



Ukraine: “Surrendering is not an option”

As millions of people escape the war in Ukraine this month, Kseniia Tomchyk has returned to her hometown of Berehove, near the Hungarian border. After spending 7 years in Brazil, the conflict motivated her to return to her home country to help her family. In addition to love and concern for her parents, she is also motivated by human values. According to her, Putin is a “psychopathic dictator” who does not accept the independence of her country, let alone the tendency of its people to lean towards European values.

In this interview, Kseniia tells us what she has been doing in Ukraine and her perspective on the political situation in her country.

0:00:00 — Warning sirens

Recommendations: go to the nearest shelter, or to the bathroom, or wherever there are at least two walls between you and the street. Have an evacuation-ready backpack with a portable battery and other basic necessities.

0:00:10 — Children in Berehove.

War is when, for example, 2 or 3 countries are fighting.

Yeah?

Yeah.

Tanks are like cars, but they have cannons, guns, military planes. Just awful. Bombs even. Simply terrifying. Houses are being destroyed.

Wow... people are dying. And the worst, the bomb flew, all the windows flew.

We also have rockets flying over there in Odessa.

There in Kyiv, at home, just Bam! Boom! bam! Only.

At home too. There will never be silence. Only overnight.

There will be. We'll come home and everything will be... normal...

Interview with Kseniia

0:01:15 — What do you think about how the media describes this conflict?

I majored in Political Science for me some things are very obvious, but they are not obvious for people who haven't majored in Political Science. One thing I noticed, I said yesterday while reading the news in the Brazilian media... it is common for me to feel that the journalist who did the article does not understand the difference between fascism, Nazism, neo-Nazism, nationalism, chauvinism and so on. It's, like, one thing... they use these strong words that get attention. Audiences start using these words, but at the end of the day, they don't even understand the basic difference between these words. This is scary, because, these are very, very serious conceptual words. It's not a joke, to

draw attention, for someone to read that Azov, neo-Nazism, killing who-knows-who in Ukraine, and start spreading this news without understanding what it is about. So I think that when we talk about these difficult issues we can make parallels with normal life, for example, let's imagine that there is NATO, it would be Ukraine and it would be Russia.

Let's say in parallel that he has a husband and a wife, let's say that this husband, he is a psychopath, he has mental problems, right? And it's no use for the woman to be nice for the woman to do what he asks or for the woman to provoke him no matter how the woman will behave if the man if this husband is psychopath I don't know aggressive he will attack her anyway, that is, it's not that the woman provoked him, then he now has this reason, right, the excuse to attack her.

I think Ukraine, Russia and NATO are the same. We have Russia, which in this case is a psychopathic husband, is the country with a psychopathic leader. Yeah... and there's Ukraine, which is a woman in this case, it doesn't matter what Ukraine is going to do, Russia will always find a reason to attack Ukraine. Always. Ukraine can do nothing and Russia will still create crazy propaganda and come up with an excuse to attack Ukraine. That's the truth, so when people talk about NATO, they don't understand that NATO is not the reason for this war, NATO is an excuse for this war. If it didn't have NATO, Russia would come up with another excuse.

So, when people talk about NATO, I get sad because they can't see or observe a centuries-old historical explanation of this relationship between Russia and Ukraine. NATO is an excuse, not a reason. The reason is another, and people instead of trying to learn a little bit about history, about dictatorship, about totalitarianism, about authoritarianism, and so on, they focused, in Brazil, I don't know why, right, on NATO, on Azov. Azov is a thousand people, for God's sake, a thousand people. They do not represent Ukraine, there is no one from Azov, from that party, in the Ukrainian Parliament. Anyway, and they focus on that? On that? And they can't see, look at the big picture, you know? And I don't know why the Brazilian media created this discussion.

No, this speech, this narrative, but I get desperate. I want to sometimes, you know, scream when I read the news in Brazil because they can't see the big picture.

I think it's cool, when you talk about it, you make a parallel with real life, because people will understand. If you keep explaining Nazism, neo-Nazism, fascism... it's all the same for them, it's normal. I spent four years studying this. Now, making a parallel with a life that each one has, right, family, I don't know, husband, wife and so on, people can understand better.

0:06:03 — What is the difference between European and Russian values?

It's hard for me to talk about this outside of therapy because I've been in therapy for 3 years, and in therapy I learned, I understood better how these values work in real life, it's not just a beautiful phrase: freedom and responsibility... It's very beautiful, but how does it work? And today I understand responsibility like this: there is a government, fifty percent responsibility. But people have responsibility also. Let's say I live in Brazil and I'm not satisfied with something. I need to understand that the solution to social problems, problems with the 'partner', is fifty percent of the government that we chose, it's there, it's its job. But if we don't do our part... It's like, then, we want to say that we are, I don't know, a victim, that we don't have any power, that we don't have any tools and we'll be sitting there waiting the government solve all our problems... And that's when I started to understand this part of responsibility that every adult has, eh... I understood that it is, that, I know that our Ukrainian government is doing everything possible and impossible in this war, but if we, Ukrainians, are going to do anything, we say 'I'll just stay at home, I don't know, in a shelter, waiting'... we would have lost this war a few weeks ago. And we are already arriving at four weeks soon.

I'm here, up close, for the first time in my life I realized that those who are playing a very important part at this moment are not big and famous organizations, those that

everyone knows, it's not... Red Cross is trying. Obviously, it's helping. But our country still hasn't lost the war because of Ukrainians, each one trying to do their part, which depends on the person. It may seem like the minimum for that person, but all together... we've been in this war for 24 days, against the second largest Armed Force in the world and you'll see, right, the comparison of the size of Russia and Ukraine, and no one expected Ukraine to be able to hold out for so long. Me, when I talk about values, responsibility, freedom, life, respect... That's it, but what's important: it's no use putting it on paper, the names... right, it's beautiful, they are very beautiful words, who doesn't like respect who doesn't like freedom. But in practice, if you don't stand up, if you don't do your part — fifty percent — of really fighting for those values, those values are really just going to be pretty words. And I think now I'm realizing that, really, values only have their value (excuse me) when we practice them, when we fight, when we defend them.

And, sorry, I know Russians are feeling very offended, but, yeah... Ukrainians, it's a general opinion, right, in my country right now, among Ukrainians, they're losing everything too. They (the Russians) are not being bombed but they are losing their lives too, and we don't see them fighting. We're seeing them complaining on the internet, we're seeing them being, like, getting into despair, right? Their lives are falling apart. But the difference is that we are here fighting, dying, anyway. And they haven't so far, at least most of them, right? The vast majority, then, for me, I think the main idea for me now is that having values on paper is one thing, but now, at the moment, a decisive one... it's worth nothing we must defend them.

0:11:16 — How are the Russians suffering from this war? What are they losing?

For you to have an idea, it's all... they already have lines at the market, because Russia is being isolated.

Big brands, if you look on the Internet, brands that just left Russia in three weeks, it's a very abrupt exit. Very abrupt. You will see that the brands are leaving. There's already a line to buy, I don't know, sugar, a line to buy intimate hygiene things, I forgot the name, sanitary pads. And when they do have them, they don't have money because their currency is devaluing at an absurd speed and they are even losing access to the internet, right, which for us is hard to imagine... Not difficult, no, yesterday Telegram was blocked in Brazil, but anyway. Here now. Everything is being blocked, your country is being isolated, you, even though you have money, cannot take a plane and leave, because Russian planes cannot enter the European Union or the United States. Then your life, which you've grown used to, is falling apart in a matter of days. A matter of days. And they are losing their reputation... gaining a reputation of a terrorist country, they are losing access to basic freedoms, like access to the internet, information... Absurd censorship. They are losing jobs, losing money, losing their children's future... There are few people making any demonstration, any movement.

You know, in my opinion, the whole country should already be on the street, defending their lives. If you see how many millions of Russians there are, and you will see how many police there are. If a large number of Russians go out on the street to demonstrate, to defend, there won't even be prisons to arrest everyone, you know. And what we joke about is the following — in the old days, when there was a big demonstration in Russia, they could call the army, right, call the police... we joke: 'Man, who are you afraid of, your armed forces are all in Ukraine. Who helps the police to arrest everyone as soon as people in large numbers go out to the streets to demonstrate. People are like, 'Wait a minute, who has to save you? We are trying to save us, what do you expect? Who has to magically appear there and save you?' I don't know... That's why when we talk about Russians, that it's their responsibility, there are Russians who say 'no, but I didn't choose Putin, I have nothing to do with it', yes you do, because Putin is president for 22 years, he has been a dictator for 22 years. There are 140 million Russians, and they have a dictatorial president. Unfortunately, we know it's not just Putin. Because yesterday there was a fresh statistic: seventy percent of Russians support Putin. 70%. So it would be very unfair to say that a war of this size, terrorism and genocide of this size is the responsibility of one person.

There's one person, she's from Russia and lives in Rio, she said to me, like, 'look, they do this, like, they support Putin, because they don't know what's going on, because they don't have access to information.' Then I told her, 'look, they don't have access to it just last three weeks. Until February 24th... Russia is not China, Russia did not have Facebook and Instagram, the media or press blocked. That was open. In other words, if they didn't look for it, it's because they didn't want to. If they didn't know, it's because they always preferred to ignore it. Because the blocking is from 3 weeks ago. Until recently, they had full access and in the European Union we have... mostly... The European Union is considered that first world, in the sense that we know about how they are putting these values into practice. In Russia, it's speech, and it has nothing to do with what they do. You know what they're talking about, for example one of the strongest ideas in this Russian propaganda, they say they're saving the Russian population, like someone who speaks Russian in Ukraine, because, like, the Ukrainian government treats them very badly.

Today, an article came out that goes like this. Do you know who else killed Russians and Russian-speaking people in Ukraine? Russian soldiers in this absurd war. And they came in here to... it's a speech... They're not saving anyone. They are killing everyone, there is no more... child, Russian, Ukrainian... there is no such thing, everyone, anyone who passes close by, they kill.

0:16:49 — Is there a political divide between the Ukrainian and Russian population in Ukraine?

Ukraine started to be more united than ever exactly from 2014, because until 2014 there was this chat, 'ah, who speaks Russian, who speaks Ukrainian...' we are divided, etc. When, in 2014, Russia attacked Ukraine, we understood that we have an enemy, one, and we have to unite against this enemy, we can no longer be, you know, divided within, because there, to defend ourselves against a enemy from outside, and then, and at this

moment now we are saying that Ukraine will be a very strong, very united, and very incredible nation after this war. Because, unfortunately, we had no choice but to unite, because if we don't unite, we don't fight Russia... So, we have to unite. So... at that moment, you can be sure that there is no one... no one remembers differences anymore, which divides us... no. This enemy brought us together. In February, and January, the news started that Russia is coming to the border, and even so we couldn't believe it, we, like, no, it's not possible people... it's... it's not possible, it's not possible, it must be gossip, someone is exaggerating, because it is not possible, it is not possible, it is not possible.

0:18:11 — Where are you now and what have you been up to?

I'm at my house, my house is on the border with Hungary and we already have our problems here too, right, we've also had a siren calling several times, but nothing has fallen here. I think now this region where I'm in, within the last three that hasn't been... they haven't arrived at, it hasn't actually been attacked. We already have other problems. And we already have men from my city, from my region, fighting on the front lines, you know. We have a point here now, I saw lines of men today wanting to sign up for the armed forces. We, here, are taking advantage of the calm, relatively speaking, so here is a base to give support to the rest of Ukraine. We are having another problem, our hospitals are full of soldiers. Crowded. There are no more military hospitals, there are no more places. They are arriving to be treated in normal hospitals that have no preparation, they don't have... the team doesn't know how to deal with them, they don't know how to treat them... There's a problem with... my state is full of refugees, the people are already in a density where there are no more houses, like, people open their houses and there are no more houses to receive refugees. No more. There are refugees in my house... I don't think... or even know of any family now that hasn't opened their house here to other families from other regions of Ukraine.

And finally, my work... First, I wanted to say... I studied in Kiev, in the capital. Actually, Kyiv, we say. I wanted to go there, join an organization there. My mother didn't let me. She said, 'I won't let you go there now'. So, I had to organize my work kind of on my own here... And right now, I have three projects that I'm trying to develop. One of them: I work with our wounded soldiers in the hospital. Our hospital... Any military hospital has to have a military psychologist. Our hospital is not military and has no psychologist. I really like psychology, I do therapy, and I, with my personal psychologist, are creating a small psychological first aid program for our soldiers here. I'm finally putting together a team, teaching them basic things, and this is essential, they need it, and there's no one, no specialist here to provide psychological support. That's first. Second, I take care of them in the sense of buying their medicine if necessary, in short, buying everything they need, you know, I try to provide it.

Second project... I'm trying to organize a big purchase of tactical materials, there's a lot missing, in Ukraine it's already impossible to buy, there's no more, only from outside, bringing in from outside. Israeli bandage, tourniquets. Anyway, anything that can save your life when you have hemorrhage. To control bleeding. Because if you've been wounded on the battlefield, you have a few minutes to save your life or someone else's. You have to stop the bleeding. Our country was not ready for this demand. It's over, there's no more, so our soldiers really need a first-aid kit, in Ukraine they don't have it anymore. I can have a lot of money, in Ukraine I don't buy anymore, even with money, I don't have it. So, the logistics now is to buy and bring from outside. And third, I'm also helping in a refugee center here in my city, and I help the children and more. Our city was not ready to receive so many children, it doesn't have so many parks, it doesn't have so much infrastructure. Schools and day care centers are not working, so we have many mothers and many children and we are creating a center where there is a structure for them to come, take some classes, socialize, for children to play. The mothers talk to each other, it helps to alleviate a little, share the problems, the pain, the children have a place to play too, anyway, so there are three, let's say, projects I'm working on...