

## Annex 1. Intro to the Ukrainian Theatre Scene

### Three Words on Ukrainian Theatre

Perhaps better than any other, the following three words describe the current state of theatre in Ukraine: Development, potential and integration. Allow us to explain.

#### Development

In the nearly 30 years since Ukraine declared its independence from the Soviet Union, professional theatre has undergone a significant transformation accompanied by even more significant challenge. While a healthy six million Ukrainians attend theatre productions annually, recent social and democratic upheavals have influenced the theatre-going (and wider) public in very concrete ways and have given rise to two expectations: that theatres they visit will produce work that is socially relevant; and that theatrical art can, indeed, must influence political reality. Facing strong competition for audiences from increasingly vibrant local independent and commercial theatre sectors that have expanded the scope of theatrical form and invention, the 113 publicly-funded, tradition-bound State Theatres currently operating across the country now face a dilemma that can be summed up with two key questions: *Is what we do pure entertainment or a public service? and Is theatre a commercial venture or is it art?*

#### Potential

Prolonged political ineffectiveness has compelled theatre activists to be just that — actively innovative, if they wanted to survive. Despite significant financial constraints, new directions, genres, forms and themes have been assimilated by theatre companies, including forms that had never been seen before in Ukrainian theatre: cabaret, new circus, stand-up and more. This has resulted in a willing, if gradual, departure from the traditional norm of post-Soviet theatre — repertory theatre — led by a new generation of managerial, marketing and directorial talent. In tandem with this, the State and independent theatre sectors are also becoming more aware of the necessity for greater inclusivity at the theatre, affecting positively both those who produce the work and those able to consume it.

#### Integration

And yet, Ukrainian theatre is largely unknown outside the country. The country has no celebrated international theatre festival. But the change taking place, the emergence of authentic stars — both directors and actors — and the production of ground-breaking projects and performances — these are all real. So far, when Ukrainian theatre does travel, it is largely restricted to former Soviet states or satellites. And despite the recent — and rare — appearance of western European directors of note working in Ukrainian theatres, the drama produced here is less well known in Germany, France and the UK. Today marks a window of real opportunity: Ukrainian theatre is poised as never before to entertain the possibility of co-productions, sustainable partnerships and creative exchange. The five venues listed below will spell out precisely how ready. Read on, Macduff.