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Collection of testimonies from Ukrainian families belonging to the Hungarian, Romani and Romanian minorities in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

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Abstract : After an introduction on the Russian-Ukrainian war and a reflection on the causes of the war, this research article collected the words of the Hungarian, Romani and Romanian minorities in Ukraine. Have they been discriminated against? What are their perceptions of the Russian-Ukrainian war? What are their experiences? What do they think of the current Ukrainian regime? What future do they see for Ukraine after more than three years of war?
The aim of this research is to gather the testimonies of Ukrainian families of Magyar, Romanian and Gypsy origin. Fifteen families who fled Ukraine were interviewed about the circumstances and reasons for leaving their war-torn country. The study concludes with an analysis of the interviewees' responses.

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I. A reminder of some of the triggers of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the repression of minorities – Reflections on this conflict.

Following the implosion of the USSR (25/12/1991), the USSR quickly lost its satellite countries: Russia became the heir to the USSR, keeping Kaliningrad and all the nuclear bombs. The three Baltic republics demanded their independence and hastened to join NATO and the European Union. The Russian-Ukrainian war, with the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, motivated Finland and Sweden to join NATO. But let us remember that when the two Germanys were reunified, NATO clearly agreed not to move closer to Russia, a commitment it has not honoured. Indeed, the satellite countries also join NATO to be under NATO's protective umbrella. These countries in turn become members of the European Union.

Obviously, Russia has felt betrayed on several occasions. The final straw came when Ukraine wanted to join NATO and the European Union, because Ukraine's accession to NATO means that NATO is moving to Russia's borders, directly threatening Moscow. Was it not a globalist ideology that drove the West to want to establish itself at Moscow's doorstep? China and India carry a lot of weight and are undoubtedly tough enemies to eliminate. Russia, weakened by the implosion of the USSR, no longer posed much of a threat to NATO.
In the aftermath of the implosion of the USSR, the USA became the master of the world with its allies. Did the dream of dismantling Russia not take shape in the minds of globalists? What a godsend to dismantle and appropriate the lands beyond the Urals, right? However, Vladimir Putin came to power and proceeded to rebuild Russia economically and, above all, militarily.

The war that seemed easy to win for the former US President, aided by his allies, proved to be difficult to achieve. Currently, the West has invested so much financially in the war of attrition with Russia that it is

obviously intolerable to lose the war with Russia. 2014 was the real trigger for the war, when Russia gradually and methodically annexed Crimea and recognized the two separatist oblasts (Luhansk and Donetsk).

As for the repression and discrimination affecting minorities in Ukraine, it can be said that this is a reality, both for the very large Russian minority in Donbass and Odessa, but also elsewhere in Ukraine. Discrimination affects Hungarian, Romanian and Roma minorities. As far as the Hungarian minority is concerned, schools are being closed and pressure is being exerted on the population not to speak their mother tongue. Discrimination affects all minorities. A nationalist and 'Banderists' use intimidation tactics. The actions of people from the far-right movement and very active neo-Nazis have been tolerated and ignored by the authorities. The European Union is also reluctant to take a stand on this discrimination against minorities, even though the European Union is supposed to protect minorities.

Despite complaints lodged with the Commission, the EU has always turned a deaf ear.

The Roma population has also been affected by various forms of discrimination. There has been a reduction in minority rights and the mainstream has remained silent. Another problem raised by the population is the forced conscription of men who are arrested, abused and sent to the front with what appears to be minimal preparation for war. This has led to a situation where men are being kidnapped and used as cannon fodder. All of this creates a negative image of Ukraine. However, the European Union seems to be dismissing all of this in order to defend Ukraine and help it in the war that has already cost the lives of several hundred thousand Ukrainian and Russian soldiers.

Endemic corruption is plaguing Ukraine, making it difficult to move towards democracy. Yet, against all odds, the European Union supports Ukraine, raising questions about the underlying reasons for this clear-cut position. Corruption even affects forced enlistment. According to testimonies and sources of information (YouTube, news broadcasts, etc.), a large sum of money has enabled those with money to avoid forced conscription. Unfortunately, these abuses are being ignored by the European Union. Worse still, many politicians believe that Ukraine is ready to join the European Union and that Ukraine was a model of democracy.

When asked a question by the current US President, the Ukrainian President admitted that he could not account for the whereabouts of approximately $100 billion (2024).

A fringe group of Azov soldiers and the far-right Sloboda party, displaying Nazi symbols and considering Bandera an icon, do indeed exist. It should be noted that Bandera's statue is decorated with flowers in several places around the country. We should also recall Simone Veil's statement denouncing the persecution of Jews in Ukraine during the Second World War by Ukrainian pro-Nazis.

After hundreds of billions given or lent to Ukraine during more than three years of war, one thing is clear: Western aid to Ukraine has failed to defeat Russia, which is also a bitter failure for NATO. Eighteen rounds of sanctions have not brought Russia to its knees economically. Yet the West has done everything in its power to break Russia. On the contrary, we are now seeing that Russia has invaded about 20% of Ukraine's territory, despite the fact that the entire West has armed Ukraine and is participating in a proxy war against Russia.

What is the solution to end the war? The diplomatic route, but as long as the belligerents and their allies want war, each side will say that it is the other's fault.

The current Ukrainian President is taking a big risk in this situation, because ceding part of Ukraine when he previously guaranteed that he would not do so would put him in a dangerous position politically and in relation to the country's population. Indeed, how can so many deaths be justified? Is there not a risk that popular outrage will cause damage? Who will be held accountable for the tens of billions that have disappeared?

It is regrettable that this fratricidal war took place. A war that should not have happened, according to the current President of the United States, Donald Trump. Indeed, he blames his predecessor for the war. Let us hope that tempers will calm down to avoid a Third World War.

As a result of this war and the fact that the European Union no longer wants to depend on Russian gas and oil, it is now completely dependent on the US... A bad choice? Spot the mistake! We don't have a crystal ball, and only time will tell what will happen. However, after the Covid-19 period and with the Russian-Ukrainian war, the European Union seems to have lost its leadership to the US, and Europe has spent astronomical sums supplying Ukraine with sophisticated weapons. Has this involvement in the proxy war had any results? Instead, we are seeing a gradual collapse of the European economy and the progressive impoverishment of the European population.

Wasn't the aim of the common market in the aftermath of the Second World War to improve the lot of the people?

II. The reception of Ukrainian families in European Union countries following Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022

In Belgium, more than 90,000 protection certificates

have been issued, including to Ukrainians. Currently, around 12,000 Ukrainians are living in Wallonia. Here is the number of Ukrainian refugees benefiting from temporary protection status in the EU following Russia's invasion in February 2022.
The total number of Ukrainians who have fled Ukraine and are now in the European Union: 4,263,195 (27 countries).
Breakdown by EU countries:

1,347,525 in Germany,
965,775 in Poland,
360,776 in the Czech Republic,
206,444 in Spain,
165,510 in Italy,
162,045 in Romania,
122,885 in Slovakia,
115,885 in the Netherlands,
106,295 in Ireland,
80,420 in Belgium,
78,450 in Lithuania,
77,700 in Austria,
63,850 in Finland,
61,865 in Portugal,
61,820 in France,
57,350 in Bulgaria,
45,550 in Latvia,
41,220 in Sweden,
36,565 in Hungary,
34,065 in Denmark,
32,370 in Estonia,
24,580 in Croatia,
20,675 in Cyprus,
9,280 in Slovenia,
4,285 in Luxembourg,
2,060 in Malta.

Date of publication: August 2024.
Survey period: 2024
Sources:
https://fr.statista.com/statistiques/1295718/nombre-refugies-guerre-ukraine-europe/
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RTL info, 21 November 2024

III. Methodological choices for collecting statements

Sample and method

Fifteen Ukrainian families who speak Hungarian participated in this research. Their request for anonymity was respected.
Samples of respondents: among the participating families, nine have dual (Ukrainian and Hungarian). These nine families are Magyar and Gypsy.
Method used: open-ended questions allowing people to express themselves, with a commitment to anonymity.
Location for interviews:
Debrecen and Budapest. Period: mid-July to mid-August 2024 and 2025.
Qualitative approach used. The open-ended questions made it possible to gather rich and poignant testimonies from people displaced by the war in their country. All participants gave their consent, with the option to end the interviews as soon as they expressed a desire to do so. No one requested to stop the interview. Both husbands and wives participated, except when the husband was absent due to military service.

Three sets of questions asked

1. Before you arrived in Hungary, where did you live? Why did you leave Ukraine? Would you like to return to Ukraine after the war?
2. What is currently happening in Ukraine for men, families and children? Are minorities discriminated against?

3. Is there corruption in Ukraine? What do you think of the current authorities? What do you think of the European Union's role in this war?

IV. Compilation of statements from minorities in Ukraine

Responses from interviewees.

Responses from families (witness = W). The questions must be repeated so that people can answer everything.

1. When did you arrive in Hungary and from which city or town? Why did you leave Ukraine? Would you like to return to Ukraine one day?

T1 We are Gypsies and we come from Ungvár. We escaped two and a half years ago. Things are terrible there. The Roma are looked down upon. We are considered less than nothing by the authorities. We speak Romani and Hungarian. We speak a little Ukrainian, but it's difficult because we can't read or write.

T2 We come from Munkács, in 2023. It's a beautiful city with a large Hungarian population. It was hard to leave. We lost everything because of the war.

T3 We left Ukraine at the end of 2023. We come from Beregszász. We left the country because we were persecuted for speaking our language and because of the war.

T4 We come from Tsirtcsik. We are Gypsies. We left our town in 2023 because of the war and because of the discrimination we faced. Gypsies are persecuted in Ukraine; it's much better in Hungary. At the front, Gypsies are cannon fodder. I lost four members of my family.

T5 E, 2023, my family left Ukraine and I was able to save myself by escaping forced conscription. We come from Körösmező. It's a real dictatorship there and Zelenski and his cronies are lining their pockets while the population is dying! We don't want to go back there.

T6 We left Ukraine in 2023. We come from Nagyszőlős, in Transcarpathia. We speak Romanian and Hungarian. But we also know how to speak Ukrainian. Over there, it was frowned upon if you didn't speak Ukrainian. There was no tolerance! Ukrainian nationalists are not to be trifled with. They are Bandera's fanatics. They behave like Nazis.

In schools, the language of instruction is Ukrainian, and our children were looked down upon because they spoke a language other than Ukrainian.

T7 We left at the end of 2022; fortunately, because we have little information, but we know that men are being forcibly sent to the front by Zelinski's henchmen. Some avoid the front by giving them a large sum of money. It's corrupt there, to the core!

I hope they will be brought to justice after the war. During this war, it is the minorities who are being harassed or sent to the front. As the villages and towns empty, Ukrainians are moving in. Thus, in a village or small town, the replacement means that strong minorities become very weak minorities.

T8 We arrived in Hungary at the end of 2022. We left Beregszász. We were lucky. My husband was killed at the front. He was kidnapped and forcibly sent to the front, where he died. I know this from an acquaintance there. Ukrainian nationalists are brutal and want to eradicate the Hungarian language at all costs. But it's the same with people who speak Romanian. It's even worse for the Gypsy population. They even attacked Russian speakers in Odessa. Russians are the largest minority in Ukraine. Even many Ukrainians speak Russian. That's what the Rada wanted to eliminate.

T9 We left Ukraine in 2023 with our two children. We come from the town of Beregszász. We have dual nationality, which is very frowned upon. My husband was not so lucky. The bastards sent him to the front and I haven't heard from him since. They are capable of lying about the number of deaths so they don't have to pay compensation. In any case, there is no question of returning to a country led by a bastard and his gang of neo-Nazis. They even persecute people who speak Russian. Look at what happened in Odessa, where far-right Ukrainians burned Russian speakers because they spoke Russian!

In Odessa, for example, where the majority of the population speaks Russian. The person responsible for all this is Zelinski, whom I refuse to call 'President'. He runs the country with two other bastards. He's a scumbag who has encouraged repression and the closure of Hungarian schools. The whole country is rotten to the core. I don't want to go back there. Here, at least, my children can go to school without any problems. At least here in Hungary, we can enjoy the taste of freedom, and I have found work and a place to live.

T10 We come from Nagyszőlős. We managed to leave Ukraine in 2023 with our daughter and son. My husband was not lucky enough to escape. He was caught and sent to the front. I have not heard from him since. It is impossible to know what happens to husbands sent to the front. The government lies and says that so-and-so has disappeared, so that it doesn't have to pay war compensation. Zelinski had promised peace and an agreement with Moscow. What did he do? He obeyed bastards like Boris Johnson and refused to sign a peace agreement.

As Hungarian-speaking Ukrainians, we were intimidated by far-right people who were proud to love their idol Bandera. Corruption is endemic in Ukraine and affects the entire system, including senior officials and the people who run Ukraine. There is no question of going back there, because I want my children to be safe. But I

would like to hear from my husband. The Rada, which is the Supreme Council of Ukraine, has followed Zelinski so far, but you'll see, it will end badly for him.

T11 We left our town, Körösmező, in 2023. My husband managed to escape a year later. We speak Hungarian and Russian. Yes, it's awful: they forcibly recruit people, using violence; they beat up those who don't obey. We are like calves being sent to the slaughterhouse. I know that many of my acquaintances have died at the front and the authorities claim that they have disappeared. I also know that there are more and more desertions. The people who govern the country are rotten. They should leave the Russian-speaking Oblasts to the Russians. We need to seek peace, which Kiev does not want. How stupid to have started a war with the Russians, who outnumber us four to one! But even with the help of NATO countries, Ukraine will not be able to defeat Russia, and hundreds of thousands of soldiers will die at the front.

T12 We fled Ungvár because people started insulting us for speaking Hungarian and Russian and not so much Ukrainian. But mind you, the two languages are largely mutually intelligible! What nonsense, this war between brothers. In 2022, with my children and husband, who escaped conscription. Currently, the borders are closed and they don't hesitate to shoot at those who try to flee! It's not surprising, with that corrupt clown ruling the country. What's more, Brussels seems blind and doesn't realize the extent of the damage caused by the war. We don't understand! Or are there hidden interests at play? In any case, Zelinski and his clique have enriched themselves during this war, that much we know. They are even selling Western weapons to make money, it seems!

Reflexive retreat

The people come from Subcarpathian Rus; the towns of Mukachevo (Munkács in Hungarian), Uzhhorod (Ungvár), Berehove (Beregszász), Chertchyk (Tsirtcsik), Lacinia (Körösmező) and Vynohradiv (Nagyszőlős in Hungarian). This is a mountainous region. The region is populated by Ukrainians, known as Rusyns (Ruthenians), and other minorities such as Hungarians, Slovaks, Poles, Romanians and Gypsies. Most of Ruthenia forms the oblast of Transcarpathia. Russians are the largest minority.

The people interviewed talk about where they come from and describe today's Ukraine as a dictatorship where fundamental freedoms are violated. There is forced conscription, and some believe that men who are ill-prepared for war are being sent to the front as cannon fodder. Roma are considered ‘less than nothing’.

They blame their President for all the problems the country is facing in this war. Some point to the existence of neo-Nazis in the state apparatus. They talk about forced conscription and large-scale corruption. One interviewee believes that Brussels (the EU) is blind in its support for a corrupt government. The testimonies speak of discrimination against minorities and intimidation or even violence towards minorities. There is a significant Russian minority, but many Ukrainians speak Russian.

2. What is currently happening in Ukraine for men, families and children? Are minorities discriminated against?

T1 Minorities have always been discriminated against, even though there is a law protecting the use of languages. The government has gradually eroded the rights of minorities. Gangs in the pay of the authorities are used to intimidate people. The same applies to schools that teach languages other than Ukrainian. As a Romani, it is difficult to find work. My children are discriminated against at school. The Roma live in a neighbourhood where there is only Roma. The sanitation is poor, there are no bathrooms, and it is very difficult for a Gypsy to live in Ukraine, even before this war. For families, the war is atrocious, because fathers are taken away in front of their children! And the government lets it happen. Do you think it's normal to fight without preparation? Brussels is partly responsible for all this, because without the help of the European Union, Zelensky would have lost long ago.

T2 Families are suffering and the cemeteries are filling up and there is no more room. The cruellest thing is that a senile president supported this war. The Ukrainian people are the first to lose out. Before the war, minorities lived peacefully with Ukrainians, even if some of them made threats from time to time. They were extremists. In some cities, there are many extremists. They even worship the statue of Bandera, the Nazi.

T3 Of course minorities are discriminated against, and even more so since Russia's invasion. I would like the Russians to teach Zelensky and his henchmen a lesson for committing acts of violence against the population and kidnapping fathers. The biggest losers are the children, who no longer have good living conditions.

T4 Even before the war, it was difficult and we lived in a neighbourhood for Gypsies where the houses were in poor condition, with no sanitation. Going to the toilet? At the bottom of the garden. Electricity? The meter kept tripping. The authorities don't care about the Roma. The children don't go to school regularly because it's far away and, for example, in winter, it's a hardship to walk there. And then, people don't like my children. In Ukraine? I've had news since we fled. The men are in hiding so they won't be caught by the government's henchmen and the militia. Even the police are helping the militia to forcibly take the men away. Women are often the only ones defending men who are being forcibly conscripted. There was no problem between Ukrainians and Russians. All of this has been provoked, and a puppet has been put in place to dance to the tune of neo-Nazis like Azov. It's no longer a life for children.

T5 Since the invasion of Ukraine, everything Russian is suspect and a psychosis has set in. It's so true that brothers and cousins are killing each other for what? For whom? The children are increasingly traumatized.
T6 Zelensky should be arrested and put in prison for the hundreds of thousands of deaths. How long is this shit going to last? We have lost everything because our house was destroyed. We fled.
T7 The children are hungry, and going to school is difficult because of the bombings. When we left, luckily with my husband, we knew we would have to rebuild our lives elsewhere.
T8 Several members of my family have died on the front lines. There is no longer any security and there is no future for the children. Who would still want to rebuild a life there? The Hungarian minority is harassed and pressure is being exerted on the Hungarian community with regard to language. In general, it is nationalists who are making our lives miserable.
It's the same for Romanians. It's worse for the Gypsies.
T9 Yes, discrimination exists, but less so in cities where there is a large minority. Family life has become impossible since the war, and for children too.
T10 Since the war, tensions between communities have increased and Zelenski's nationalist henchmen have created problems in regions where there are minorities. And to think that Brussels does not understand the reality of the situation. Why not investigate the nationalists and corruption in Ukraine? It's a bloody war!
T11 We are glad we fled the war. The current government is becoming increasingly autocratic. It is not a democracy and yes, the rights of minorities are being violated. Children suffer the most in this war.
T12 We are trying to turn the page. My husband managed to flee and join us. We now live in Hungary, where we are rebuilding our lives, and the children do not seem to have been traumatized. They go to school as normal. Gypsies are very stigmatized in Ukraine. Since the war, problems have started for minorities because of nationalists, and the government has done nothing to stop this problem.

Reflexive step back

Those interviewed say that there are nationalists in Ukraine who have caused concern among minorities. The Gypsy community seems to be particularly affected by forms of discrimination. Families say they no longer want to return to Ukraine. The war has destroyed families, and children are ultimately the most affected by the precarious situation. There are women with children who have lost their husbands at the front or who have been declared missing. The government has not intervened to stop the intimidation or aggression of nationalist groups. However, they say that minority rights are enshrined in the constitution. In their view, Ukraine is not a democracy.

3. Is there corruption in Ukraine? What do you think of the current authorities? What do you think of the European Union's role in this war?

T1 Yes, there is a lot of corruption. For example, when it comes to conscription, if you have money, you can get a medical document that protects you from being drafted. But it's like that everywhere. I wonder how the European Union will be able to manage such a corrupt country if Ukraine succeeds in joining Europe. The European Union? I don't understand why we are helping a corrupt government.
T2 Corruption exists throughout the state apparatus, right up to the highest level. To think that many people in the European Union consider Ukraine to be a democracy!
T3 The authorities? There's a lot of corruption. The European Union? I don't know, but I don't understand why the EU is so keen to help President Zelensky, who has already been implicated in the Panama Papers and is responsible, at least in part, for all these deaths. Yet he promised to seek peace when he became president.
T4 If you have money, you can buy anything, even a civil servant. Want a weapon? No problem! If you don't have money? You die and you're worthless. You run away, you hide so you don't have to go to the front. This is a war that has been fuelled by Biden, and Ukraine is now on the verge of destruction.
T5 Corruption exists on a large scale in Ukraine. There is a lot of corruption everywhere and in everything in Ukraine, but those who get rich are mainly those in high positions in the state. The European Union? I don't have a particular opinion.
T6 I think the European Union bears a heavy responsibility in this war, with their supply of weapons to a corrupt government that has only one thing in mind: forcible conscription to continue the war. I've heard that there are more and more deserters. Just think about it: a Ukrainian soldier whose language is Russian, forced to kill Russians! Corrupt oligarchs have put a comedian at the head of Ukraine. We can see what that has led to. If he stops the war, he risks being killed by those who put him in charge of the government.
T7 With money, you can buy anything in Ukraine. Even politicians. But if you don't have money, you are very vulnerable. That is the law of money and corruption.
I don't think the European Union knows what kind of corrupt state it is defending.
T8 Corruption exists in Ukraine, with organized gangs, nationalist movements and a government incapable of establishing the rule of law. The European Union should play a humanitarian role rather than helping to wage war.

T9 I don't know enough about the European Union to give a relevant opinion. I have a simple question: how can we aspire to peace by sending weapons? Corruption is rife in Ukraine and there are quite a few neo-Nazi nationalists who idolize Bandera. They are members of Svoboda or Azov. They are also present in the army.
T10 People with money can corrupt the authorities, doctors issuing certificates of unfitness, and civil servants. I have no particular opinion of the European Union. It should have made much greater use of diplomatic channels and not added fuel to the fire by banning the Russian language and culture.
T11 The Ukrainian government is looking more and more like a dictatorship. There is a lot of corruption in Ukraine. I believe the European Union is doing what it can to help Ukrainians. But the European Union should use diplomacy to stop Putin. Brussels should not turn a blind eye to neo-Nazi groups such as Svoboda or Azov.
T12 The European Union is helping Ukrainians by sending weapons, but why not take on a more humanitarian role? Corruption is rife at all levels of government. Zelensky? He is responsible for listening to warmongering politicians rather than seeking compromise. This could have been achieved if the Russian language had not been banned in Ukraine. They made a serious mistake in Donbass, which rebelled. I know this because I have family there.

V. Conclusion

It is true that the number of people interviewed is not high, but the aim was to meet people who had taken refuge in another country, such as Hungary. Listening to their life stories was important, and the approach was anthropological in nature. Those interviewed denounced forced conscription by the Ukrainian authorities. Families also fled because their situation had become precarious.
People talk about discrimination, threats and violations of fundamental rights, such as the right to speak their mother tongue, knowing that the country's laws allow this possibility. The right to education is also being violated. Those interviewed spoke of the discrimination they had suffered. The responses of families speaking Romanian or Hungarian were similar. The authorities are considered to be quite coercive with regard to language and, according to them, are working in an increasingly dictatorial country. According to them, corruption is widespread.

People complain about the raids taking place in towns, villages and streets to forcibly take men to the front without any real preparation. The country's president is considered a dictator surrounded by neo-Nazis. He is considered to be corrupt, like the entire state apparatus. Those interviewed do not want to return to Ukraine. The European Union does not have a very good image in the minds of those interviewed. Some interviewees believe that the current government could probably have avoided the catastrophe if the Russian language had not been banned. According to some, diplomatic efforts have not been sufficiently exploited to bring about peace. Some interviewees refer to the existence of Ukrainian nationalists with Nazi-like ideologies (Azov, Svoboda).

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