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Diasporic Mobilisation and Repositioning: The Ukrainian World Congress' Responses to Critical Junctures and Events

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This paper explores the evolving engagements with the homeland by the Ukrainian World Congress (UWC), the leading organisation representing the Ukrainian global diaspora. Using Maria Koinova's concepts of critical event and critical juncture, the study examines the UWC's modes and types of involvement with Ukraine and its repositioning, identifying 4 distinct periods before and during the ongoing war with Russia. The paper also investigates the UWC's persistent campaign for the recognition of multiple citizenship. To this end, it draws on a qualitative content analysis and link analysis of Congress' official website and public Facebook page. This exploration from a top-down perspective demonstrates the repositioning of the UWC alongside the changing prevalence of symbolic, political, organisational and procedural types of involvement. The findings reveal that, despite the Russian existential threat to its homeland, the UWC has not resorted to radical or 'transgressive' rhetoric and actions.

Keywords: diaspora, Ukrainian World Congress, critical juncture, repositioning, Russo–Ukrainian war

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Introduction

Conflict in the homeland is a significant factor affecting the ways in which diasporas operate, engage with their countries of origin and mobilise support for their causes. However, as pointed out by Maria Koinova (2018a), the relationships between diasporas and conflicts are not unambiguous, as conflicts are often blurred, repetitive and of a complex nature. The ongoing Russo–Ukrainian war may serve as an example of such a complex conflict, as it has evolved from internal non-violent resistance to the policies of the Viktor Yanukovych regime to a full-scale interstate war. Arguably, the responses to these developments by Ukrainian diasporas and the ways in which they are being affected constitute an essential field of study. There is an emerging body of literature exploring recent mobilisations (Fihel, Homel, Jaroszewicz, Lesińska and Bentz 2025; Özgür and Deniz 2024; Trzeszczyńska and Demel 2025a, b) that predominantly focuses on the individual level of diaspora entrepreneurs. However, diasporic responses on the collective level of organisations and within a top-down perspective remain under-researched. To address this gap in scholarship, this paper examines diasporic engagements with the homeland and the effects of the escalating conflict on diaspora–homeland relationships, focusing on the leading Ukrainian diaspora organisation, the Ukrainian World Congress (UWC).

Having prioritised its support for democratisation and the European integration of Ukraine, the UWC demonstrates a reconfiguration of its efforts to participate in Ukraine's development and the shifting of its political stances in response to the changing situation. Michel Laguerre (1999) previously defined such diasporic actions as *reshaping* and *repositioning*. The reshaping involvements with the homeland can be differentiated into symbolic, political, organisational and procedural types (Kozachenko 2019). The repositioning refers to the ways diasporas strategically relocate themselves politically, socially, symbolically *vis-à-vis* homeland, host society or transnational networks. Notably, dramatic changes in the homeland may constitute *critical junctures* (Koinova 2018b) that are manifested in institutional change in diasporas, the state and the society of the homeland – and ultimately reconfigure the relationships between them. Such changes also have the potential for diaspora radicalisation (Beaugrand and Geisser 2016; Koinova 2018a, b; Smith and Stares 2007). Considering these ideas, this paper addresses 2 primary research questions. First, how did the UWC respond to critical junctures in the homeland? Second, did the conflict escalation make the UWC 'transgressive' in its rhetoric and actions? Considering that new media have become a key means for diasporic organisations to mobilise support, represent their political interests and promote their agendas (Alonso and Oiarzabal 2010; Krasynska 2015), this study examines the UWC's engagement through its online presence. It draws on qualitative content analysis (Bryman 2004) and link analysis of the UWC's website and public Facebook page.

Given that different types of crisis or conflict in the homeland cause varied responses, modes of operation or use of channels by diasporas (Koinova 2018a; Smith and Stares 2007; Sökefeld 2006), this study scrutinises 4 distinct periods: a non-violent conflict (2010–2013) with opposition to the policies of President Viktor Yanukovych; the Euromaidan Revolution (2013–2014); the initial stage of the Russo–Ukrainian war with elements of secessionist conflict (2014–2022); and a full-scale war (2022 and ongoing). The examination of these periods reveals that, despite facing escalation phases of the conflict, the UWC has demonstrated increased mobilisation but has not resorted to a radical or 'transgressive' rhetoric or mode of engagement. This paper also argues that the election of Yanukovych, the Euromaidan Revolution and two phases of the Russo–Ukrainian War constitute critical junctures (Koinova 2018b) with evident institutional changes.

In developing these arguments, this paper is organised into 4 main sections. The first deals with the conceptualisation of diaspora and mobilisation in response to different types of crisis in the homeland. It also outlines the differences between critical junctures and critical events. The second section addresses the role of diasporas in the nation-building and democratisation processes in Ukraine and specifies the case of the UWC. The third section outlines the research methods and data that form the empirical basis of this study. The findings on the reshaping and repositioning of the UWC and its responses to critical events and junctures are presented in the fourth section. Then the conclusions are provided. Having pointed this out, it is necessary to outline the conceptual framework of this study.

Diasporas, homeland conflicts and mobilisation

Rogers Brubaker (2005) emphasises the significance of claim-making in diasporic politics, where claims are made to the homeland – such as demands for the right of return or recognition of multiple citizenship – to host countries and transnationally. The dynamic and changing nature of a diaspora is reflected in his definition of it as a 'category of practice, project, claim and stance, rather than as a bounded group' (Brubaker 2005: 13). This paper adopts this definition of a diaspora as it underscores articulations of claims and stances as a crucial part of diasporic practices.

The understanding of a diaspora as a process rather than a stable community is well reflected in the studies of diaspora mobilisation (Fihel *et al.* 2025; Kennedy 2022; Koinova 2018a, c; Özgür and Deniz 2024). One of the pioneers of this approach, Martin Sökefeld (2006), proposes introducing elements of social movement studies into research on diasporas: opportunity structures, framing, mobilising structures and organisations. The ideas on framing and organisations are particularly relevant here. Framing not only plays a key role in the motivation for collective action (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996) but it also allows the presentation of causes and goals as universally relevant and significant. Diaspora organisations, similar to social movement organisations (Della Porta and Diani 2006), facilitate the connection of different groups and the mobilisation of resources and ideas.

While there are various definitions of a diaspora (Brubaker 2005; Cohen 1997; Vertovec 1997), the crucial role of 'imaginings' or the myth of the homeland (Safran 1991) in the making of diasporic identities and shaping engagement practices is commonly acknowledged. Benedict Anderson (1992) describes the efforts of *émigrés* or exiles to shape the homeland by their specific imaginings as long-distance nationalism. He points out that a safe distance may lead to a lack of accountability and support for reckless or radical initiatives (Anderson 1992). Moreover, the mechanisms and modes of diasporic involvement with the homeland, based on either nationalist or citizenship principles, constitute a crucial area in diaspora studies. Arguably, citizenship manifests both belonging and entitlement to the full rights to participate in the polity (Yuval-Davis 2006) and may be prioritised by diasporas in their relationships with a kin-state.

Laguerre (1999) defines diasporic efforts to change the homeland and the processes of adjusting the diaspora's position *vis-à-vis* it as *reshaping* and *repositioning*. These concepts reflect the changes that occur both in the state to which they are related and within diasporas themselves, allowing for the tracing of interactional relationships between 3 key elements: state transformation, diaspora influence on the homeland and the transnational nature of state–diaspora relationships (Laguerre 1999). Diasporic involvement with the homeland can be differentiated into 4 main types: *symbolic*, *political*, *organisational* and *procedural* (Kozachenko 2019: 113). Symbolic involvement pertains to the efforts to shape the homeland's 'imagined community' (Anderson 2006) by introducing and amplifying certain narratives and symbols. Political involvement encompasses participation in political campaigns and the

formation of political parties. Organisational involvement refers to the creation of institutions, legislation and organisational structures in the homeland. Finally, procedural involvement is related to the support of the procedural aspects of democracy (Koinova 2009) – notably, dramatic changes in the homeland can fundamentally alter the characteristics and balance of different types of diasporic involvement.

As pointed out by Koinova (2018b), *critical junctions* and *events* directly affect the modes of diasporic mobilisation and engagements with the homeland and may 'feed' radicalism. Critical junctures transform international and state institutions, ultimately reconfiguring diaspora–state relationships. For instance, it may move the diaspora strategic centre – a core location for coordinating its activities – from abroad to the homeland and *vice versa*. In contrast, critical events may manifest in a change in scale or magnitude of mobilisation without substantive transformation and may be part of a critical juncture (Koinova 2018b). Moreover, Sökefeld (2006) argues that homeland conflict not just mobilises diasporas but can also create them – as in the case of the Kashmiri diaspora in the United Kingdom. The importance of the conflict in the homeland is reflected by the concept of a 'conflict-generated diaspora' as being the one formed by individuals or their descendants who escaped violence or persecution (Koinova 2018a). Terrence Lyons (2007), who coined this concept, argued that this type of diaspora plays a leading role in framing the issues related to the homeland conflict. Depending on these specific connections and other contextual factors, diasporas are thought to have either more moderate ('contained') or radical ('transgressive') modes of diaspora mobilisation (Koinova 2018a: 312). 'Moderate' pertains to the use of state-based and institutional channels, non-violent activities and advocacy, whereas 'radical' involves confrontational approaches, maximalist goals and the support of violent and/or repressive means to achieve them. This may include supporting discriminatory policies and militant groups.

Different types of homeland conflict (crisis of democracy, non-violent/violent, successionist/irredentist, internal/interstate, etc.) prompt different diasporic responses. Koinova (2009, 2018c) stresses the crucial role of the *contested sovereignty* of kin-states as a fundamental factor that defines the ways and magnitude of diasporic mobilisations. Diasporas are often capable of constituting a strong opposition to authoritarian regimes in their countries of origin. Recent scholarship has focused on transnational contestations during the Arab Spring (Beaugrand and Geisser 2016; Kennedy 2022; Moss 2022). Claire Beaugrand and Vincent Geisser (2016) emphasise that diasporas may rapidly radicalise, noting that certain pro-democracy diaspora groups have later shown support for radical Islamist ideologies. Thus, it is essential to investigate whether radical goals have replaced positive, initial pro-democratic ones over the course of mobilisation and conflict escalation. The eruption of violence and subsequent transition from non-violent to violent conflict can be seen as a fundamental division here. Discussing internal conflicts, Hazel Smith and Paul Stares (2007) argue that diasporas can contribute to it during the escalation phase. They also point out that diasporas tend to play the role of 'peace-makers' when the political line of their homeland aligns with their own and their aspirations for statehood are fulfilled. Notably, interstate conflict often constitutes a critical juncture that leads to profound changes in both the diaspora and the homeland. It is necessary to reiterate Koinova's idea that different types of conflict can overlap, as seen in Kosovo. In this case, a secessionist conflict overlapped with the interstate one between Serbia and NATO (Koinova 2018b) and had a galvanising and radicalising effect on Albanian diasporas in Western countries. Koinova also stresses that the existence of diasporic organisations is necessary for radicalisation. In sum, considering these ideas on diasporas and mobilisation for different types of conflict, it is essential to highlight the politics, mobilisations and involvement with the homeland of Ukrainian diasporas, discuss previous research and contextualise the case of the UWC.

Ukrainian diasporas, democratisation and the case of the UWC

Before Russia's full-scale invasion, the Ukrainian overseas population was estimated at 6.1 million, placing it 8th in the world in terms of diaspora size (UN DESA 2020). While a significant portion of this population resided in Russia, it was largely silenced by censorship, with the aggressive assimilationist policies and consistent political pressures undermining its subjectivity and preventing the development and empowerment of diasporic organisations. In contrast, Ukrainian diasporas in Western countries demonstrate a high degree of institutional completeness – the level of development of institutions by ethnic groups to further their goals and interests (Satzewich 2002). These diasporas have been actively involved in representing Ukraine within a transnational setting and have significantly contributed to the nation-building and democratisation of their homeland. Their symbolic involvement with the homeland is particularly notable, with diasporas playing a significant role in the construction of national narratives, participating in memory politics and protecting the Ukrainian language (Koinova 2009; Kozachenko 2019). Historians from the diaspora such as, *inter alia*, Ivan Lysiak-Rudnytsky, Omelian Pricak, Orest Subtelny and Serhii Plokhy, played a key role in developing and popularising the Ukrainian historical canon. One of the key achievements of diasporas is the research on and campaign for the recognition of the *Holodomor* – the artificial famine of 1932–1933 in Soviet Ukraine – as a genocide against the Ukrainian people. Similar to the diaspora campaign for the international recognition of the Armenian genocide of 1915, Ukrainian diasporas played a crucial role in lobbying for such recognition in the homeland and worldwide. Since the late 2000s, the *Holodomor* has become a central element of Ukraine's national symbolism of martyrdom, effectively challenging discourses and narratives based on nostalgia for the Soviet Union (Kozachenko 2019). Diasporas also played a key role in amplifying the narrative on the Ukrainian nationalist struggle during the Second World War (WWII). This pertains particularly to the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and Stepan Bandera, leader of its radical OUN(b) faction, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the Ukrainian 14th Waffen SS Division. Per Rudling (2024: 1323) defines such diasporic involvement as 'repatriating and edifying the past', stressing the promotion of uncritical narratives and silencing the discussion on the participation of these formations in the Holocaust and the ethnic cleansing of Poles in Volhynia. He also blames diasporas for the reintroduction of far-right ideology connected to wartime nationalism in Ukraine (Rudling 2024). However, he acknowledges the limited outcomes of the direct political involvement of diasporic right-wingers. The most prominent political party, founded by representatives of the diaspora – the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists – won a maximum of 8 seats in the Ukrainian Parliament in 1993 and only 1 seat in 2019. A key illiberal achievement of diasporas, according to Rudling (2024), was the successful lobbying and adoption of the 'Decommunisation laws' in 2015. These laws criminalised Nazi and Communist ideologies, provided the list of fighters for Ukraine's independence that included WWII nationalist organisations and penalised the 'disrespect' of them. Thus, in this case, symbolic and organisational types of involvement overlap. As noted by Volodymyr Kulyk (2016), this achievement can be attributed to the Russian aggression. Arguably, the ongoing war may further strengthen this trend.

A positive role in the democratic development of Ukraine is also commonly acknowledged in the contemporary literature on Ukrainian diasporas (Dunin-Wąsowicz and Fomina 2019; Korzh, Kovalchuk and Marshall 2022; Krasynska 2015; Lapshyna 2019; Oleinikova and Bayeh 2019). Olga Oleinikova and Jumana Bayeh (2019) point out that Ukrainian diasporas served as a crucial resource for the democratisation of the homeland. Diasporic positive impact is particularly pronounced by the organisational and procedural types of involvement. Such prominent figures from the diaspora as

Bohdan Krawchenko and Bohdan Hawrylyshyn came to the late Soviet Ukraine and served as advisors to the Parliament of the Ukrainian Socialist Republic. Their contributions were instrumental in shaping the future architecture of the Ukrainian independent state (Kozachenko 2019). Halyna Chomiak – a Professor of Law at the University of Alberta and mother of the former Deputy Prime Minister of Canada, Chrystia Freeland – played an active role in drafting the Constitution of Ukraine. Diasporic procedural involvement helped to educate Ukrainian politicians and officials – including election monitors – and sent representatives of various diasporic organisations to ensure that Ukrainian elections met democratic standards. This support substantially contributed to the development of Ukraine's democratic system and political pluralism. It is necessary to mention 2 critical junctures in this context: the Orange Revolution (2005) and the Euromaidan Revolution (2014).

The Orange Revolution was a protest against fraudulent presidential elections that saw a mass mobilisation of diasporas. They managed to generate a very positive response to it in the West (Koinova 2009), demonstrating the effectiveness of both activism and creative framing. This revolution was peaceful or 'contained' and led to the creation of several organisational initiatives in the West (Dunin-Wąsowicz and Fomina 2019; Koinova 2009). The eventual victory of the pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko also increased the acceptance of diasporas by the Ukrainian state, particularly in terms of memory politics. However, the subsequent lack of progress in democratic development and reforms brought substantial disillusionment and demobilisation in the post-2005 period. In contrast to the Orange Revolution, the Euromaidan caused a much more profound change for the Ukrainian state and diasporas. In line with Sökefeld's (2006) study, which documented the formation of diasporic organisations following mobilisations, the Euromaidan Revolution led to the emergence of a network of new organisations and sustainable initiatives. Organisations like *Razom* and *Global Ukraine* have participated in the largest coalition of initiatives pushing for reforms in post-Euromaidan Ukraine (Korzh *et al.* 2022; Kozachenko 2019). Iryna Lapshyna (2019) documented the emergence of 'Euromaidan London' and 'Euromaidan Warszawa' resulting from the revolution. She stresses, however, that diasporas achieved limited influence on the Ukrainian state and were not considered by it as an important development actor (Lapshyna 2019). Roch Dunin-Wąsowicz and Joanna Fomina (2019: 104) provide a more upbeat evaluation pointing at the positive impact of the 'diasporic civil society' on Ukraine's democratic and institutional development. They acknowledge, however, that repelling the Russian aggression in Donbas has taken a lot of resources from diasporic organisations. Ukrainian diasporic mobilisation in the wake of the full-scale war is the focus of the emerging body of literature (Fihel *et al.* 2025; Özgür and Deniz 2024; Trzeszczyńska and Demel 2025b). These studies focus predominantly on the individual perspective and consider new diasporic organisations.

The UWC, however, has a long history and can be considered as the 'old' organisation. The UWC was established in 1967 in Canada as the Congress of Free Ukrainians and adopted its current name in 1993. As the largest and most influential Ukrainian diasporic organisation, the UWC is recognised by the United Nations. Its headquarters are based in Toronto and it claims to represent 'the interests of over 20 million Ukrainians in the diaspora, unite Ukrainian communities and organisations in over 60 countries and work to support a democratic, prosperous, European Ukraine'.[1] In analysing the case of the UWC, Victor Satzewich (2002) points out that, despite its global scale, it is profoundly influenced by several North American diasporic organisations. During the Cold War, the UWC actively opposed the Soviet regime. Little doubt that Ukraine's independence was a critical juncture for the UWC and diasporas in general, signifying the switch from stateless to diasporas with a state. The appreciation of one's own state even had some negative consequences. Koinova (2009) points out that, in the 1990s, the *derzhavnyki* (statists) faction of the UWC was not eager to openly criticise the semi-authoritarian

rule of President Leonid Kuchma (1994–2005), fearing that this might destabilise a newly independent state. Thus, the UWC did not always act as an unequivocal defender of democracy. Notably, in the 1990s, the UWC resisted the integration with the Ukraine-based Ukrainian World Coordinating Council as it would have made it too dependent on the Ukrainian state (Satzewich 2002). Thus, the critical juncture of independence has not led the UWC to move its strategic centre to the homeland. Its procedural involvement with the homeland was very significant, with its electoral monitors, normally numbered in hundreds, participating in all Ukrainian elections (Kozachenko 2019). It must also be emphasised that the UWC can be considered as a conflict-generated diaspora, as it is formed mainly by people descended from participants in the Ukrainian independence struggle during WWII. Moreover, since the 1980s, it has had the leadership originating from the radical OUN(b) faction (Rudling 2024) and, thus, it might be seen as prone to radicalisation. Building on these ideas and previous studies, this paper examines the UWC's involvement with the homeland and its repositioning and reshaping activities through the following methodology.

Methods and data

This study draws on data from the UWC's official website and public Facebook page. The website of the UWC has English and Ukrainian versions and includes official statements manifesting its stances and claims. The website features several sections: one with general information about the organisation and its international network, a news section that features both original news and reposts from other sources and a section dedicated to its programmes and campaigns (such as an educational programme, a network on *Holodomor*, the memberships committee, fundraisers such as 'Stand with Ukraine', etc.). The UWC's Facebook page had 47,000 followers at the time of data collection. It is mainly in Ukrainian and provides somewhat different data, featuring more reposts from news portals, various public Facebook pages and accounts and governmental websites. While it also allows for comments and reactions, it is notable that the posts rarely spark online debates and discussions.

The online materials from these platforms were analysed using qualitative content analysis (Bryman 2004) and link analysis. While the former was applied as both the research method and as an analytical tool with which to explore the thematic content of posts and entries, the latter focused on reposts and shared materials. Based on the elements of social network analysis, link analysis defines the UWC as a central node (Nguyen 2023) and examines dyadic relationships between its webpages and other groups and websites. It is aimed at providing insights into the broader online networks and dissemination strategies of the UWC. The qualitative analysis focused on the entries related to areas suggested by Laguerre (1999: 636): 'efforts to influence the homeland and reactions to state transformation, including instances of contested sovereignty' and those that signify 'critical junctures or events' (Koinova 2018a, b). This focus enabled the identification and analysis of 407 entries that matched these criteria. To those entries, deductive coding was applied to group them into moderate ('contained') or radical ('transgressive') modes of mobilisation (Koinova 2018a) and symbolic, political, organisational and procedural types of involvement with the homeland. The main body of data was collected in the spring of 2024, with some updates made in the spring of 2025. Relevant online materials encompassed not only contemporary posts but also those dated from 2010 onwards. This starting point was selected due to, arguably, a critical juncture – the election of Viktor Yanukovych as the President of Ukraine. Ethical approval (CMR/EC/II/2024) from the Ethical Committee of the Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw, was obtained before the data collection. The deployment of these research techniques has yielded the following insights.

The UWC's responses to critical junctures and events

The analysis reveals dynamic processes of repositioning by the UWC in response to critical junctures and events (Koinova 2018b). The identified junctures delineate 4 periods: increasing opposition to the Yanukovych regime from 2010 to 2013, followed by active support for the Euromaidan Revolution; mobilisation efforts aimed at protecting the homeland during the initial stage of the Russo–Ukrainian war (2014–2022); and an even greater mobilisation in response to the full-scale Russian invasion, during which the UWC made an extensive effort to amplify the official narratives of the Ukrainian state. It is evident that, during the first period, the UWC primarily demonstrated political, symbolic and organisational types of involvement, relying mainly on transnational channels. The Euromaidan was a critical juncture that set the UWC in complete opposition to the Yanukovych regime. This was followed by another critical juncture – the Russian aggression, with the elements of secessionist conflict. The UWC responded with initial active procedural involvement, followed by predominantly symbolic and, to a lesser extent, organisational involvement. The full-scale war constitutes another critical juncture, causing institutional change, the repositioning of the diasporic strategic centre and the greater integration of diasporas into the Ukrainian polity. This is due to the success of the campaign or 'claim' to recognise multiple citizenship. Symbolic and organisational types of involvement dominate during this ongoing period. These distinct periods illustrate nuanced repositioning and involvement strategies by the UWC and require a detailed discussion.

Non-violent conflict and anti-authoritarian efforts

A critical juncture marked the beginning of the period of non-violent conflict: the election of Viktor Yanukovych as President of Ukraine in 2010. The UWC was procedurally involved in these elections and acknowledged their fairness and transparency. The analysis suggests that, after the elections, the UWC tried to establish a rapport with the Yanukovych government, but these attempts were short-lived. At his first meeting with Yanukovych, the UWC President Eugene Czolij outlined the main concerns: the extension of lease agreement for the Russian military fleet in Crimea, the diversion from European integration, the elevation of Russian to the *de facto* second official language, the change in memory politics with the rehabilitation of Stalin, lesser attention paid to *Holodomor* commemoration and 'unsubstantiated accusations of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists led by Stepan Bandera'.[2] For the next 3 years, the symbolic involvement of the UWC was focused on these geopolitical concerns,[3] a resistance to the use of Soviet symbols and the defence of a positive narrative on the OUN and UPA.

The UWC's organisational involvement was mainly related to attempts to block rather than implement specific policies. A critical event here was the elevation of the status of the Russian language. A new law by the ruling *Party of Regions* granted official status to the Russian language at the regional level. On 3 July 2012, despite the resistance of political opposition and diaspora organisations, the Ukrainian parliament passed this law. Not only the UWC itself but also its affiliated organisations worldwide expressed their profound disappointment. Despite numerous appeals, Yanukovych signed this law, further deepening the rift between the diaspora and the Ukrainian government. Link analysis shows that, in this period, the UWC actively shared critical posts by diaspora organisations worldwide. These developments suggest that diasporas had a limited impact on the state, primarily utilising transnational channels (Koinova 2018a). Furthermore, the UWC President Czolij repeatedly mentioned the issue of selective prosecution in Ukraine at various official events. Since the end of 2012, the intensifying tensions between the UWC and the increasingly authoritarian government have become

very pronounced. Throughout 2012 and 2013, the UWC released a barrage of statements criticising the Ukrainian state's political trajectory. Most notably, these included criticism of the raids by the Ukrainian tax police on the independent TV channel TVi[4] and the imprisonment of opposition politicians.[5]

Despite an openly critical position towards Yanukovych and his ruling party, the UWC supported their campaign for European integration. For instance, in April 2013, the UWC hailed the pardon and release from prison of 2 opposition politicians. In its statement, the UWC framed this development as a positive step towards Ukraine's European integration.[6] The hopes for European integration, however, were compromised by Yanukovych's refusal to sign a Ukraine–EU Association Agreement in November 2013.

Violent conflict and the Euromaidan Revolution

The UWC swiftly expressed its support for the Euromaidan protests and consistently condemned the efforts to suppress them. The brutal beating of the protesters in Kyiv on 30 November and 11 December seems to constitute critical events. It pertained to the switch from non-violent to violent conflict and resulted in the severing of ties between the UWC and the Ukrainian state. On 16 December 2013, the UWC issued its last direct address to Yanukovych, urging him not to sign the Customs Union Agreement with Russia:

> *The UWC calls upon the governing authorities of Ukraine to act in accordance with the law of Ukraine on the principles of foreign and domestic policies and, listening to the will of the Ukrainian people, demonstrate, as quickly as possible, with concrete actions, the renewal of preparations for signing the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement instead of moving toward the Customs and Eurasian unions which constitutes a revival of the Soviet Union.*[7]

This address manifests an attempt to prevent Ukraine from falling into Russia's sphere of influence and also highlights a symbolic dimension related to the negative memory of the USSR. The cessation of direct communication between the UWC and the Ukrainian state was a dramatic repositioning of the former, as it moved into opposition to the regime. Over the next months, the UWC amplified the voices within its associated network of Euromaidan protests worldwide. Link analysis indicates constant reposts from the pages of the UWC's partner organisations as well as from news portals like the 'Voice of America'. It also expressed its frustration with the adoption of repressive legislation in January 2014. The so-called 'Dictatorship laws' were passed with blatant violations of parliamentary voting procedures. The adoption of these laws escalated violence in Kyiv and led to the death of 2 Euromaidan protesters.

In response, President Czolij called on the international community to impose individual sanctions on those responsible for 'the killing and kidnapping of Euromaidan activists, as well as brutal attacks and shooting on journalists and peaceful protesters'.[8] While this call focused on sanctioning specific individuals, the escalation of violence eventually led to calls by the UWC to advocate for blanket sanctions against the 'Ukrainian governing authorities'.[9] The harshening of rhetoric indicates a widening gap between the UWC and the kin-state. At the final stages of the Euromaidan protests, the UWC's priorities matched the inward goals described by Laguerre (1999) – the change of the government in the homeland. The collapse of the Yanukovych regime in February 2014 and the first signs of the Russian military aggression marked a new phase in the UWC's repositioning.

Resistance to the Russian aggression and secessionism (2014–2022)

The Russian occupation and annexation of Crimea and the subsequent war in Donbas constitute a case of contested sovereignty and, arguably, are a part of a critical juncture that caused a profound institutional change. At the initial stage of the conflict, the UWC actively defended the legitimacy of the Ukrainian state by immediately recognising Oleksandr Turchynov as the Acting President and calling on the international community to protect Ukrainian sovereignty.[10] The UWC also showed procedural involvement, first in the presidential and then in the parliamentary elections. It increasingly relied on state-based channels (Koinova 2018a). This was coupled with efforts to bolster the activities of its affiliated organisations worldwide. On 22 March 2014, Czolij met with Turchynov in Kyiv and assured him of the UWC's support for the new Ukrainian government, congratulated him on the victory of the Euromaidan and voiced the hope that Ukraine would successfully resist Russian occupation.[11]

In its articulated statements, the UWC framed the war in Donbas not as a secessionist conflict with self-proclaimed Luhansk and Donetsk republics but as an interstate one – the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Thus, its mobilisation was aimed at repelling external aggression. The separatist forces were addressed exclusively as 'armed Russian-backed provocateurs'. The UWC consistently framed the conflict as a universal threat to Europe and called for a United Nations peacekeeping mission to be deployed to Ukraine.[12] There is no evidence to suggest that the UWC presented the residents of Donbas or Russian-speakers as a threat to the state. Furthermore, since the occupation of Crimea, the UWC has consistently shown support for the Crimean Tatar minority.

The May 2014 presidential elections resulted in the unprecedented first-round victory of Petro Poroshenko. The UWC sent 230 monitors and declared the elections to be 'truly democratic'.[13] Following this, Czolij personally congratulated Poroshenko on his victory. Shortly after the elections, Poroshenko met with the UWC leadership in Kyiv, pledging to strengthen ties with the 'Ukrainian overseas community'.[14] During Poroshenko's presidency, the relationships between the Ukrainian state and the UWC markedly improved. This period witnessed a repositioning of the UWC, shifting from its opposition to the Yanukovych regime to a highly favourable stance towards the Poroshenko government. This latter even featured two diaspora returnees engaged in transition reforms: Ulana Suprun – serving as Health Minister and Natalie Jaresko, serving as Finance Minister. The opening of the UWC's permanent mission in Ukraine in 2015 is a significant indication of an institutional change and closer alignment between the kin-state and diasporas.

The 'Decommunisation laws' were created with direct diasporic involvement (Rudling 2024), thus encompassing symbolic and organisational involvement. Some academics raised concerns about these laws, suggesting that they might limit academic freedom and insufficiently accommodate the heritage of Ukraine's ethnic minorities (Marples 2018). The decommunisation policies, which resulted in the dismantling of Soviet-era monuments and the changing of Soviet-era toponyms across Ukraine, were evidently appreciated by the UWC.

Another crucial development hailed by the UWC was the establishment of an independent Orthodox Church. On 6 January 2019, the ceremony of Tomos of Autocephaly being granted by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew was attended by the new UWC President, Paul Grod.[15] This event was branded as a milestone in Ukraine's history, stating that it 'returns Ukrainian Orthodoxy to its historic roots, restores historical justice and strengthens the dignity of all faithful in Ukraine'.[16] Such appreciation comes from a greater autonomy and distancing from Russia. Another of the UWC's pronounced concerns was the protection and promotion of the Ukrainian language. Following the Euromaidan victory, the Yanukovych-era language law was annulled, creating a need for new legislation. A new law was adopted

in April 2019 – just 4 days after Poroshenko lost to Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the second round of the presidential elections. The UWC praised this development:

> [in Ukrainian] *We congratulate all Ukrainians around the world with this historical decision – the adoption of the law 'On the Provision of the Functioning of Ukrainian as the State Language'! The Ukrainian language is the symbol of our nation, all Ukrainians, irrespective of their place of residence. Our language unites us and binds us together!*[17]

After the law was adopted, the UWC regularly shared materials from the Facebook page of the Ukrainian State Language Protection Commissioner, a new government role. The Commissioner's role is crucial for ensuring the efficient implementation and enforcement of the law. The UWC's attention to this issue, evidenced by 28 such shared posts, underscores the significance of the Ukrainian language for it. Overall, symbolic involvement by the UWC dominated over other types during most of Poroshenko's term in office. Notably, criticism of Poroshenko's administration was virtually absent. This absence, considering Poroshenko's mixed record on reforms, particularly in addressing corruption, can be attributed to 2 primary factors. First, the persistence of the UWC's rationale, highlighted by Koinova (2009), where criticism from the diaspora was perceived as damaging for Ukraine. Arguably, this was even more the case in the face of escalating conflict with Russia. Second, although Poroshenko's reform efforts were limited, he consistently pursued policies related to memory politics and national symbolism aligned with the priorities of the UWC. After the 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections, the UWC followed its established pattern in seeking constructive relationships with the new government. However, it expressed concerns that Zelenskyy would roll back symbolic polices and seek a rapprochement with Russia. For instance, the UWC criticised Zelenskyy's idea of a referendum on a peace deal with Russia[18] and defined concessions to Russia in the Minsk negotiations as 'red lines'.[19] Whether peace could be achieved through these negotiations is open to discussion; this stance of the UWC corresponds, at least partly, with the role of 'peace-wrecker' (Smith and Stares 2007). The UWC, however, supported a radical move by Zelenskyy to ban several openly pro-Russian TV channels, stating:

> *The UWC does not consider this decision a violation of freedom of speech and freedom of expression in Ukraine. Amid the ongoing military aggression of the Russian Federation, it is critical to combat disinformation, propaganda and information on the war of the aggressor state against Ukraine. The UWC supports Ukraine's efforts to counter Russian manipulations, fake news and influence in order to defend national sovereignty and security.*[20]

In the period preceding the full-scale invasion, the UWC called for greater pressure on Russia and further democratic reforms in Ukraine. Its symbolic involvement focused on protecting previous achievements rather than introducing new initiatives. For instance, it issued several statements warning against the 'russification of Ukraine'[21] and called for more-active protection of the Ukrainian language. While the UWC continued to rely on state-based channels, its organisational and political types of involvement were limited in this period. Mobilising support for the homeland was at the centre of the UWC's activities in the months before the full-scale invasion.

Effects of the full-scale Russian invasion

The full-scale war constitutes another critical juncture. While it caused a fundamental mobilisation of diasporas, the institutional change was somewhat delayed. In its attempts to prevent the invasion, the UWC organised rallies worldwide to showcase diasporic solidarity and support for the homeland. The UWC also commemorated the 'Heavenly Hundred' protesters who were killed during the final days of the Euromaidan Revolution, demonstrating symbolic involvement and underscoring their sacrifice for Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic future. The UWC's statements indicate the organisation's seriousness in anticipating the Russian invasion and its swift response to this critical juncture. On the day of the invasion, the UWC published an official statement, a section of which reads:

> *The Ukrainian World Congress calls on the international community to stop the Kremlin's premeditated atrocious war against Ukraine, against Europe and against the international rules-based order. We urge all peace-loving nations to act with unity and resolve now and support Ukrainian peoples' right to statehood and independence.*[22]

In the same statement, the UWC called for the disabling of the SWIFT payment system in Russia, providing more support for the Ukrainian army, removing Russia from international organisations and banning Russian ships from entering seaports. Following these appeals, the UWC engaged in numerous activities related to international advocacy for Ukraine. During the initial stage of the invasion, a significant portion of Congress' activities involved transnational channels and promoted participation in protests and marches worldwide. Photo reports often followed these events. Thus, the UWC served as an important element of diasporic mobilising structures (Koinova 2018a). Furthermore, President Grod provided numerous reports from meetings and summits where he advocated for the necessity of continued support for Ukraine. Another critical aspect of the UWC's repositioning in response to the full-scale invasion was the amplification of the voices of Ukrainian government officials. This was particularly evident in the frequent reposting of President Zelenskyy's daily video addresses across UWC's online platforms, which underscored solidarity with the leadership of Ukraine. Furthermore, the UWC displayed framing efforts, presenting the attack on Ukraine as an attack on democracy, Europe and the West. The UWC also framed the war as 'genocidal' after the atrocities in the town of Bucha were revealed. Even with such framing, the UWC has not employed radical rhetoric or gone beyond the calls to defend Ukraine.

Before discussing the UWC campaign for the recognition of multiple citizenship, it is essential to address the highly damaging situation. During an unannounced visit by President Zelenskyy to Canada on 22 September 2023, an incident at the Canadian Parliament sparked widespread controversy. Speaker Anthony Rota acknowledged the service of Jaroslav Hunka, a Ukrainian veteran of WWII, prompting a standing ovation from those present. It was quickly revealed that Hunka had served in the Ukrainian Waffen SS division during the war, leading to a scandal and Rota's subsequent resignation. This incident was quickly exploited by Russian propaganda to help its portrayal of Ukrainians as Nazis. As was pointed out earlier, the UWC always placed symbolic involvement high on its list of priorities. However, this time, the UWC did not issue any official statement on this situation or try to reframe it. This silence was met with criticism, as commentators on its Facebook page openly questioned the lack of response. Apparently, it was decided not to engage in public debates on this issue. Only in January 2024 did the UWC share a booklet by a Ukrainian–Canadian scholar, Lubomyr Luciuk, *The Galicia Division: They Fought for Ukraine*.[23] This publication denied that its soldiers embraced Nazi ideology and

stressed that charges of war crimes were never substantiated. The promotion of this booklet served as an indirect response of the UWC to the scandal. Having pointed this out, it is necessary to address Congress' broader efforts to make diasporic political participation more substantive.

Campaign for multiple citizenship recognition and institutional change

The campaign for the recognition of multiple citizenship has been a long-standing priority for Ukrainian diasporas. In the early 2000s, Satzewich (2002) noted that the desire of diasporic subjects in Canada to obtain Ukrainian citizenship primarily had symbolic drivers. Arguably, such a symbolic dimension may manifest some form of 'return' to the homeland (Safran 1991). However, behind this symbolic dimension, obtaining Ukrainian citizenship has practical aspects such as full rights to participate in the homeland's polity. Previously, this recognition had faced resistance from the Ukrainian state, largely due to Russia's expansive approach and granting citizenship in breakaway territories like Transnistria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The Russian law allowed individuals with vague connections to the former USSR or Russian Empire to apply for Russian citizenship (Shevel 2010). In light of this, the Ukrainian authorities have been reluctant to recognise multiple citizenship, fearing that Russia might use it to assert political influence over Ukraine.

Many aspects related to multiple citizenship remained unregulated. While those with multiple citizenships were not supposed to take up governmental jobs, this was often not adhered to. The UWC and other diaspora organisations have argued that appropriate legislation should be developed to provide effective mechanisms. Representatives of the UWC stressed that this would enable Ukrainians from Western diasporas to participate in Ukraine's political processes and contribute to its democratic development. Despite the UWC's persistent efforts, progress on this issue has been slow. The election of Zelenskyy has positively changed the situation. After just 1 month in office, he met with the UWC leadership and encouraged the organisation's participation in drafting the law on multiple citizenship.[24] In numerous statements, the UWC stressed that it has provided detailed recommendations for this law, recommendations which suggested signing bilateral agreements on citizenship recognition with Western countries that host Ukrainian diasporas. This approach, the UWC argued, would safeguard Ukraine from the risk of Russian interference by explicitly excluding Russia from such agreements.

In December 2019, a Draft Law No. 2590 'On amendments to certain laws of Ukraine on citizenship' was submitted to the Ukrainian parliament. It fell short of recognising multiple citizenship and was criticised by the UWC as not adequately protecting '(…) the rights of the diaspora representatives and further engage the global Ukrainian community in developing Ukraine'.[25] Zelenskyy (2021) reiterated his commitment to making diasporic subjects full members of the Ukrainian polity in his address to the Ukrainian Parliament:

> [in Ukrainian] *I know how important the question of multiple citizenship is for Ukrainians who live in the US, in Canada, in the EU. I will submit a draft of the appropriate law to parliament today. There are 65 million of us. For the first time, Ukrainians from around the world will feel themselves not as a diaspora, not just as people of Ukrainian heritage but as Ukrainian citizens with equal rights.*

This statement was made shortly before the full-scale invasion that disrupted but did not stop the work on the legislation. After its beginning, the UWC urged the Ukrainian authorities to lift the restriction preventing foreign nationals to take up governmental jobs, in order that diasporic subjects can do more for their homeland. In 2024, the discussion of the law was renewed with the UWC President stressing:

> [in Ukrainian] *When we feel like strangers in our own country, without the right to citizenship, it distinguishes Ukrainians living abroad from those living in Ukraine. Today, the world has become significantly more global and we see how many Ukrainians now reside beyond Ukraine's borders – creating all the conditions for us to work and feel like one Ukrainian nation is crucial. Citizenship is a key to that* (Grod 2024).

The UWC constantly emphasised the potential role of diasporas both in repelling the Russian aggression and in their potential for post-war reconstruction. Ukrainian citizenship, however, comes not only with rights but with duties such as military service. In December 2024, the Ukrainian parliament passed Law No. 11469 in the first reading and, after intensive work, passed it on 18 June 2025. The President signed it the following month. The UWC stated:

> *The timing of the signing – on 15 July, Ukraine's Day of Statehood – is highly symbolic. With this step, Ukraine reaffirms its commitment to all who identify as Ukrainian – regardless of where they live – and welcomes them as active members of the global Ukrainian nation.*[26]

This quote shows the perception of this law as changing not only the Ukrainian polity but also redefining the mere sense of the Ukrainian national belonging worldwide. Adamson and Demetriou (2007) describe such encouragement by states for diasporas to obtain citizenship as pragmatic. Thus, it is possible to assume that the progress made in the multiple citizenship domain is driven by the greater dependence of the Ukrainian state on its diaspora, hopes for diasporic returnees and a positive role in post-war reconstruction. These institutional changes show both mutual interest and a closer alignment between diasporas and the kin-state.

Conclusions

This paper has investigated changing diasporic relationships with the homeland in the context of escalating conflict by focusing on the leading Ukrainian diasporic organisation. The concepts of critical junctures and events provide an essential conceptual framework for the understanding of the analysed repositioning, modes of mobilisation and changing types of diasporic involvement. With its activities and claim-making, the UWC demonstrated consistency in its support of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine. The repositioning processes analysed in this paper's 15-year period highlight the changes in stance and claims by the UWC in its reactions to critical junctures and events (Koinova 2018b). The election of Yanukovych marked a critical juncture, prompting the UWC to rely on transnational rather than state-based channels, which eventually led to a stark opposition to the government of the kin-state. Its dedication to the symbolic involvement demonstrates its efforts to reshape or protect elements of an 'imagined community' which it deemed crucial.

Another critical juncture was the shift from non-violent to violent conflict at the beginning of the Euromaidan Revolution. The victory of the revolution and the subsequent Russian aggression constitute another critical juncture that has led to the repositioning of this leading diasporic organisation, with its 'strategic centre' partly moving to Ukraine. The establishment of the permanent mission is a key organisational development. The UWC helped to restore the legitimacy of the Ukrainian state with a procedural involvement. It refrained from criticising the slow pace of reforms or the persistence of corruption with an apparent intent not to undermine the state in the face of external aggression. Notably, it never recognised the secessionist traits of the conflict, framing it exclusively in interstate terms.

While not exhibiting levels of radicalisation comparable to those in some other cases of diasporic mobilisation (Beaugrand and Geisser 2016; Koinova 2018a, b; Smith and Stares 2007), the UWC supported restrictive legislation like the 'Decommunisation laws'. The UWC's cautious approach to the initiatives by President Zelenskyy and efforts to avoid, in its view, 'peace at any price' characterises it to some extent as a 'peace-wrecker'. Ultimately, the full-scale war has not made the UWC adopt radicalism. Despite the existential threat to its homeland, the UWC consistently practised contained politics. Finally, this study clearly indicates the UWC's willingness to enable diasporic subjects to participate more widely in political processes in Ukraine – the adoption of the law on multiple citizenship makes this possible. As current research indicates, Ukraine moved closer to integrating diasporas into its polity. This, if not entirely, can be attributed to the critical juncture of the full-scale war. However, the actual effects of this institutional change are something for future research to consider.

It is necessary to acknowledge the limitations of this study related to its methodology and to point out directions of possible investigation. While the UWC's online representation provides a sufficient basis for investigating its claims and stances, adding other data-collection techniques, such as interviews or participant observation, may expand our understanding of the rationale and context behind the organisational 'facade'. Moreover, future research can consider how the factors related to sociospatial positionality (Koinova 2018a) address how proximity to institutions, networks and resources shapes the mobilisation of the UWC and other Ukrainian diasporic organisations and groups. Finally, the effects of the grassroots dynamics within the UWC's networks constitute an important research topic. While much depends on the outcomes of the ongoing war, we may ask: Are we witnessing the emergence of a fundamentally new global Ukrainian nation? This is what future research definitely should consider.

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Notes

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