Bulbeniuk S.S.,
PhD in Political Science, Associate Professor,
Professor of the Department of Political Science,
Kyiv National Economic University named after Vadym Hetman

THE DISCOURSE OF WAR AND PEACE IN THE GERMAN INFORMATIONAL SPACE: 2022-2024

Analysing the discourse of the Russian-Ukrainian war in the German information space in 2022-2024 is important for several reasons. Firstly, Germany is one of the most influential countries in the European political space (along with France) and the third largest economy in the world (Ivanova & Shchvarts, 2024). Secondly, as of March 2024, Germany was the European country that sheltered the largest number of Ukrainian refugees - more than a million people (Tsurkanu, 2023). Third, as of March 2024, Germany became one of the largest donors to Ukraine (Defense Express, 2023). Why does Germany play such an important role today, providing crucial financial, military and humanitarian assistance to our country?

It is worth noting that at the beginning of 2022, Ukraine and the Ukrainian issue were not in the focus of attention of German politicians, public figures, intellectuals and ordinary citizens. Rather, Germany was Russia-centric, which was facilitated by Chancellor Angela Merkel's economic policy (Mahazova, 2021). So 24 February 2022 came as a shock to many Germans. A full-scale invasion in the centre of Europe, thousands, later tens of thousands of women with children who found themselves in Germany - all this was a psychological shock for many. The coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war in late February and March 2022 on German television was primarily about the stories of Ukrainian refugee women and live reports by German journalists from Ukraine, namely from Lviv, Odesa, and Khmelnytskyi. Until mid-April 2022, German journalists did not reach Kyiv due to security concerns. A separate information area at the first stage of the full-scale invasion was a talk show on German television with the participation of the then Ukrainian ambassador to Germany, Andriy Melnyk, and Ukrainian public figures known to the German public, such as the former wife of

Kyiv Mayor Natalia Klitschko, and economist and Cambridge professor Oleksandr Rodnyansky. Similar talk shows were held on leading German television channels on a daily basis. On the German side, their guests were well-known German politicians (federal and representatives of various states), scientists and cultural figures.

Particular attention should be paid to the thesaurus of news reports in the German media in late February - early April 2022. Initially, the events in Ukraine were referred to as a «crisis», «Ukrainian crisis» or «crisis in Ukraine», in the third week of the invasion – «conflict in Ukraine» and/or «Putin's war», «Putin's war», only from the end of March 2022 did journalists, commentators and politicians start talking about the «Russian war in Ukraine».

One of the biggest shocks for German citizens was the video reports from the liberated Kyiv region in early April 2022. These video testimonies, combined with the daily stories of Ukrainian refugee women who, together with their children and retired parents, found themselves in Germany, undoubtedly swayed the majority of German citizens to the side of Ukraine, despite aggressive opposition from the large (about 2 million) so-called «Russian-speaking» community.

The tools of information warfare used by pro-Russian residents of Germany were also indicative. These were short videos on TikTok and You Tube saying that it was not refugees who were leaving Ukraine, but Nazis and criminals or marginalised people; that there was no full-scale war in Ukraine and no massacres of civilians by the Russian military; that German citizens demanded that Ukrainian citizens be banned from entering Germany. It should be noted that all of these video messages did not have a large reach, especially among the German-speaking audience, as most of them were Russian-speaking.

Thus, in the second half of April - May 2022, the German information space for the mass consumer formed a generally coherent and objective picture of the full-scale stage of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Undoubtedly, the activities of German journalists, commentators and political analysts were greatly influenced by the emotional mood of sympathy for Ukrainians and the memories of the horrors of the Second World War, which are kept by those Germans who lived through it as children.

A separate segment of the German information space is non-fiction and scientific and popular literature. In this segment, the first works by German authors about Ukraine as an independent and self-sufficient state, and not a part of Russia, appeared after 2014 and were related to German researchers' attempts to understand the causes and origins of Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine. The following studies published in 2015-2021 are worth noting.

1. The study «The Ukrainian War. Behind the Frontline of a European Conflict» (2016) by Jutta Somerbauer, in which the author begins her examination of the origins of the war by analysing the causes of the Euromaidan in 2013 and describes her own impressions of her trip to the Ukrainian Donbas (Sommerbauer, 2016).

2. «Decisions in Kyiv. Lessons from the Ukrainian Language» (2022) by Karl Schlögel, the researcher begins the book with the statement that in Germany, many of his colleagues have long considered Ukraine to be just a part of Russia/USSR/Russian Empire, and the Ukrainian language to be a dialect of Russian. It was only the Revolution of Dignity and Ukraine's resistance to Russian aggression that began to change this view. A Slavic studies researcher who has travelled extensively across Ukraine has supplemented his book, the first edition of which was published in 2015. He regrets to say that by the end of February 2022, Ukraine and Ukrainians did not exist on the mental map of the vast majority of Germans (Schlögel, 2022; 38). Karl Schlögel admits that he himself, as a specialist on Russia, became a hostage to this view, and after February 2022, he was forced to change the optics of his research (Schlögel, 2022; 9).

3. «The War Against Ukraine. Background, Events, Consequences» by Gwendolyn Sass is a book written in the first five months after the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The author argues that Russia's goal is «the destruction of the independent Ukrainian state and the Ukrainian nation», and more globally, it is a war against «democracy and peaceful coexistence». It is important that in preparing her research, Gwendolyn Sass used the results of international sociological surveys conducted in Ukraine since 2014 (Sasse, 2022; 8-9).

4. «Unequal Brothers. Russians and Ukrainians from the Middle Ages to the Present» by Andreas Kappeler also became one of the first studies by German authors

after February 2022, which attempts to differentiate between Russia and Ukraine, to prove the neocolonial nature of the Russian-Ukrainian war (Kappeler, 2017).

5. It is noteworthy that in early March 2024, a translated book «The Showman» by Simon Schuster was available in German bookstores. The German edition is entitled «Before the eyes of the world» (Shuster, 2024).

Thus, the interest of German scholars in Ukrainian topics – political, sociological, cultural, historical - is emerging and developing. It is important that today Ukraine is no longer terra incognita for German scholars and publicists, or part of the general Russian discourse and political world. Undoubtedly, interest in Ukraine is only emerging and has not yet reached the same scale as interest in everything Russian in its time, so the struggle between the Ukrainian and pro-Ukrainian view of the world continues.

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