

EU Understanding Ukraine: Live ESN Voices for Erasmus+ and Solidarity

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EU Understanding Ukraine is a Brussels-based advocacy and outreach activity focused on bringing Ukrainian student and youth experiences directly into European institutional and academic spaces.

The activity uses a Living Library format to promote ESN Ukraine and **Erasmus+ programme**, and foster solidarity with personal stories of Ukrainian youth.

The programme took place over the course of three days in Brussels and involved study visits and **Living Library** sessions at the European Commission, the European Parliament, and a host university (ULB).





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Around 60 local participants took part, including EU institutional staff and trainees, university students and local youth. The activity was led by ESN Ukraine and *European Parliament Antenna in Ukraine* and delivered in close cooperation with the EU and academic partners, including the ULB university and **DG EAC** of the European Commission.

The main idea was simple: to **shift perception about Ukraine** from abstract concepts and common beliefs to awareness and understanding based on direct conversations with Ukrainian students and alumni who have lived these realities themselves.

Activity format and approach

The core method of the activity was the Living Library idea. Ten Ukrainian Erasmus+ alumni acted as “**living books**” and shared personal stories related to student mobility, volunteering, leadership, war-time realities and engagement with European programmes.

Instead of policy language and prepared speeches, the Living Library created space for open questions and **honest exchange**. ESN Ukraine facilitators moderated the process to keep discussions focused and respectful.



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Alongside the Living Library sessions, the programme included institutional study visits and three **professional development** sessions for the Ukrainian delegation. These focused on advocacy and understanding how EU institutions work in practice, ensuring the activity had outward-facing impact & internal capacity-building value.

Participants and engagement

The activity reached approximately 60 local participants. These included staff and trainees from the **European Commission** and **European Parliament**, students from ULB and local youth.





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The Ukrainian delegation consisted of Erasmus+ alumni and ESN volunteers from different Ukrainian regions and academic backgrounds. Their stories covered a wide range of topics, from studying abroad during the Russian-Ukrainian war to volunteering in ESN, supporting peers, and navigating **European opportunities** as Ukrainian youth.

Feedback from EU institutional staff and partners highlighted the clarity and credibility of the exchanges, as well as the value of hearing directly from students rather than through reports or briefings.

Key outputs

Twelve personal testimonies were recorded, for making short outreach videos (5-7 minutes) and a digital booklet. These materials are intended for continued Erasmus+ and ESN **outreach** and can be reused in future advocacy and promotional activities.

In addition, the activity strengthened the skills and confidence of the Ukrainian participants. Delegates reported a better understanding of EU processes and increased confidence in **advocacy** and storytelling. Informal networking during the study visits also led to new professional and organisational contacts.



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Results and impact

In the short term, the activity changed **how Ukraine was discussed** within the participating institutional and academic settings. Many reported a deeper understanding of Ukrainian student and youth realities and expressed interest in further cooperation through Erasmus+ and ESN Ukraine channels with Ukraine.

In the medium term, the recorded materials and strengthened alumni profiles will better position ESN Ukraine in the EU contexts. The outputs will circulate within ESN and partner channels to elevate and foster further awareness and understanding of ESN & Ukraine alumni.

In the long term, the activity contributes to a broader shift in how engagement with Ukraine is approached at EU level. The Living Library model showed that people-to-people formats work well even in formal institutional environments.

Overall conclusion

EU Understanding Ukraine successfully created a space where Ukrainian student voices could be heard directly by EU institutions and local academic communities. It **strengthened** Erasmus+ visibility, built practical skills among Ukrainian alumni and positioned **ESN Ukraine** as

a reliable bridge between lived experience and European policy environments.



The Living Library format proved clear, adaptable, and effective. It offers strong potential for replication in other European contexts and supports long-term cooperation, understanding, and solidarity with Ukraine within the Erasmus+ framework.