

Political problems of international systems and global development

UDC 327.8:316.77:394.1

DOI <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20654532>

**Affective Gastrodiplomacy of Ukraine in Wartime: Communicative
Mechanisms and Practices**

Volodymyr Yaroslavskyi,

PhD student of the Department of International

Relations and Strategic Studies

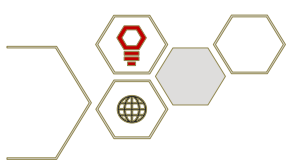
National university «Kyiv aviation institute»

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6645-7074>

Accepted: 19.05.2026 | Published: 30.05.2026

Abstract: The article examines Ukraine's gastrodiplomacy under conditions of full-scale war as an affective form of public diplomacy. The relevance of the study is determined by changes in the nature of the state's international communication, as cultural and media practices capable of engaging broad audiences have gained increasing importance. The article argues that, in the Ukrainian wartime context, gastrodiplomacy extends beyond its traditional understanding as an instrument of cultural representation and soft power and becomes an emotional mediator between the experience of the national community and global audiences.

The study employs a qualitative design that combines discourse analysis, semiotic analysis, and case study. This combination makes it possible, on the one hand, to trace recurring semantic and affective patterns in texts and, on the other, to relate them to specific communicative events and public practices.



The methodological framework combines discourse analysis, semiotic analysis, and case study. The empirical material consists of a corpus of publicly available sources from 2022 to 2026, selected through theoretical sampling, including academic publications, institutional materials, media texts, and materials related to humanitarian initiatives.

The analysis identifies five key mechanisms of affective gastrodiplomacy: symbolic condensation, affective witnessing of trauma, ethics of care, participatory solidarity, and mediatized amplification. It is shown that gastronomic practices in wartime contribute to the formation of empathy, trust, and readiness for solidaristic action, enabling a transition from observation to participation.

The scientific novelty lies in introducing the concept of affective gastrodiplomacy and developing a model of its functioning.

Keywords: gastrodiplomacy, public diplomacy, affective gastrodiplomacy, cultural diplomacy, Ukraine, war, gastronomic practices, #CookForUkraine.

Афективна гастродіпломатія України в умовах війни: комунікативні механізми та практики

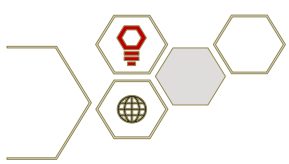
Ярославський Володимир Юрійович

аспірант кафедри міжнародних відносин та стратегічних студій

Державного університету «Київський авіаційний інститут»

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6645-7074>

Анотація. У статті проаналізовано гастродіпломатію України в умовах повномасштабної війни як афективну форму публічної дипломатії. Актуальність теми зумовлена трансформацією міжнародної комунікації держави, у якій культурні та медійні практики відіграють зростаючу роль у формуванні міжнародного іміджу. Показано, що в українському кейсі



гастродипломатія виходить за межі традиційного розуміння її, як інструменту культурної репрезентації та «м'якої сили», і функціонує як механізм емоційного впливу на міжнародні аудиторії.

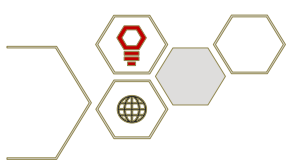
У дослідженні використовується якісний дизайн, що поєднує дискурс-аналіз, семіотичний аналіз та тематичне дослідження. Таке поєднання дозволяє, з одного боку, відстежувати семантичні та афективні патерни, повторювані в текстах, а з іншого – пов'язувати їх із конкретними комунікативними подіями та публічними практиками.

Методологія дослідження поєднує дискурс-аналіз, семіотичний аналіз та case-study. Емпіричний матеріал представлений корпусом публічно доступних джерел 2022–2026 років, відібраних за принципом теоретичної вибірки, що охоплює академічні тексти, інституційні матеріали, медійні публікації та гуманітарні ініціативи.

У результаті проведеного дослідження визначено п'ять ключових механізмів афективної гастродипломатії: символічну конденсацію, афективне свідчення травми, етику турботи, партисипативну солідарність і медіатизовану ампліфікацію. Доведено, що гастрономічні практики в умовах війни сприяють формуванню емпатії, довіри та готовності до солідарної дії, забезпечуючи перехід від сприйняття до співучасті.

У якості наукової новизни пропонується введення у науковий обіг поняття афективної гастродипломатії та розробка її моделі. Отримані результати можуть бути використані у подальших дослідженнях культурної дипломатії, а також – стратегічних комунікацій і творення міжнародного іміджу держави.

Ключові слова: гастродипломатія, публічна дипломатія, афективна дипломатія, культурна дипломатія, Україна, війна, гастрономічні практики, Cook for Ukraine.



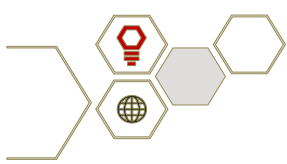
Introduction. Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine has fundamentally transformed the state's international communication. Alongside traditional channels of diplomatic representation, cultural and media forms of communication capable of engaging broad and heterogeneous audiences have acquired particular significance. Gastrodiplomacy has become one of the most visible of these forms.

In peacetime, gastrodiplomacy is typically conceptualized as a subset of cultural diplomacy and nation branding that promotes national cuisine as a resource of positive image-making. The Ukrainian experience of 2022–2026, however, demonstrates a different communicative logic: food functions not only as a cultural sign, but also as a medium of wartime experience, empathy, care, and solidarity.

Within this transformation, not only borscht as a national symbol but also charity dinners, campaigns such as #CookForUkraine, and humanitarian and volunteer food practices come to the fore. These phenomena operate simultaneously on material, symbolic, and mediated levels. They involve actual food, encode meanings related to home, memory, identity, and vulnerability, and gain public significance through digital circulation and media coverage. Accordingly, Ukrainian gastrodiplomacy is particularly suitable for analysis within the field of social communications.

The scholarly problem addressed in this article is that classical studies of gastrodiplomacy explain its effectiveness primarily through cultural attractiveness and soft power, while insufficiently accounting for emotional influence, empathy, and participatory solidarity. Yet it is precisely these dimensions that, in the Ukrainian case, enable the transition from passive observation to co-action. The article therefore aims to conceptualize affective gastrodiplomacy and to identify the mechanisms through which gastronomic practices shape Ukraine's international image under wartime conditions.

Theoretical Framework. Gastrodiplomacy as a distinct field of research is generally defined as the strategic use of national cuisine in public diplomacy and the

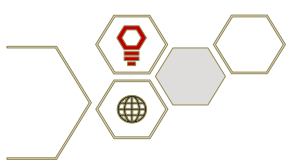


cultural promotion of the state. In his seminal article, Paul Rockower describes it as a way to “win hearts and minds through stomachs,” emphasizing that it addresses not a narrow diplomatic corps but a broad foreign public [1]. A review by G. Li and K. Mok, covering two decades of scholarship, demonstrates that while most studies continue to focus on state-led strategies for promoting national cuisine, more recent research increasingly accounts for the role of non-state actors, including diasporas, chefs, influencers, and local communities [2].

This understanding of gastrodiploamacy is closely linked to the concept of soft power. Joseph Nye defines soft power as the ability to achieve desired outcomes through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment; its key resources include culture, values, and policies [3; 4]. Accordingly, gastrodiploamacy is often interpreted as one of the practical means of projecting soft power. However, the Ukrainian wartime case reveals the limits of this framework, as practices such as borscht, charity dinners, and volunteer kitchens demonstrate forms of engagement that extend beyond cultural attractiveness. These cases demonstrate that Ukrainian gastrodiploamacy, charity dinners, and volunteer kitchens matter not only because they are appealing, but because they emotionally recode the experience of war.

To account for this specificity, scholarship on emotion in public diplomacy is especially productive. Sarah Ellen Graham demonstrates that emotion is not peripheral but central to public diplomacy, shaping persuasion, argumentation, intercultural dialogue, and the construction of collective identities [5]. Constance Duncombe shows that digital diplomacy intensifies this role of emotion, since social media allow state and non-state actors to engage identity through emotionally charged messages that circulate rapidly in the public sphere [6]. Contemporary gastrodiploamacy should therefore be understood not only as cultural representation but also as emotionally structured communication.

Equally important is the semiotic approach to food. In "Semiotics of Food," Simona Stano conceptualizes food as a sign system in which culinary practices

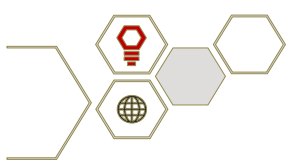


produce meanings, social roles, and cultural codes [7]. Food is not a neutral substance; rather, it structures perceptions of community, memory, hierarchy, territory, belonging, and difference. In wartime, this signifying function becomes even more pronounced, as a dish represents not only taste or tradition but also the right to cultural continuity, survival, and mutual support.

Finally, it is essential to consider the mediatization of diplomacy. James Pamment argues that diplomacy increasingly operates within media regimes of representation: communication technologies shape how diplomatic actors produce knowledge, manage identities, and coordinate public campaigns [8]. A charity dinner, a social media post, a crowdfunding page, and a report on a volunteer kitchen are therefore not separate events but elements of a single communicative chain. Building on these approaches, this article defines affective gastrodiploamacy as a form of public diplomacy in which gastronomic symbols, feeding practices, and culinary events produce an emotional connection between the experience of a national community and external audiences, contributing to the state's international image and facilitating the transition from empathy to solidaristic action.

Materials and Methods. The study employs a qualitative design that combines discourse analysis, semiotic analysis, and case study. This combination makes it possible, on the one hand, to trace recurring semantic and affective patterns in texts and, on the other, to relate them to specific communicative events and public practices.

The empirical corpus consists of publicly available texts and online materials (2022–2026) selected through theoretical sampling and meeting three criteria: the presence of a clearly articulated gastronomic component; international or nationally significant public visibility; and a direct connection to the war and the representation of Ukraine. The corpus encompasses academic works on gastrodiploamacy and emotion in public diplomacy, materials produced by UNESCO and the Ukrainian Institute on borscht and Ukrainian gastronomic culture, the #CookForUkraine



campaign page on JustGiving, media coverage of charity dinners, and materials from World Central Kitchen, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, and LB.ua concerning humanitarian and volunteer food initiatives.

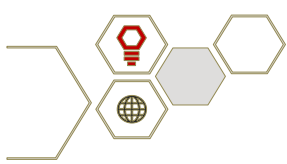
The units of analysis include: (a) key signs and images of food; (b) affective markers, such as home, care, solidarity, trauma, and resilience; (c) rhetorical strategies of audience engagement; (d) the types of actors producing the messages; and (e) forms of media amplification. This operationalization allows the analysis to move beyond individual cases and to identify recurring mechanisms.

Discourse analysis is used to interpret how Ukraine's public image is constructed through gastronomic practices. Semiotic analysis examines how particular dishes and food practices function as signs, while the case-study approach connects these signs to specific campaigns and events. This research design corresponds to recent reviews of gastrodiploacy scholarship, which emphasize the need for micro-level, qualitative studies focused on concrete communicative mechanisms [2].

Borscht as Symbolic Condensation of Cultural Vulnerability.

Ukrainian borscht is widely recognized as the most prominent gastronomic symbol of Ukraine in the international arena; however, under wartime conditions its meaning has undergone a significant transformation. UNESCO's decision of July 1, 2022, to inscribe the culture of Ukrainian borscht cooking on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding was adopted in response to the negative impact of the war on this tradition (9.UNESCO, 2022). UNESCO documentation emphasizes that **borscht** is an integral part of family and community life in Ukraine, while the war threatens the viability of this practice due to displacement, the destruction of local environments, and the disruption of everyday rituals.

In this context, borscht functions as a mechanism of symbolic condensation. It condenses multiple semiotic layers into a single sign: home, family, regional



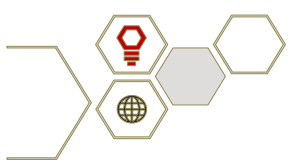
diversity, continuity of tradition, and the right to cultural distinctiveness. At the same time, the war introduces an additional dimension: vulnerability. A dish that conventionally signifies domesticity and shared meals now also signifies the threat of disruption to cultural life. It is precisely this combination of intimacy and fragility that generates a strong affective effect.

Importantly, UNESCO explicitly cautions against interpreting the inscription as exclusive “ownership” of the dish. The international symbolic effect is grounded not in exclusivist appropriation, but in the recognition of the sociocultural significance of **borscht** for the Ukrainian community [9]. Borscht therefore becomes not merely a gastronomic emblem, but a sign of morally grounded cultural subjectivity.

A further perspective is provided by the Ukrainian Institute’s page “Ukraine. Food & History,” where Ukrainian cuisine is presented as part of the country’s cultural history and diplomatic experience [10]. Within this framework, **borscht** is no longer limited to folkloric representation and enters global public circulation as part of a broader narrative about a living culture that sustains continuity under conditions of threat.

From Charity Dinners to Participatory Solidarity: The Case of #CookForUkraine. If borscht functions as the core of symbolic representation, the #CookForUkraine campaign embodies another dimension of Ukrainian gastrodiplomacy – the shift from cultural visibility to solidaristic participation. The campaign’s page on JustGiving describes it as a global movement aimed at raising awareness of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and raising funds to support children and families displaced by the war [11]. It explicitly calls not only for donations but also for organizing charity supper clubs, bake sales, restaurant fundraisers, and social media posts.

This communicative architecture makes the case especially revealing. International audiences do not remain passive observers of the Ukrainian

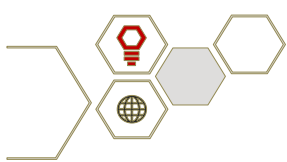


experience; rather, they enter it through gastronomic action. A Guardian article on #CookForUkraine notes that by October 2022 the campaign had raised £1.8 million and mobilized the culinary community through supper clubs, bake sales, and restaurant-based donation mechanisms [12]. The JustGiving page documents the initiative's sustained viability: more than 5,000 donations, over £900,000 raised online, and the framing of the campaign as a platform for collective cooking, recipe sharing, and storytelling about Ukrainian dishes [11].

In this context, food performs not a representational but a relational function. It allows international audiences not merely to observe Ukrainian cuisine, but to symbolically enter it – by cooking, tasting, serving, posting, and donating. This mechanism can be defined as participatory solidarity. Affect emerges not only from the image of the dish itself, but from embodied engagement and practice: empathy is transformed into shared action.

A New Yorker article further highlights the cultural and emotional foundations of the campaign. Anna Russell demonstrates that #CookForUkraine did not emerge from marketing calculation, but from an urgent need to act, as personal experiences of war were translated into the culinary public sphere [13]. Particularly revealing in this account is the idea that recipes and dishes become not merely content, but a means of making the war understandable and emotionally proximate for those geographically distant from it.

A particularly media-visible episode was the charity dinner held at Jamie Oliver HQ, where Ukrainian chef Yurii Kovryzhenko, together with Jamie Oliver, Olia Hercules, and Alissa Timoshkina, prepared a menu of Ukrainian dishes, with all proceeds directed to UNICEF [14]. The significance of this event extends beyond fundraising. The charity dinner functions as a ritual of public validation: Ukrainian cuisine enters a prestigious gastronomic space while simultaneously becoming a medium of support. The combination of borscht, high-profile chef collaboration, and

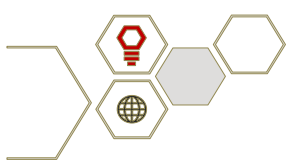


a charitable purpose produces a complex affective configuration – respect, proximity, trust, and readiness to support.

Humanitarian Food Provision as an Ethics of Care. The third cluster of cases is associated with practices of humanitarian and volunteer food provision. Formally, these practices are not always positioned as diplomatic; however, under conditions of mediatization and international visibility, they acquire a distinct gastrodipomatic effect. The most significant example is the activity of World Central Kitchen in Ukraine. On its #ChefsForUkraine response page, the organization reports that it operates with the support of a team of more than 500 Ukrainians, providing hot meals, bread, water, food and vegetable kits, and cooking facilities, and that by 2026 it had surpassed 295 million meals served [15].

For the purposes of this study, scale alone is not the decisive factor. In the report "Three Years of Adaptation and Impact in Ukraine," World Central Kitchen emphasizes that vegetable kits are built around locally familiar ingredients required for traditional dishes, particularly borsch, while community kitchens in shelters are designed to provide not merely food, but a sense of normalcy and belonging [16]. Humanitarian food is therefore not culturally neutral. It sustains local dietary practices, restores a sense of home, and adds a symbolic dimension to crisis response.

It is precisely here that the mechanism defined in this article as the ethics of care takes shape. This refers to a configuration of communication in which food signifies not prestige, luxury, or exoticism, but the maintenance of human dignity and social connection. Within this narrative, Ukraine is represented as a space in which, even under conditions of war, the importance of home-cooked meals, traditional food sets, festive tables, and shared kitchens is preserved. For international audiences, this produces an image of the state not only as resilient, but also as humane.

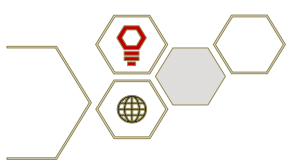


This logic becomes even more evident in the volunteer movement Borsch for the Armed Forces. Materials from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine emphasize that the initiative supplies defenders with dried borsch, soups, and porridges that matter not only logistically but also emotionally: they enable soldiers to taste home-cooked dishes and to feel that someone cares [17]. A report by LB.ua further details the scale of the movement: in 2024, volunteers prepared more than 1.2 million portions of dried borsch and soups, over 150,000 portions of porridge, nearly 40,000 portions of vitamin teas, and more than 330,000 energy bars [18]. These texts foreground domesticity at the frontline: food provides sustenance while maintaining a symbolic connection between home and the front. For this reason, volunteer food practices become part of Ukraine's international image as a community of care and mutual support, rather than merely a site of military resistance.

A Model of Affective Mechanisms of Ukrainian Gastrodiplomacy. A comparative analysis of the three clusters of cases – borscht as a cultural symbol, charity dinners and the #CookForUkraine campaign, and humanitarian and volunteer food practices – allows for the identification of five affective mechanisms of Ukrainian gastrodiplomacy.

The first mechanism is symbolic condensation. Within this framework, a single dish condenses into one image a complex set of meanings: home, memory, regionality, cultural distinctiveness, everyday life, and continuity. The affective effect emerges when the dish comes to signify not only culinary taste, but also the lifeworld of a community.

The second mechanism is affective witnessing of trauma. This refers to situations in which food communicates the disruption of the normal order of life: the destruction of homes, the interruption of traditions, threats to cultural practices, experiences of evacuation, or food scarcity at the front. In this mode, food becomes



a way of narrating war beyond the language of statistics, and affect is produced through the juxtaposition of the familiar and the endangered.

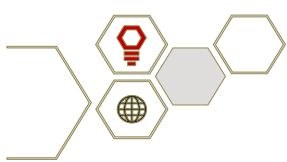
The third mechanism is the ethics of care. It manifests where gastronomic practice acquires the meaning of human presence, care, the maintenance of dignity, and the creation of a sense of normalcy. Community kitchens, vegetable kits for borscht, dried soups for soldiers, or hot tea after shelling all construct an image of Ukraine as a moral community capable of supporting its people even in conditions of crisis.

The fourth mechanism is participatory solidarity. Unlike the traditional model in which the state presents culture and the audience consumes it, international audiences here are invited to co-act: to cook, organize dinners, donate, share images, or exchange recipes. The emotional effect is achieved through the shift from observation to participation. The charity dinner is an especially effective form, since it combines the ritual of the shared table with social action.

The fifth mechanism is mediatized amplification. None of the preceding mechanisms would reach such scale without digital platforms, journalistic narratives, and visual circulation. Through mediatization, a local dish becomes a global symbol, and a charity dinner becomes an international event contributing to the construction of the state's image.

Discussion. The proposed model demonstrates that Ukrainian wartime gastrodiplomacy cannot be reduced to soft power in its classical, attraction-based understanding. It operates differently: not through exoticization or the mere presentation of delicious national cuisine, but through the emotional organization of international perception. In the Ukrainian case, it is therefore more precise to speak not simply of gastrodiplomacy, but of affective gastrodiplomacy.

This perspective refines existing approaches to gastrodiplomacy while expanding the theoretical toolkit of public diplomacy research. Whereas for many states gastrodiplomacy primarily functions as a form of cultural marketing, in



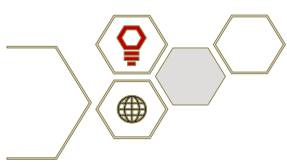
Ukraine it becomes a means of representing a vulnerable yet resilient culture that integrates memory, resistance, and care. Under conditions of war, gastrodiploamacy thus emerges as part of a broader strategy of the state's moral legitimization.

The Ukrainian material also demonstrates that effective gastrodiploamacy can be hybrid in nature. State institutions, cultural organizations, volunteer networks, international humanitarian actors, journalists, chefs, and home cooks jointly produce the image of Ukraine that circulates in the international arena. This polycentricity supports the conclusion that public diplomacy is increasingly organized as a networked communication process rather than as an exclusively state-driven activity.

Conclusions. The findings demonstrate that Ukrainian gastrodiploamacy under conditions of full-scale war has a distinctly affective character. Its effectiveness derives not merely from the promotion of national cuisine, but from the capacity of gastronomic images and practices to generate empathy, trust, proximity, and solidaristic action.

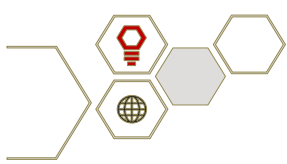
The study contributes to the field by introducing the concept of affective gastrodiploamacy and developing a model of five mechanisms through which it operates: symbolic condensation, affective witnessing of trauma, ethics of care, participatory solidarity, and mediatized amplification. When applied to the Ukrainian case, this model shows that wartime gastrodiploamacy is not a peripheral element of cultural policy, but one of the most effective channels of international communication.

The findings have practical significance for further studies of Ukrainian cultural diplomacy, wartime strategic communications, and mediatized image-making. Future research may further expand the empirical corpus through social media data, examine the reception of Ukrainian gastrodiploamacy among foreign audiences, and conduct comparative analyses of gastrodiploamacy in crisis contexts.



References

1. Rockower P. S. Recipes for gastrodiploamcy. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*. 2021. № 8(3). 235–246. <https://doi.org/10.1057/pb.2012.17>
2. Li G., Mok K. More than two decades of gastrodiploamcy: A review of the concept, current characteristics, and future trends. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 2025. Vol.7. 1659162. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2025.1659162>
3. Nye J. S., Jr. Soft power and public diplomacy revisited. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 2019. Vol.14(1–2). 1–14.
4. Nye J. S. Soft power: The evolution of a concept. *Journal of Political Power*. 2021. Vol.14(1). 196–208.
5. Graham S. E. Emotion and public diplomacy: Dispositions in international communications, dialogue, and persuasion. *International Studies Review*. 2014. Vol. 16(4). 522–539. <https://doi.org/10.1111/misr.12156>
6. Duncombe C. Digital diplomacy: Emotion and identity in the public realm. In N. Snow & N. J. Cull (Eds.), *Debating public diplomacy*. 2019. 102–116 https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004410824_009
7. Stano S. Semiotics of food. In P. P. Trifonas (Ed.), *International handbook of semiotics*. 2015. 647–671. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9404-6_30
8. Pamment J. The mediatization of diplomacy. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 2014 Vol. 9(3). 253–280. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1871191X-12341279>
9. UNESCO. *Culture of Ukrainian borscht cooking inscribed on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding*. 2022, July 1. URL: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/culture-ukrainian-borscht-cooking-inscribed-list-intangible-cultural-heritage-need-urgent>
10. Ukrainian Institute. (n.d.). *Ukraine: Food & History*. URL: <https://ui.org.ua/en/sectors-en/ukraine-food-history/>



11. Cook for Ukraine. #CookForUkraine. JustGiving. 2022. February 26). <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/cookforukraine>
12. Lewis T. OFM Awards 2022: Editor's Award – #CookForUkraine. *The Guardian*. 2022, October 17
URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/food/2022/oct/17/ofm-awards-2022-editors-award-cook-for-ukraine-olia-hercules-alissa-timoshkina>
13. Russell A. The Ukrainian and Russian chefs cooking for Ukraine. *The New Yorker*. 2022, April 4. URL: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/letter-from-the-uk/the-ukrainian-and-russian-chefs-cooking-for-ukraine>
14. Druziuk Y. Mriya: Ukrainian chef Yurii Kovryzhenko opened his first restaurant in London: In-depth interview. *The Village Ukraine*. 2022, July 20. URL: <https://www.village.com.ua/village/city/eng/331007-mriya-ukrainian-chef-yurii-kovryzhenko-s-first-restaurant-in-london-long-interview>
15. World Central Kitchen. (n.d.). *WCK provides critical support to Ukrainians impacted by war*. URL: <https://wck.org/relief/activation>
16. World Central Kitchen. *Three years of adaptation and impact in Ukraine*. 2025. February 21. URL: <https://wck.org/news/ukraine-3/>
17. Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine. *How humanitarian volunteers help National Guard units*. 2023, November 26. <https://mvs.gov.ua/en/news/iak-volonter-i-gumanitarnogo-napriamku-dopomagaiut-pidrozdilam-nacgvardiyi>
18. LB.ua. *Feeding Ukraine's defenders: How volunteers provide nourishment on the frontline*. 2025. March 26. URL: https://en.lb.ua/news/2025/03/26/35378_feeding_ukraines_defenders_how.html