

## Letter to the colleagues in the Global West

The war makes you understand things you never wanted to understand, to feel what you never thought you'd feel. Hatred. Rage. Desire to kill with your bare hands but still better with a good weapon. It's killing to feel this. It's impossible to accept, even more to explain.

I recall how after 2014, after begging of the occupation of Donbas, my colleagues and I debated the dangers of black-and-white polarized perception, warned against dehumanizing "the other," be it pro-Russian Crimeans, people from the occupied territories, or Russians. We tried to understand and stood for complex identities and inclusive realities. We insisted on dialogue.

The war changed it. The war changes everything, what a surprise. Actually, death changes everything but the war is worse than death, because it is a slow sinking into helplessness (no matter how much you actually do) and as the cities are ruined around you, your soul is crumbling. Numbness comes and takes over.

It was just a few days ago I was writing about anger, profound anger that came after shock. Now I'm writing about hatred, nested so deep inside so many people that I doubt there would be any time, any chance to ever forgive (and definitely never to forget).

We will never forgive those cowardly silent people, especially those fragile artists and intellectuals, those double-minded journalists who for years hold their illusionary safety and comfort above human lives, freedom, and truth.

The only way to call this war 'a Putin's war' is to acknowledge that there is Putin inside each and every one of them. And the only way to put an equation mark between their "suffering" and the Ukrainian one is to acknowledge acute hypocrisy.

So, dear western colleagues, dare to ask yourself where you come from when in the letter of solidarity to Ukraine you mention bravery of artists and curator of Russian pavilion in Venice? Do you know where the artist and curators of the Ukrainian one are at the moment? In the basement in Kharkiv that the Russian army is trying to erase, in the basement in Kyiv about to give birth, and on the road to the west of the country. How deeply did you decolonize your thinking when all major "no to war, support to Ukraine (and the oppositional Russian artists)" letters do not have a single Ukrainian artist or institution as initiators?

You cannot protest against the war without acknowledging how it became possible and how it is still possible. And it is not just because of the Putin-loving majority but to a huge extent because of silent, scared, voiceless, hiding "it's not my war" cultural minority. The best way to fight colonial thinking and imperialism is when you start with yourself.

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