

Editors' note

In early February 2022, Ukrainian Studies scholars from around the globe participated in an online conference of the Ukrainian Studies Association of Australia and New Zealand, co-organised in partnership with the University of Melbourne, the Association of Ukrainians in Victoria, and the Ukrainian Studies Foundation in Australia. The title of the conference, “Independence. Archive. Prognosis. Ukraine in 1991-2021 and Beyond,” signalled its intent: to celebrate Ukraine’s independence thirty years after the fall of the Soviet Union.

When the organising committee started working in mid-2021, no one could imagine that 2022 would become the most dramatic year in European history after the end of World War II, with millions of Ukrainians displaced from their homes and the European Parliament declaring the Russian Federation a state sponsor of terrorism. Although Russia had illegally annexed Crimea and started a war in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine in 2014 – crimes to which the international community in many instances reacted less decisively than their magnitude demanded – many refused to believe that a full-scale war was about to begin. When the conference participants gathered on Zoom on 3 February, Russia’s increasingly aggressive stance towards Ukraine could not be ignored any longer. The conference papers touched upon several aspects of Ukraine’s recent history and culture, from legal matters to film and from sociology to literature, but keynotes and discussions openly discussed the growing threat from Russia.

Less than three weeks after the conclusion of the conference – an event that significantly contributed to strengthening professional and personal links among Ukrainian Studies scholars worldwide, as frequently recognised in informal exchanges thereafter – the world was eventually confronted with Russian bombs falling on Kyiv, Kharkiv, Kherson and many other Ukrainian cities. As experts on Ukraine, many of us initially experienced contradictory feelings: on the one hand, powerlessness, and yet, on the other, responsibility for shedding light on what was happening and on the cultural and historical premises underlying the full-scale war. The war has significantly increased interest in Ukrainian matters on the part of academic institutions, media and publishing houses worldwide, at the same time highlighting how insufficient support for Ukrainian Studies has been hitherto.

The five papers published in this issue of the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies* represent only a small portion of the scholarly work presented at the February conference. Many colleagues have not been able to submit their papers for consideration because of the war: some have been displaced, others are fighting on the front line or volunteering to support Ukraine’s defence efforts. In spite of these difficulties, we are happy to present the work of scholars based in different countries (Bulgaria, Germany, Poland and Ukraine) and active in various research areas, including history and archival studies, film and cultural studies, philology and literature. While these articles show the quality and the depth of the research currently conducted in Ukrainian Studies, we cannot but hope that they will prompt scholars working in related fields to focus more attention on Ukraine and help the international

community better understand a country and a culture whose weight has been underestimated for too long.

We express our gratitude to the anonymous peer reviewers for their constructive engagements with these papers, as well as to our sponsors for making the “Independence. Archive. Prognosis. Ukraine in 1991-2021 and Beyond” conference possible.

Editors of the Special Issue:

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