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## V.I. VERNADSKYI NATIONAL LIBRARY OF UKRAINE: LIBRARY DIPLOMACY AND BUILDING INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS DURING THE CRISIS TIME

### BIBLIOTECA NAȚIONALĂ V.I. VERNADSKI A UCRAINEI: DIPLOMAȚIA BIBLIOTECILOR ȘI CONSTRUIREA RELAȚIILOR INTERNAȚIONALE ÎN PERIOADA DE CRIZĂ

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**Rezumat:** Articolul examinează dezvoltarea relațiilor internaționale și construirea de parteneriate internaționale de către Biblioteca Națională V.I. Vernadskyi a Ucrainei (BNVU) în timpul crizei cauzate de agresiunea militară a Federației Ruse. S-a stabilit că războiul a afectat în mod semnificativ toate sferele vieții, inclusiv sectorul bibliotecilor din Ucraina, necesitând schimbări în funcțiile de rutină ale bibliotecii și strategiile de supraviețuire. Ca răspuns la aceste provocări, BNVU s-a concentrat în special pe consolidarea relațiilor sale internaționale. Articolul evidențiază importanța deosebită a diplomației bibliotecilor ca unul dintre mijloacele de amplificare a vocilor bibliotecarilor ucraineni pe scena internațională. Colaborarea activă cu comunitatea internațională a bibliotecilor, în special cu CBNE (Conferința Bibliotecarilor Naționali Europeni), a devenit esențială pentru conservarea resurselor bibliotecii și asigurarea funcționalității instituțiilor de informare, a bibliotecilor ucrainene, inclusiv BNVU. Sprijinul permanent din partea partenerilor internaționali ai BNVU se dovedește a juca un rol crucial în a ajuta Ucraina să depășească această criză, subliniind importanța strategică a diplomației bibliotecilor în protejarea moștenirii culturale și a informațiilor în aceste vremuri dificile de război.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** diplomația bibliotecii, relații internaționale, Biblioteca Națională V. I. Vernadskyi a Ucrainei (BNVU).

**Abstract:** This article examines the development of international relations and the building of international partnerships by V. I. Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine (VNLU) during the crisis caused by the military aggression of the Russian Federation. It is determined that the war significantly affected all spheres of life, including Ukraine's library sector, demanding changes in routine library functions and survival strategies. In response to these challenges, VNLU has particularly focused on strengthening its international relations. The author highlights the special importance of library diplomacy as one of the means to amplify the voices of Ukrainian librarians on the international stage. It notes that active engagement with the international library community, especially with CENL (Conference of European National Librarians), has become pivotal for preserving library resources and ensuring the functionality of Ukrainian library and information institutions, including VNLU. The ongoing support from VNLU's international partners is shown to play a crucial role in assisting Ukraine to overcome this crisis, underlining the strategic importance of library diplomacy in protecting cultural heritage and information during these challenging times of war.

**Keywords:** library diplomacy, international relations, V. I. Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine (VNLU), crisis time.

International cooperation has always been a key priority for V. I. Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine (VNLU). However, the onset of full-scale military aggression by the Russian Federation has significantly heightened its importance. This war has fundamentally altered not only Ukraine's political and social landscape but also the established library landscape. The operational agendas, routine processes, and general conditions of libraries' existence – particularly the conditions for their survival – have experienced significant changes. V.I. Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine, along with other libraries in the country, has faced an unexpected reality replete with challenges and the need to find suitable ways forward. Within the realm of library activities, special focus has been placed on international relations, encompassing strategies for development and maintenance, with a particular emphasis on library diplomacy. This approach is vital to ensuring that the voices of Ukrainian librarians are heard on the international library stage.

The crucial elements for advancing the international activity of V. I. Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine in these challenging times include the development of library diplomacy, which entails continuous interaction with international organizations, foreign partners, and the global library community as a whole. The role of library diplomacy is pivotal as it actively nurtures international relations among library and information institutions worldwide. This form of public diplomacy serves as a cornerstone in positioning and elevating the stature of Ukrainian libraries within the global library community. In the international arena, it acts as a key catalyst, fostering enhanced mutual understanding and collaboration between nations. Furthermore, this endeavor involves intensifying efforts and fostering teamwork to enable library staff to fulfill their responsibilities, even in times of crisis. International library diplomacy assumes a unique and vital role in such circumstances, as its successful execution becomes paramount for survival amid crisis conditions, particularly in

times of war. In these challenging days, the reliable and strong support of foreign partners is of utmost importance to navigate a path filled with despair, grief, and sorrow of Ukrainian librarians, all while enduring missile attacks and maintaining unwavering determination.

Underlining the significance of the library diplomacy, Norwegian researcher Randolph Mariano, in his article "Mapping and searching for a theory and concept of library diplomacy", emphasized the critical need for global collaboration. He stated: "No nation-state and standalone institution can address these issues and solve these global information challenges on their own. Thus, international diplomacy, global cooperation, and partnership are needed and must be adapted and bolstered more than ever to address real-world issues affecting libraries, information institutions, and knowledge societies" [2]. This assertion vividly highlights the necessity for international dialogue and cooperation in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by libraries and information institutions in today's interconnected world.

In the demanding context of war, the roles of international library diplomacy and the development of global relations assume an unprecedented level of importance. These efforts are pivotal not just for the preservation of cultural heritage but also for ensuring the continuity of library services and fostering global solidarity. To adapt to these challenges, libraries must focus on strategic actions that emphasize digital collaboration, increasingly crucial as digital resources and platforms become key in maintaining international dialogue and protecting endangered collections. Moreover, advocacy and raising awareness of these issues on international platforms are essential. These activities bring attention to the impacts of conflict on cultural institutions and advocate for the protection of libraries and cultural heritage sites in conflict zones. Such awareness is vital in mobilizing global support and fostering a deeper understanding of the challenges faced. Securing emergency funding and resources also becomes a primary concern in these extreme

conditions. Coordinating with international bodies for infrastructure and technical support is imperative to ensure the survival and functioning of libraries. Establishing resilient networks for communication with the global library community is equally essential. These networks facilitate quick information exchange and support, acting as lifelines in unpredictable conflict scenarios by offering guidance, moral support, and practical assistance.

The global library community manifested solidarity with Ukraine and on the web portals of authoritative library organizations such as the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the Conference of European National Librarians (CENL), the American Library Association (ALA), the Conference of European Research Libraries (CERL), EBLIDA, NAPLE, and Public Libraries 2030, statements began to appear one after another, condemning Russia's actions and affirming support for Ukrainian libraries. For instance, on the IFLA website, there was a statement regarding Ukraine („IFLA Statement on Ukraine”) which expressed solidarity with colleagues in Ukraine, condemned any acts of violence, and joined the international community in their statements about the situation. Additionally, IFLA urged libraries worldwide to mobilize efforts to spread accurate information about the conflict as a means of supporting democracy and freedom of speech, and also appealed for support for Ukrainian refugees. Alongside these, CENL also actively participated in expressing support and mobilizing aid for Ukraine's library sector.

It's important to acknowledge the significant role of the Conference of European National Librarians (CENL) in this context, especially in relation to V.I. Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine. As a key pillar in the European library network, CENL strengthens the collective resilience and fortitude of the library community. In response to the critical need to support Ukraine following Russia's invasion on February 24, 2022, CENL has been instrumental in mobilizing assistance for Ukrainian libraries and their personnel. National

libraries across Europe rapidly began to explore avenues for providing support, participating in existing initiatives and creating new projects specifically aimed at delivering aid. The support extended by CENL members, including humanitarian aid and essential resources, has been crucial for maintaining and preserving Ukraine's library collections during the ongoing challenges.

About a year after the conflict began, CENL sought to gain a comprehensive understanding of the various support actions undertaken by European national libraries in solidarity with Ukraine, its cultural institutions, and heritage. Between January and March 2023, CENL conducted a survey among its members to catalog and assess the support measures being implemented. The aim of this survey was to coordinate efforts effectively and ensure they were meeting the acute needs of Ukrainian libraries and librarians during these challenging times [3]. This support goes beyond just material aid, fostering a heightened sense of security during challenging times. Membership in CENL is not merely a symbol of honor; it underscores the importance of collaboration and unity in facing crises. The collective efforts and impacts of CENL members are crucial, demonstrating a shared commitment to protecting and promoting knowledge and cultural heritage. These actions exemplify the strength and significance of community and cooperation within the international library realm.

Discussing initiatives by foreign institutions to aid Ukraine, it's important to emphasize the significance of the SUCHO (Saving Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Online) project – an initiative of over 1,500 international volunteers collaborating online to digitize and preserve Ukrainian cultural heritage. Since the start of Russia's aggression, SUCHO has archived over 5,000 websites and 50 TB of data from Ukrainian cultural institutions to prevent their loss. These websites range from national archives to local museums, and from 3D tours of churches to children's creativity centers. SUCHO (Saving Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Online) not only coordi-

nates the digitization of Ukrainian cultural materials but also facilitates the delivery of necessary equipment for digitization and showcasing Ukrainian culture online. Additionally, SUCHO organizes training in digitization methods for Ukrainian cultural workers. Currently, SUCHO is curating the complete 50 TB of web archives it has collected. The raw files are publicly accessible in the AWS open data registry, and are supposed to be made available for viewing on the SUCHO website. To draw attention to Ukrainian culture, a virtual exhibition space was created using materials selected from the web archives. Another innovation by SUCHO is the creation of the SUCHO Meme Wall, which is continually updated by a team of volunteers collecting internet memes created in response to the war in Ukraine [4].

The primary question in times of crisis is how to maintain international relations, especially in a country experiencing a full-scale war, accompanied by power outages and constant air raid alerts. The answer lies in finding opportunities and managing time effectively, which entails continuously adapting one's time management strategies for carrying out work tasks. Most importantly, this situation calls for proactive communication and concerted efforts to cultivate and strengthen collaboration with foreign partners. It should also be noted that with the onset of Russian aggression, there has been a reassessment of values, and it would be worth mentioning the perception of the library by each of the employees of V. I. Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine. Viewing the library as more than just a facility, the staff sees it as a sacred repository, akin to a living organism where each department contributes to its vitality. The director, serving as the heart of this organism, ensures seamless operations, while the department of international relations acts as its pulse, adapting to external changes and enabling resilience in difficult environments. Under Director General Lyubov Dubrovina's advocacy, VNLU's voice has resonated internationally, invigorating the institution and motivating its staff to persevere in their mission. Despite

the complexities brought by the Russian aggression, the VNLU's intensified international efforts have been supported and bolstered by the global library community, leading to tangible achievements.

Maintaining international relations in a crisis is vital, which requires active and strategic communication and efforts to strengthen global partnerships. Library management, particularly under challenging conditions, must act decisively to ensure their voices are heard internationally, a key to securing support and resources. The V. I. Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine (VNLU) exemplifies this approach, enhancing communication strategies and increasing engagement for international solidarity and support. This proactive stance, despite the challenges of crafting a cooperative vision in tumultuous times, has been reinforced by robust global library community support, guiding VNLU towards safeguarding its collections and cultural assets.

In these difficult times, collaboration and communication with the international library community are crucial for preserving valuable resources and ensuring the ongoing operation of Ukrainian library institutions, including VNLU. Since the war's onset, VNLU's foreign partners have provided essential support, standing as steadfast allies. This solid international backing not only aids VNLU in facing numerous challenges but also underscores the strength and importance of international cooperation and community solidarity in crisis situations.

Despite aforementioned challenging circumstances, in 2023, the Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine successfully organized and hosted an international scientific conference. This achievement demonstrates the institution's resilience and dedication to fostering academic and cultural exchanges, even in times of adversity. Hosting such an event underlines VNLU's commitment to maintaining its role as a prominent center for scientific research and dialogue. The conference, eagerly anticipated by VNLU librarians and researchers, featured distinguished speakers from the British Library, the National Library of Po-



land, the National and University Library in Zagreb, and included scholars from Canada and representatives from educational and cultural organizations of Turkey. This event became a wellspring of inspiration and a symbol of VNLU's ongoing endeavors in the face war. The participation of international colleagues has not only enriched the conference atmosphere but also instilled a profound sense of solidarity, reminding Ukrainian librarians that they are not alone in their challenges. Through this conference, VNLU sent a powerful message to the international library community about its resilience and unwavering commitment to scholarly endeavors, despite the ongoing challenges. It symbolized a shared commitment to fostering cross-cultural collaboration, strengthening institutional ties, and actively participating in the global dialogue that overcomes borders and challenges. This event marked not just a triumph over immediate hurdles but also reinforced VNLU's role as a vital contributor to the global exchange of knowledge and culture.

Within this context, an important step for V.I. Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine was the development and approval of a pivotal document that guides its operations, particularly in crisis conditions spurred by Russian aggression. The Development Strategy for 2022-2025 serves as this guiding framework, detailing VNLU's priorities in library and scientific activities. This strategy adapts to the evolving political, social, economic, and cultural landscape of Ukraine, specifically addressing the challenges brought forth by martial law, the necessities of the country's post-war reconstruction, and the impact of Russian aggression.

The strategy ensures VNLU's alignment with international trends in the library sector and related educational, scientific, and cultural fields, thereby reinforcing its position within the global library community. It is tailored to meet the specific challenges posed by Ukraine's current martial law status, including funding constraints and the risks to the preservation of its collections, all under the shadow of ongoing conflict. In response, VNLU is concentrating on op-

timizing its core operations, strategically selecting its priorities, and improving its forecasting and planning methods. These measures are integral in effectively navigating the complex and crisis-laden circumstances presented by the current state of affairs.

Another crucial aspect highlighted in the Development Strategy of V.I. Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine (2022-2025) is detailed in paragraph 8, which stresses the importance of expanding cooperation and partnership relations with other libraries, archives, museums, scientific and educational institutions, media, and publishing houses, both domestically and internationally. This strategic emphasis on developing international book exchanges, enhancing international communication, and participating in international scientific projects and cultural events aims to foster the development and socio-cultural unity of both the national and global community. This direction is particularly significant, as it not only facilitates a broader pervasiveness of knowledge but also enhances cultural understanding and cultivates a sense of community and solidarity among libraries and related institutions worldwide [1].

In implementing these strategies, libraries must navigate the volatile environment of war with realistic and achievable goals. Flexibility is crucial, allowing strategies to evolve in response to changing circumstances. The safety and security of staff, patrons, and collections are paramount, necessitating operational adjustments to minimize risks. Engaging with local communities ensures that library services remain relevant and aligned with their needs during crises. Engaging in cultural diplomacy further strengthens international relationships. Organizing international events and seminars, even amidst conflict, maintains active involvement and visibility of the library community on the global stage. Such initiatives not only underline the cultural value of threatened collections but also reinforce the library's role as a cultural ambassador. This strategic approach enables libraries to not only cope with the immediate challenges posed by conflict but also to maintain their

critical roles as information providers, cultural preservers, and hubs of resilience and hope. By adopting these strategies, libraries affirm their vital position in both local and global contexts, highlighting the enduring power of knowledge and cultural continuity, even amidst the chaos of war.

**Conclusions.** The study's findings emphasize the critical importance of international library cooperation and diplomacy during times of military conflict. These conflicts deeply impact a nation's socio-political landscape and necessitate strategic adaptability and innovation within the library sector. Key strategies underscored include the need for digital cooperation, the protection of cultural heritage, the enhancement of international communication, and the development of strong part-

nerships. These measures are not only vital for preserving library resources but also for enabling ongoing international knowledge exchange. Common efforts in international diplomacy and cultural projects significantly enhance the library's global reputation, creating opportunities for collaboration and mutual understanding. The pivotal role of each library staff member, especially in leadership and decision-making, is crucial for maintaining operational stability in such challenging conditions. Ultimately, every endeavor to strengthen international library cooperation is invaluable, contributing to the development of resilience and sustainable future of libraries, and ensuring the continued exchange of knowledge and culture, even in the face of adversity.

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