



The first flowers in Kyiv, March, 2022;



Textbooks in school library after bombing, April, 2022.



Destroyed secondary school in Makariv region, April, 2022;

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My soul was somewhere

Usually you observe such dramatic changes to everyday life when you read a book or watch a movie, but here we are faced with a cruel reality ... When my sister Halyna left Ukraine for Argentina on February 9, 2022, after her first visit to our parents since the COVID-19 pandemic situation started, she told me: “Can you imagine: When I decided to visit Ukraine, my colleagues thought that I was recruited as a reporter for the future war between Russia and Ukraine! Will everything be ok?” “Everything will be ok!” – I responded and this was a false prognosis ...

I recalled this dialogue on February 24, 2022, after being woken by the sound of explosions at approximately 5 am. My first impulse was to turn off this “bloody movie”, but it was reality. Currently millions of Ukrainians continue to live and to struggle with Russian aggression in this new reality. Psychologically it was difficult to accept the idea that our

“So this was my destiny – to stay in Kyiv!”

traditional peaceful life has ended – probably for a long period. That is why the first day of war was a chaotic one for me. While withdrawing some cash from an ATM machine, I observed numerous people with children and pets – they were heading for the railway station, which is not far from my apartment. It was 6 am, when public transport just started running. I understood that I needed to make a decision about where I should stay during the first period of the war: in Kyiv, where I have lived for about the last twenty years, or in my native city, Sumy, with my parents, Volodymyr, 84 and Olha, 81 and their cat Martyshka. I decided to go to Sumy to support my parents and bought a train ticket. But the train was cancelled due to a Russian attack. So this was my destiny – to stay in Kyiv!

Since the beginning of the war both academic institutions where I work – Kyiv National Economic University named after



Meeting of the Presidium of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv, March, 2022



Together with representatives of the Council of Young Scientists at the MES of Ukraine during volunteer work, April, 2022.



Empty central street in Kyiv, February, 25, 2022.

between Kyiv and Sumy...

Vadym Hetman and National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine – provided clear instructions regarding the peculiarities of our work in the war situation. Paradoxically, it was a positive result of COVID-19 pandemic situation, which prepared us for distance teaching, communication, and cooperation. I could recall here the regular monthly meeting of the Presidium of National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine in March 2022. Usually numerous people join this event, but this time the large hall was almost empty – only our president, Vasyl Kremen, and two vice-presidents were sitting at their places, but many colleagues joined this meeting online.

A few days after the war started, Kyiv also became almost empty, with a very limited number of people and cars. All public transport was stopped. Only in some working pharmacies you could see long queues for medicines. Curfews sometimes lasted for 36 hours and, again

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paradoxically, the sound of the alarms provided the rare opportunity to go outside and take some exercise while walking to and from the shelter. Can you imagine – I was waiting for the alarm to sound during these long curfews! My impressions from this period were described in an interview to Diane Taylor from the *Guardian*¹, which was published on March 15, 2022. Although I gave permission to mention my surname, Diane wrote to me that the editor decided not to mention it – for safety reasons. The situation around Kyiv was still unpredictable this time.

During the whole of March 2022 we heard bombing – the most stressful of these sounds were in the night, usually between 1 and 2 am. But the initial horror became routine very soon. I was much more worried listening to news about bombing of Sumy, where my parents were still living. I became almost crazy when there was no mobile connection with them for a few



Inside destroyed secondary school in Makariv region, April, 2022;

hours. My soul was somewhere between Kyiv and Sumy during this time. It was difficult to understand that in the 21st century it is totally impossible to cross these approximately 330 km between the two cities and to help your old parents to survive in situation of bloody war.

Really helpful during this time was the support of my foreign colleagues. Every day I received numerous messages from them with different proposals and kind words. A substantial number of these messages were from Sweden where I had previously held a research position. Li Bennich-Björkman and Ann-Cathrine Jungar recorded a video with words of support of Ukraine and the necessity to stop Russian aggression for our project “Western Academia Support Ukraine”, which we conducted on volunteer basis together with Ukrainian journalist Anton Podlutsky. I received numerous messages of solidarity and support from Matthew Kott, Ausra Pads kocimaite, Pär Gustafsson, Michal Smrek and other Swedish colleagues. As a Ukrainian proverb says: “You need to be in trouble in order to understand who your real friends are”. I am really happy to have numerous real friends in Sweden!

When I saw the first flowers in Kyiv botanical garden, I understood – everything would be ok and we would be winners in this



Red tulips near the Red building of Kyiv National Taras Shevchenko University, May, 2022.



Chestnuts trees – the symbol of Kyiv – are flourishing, May, 2022;

battle. And, paradoxically for the third time, this revelation coincided with the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Kyiv and Sumy regions. I was able to observe the results of this Russian “visit to Ukraine” in April 2022, when together with representatives of the Council of Young Scientists at the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine I visited Makariv with a humanitarian mission. This town suffered dramatically from the Russian invasion and we could see destroyed houses, schools, churches. This is unforgettable!

On Orthodox Easter I visited my parents in Sumy for the first time since the beginning of this war. During our meeting I recall the main message of the Easter – life is more powerful than the death. The culture of war is connected with death, the culture of peace – with life. I am sure we can overcome death! ✕

PhD, Kyiv National Economic University named after Vadym Hetman
& National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine

reference

- 1 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/15/resident-describes-life-in-kyiv-ukraine-russia>