “Russian factor” became less categorical. Not in the sense of supporting the RF, but in the direction of moving away from a rigid “either–or”; most often these are people from eastern Ukraine who spoke Russian before the war and who in emigration are in everyday contact with the Russian-speaking diaspora. The second zone is vulnerability to narratives of “war fatigue” after 3–4 years of residence, especially in groups under high psychological strain (all 100 interviews contain self-described manifestations of psycho-emotional strain of varying intensity – this is an observation by the researchers, not a clinical assessment; in none of the five countries was a sustained system of Ukrainian-language psychological support found). The third is the “generational gap” in political consciousness between adults, for whom the war is a defining experience, and younger children, for whom Ukraine is “a fairy tale from mom’s phone” rather than their own life.

These zones do not make the community pro-Russian. They delineate the space in which Russian operational work (Section II) finds points of entry. The inertia of pro-Ukrainian identity is a resource that, without institutional support, is quickly exhausted; the window for effective work to maintain it is 2026–2028.

II. Key Instruments of Russian Influence on Ukrainian Communities in Europe

Analysis of the INRS research materials in the five countries, set against open data from European state institutions and think tanks (VIGINUM, VSSE, AISE, BAMF, Klub Jagielloński, OSW) and monitoring organizations (NewsGuard, ASD/GMF, GLOBSEC, EUvsDisinfo)[26][27][28][29][30][31], shows that Russian influence on the Ukrainian community in the EU operates not as a set of isolated actions but as a single adaptive architecture of six interconnected channels. The RF's total spending on propaganda and influence operations is estimated at 1.5–2 billion dollars a year[32][33]: the budget of the state media alone for 2026 amounts to 146.3 billion rubles (EEAS), while Debunk.org estimated 2022 spending at 1.9 billion dollars. On such a scale a symmetrical response is impossible and unnecessary; work must be targeted, at the nodes of greatest vulnerability.

2.1. Institutional backbone: ROC of Moscow Patriarchate and its satellites

The most institutionally developed and at the same time the least addressed channel of influence in counter-policies is the infrastructure of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. In the five focus countries the network of the ROC sphere numbers ~270–295 structures (Table 2)[34], and across Europe as a whole, including the Baltic states, around 560–660[35]; the flock of the three branches is estimated at 1.0–1.2 million people, and spending on the foreign network at 60–95 million dollars a year from state and oligarchic sources[36]. The church field consists of three branches: the ROC proper (direct jurisdiction of Moscow), the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR; reunited with the Moscow Patriarchate, MP, in 2007) and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP; former communities of the "foreign diaspora" since 2022; according to available data, the funding and expansion of this network is being handled by Ukrainian oligarchs). A separate case is the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (PAOC; ~235–263 parishes): legally autocephalous, yet on the question of Ukrainian autocephaly it takes Moscow's side. In Belgium, Orthodoxy is a recognized religion under the 1985 law, so the clergy and the upkeep of parishes, including those of the ROC, are financed by the state. Against this infrastructure, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine has 15 active communities in the five focus countries (here and below "community" is used as a synonym for parish): 11 chaplaincy communities in Poland and 4 in Germany, with 14 of the 15 chaplains serving alongside secular jobs; the only institutional model is the Polish network. Outside the five focus countries, an OCU chaplaincy mission has operated in the Czech Republic since August 2025, with communities in Brno and Prague[37]. This asymmetry is not accidental: it stems from the provision of the 2019 Tomos under which the jurisdiction of the OCU is limited to the territory of Ukraine, while parishes in the diaspora fall within the canonical competence of the Ecumenical See.

Table 2. Asymmetry of church infrastructure in five countries

Country	Network of the ROC sphere (ROC, ROCOR, UOC-MP)	Ukrainian church presence
Germany	~130 (ROC 61 + 2 cathedrals; ROCOR ~42; UOC-MP ~25–35)	~4 OCU communities; partly the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC)
Italy	~75–85; institutional core – Bari	the OCU is canonically absent; the hub is the UGCC
France	~35–45 parishes and communities	weak institutionalization; predominantly the UGCC
Belgium	~17–19, of which 14 ROC parishes on state funding	the OCU is absent; the core of the community is the UGCC
Poland	10–15 parishes; separately the PAOC (~235–263)	11 OCU chaplaincy communities – a working model

Sources: diocesan data and public registers; INRS report "The Russian Orthodox Church in Europe"[38]; data as of the first half of 2026. Ranges are INRS expert estimates (see the methodological note).

The most important element here is the very mechanics of drawing Ukrainian refugees into the parish environment and keeping them there, documented systematically for the first time in the INRS report "The Russian Orthodox Church in Europe: infrastructure of Russian influence"[39]. Seven practices recur in respondents' accounts, each of them recorded in at least two independent sources:

- free children's centers attached to parishes, aimed at mothers with children;
- free psychological training sessions in Russian for the traumatized and the lonely;
- material assistance through parishes for newcomers during the first 6–12 months;
- linguistic mimicry: use of the tryzub (trident), services in Ukrainian, names such as "Ukrainian Orthodox community";
- jurisdictional mimicry: "under Metropolitan Onufriy", formally without mentioning Kirill;
- systematic collection of parishioners' personal data ("the person with the notebook", video surveillance);
- recruitment to the "Russia against war" marches and to May 9 events.

Two phenomena deserve particular attention, as they explain why conscious Ukrainian patriots continue to attend parishes of the ROC sphere. The first is the "normalized paradox": the parishioner knows that the church belongs to Moscow but psychologically separates "liturgy" from "politics", so that during the commemoration of Kirill they pray for Onufriy or Epiphanius, and "for the authorities" they pray for Ukrainian soldiers. The second is the "soundscape of home": a Russian-language liturgy structurally holds a refugee from eastern and southern Ukraine in a pro-Russian parish as "the sound of home" rather than as a political choice. Both phenomena lead to a fundamental practical conclusion. Hard delegitimization ("do not go to the ROC – it is the FSB") does not work, because the parishioner is aware of the affiliation anyway. The only effective approach is infrastructural displacement: a Ukrainian alternative of such density and visibility that choosing it becomes easier than sustaining the paradox.

The strongest cumulative influence and the most sophisticated documented mimicry are in Italy. The model case is a parish in Milan: a "multi-ethnic community under Metropolitan Onufriy", with services in four languages – under the cover of the Romanian Patriarchate. The mechanics of the cover are as follows: formally the community is registered within the jurisdiction of the Romanian Orthodox Church – a canonical structure not subject to any European restrictions – while, according to

respondents' testimony and open monitoring data, its actual ties and core personnel are oriented toward the Moscow vertical. That is precisely why the parish is legally invisible to EU legal frameworks geared to direct "ROC affiliation". At the same time, the Ukrainian presence in Italy (the older diaspora plus the new wave) exceeds the Russian one several times over (the Russian presence is around 50,000–120,000 people), and the critical mass for deploying an OCU alternative already exists, in particular through UGCC communities. Italy is therefore potentially the most promising rather than the most difficult direction.

2.2. Pseudo-Ukrainian structures as "entry points" for infiltration

In all the countries studied, formally Ukrainian organizations were documented that in fact work in Russian interests. The model is the same everywhere. Humanitarian aid serves as the "front door" through which narratives of "peace at any price" and "both sides are to blame" are spread; this is followed by integration into diaspora events, the injection of softening narratives through their own people inside genuine Ukrainian civil society organizations and, ultimately, the discrediting of real activists. According to the study's materials, no systematic work on this channel was found: in four of the five countries there is no state register of organizations under monitoring, and there is no coordination between Ukrainian consulates and the security services of the host countries.

2.3. Academic infiltration and cultural "soft power"

The academic channel operates synergistically across the five countries: Russian-speaking lecturers at European universities shape a neutral or pro-Russian discourse on the war, while the scholarly schools of "Russian Slavic studies" produce experts for whom the "Russian region" is the natural lens. The sharpest documented case is the Catholic University of Leuven (KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium), where over four years (2022–2026), according to respondents, the Ukrainian community was practically unable to hold its own events because of a powerful pro-Russian environment, while Russian lectures remain routine practice. In Italy, the Istituto Gino Germani report "Narrazioni strategiche russe nei libri di testo" (authors M. Di Pasquale and I. Kashchey; full text of the study – May 2025, official presentation in the Senate on September 23, 2025)[40] recorded six Kremlin narratives in 28 school textbooks on geography and history for grades 6–8, published between 2010 and 2024 by the largest publishing houses. The range runs from "Kyivan Rus is the cradle of Russia" and "Crimea returned through a referendum" to the concept of the "Russian region", in which Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and the Baltic states are presented as a single whole and Kyiv is called "the third city of the Russian region after Moscow and Saint Petersburg" (Namaskar Europa, DeA Scuola, 2019). A detailed analysis with a list of the editions is available in the primary source[41] and in the INRS analytical brief on Italy[42]. Cultural "soft power" (concerts, the "Russian House" in Brussels, film screenings) normalizes the Russian presence as "high culture", against which criticism of the RF looks like "the intrusion of politics into art".

2.4. Digital disinformation

The most dynamic channel. According to the French service VIGINUM (SGDSN), 77 operations of the Storm-1516 network were documented between August 2023 and March 2025, 35 of them directly against Ukraine[43]; the number of its false narratives against France and Germany rose from 12 in 2024 to 30 in 2025 (NewsGuard). Doppelganger (cloning of European media) and Matriochka (spam attacks on journalists) operate in parallel. According to NewsGuard[44], the Storm-1516 campaigns

against France and Germany alone produced 175,000 posts and 274 million views on the X platform from January 2025. These operations strike not at the Ukrainian community directly but at the European society around it, in order to undermine support for Ukraine. The influence on the diaspora comes primarily through Telegram – the main information platform for Ukrainians abroad. According to INRS materials and monitoring data, the narratives addressed to the diaspora are above all those of "Europe's fatigue with Ukrainians" and the inevitable cancellation of payments, fear of mobilization ("they will get you abroad too"), the futility of returning, and the setting of those who left against those who stayed[4546]. A telling example of the mechanics is the Storm-1516 fakes portraying Ukrainian refugees as criminals or ungrateful dependents in France and Germany: they work simultaneously on the European audience (reducing support for Ukraine) and on the Ukrainian one (heightening the sense of a hostile environment)[4748]. Five information strategies can be traced in the INRS sample, from "total immersion" (correlated with high anxiety) to "local integration" (correlated with the best psychological condition). The pattern is common to all five countries: less news load – better condition – more real action for Ukraine. For Ukrainian communications this is a ready-made guide.

2.5. Everyday and passport-consular channel

The least visible but systemic channel. Russian consular institutions in the EU continue to issue passports to Ukrainians from the occupied territories, to draw up notarial documents and to register marriages and births. This creates a dual legal and psychological attachment: a refugee from the temporarily occupied territories cannot obtain some Ukrainian documents remotely and is forced to turn to Russian consulates. The everyday level (Russian-language schools, "russkiy mir" shops, restaurants, cultural clubs) works as a "soundscape" that lowers the cognitive load of adaptation and structurally keeps a person within a Russian-speaking environment.

2.6. Political lobbying

The institutionally most dangerous channel. The Voice of Europe case (exposed by the Belgian and Czech security services in March 2024)[49] revealed a system for directly buying pro-Russian narratives from European parliamentarians; the then Prime Minister of Belgium, Alexander De Croo, publicly confirmed these facts. According to Czech intelligence, the network paid politicians in at least six EU countries – Germany, France, Poland, Belgium, the Netherlands and Hungary. Resolutions 2540 (2024) and 2567 (2024) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe[5051] explicitly recognized the Russian Orthodox Church as an instrument of Russian influence and propaganda, yet European implementation of these resolutions at national level remains fragmentary.

2.7. Cumulative effect

The main thing about Russian influence is its architectural character. The six channels do not add up, they reinforce one another: the institutional presence of the ROC legitimizes cultural "soft power", which forms an audience for pseudo-Ukrainian structures, which promote narratives that resonate with digital operations, and digital operations open a window of normality for political lobbying. Weakening one channel in one country does not neutralize the system – the load is redistributed to other nodes. The response must accordingly be equally networked and coordinated.

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Imprint

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Ukraine

kas.de

Publisher: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Ukraine, 2026, Kyiv
wul. Akademika Bohomoltsia 5, Office 1, 01024 Kyiv, Ukraine
Telephone: +380444927443
https://www.kas.de/en/web/ukraine

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The publication is prepared under the project “Strengthening the Analytical Capabilities of the Foreign Policy Decision-Making with the Civil Society” of the Centre for International Security with the support of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Ukraine.

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