



Lithuania at the dawn of 2023

Report of a Listening Post held in Vilnius, 11th Jan 2023

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Lithuanian Listening Post was held on-line, it had 10 participants.

PART 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

Quotes and Images from the first part 1:

What was it, what was it? - There was a war

We will talk about the war in Ukraine, so I am going to get some handkerchiefs

It has been a cosmically intense year with all kinds of content, but as soon as you start thinking, nothing but war comes to mind

A theme that floods life

And then such a wave came

Paralysis

A strong movement of tectonic plates

Mobilisation

Headquarter

91 seems to be making a comeback

People do not forget that the pyramid [of needs] starts from nutrition, survival and safety, and they will not move to morality until they are fed

It is pointless to create the illusion of tragedy [in the theatre] when real tragedies are happening nearby

The relativism of the 21st century was replaced by existentialism and romanticism

The taps have closed for them [for young artists]

Collapsed the naive belief in peace and pacifism

Energy saving

As Hitler seduced the Germans, so we have another hitler in the 21st century

The Russian musician bowed so sincerely it seemed he would remove his heart

PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

Theme 1. The world is divided into two warring camps

Russia's aggression is not a war against only one country. It attempts to question all the principles of democracy that the Western world is guided by.

This situation forces people to be at the extremes [of supporting one warring side or the other]. They can't just be in the middle.

That generalisation [that all Russian speakers in Lithuania support Russia's war in Ukraine] makes things easier. However, at the same time, it is a very temporary solution because it does not encompass all diversity.

Now our aggression (transferences) is directed outward. There is a clear aggressor and an enemy to whom all negativity can be directed.

Theme 2. Contradictory relationship with Russians and Russian speakers living in Lithuania, Russian language and culture

A Russian language teacher feels uncomfortable teaching Russian to children.

Russian-language school students and Roma children reveal their families' pro-Russian, pro-Putin sentiments.

The Russians living in Lithuania have revived. They speak more confidently in Russian and tell us: "You don't know how it is in Russia".

Some citizens of Lithuania have sentiments towards Russians and Russia because of their youth in the Soviet era.

It is easy enough to point the finger at the enemy who is in Russia. However, what worries me is that this is how we and society can direct that anger inward.

I am worried that they will direct their anger at a Russian-speaking neighbour whose parents, maybe even grandparents, were born here, and they consider themselves citizens of Lithuania.

It is not so easy for a Lithuanian to blame a Russian. There are many connections, from neighbour to literature.

Theme 3. Emotional reactions to war: fear, anger, meaninglessness, fatigue

First of all, it was about fear - how will it be for us in Lithuania here?

If war comes to us, we will not escape it. I want to do something. We need to do something because otherwise, we can go crazy.

Fear that young people are leaving or will leave Lithuania.

Everything seems terrible and so hopeless that the Russians here [in Lithuania] are waiting for the moment when Russia will come here and they can live as they are used to – superior.

My work has lost its meaning: what am I doing this for? What's the point of all this?

Acting out tragedies and dramas [in the theatre] is pointless when the real drama and tragedy - war - is happening nearby.

You have to work with groups, with people, while feeling so bad inside.

At the end of the year, people feel tired and angry.

Theme 4. Personal and societal coping strategies to a divided world.

4.1 Withdrawal and depression (fighting with oneself)

If a person is suffering from depression, then its most severe form is that a person becomes his own enemy. Depression is auto-aggression.

The aggression is directed inwards. That man goes into self-destruction, which is frightening.

In case of illness, the body shifts to the side of the virus and kills the owner.

When there is war outside, inside, it is also happening, however, not only war but also revision, rebirth, death and rebirth.

4.2 Accusations and search for enemies among fellow citizens (struggle within the nation) (confrontation of Lithuanian citizens)

People searched for who was guilty (enemies) outside and inside – Russian speakers in Lithuania.

Some people are very supportive of Russia's politics.

Are those people [Russians] who live in Lithuania and have done nothing wrong themselves? Do they have some share of that collective guilt or not?

The boy has a Russian name, and all his classmates in the Lithuanian school know he is guilty of the war.

Because that [Russian] language and that [Russian] culture make them guilty.

For Lithuanians, it does not matter what views and attitudes a person has, but if he is Russian, then they are against him.

"Suddenly, you no longer understand what you need to talk about with a person because there is some fundamental contradiction. And then there's no point in continuing talking as it seems superficial."

4.3 Mobilisation of the society to help Ukrainian refugees and support Ukraine's fight against Russia

In the face of war, the community gathered and united. This is a survival strategy. You cannot survive alone - you need others.

Mass aid, mass volunteering, and many volunteers gathered for help.

Many specialists [of governmental organisations] exceeded their working hours and provided professional assistance voluntarily.

"We redistributed: those who speak the Russian language - go to work with Ukrainians, and those who do not speak - cover the work of the first. This was our mobilisation."

It was chaos when the first wave of refugees came in, but we mobilised our efforts and managed it.

Our biggest problems are solved by civil society. It's great to see people coming together in times of crisis.

Civil society is getting stronger. At least one good thing that recent crises have brought is people's determination, awareness and participation.

4.4 Personal coping

Volunteering immediately became a matter of course. People were no longer looking for added value in volunteering. It was simply helping others and themselves.

I felt much calmer with the opportunity to do something, act, and help calm me down.

Hosting a Ukrainian family was one of the best things that happened to me. I faced my limitations, but at the same time, it gave me much joy.

My children had many difficulties when we took Ukrainians into our home, but their relationships with other people changed. They have become much more sensitive and more truthful.

When we celebrated Christmas with the Ukrainians, I thought they were already like family to me. There was no bitterness, and if I had to decide whether to take them into my home again, I would do it again.

Groups of friends and like-minded people gathered to help each other survive: they met periodically, talked, supported each other, and forgot past differences and disagreements.

Theme 5. What have we forgotten or neglected because of the war in Ukraine?

Social minorities: Roma people and their children, children with delinquent behaviour, regional poverty and LGBT rights.

People living on the border with Belarus are impoverished due to inflation and layoffs. Smuggling thrives there. It feels like the 91's are coming back.

Issues of LGBT rights: postponed consideration of the law on partnership.

We welcomed Ukrainian refugees with open arms, and we "defended" ourselves against other groups of refugees with a concertina wall.

PART 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

The central theme of the year is war. There are two fighting camps. One is Russia, and the other is Ukraine, with the West supporting it. Lithuania is on the Western side, and because of its centuries-long struggles with Tsarist and later Soviet Russia and its geopolitical position, it is on the front lines between Russia and the Western world and its values. Due to these circumstances, Lithuanians have no questions or doubts about who the enemy is and that we must help Ukraine win this war. However, because of conflicting thoughts and feelings towards the Russian language and culture, towards Russians and Russian speakers living in Lithuania, people are confused and struggling to find out where and who the enemy is. The confrontation is outside and inside the country; here, we also look for enemies and see them.

War provokes many negative feelings. The **fear** that Russia may also attack Lithuania, that young people will leave Lithuania and then who will defend it. **Anger** at the aggressor and anyone who supports or admires that aggressor. Disappointment with the good human nature. People are experiencing meaninglessness, as many everyday activities and jobs lose meaning in the face of war. It is difficult to work and live with all these feelings, the war has been going on for a long time, and we feel tired from the tension, anxiety and efforts to help Ukraine,

There is no room for reflection in wartime. The split of society is enormous because that hatred brings us together and unites our forces for resistance, for the fight against the aggressor. There is no place for sympathy and understanding of the aggressor. Society is divided into at least two large groups. One's voice is loud and dominant, while the other's is muffled, but it is still heard and quietly emerges. There is a prevailing discourse in aid and support for Ukraine. However, poverty, deprivation, various dissatisfactions, and jealousy make one distrust the prevailing discourse, which helps sustain pro-Russian sentiments and pro-Russia voices.

A more significant part of society is in a schizoid-paranoid state, while others are still trying to be in a depressive state. The first wants to stay in confrontation with Russians and Russia as they are the source of aggression. Because it is easier in a war situation when people recognise who the enemy is, and when they are at war, they take action instead of reflecting on them.

The second tries to be in a depressive position and to understand the Russians, to see the diversity in that nation, that not everyone is the same, and that they also gave good things for the world - in literature, music, and even during the soviet times. However, there is no room for reflection in the face of war. Because it leads to depression or paralysis: a person is in danger of starting to look for an enemy within himself and engaging in self-destruction. It leads to death: the person becomes a passive observer of events, waiting without knowing what he is waiting for. This human condition means the defeat of the war because the aggressor is active; he does not wait but takes advantage of the paralysis.

How do we react? What do we do in the face of war? There are two levels of response - personal and societal. Individuals either shut down, withdraw, leave, fall into depression, or go to volunteer, take Ukrainians into their homes, and become active in other ways. In the first case, anger is directed inward, auto aggression and self-destruction occur, and some part of the person must die to be reborn. In the second case, anger is transformed into activity. That path is also challenging. People face fatigue, disappointments, and get hurt. However, it also brings joy, allows discoveries, and provides opportunities for learning about oneself and others and changing into a more sensitive and understanding person. The war brought society together. Society has rallied to fight an external enemy because a war can only be won by collective, not by individual efforts. Lithuanian society rallied to help Ukrainian refugees and Ukraine's fight against Russia. It welcomed refugees into the country, into their homes, took care of them, volunteered, and collected things and money for aid. However, at the same time, fellow citizens were accused of pro-Russian sentiments, there were searches for the enemy, clashes between citizens within the country, and self-aggression. So processes are similar at the personal and societal levels.

Hypotheses:

During the war, the world split into two opposing camps. People and countries are forced to choose between them, and staying somewhere in the middle is impossible. Therefore, people experience fear, anger, frustration, and meaninglessness. Furthermore, they deal with these feelings by mobilising joint efforts to fight against an external enemy or aggressor, i.e. engaging in activities that give meaning to the existence or by looking for faults and enemies among their fellow citizens, on whom they can pour out negative feelings. The topic of war is famous, so other problems of society remain unheard of and unsolved.

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