

Ukrainian cinematography in the context of intercultural cooperation

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The article describes the production and distribution of Ukrainian films and establishes scientific guidelines that will contribute to a comprehensive analysis of Ukrainian cinema in the intercultural space. An analytical method was used to develop this topic, which is necessary for studying the art history and cultural aspect of the problem. In addition, the author used the methods of systematization and generalization to argue for the originality of Ukrainian cinematography and its place in modern culture-creating processes. The scientific novelty of the study is that it describes the work of film directors whose films were created as international projects.

KEYWORDS: Ukrainian cinematography, cultural exchange, co-production, Yuriy Rechynsky, Andrea Magnani, Peter Babiak, *January – March, Easy, The Line*, director

Ukrainians have long sought to present themselves to the world community with the help of cultural and artistic achievements and to confidently enter the general cultural space. However, such aspirations have not always been realized effectively enough due to a number of objective and subjective reasons related to unfavorable socio-political and economic factors, which delayed a full-fledged acquaintance with Ukrainian culture at the international level. In today's renaissance of statehood, despite the difficult political and economic conditions in which our country finds itself, it is extremely important to present Ukraine to the world in various facets of its cultural and artistic life. The realization of this urgent task can be viewed through the prism of international cultural cooperation in the field of cinema, which is an integral part of European civil consciousness and public life. At the same time, the production and distribution of Ukrainian films representing various directorial models, as well as using the method of international cooperation, namely co-production, remain relevant.

Relevance of the research topic

The problems of production and distribution of film, including author's films, in the context of intercultural dialogue are addressed by such theorists and practitioners of cinema and culture as: A. Anastasieva, V. Bakalchuk, K. Bilokin, S. Vasyliev, A. Hurkov, E. Deineka, D. Zubenko, P. Zhessati, A. Kachkan, T. Klerk, A. Krysalna, O. Pershko, Ya. Pidhora-Hviazdovskiyi, O. Rodnianskyi, S. Sliepak, Zh. Shapron, V. Shyrokova, O. Filatov, and V. Khomenko. In particular, V. Bakalchuk notes in her work *Formation of National Identity as a Component of*

Analysis of research and publications

the European Cultural Space: Opportunities for Co-Production that “the development of the film industry within the framework of joint European film production, in addition to economic levers, aims to establish and popularize European identity.” In addition, the author is convinced that it is thanks to the European Film Market that national producers are expanding their potential “opportunities within the framework of European co-production programs in order to establish, popularize and create a common European identity.”[1] In his controversial article *Ukrainian Cinema Should Unite the Nation*, O. Filatov considers it necessary to take into account the fact that in the case of differences in cultural traditions, mentality, and language of film-producing countries, a co-production film may lose its national characteristics and acquire cosmopolitan features – this is a disastrous path for Ukrainian cinema, which should now serve to unite the nation and bring it into the intercultural communication space.[2]

A. Kachkan, in his study *Co-production in cinema opens Ukraine to the world*, notes that it is not by chance that co-production is a form of existence for European cinema, as the vast majority of European countries cannot (primarily financially) independently realize big-budget film projects for their domestic market. Therefore, he creates several joint projects (simultaneously designed for different film markets), thus integrating into the “European co-production system”, which allows expanding audiences, cultural exchange, opens Ukraine to the world, integrates Ukrainian filmmakers “into the European business and cultural community”, and provides valuable practical experience, including the launch of profitable film production.[3]

At the same time, O. Pershko notes in his work *Co-production with Ukraine* that in Ukraine, despite the imperfection of its legislation and the bureaucratic negligence of officials, international (primarily own) film projects (which not only gain recognition at prestigious film festivals, but also enjoy success in theaters in the countries of production) are gradually being created, in particular, in cooperation with Slovak, Czech, Romanian, Bulgarian, Polish, Lithuanian, Georgian, Italian, Israeli, British, Belgian, French, Dutch, Serbian, Swiss, Norwegian, and Turkish filmmakers.[4]

The purpose of the article is to identify the problems of intercultural cooperation in the production and distribution of Ukrainian films and to define scientific guidelines that will contribute to a com-

[1] V. Bakalchuk, *The formation of national identity as a component of the European cultural space: opportunities for co-production*, “Strategic Panorama” 2018, no. 2, p. 49.

[2] A. Filatov, *Pylyp Ilyenko: Ukrainian cinema should unite the nation*, Ukrkino, 18.09.2014, <http://www.ukrkino.com.ua/kinotext/news/?id=811> (accessed: 13.07.2022).

[3] A. Kachkan, *Co-production in cinema opens Ukraine to the world*, Radiosvoboda, 19.02.2016, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/27562939.html> (accessed: 23.06.2022).

[4] O. Pershko, *Co-production with Ukraine*, Kino-teatr, 9.09.2019, <https://kino-teatr.ua/uk/news/koproduktsiya-s-ukrainoy-10644.phtml> (accessed: 14.07.2022).

prehensive analysis of the phenomenon of Ukrainian cinema in the intercultural space.

The dramatic, sometimes contradictory changes that have been taking place in Ukrainian society over the past twenty years have led to the raising of issues related to the establishment of universal values in the system of intercultural relations. Therefore, we will focus on their specific significance for Ukrainian culture in its present and possible future forms, in particular in the film industry.

The analytical note "Prospects for expanding the participation of Ukrainian cinema in co-production projects" by the National Institute for Strategic Studies states that "one of the most effective and realistic ways for the internal development and improvement of Ukrainian cinema is the participation of our country in international joint projects – co-production". According to analysts, "this type of film production should be seen as a unique opportunity to integrate Ukrainian culture into the European one with all the benefits for our state", because such an experience will strengthen the country's "authority and positive international image", will not only be a sign of openness to the world, but will also enable internal "growth through the use of the powerful potential of national culture." [5] At the same time, S. Sliepak rightly notes that "the full development of national cinema is possible only if there is intensive integration and cooperation with international film organizations in all sectors of the industry – not only production, distribution, and film distribution networks, but also structured film business, festival movement, and effective legislation," which rapidly paves the way for "internal growth through the use of the powerful potential of national culture." Sliepak argues that "since several countries are involved in the production of a film, the costs of its creation are shared among them," which allows for the emergence of several interested parties (both in sales and in receiving profits from the film) who automatically distribute products within their geographical film space. In addition, analyzing the indicators of the European Audiovisual Observatory (EOA), which studies the audiovisual market in Europe and publishes data on the development of the film and television industry, the author concludes that European film products "co-produced by European countries are more successful" than those created "by European countries on their own." It is desirable that a co-produced film should be aimed at the audience of all "countries participating in the cooperation." [6] It is worth remembering that international or co-production, which involves the production of a cultural and artistic

Summary of the main material

[5] *Prospects for expanding the participation of Ukrainian cinema in co-production projects: Analytical Note*, <https://niss.gov.ua/doslidzhennya/gumanitarniy-rozvitok/perspektivi-rozshirennya-uchasti-ukrainskogo-kinematografu-v> (accessed: 14.07.2022).

[6] V.S. Sliepak, *Ways of Ukraine's integration into the world and European cinematic space*, http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/Tpdu_2014_3_39 (accessed: 10.07.2022).

product (including author's films) with the participation of production companies from different countries, is a common cultural and artistic practice among filmmakers around the world.

Co-production is now a form of existence for European cinema, as most European countries cannot financially realize big-budget film projects for the domestic market on their own, and therefore create joint projects (designed for different film markets and different socio-cultural environments). At the same time, co-production is aimed at both the audience of the countries participating in the co-creation and at wide distribution, and is an economically viable and effective way to develop national cinema, promoting the integration of Ukrainian audiovisual products into the global cultural space. Through participation in co-production, Ukrainian filmmakers integrate into the European co-production system, which makes it possible to expand audiences, cultural exchange (in the field of literary and script base, creative methods of project implementation, and creative personnel), and open up the cultural potential of Ukraine to the world as a film country. It consolidates Ukrainian film producers with the European business and cultural community, and demonstrates the openness of participants in intercultural cooperation in the field of cinema, the willingness to establish new cultural contacts provides valuable practical experience, including the launch of profitable film production.

Despite the bureaucratic obstacles that arise in Ukraine in the field of intercultural cooperation, Ukrainian filmmakers still manage to be involved in a number of successful international projects. These include the Ukrainian-Polish tragicomic project *Heart on the Palm* by K. Zanussi; the joint social and psychological project *Tribe* by M. Slaboshpytskyi; the Ukrainian-French comedy project *F 63.9. The Disease of Love* by D. Tomashpolskyi; the Ukrainian-Turkish melodramatic film project *Love Me* by M. Horbach; the film drama *Women Without Men* by Iranian director Shirin Neshat (with the participation of Ukraine, Germany, Austria, France); *Mountain Woman: At War* (Ukrainian-French-Icelandic thriller directed by B. Erlingsson); the adventure project *The Price of Truth* by A. Holland (co-produced by Poland, UK and Ukraine); the Ukrainian-Georgian romantic comedy *Now I Will Love You* by R. Shyrman; the Ukrainian-Italian social drama *The Nest of the Turtledove* by T. Tkachenko; the Ukrainian-German documentary projects *Delta* by O. Techynskyi and *School No. 3* by Elisabeth Smith and Georg Geno, as well as *Winter in War: Ukraine's Struggle for Freedom* by Ye. Afineievskyi (co-production of Ukraine, USA, UK); *Mariupolis* by M. Kvedaravicius (co-production of Lithuania, Germany, France and Ukraine); *Ridni* by V. Manskyi (co-production of Ukraine, Germany, Latvia, Estonia); *Ukrainian Sheriffs* by R. Bondarchuk (co-production of Ukraine, Germany, Latvia, Estonia), war drama *Frost* (by Lithuanian director Šarus Bartas, produced in cooperation between Lithuania, Ukraine, France and Poland); the social dramas *The Line* by P. Bebiak (co-production of Ukraine and

Slovakia) and the Ukrainian-Austrian drama *January – March* by Yu. Rechynsky; the Ukrainian-Italian comedy project *Easy* by A. Magnani; the Ukrainian-Lithuanian adventure project *Traitor* with the participation of American director M. Hammond; the Ukrainian-Georgian historical drama project *Someone Else's Prayer* by A. Seitablaiev; the war tragicomedy *Donbas* by S. Loznytisia (co-production of Germany, Ukraine, France, the Netherlands and Romania); the mystical drama *When Trees Fall* by M. Nykytiuk (co-production of Ukraine, Poland, and Macedonia) and the Ukrainian-American film *The Gate* by Volodymyr Tykhyi; the French-Ukrainian genre film *Cold Blood* (directed by F. Petitzhan and starring Jean Reno), the fantasy film *Polina and the Secret of the Film Studio* by O. Barko (Ukrainian-Belgian co-production), the docudrama *The King of Ukraine* by G. Stadler and B. Kölz (Ukrainian-Austrian co-production), and others. Another noteworthy fact is the emergence of television (series) co-productions, including the detective project *Marcus* co-produced by TRK Ukraine and the Latvian media company “Helio Media”, and the detective thriller *The Pleasure Principle*, a co-production project of Ukraine, the Czech Republic and Poland.

In our research, we turn to the films *Easy* by Andrea Magnani, *January – March* by Yuriy Rechynsky, and *The Line* by Peter Bebiak. Analysing them reveals typical and, unfortunately, still unchanged problems of co-production and distribution in Ukraine.

In this article, we focus on the sometimes random meetings of filmmakers, whose creative cooperation nevertheless results in successful international projects (because the international film industry is a rather personal business, where everything is tied to personal acquaintances and authority[7]), and we should take into account the opinion of O. Shcherbyna, the chairman of the board of the Ukrainian film company “Fresh production”. He recalled that he and his colleagues (the general producer of the company Yu. Cherniavska and director Z. Buadze) meeting and making acquaintance with representatives of the Italian film company “Bartleby Film”, Andrea Magnani and Chiara Barbo, actually took place unexpectedly in Greece in 2010 at a session of the Mediterranean Film Institute, where both sides were finalizing the dramatic material. In his article *The Not Quiet Project “Easy”*, Ya. Pidhora-Hviazdovskyi noted that at this session, Ukrainians edited the script for the project *Love of a Murderer*, and Italians edited the script for *Easy*. A year and a half later, the Kyiv office of “Fresh Production” received a letter in which director, screenwriter and producer A. Magnani offered Ukrainian filmmakers to become full participants in the *Easy* film project, and during the Berlin Film Forum in 2012 the future partners finally agreed to cooperate. In particular, it

[7] V. Shyrokovska, *Head of the State Film Agency, Pylyp Illienko: The world is forming the idea that Ukrainian cinema has been revived*, Life.pravda, 15.09.2017,

<https://life.pravda.com.ua/culture/2017/09/15/226475/> (accessed: 3.07.2022).

involved the Italian production companies “Bartlebyfilm” and “Pilgrim Film”, which were 42% funded by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Cultural Activities and Tourism, as well as the regional audiovisual fund “Friuli-Venezia Giulia”. However, according to the researcher, the excellent screenplay created by the Italian authors, which skillfully combined the comic and the sad, had a certain drawback, because it was “about a Venetian who takes the coffin of a migrant worker to the Balkans, and not a word was said about Ukraine,” which, in fact, provoked a reasonable question: how to connect the future co-production with a non-Ukrainian context, since such a film product should have a national identity for all participants? So, after bilateral consultations (during which the Italian filmmakers visited the Carpathians, Transcarpathia, Kamianets-Podilskyi, Khotyn and other places), they decided to change the Balkans to Ukrainian reality, and soon “a new script was born at an accelerated pace (with the participation of the famous Greek screenwriter and writer Nikos Panayotopoulos), in which a Venetian takes the coffin of a migrant worker to Ukraine.” The change in the plot vectors was quite successful, and, according to Ya. Pidhora-Hviazdovskyi, this turn does not look artificial, because it naturally and logically “fits into the realities of today, where Italy is one of the largest areas” for Ukrainian overseas workers, such as “50-year-old painter Taras, who died on the construction site of Easy’s successful younger brother, Philo.” It should be noted that the uniqueness of the *Easy* project, which attracted both viewers and distributors (in particular American companies “Shoreline Entertainment Group” and “Camelot Entertainment”, Ukrainian “MMD UA”, and Italian “Tucker film”) is that, on the one hand, the authors managed to show typical Western European views, and on the other hand, to represent Ukrainian reality authentically and skillfully, “with the multinational flavor of the Carpathians, where Hungarians, Bulgarians and even Chinese, Orthodox and Greek Catholics live side by side.” The film is also supported by the positive fact that, using a universal cinematic language (understandable to a representative of any ethnicity, nation or country), the filmmakers try to interpret the stunning journey of the protagonist of *Easy* as a kind of journey of a “little” person (who has lost his life’s guidelines, but who, overcoming physiological and psychological torment, is reborn) to himself.[8]

Analyzing the specifics of co-production, P. Illienko notes that films produced together with other states “cannot be defined as ‘national cinema’ because they involve a foreign component, and therefore, in order for a co-production to receive support in each of the participating countries, it needs to acquire national status in each of them. It is membership of Eurimages, the European Fund for the Support of the Co-Production and Distribution of Cinematographic and Audiovisual

[8] Ya. Pidhora-Hviazdovskyi, *Co-production in Ukraine: examples of joint production*, Detector.media, 2.02.2018, <https://detector.media/rinok/article/134311/2018-02-0> (accessed: 24.06.2021).

Works that grants films so-called national treatment”[9] and enables “active measures to support the distribution of European films and increase their audience,”[10] in particular, through “mandatory distribution in the international network of «Europa Cinemas» and other cinemas affiliated with this network, which are more than a thousand in more than fifty countries” as P. Sushko (Head of the Subcommittee on Cinematography and Advertising of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Humanitarian and Information Policy) points out.[11]

V. Bakalchuk points out that the main tasks of the above-mentioned cinema network are “to provide technical and financial support to cinemas that undertake to adhere to a certain quota of European films”. At the same time, “only two Ukrainian cinemas («Kyiv» and «Zhovten») have been part of the «Europa Cinemas» network since 2007, but the format of this participation does not provide for financial and technical support,”[12] and since 2019, the “Kyiv” cinema has not been functioning, as it was purchased from the city authorities by a private individual long before (in violation of Ukrainian law).

In the context of our discussions about the advantages of co-production, it is indicative that *Easy* (which won a number of prizes at the Locarno, Monte Carlo, Venice, New Jersey International Film Festivals (Lighthouse), including the Grand Prix at the 35th Annecy Cinema Italien, the largest Italian film forum outside Italy, the award of the analytical magazine of the Italian film industry for the best debut film in the “Fabrique du Cinema” competition and the prize from the young jury of the 40th anniversary Festival of Italian Cinema in Villejuillet (France)[13] and being named one of the ten best films in Italy in 2017 by the most influential Italian newspaper “La Repubblica”, it won the national film award David di Donatello) was a co-production of Ukraine and Italy, both of which are members of the European Convention on Joint Cinematographic Production, without which the film would not have been made. According to O. Shcherbyna, one of the film’s producers, such international cooperation, which involved raising the production budget from various sources, made it possible to diversify the storyline, use an international cast and interesting locations, and expand the film’s international sales potential. Co-producers Chiara Barbo (Pilgrim Film) and Massimo Di Rocco (Bartleby Film), developing their colleague’s idea, noted that today in Europe about 99% of films are produced in co-production between two or more countries, and in addition, they described Ukraine as a good partner with a significant national fund and highly professional production companies, which largely allowed

[9] V. Shyrokova, op. cit.

[10] V. Bakalchuk, op. cit., p. 50.

[11] P. Sushko, *European Integration of Ukrainian Cinema to Bel*, Detector.media, 13.01.2020, <https://detector.media/production/article/173866/2020-01-13-ev-roitegratsii-ukrainskogo-kino-buti/> (accessed: 15.07.2022).

[12] V. Bakalchuk, op. cit., p. 48.

[13] *The film “Easy” was shortlisted for the Italian National Film Award*, <https://m.facebook.com/lirakinoteatr/photos/1832102187093172> (accessed: 7.07.2022).

us to create a film whose production would have been more expensive without such cooperation. M. Osadchyi (representative of Pronto Film) is convinced that, in addition to the investment component, co-production can be attractive to foreign partners due to the specifics of domestic locations, and because it speaks about Ukrainian history full of tumultuous events, “many routes and borders, lines of contact between civilizations have passed through Ukraine,” which ensures that Ukrainian filmmakers work closely with foreign filmmakers who are interested in making films about such events and releasing them for wide international distribution.[14]

Reflecting on the personal creative preferences and contacts of directors and film entrepreneurs, as well as the basic comfort of creativity, let us look at the strangely fruitful cooperation between the famous Austrian director and producer Ulrich Seidl and representatives of the Pronto Film company. Thanks to their efforts, a significant part of the author’s documentary “Import-Export”, documentarily accurate and emphatically realistic, was shot in Ukraine.

It is gratifying that despite the polarity of critics’ assessments, this “serious work” (according to Tobias Kniebe[15]) with its unique international cast (which included a Ukrainian theater performer from Mykolaiv, Kateryna Rak) was selected to compete at the Cannes Film Festival and a number of other prestigious film forums (which made it possible for it to be widely distributed in the international film space).

It is also worth noting that despite the unfortunate vicissitudes of film production in Ukraine by the Austrian film crew, which had to incur significant financial and moral losses (according to the assistant director and producer K. Prinding), suffering from the behavior of local (Uzhhorod) criminals, corrupt police officers, and the actions of the *Donetsk mafia*, who in a rather “unusual” (for foreigners) form granted permission to film certain scenes within the Yenakievo Metallurgical Plant (whose paid products were never used by the filmmakers for subjective reasons),[16] Ulrich Seidl, hardened by Ukrainian realities, started cooperation once again. The next official co-production of the Austrian companies “Ulrich Seidl Filmproduktion”, “Novotny & Novotny Filmproduktion” and the Ukrainian “Pronto Film” was the debut feature film *January–March* (titled *Ugly* in international distribution) by the director Yurii Rechynsky. However, the possibility and, most importantly, the desire to make such a film arose not only because of the Austrian filmmakers’ production contacts with Pronto Film, but also because of their personal acquaintance and information about the significant creative potential of the aforementioned young Ukrainian director.

[14] Ya. Pidhora-Hviazdovskyi, op. cit.

[15] T. Kniebe, *Schiffsjunge im roten Abendkleid*, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 19.05.2010, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/60-filmfestival-in-cannes-schiffsjunge-im-roten-abendkleid-1.896510> (accessed: 9.07.2022).

[16] I. Hrabovych, *For Ukrainian exports and Austrian imports!*, Life.pravda, 1.01.2018, <https://life.pravda.com.ua/culture/2008/12/1/10682/> (accessed: 12.07.2022).

In semi-legal (as for Ukraine) cooperation with Yurii Rechynsky foreign producers (including Klaus Prinding, who lived in our country at that time) by means of “Novotny & Novotny Filmproduction”, created in 2013 the author’s revelatory film *Sickfuckpeople*, a documentary triptych about homeless young people who, having overcome drug addiction (caused primarily by the need to escape from a reality dominated by violence, anger, and the inability to stay with their families), make desperate, tragic attempts to live in a new way. The film resonated around the world – this film with a “degraded narrative”[17] was shot by Yurii Rechynsky partly “to get rid of painful memories”[18] and, according to S. Rafalskyi, “grew out of the director’s short film and opened the way for the author to work on films in Europe.[19] In the context of poverty and drug addiction in Ukraine, *Sickfuckpeople* is a sharp statement, even at a time when the state is conditionally calm or stagnant.”[20] We would like to remind you that this film was successfully shown in the competition program of the documentary film forum “Hot Docs” in Toronto, Canada, and became one of the winners of the European Independent Film Festival (The European Independent Film Festival: ECU – 14) in France. The film *Sickfuckpeople* was awarded the Central and Eastern European IFF “HumanDOC” (Poland), the Raidance Film Festival (UK), the largest festival of the Balkans “Sarajevo Film Festival” in Sarajevo, the Austrian Viennale in Vienna, the Mexican DocsDF in Mexico City. The film’s festival success not only provided the director with fairly wide contacts in the cinematographic environment, but also increased the interest of film entrepreneurs in cooperation on future co-productive projects. Yu.Rechynsky received the right to choose his own theme for future films.

Thus, the next co-production of the Ukrainian Pronto Film and the Austrian companies “Novotny & Novotny Filmproduction” and “Ulrich Seidl Filmproduktion”, with the support of the Ukrainian State Film Agency, was the documentary-fiction film directed by Yurii Rechynsky (who had no previous experience of working with professional actors) *January – March*, distributed by Arthouse Traffic. Like Rechynsky’s previous film, the social drama *January – March* (which simultaneously tells two storylines about the destruction of human relationships and the personality of the individual) enjoyed a successful world premiere, in particular at the International Film Festival Rotterdam, while the Odesa International Film Festival made it possible for this co-production to participate in international and national competition programs. At the Austrian Diagonale Film Festival, the cinematographers Wolfgang and Sebastian Thaler were awarded the prize for the best work that attracts the audience’s attention. In a unique creative tandem with the

[17] S. Rafalskyi, *Sickfuckpeople*, Moviegram, 24.08.2019, <https://moviegram.com.ua/top-documentary-ukraine/> (accessed: 6.07.2022).

[18] *Review of the movie “January – March”*, TMGIn-

fo, 30.04.2018, <https://tmginfo.net/2018/04/recenziya-na-film-sichen-berezen/> (accessed: 15.07.2022).

[19] Ibidem.

[20] S. Rafalskyi, op. cit.

director, these cinematographers present the viewer with masterfully filmed, atmospheric soundtracked shots of a field of dry reeds bending in the wind, a small boat in the middle of a river overgrown with the same reeds, where sad Martha is sitting, standing out as a bright red spot against the sepia of the serene landscape, the sparse decoration of the Kryvyi Rih hospital in contrast to the expensive designer but empty and sterile house of the Austrian characters, and the clearly arranged composition. The color coding of the shots proves incredibly accurate in reproducing the inner state of the characters, who, experiencing mental discomfort, speak little but sob a lot, scream or just keep silent while the camera looks at them carefully for a long time. It is noteworthy that in his somewhat contradictory reflections his own cinematography, the young director (who shares a significant part of his life experience in various spheres of social activity in his films) noted that it is impossible to create such films for a specific audience, so according to the ambitious young artist, the only thing the director should be concerned with is “the spirit and atmosphere of the film, but not the thoughts about who to sell catharsis to.”^[21]

In the context of our discussion about the randomness or regularity of creative cooperation between filmmakers (even from different countries), the creation of the film *The Line* [Čiara], a co-production between Ukraine, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, seems interesting. According to Andrii Yermak, producer and founder of the Garnet International Media Group, he accidentally met the future co-producer Vanda Adamyk-Hrytsova, who shared a real story related to the difficult situation on the Ukrainian-Slovak border and the not always legal business there. Nevertheless, the film entrepreneurs immediately liked the idea of creating a co-production project and they pursued further production dialogue. What is worth noting is that having received the support of the Ukrainian State Film Agency, the Ministry of Culture of Slovakia and the Bratislava Region, the Audiovisual Fund of Slovakia, the Slovak public television channel RTVS, and the EU program Creative Europe, the film directed by Peter Bebyak (who not only created a strong crime thriller, but also presented a smart movie in a language that the public understands, whose problems are close to conscious and law-abiding citizens of the world) won the Works-in-progress competition of the BalticEvent industrial section of the XX Tallinn International Film Festival. An interesting aspect of the film production process (provided by Garnet International Media Group, RTVS, Wandal Production, Home Media Production) is the casting of Ukrainian performers (who became worthy partners for Slovak artists), where (along with S. Baklan, M. Tikhomyrov, O. Piskunov, V. Helias, and Ye. Libezniuk), Rymma Ziubina, an actress of the Kyiv National Academic Young Theater, was invited not by accident. The film project managers found this actress in Ukraine because the Slovak producer

[21] Review of the movie «January – March»...

V. Adamyk-Hrytsova admired her performance in the Ukrainian-Italian film *The Nest of the Turtledove* by T. Tkachenko (winner of numerous awards at the International Film Festivals in Varna, Lublin, Mumbai, Mannheim and Heidelberg – Internationales Filmfestival Mannheim-Heidelberg), which received the Golden Jig National Film Award. The producer saw the film at the Cannes Film Market, which shows the gradual, albeit very slow, integration of Ukrainian cinema into the world space.

Considering Ukrainian films in the context of intercultural space, we find it encouraging that the world premiere of *The Line* took place at the 52nd International Film Festival in Karlovy Vary, where, according to producer A. Yermak, talented and highly professional Ukrainian filmmakers felt not like “poor relatives” but worthy, equal participants in the process, proud not only to attend a prestigious film forum but also to bring a good film product. After all, a lot of seemingly “small” details are extremely important for the film’s further fate (in distribution): the way the filmmakers who present the film behave, the way they give interviews, the publications they are interviewed by, the hotel accommodations they stay in, and the events they are invited to. So, when presenting the film *The Line* (which caused a real buzz) in Karlovy Vary, where the director P. Bebyak won the Crystal Globe Award for Best Picture, for the first time in many years Ukrainian filmmakers really felt like headliners at this forum, as they did at numerous international film festivals around the world, including Chicago, Cottbus, Arras, and at the Slovak National Film Awards for *The Sun in the Net*, when the 12-time nominated film won six awards. Perhaps it was at this moment that the director realized and felt more acutely than ever, as Puchkov believes, “what a precarious line a person exists on, especially a creative person. This is the line between focusing on inner life and openness to external, even primitively simplified manifestations of life, between loving yourself and trying to unleash a team indifferent to your abilities.”[22]

It is worth noting that the film (which was nominated from Slovakia for an Oscar by the American Film Academy in the Best Foreign Language Film category) was released internationally after an agreement with the British trading company “Film Republic” (a member of Europa International) was signed, because cinema is still a business and needs to be sold, and it should be greatly facilitated by the Ukrainian distribution company UFD.[23] It is hard not to envy the success of this co-production, which combines different national traditions (in particular, it is extremely important to hear the famous Ukrainian-Slovak song *Hey, Falcons* performed by the popular band IMT Smile) and

[22] A. Puchkov, *The persistent trolling of the trickster: The Metadramaturgy of Oleksandr Korniiichuk*, Kyiv 2021.

[23] M. Riapulova, *All about “the Line”: sacrifices for the sake of filming, creative searches on the set and triumph at the international film festival*, Detector.media, 4.08.2017, <https://tinyurl.com/475r-3wky> (accessed: 17.07.2022).

cinematic schools among Slovak and Czech viewers. It is significant that in the year of its release (not least due to its success at film forums and media attention), the film became a box office leader in Slovakia (distributed by Continental Film), grossing over \$2 million in 71 cinemas in just six weeks of screenings, while in the Czech Republic it grossed \$68,000 in just 21 days (with a budget of €1.3 million). However, unfortunately (though not unexpectedly), it was an absolute failure at the Ukrainian box office. Although the film was scheduled by distributors to be shown in 120 theaters, it was shown (unfortunately in today's Ukrainian cinema reality) at a low-attendance daytime screening from 12.00 to 14.00. In addition, sometimes the film was unreasonably removed from screenings (in Ivano-Frankivsk, Uzhhorod, Mykolaiv, etc.) after the first or second week, even during active screenings. The screening of the film in Ukraine was largely hindered by the distribution company UFD.

Despite an agreement with the producers, it did not provide a timely schedule of screenings of the film and promotional materials in the cinema network of Ukrainian regions, expressing the erroneous opinion that such films can be interesting only to a narrow target audience. In this context, it is also regrettable that the co-production with Italian producers *Easy* (mentioned above) experienced a similarly disappointing distribution fate in Ukraine (as a result of the actual negligence of the distribution company MMD). In Italy the film grossed \$265,000 at the box office after being shown in 39 theaters, while at home, it grossed only UAH 1,700,000 after being shown on 120 screens. At the same time, the question arises: perhaps the reason for the lack of huge demand in Ukraine, even for decent co-productions, lies elsewhere? After all, in both of these films, Ukraine appears as a territory that is better not to enter. In addition, according to Andrii Kokotiukha, “due to the incredible adventures of an Italian in Ukraine in the case of *Easy* and the showdown between Slovaks in Slovakia, both films were successful on the western side of the border, and they touched Ukrainians less than the authors wanted, and definitely less than the films deserved.” The writer emphasizes the unfortunate fact that in the Ukrainian-Slovak film *The Line*, the Ukrainian side plays a mostly passive role, which is not in the film's favor. Kokotiukha, a well-known Ukrainian writer, notes that “Slovaks saw, recognized and loved their characters, even though they are anti-heroes in the story, justified by the desire to protect their family, while viewers in Ukraine still need to find and understand their character – an ordinary recognizable person who can be trusted.”[24]

Thus, when it comes to integrating Ukrainian cinema into the international cultural space, there should be concrete confirmatory actions, first of all, by the main “players” in this complex and important

[24] A. Kokotiukha, «*The Line*»: *Family Values on the Border*, Detector.media, 25.11.2017, [https://detector.](https://detector.media/kritika/article/132289/2017-11-25-mezha-simeini-tsinnosti-na-kordonii/)

[media/kritika/article/132289/2017-11-25-mezha-simeini-tsinnosti-na-kordonii/](https://detector.media/kritika/article/132289/2017-11-25-mezha-simeini-tsinnosti-na-kordonii/) (accessed: 4.07.2022).

process for national cinema. In particular, in Slovakia, the film *The Line* was shown on the public television channel RTVS, and with the assistance of the Bonton Film company, it was released on DVD with both Ukrainian and Slovak dubbing and subtitles in English and Czech. In addition, the film product was distributed through a system of individual delivery of television programs and movies to subscribers via digital cable, satellite (or terrestrial) television networks from a multimedia server, namely VoD platforms, including the iTunes Store. Therefore, it would be a mistake to hope for a quick integration of Ukrainian cinema, at least in the EU, since it would be desirable to learn how to integrate it into the national space, properly preparing this not-at-all-conditional “space” in which ordinary Ukrainian viewers are located.

This analysis of the production and distribution of the films *Easy*, *The Line*, *January – March* (created in co-production) reveals typical problems of cooperation with Ukrainian filmmakers at the present stage. The production and distribution of these films (as well as other films listed) proves that the high professionalism of Ukrainian filmmakers (demonstrated primarily in the production of films) allows them to establish broad communication in the cultural space; it shows the interest of foreign film producers in their work; it demonstrates a creative triumph in the context of awarding national prizes in partner countries; it publicizes powerful festival progress; it indicates the wide distribution of international projects (involving Ukrainian artists), but, unfortunately, it also further exposes the problems of creating and distributing co-productions directly in Ukraine. Using typical examples of the production and distribution of films (*Easy*, *The Line*, *January – March*), the author shows that the integration of Ukrainian co-produced films, including auteur films, into the international cultural space has so far been more active and faster than into the national one. The author reveals the persistent reasons for this disappointing situation: lack of proper (not declared) state protectionism; unpreparedness and lack of interest among the domestic audiences in consuming Ukrainian co-productions; destruction of the film distribution network in Ukraine during the period of independence; a small number of operating cinemas; outdated technical equipment of cinemas; screening of films with a limited number of film copies; refusal (due to lack of profitability) to show Ukrainian films (even those created in co-production) in the screening halls of shopping malls.

At the same time, the study proves that Ukrainian filmmakers, through participation in co-productions, despite the persistent problems of production and distribution of international film projects in Ukraine, are integrating into the European co-production system. It is an economically viable and effective way to develop national cinema; it enables audience expansion, cultural exchange (in the field of literary and script base, cultural, artistic and production methods of project implementation, and creative personnel); it reveals to the world the

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cultural potential of Ukraine as a film country; it consolidates Ukrainian film producers with the European business and cultural community; it optimizes the entry of Ukrainian cinema into the cultural space of international film markets; it demonstrates the openness of participants in intercultural cooperation in the field of cinema, readiness to establish new cultural contacts; it provides valuable practical experience, including the launch of profitable film production; and finally, it affirms national priorities and actively shapes the Ukrainian Cinema brand.

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