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# The Russian-Ukrainian War and Ukrainian Migrants and Refugees in Polish Political Discourse

April 2023 – February 2024

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# Summary

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- The topic of Russian aggression against Ukraine, and the situation of Ukrainian migrants and refugees is addressed in the Polish public space far more than in other EU countries. However, during the 2023 election campaign and in the first months of Donald Tusk's new government, the word Ukraine faded into the background, with it rarely appearing in party programs except for the Left's. Moreover, no party that participated in the campaign had invited migrants from Ukraine with Polish citizenship to their lists.
- The turning points of the campaign on Ukrainian issues were: April 2023 – when the embargo on Ukrainian agricultural products was announced; End of July 2023 – an interview of presidential minister Marcin Przydacz, where he mentioned “ungrateful Ukrainians”; and February 2024, when the new government began to play the “Russian agents” card, and anti-Russian threads obscured the anti-Ukrainian narrative in public debate.
- The Polish political mainstream correctly communicated to voters the importance of aid to Ukraine for the security of Poland itself. Still, when reporting on the “grain crisis,” even centrist politicians preferred to repeat fake news about “poisoned Ukrainian food” to raise the farmers' votes. The Polish embargo on Ukrainian agricultural production and farmers' protests on the border with Ukraine were the central issues for disinformation campaigns. Even if the campaigns were not invented in Russia, Moscow undoubtedly used them to demobilize Polish support for Ukrainian resistance.
- The topic of the Volhynian massacre did not lead the campaign. Still, Law and Justice politicians called the lack of changes in Ukrainian memory policy “ungrateful” and “an obstacle to integration with the EU.” The slogan about “ungrateful Ukrainians” not only cooled relations between Kyiv and Warsaw but also worsened the attitude of Poles towards Ukrainian refugees. The far-right Confederation campaigned for “limiting aid for refugees from Ukraine”, which costs the Polish budget less than the tax revenue from Ukrainian workers.
- Although the policy of intensive military, financial, and humanitarian support for Ukraine Mateusz Morawiecki's government began, and the government of Donald Tusk continues, on the other hand, both Law and Justice and the October 15 Coalition members are playing on anti-Ukrainian sentiments. As Poland is going through a long electoral cycle that will end only in the summer of 2025, and Polish society's fatigue with the war in Ukraine is growing, populist moves may hit Ukrainian migrants and refugees in Poland. Tension between Poles and Ukrainians living nearby could weaken social resistance to information and hybrid threats.



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# Introduction

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This report focuses on the issue of Ukraine and Ukrainians during the Polish election campaign to the Sejm and Senate and the first two months after the new government formation, i.e., covers the period from April 2023<sup>1</sup> to mid-February 2024. Based on analyzing political parties' programs, speeches, and messages of leading Polish politicians in traditional and social media, results of public opinion polls, and six semi-structured interviews with experts,<sup>2</sup> who identified and described key narratives about the war in Ukraine, Ukrainian migrants, and refugees. Special attention was paid to the examples of disinformation and misinformation.<sup>3</sup>

The issues mentioned above are important because, according to the opinions of EU residents, the war in Ukraine and immigration are the most significant challenges for a united Europe.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, reliable information about these challenges supports social cohesion, gives ground for adequate assessment and prioritization of risks by authorities and

civil societies, and strengthens resistance to disinformation campaigns. At the same time, manipulations weaken the ability of states and societies to cope with crises and lead to potential social tensions.

The parliamentary elections in October 2023 inaugurated a long electoral cycle in Poland: along with the local elections in April 2024, the European Parliament elections in June 2024, and the presidential elections in July 2025, the electoral campaigns created a space for constant confrontation in Polish public debate. Due to non-stop campaigning, Polish politicians were and are willing to constantly attack their opponents and simultaneously choose populist slogans and strategies in fear of losing support.

Since polls had long predicted the victory of Law and Justice (PiS, formally, the United Right Block – O. B.), which has been in power since 2015, the campaign was dominated by two issues: a possible joint list of Civic Coalition (KO),

- <sup>1</sup> The parliamentary campaign officially started on August 8, 2023, but an intense discussion on party programs and lists began in the spring. For this report, April 2023 is crucial because of President Volodymyr Zelenskiy's visit to Warsaw; many analysts consider it the last chord of the blooming Polish-Ukrainian friendship in 2022. A couple of days later, the government of Mateusz Morawiecki violated the EU law and introduced an embargo on Ukrainian food.
- <sup>2</sup> Interviews were conducted in the second half of May 2024 with Polish political analysts, journalists, historians, PR specialists, migrant and minority organizations representatives.
- <sup>3</sup> Misinformation is providing incomplete, only partially accurate information. Unlike disinformation, misinformation is not intended to deceive or outrage the recipient; it is created as a result of either ignorance or ideological distortion of the author of the message, see: UNHCR: Types of Misinformation and Disinformation, [tinyurl.com/bdzaxwk9](https://tinyurl.com/bdzaxwk9), no data (verified 21/06/2024)
- <sup>4</sup> They are perceived as more significant challenges than inflation or the climate crisis, while Poles are most concerned about the rising costs of living, see: Standard Eurobarometer 100 – Autumn 2023, [tinyurl.com/528v7jxj](https://tinyurl.com/528v7jxj) (verified 21/05/2024)

the Third Way (TD) and the Lefts, and the potential high results of Confederation which could enable them to create the majority with PiS. Neither of these happened.

The October 15 elections saw a record turnout of 74.4%. After the winner, PiS unsuccessfully attempted to form a government, KO, TD, and Lefts created a new cabinet and swore it in on December 13, 2023.

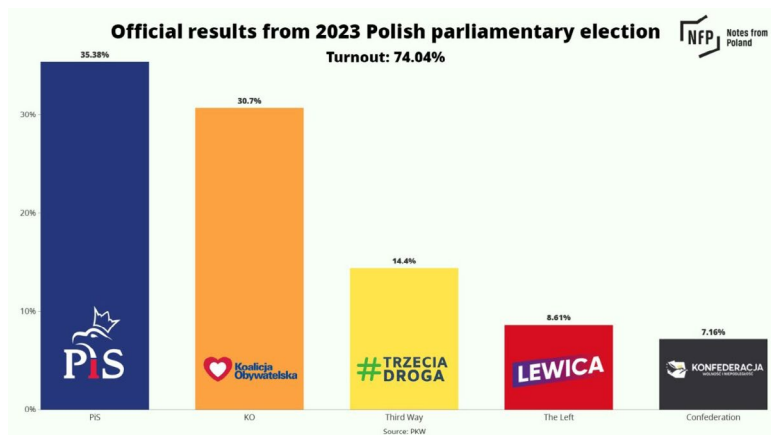
The leading topics of the campaign include the long PiS rule assessment, Poland-EU relations (more integration or more sovereignty, the Green Deal), the scope of Russian influence on Polish politics (creation of the investigation commission by PiS), women’s reproductive rights (repealing the abortion ban introduced by the decision of the Constitutional Tribunal in 2019), the “visa scandal,” ways to alleviate the security crisis on the border with Belarus, increasing pro-family spending and limiting taxes for entrepreneurs.

The topic of the war in Ukraine and issues related to the stay of Ukrainian migrants and refugees in Poland were featured in the campaign in several forms:

1. General topics regarding Polish aid to Ukraine and the alleged “ungratefulness of Ukrainians”
2. An Embargo on Ukrainian agriculture, farmers’ protests, and the myth of “poisonous food from the East” – the so-called “grain crisis”
3. Criticism of Ukrainian memory policy, primarily regarding the Volhynia massacre
4. Polish budget spending on helping Ukrainian refugees. Although most of these threads are related to bilateral relations between Warsaw and Kyiv, Ukrainian residents of Poland became hostages of interstate tensions.

Ukrainians already constitute over 5% of Poland’s population; in the case of metropolises like Warsaw or Wrocław, even 10%. Therefore, peaceful mutual adaptation between Poles and Ukrainians is critical for social cohesion. The basis of this coherence – in addition to a well-thought-out integration policy – is reliable information about Ukraine and Ukrainians in the public discourse, including how politicians and opinion-makers approach the topic.

**Fig. 1.** Seven electoral committees registered the lists in more than half of the districts, and five exceeded the electoral threshold.  
Source – Notes from Poland.



## By Ukrainian community in Poland, we mean three quite different groups:

**Ukrainian national minority** – Polish citizens of Ukrainian origin, whose status and rights are described in the National Minorities and Regional Language Act of January 6, 2005. The descendants of those displaced under Operation Vistula (Akcja Wisła), live mainly in the regions of Podkarpacie, Mazury, Western Pomerania, Lower Silesia, and in Warsaw city. According to the 2011 National Census, this group numbered 38.8 thousand people.<sup>1</sup>

**Economic migrants** are Ukrainian citizens who came to Poland mainly from 2015 to 2021, usually to work. Before the COVID-19 pandemic and the full-scale Russian invasion,

this group had a significant percentage of men who were short-term migrants working in Poland for several months up to a year. At the beginning of 2024, the group's size was estimated at 1 million people.

**War refugees from Ukraine** arrived after February 24, 2022, with the legal status of temporary protection under the EU Council directive, introduced into the Polish legal order through the Assistance to Ukrainian Citizens Act of March 12, 2022. As of the beginning of January 2024, the number of Ukrainian refugees was close to 950 thousand (over 40% of this group were minors).<sup>2</sup>

1 There is a discussion whether it is worth including economic migrants naturalized in Poland as part of the Ukrainian minority; after 2009, ca. 35,000 Ukrainians received Polish citizenship, see: Rzeczpospolita. Rekordowa liczba cudzoziemców – Ukraińców i Białorusinów – otrzymała w ubiegłym roku polski paszport, 25/04/2023, [tinyurl.com/435ypc7k](https://tinyurl.com/435ypc7k) (verified 20/05/2024)

2 Szczegółowe statystyki dotyczące osób zarejestrowanych w rejestrze obywateli Ukrainy i członków ich rodzin, którym nadano status cudzoziemca na podstawie specustawy. Stan na 09.01.2024 r., Otwarte Dane gov.pl [tinyurl.com/yvjtmezv](https://tinyurl.com/yvjtmezv) (verified on 28/05/2024)



# I A poisoned friendship

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Almost the entire PiS term was a period of crises in Polish-Ukrainian relations. Despite the record increase in trade and migration flows between the two countries, political contacts disappointed both parties. The most obvious reason was the memory politics: in 2015, Ukraine recognized UPA soldiers and OUN members as participants in the struggle for the independence of the state, while in Poland, these formations in 2016 were named as co-perpetrators of the genocide against the Polish population in Volhynia during WWII. But there were also deeper reasons: for Kyiv, Poland remained a less critical partner than Berlin, and Warsaw, due to the poor prospects of Ukraine's membership in the EU, found it difficult to regain the former Giedroyc drive in its eastern policy.

The sense of common interests and purpose beyond divisions returned in 2021 with the threat of a full-scale Russian invasion. The fact

that Poland was one of the few that believed in the Ukrainian defense succeeding, quickly organized the delivery of military equipment and ammunition, and after February 24 accepted over 1.7 million Ukrainian refugees,<sup>5</sup> resulting in an increase in Ukrainians' sympathy for their western neighbours. With over 90% of Ukrainians declaring it in the Summer of 2022. However, this love was asymmetric – Poles' sympathy for Ukrainians grew to just 51%, but opinion leaders from both countries wrote elegies about brotherly nations for almost a year.

The cracks became visible already in the Fall of 2022 when shrapnel from a Ukrainian anti-aircraft missile killed two Polish citizens in Przewodow.<sup>6</sup> President Zelensky travelled everywhere but not to Warsaw. Although Polish exports to Ukraine increased to a record PLN 45.6 billion<sup>7</sup> (ca. 10 billion EUR), Kyiv did not provide guarantees for Polish entrepreneurs in the post-war recovery process.

5 Polish politicians' constantly repeat the cliché about „accepting millions of refugees”; meanwhile, over 4 million came through Poland in transit, 1.74 million Ukrainians applied for temporary protection status (PESEL UKR number) from March 2022 to January 2024, and the maximum number of people who had this status at the same time was approximately 1.2 million, see: Szczegółowe statystyki dotyczące osób zarejestrowanych w rejestrze obywateli Ukrainy i członków ich rodzin, którym nadano status cudzoziemca na podstawie specustawy. Stan na 09.01.2024 r., Otwarte Dane gov.pl [tinyurl.com/yvjtmezv](https://tinyurl.com/yvjtmezv) (verified 28/05/2024)

6 Warsaw's relations with Kyiv in 2022–2023, as seen by President Duda's advisors, high officials of the Prime Minister Chancellery, and the MFA, are described in detail by Parafianowicz Z., *Polska na wojnie*, Warszawa 2023.

7 *cus: Ogromny wzrost eksportu towarów z Polski do Ukrainy | Polska Agencja Prasowa SA, 05/03/2024* [tinyurl.com/3hpmn47h](https://tinyurl.com/3hpmn47h) (verified 29/05/2024)



## The topic of the war in Ukraine and integration policy towards Ukrainian migrant and refugee community in the programmes of political parties:

In a 240-page document titled “A Safe Future for Poles”<sup>1</sup> **PiS** emphasized that “only Ukraine’s victory will stop the imperialist ambitions of the Russian Federation and the further march of Putin’s troops into Western Europe.” It promised military assistance for Kyiv as part of the international coalition and confirmed support for Ukraine’s accession to the EU. The document vaguely referred to the grain crisis: “The Polish government has imposed an embargo on products from Ukraine in the face of doubts about the threats posed by these imports,” and protecting the interests of Polish farmers will be possible “by building stable alliances and strong coalitions with [EU] countries that are in a similar situation.” PiS wanted to help refugees from Ukraine by using European funds. It also wanted to fight unfair employers who invite migrant workers through the deposit system.

**KO** in “100 concrete things for 100 days”<sup>2</sup> completely omitted the topic of war and aid to Ukraine. The chapters “Security” and “National Defense” focused on the criticism of PiS’ Ministry of Interior, staff nominations at the Ministry of National Defense, and the governmental purchase of military equipment. As for migration, there was a promise to settle the visa scandal, nothing more.

**TD** in “Poland’s recovery plan – Enough of quarrels! Forward!”<sup>3</sup> mentioned that defence against the Russian threat is one of the most important tasks of the state. Without directly referring to the grain crisis and Ukraine, it promised Polish farmers “effective phytosanitary, veterinary and quality control of imported agri-food products [...], a tight system of grain transit to Polish ports”.<sup>4</sup> Nothing about migrants or refugees.

**The Left**<sup>5</sup> mentioned Ukraine the most often. The formation supports Kyiv’s EU aspirations, promises a continuation of equipment and humanitarian assistance, cooperation in creating a reconstruction plan for Ukraine based on the principle of social justice, a complete ban on trade with Russia, and tightening sanctions imposed on the aggressor. It supported the cancellation of Ukraine’s foreign debt and the confiscation of Russian oligarchs’ foreign assets. Migrants would be better supported by the National Labor Inspectorate, and refugees would be guaranteed to submit the asylum application at the border.

**The Confederation**, in its “Constitution of Freedom,”<sup>6</sup> recalled the war in Ukraine only as a reason to intensify arm the Polish military and expand intelligence. It didn’t mention migration from Ukraine but repeatedly mentioned Kyiv as a source of problems for Polish workers: “unfair competition from Ukrainian carriers,” “flooding of the Polish market with low-quality food products from Ukraine,” “agricultural farms in Ukraine [...] are large agro-holdings often owned by international corporations.” Poland’s problems were blamed on the EU, whose rules “favour Ukrainian oligarchs.” The first point of its agricultural program was to stop unfair competition created by Ukrainian producers.

1 Bezpieczna Przyszłość Polaków – PROGRAM PiS, 9/09/2023 [tinyurl.com/nc69h288](https://tinyurl.com/nc69h288) (verified on 28/05/2024)

2 100konkretów, 9/09/2024, [tinyurl.com/m4tubdmf](https://tinyurl.com/m4tubdmf) (verified 27/05/2024)

3 Trzecia Droga: Dość kłótni, do przodu! | Polska 2050 Szymona Hołowni, 2/09/2023, [polska2050.pl/trzecia-droga](https://polska2050.pl/trzecia-droga) (verified on 27/05/2024)

4 Rozwój rolnictwa | Polska żywność i proste dopłaty bezpośrednie, 2/09/2023, [tinyurl.com/tr7jshhy](https://tinyurl.com/tr7jshhy) (verified 27/05/2024)

5 Program wyborczy KW Nowa Lewica, 16/09/2023, [tinyurl.com/yc2pdda2](https://tinyurl.com/yc2pdda2) (verified 27/05/2024)

6 Konfederacja – PROGRAM WYBORCZY 2023, 4/05/2023, [tinyurl.com/23c6p7tj](https://tinyurl.com/23c6p7tj) (verified 28/05/2024)



Importing Ukrainian agricultural products to Poland had become a natural bone of contention. The topic of competition between Polish and Ukrainian food producers has already appeared in the 2010s. Small Polish family farms – 50% occupy 1 to 5 ha, and only 3% over 50 ha<sup>8</sup>, thus being unable to compete with large Ukrainian agro-holdings. Without land concentration, even EU subsidies could not help Polish agriculture; 54% of farms recorded a loss or did not generate a profit in 2022.<sup>9</sup> When, in April 2022, the European Commission lifted the limits on Ukrainian agricultural exports to help Ukrainians cope with the economic consequences of the war, the Polish countryside was in an uproar. Moreover, in the Summer of 2022, several Polish companies began to buy grain to pass through Poland only in transit on the internal market. In Winter 2022/2023, grain purchase prices from Polish producers dropped dramatically – the so-called grain crisis began.

As long as Polish society was enthusiastic about helping Ukraine (more on this in the next chapter), Mateusz Morawiecki's government did not pay due attention to this problem. The reform of Polish agriculture requires years of preparation and would lead to a guaranteed election defeat. But a few days after

Volodymyr Zelensky's visit to Warsaw, which took place in an atmosphere of friendship and mutual admiration, slogans about "poisoned Ukrainian grain" flooded the Polish political mainstream, and on April 15, Morawiecki announced an embargo on agricultural products from Ukraine.

"The worst crap is coming to our country, and the government is looking at this pathology" – these are the words of one of the farmers quoted by "Tygodnik Rolniczy." Head of the Grain and Food Chamber: "This grain will finally leave these wagons and come to us. Worms, bacteria and fungi could and would grow there." "It's about the grain flowing from Ukraine to Poland for months. It was supposed to help Ukraine, it was supposed to save the starving in Africa, but in fact, it is ruining Polish farmers. [...] I warned in June last year [...] and Morawiecki said: this is Russian propaganda [...]. Poles are debating whether idiots or thieves rule us. It looks both are right," KO leader Donald Tusk boiled over on TikTok in April 2023.<sup>10</sup>

Later, Tusk focused less on Ukraine and more on PiS's sins. He promised to reach an agreement with Brussels to defend Polish farmers. To strengthen the "agrarian bloc," in mid-August, he invited one of the leaders of farmers' protests, Michał Kołodziejczak, to the KO list. Kołodziejczak trumpeted "poisonous Ukrainian food," although Tusk did not agree with him, he did not refute these words either.

Poland 2050 did not remain indifferent to this topic either. Its MPs submitted a request to the Supreme Audit Office to inspect the Ministry of Agriculture to check the transport of Ukrainian

## **"The investigation [initiated by the opposition] into how LLCs close to PiS made money on grain from Ukraine was supposed to hit PiS, but in fact, it hit Ukraine more."**

/ Expert 2

8 Główny Urząd Statystyczny / Obszary tematyczne / Rolnictwo. Leśnictwo / PSR 2020 / Powszechny Spis Rolny 2020. Raport z wyników, 11/08/2021, [shorturl.at/2wToo](https://shorturl.at/2wToo) (verified 1/06/2024)

9 Ziarno niezgody: analiza protestów rolniczych – Instytut Finansów Publicznych, 18/03/2024 [tinyurl.com/3azdx4de](https://tinyurl.com/3azdx4de) (verified 1/06/2024)

10 [tinyurl.com/49kd6sz8](https://tinyurl.com/49kd6sz8), 12/04/2023 (verified 1/06/2024). The video attracted over 32.7 thousand likes and more than 2.5 thousand shares.

grain. “We demand an obvious answer – where did this grain go? Is it true that citizens today eat poisoned bread and other grain products? – asked MP Mirosław Suchoń<sup>11</sup>. A month before the elections, Szymon Hołownia confirmed the need to maintain the embargo on Ukraine’s products, explaining it also in the interest of Ukraine itself: “We should not allow certain agricultural products to enter our market, because it will undermine our security. And if our security is disturbed, Ukraine’s security will also be disturbed. This is in our common interest.” At the same time, he stressed the importance of ensuring transit to countries “that need it, want it, and are willing to pay for it.”<sup>12</sup>

In the Summer of 2023, PiS started playing the anti-Ukrainian card to stop the outflow of its electorate. The accusations against Kyiv for exporting “poisoned food” were accompanied by a thread about “ungrateful Ukrainians,” which already became viral on social media. A breakthrough moment was the interview of Presidential Minister Marcin Przydacz for TVP on July 31, in which the politician suggested that Kyiv had no moral right to unblock food exports to Poland: “Ukraine really received a lot of support from Poland. “I think it would be worth it for her to start appreciating Poland’s efforts for Ukraine in recent months and years.”

Zelensky’s team reacted sharply: “We categorically reject politicians’ attempts to impose on Polish society the groundless opinion that Ukraine does not appreciate the help from

Poland [...]. There’s nothing worse than having your rescuer demanding a rescue fee even while you’re bleeding. [...] Supporting us is not philanthropy, but an investment in Poland’s own security,” said Andriy Sybiha, deputy head of the President’s. The Ukrainian MFA summoned the Polish ambassador and the Polish MFA – his Ukrainian counterpart.

“We will not get far in the campaign by showing sympathy for Ukrainians because social emotions have changed,” a PiS MP who wished to remain anonymous told “Wirtualna Polska” at the beginning of August.<sup>13</sup> Deputy Minister Paweł Jabłoński emphasized on X that “Poland supports Ukraine – so much, so intensive and so long – as it suits our national interest.”<sup>14</sup>

The Confederation was the party which incited most of the topics of farmers’ protests and alleged ingratitude of Ukrainians. Its politicians created the link between the fight against Ukrainian grain and the state aid to Ukrainian refugees (more on this in the next chapter). The loudest voice belonged to Confederation MP Grzegorz Braun – as Demagogue watch dog reveals, one of the leading popularizers of anti-Ukrainian content in Polish social media. Also, MPs Andrzej Zapałowski (Confederation of the Polish Crown) and Ryszard Wilk (New Hope) published videos of the “MP inspection of wagons” transporting grain allegedly destined for Poland. The recording was taken on the same day that grain from trains was poured onto the tracks; this episode raised the tensions between Kyiv and Warsaw.<sup>15</sup>

11 Dzięki Polsce 2050 NIK skontroluje ukraińskie zboże | Polska 2050 Szymona Hołowni, 16/05/2023, [tinyurl.com/3hvt9ds](https://tinyurl.com/3hvt9ds) (verified 3/06/2024)

12 Hołownia: nie powinniśmy dopuszczać niektórych produktów rolnych na polski rynek | Polska Agencja Prasowa SA, 13/09/2023, [tinyurl.com/yckczyd5](https://tinyurl.com/yckczyd5) (verified 30/05/2024)

13 PiS wciąga relacje z Ukrainą do kampanii. „Na współczuciu daleko nie zajedziemy” – wP Wiadomości, 2/08/2023, [tinyurl.com/2xurt287](https://tinyurl.com/2xurt287) (verified 29/05/2024)

14 [tinyurl.com/mupahw4a](https://tinyurl.com/mupahw4a), 1/08/2023 (verified 3/06/2024)

15 Gordyjski węzeł rosyjsko-dezinformacyjny, czyli drugie dno rolniczych protestów, 21/03/2024, [tinyurl.com/2mkkd2tn](https://tinyurl.com/2mkkd2tn) (verified 1/06/2024)



Polish farmers protest primarily against the EU Green Deal policy. **Anti-Ukrainian slogans were less important but also visible and focused around two threads: grain is exported to Poland not by Ukrainian family farms but by oligarchs, so the fight against this export is a fight against large international capital; agricultural products from Ukraine are of poor quality because they are produced without taking into account EU requirements regarding the use of pesticides, land cultivation, etc.**

We can partially agree with the first issue – Ukrainian farmers work in larger areas than Poles; agro-holdings own approximately  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the arable land and play a leading role in exports (although they are not the sole exporters). However, the information about Ukrainian food's poor quality is simply fake.

In September 2023, the RMF FM radio station announced that it had received unofficial results of the Supreme Audit Office's report on the Ukrainian grain. From January to May 2023, the State Veterinary Inspection allegedly found contamination in 35% of cereal samples from Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> This news caused a wave of anti-Ukrainian hate on social media. When the official report was made public in November 2023, it turned out that five of the 717-grain samples tested had traces of contamination. The Chief Sanitary Inspector informed the Supreme Audit Office that in 2022–2023, it conducted 11,569 analyses of grain samples from Ukraine and found unacceptable contaminants in 278 (2.4%).<sup>2</sup>

**“The reason [for the grain crisis] was the Polish media’s love for tabloid-style headlines; it was the media that created a sensation with the results of the routine sanitary inspection.”**

/ Expert 3

**“No one [politician – OB] mentioned that the Ukrainian economy is a part of the fight against Russian aggression. No one complained about the losses of Polish farmers due to the border blockade. No one refuted the lie about the poor quality of Ukrainian food. This silence has created the impression there is a symmetry between the Russian military threat and Ukrainian exports.”**

/ Expert 1

1 Ustalenia NIK ws. importu zbóż z Ukrainy. Mamy nieoficjalne wyniki kontroli – RMF 24, 19/09/2023 [tinyurl.com/yc47cvyp](https://tinyurl.com/yc47cvyp) (verified 3/06/2024)

2 Działania organów państwa w zakresie importu i obrotu zboża i rzepaku z Ukrainy, 7/11/2023 [tinyurl.com/48tvt5jk](https://tinyurl.com/48tvt5jk) (verified 2/06/2024)

**“Confederation is the only party with a tough approach towards Ukraine even beyond the election campaign. It is not a pro-Russian political force, although it has pro-Russian members. Raising anti-Ukrainian sentiment in Poland pays off more than promoting pro-Russian positions.”**

/ Expert 4

**“Even the Confederation understands the Russian threat. It attacks Ukraine because it wants to respond to the sentiments of some voters who blame Ukrainian politicians for historical policy or support the idea of a Polish mono-ethnic state without granting political rights to migrants. Compared to other ultra-right parties in the EU, it is not very anti-Ukrainian. If others on the Polish political scene preach solidarity towards Ukraine, the Confederation favours a transactional approach, concession for concession.”**

/ Expert 5

Worth noting, that one of the leaders of the Confederation Lublin, entrepreneur Rafał Mekler, became the face of the Polish-Ukrainian border blockade. First, he was blocking border roads together with transport companies in autumn 2023, and then with farmers in February 2024. Mekler spread fake news on social media, claiming that it was not humanitarian aid that was going to Ukraine from Poland, but luxury goods. He also claimed that Ukrainian customs officers deliberately forced Poles to stand in long lines, and the Polish police helped Ukrainian drivers bypass the blockade.<sup>16</sup> He also shared pictures of Ukrainian grain scattered in Dorohusk on social media.<sup>17</sup> All this had a disastrous impact on Poland's image in Ukraine.<sup>18</sup>

16 Рупор російської пропаганди у Польщі став голосом протесту фермерів – Тексти.org.ua, 14/02/2024, [tinyurl.com/27fpcds7](https://tinyurl.com/27fpcds7) (verified 30/05/2023)

17 [tinyurl.com/5n8drcbd](https://tinyurl.com/5n8drcbd) the video has over 26,000 likes (verified 3/06/2024)

18 Оцінка впливу зовнішньополітичних чинників на Україну. Ставлення до іноземних держав та окремих ініціатив їх лідерів. Оцінка громадянами України легітимності правління Путіна (березень 2024р.), 18/04/2024 [shorturl.at/3WdeT](https://shorturl.at/3WdeT) (verified 20/05/2024)



After the October elections, anti-Ukrainian rhetoric related to the grain crisis decreased. Prime Minister Tusk, in his expose of December 13, 2023, addressed the topic constructively: “We will [...] loudly and decisively demand the full mobilization of the free world, the Western world, to help Ukraine in this war. There is no

**“The grain crisis was caused not by Internet trolls, but disinformation spread by Polish politicians. However, cannot exclude the possibility the protests at the border were the result of Russian information and psychological operations. The topic was particularly hot when Ukraine tried to find alternative grain transit channels without the involvement of Turkey, which is so anti-Russian. When Kyiv reached an agreement with Erdogan, the protests quitted.”**

/ Expert 3

alternative way of thinking. And I want to say that Poland’s full commitment to Ukraine in this cruel conflict with the Russian aggressor cannot mean a lack of cordial and friendly assertiveness when it comes to Polish interests – the interests of Polish entrepreneurs, drivers, farmers.<sup>19</sup> Although the exposé also included a paragraph about “an uncontrolled wave of products from Ukraine”. Kołodziejczak became deputy minister of agriculture and asked all those who suspected that Ukrainian grain actually went to Poland to contact him to initiate state inspections.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, during his visit to Kyiv in January 2024, Tusk appointed MP Paweł Kowal – one of the most experienced experts in Ukrainian affairs in Polish politics – as the plenipotentiary for the reconstruction of Ukraine.<sup>21</sup>

Anti-Ukrainian sentiment again became visible during the farmers’ border blockade in February 2024. It began to fade with the ko’s announcement to create a commission to investigate Russian influence in Polish politics. The search for Kremlin agents replaced other eastern threads.

19 Stenogram expose premiera Donalda Tuska – Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów – Portal Gov.pl, 13/13/2023, [tinyurl.com/nhkncwk](https://tinyurl.com/nhkncwk) (verified 1/06/2024)

20 Czy zboże z Ukrainy wjeżdża do Polski? – Michał Kołodziejczak, 22/01/2024, [tinyurl.com/4p5pevfn](https://tinyurl.com/4p5pevfn) (verified 2/06/2024)

21 Paweł Kowal zostanie pełnomocnikiem ds. odbudowy Ukrainy | Polska Agencja Prasowa SA, 22/01/2024, [tinyurl.com/n2s79a6x](https://tinyurl.com/n2s79a6x) (verified 21/06/2024)

## II Limits of Hospitality

So, the grain crisis had the most remarkable impact on the discourse of Ukraine in Poland. The issue of limiting assistance to refugees from Ukraine who have been arriving in the country since February 2022 was less significant but still significant.

At the end of 2023, the 65% employment rate of adult Ukrainian refugees in Poland was the highest in the EU.<sup>22</sup> From March 2022 to December 2023, refugees from Ukraine contributed to the Polish budget from 30.5 billion to 37.7 billion PLN in taxes (increasing the GDP level by 0.7–1.1%). At the same time, the Polish government spent approximately PLN 20 billion on their support.<sup>23</sup> However, more than half of Poles in the GLOBSEC Trends 2023 study declared that Ukrainian refugees are supported at the expense of poor Polish citizens.

The situation of Ukrainians under temporary protection became the subject of disinformation campaigns in 2022 (“A cousin wanted to take her child to a doctor, but Ukrainians took all the appointments”). In 2023, politicians included the “demanding refugees” narrative in their election speeches. The slogan “Let’s help Ukraine” lost momentum, but “Let’s hold

Ukrainians accountable for this help” was on the rise.

Playing the anti migration card, Polish politicians tried to adapt to the public mood: as the Openfield survey indicated, in February 2022, 72% of Poles supported the idea of accepting refugees from Ukraine, and a year later, that support dropped by only 5 percentage points. Then in February 2024 it decreased to 52%.<sup>24</sup> Dr. Robert Staniszewski (Warsaw University) research proved that if over 80% of Poles were in favour of admitting Ukrainian children to Polish schools, and 52% agreed to refugees’ access to free health care, then 53% were against granting them the 800+ PLN benefit. At the same time, 32% of respondents mentioned they had changed their attitude towards refugees from Ukraine – for the more negative.<sup>25</sup>

The first reason for this change was natural war fatigue. The tensions in Polish-Ukrainian relations were not without significance, too. For example, CBOS annual research on the attitude of Poles towards other nations indicates that the attitude towards Ukrainians is strongly related to the state of governmental relations. Sharper bilateral tension could explain the decreased

22 65 proc. ukraińskich uchodźców pracuje, ale polski rynek pracy to dla nich wiele wyzwania, 31/01/2024, tinyurl.com/bdh-6c8yj (verified 20/05/2024)

23 Ukraińcy są motorem polskiej gospodarki. „Teraz wszystko będzie zależeć od wyniku wojny” [ANALIZA], Onet.pl, 27/03/2024, shorturl.at/bt2U6 (verified 27/05/2024)

24 Zmniejsza się poparcie Polaków dla uchodźców z Ukrainy [Badanie], Forsal.pl, 24/02/2024 tinyurl.com/y84xnrkb (verified 30/05/2024)

25 Badanie: Polacy widzą korzyści płynące z przyjazdu uchodźców z Ukrainy, Rzeczpospolita, 9/02/2024 tinyurl.com/yysz-7bfd (verified 30/05/2024)



positive attitudes towards Ukrainians in 2016 and 2018.<sup>26</sup>

But in 2023, there was another reason – both PiS and the liberal opposition had exaggerated the stories about how Poland helps Ukrainian refugees. The Polish offer to asylum seekers was more modest than in Western European countries, and international humanitarian organizations, non-governmental organizations, and the Ukrainian diaspora bore a significant part of the costs. However, the narrative about “unique Polish helping” made the Poles frustrated, with a feeling of great effort without adequate gratitude.

**“[The government] keeps saying how much we help Ukraine, but these numbers cannot be verified. Besides, voters believe that we help the most. Hence, society is reluctant to make more of an effort. There is a Czech initiative to collect ammunition for Ukraine and a German one to collect anti-aircraft defence assets. Poland no longer goes ahead with such initiatives. [...] Due to the dictatorship of public opinion polls, which rule both in PiS and KO, politicians are unwilling to convince people to make greater efforts. Rather, they are interested in cultivating citizens’ self-adoration.”**

/ Expert 4

The Confederation prioritized the issue of radically limiting assistance to refugees from Ukraine. Yet in 2022, its MPs promoted the #StopUkrainizationOfPoland campaign on social media and fed Poles with stories about newcomers who would soon throw the hosts out of public life. The National Movement, whose president is Confederation MP Krzysztof Bosak, argued that support for Ukraine comes at the expense of Poland and Poles. MP Braun, whom we mentioned in the previous chapter, was particularly active; worth noting, he was one of the few who published anti-Ukrainian and outright pro-Russian content on his timeline.<sup>27</sup>

It is important to stress that PiS and PO MPs repeatedly criticized Braun’s anti-Ukrainian statements. However, in April 2023, the Sejm Ethics Committee did not decide on a reprimand for the Confederation MP, arguing, among other things, that the hate he expressed against Ukrainians is “just an opinion.”

Sławomir Mentzen – the new face of the Confederation party – dedicated to Ukrainian refugees several videos on TikTok. One of them: “We do not want to finance 300+, 500+, 800+, 2% loan to anyone who is not Polish [...]. We shouldn’t support a neighbouring nation,” had over 44,000 views and almost 2,300 shares.<sup>28</sup> “It’s time to end social welfare for Ukrainians” video collected an additional dozen or so thousand likes.<sup>29</sup>

26 CBOS, Stosunek do innych narodów rok po wybuchu wojny na Ukrainie, March 2023, pp. 2, 4–5, [cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2023/K\\_033\\_23.PDF](https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2023/K_033_23.PDF) (verified 21/05/2024)

27 Raport Demagoga i IMM: Antyukraińska propaganda w 2023 roku, 22/02/2024, [tinyurl.com/5xvjxuh3](https://tinyurl.com/5xvjxuh3) (verified 20/05/2024)

28 <https://www.tiktok.com/@slawomirmentzen/video/7286100033424919840>, 4/10/2023 (verified 1/06/2024)

29 [https://www.tiktok.com/@mentzen\\_fanpage/video/7278759344861105440](https://www.tiktok.com/@mentzen_fanpage/video/7278759344861105440), 14/09/2023 (verified 1/06/2024)



**Fig. 2.** In 2023, Demagogue Watch dog and the Institute of Media Monitoring identified approximately 290,000 pieces of anti-Ukrainian content on Polish Facebook, X, and online forums. The estimated reach of such posts is 20–30 million contacts monthly. Source – Demagog.



ko also sensed the topic's potential, but instead of limiting the aid to refugees, it introduced the slogan of "tightening" it. "There are no people in our electorate who are tired of the war or the mere presence of Ukrainians in Poland. Rather, these are people who say that we accepted refugees and incurred costs, so why isn't Europe helping us? The answer is simple: PiS did not provide us with this support. However, there is indeed no more room in Poland to increase privileges for Ukrainians," an anonymous opposition politician told DGP newspaper in September 2023.<sup>30</sup>

Ultimately, the bill on "tightening the aid to Ukrainians" was submitted to the Sejm by the new coalition in February 2024. Experts criticized it for limiting support for the most vulnerable refugee groups and Confederation – for "too much generosity" towards Ukrainians.<sup>31</sup> (Poland helps Ukrainians to the extent specified by the EU Council directive. Ukrainian refugees have the right to benefit from social assistance, health care, and education in all EU countries).

The media and the third sector in Poland are open to Ukrainian migrants. Ukrainian journalists comment on international events, and activists receive awards and distinctions. However, Polish politics avoids this type of diversity. Out of 6,656 candidates for the Sejm and 360 for the Senate, only three people were representatives of the Ukrainian minority (Natalia Sycz and Zbigniew Homza from ko ran for seats in a district in Masuria, and Lemko Bohdan Gocz ran on behalf of TD). There were no candidates of Ukrainian immigration background, although the parties' lists included people from Bangladesh, Turkey and Belarus.

The lack of Ukrainian representation can partly be explained by the low naturalization rates in Poland. From 2009 to 2021, approximately 35,000 Ukrainians received a Polish passport (in 2021, Poland recognized 10,000 foreigners as citizens, while France and Germany – over 130,000 each). It looks like the Polish political class treats Ukrainians as guests, not subjects of the political process; we can offer them sympathy and expect (and, to some extent, as in

<sup>30</sup> Osiecki G., Żółciak T., Wybory 2023. Jak partie zamierzają wykorzystać spór z Ukrainą? in: Dziennik Gazeta Prawna, 25/09/2023, [tinyurl.com/3um9cuhp](https://tinyurl.com/3um9cuhp) (verified 27/05/2024)

<sup>31</sup> Nowelizacja ustawy o pomocy Ukraińcom. Krzysztof Bosak: To nie są normalne przepisy – rp.pl, 7/02/2024, [tinyurl.com/mr45ae5x](https://tinyurl.com/mr45ae5x) (verified 3/06/2024)



**“[In Polish politics] there is little to gain and much to lose from being pro-Ukrainian. “Politicians are afraid of accusations of excessive pro-Ukrainianism, that they are the ones who are leading Ukrainians to power.”**

/ Expert 6

**“Ukrainian candidates on the lists do not have their electorate. In 2019, several parties tried to invite them during the national and European elections – with disastrous results. Perhaps in 2028, when more than 30–40 thousand Ukrainian migrants will receive Polish passports, the situation will change.”**

/ Expert 2

the case of the grain crisis, demand) gratitude, but we do not invite them to the table to discuss the country’s future together.

At the end of 2023, CBOS asked Ukrainians in Poland – both economic migrants and refugees – how they perceive their life in the new country. Most respondents believed that Poles’ attitude towards Ukrainians began to deteriorate after the incredible surge of solidarity they experienced at the beginning of the war, and the future of Polish-Ukrainian relations would be rather pessimistic. Tensions between countries will affect migrants’ perceptions in Poland. However, the Ukrainian government’s concessions on the Volhynia massacre commemoration could improve the situation.<sup>32</sup>

32 CBOS, Fokus nr 2/2024. Ukraińcy o swoim życiu w Polsce, 16/02/2024, [tinyurl.com/yrs86rhhb](https://tinyurl.com/yrs86rhhb) (verified 1/06/2024)

## III History Becomes History?

Research conducted in 2015–2021 by the Center for Research on Prejudice (Warsaw University) showed that an important element of Poles' reluctance or indifference towards Ukrainian neighbours is the perception of them as responsible for historical detriments.<sup>33</sup> The conflict of Polish and Ukrainian memory policy around Volhynia became the leading theme of bilateral relations in the second half of the 2010s. If Poles criticized the commemoration of Shukhevych and Bandera in Ukraine, Ukrainians resented the PiS government for idly watching the desecration and destruction of several Ukrainian graves and monuments in Podkarpacie and the Lublin region.

The annual July celebration of the anniversary of the Volhynian massacre became an opportunity not only to commemorate the victims but to spread mass anti-Ukrainian hate. Moreover, after the outbreak of a full-scale war, Facebook and X were flooded with posts that Ukrainians do not deserve help due to the crimes they once committed against the Poles. Poles should stop accepting refugees from Ukraine, otherwise, they may share the fate of the inhabitants of Volhynia.<sup>34</sup>

The parliamentary campaign coincided with a sensitive date – the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Volhynian massacre. Although all interviewed experts agreed that the topic of Volhynia crime was communicated by Polish politicians more calmly than, for example, in 2016 or 2018, even mainstream parties didn't resign from the flirt with the electorate that shares anti-Ukrainian sentiment.

In mid-May 2023, when the MFA spokesman Łukasz Jasina said that “the Ukrainian side still lacks the understanding that the Volhynia issue is crucial for Poles,” and in his opinion, “Volodymyr Zelensky should once again apologize to the Poles for Volhynia”<sup>35</sup> - he was suspended in duties. But at the end of June, Jarosław Kaczyński, interviewed by RMF FM, claimed: “It was a ruthless, cruel genocide, even worse than the German genocides.” When asked if he would be willing to go to Kyiv and tell President Zelensky this, he replied: “Right now, I don't think it will help. Our main goal at the moment is defeating Russia. [Ukrainians] believe that at this moment, they cannot [come to terms with the past]. I do not share this opinion, but they are the ones waging the war; they are dying on the fronts, they are bombed, and they are destroyed in various ways.”<sup>36</sup>

33 M. Winiewski, K. Hansen, M. Bilewicz, W. Soral, A. Świdorska, D. Bulska, *Mowa nienawiści. Mowa pogardy. Raport z badania przemocy werbalnej wobec grup mniejszościowych*, Fundacja Batorego, 27/02/2017, [tinyurl.com/57mhxaxh](https://tinyurl.com/57mhxaxh) (verified 28/05/2024)

34 K. Liber-Kwiecińska, *Emocje na celowniku – antyukraińskie komentarze w mediach społecznościowych*, in: *Socjolingwistyka t. 37 (1)*, Kraków 2023, pp. 217–238 [tinyurl.com/5n6dfcm9](https://tinyurl.com/5n6dfcm9) (verified 28/05/2024)

35 Rzecznik msz: prezydent Zełenski powinien przeprosić za Wołyń [WYWIAD], Onet.pl, 19/05/2023 [tinyurl.com/4brh3neb](https://tinyurl.com/4brh3neb) (verified 20/05/2024)

36 Kaczyński: Rzeź wołyńska była brutalnym ludobójstwem. Trzeba się z tym rozliczyć, *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, 24/06/2023, [tinyurl.com/2vatekcr](https://tinyurl.com/2vatekcr) (verified 20/05/2024)



## Russian propaganda in Poland promotes content that creates an image of cynical and ungrateful Ukrainian elites and suggests that Polish society loses its wealth by helping Ukrainian refugees.

The key messages were developed in the 2010s, but in 2022–2023 the new toxic narratives had arrived:<sup>1</sup>

- the Volhynian crime, the commemoration of UPA commanders in Ukraine, Ukrainians then and now are Nazis;
- Ukraine will lose this war; it's not worth sacrificing yourself to support it;
- Helping Ukraine may lead to the conflict spreading to NATO countries;
- Ukrainian elites are corrupt; they don't care about the people on the front;
- Ukrainian refugees in Poland do not want to work; they only live on social benefits; you can't make an appointment with a doctor because of them; you cannot enrol your child in kindergarten – only refugee children, etc. Before the 2023 elections, there was a conspiracy theory that PiS and KO wanted to rig the elections using the support of Ukrainian refugees, whose PESEL number had supposedly entitled them to vote;<sup>2</sup>
- Ukropolin – the West started a war with Russia to transform Poland into a Ukrainian-Jewish state; the participants of the conspiracy led by the USA will benefit from this;
- Poisonous food from Ukraine.

It should be stressed, that in the case of Poland, the fakes distributed by anonymous accounts or some alt-right representatives do not aim to create a basis for sympathy towards Russia, they fuel anti-Ukrainian sentiment. There were the narratives about “poisonous food” and “demanding refugees” that had done the most damage, but more marginal threads should not be ignored either. As a 2024 study by the Digital Poland Foundation and the Demagogue Watch dog shows, 91% of adult Poles believe in at least one conspiracy theory and repeat false content related to it on the Internet. 51% believe that limits on cash withdrawal from the banks were introduced to control society, 38% share the opinion that Poland has lost its sovereignty and is controlled by the EU, 11% of adults believe in the Ukropolin theory. Contrary to widespread stereotypes, it is not seniors, but generation Z and middle-aged people who are more susceptible to conspiracy theories.<sup>3</sup> Such vulnerability creates the ground for Russian Misinformation and psychological operations.

1 See: Як змінювалися наративи кремлівської пропаганди у Європі та про що вона розповідає тепер? 3/01/2023, [tinyurl.com/2z-88m4dh](https://tinyurl.com/2z-88m4dh); Які наративи російської пропаганди поширені у країнах-сусідах, 25/05/2023, [tinyurl.com/85r59mcc](https://tinyurl.com/85r59mcc) (verified 28/05/2024)

2 Falszowanie wyborów z udziałem Ukraińców? Teoria spiskowa, Demagog, 18/07/2023 [tinyurl.com/5av42skj](https://tinyurl.com/5av42skj) (verified 30/05/2024)

3 Badanie potwierdza – prawie każdy ufa jakiejś fałszywej informacji, Demagog, 12/04/2024, [tinyurl.com/y99z6e4x](https://tinyurl.com/y99z6e4x) (verified 15/05/2024)

On July 9, the presidents of Poland and Ukraine jointly paid tribute to the victims of the massacre in the Roman Catholic cathedral in Lutsk. They posted the same content on social media: “Together we pay tribute to all the innocent victims of Volhynia!”<sup>37</sup> On July 11, 2023, the Sejm by acclamation adopted a resolution, which – apart from emphasizing the genocidal nature of the UPA crimes – for the first time officially mentioned that the UPA soldiers’ actions were “often supported by the Ukrainian civilian population”.<sup>38</sup> Morawiecki, appearing in the Sejm, argued that a separate name should be reserved for the Volhynian crime – *genocidium atrox*, a particularly cruel genocide.<sup>39</sup>

**“In July, PiS decided to adopt harsher rhetoric regarding Ukraine: a month or two before that, polls showed Poles were tired of helping Ukraine. There was growing support for the Confederation, which opted to deprive Ukrainian refugees of any social assistance and limit the import of agricultural products from Ukraine. The lack of solid gestures from Kyiv on the Volhynia anniversary was also significant. It can be said that at the end of July, PiS had already adopted the Confederation’s anti-Ukrainian rhetoric.”**

/ Expert 6

The Confederation and Kresy communities criticized PiS politicians’ actions as too soft. MP Braun accused the president and prime minister of relativizing the crime and reluctance to defend the Polish *raison d’état* in relations with Ukraine. According to the Confederation, Zelensky should not only apologize for Volhynia but also call the events of that time a crime of genocide; without such a statement, there would be no Polish aid for Ukraine.<sup>40</sup>

Worth noting that Paweł Jabłoński, PiS member and MFA Undersecretary of State, when summoned the Ukrainian ambassador Vasyl Zvarych on August 2, 2023, named grain imports and Volhynia to be the two most essential problems in Polish-Ukrainian relations. “Volhynian crime is the genocide committed 80 years ago by Ukrainians against Poles. Without settling this issue, unblocking the exhumation and commemorating its victims, there will be neither true Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation nor integration of Ukraine with the EU.” Then he said that forced apologies do not have the same value as those achieved due to understanding and education, and currently, war assistance and security protection are the core of bilateral relations.<sup>41</sup> After losing the elections, Jabłoński presented a different point: it is worth linking the support for Ukrainian EU membership to the exhumation of the Volhynia victims.<sup>42</sup>

37 Zelenskiy / Official, 9/07/2023 t.me/V\_Zelenskiy\_official/6912 (verified 23/05/2024)

38 Sejm przyjął uchwałę upamiętniającą ofiary Rzezi Wołyńskiej | Polska Agencja Prasowa SA, 11/07/2023 tinyurl.com/bddz9euk (verified 19/05/2024)

39 Balcer A., Polska pamięć historyczna i polityka wobec Ukrainy i Ukraińców, [in] Forum Idei, Fundacja Stefana Batorego, August 2023 tinyurl.com/2wxyevhm (verified 20/05/2024)

40 Konfederacja domaga się od Zełenskiego nazwania zbrodni wołyńskiej ludobójstwem, 11/07/2023 tinyurl.com/y43bmospw (verified 19/05/2024)

41 Wiceszef MSZ Paweł Jabłoński o rzezi wołyńskiej: Nie chodzi o to, by coś Ukrainie narzucić, 22/05/2023 tinyurl.com/n2vn5yvte (verified 19/04/2024)

42 MSZ o ekshumacjach ofiar Wołynia: Bez rozwiązania sprawy Ukraina nie ma co marzyć, że wejdzie do UE – GazetaPrawna.pl, 7/11/2023 tinyurl.com/ct7k7e2h (verified 19/05/2024)



For PiS politicians, it is easier to escalate the message on Ukraine than to soften it, Jabłoński is not alone in promoting the conditionality of assistance to Kyiv. PiS MP Arkadiusz Mularczyk, as a deputy head of the MFA in July 2023, said that assistance to Ukraine cannot depend on the Ukrainian commemoration of the Volhynian genocide. He criticized Confederation MP Bosak, who proposed linking the issue of military and political aid to unblocking the exhumation of Volhynia victims. In his opinion, if Ukraine collapses, Poland and the Baltic states will become Putin's next target.<sup>43</sup> In May 2024 the same claimed Ukraine a failed state, riddled with corruption and crime.<sup>44</sup>

**“Would we have a honeymoon in Polish-Ukrainian relations again? Probably, there will be less anti-Ukrainian rhetoric, but only after the 2025 elections. Or in the event of a radical deterioration of Poland's security situation. If a deliberately fired Russian missile falls, for example, on Świdnik, we will be brother nations again.”**

/ Expert 2

ko and the Left did not dig into this topic but also did not create an alternative historical narrative around Volhynia. And they are unlikely to – as political scientist and researcher of memory politics Adam Balcer says – Poles prefer to see their past as a history of unique heroism and sacrifice, without reflection on the harm done to their neighbors. “Certainly, clear changes in Ukrainian historical policy would make it easier to alleviate the memory conflict, but the problem cannot be reduced to Ukraine's actions. [...] The integration of the Ukrainian community may encounter serious challenges if there is no debate in Poland about our interpretations of Polish-Ukrainian history and the shape of Polish identity. However, in Poland, despite some differences, a broad consensus has emerged regarding the narrative of Polish-Ukrainian history. We can talk about its canonization, which seriously hinders dialogue on difficult historical issues with Ukraine.<sup>45</sup>

In the case of Volhynia, it is visible that politicians, even if they do not repeat anti-Ukrainian slogans or disinformation content, do not create narratives and institutions that would effectively fight such content in public space, including social media.<sup>46</sup> The decline in social support for helping refugees and the narrative about conditioning Polish aid to Ukraine are perceived as natural consequences of “war fatigue.” The fact that these elements fit perfectly into the goals of Russian propaganda in Poland is not perceived as a severe threat by the political class.

43 Arkadiusz Mularczyk: pomoc Ukrainie nie może być warunkowana upamiętnieniem ludobójstwa wołyńskiego [WIDEO] | Polska Agencja Prasowa SA, 7/07/2023 [tinyurl.com/y29w6x2d](https://tinyurl.com/y29w6x2d) (verified 21/05/2024)

44 Mularczyk: Ukraina jest państwem upadłym, Do Rzeczy, 23/05/2024 [tinyurl.com/dorzeczy](https://tinyurl.com/dorzeczy) (verified 21/05/2024)

45 Balcer A., Polska pamięć historyczna i polityka wobec Ukrainy i Ukraińców (verified 20/05/2024)

46 Antyukraińska propaganda szerzy się w Internecie. Rząd ma obowiązek na nią reagować – Amnesty International, 6/04/2023 [tinyurl.com/7wm9ws6j](https://tinyurl.com/7wm9ws6j) (verified 21/05/2023). Accusation under the Penal Code Art. 257 requires that a private person or NGO, which could act as an injured party, and be involved in a complaint to the police or prosecutor's office.



