

WAYS OF PRESERVING THE NATIONAL IDENTITY OF THE UKRAINIAN DIASPORA IN TURKEY (a Case Study of the City of Bursa, Republic of Turkey)

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Summary

This article examines possible strategies for preserving the national identity of Ukrainians living outside of Ukraine, specifically in the Republic of Turkey for many years, as well as those who were forced to leave Ukrainian territory due to Russia's open military aggression against Ukraine in 2022. The research material is based on the achievements of the Ukrainian community in the Turkish city of Bursa, which is one of the largest cities in the Republic of Turkey. The close proximity of Bursa to Istanbul, and therefore to Turkey's major transportation hub, led Ukrainians to choose this city for temporary residence outside of Ukraine as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Despite the fact that the Turkish government does not extensively cover the events currently taking place in Ukraine in the majority of media outlets, has not imposed sanctions against Russia and the increasing number of Russians in Turkey, the Ukrainian community is making significant efforts to preserve, promote, and manifest the Ukrainian language, culture, and unity.

The study focuses on the means and methods that have contributed to the exploration of these paths. It analyzes the achievements of Ukrainians in the fields of education, politics, religion, and culture. The article also highlights certain volunteer initiatives, including online volunteering, by Ukrainians, particularly those who were forced to leave Ukraine due to the full-scale war, in the city of Bursa.

Key words: Ukrainians in Turkey, Ukrainian communities in Turkey, national identity, diaspora, Turkey, volunteering.

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1. Introduction

The relevance of the chosen topic lies in the fact that the Ukrainian diaspora in Turkey was relatively significant for objective reasons before the onset of the full-scale war in Ukraine: historical ties between the countries, Turkey's proximity to our country, economic and political factors, as well as Turkey's relatively favorable migration policy towards Ukrainians (Turkey has a relatively tolerant migration policy that allows legal migrants to find employment and housing in the country). Some Ukrainians migrated to Turkey in search of new employment opportunities, education, and there are also numerous examples of Ukrainian-Turkish marriages.

After February 24th, a significant number of Ukrainian population moved to the Republic of Turkey. Among the main factors that contributed to this decision by Ukrainians were the aforementioned favorable migration policy of Turkey, climate, availability of a wide range of inexpensive fruits and vegetables throughout the year, relatively affordable rental housing and utilities, as well as a straightforward system for foreigners to rent housing (compared to

renting an apartment in Europe, the rental procedure in Turkey appears to be much simpler). Additionally, Ukrainians are familiar with Turkey through tourism, Ukrainian-Turkish business connections, and other factors.

However, preserving Ukrainian identity, particularly language, culture, traditions, and other elements of Ukrainian national distinctiveness, poses challenges. It is important to study these problems and propose ways to overcome them to ensure that the diaspora maintains a connection with their homeland and does not lose its identity. Moreover, preserving Ukrainian identity abroad is essential for strengthening Ukraine's international position and promoting cultural exchange between Ukraine and other countries, including the Republic of Turkey.

The objective is to examine the achievements of the Ukrainian ethnic group in Turkey in preserving their national distinctiveness and identify the means and methods that have contributed to this matter. The research **object** is the preservation of Ukrainian identity abroad. The research **subject** is the issues related to preserving Ukrainian identity in the Republic of Turkey and the searching for relevant solutions. Analysis, observation, induction, deduction, and generalization **methods** were used while writing the article.

Although there have been numerous scientific studies dedicated to preserving Ukrainian national identity (*Stepyko, 2011*), there is a lack of research specifically focused on preserving Ukrainian national identity in Turkey. Among the existing studies, the research “Ukrainians in Turkey: Society, Identity, Future” (*Kluchkovska, Piatkovska, Marusyk, Cherepenchuk, Manyk, 2022*) stands out as substantial.

The number of Ukrainians in Turkey ranges from nearly 6,000 (according to the UN) to 35,000 (as indicated by the Embassy). Based on approximate data, including permanent and temporary residents in Turkey, the Ukrainian population amounts to 35,000-37,000 individuals, and as of March 2023, approximately 50,000 Ukrainians remain on temporary residence in the Republic of Turkey. The geographic distribution of Ukrainians in the regions is as follows: Istanbul – around 15,000, Antalya – around 15,000, Bursa – over 1,100, Ankara – approximately 5,000. However, due to the significant number of Ukrainian temporary migrants, these figures may temporarily vary (*Official website of the Embassy of Ukraine in the Republic of Turkey, 2023*).

Ukrainians currently residing in Turkey not only anticipate a quantitative growth of their compatriots in the country but also an increased self-awareness of national identity, particularly emphasizing the peculiarities of community formation that evolve into the phenomenon of “diaspora”. This contributes to strengthening transnational ties with the country of origin and solidifying the global Ukrainian community (*Kluchkovska, Piatkovska, Marusyk, Cherepenchuk, Manyk, 2022*).

2. Examples of preservation of the national identity of the Ukrainian diaspora in Bursa

For instance, let's provide examples of Ukrainians preserving their national identity based on the city of Bursa in Turkey, which, among its other notable features, is twinned with the Ukrainian city of Vinnytsia and has enjoyed 20 years of exemplary friendship with Ukrainian Mykolaiv (*20 years of exemplary brotherhood of Nilüfer and Mykolaiv*).

1. Bursa, located near Istanbul, facilitates the use of diverse logistics for transporting people from Ukraine to Bursa and vice versa, as well as for supplying traditional household items, traditional food, delicacies, and children's books in the Ukrainian language from Ukraine. During our visit to Bursa in spring 2022, we also successfully attempted to send humanitarian

aid to Kyiv (buses from Bursa to Kyiv depart almost daily, and Turkish drivers kindly treat boxes of humanitarian aid if they meet the regulations).

2. Bursa is a relatively large city with a long history, unique traditions, and customs. It is worth mentioning that they have a significant influence on society in Turkey. Despite this, Ukrainians in Bursa have created their own cultural and educational space within the city. The example is the Ukrainian Community in Bursa, which houses the Bursa Ukrainian Saturday school. On weekends, children can participate in activities such as “Ukrainian Language” for children aged 5-10, “Visual Arts” for children aged 5-10, “Developmental Activities” for children aged 2.5-4 etc. The workshops held at this school primarily focus on Ukrainian culture, patriotic symbols, and similar topics. Additionally, in May of this year, the creative workshop “May Embroidery” operated within the community.

3. Currently, Turkey is going through difficult times associated with an earthquake (which occurred on February 6, 2023, resulting in severe destruction in numerous cities and towns, with the official death toll exceeding 50,000), an economic crisis, and elections held in May 2023. Despite this, the activities of the Ukrainian Community in Bursa unite forces and continue to nurture, preserve, and popularize Ukrainian culture in Turkey, organizing events and participating in demonstrations against Russia's war on Ukraine.

4. Ukrainians in Bursa actively utilize all available technologies and communication tools to support fellow Ukrainians. There is a WhatsApp group where advice, services, guidance, diverse assistance for Ukrainians integrating into Turkish society, or simply sharing experiences on relevant matters of life in Turkey, can be obtained almost around the clock. They also organize and host various events, rallies, and provide information about other Ukraine-related activities in Bursa.

5. Ukrainian women who moved to Bursa at the start of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine actively participate in various volunteer initiatives. These include:

1) Fundraising activities (mostly through online volunteering).

2) Collecting medicines (although such collections are not always successful due to restrictions on transporting them across borders, and there have been cases where the medicines collected by volunteers with the support of local pharmacies and Turkish citizens turned out to be expired, making it impossible to deliver them to Ukraine).

3) Organizing and participating in various cultural and educational events to raise funds for the Ukrainian Armed Forces, as well as collecting funds and providing support to mothers with young children and elderly people who had to flee to Turkey and require financial assistance. In particular, the author of this article, while in Bursa in March-April 2022, taught Turkish language to forced migrants from Ukraine free of charge (mostly women, children, and elderly people; families of employees of Turkish companies whose offices are located in Kyiv and who were evacuated from Kyiv with the assistance of Turkish employers). Author has also raised funds for medical kits for the Ukrainian Armed Forces in collaboration with representatives of the Ukrainian Community in Bursa, which were successfully delivered to Kyiv, and so on.

6. Through the efforts of volunteers and experts in the relevant field, the city of Bursa is now represented in the *I'm Ukrainian* application, which helps Ukrainians find each other in many countries around the world, provides consultations and services in the Ukrainian language, represents Ukrainian businesses in Turkey, and provides information about events dedicated to Ukraine, the Ukrainian language, culture, and many other things that are useful for Ukrainians abroad (Virnyk, 2023).

7. Finally, it should be noted that in 2023, the Ukrainian community in the city of Bursa celebrated Easter not only with a festive picnic and Easter cakes but also with the blessing of

His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and thanks to Metropolitan Ioakim Billis of Bursa and Father Methodius, the liturgy was conducted in the Ukrainian language. A few years ago, this may have seemed unrealistic (*The Ukrainian community of Bursa celebrated Easter in a special way this year, a post on the official page of the Society of Ukrainians in Bursa, 2023*). However, today the Ukrainian parish and clergy have realized the opportunity to celebrate the holiday in a familiar way, gather parishioners for joint prayer in the Ukrainian language, organize traditional Ukrainian feasts, and, if we delve into the essence, it is a significant example of preserving, popularizing, and manifesting Ukrainian culture and traditions abroad, as well as raising children for the future of the Ukrainian community and Ukraine.

3. Proposals for the preservation of the national identity of the Ukrainian diaspora in Turkey

Ukrainian citizens living outside their homeland are now ambassadors of their country and are part of the Ukrainian global community. There are numerous tasks for all of us to accomplish, ranging from large-scale to relatively simple ones.

1. In particular, to ensure that Ukrainian children currently residing in Turkey become carriers of knowledge about Ukraine in the future, it is necessary to strengthen, develop, and nurture their identity. A positive impetus to this would be the creation of a “working group” or a team of volunteers who, together with schools in Ukraine, would develop a support program for Ukrainian schoolchildren in Turkey (creating a list of necessary textbooks and literature, searching for and involving sponsors, creating a positive and popular image of Ukrainian culture among children and teenagers, selectively referring to the Turkish experience and the famous phrase of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk “Happy is the one who can say, “I am a Turk””), enhancing the “living presence” of Ukraine in Turkey both online and offline.

2. Ukrainian language and culture should saturate the information space of Ukrainian children and youth abroad (as they are easily subjected to assimilation processes). It would be useful to create a specially designed application that could become popular among children and youth, ensuring that a child, when abroad, does not feel “disconnected” from their ethnoculture, prevalent expressions and lexemes in Ukraine, popular trends, toys, jokes etc. It also requires a team that will direct its efforts towards promoting the modern brand of our country, actively involving the Ukrainian diaspora and businesses.

3. The majority of Ukrainians in Turkey attend integration courses, language schools, and private Turkish language lessons to adapt and find employment more quickly. Most Ukrainians are accustomed to living in a monoslavic environment, and the majority of them have limited experience living in a multicultural environment. It would be beneficial to create not only a comprehensive platform for the unification and support of Ukrainians in Turkey but also to include a special course on proper behavior abroad, with a focus on the host country (its culture, religion, etc.) in order to maintain a positive image of Ukrainians internationally.

4. Conclusions

The level of cohesion in Ukrainian society is currently quite high, and we must make every effort to preserve this unity. Our task is to avoid societal division and prevent this division from turning into discord. Therefore, we need to channel all possible energy and resources into finding and implementing means that can unite, restore, or make highly effective for Ukraine, even across the distances, all Ukrainian women, men, and children. We must stand as one.

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