



Lyubov Andriivna Dubrovina:  
Situation in Ukrainian libraries

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## Lyubov Andriivna Dubrovina: Situation in Ukrainian libraries

Dear colleagues, I express my deep gratitude for giving me an opportunity to speak at CENL AGM.

My speech takes place in tragic times for the history of my country- the times connected with destructive war of Russian Federation against Ukraine. The war which completely changed the life of Ukrainian people, as well as it has brought changes to the whole world community.

And, of course, the war has absolutely changed conditions under which libraries can exist, as traditional complex of library multi vector activities was disrupted and new forms of resistance against negative information influence appeared.

But one of the most important and urgent problems remains the problem of saving and preservation of libraries' collections and resources, especially items of cultural heritage, loss of which are irreversible.

I think that everyone is following the news from Ukraine. Living through the tragedies of war and unlawful Russian invasion, being the researcher and the Director of the national library of Ukraine, it's important for me today to focus on the basic questions of my duties and activity that is the role of the national library in a society and preservation of the unique cultural heritage and valuables kept by national libraries at all times and conditions- manuscripts, all kinds of printed editions going back to the beginnings of printing, historical collections, documents, archives of organizations and individuals.

I would like to draw your attention to some historical features of our collections and library items in a context of the history of our Ukrainian state and its culture.

Such special kind of information will make the problems of library collections preservation more reasonable, I suppose.

There are several national and public libraries in Ukraine as well as scientific and university ones which are forming the joint library fund. Each of these libraries also possess its own book collections and rare items. Information about them is widely represented on library sites.

But I want to pay attention to the importance of the Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine, which has a huge collection of historical heritage. The Library is recognized by the legislation of Ukraine as national cultural heritage, which has to be subject to special protection during the ruthless war of Russia against Ukraine.

The National Library of Ukraine has also unique legal status today, as it is subordinated to the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, and this subordination has developed and occurred historically. It is necessary to dwell on history briefly to understand the Library's current status.

NBUV was founded in 1918 as the National Library of the Ukrainian state by the independent Ukrainian Hetman Pavel Skoropadsky government, by his order as one of the first national independent institutions non-existent in Ukraine under Russian Empire before 1918 - together with National Academy of Sciences.

As you know, up to 1918, a part of the territory of Ukraine was a part of the Russian Empire, and its other part – was ruled by the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The single National Library was created by a team government officials and scientists under the leadership of Academician Volodymyr Vernadskyi. That's why in addition to traditional functions for a national library, the national library

of Ukrainian state has attached great importance to its function as the main scientific library of the country in a combination of national public library status.

During the Soviet rule, the library changed its status several times, it existed as the Library of the Academy of Sciences, as a national public library, as a library of double subordination, etc.

Gaining independence of Ukraine in 1991 returned to our library its due status of the National in 1996.

VNLU has a century-old history, but its collections represent millennial history of Ukraine preserved within the library. In times of wars and revolutions on the territory of Ukraine in 1917–1920, more than 200 abandoned collections and masterpieces were rescued by the founders of the Library.

When Bolsheviks came to power in Kyiv, the library became a center for saving of cultural heritage of Ukraine by preserving many collections from destruction planned by communist terror and policy of re-writing history. At that time, the library included in its holdings many collections which were nationalized/confiscated by the Soviet authorities: they were precious and unique collections from academic, ecclesiastical, cultural and educational institutions and private libraries of the pre-communist Soviet period.

But even preserved by librarians, most of these collections were banned by communists for free public access until 90s of the 20th century. During this time, our library has processed all this oppressed and censored historical and cultural heritage of Ukraine and made it later available to users - and that played a significant role in the process of re-enstating the national memory and Spirituality of independent Ukrainian state.

Today Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine works for the development of science, education, culture, management, socio-political and innovative progress of my country- Ukraine - which is a sovereign European state.

There are six specialized research institutes within the Library structure representing the Library's scientific and applied activity.

1. Institute of Library Science;
2. Institute of Manuscript;
3. Institute of Book Studies;
4. Institute of IT ;
5. Institute of Archival Science;
6. Institute of Biobibliography and biographical Studies.

Their professional activities are aimed at the development of the research on content of library's treasures and the development of science, related to the activities of the library and its historical collections.

Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine has special centers and services that implement the functions of information and analytical government services, such as electronic law library, museum-archival and book collection of the Presidents of Ukraine, and center of conservation and restoration of rare books and manuscripts.

At present time The Library holdings number is more than 16 million books, manuscripts, archival documents, annual sets of journal and newspaper periodicals that have the legal status of national heritage. Over 4 million items from the whole library collection are unique items. For example, the

Institute of Manuscript keeps in its collection The Peresopnytsia Gospel of the 16th century, on which the presidents of Ukraine make oath during the inauguration.

The library has stable and long-term international books exchange in accordance to IFLA standard with partners of all continents.

VNLU developed its electronic scientific information library resource. The Library houses the main information portal of Ukraine, repository "Scientific Periodicals of Ukraine", thematic portals "Science of Ukraine: access to knowledge", "Research Center of social communications ", for serving the state authorities; "Ukrainian National Biographical Archive"; abstracts and scientometric databases, as well as digital archives and libraries.

Historical and cultural heritage is represented by a digital UKRAINICA collection which unites not only the national bibliographic information, but also a digital full-text historical resource heritage from ancient times. These resources are of great interest and demand both in Ukraine and around the world.

Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine annually publishes more than 30 scientific publications - collective and individual monographs, collections of documents, catalogs and reference books, professional collections of scientific papers, as well as professional journal " Bibliotechnyi Visnyk"(Library Bulletin).

Under current circumstances the National Library of Ukraine serves as an important center of culture and intellectual communication of scientific and educational community, public organizations.

Its national importance as an integrator of knowledge and cultural heritage is increasing.

But the negative consequences of war underlined existing economic problems, such as lack of funding and logistics provision, reduction of staff, etc. In recent years the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyi drew attention to this state of the Library and necessary funding. With his support we received a certain amount of money for major renovation which started in 2022 and computer equipment for one of the buildings of the Library.

The beginning of the Russian war against Ukraine exposed the urgency of proper funding and financing. The previously allocated budget funds were returned to the budget of Ukraine for support of the country under martial law. Since 24<sup>th</sup> of February, 2022, we found ourselves in a situation of lack of digitized resources, outdated equipment for the implementation of such functions, lack of proper premises, and lack of conditions for proper preservation of collections during war, etc. And of course, we can not ignore the depressed psychological state of our staffs and Ukrainian people – our users and scientists- who did not expect brutal Russian aggression but today have to bury their relatives and friends.

There are great number of employees who suffered from the occupation and shelling, lost their homes, became refugees. The library staff has decreased in half, and salaries decreased, while the responsibility for holdings preservation keeps increasing. However, the library staff is full of energy to continue all the library operations. Kyiv lives relatively quiet today as shellings and bombings are sporadic\becoming new normal, and we began to recover our library activities.

But the danger of further development of the situation requires considerable care for the people and conservation of resources, including those which are unique. And so, my biggest professional concern is absence of powerful modern equipment for digitization of our collections. This is a direct threat to the cultural heritage during the war.

Our library has survived two world wars and revolutions, Holodomor famine, repressions and persecutions of communist regime, when its first few directors were shot by Soviets, and the whole library staff was convicted by Soviet terror regime under political articles in the 30s of the 20th century. It is unbelievable, but the Library was able to preserve those remnants of national heritage through the catastrophes of the twentieth century.

The possible destruction of these treasures now in act of ruthless aggression will be a real disaster not only for Ukraine, but also for the world community because the library has not only Ukrainian, but book monuments of different nations and states, old prints and manuscripts, precious samples of rare editions.

In conclusion, I would like to express my deep gratitude to all directors of European national libraries, who expressed solidarity with Ukraine, condemned Russian aggression and supported our library, drew attention to the needs of saving and preserving cultural heritage of Ukraine, published materials in blogs, placed our digital resources in cloud storage, organized support rallies and real humanitarian aid.

The library community of the whole world expressed its solidarity with us in our struggle for peace and democracy, for freedom and right to live in the native land and to be a part of European community.

My deep respect and thanks go to British Library, National Library of Scotland, Austrian National Library, State Library in Berlin, National Library of Poland, Lithuanian Martinas Mažvidas National Library, Latvia National Library, National Library of Estonia, Library of Jagiellonian University in Krakow, National Library of France, National Library of Sweden, Royal Library, National Library of Finland, National Library of Spain and for other libraries and cultural institutions all over the European continent.

I would like to express my special gratitude to the directors of the national libraries in Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Sweden, Germany, Finland. Strong friendly relations have been established with these libraries, as they took an active part in humanitarian aid, constantly supported and continue to support Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine and its staff morally and otherwise.

Thank you, dear colleagues !