

V.I. VERNADSKYI NATIONAL LIBRARY OF UKRAINE DURING THE CRISIS: PATHS TO SURVIVAL — EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY

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**V.I. Vernadskyi National Library
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Rezumat: *Articolul abordează provocările întâmpinate de Biblioteca Națională V.I. Vernadskyi a Ucrainei în vremuri de criză și strategiile de supraviețuire ale instituției, în special prin sprijinul comunității bibliotecilor europene. Este subliniat rolul esențial al bibliotecii în conservarea bunurilor culturale și științifice ale Ucrainei, în promovarea identității naționale și în alinierea la obiectivele integrării europene. Accentul este pus pe eforturile bibliotecii privind accesul deschis la resursele sale, dezvoltarea strategică pentru reziliență în fața provocărilor contemporane și conservarea digitală a colecțiilor sale extinse. Se evidențiază atât sprijinul și cooperarea semnificativă din partea partenerilor europeni, precum și importanța solidarității și colaborării internaționale pentru susținerea și progresul bibliotecii în timpul și după perioada de criză.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *căi către supraviețuire, Biblioteca Națională V.I. Vernadskyi a Ucrainei (BNVU), timp de criză, dezvoltare strategică, solidaritate europeană.*

Abstract: *This article addresses the challenges encountered by V.I. Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine during times of crisis and the institution's survival strategies, particularly through the support of the European library community. The library's essential role in preserving Ukraine's cultural and scientific assets, fostering national identity, and aligning with the goals of European integration is emphasized. The focus is placed on the library's efforts to provide open access to its resources, strategic development for resilience in the face of contemporary challenges, and digital preservation of its extensive collections. The significant support and cooperation from European library partners are highlighted, along with the importance of international solidarity and collaboration for the library's sustenance and progress during and after the crisis period.*

Keywords: *paths to survival, V. I. Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine (VNLU), crisis time, strategic development, European solidarity.*

Crisis periods have different faces in the history of nations, but all of them are accompanied by the destruction of society, including the spheres of culture and science, with complex processes affecting the moral and psychological state of various population groups. Under these conditions, it is very difficult to find means for survival without support. As a rule, the state needs to make a choices in the course of its internal and foreign policy. Ukraine is focused on joining the European Union,

which requires accelerating the pace of science development directed towards the national economy and human capital, as well as culture aimed at preserving the value orientations of the lifestyle and the entire realm of society's creativity. In the context of military aggression in Ukraine, this becomes extremely important. The science and culture of Ukraine, encompassing both its historical legacy and its future prospects, constitute an integral part of the common European cultural and scientific heritage.

If this resource is scientifically developed, structured, and made accessible through open access on a European platform, it will seamlessly intertwine with the fabric of national and European identity.

The national libraries of Ukraine conduct important scientific research and actively update the nation's historical, spiritual, and cultural heritage, laying the foundation for a robust national identity and the development of contemporary resources. Entering the European Community, Ukraine opens its knowledge to the world and gains powerful protection against the unforeseen consequences of war. Therefore, Ukraine is intensively discussing a number of state strategy projects for the development of science and culture, technology, and innovative activities, with a focus on European technologies and communications.

It is necessary to indicate, that today in Ukraine, there are several national libraries within the structure of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy (MCIP) [2] and the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine [3]. Overall, these institutions unite the national library collections of Ukraine and are part of its property. V.I. Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine is the largest in Ukraine. Established in 1918 by the Ukrainian government as the National Library of the Ukrainian State, it became the repository for the majority of collections from various institutions that were nationalized by the Soviet government. The most significant collections and holdings from various dissolved institutions nationalized by the Soviet regime were gathered here. Throughout the entire 20th century, while under the jurisdiction of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, it continued to perform national functions and enrich its collections. For a long time, it served as the national public library of Ukraine and the scientific library of the main scientific center of Ukraine - the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. The uniqueness of VNLU is underscored by its role as the foremost state library of national significance, acting as a primary scientific, informational, and socio-cultural center in Ukraine and concurrently operating as

a research institution within the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. This defines its current status. It not only preserves the cultural values of history and works closely with the Academy of Sciences and the Ministry of Culture but also, as tasked by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, forms modern scientific resources for the whole of Ukraine.

Today, V.I. Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine houses 17 million items in its collection. Simultaneously, VNLU stands as a treasured asset of global heritage and a repository of collective memory, playing a pivotal role for every individual in society by fostering personal development and societal contribution. It is imperative, therefore, that the wealth of knowledge housed within be accessible to the public. The composition of VNLU's collections affirms its integral connection to European culture, underlining the shared heritage and intellectual bonds that unite Ukraine with the broader European community.

It is noteworthy that the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine also oversees another national library - Vasyl Stefanyk National Scientific Library of Ukraine in Lviv, which comprises valuable nationalized collections from the western regions of Ukraine that were annexed by the Soviet Union before World War II [4]. Currently, the aforementioned library holds over 8 million storage units. Taking these collections into account, the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine preserves over 25 million historically valuable pieces of literature, collections of manuscripts and early printed books, music publications, posters, albums and other types of fine arts publications, magazines, archives, newspapers, an archival copy of the Ukrainian press, a special collection of the presidents of Ukraine „Fond of the Presidents of Ukraine”, and also contains the National Law Library, which provides informational and analytical services for government authorities, among other resources.

It should be noted that V.I. Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine's workforce exceeds 900 employees, including researchers. The structure of the library also includes

the Institute of Information Technologies, which assists in creating an electronic catalog and numerous databases that preserve the cultural heritage of Ukraine. Furthermore, it contributes to the development of electronic scientific resources within Ukraine and facilitates access to global resources.

Moving towards integration with the European community requires national and other significant libraries to collaborate through technology and resource sharing, thereby becoming integral to the cultural, scientific, and educational fabric of Europe. The willingness to engage in collaborative communication is a significant aspect of the library's operations. Presently, the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine is orchestrating a UNESCO project to develop a National Electronic Library of Cultural Heritage, envisioned to encompass the most treasured volumes of the nation's libraries. V.I. Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine possesses an expertise in creating such a resource on its platform; it should be elaborated taking into account European technologies, standards, and legal frameworks relevant to such resources. Additionally, the Library has engaged with the database projects of the Conference of European National Librarians (CENL) and other library communities to reinforce international collaboration.

In this context, it is important to pay attention to the stature of V.I. Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine as a testament to the nation's cultural legacy, a custodian of memories that trace the Ukrainian contribution to world culture from ancient times to the present. Emphasizing its role as a collective heritage and a pivotal element in societal development, the library ensures that its extensive collections are accessible to the public, affirming Ukraine's connection to the broader tapestry of European civilization. It is a guardian of Ukraine's unique documentary heritage, preserving vital aspects of the nation's historical and cultural legacy from the earliest periods to contemporary times. This underscores the Ukrainian people's significant contribution to the development of world culture. The li-

brary's memorial collections are invaluable to society. The primary goal of the library is to safeguard this heritage for future generations of Ukrainians, ensuring its preservation in both tangible and digital forms, facilitating access for users, and integrating it into contemporary global information networks.

VNLU owns fonds of universal scientific and significant literature from various fields of development of science, culture, and education, is a depository of international organizations, and a custodian of separate collections of literature from various foreign countries. With a strategic emphasis on digitization, VNLU is at the forefront of transitioning historical and contemporary literary works into the digital realm. This initiative is pivotal for safeguarding Ukraine's documentary heritage and making it universally accessible. Moreover, the VNLU's role in creating a positive portrayal of Ukraine within the sphere of global digital communications is crucial for enhancing the country's scholarly and cultural diplomacy. As a significant part of the European and global library network, VNLU's contributions are instrumental in maintaining a dynamic exchange of knowledge and culture, while simultaneously fostering Ukraine's image as a nation rich in history and scholarly contributions.

Within structure of Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine, specialized scientific institutes and information-analytical services are established to advance these objectives. Their work is pivotal in disseminating information that supports the innovative progress of Ukrainian society, as well as facilitating the nation's integration into the European landscape. The institution's commitment to the development and utilization of its resources underscores its dual role as a preserver of heritage and a promoter of scholarly advancement, thereby reinforcing its integral position in the national and international scholarly community.

The year 2022 marked a watershed moment for V. I. Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine. Amidst the turmoil of the full-scale war initiated by Russia, the

Library, like many Ukrainian institutions, faced unprecedented challenges. It was not merely a question of enduring but also of strategizing for continuity and growth. In response to these exigencies, the Development Strategy of V. I. Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine was thoughtfully crafted and adopted to ensure the institution's resilience and future progression. The strategy was carefully developed in light of the wartime challenges that faced the nation and with a foresight towards the anticipated post-war reconstruction of Ukraine, setting a course for the library's role in the nation's recovery and cultural preservation. It not only confronts the immediate challenges but also outlines a vision for post-conflict recovery and growth, underscoring the library's contribution to the nation's renewal and cultural legacy. Its content reflects global trends in shaping the functions of the world's leading national libraries and international organizations in the realms of education, science, and culture, positioning VNLU as an integral part of the global library community [1].

The current objective of VNLU Development Strategy now is to determine the main priorities of the library activity, which are primarily the preservation and development of the Library's integral fond and its historical and cultural component, the creation of integrated electronic resources and services, the acceleration of the formation of digital resources as spiritual and intellectual capital of Ukrainian and world science and culture, taking into account the rapid development of knowledge technologies and digital society. Digital preservation of documentary heritage for future generations is essential, as is the enhancement of library services to accommodate users with special needs. These efforts are vital in ensuring that the wealth of knowledge and history contained within the library's archives remains accessible and usable for all segments of society, now and in the years to come. Ukraine is actively working on the possibilities of optimization and transition to the legal and information-technological conditions necessary for entering the European system, establishing new forms of

scientific and cultural communication, including within the library community.

Through these strategic priorities, VNLU is set to reinforce its role as a dynamic, evolving institution, essential for both the preservation of the past and the innovation of the future, firmly integrating Ukraine's rich heritage into the global digital narrative. Ukrainian libraries, with V.I. Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine at the forefront, are critical in this period of transformation. The acknowledgment of their mission is evidenced by the material support from some of Europe's leading libraries, which, in response to current challenges, have initiated and continue to provide aid to sustain and preserve Ukrainian scientific and cultural heritage. These contributions are instrumental not only in renewing the library's material and legal bases but also in facilitating its integration into European digital resources – a primary concern today for preserving and enhancing this repository of knowledge. For this purpose, the library leverages its substantial intellectual development, human resource potential, and experience in promoting social communications. This strategy is viewed as a critical pathway out of the crisis. The prolonged period of military aggression has underscored the solidarity of European libraries. There is a strong belief that such collaborative efforts will yield significant benefits in the future, benefiting not only the library but also reinforcing the spirit of European unity.

The involvement of VNLU in common scientific events by CENL and its member libraries signifies a commitment to deepening collaborative ties. Shared historical experiences and extensive expertise in international professional communication offer a robust platform for unity. As the world rapidly evolves, these scientific gatherings present new opportunities to enhance our cooperative efforts and professional networks. These fortified bonds pave the way toward a shared future, enriched by the collective wisdom and solidarity of all CENL member libraries.

Conclusion. Despite the crisis conditions in Ukraine, V. I. Vernadskyi National

Library remains a steadfast symbol of cultural endurance and academic advancement amid turbulent times. In the face of adversity, Ukrainian libraries, with VNLU at the helm, stand as vital custodians of the nation's scholarly and cultural treasures. The support and solidarity from esteemed European libraries have been crucial, supplying necessary resources that enable VNLU to sustain and amplify its contributions to the enrichment of both Ukrainian and international knowledge domains. Acknowledging the efforts of the Conference of European National Librarians (CENL) and the contributions of its members, this collaboration lays the groundwork for a brighter, interconnected scholarly future. Together, through dynamic dialogues and events, we are mapping out a path that leverages our shared heritage and professional acumen. Embracing change and fostering reliable networks are now more crucial than ever for advancing our collective journey in a vibrant Europe.

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V.I. Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine's engagement with European partners is crucial, and is reshaping its digital future. Focused on infrastructural enhancements and legislative harmonization, VNLU is aligning with the European digital landscape. This strategic partnership addresses the critical need to safeguard and augment our shared intellectual heritage. Bolstered by substantial intellectual resources and a rich history of fostering community ties, VNLU navigates through present challenges, drawing on the robust solidarity of European libraries. The collaboration, spearheaded by the efforts of CENL and the support of its members, is paving the way for a more connected and enlightened scholarly environment. As we actively participate in dynamic exchanges and initiatives, we apply our collective heritage and expertise, reinforcing the importance of adaptability and resilient networks to progress our joint endeavors within a thriving European context.