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Ukraine-Lithuania: Librarians Who Never Get Tired

Dear colleagues,

It is an honor for me to be here with you at this conference. I have pondered for quite some time about what I should convey with this presentation. This marks the third year that Lithuanian librarians have been striving to support our colleagues in Ukraine in every conceivable way. Yet, it seems that everything we do amounts to merely a drop in the ocean, and there is still much more to be done. When we compare our efforts to the resilience and dedication displayed by our Ukrainian counterparts in the face of adversity, our support can often feel as fragile as wooden bricks supporting a towering structure. However, I want to emphasize that we stand with you and will continue to do so for as long as our support is needed.

Currently, our cooperation spans various areas, including providing information services for the Ukrainian community in Lithuania, collaborating on joint projects, offering support, and exchanging information and knowledge through the Ukraine-Lithuania forum and conferences.

Support for Ukrainian Cultural and Creative Sectors:

- The Lithuanian Council for Culture and Lithuanian Film Centre, in the years 2022-2023, granted scholarships to Ukrainian artists seeking refuge in Lithuania due to the war.
- The Lithuanian Council for Culture has allocated project funding to Lithuanian art and culture organizations undertaking initiatives in support of Ukraine, involving Ukrainian artists and cultural professionals.
- In December 2022, the Lithuanian Film Centre contributed to the European Solidarity Fund in Support of Ukrainian Films, administered by CNC (<https://esfuf.eu>).
- Collaborating with the Lithuanian Librarians' Association, the Association of Lithuanian County Public Libraries, and the 1K Foundation, the Ministry of Culture launched a donation campaign during the Vilnius Book Fair in February 2023 for the reconstruction of the M.M. Kotsiubinsky City Central Library in Chernihiv and the procurement of equipment such as electric heaters and generators for heating the library premises.

- Lithuanian cultural attachés abroad initiated various projects showcasing Ukrainian artists and culture, including film screenings, exhibitions, concerts, workshops, discussions, and articles by Lithuanian intellectuals expressing solidarity with Ukraine.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture issued a joint letter to Lithuanian art and cultural organizations, recommending the suspension of cooperation with Russian and Belarusian artists and cultural figures, except for those who have publicly condemned the military aggression of the Kremlin regime against Ukraine.

Support by Cultural Institutions and Organizations:

- Approximately 125 art and cultural institutions provided employment opportunities for Ukrainian art and cultural workers displaced by the war.
- Ukrainian war refugees are offered free admission to certain Lithuanian art and cultural institutions. Public libraries also offer free Lithuanian language training and designated spaces for Ukrainian children to engage in various creative activities.
- During the "Kaunas - European Capital of Culture 2022" program, the focus shifted to Ukraine, hosting the fifth Ukrainian Contemporary Art Triennial "Ukraine! Unmuted" and establishing a co-working space for Ukrainian creative professionals and artists, "CulturEUkraine," in Kaunas Central Post Office building.
- Numerous cultural institutions organized events featuring Ukrainian culture by inviting Ukrainian collectives and artists. For instance, the Lithuanian Opera and Ballet Theatre hosted the Kharkiv National Opera and Ballet Theatre group for a month, presenting performances and projects across multiple cities.
- Organizations initiated activities for Ukrainian children and youth, including establishing day-care centers, conducting educational activities such as robotics and programming classes, organizing summer camps, and acquiring books in Ukrainian language, audio formats, and Braille for public libraries.

Humanitarian Aid

Lithuanian culture and art organizations provided humanitarian aid to Ukrainian art and cultural institutions, such as providing electricity and heating systems through campaigns like "Warm up Ukraine" by the organization "Strong Together" and the Lithuanian National Museum of Art.

The Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, along with other public libraries and volunteers, produced candles for Ukrainian soldiers. Lithuanian museums provided tools for protecting treasures in Ukrainian museums, and employees of cultural institutions collected funds and necessary items for Ukraine.

In December 2023, some libraries joined the "Christmas in a Shoebox" campaign organized by the charity foundation "Safehaven LT". As a result of the campaign, shoeboxes with gifts for children were sent to Ukraine.

Initiatives to Strengthen Professional Competences (Library Sector)

In June 2023, the Association of Lithuanian County Public Libraries and the Martynas Mažvydas Lithuanian National Library, implementing a project partially funded by the Lithuanian Council for Culture, organized the first Ukrainian-Lithuanian librarians' forum "The role of libraries in strengthening democratic society". Media and informational literacy was the main topic of the forum. Other topics – the role of academic and librarian institutions in the development of a democratic society, bibliotherapy, and art therapy were also discussed. The forum took 3 days, main libraries in Vilnius, Kaunas, and Klaipėda were visited.

The next forum will take place in June 2024 in Vilnius, Panevėžys and Kaunas, with possible topics, relevant to Ukrainian librarians (institutional preparedness for extreme situations, cooperation network, and networking practices; integration, promotion of active citizenship, ensuring access to services, and use of libraries in building emotional and mental wellbeing and resilience; and media and informational literacy education, cultural heritage preservation, and actualization in libraries) and with sharing of good practices, presentation of product and services as well as librarian tools.

Rebuilding of Ukraine

U-RE-HERIT project for Ukraine

The project "Architects for heritage in Ukraine: recreating identity and memory," coordinated by the Lithuanian Association of Architects, received co-funding from the EU Creative Europe Programme in 2023. It aims to evaluate, preserve, and restore urban and architectural heritage in Ukraine during and after the war, emphasizing sustainable cultural, social, environmental, and economic recovery. Interdisciplinary teams will share knowledge and experience to reconstruct heritage, empower local communities, and build a new, democratic, and sustainable Ukraine. The aims are to recover the cultural sector of architecture as a blossoming field of action engaging in combining tangible and intangible heritage with new architecture and urban design. The project will build capacity: 1) to recover the war-damaged immovable heritage of Ukraine, as part of a general reconstruction effort; 2) to reconstruct social and identity structures starting from the cultural heritage recovery; 3) to activate and involve local communities in all phases of the recovery; and 4) to activate and generate local economic networks and processes. 9 countries participating in the project, including Ukraine: Architects Association of Lithuania; Architects Sweden; Bundeskammer der Ziviltechniker: innen – BKZT (Federal Chamber of Architects and Chartered Engineers) Austria; Royal Danish Academy, the Institute of Technology and Architecture (IBT), Architects Chamber of Romania; The National Council of Architects, Planners, Landscapers and Conservationists, or CNAPPC Italy; The "Bundesarchitektenkammer e.V." (BAK – Federal Chamber of German Architects); Estonian Association of Architects; The National Union of Architects of Ukraine; ro3kvit; Kharkiv School of Architecture. Associated partner: The Architects' Council of Europe.

Lithuanian Fund for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid

Lithuania's Fund for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid finances and administers projects for Ukraine's rebuilding. Pilot projects since August 2022 have focused on school and kindergarten renovation, mobile house construction, and electricity system modernization to enhance skills and competencies for Ukraine's reconstruction.

Culture's place in the rebuilding of Ukraine

The Ministry of Culture advocates for integrating culture and creative sectors into Ukraine's recovery, emphasizing their role in economic growth, post-war healing, community rebuilding, and social cohesion. International organizations like the OECD could provide valuable assistance in developing mechanisms and standards for cultural restoration alongside infrastructure projects. It is needed to find mechanisms for how Ukrainian cities and villages, as well as Ukrainian cultural objects and sites, will be rebuilt. For instance, nearby cultural objects and sites could be developed and rebuilt alongside infrastructure and necessities projects. Cultural restoration should become a twin goal when rebuilding factories, bridges, or dams.

International organizations, for ex. OECD, could substantially help in developing the best mechanisms and standards for this. In developing standards for the rebuilding of Ukraine synergies should be sought and efforts combined between OECD's standards, Davos Baukultur Quality System and New European Bauhaus (and European Green Deal) initiatives, as well as other international organizations and NGOs initiatives.

Moreover, it is necessary, and we aim for, to mainstream support for Ukrainian culture into the EU policy and financial instruments and funds (support for Ukrainian culture should go far beyond the Creative Europe Programme, which finances only soft projects).

Davos Baukultur Alliance

Established in January 2023, the Davos Baukultur Alliance, including the Lithuanian Ministry of Culture, promotes high-quality Baukultur in Europe and supports Ukraine's rebuilding efforts. Lithuanian Ministry of Culture was elected as the member of the Davos Baukultur Alliance Steering Committee. Lithuania aims that the rebuilding of Ukraine would be part of the agenda of the Davos Baukultur Alliance.

Providing information services for the Ukrainian community in Lithuania (Klaipėda case)

The beginning of the war in Ukraine could not but affect the activities of the library. According to the Department of Statistics, about 6500 Ukrainians of all ages and professions from different regions of Ukraine live in Klaipėda. And all of them received support from the Department of Migration, the Red Cross, the Klaipėda branch of the international Catholic social and spiritual support organization "Caritas" and the Klaipėda libraries, which is now an information, cultural, educational and social centers for Ukrainians.

During the war period Lithuanian libraries received a lot of publications in Ukrainian, which were especially needed by the children's category of readers. To solve the issue

in 2022, the library staff appealed to their colleagues from the Public Library named after Lesya Ukrainka in Kyiv (director O. Romaniuk) with a request to form a batch of fiction and popular science literature and thanks to the volunteers the library received more than 100 copies of books. Participants of the Lithuanian-Ukrainian Forum also donated books in Ukrainian to the library.

In 2022-2024 the Klaipėda County Public Library hosted presentations of books by young Ukrainian writer S. Vertola (Kiev) "This is the Kitchen", "Traveling Wind", "Yuna. War", "Lel", which were added to the library's collections. In order to popularize the Lithuanian national heritage, the National Volunteer Coordination Center "Strong Together" and the publishing house "Balto print" published books for children by famous Lithuanian writers Evelina Daciute "Happiness is a Little Fox", Marius Marčinkivičius "Lake of Riddles", Benas Berantas and Vilija Kveskaite "Babaika", "Goristechko", translated into Ukrainian. The library actively popularizes Ukrainian literature. Thus, in December 2022-January 2023, during school vacations, so-called "winter readings" of I. Andrusiak's book "The Third Snow" were organized in an interactive format for three groups of children from Ukraine.

Speaking to city residents about the war in Ukraine

The library's activities to raise awareness of the city's public about the war in Ukraine are worth mentioning separately. Among them are screenings and discussions of documentary films "Mariupol. Unquenchable Hope" (directed by Max Litvinov), "Strong as the Earth" (directed by Lyudmila Melnik), "Mariupol 2" (directed by Mantas Kvedaravicius). The library also hosted a meeting with N. Sukhorukova, a journalist from Mariupol, and O. Zhurakhovska, a famous Ukrainian actress, during which they read fragments of the journalist's diary written before leaving occupied Mariupol.

In the summer of 2023, the library organized an interactive exhibition of children's portraits of famous people of Ukraine "Unbroken", and teachers of Lyubotin Art Lyceum "Dyvosvit" (Kharkiv region) held master classes for children and adults on the technique of Petrikovsky painting and pytnants. These were emotional meetings with children's perception of the world.

Taking care of spiritual things

Being away from their homeland, Ukrainians feel the need to be involved in their culture. That is why Klaipėda County Public Library organized winter and spring musical concerts "Colors of Spring" and "Ukrainian Christmas Sketches", during which the participants read poems in Ukrainian, and sang Ukrainian songs. The library also organized master classes with the Ukrainian artist, writer and master of "vytynanka" technique Natalia Didenko from Kiev. The events were filled with the atmosphere of the homeland: Ukrainian speech, quizzes, and songs dear to every Ukrainian's heart. It should be noted that not only Ukrainians but also residents and guests of Klaipėda took part in all these events.

One of the reading rooms where the Ukrainian community actively gathers for various events is the American Corner, which has been opened in the library since May 2022 with the support of the U.S. Embassy in Lithuania. Ukrainians participate in meetings of

the English conversation and book clubs, English study and improvement circles for young people and beginners, presentations of educational programs, celebrations of traditional American holidays, etc. A team of Lithuanian and Ukrainian volunteers assists in preparing and conducting the events. Media and information literacy events are also very popular. The events were held in the American Corner, Klaipeda International Ukrainian School, Klaipeda Gymnasium "Žaliakalnio" and Klaipeda Port City Progymnasium. This topic is very relevant nowadays, so the library staff in an interactive form told the participants how to recognize a fake, what is manipulation and how to resist it, what is information culture and hygiene, etc.

Learning and practicing the Lithuanian language is a very important element of adaptation and integration of Ukrainians in Lithuania and Klaipeda. Thanks to the cooperation with the Red Cross, starting from autumn 2023, its volunteers organize talks in Lithuanian language.

In conclusion, over the past two years, the library has accumulated significant experience in providing informational and socio-cultural support to Ukraine and the Ukrainian community in Klaipėda. Let us continue our efforts without tiring.

I wish for all of us never get tired.