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Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues.

It is often said that truth is the first casualty of war. In the case of Russian aggression against Ukraine, this is not true. The Russian regime began destroying the truth before invading Ukraine — and precisely in order to start this war. Disguising armed aggression and occupation as the self-proclamation of so-called 'people's republics,' denying Russia's involvement, denying war crimes, attributing characteristics to Ukraine that would justify aggression — this is what made the war possible. The full-scale invasion of 2022 began with even greater deception: calling an aggressive war a 'special military operation' has led to a situation in contemporary Russia where people who call war a **war** risk ending up behind bars. This is no longer about political position. Philologists, historians, and specialists in the social sciences and humanities simply cannot remain professional without risking their freedom.

This is no accident. It tells us more about the very nature of the modern Russian regime than anything else. Russia is not waging war against one version of the truth or another: it is fighting against the very concept of independent truth as such. One of the leading principles of modern Russian propaganda is well known: not to oppose its unchanging version of events to others, but to deny the existence of an unchanging account of events, insisting that truth is a matter of interpretation. 'Everything is not so clear-cut,' 'every phenomenon has several sides,' 'it all depends on how you look at it' — these seemingly correct and neutral statements are turned into weapons by Russian propaganda to deny the existence of a true account of events.

I heard this repeatedly while in captivity, and part of the efforts of those who interrogated us was aimed precisely at getting us to admit that the Russian version of events was more valuable, while our interrogators were not interested in insisting on the truth. And this version of events is formulated by the only institution that has a monopoly on the truth in the ideology of the 'Russian world': the Russian state. The relativisation of truth is intended to

deprive people of the opportunity to rely on their own assessment of events, handing over all authority to the authoritarian state. When there is no independent truth formed by people's view of the world in conjunction with their values, any interpretation, or even outright falsification, can be called 'truth' if it benefits those doing it. And the right to be this arbiter of truth in modern Russian ideology is vested in the state embodied in the leaders of the contemporary Russian regime: the state is the source of truth, the only actor who decides what is true and what is not, and how this truth can be changed and distorted in accordance with the current interests of the regime's leaders.

This postmodernism in the Russian reading, reinterpreted and put at the service of authoritarianism and imperialism, has very specific goals. By depriving people of the opportunity to learn the truth, to form and realise it, Russian ideologues take away their subjectivity, agency, and ability to make independent decisions. It is impossible to strengthen an ideology where **the state is the number one value and people are expendable** unless the state is given a monopoly on the truth, depriving people of the opportunity to form it. When the state is the arbiter of truth, people are deprived of their personal, human view of the world and lose the ability to independently assess events. Because truth is linked to subjectivity, human autonomy, and therefore freedom. Only truth makes this freedom possible.

Truth is also linked to justice. We judge what is fair and what is not based on our understanding of truth and the values associated with it. When the monopoly on truth is given to the state, it becomes the sole judge of justice. And what is fair and what is not is decided by the regime, which becomes just in all its most terrible and disgusting actions, thereby depriving the concept of justice of its very essence.

Truth is ultimately linked to action. Awareness of the truth, and the related concept of justice, motivates people to act in one way or another — in particular, to correct blatant injustice or to live their lives in accordance with their understanding of how to live in the truth. When the state becomes the sole source of truth, its role allows it to ultimately turn people into instruments, compelling them to act in accordance with the understanding of truth proclaimed by the authoritarian regime.

Such a transformation of the state, a creation of human hands and an instrument created by humans, into the supreme arbiter of truth, justice, human freedom and action, inevitably resembles idolatry; and, ultimately, it leads to human sacrifices to this idol.

Therefore, in the war that Ukraine was forced into, and which is being fought for values, Ukraine defends and fights for an understanding of truth: with recognition of human freedom, subjectivity and agency, with autonomy in understanding justice and insistence on the ability of humans to act independently. In our struggle against the Russian invasion, we oppose the worldview of the 'Russian world' with its destruction of the understanding of truth and the endowment of the state with the functions of an idol, defending humanity and the ability of people to live in accordance with the truth. And in this war for truth, we cannot lose.