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Le Monde's Coverage of Ukraine amid the War: Themes and Issues

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This article examines trends in Le Monde's coverage of events in Ukraine and their global implications during Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The study pursues the following objectives: to analyze the French media's perspective on Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine; to quantify Le Monde's articles on the war in Ukraine; to identify the themes and issues in Le Monde's coverage of Ukrainian realities; and to compare Le Monde's articles published from February to April in 2022, 2023, and 2024. **Method.** A literature review was conducted to explore Ukrainian scholars' views on objective and accurate media reporting. Monitoring identified Le Monde articles addressing Ukrainian issues. Content analysis determined the quantity, themes, and issues of these articles, as well as the presence of Russian propaganda narratives. A comparative analysis was performed on articles published in Le Monde during February – April of 2022, 2023, and 2024. **Results.** Between February and April each year from 2022 to 2024, Le Monde published 57 articles on the Russia-Ukraine war. Of these, 28 focused on military topics, 14 addressed economic issues, and 15 explored socio-political matters. The number of articles on the war's economic impact declined over this period, suggesting relative stabilization in Ukraine and globally. Military coverage surged in 2023, reflecting heightened international cooperation, Western support for Ukraine, and preparations for a Ukrainian counteroffensive. In 2024, socio-political coverage increased significantly, driven by the need to address the evolving international landscape amid Russia's prolonged aggression against Ukraine and the growing threat of invasion of other European countries. **Conclusions.** Le Monde's coverage of Ukraine reflects a commitment to objectivity and reliability. The newspaper consistently condemns Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine and avoids Russian propaganda narratives. The analyzed articles demonstrate Le Monde's thorough and comprehensive examination of the Russia-Ukraine war and its economic, social, and political impacts on Ukraine and the world.

Keywords: Le Monde; Russian-Ukrainian war; themes and issues

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Висвітлення України газетою Le Monde під час війни: теми та проблеми

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У цій статті розглядаються тенденції у висвітленні Le Monde подій в Україні та їх глобальні наслідки під час повномасштабного вторгнення Росії в Україну. Дослідження було спрямоване на досягнення таких цілей: проаналізувати точку зору французьких медіа на збройну агресію Росії проти України; кількісно оцінити статті Le Monde про війну в Україні; визначити теми та проблеми у висвітленні Le Monde українських реалій; а також порівняти статті Le Monde, опубліковані з лютого у 2022, 2023 та 2024 роках. **Метод.** Було проведено огляд літератури, щоб дослідити погляди українських науковців на об'єктивність та точність медійних повідомлень. Моніторинг виявив статті Le Monde, присвячені українській тематиці. Контент-аналіз визначив кількість, тематику та проблематику цих статей, а також наявність російського пропагандистського наративу. Проведено порівняльний аналіз статей, опублікованих у Le Monde протягом лютого – квітня 2022, 2023 та 2024 років. **Результати.** У період з лютого до квітня кожного року з 2022 по 2024 рік Le Monde опублікувала 57 статей про російсько-українську війну. З них 28 були присвячені військовій тематиці, 14 – економічним, 15 – соціально-політичним. Кількість статей про економічні наслідки війни за цей період зменшилася, що свідчить про відносну стабілізацію в Україні та в усьому світі. Висвітлення війни зросло у 2023 році, відображаючи активізацію міжнародного співробітництва, підтримку України Заходом і підготовку до українського контрнаступу. У 2024 році суспільно-політичне висвітлення суттєво зросло через необхідність реагувати на мінливий міжнародний ландшафт на тлі тривалої агресії Росії проти України та зростаючої загрози вторгнення в інші європейські країни. **Висновки.** Висвітлення Le Monde України відображає прагнення до об'єктивності та надійності. Газета послідовно засуджує збройну агресію Росії проти України та уникає наративів російської пропаганди. Проаналізовані статті демонструють ретельний і всебічний аналіз російсько-української війни та її економічного, соціального та політичного впливу на Україну та світ у Le Monde.

Ключові слова: Le Monde, російсько-українська війна, теми та проблеми

Since Russia's aggression against Ukraine began in 2014, the need for objective, reliable, and comprehensive media coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war has been a pressing concern. This issue became even more critical with the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. Assessments by international experts, commentary from political scientists and historians, and journalistic investigations have significantly shaped global perceptions of Ukraine as a state and Ukrainians as a nation.

This article aims to examine trends in the coverage of events in Ukraine by the French newspaper Le Monde during Russia's full-scale invasion. To achieve this objective, the study addresses the following tasks: to analyze the French media's stance on Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine; to quantify Le Monde's articles devoted to the war in Ukraine; to identify the themes and issues in Le Monde's coverage of Ukrainian realities; and to conduct a comparative analysis of Le Monde's articles published from February to April in 2022, 2023, and 2024.

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Strict adherence to professional journalistic standards is the only way to ensure public trust in the work of media professionals. Conversely, manipulations and fake news, half-truths and propaganda of Russian narratives lead to pollution of the information space, substitution of values, disorientation and chaos in society.

According to the Institute of Mass Information (IMI), modern Ukrainian professional standards for quality media include a balance of opinions and points of view, reliability, separation of facts from comments, accuracy, completeness, and efficiency (Kuriata, 2021). Since the beginning of Russian aggression in 2014, IMI has published a list of standards that apply in times of war: accuracy, efficiency, impartiality, ethics, completeness, separation of facts from comments (Standards of Journalism in Time of War. How to write about tragic events - infographic, 2014).

In its editorial guidelines, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) lists the main editorial values as audience trust, freedom of expression, independence, public interest, honesty, and accuracy, impartiality, editorial integrity, protection of vulnerable groups, avoidance of unjustified wrongdoing, and respect for privacy.

The issue of quality coverage and delivery of information to the audience has always been in the focus of domestic scholars.

The main criteria for assessing a journalist's performance are an objective and truthful reflection of reality. The criteria are quite reasonable, and the desire for objectivity and truthfulness should be the basis of the activities of those on whom the fate of society and the individual depends', - notes V. Rizun (Rizun, 2004, p. 45).

In research, educational, and methodological publications by Ukrainian scholars, the need to comply with standards as the only possible way of functioning of professional journalism is deeply and comprehensively substantiated: V. Rizun (Rizun, 2008), V. Ivanov (Ivanov & Serdiuk, 2008), O. Kuznetsova (Kuznetsova, 2007), T. Prystupenko (Prystupenko, 2011), O. Chekmyshev (Chekmyshev, 2021). According to B. Potiatynyk, compliance or non-compliance with professional standards is the watershed that determines whether texts of various forms of mass communication belong to journalism (Potiatynyk, 2010).

Among the scholars who study the experience of foreign media coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war are T. Lylo (Lylo, 2023), A. Soroka (Soroka, 2023), Y. Melnyk (Melnyk, 2023), and others. In particular, T. Lylo's study describes the main ideological and manipulative techniques used by the Iranian English-language newspaper 'The Tehran Times' in its publications about the Russian-Ukrainian war. The article by A. Soroka examines the main narratives and features of the coverage of the full-scale intervention of Russian troops in Ukraine in the online versions of leading Spanish print media. Y. Melnyk analyzed the narratives about the Russian-Ukrainian war in one of the pro-Russian publications of the People's Republic of China.

Despite the interest of Ukrainian scholars in the problem of coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war in the world media, this topic remains poorly understood today. There is a lack of research that examines the experience of reflecting the topic of the war in Ukraine in the foreign media of Europe and the United States of America.

Method

The perception of Ukraine as a state and Ukrainians as a nation on the international stage depends on many factors, one of which is the coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war in the world media. Leading media form the opinion of the international community not only about the image of Ukraine as a country experiencing a crisis, but also provide a deep understanding of the complex realities of the war that Ukrainian society is facing. Among them – Le Monde, one of the most popular and respected daily newspapers in France.



A literature review was conducted to examine Ukrainian scholars’ perspectives on objective and accurate media coverage. Monitoring was employed to identify Le Monde articles addressing Ukrainian issues. Content analysis was used to quantify these articles, analyze their themes and issues, and assess the presence of Russian propaganda narratives. A comparative analysis was performed on 58 articles published in Le Monde during February – April of 2022, 2023, and 2024.

The empirical foundation of the study comprises 58 articles published in Le Monde from February to April in 2022, 2023, and 2024.

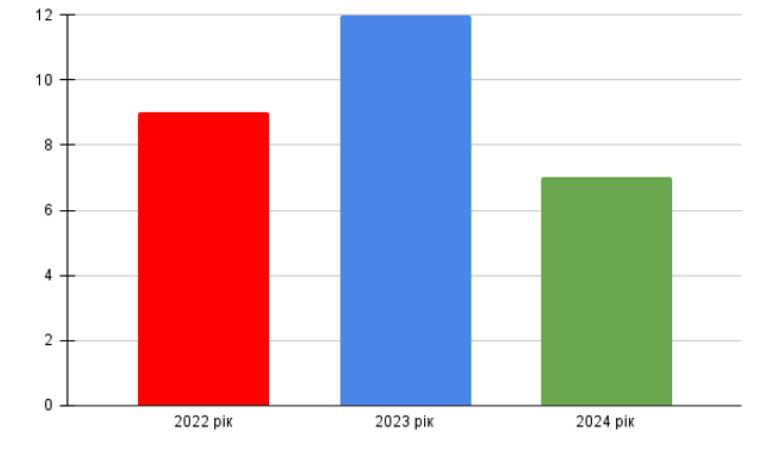
Results and discussion

From the first weeks of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops, the French newspaper Le Monde has been investigating the causes of the aggression and the Russian invaders’ attempts to justify their criminal actions by distorting historical facts. The analytical materials published on the pages of the newspaper throughout the entire period of the Russian-Ukrainian war not only create an image of Ukraine as a country in crisis, but also provide a deep understanding of the complex realities of the war that Ukrainian society is facing.

Before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops, on 18 February 2022, Le Monde¹¹ published an analytical piece on the Revolution of Dignity of 2013–2014, with an in-depth analysis and identification of the true reasons for the Russian attack – an attack on the democracy and independence of the Ukrainian people. In this article, Le Monde journalists examined the factors that led to the overthrow of the Viktor Yanukovich regime and the impact of these events on the country’s further development. The article covered the large-scale protests on the Maidan, the struggle of the Ukrainian people for their rights, and the importance of these events for the establishment of democracy in Ukraine.

In order to trace the trends in Le Monde’s coverage of events in Ukraine during the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, we grouped the materials about the Russian-Ukrainian war published in February–April 2022–2024 into three thematic groups: military, economic, and socio-political.

Figure 1.
Military topics on the pages of Le Monde in February–April 2022–2024



¹¹ Bienvenu, H., Boutelet, C., & Vincent, F. (29.04.2024). L’état se resserre autour des exilés ukrainiens en âge de combattre. Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2024/04/29/l-etat-se-resserre-autour-des-exiles-ukrainiens-en-age-de-combattre_6230650_3210.html.



In February–April 2022, 9 stories were published on military topics, in February–April 2023 – 12 stories, and in February–April 2024 – 7 stories. A total of 28 stories.

Materials on military topics published in 2022 are distinguished by titles that begin with the phrase «War in Ukraine». E.g.: «War in Ukraine: Russian troops withdraw from the outskirts of Kyiv, more than 3,000 civilians evacuated from Mariupol»¹² (Le Monde, 7 April 2022) or «War in Ukraine: in Kharkiv, no one met the Russians with flowers»¹³ (Le Monde, 29 April 2022). The military-related materials refer to military assistance to the Ukrainian army, as well as assistance to people fleeing the temporarily occupied territories. Much attention was paid to debunking fakes coming from the Russian invaders, explaining, why they are false and what the reality is.

In 2023, military issues were also covered in a significant number of articles, including «We must create a special court for Ukraine within the Council of Europe»¹⁴ (Le Monde, 1 March 2023); «Brotherhood battalion, Ukrainian volunteers behind the Russian lines»¹⁵ (Le Monde, 13 March 2023); «War in Ukraine: the Russian army is strengthening the front in anticipation of a counter-offensive even on its own territory»¹⁶ (Le Monde, 6 April 2023). The materials reflect the course of military operations on the territory of Ukraine, the successes and defeats of the Ukrainian army. Considerable attention is paid to the question of whose side European politicians support in the war (Ukrainian or enemy). One of the key issues is the state of the Zaporizhzhia NPP and how to avoid a nuclear threat from Russia.

In 2024, a significant number of articles were devoted to cooperation between Ukraine and France in the military sphere. In particular, the article «Ukrainian soldiers trained by France in the laws of war»¹⁷ (Le Monde, 7 February 2024) revealed how the French military helps Ukrainian soldiers master the skills of advanced technologies, equipment and weapons. The French side promptly responded to the request of the Ukrainian leadership and organized events, confirming the strategic partnership between the countries. The article «War in Ukraine: war crimes investigation opened after two French humanitarians killed in Russian bombing»¹⁸ (Le Monde, 3 February 2024) discusses the tragic incident that took place on 1 February 2024 in the Kherson region. Two French volunteers of the humanitarian organization EPER were killed and three other people were injured as a result of a Russian drone attack. This incident points to the possibility of a deliberate violation of international humanitarian law, as the vehicles of the humanitarian convoy were clearly marked. It is obvious that the Russian military deliberately attacked two vehicles returning to the base. The article «War in Ukraine: Russia's double strike on Odesa leaves at least

¹² Kaval, A. (01.04.2022). Guerre en Ukraine : les troupes russes se retirent des environs de Kiev, plus de 3 000 civils évacués de Marioupol. Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2022/04/01/les-troupes-russes-se-retirent-des-localites-autour-de-kiev_6120201_3210.html.

¹³ d'Istria, T. (29.04.2022). War in Ukraine: In Kharkiv, 'No one was going to greet the Russians with flowers'. Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2022/04/30/war-in-ukraine-in-kharkiv-no-one-was-going-to-greet-the-russians-with-flowers_5982070_4.html.

¹⁴ Cathala, B., & Garapon, A. (1.03.2023). Il faut créer, au sein du Conseil de l'Europe, un tribunal spécial pour l'Ukraine. Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2023/03/01/il-faut-creer-au-sein-du-conseil-de-l-europe-un-tribunal-special-pour-l-ukraine_6163777_3232.html.

¹⁵ d'Istria, T. (13.04.2023). War in Ukraine: The volunteer group going behind Russian lines. Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/03/14/war-in-ukraine-the-volunteer-group-going-behind-russian-lines_6019324_4.html.

¹⁶ Bouvier, P. (6.04.2023). War in Ukraine: Russian army fortifies front while awaiting counter-offensive, even in its own territory. Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2023/04/06/guerre-en-ukraine-les-forces-russes-fortifient-le-front-en-attendant-la-contre-offensive_6168524_3210.html.

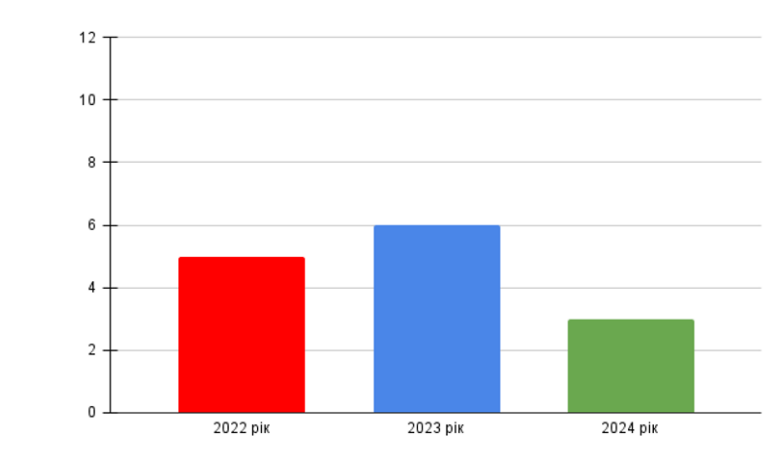
¹⁷ Vincent, E. (7.02.2024). France trains Ukrainian soldiers in the rules of war. Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/02/03/france-trains-ukrainian-soldiers-in-the-rules-of-war_6489567_4.html.

¹⁸ Grynspan, E., & Ricard, P. (3.02.2024). Guerre en Ukraine : après la mort de deux humanitaires français dans un bombardement russe, une enquête ouverte pour crime de guerre. Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2024/02/03/guerre-en-ukraine-apres-la-mort-de-deux-humanitaires-francais-dans-un-bombardement-russe-une-enquete-ouverte-pour-crime-de-guerre_6214601_3210.html.



twenty dead»¹⁹ (Le Monde, 15 March 2024) condemned the attack on Odesa, when Russian missiles hit a residential area, causing heavy civilian casualties and a massive fire, The article noted that the tactic, often used by the Russian army first in Syria and now in Ukraine, targets civilian emergency services in particular and serves to terrorize the population.

Figure 2.
Economic topics on the pages of Le Monde in February–April 2022–2024



In February–April 2022, 5 materials were published on economic topics, in February–April 2023 – 6 materials, and in February–April 2024 – 3 materials. A total of 14 materials.

Economic topics in 2022 were related to the active introduction of new international sanctions by the West against Russia immediately after the full-scale invasion. The publications analyzed possible changes in the French and European economies as a result of the atrocities in Ukraine. There are also materials with advice on how to protect yourself from inflation and a sharp rise in the exchange rate.

In 2023, there were significantly more articles on economic issues, including «The EU wants to do a better job of fighting sanctions evasion against Moscow»²⁰ (Le Monde, 24 March 2023); «The war in Ukraine: these little agreements that allow Russia to avoid sanctions»²¹ (Le Monde, 28 April 2023). The articles cover various restrictive measures against the Russian economy, tracking and exposing companies that circumvent sanctions. The publications highlight the importance and necessity of Western assistance to Ukraine in the war.

In 2024, a small number of materials were published. One of the most important issues discussed is the assistance to Ukraine to stabilize the economy in the context of the war and bring victory closer. In particular, in the article «War in Ukraine: Joe Biden unveils plan to help Kyiv,

¹⁹ Grynszpan, E. (15.03.2024). Guerre en Ukraine : une double frappe russe sur Odessa a fait au moins vingt morts. Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2024/03/15/guerre-en-ukraine-une-double-frappe-russe-sur-odessa-a-fait-au-moins-vingt-morts_6222276_3210.html.

²⁰ Jacqué, P., & Malingre, V. (24.03.2023). L’Union européenne veut mieux combattre le contournement des sanctions contre Moscou. Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2023/03/24/l-union-europeenne-veut-mieux-combattre-le-contournement-des-sanctions-contre-moscou_6166808_3210.html.

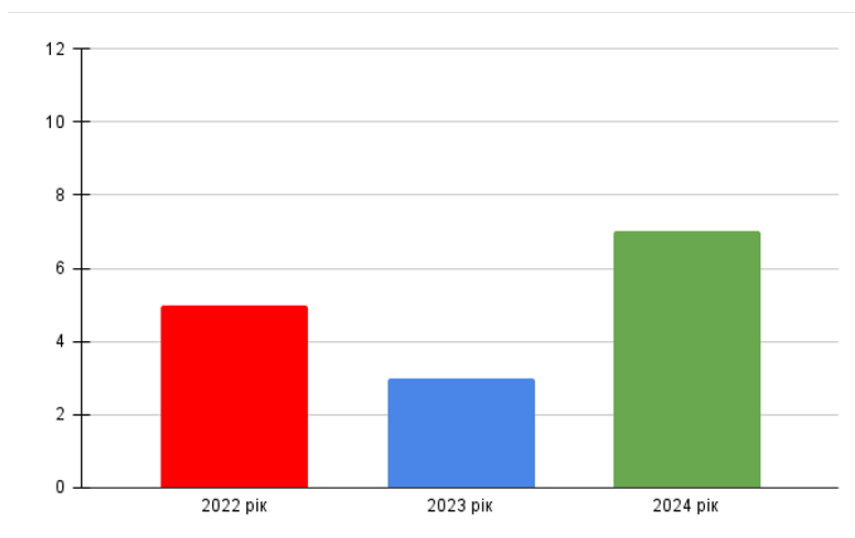
²¹ Jégo, M., & Malingre, V. (28.04.2023). Guerre en Ukraine : ces petits arrangements qui permettent à la Russie d’échapper aux sanctions. Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2023/04/28/guerre-en-ukraine-ces-petits-arrangements-qui-permettent-a-la-russie-d-echapper-aux-sanctions_6171424_3210.html.



guarantees it will not abandon its allies»²² (Le Monde, 24 April 2024), the article discusses not only the need for assistance to support our country's defense capability, but also the strategic importance of such assistance for international politics as part of the global solidarity of the Western world. In the article «It's time to make the Russian aggressor pay»²³ (Le Monde, 16 February 2024), the authors emphasize that today in Ukraine, the struggle is not only for the territory or survival of the nation, but also for the global principles of democracy and freedom. They warn that a reduction in Western support could allow Russia to pursue its aggressive goals and seize Ukraine's territory.

Figure 3.

Socio-political topics on the pages of Le Monde in February–April 2022–2024



On socio-political topics, 5 materials were published in February–April 2022, 3 materials in February–April 2023, and 7 materials in February–April 2024. A total of 15 materials.

The materials on socio-political topics published in 2022 covered the actions of solidarity with Ukraine, in particular: «In Paris for a solidarity rally with Ukraine: It's crazy to imagine living through a war in Europe»²⁴ (Le Monde, 26 February 2022). French journalists focused on the conditions in which Ukrainians must live during the war, as well as comments by French politicians reacting to the course of events in Ukraine. The publications pay considerable attention to analyzing the positions of European politicians on supporting Ukraine or Russia.

In 2023, the number of articles on socio-political topics decreased significantly compared to the previous year. However, the publications clearly reflect the idea of Ukraine's victory in the Russian-Ukrainian war. In particular, the article «Volodymyr Zelenskyy to cement “eternal

²² Guerre en Ukraine : Joe Biden promulgue le plan d'aide à Kiev assurant ne pas « abandonner ses alliés ». (24.04.2024). Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2024/04/24/guerre-en-ukraine-joe-biden-promulgue-le-plan-d-aide-a-kiev-assurant-ne-pas-abandonner-ses-allies_6229494_3211.html.

²³ Halushka, O., & Litra, L. (16.02.2024). Guerre en Ukraine : « Il est temps de faire payer l'agresseur russe ». Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2024/02/16/guerre-en-ukraine-il-est-temps-de-faire-payer-l-agresseur-russe_6216974_3232.html.

²⁴ Pascual, J. (24.02.2022). A Paris, dans la manifestation de solidarité avec l'Ukraine : « C'est démentiel d'imaginer vivre une guerre en Europe ». Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2022/02/24/c-est-dementiel-d-imaginer-vivre-une-guerre-en-europe_6115145_3224.html.



friendship” between Ukraine and Poland in Warsaw»²⁵ (Le Monde, 6 April 2023) states that Ukraine continues to develop despite the challenges of war and finds support and friends in the world.

In 2024, Le Monde covered a significant number of socio-political topics in several articles. In particular, the article «Ukraine at war against its traitors»²⁶ (Le Monde, 20 February 2024) touches upon the complex issue of internal enemies during the Russian aggression. After the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022, a new struggle against collaborators – people who support the aggressor – broke out in Ukraine. According to the French authors, the Ukrainian authorities have adopted the necessary anti-collaboration law to fairly punish those who collaborated with the enemy, but the legality of some of its articles remains controversial. The following article, «Russia puts Baltic and Polish leaders on the wanted list, accused of falsifying history»²⁷ (Le Monde, 13 February 2024), exposes Russia’s tactics of intimidation of the Baltic states. In the context of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and the threat the Kremlin poses to the Baltic states, there has been a significant deterioration in relations recently – the Russian regime is doing what it has always done: trying to suppress freedom and continuing to create its own version of the facts. It also highlights the growing tension between Moscow and the Baltic states, which has become even more apparent after the conflict in Ukraine. The Baltic states, as well as Poland, have been actively supporting Kyiv, particularly in restoring historical memory and fighting Russian aggression.

Conclusions

In February–April 2022–2024, 57 articles on the topic of the Russian-Ukrainian war were found on the pages of the French newspaper Le Monde. Among them, 28 publications cover military issues, 14 are devoted to economic issues, and 15 address socio-political issues. During this period, there was a downward trend in the number of publications analyzing the economic situation caused by the war. This indicates a certain level of stabilization of the situation in this area in Ukraine and the world.

The number of articles on military issues increased significantly in 2023, when the newspaper covered active international cooperation and support for Ukraine by Western partners, as well as the Ukrainian army’s preparations for a counter-offensive.

The trend towards an increase in the number of articles covering socio-political issues increased significantly in 2024 due to the need to understand the new international situation that has developed as a result of the protracted aggression of Russian troops against Ukraine and the growing threat of invasion of other European countries.

Analyzing the way Le Monde covers the events in Ukraine, it can be concluded that the newspaper pays considerable attention to them and adheres to an objective approach. The newspaper consistently condemns Russia’s armed aggression against Ukraine and does not publish Russian narratives. The materials reviewed in this article demonstrate the newspaper’s desire to analyze various aspects of the Russian-Ukrainian war and its impact on economic, social and political life in Ukraine and the world in a deep and comprehensive manner. Examples of publications demonstrate the newspaper’s efforts to provide readers with a balanced and accurate overview of events, which contributes to a better understanding of the situation in Ukraine for the international

²⁵ Iwaniuk, J. (6.04.2023). Zelensky champions ‘eternal friendship’ between Ukraine and Poland. Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2023/04/06/zelensky-champions-eternal-friendship-between-ukraine-and-poland_6021911_143.html.

²⁶ Constant, A. (20.02.2024). « «Collabos ! » L’Ukraine en guerre face à ses traîtres », sur Arte : l’éternelle cinquième colonne des ennemis de l’intérieur. Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2024/02/20/collabos-l-ukraine-en-guerre-face-a-ses-traîtres-sur-arte-l-éternelle-cinquième-colonne-des-ennemis-de-l-interieur_6217560_3246.html.

²⁷ Russia declares Estonian PM Kaja Kallas ‘wanted’ (13.02.2024). Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/02/13/russia-declares-estonian-pm-kaja-kallas-wanted_6520816_4.html.



audience. Adherence to high standards of journalism in the coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war makes Le Monde an important factor in shaping Ukraine's positive image worldwide.

Declaration on Generative Artificial Intelligence and Technologies Using Artificial Intelligence in the Writing Process.

The authors did not use artificial intelligence tools in the preparation of this article. The authors of the article bear full responsibility for the correct use and citation of sources.

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