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The Ukrainian Civil Volunteer Movement during Wartime (2014–2022)

Csilla Fedinec

1. Concept of “total defense”

On November 15, 2022, the Lithuanian Riflemen’s Union and Vytautas Magnus University organized the Lithuanian National Security Conference 2022, which studied the experience of “total defense” in Ukraine.¹ The Union’s commander, Albertas Dapkus, in an interview with *Ukrinform*, the National News Agency of Ukraine, explained the direct impact of the Ukrainian experience on the concept of “total defense,” stating that everyone should defend themselves, not just the armed forces.²

The concept of “total defense,” with an emphasis on military components, was used primarily by non-aligned states in the Cold War era,³ and was based on the experiences of Norway during the Second World War when all the resources of civil society were placed under the command of the armed forces.⁴ The end of the Cold War brought about the dissolution of the bipolar world order and led to a decline in militarization, thus reducing the importance of “total defense.”⁵ For example, Austria, Switzerland, and Sweden shifted their focus to international security. Finland retained its level of militarization because the long border with Russia predetermined the possibility of a military conflict. The former state of Yugoslavia, “as a multi-ethnic country provides a clear example that social cohesion is a definite prerequisite for total or comprehensive defense to be effective and not to become a threat to society itself.”⁶

In the twenty-first century we have entered the age of hybrid warfare. The global security environment has been most affected by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, various others on the European Continent, the five-day Russia–Georgia war in 2008, and the aggression, which started with the annexation of Ukrainian Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014.⁷ The Russian aggression against Ukraine initiated a comprehensive discussion not only on the capabilities of armed forces but also on society’s resilience and civilian preparedness to withstand a conventional military conflict.⁸ The NATO Warsaw Summit Communiqué of July 2016 clearly showed that only tightly coordinated efforts between civilians and the military ensure effective resilience.⁹ According to point 73 of the Communiqué,

“Civil preparedness is a central pillar of Allies’ resilience and a critical enabler for Alliance collective defense. [...] We will improve civil preparedness by achieving the NATO Baseline Requirements for National Resilience, which focus on continuity of government, continuity of essential services, security of critical civilian infrastructure, and support to military forces with civilian means.”¹⁰

According to Hanna Shelest:

Kyiv has placed cross-society resistance at the heart of its national defense, bringing all military and security agencies under a single command, assisted by support from the civilian population. Since 2014, the country has transformed its armed forces, upgrading logistics and communications and empowering mid-level officers; put in place a network of reservists; and taken measures to ensure Ukrainian society’s broader resilience to crises. It built this approach both on the adoption of NATO best practices and on a unique movement of volunteers who raise funds to support the war effort, merging defense and measures to increase national resilience into a single system.

This constitutes a “third way” between the “total defense” model of Sweden, Finland, Singapore, and Switzerland, which brings together military and civilian actors in a whole-of-society approach to security; and the strongly hierarchical model of the United States, Russia, and China, where decision-making is centralised in the political leadership. The total defense approach concentrates on defense and deterrence, while Ukraine’s approach also prioritizes resilience—including a comprehensive but agile coordination of a variety of forces within and beyond the government.¹¹

The Russia–Ukraine War has been going on since February 2014, starting after Ukraine’s Revolution of Dignity (i.e., Euromaidan) in the winter of 2013–2014. The latter event also marks the birth of a new civil volunteer movement in Ukraine. In the following, four phases of the development of this movement will be discussed (Table 1). After a brief description of the “state domination” phase (1992–2013) and the definitions of civil activism in the Ukrainian legal context, the second phase of “political activation” follows with the Revolution (2014). The third phase starts in February–March 2014, with the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, and also involves the subsequent war in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions of Ukraine, collectively named Donbas (other terms used by the Ukrainian government, foreign institutions, and media publicity include, from April 2014, the “Anti-Terrorist Operation – ATO zone”, and from February 2018, the “Joint Forces Operation – JFO zone”). This period already marks the entry into total defense, with the state “catching up” and to a large degree substituted by the activities of the civil volunteer movement. While the birth of the movement during Euromaidan meant social mobilization after the previous large degree of immobility, this phase

of total defense involved elements of both mobilization and co-optation by the state and oligarchic actors.¹² The final phase started on February, 24, 2022 with the full-scale Russian invasion. In this period, we can see an active volunteer movement alongside formal state mobilization, with the state and society co-operating in their heroic effort to counter Russian aggression.

Table 1. Phases of development of the civil volunteer movement in Ukraine (1991–2022).

Phase		Main political event	The civil volunteer movement's...	
			activity	dynamics
State domination (1992–2013)		regime change	non-political	immobility (formal)
Political activation (2014)		the Revolution of Dignity (Euromaidan)	political	mobilization (informal)
Total defense	state “catching up” (2014–2022)	annexation of Crimea, Donbas war	humanitarian + military (state-substituting)	mobilization + co-optation (semi-formal)
	state mobilizing (2022–)	full-scale Russian invasion	military + humanitarian (state-aiding)	co-operation (formal)

2. The “state domination” phase (1992–2013) and the creation of a civil volunteer movement during Euromaidan (2013–2014)

2.1. The concept of volunteering in Ukraine

In a global perspective, the volunteer movement is considered to have begun in 1859, when the Swiss entrepreneur and social activist Jean-Henri Dunant, struck by the terrible consequences of the Battle of Solferino, initiated the creation of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Dunant later became the first Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

In independent Ukraine, the beginning of volunteering is considered to be 1992, when the telephone-based Helpline Service was created. These first years of independence also saw effective volunteering areas under the auspices of religious organizations. The legal framework of civil activism in Ukraine maintains that volunteers can be citizens of Ukraine, foreigners, and stateless persons who are legally residing in Ukraine. Persons aged 14 to 18 years can carry out volunteer activities with the consent of a guardian, with restrictions against providing volunteer

assistance to military formations and law enforcement agencies, and at healthcare institutions. The main legislative acts regulating the volunteer movement in Ukraine (with a number of amendments since their adoption)¹³ are:

- Law 3236-VI of 2011 “On Volunteer Activity” – provides the first legal definitions for the concepts of “volunteer activity,” “volunteer assistance,” “volunteer organization,” “volunteer,” and “recipient of volunteer assistance.” According to Act, volunteer activity is a voluntary socially oriented, non-profit activity carried out by volunteers by providing volunteer assistance (free works and services). The list of areas of volunteer activity is not exhaustive, and therefore other types that are not prohibited by law are allowed. Volunteer organizations perform educational, informational, economic, protective and organizational functions. The state allows the activities of individual volunteers.¹⁴
- Law 4572-VI of 2012 “Non-Governmental Organizations” – NGOs are voluntary associations of individuals or legal entities for the exercise and protection of rights and freedoms, and for the satisfaction of public interests, particularly in the economic, social, cultural, environmental and other fields. This concept also includes associations of volunteers.¹⁵
- Law 5073-VI of 2012 “On Charitable Activities and Charitable Organizations”—according to the preamble “[t]his Law defines the general principles of charitable activities in Ukraine, ensures the legal regulation of the relationship in society aimed at developing charitable activities, the assertion of humanism and mercy, provides favorable conditions for the formation and the activities of charities.”¹⁶

For a long time, civil society in Ukraine was formal, and dominated by top-down initiatives from the state. Starting in 2012, the Coordination Council for Civil Society Development was established under the President of Ukraine which, in addition to officials of the presidential administration, executive authorities, and members of parliament, also included representatives of a number of civil society institutions that advocated for the strengthening of state policy in their relevant areas. The Coordination Council adopted a new National Strategy along with regional programs for promoting civil society development, laws on public associations, charity, and charitable organizations. The 2012 Strategy contained a list of strategic tasks, but only a few tasks were actually implemented. Each year, an action plan was drawn up on the basis of the Strategy, but these essentially duplicated the tasks of the previous plan. After the Revolution of Dignity, new action plans under the 2012 Strategy were not adopted. In 2015, the Coordination Council was liquidated, while the development of a new strategic document began with the involvement

of representatives of civil society institutions, some of whom were members of the liquidated Coordination Council. The new National Strategy for Civil Society Development in Ukraine for 2016–2020 was approved by the President of Ukraine in February 2016. Among the main shortcomings of the 2016 Strategy were the imperfect formulation of strategic objectives and the lack of indicators for monitoring and evaluating the results of implementing the Strategy, which made it difficult to assess the direct impact of implementing the annual plans. In November 2016, the President of Ukraine re-established the Coordination Council. More than 60% of the Coordination Council comprised representatives of civil society institutions, whereas they constituted only 40% of the Coordination Council of 2012.¹⁷ But all these changes had practically no effect on the two basic elements of civil society development: (1) the existence of an active position of the population, and (2) a high level of trust in the institutions of civil society.

Therefore it is not surprising that, on the whole, the volunteer movement in Ukraine developed rather slowly until 2014.¹⁸ In 2013, the World Giving Index, which ranks over 140 countries in the world according to how charitable they are, put Ukraine in only 102nd place.¹⁹ However, in 2020, the country jumped to 20th place.²⁰ Between 2016 and 2020, Ukraine was among the top ten countries that saw the largest increases in the overall index.²¹

2.2. Awakening civil activism, Russian GONGOs, and the political activation of the volunteer movement during Euromaidan

The first powerful surge of volunteer activity in Ukraine happened during the European Football Championship in 2012. According to the “EURO 2012 Ukraine” organizing committee, almost 24 thousand applications were received from those wishing to fill the almost five and half thousand required UEFA volunteer positions, with around 90% of the applications sent from Ukraine and Poland. A significant increase in the number of Ukrainian citizens involved in charitable and volunteer activities was observed during the Euromaidan.²² As the events of the Euromaidan of 2013–2014 proved, the transition of the civil society development process to a new, qualitatively higher level was not due to the state’s participation in this process but largely in spite of it. It was the confrontation between society and the state that became a catalyst for the rapid emergence and spread of the phenomena, the characteristic features of which were signs of the emergence of systemically new realities in Ukrainian society.²³ The level of self-organization of the population which took place from the beginning of the Euromaidan protests, as well as the processes that began to take place massively and actively in the environment of civil society, can be identified as the birth of civil society in modern Ukraine.²⁴

In Ukraine, civil society successfully deposed former president Viktor Yanukovich following the Revolution of Dignity, showing that an open and inclusive society more integrated with the European neighborhood is superior to continued subservience to Russia. Russia's objectives, however, are to promote the "Russian model," seek to reduce the influence of the United States, and become the "civilizational gravitational core"²⁵ for the region once again. Vladimir Putin nationalized Russian civil society, some of which was used to counter the Revolution of Dignity, support the annexation of Crimea, and undermine sovereignty and stir up social tensions throughout Ukraine. Beyond the borders of the former Soviet Union, Russia supports about 150 government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) with the goal of influencing policymakers, the political elite, and the youth. As international studies scholar, Joshua P. Mulford put it,

Compared to Western lobbyist organizations that rely on the strength of their argument, Russians see money as the most influential tool of persuasion.²⁶

Russia's main foreign policy goal in its neighborhood has been to extension both so-called "Russian World" (*Russkiy Mir*) and the Eurasian Union. The Kremlin's use of "Eurasian" ideas tie into the notion of the Russian World, which has been part of its foreign policy imperative since 2012 based on Russian language and culture, a shared history and heritage (from Kyivan Rus' to the Soviet Union), orthodoxy, and conservative values, along with economic integration through the Eurasian Economic Union. The Kremlin perceived that loyal groups are useful to amplify pro-government messages in the public space. These groups started being organized by the Russian state in 2005, and there are now around 150 such GONGOs affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Crimea and Donbas had its own "spin doctors," who provided ideology, along with human and financial resources. Researchers John Lough et al. concluded that while Moscow's messaging has the strong backing of Moscow's administrative resources, this same messaging "does not reflect the interests of the target population," noting further that "only 11% of Russian-speaking Ukrainians ally themselves with Russian cultural tradition."²⁷ According to Tatiana Zhurzhenko:

The majority opted for the Ukrainian state [...] However, there were also those who did—and still do—sympathize with the separatists and with Russia. [...] One of the difficult questions we will be confronted with after the war is how to live together again in one state.²⁸

Between February 5 and 14, 2014, the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation conducted an expert survey of NGO representatives in Ukraine on the topic of "Maidan and Civil Society." Among the positive influences of Euromaidan on

civil society, the experts noted the initiation of civic activity, the development of skills and technologies of self-organization, the multiplication of “social capital,” the demonstration of people power and related opportunities, and the willingness of citizens to donate funds for what they consider important.²⁹

These civic practices have led to major societal changes and the recognition of the importance of volunteerism, thus reinforcing the principles of responsibility and the importance of active direct participation in the transformational changes taking place in society. Almost simultaneously with the organization of acts of mass civil disobedience, a movement of “non-indifferent citizens” began to form, whose aim, in addition to direct participation in mass protests, was to provide direct support for Euromaidan in the provision of material necessities—food, medicine, hygiene products, warm clothes, etc. In this context, it is appropriate to speak of volunteering as arising from activist protest. The connections that were quickly established and built up in the first weeks and months passed the test of reliability in crisis situations, and eventually developed into long-term cooperation.³⁰ A characteristic feature of the development of the volunteer movement during this period was the involvement of social networks in supporting and disseminating civic initiatives, which mostly functioned in the format of “informal volunteer groups.”³¹

The world humanitarian practices traditionally associated with volunteering imply the gratuitous participation of volunteers in the performance of concrete tasks, which do not require the complete separation of the activist from his or her line of work—except in extraordinary situations such as disaster relief. The modern Ukrainian version of volunteering, in the expression of some of its wartime representatives, exists in a “24/7” format.³²

It seems impossible to determine the real number of participants in the Ukrainian volunteer movement due to its constant replenishment, unwillingness to advertise their activities, and the semi-legal nature of some volunteer organizations.³³ According to the data for March 2015, there were 132 volunteer organizations registered in the unified register of the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine. In May 2015, however, Davyd Arakhamia, founder of the People’s Project volunteer platform and coordinator of the Council of Volunteers at the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, gave the following assessment:

It was very difficult to collect statistics, but taking into account the data from the media, the registers of the Ministry of Social Policy, as well as the information provided by the Regional State Administrations, I counted 14.5 thousand volunteers who are professionally and constantly engaged in this activity and more than 2.5 thousand organizations (data from mobile operators, Privatbank, and other sources). Also, more than 1.5 million Ukrainians have helped the army at least once.³⁴

An opinion poll conducted jointly by the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation and the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) between September 12 and 14, 2014 found that 32.5% of Ukrainians already transferred their money to the accounts of the Ukrainian army between May and September, 23% employed the help of charitable foundations and volunteer organizations to transfer funds, articles, and products it is through these civic institutions, 9% participated in store-based campaigns, buying goods from the lists of articles required by the army and transferring them to volunteers, 7% were personally helping IDPs with items and money, and 3% were engaged in volunteering.³⁵

3. The beginning of total defense: the Donbas war period with the state “catching up” (2014–2022)

3.1. The incapacity of the state and the activity of the volunteer movement

The first losses in the war were a real shock. There was a blatant unpreparedness of state structures to respond effectively to challenges and to act in extreme conditions. Over the course of these events, civil society demonstrated an impressive ability to mobilize and took upon itself the most acute problems such as providing assistance. As Leonid Ilchuk writes, the Ukrainian army

remained virtually non-combatant, not well-equipped from all points of view. This was well-understood by Russia, which occupied Crimea without a “single shot.” That is why, in the realities of the social instability in the Ukrainian society, the need for volunteering has intensified. For its solving, the efforts and financial investments of the state were not enough, therefore the state and its organizations need the help of the population ready for unprofitable labor. This also happened in Ukraine, when volunteer battalions and volunteer organizations became the National Guard of Ukraine when defending the state from the Russian aggression together with the Armed Forces of Ukraine.³⁶

Precisely these flexible forms of volunteer activity that have proved in practice to be the most productive in bypassing bureaucratic procedures.³⁷ The issue of the actual lack of sufficient provision of the army with the most basic items (clothing, food, etc.) has brought the activities of volunteer activists beyond the assistance provided to “their friends and acquaintances” to a comprehensive assistance rendered to the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the National Guard, volunteer battalions, etc.³⁸

According to Horielov and Korniiievskiy “the growth of activity of the volunteer movement was due to two main factors: on the one hand the internal political crisis, which led to an imbalance in the public administration system, a lack of

quality management decisions, and a lack of resource capacity, and on the other hand external aggression, which deepened the imbalance between the state's ability to effectively perform its functions and meet the basic needs of its citizens."³⁹ With the beginning of the anti-terrorist operation in the east of Ukraine, "army volunteers," popularly called "warriors of the good," came to the fore.⁴⁰

A characteristic feature of the development of the volunteer movement has been the involvement of social networks in the support and dissemination of civic initiatives. Information technologies helped to create a new quality of communication between like-minded people and accelerated the timeframe required to bring volunteer projects to the level of their practical implementation.⁴¹ In emergency situations such as military conflicts social media exhibit infrastructural characteristics and the digital multitude exercises a collective will.⁴²

The volunteer movement had to "step in" and do what the state could not do due to its weak production base, lack of sufficient resources, lack of organization for the timely provision of these resources, and lack of sufficient support. Under such conditions, the enthusiastic and creative attitude of volunteers was impressive. Different types of volunteering work could be distinguished in this period for example:

- humanitarian assistance (for civilians in need, people living in the temporarily occupied territories);
- resettlement areas (displaced persons, evacuation of civilians from the frontline and near-frontline, assistance in acquiring and finding housing and work, social adaptation);
- medical and rehabilitation support, repair volunteering (restoration of military equipment), human rights direction (protection of the rights of people in difficult life situations);
- military equipment (design and manufacture of special equipment, development of high-tech systems);
- "Black Tulip" missions (finding and identifying bodies of missing soldiers);
- commemoration (civilians and soldiers killed in the conflict).

The development of the volunteer movement in certain regions of Ukraine has had its own peculiarities. The volunteer movement in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine faces particularly difficult conditions. Representatives of the quasi-state entities, the so-called Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and the Luhansk People's Republic (LNR), do not recognize the activities of NGOs that they do not control, which forces volunteers to either cooperate with them or conduct underground activities.⁴³

In this regard, the majority of volunteers avoided trips on the territory outside the control zone of the Ukrainian troops. This was most often done by the religious organizations, who were more likely to convince fighters that they were not involved in the conflict. However, the main way of getting humanitarian aid for the people who remain in the occupied territories was to leave the Ukrainian side along the front line. From February 21, 2015, this opportunity was limited due to the need for passes issued by the Ukrainian side only in justified cases. According to the law enforcement agencies, this is due to the fact that some volunteers 'delivered' alcohol and narcotics at certain costs to the front, and could also be informants for the separatists.⁴⁴

Volunteers have also been involved in public services ranging from the delivery and distribution of humanitarian aid to cracking down on corruption.⁴⁵ In fact, volunteers have ended up filling the information and communication void caused by government withdrawal, and have played a special role in dealing with corruption-related activities, such as abuses by local authorities and at checkpoints, cases involving the theft and resale of ammunition and special military equipment, the quality of food for the soldiers, and many others.⁴⁶ Volunteers have also played their part in rescuing prisoners of war. Officially, the state services are engaged in this, but they cannot do so without volunteers.⁴⁷ With the beginning of the anti-terrorist operation, army volunteers (70% of the total number) stepped forward, therefore it can be argued that volunteers replaced some state structures.⁴⁸ According to expert opinion of the Kurus Institute of Political and Ethnic Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, this is a temporary way out of the situation with the supply of the Ukrainian army, because NGOs should not perform and substitute the functions of the state.⁴⁹ Yet the volunteer movement has demonstrated the ability of Ukrainian society to self-organize, bringing to the fore such concepts as social responsibility, solidarity, accountability, and transparency at a time when the state is not fully capable of performing its organizational functions.

At the beginning of the active volunteer movement, there were practically no mechanisms for its interaction with the authorities. Later, however, the significant role and high authority of volunteers pushed the authorities to cooperate.⁵⁰ One of the main problems regarding interaction between civil society and the public authorities in Ukraine has been the lack of trust. Volunteers comprise the social group with the highest trust ratings among the population, a fact which also brings their role and importance to the forefront of political interest. The term "volunteer" quickly became a trend in Ukrainian political "fashion."⁵¹ The rapid development of the volunteer movement led to the issue of its control by the relevant state authorities and state structures.⁵² For example, Yuriy Biryukov, the founder of the "Wings of Phoenix" volunteer organization was advisor to the President of Ukraine (from August 2014 to May 2019) and advisor to the Minister of Defense (from

October 2014 to 2019); Tetiana Rychkova, the founder of the Dnipro branch of “Wings of Phoenix” and one of the most famous volunteers, started working at the Ministry of Defense in November 2014, heading a new state-owned enterprise engaged in the material support of the troops; and Heorhiy Tuka, the head of the “People’s Home Front” volunteer association, was appointed as the governor of the Luhansk regional civil-military administration⁵³ (from July 2015 to April 2016).⁵⁴

On the initiative of Davyd Arakhamia, adviser to the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, several volunteers became consultants of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine (“Volunteer Troops”) in the fall of 2014. Members of the Volunteer Troops have been repeatedly criticized by their fellow volunteers. People’s deputies of the Ukrainian parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, have accused the volunteers of allegedly sitting on schemes when they should have been fighting. Nevertheless, the volunteers managed to implement a number of systemic projects. However, during the first year of work, most of the volunteers resigned, and their initiatives were transferred to the Reforms Project Office of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine.⁵⁵ According to the Reform Projects Office, “Volunteers still play an active part in the efforts of Ministry of Defense and Development of Armed Forces of Ukraine both as individual activists and representatives of volunteer organizations, or via a collective body of the Volunteer Council of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine. The role of volunteers in terms of civilian control of Armed forces of Ukraine is still enormous.”⁵⁶

On December 12, 2019, Volodymyr Zelensky signed Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 879 which introduced the position of the Commissioner for Volunteer Affairs (non-staff), whose main tasks “are to monitor the situation regarding the guarantees of observance of the rights and legitimate interests of volunteers.”⁵⁷ This was followed on March 1, 2022 by Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 86 concerning the appointment of a Commissioner for Cooperation with Public Associations and Volunteer Associations, whose task was to establish the “effective interaction of citizens, public associations, voluntary formations formed or self-organized for the defense of Ukraine and voluntarily participating in national security, defense, and defense of the state, with the Armed Forces of Ukraine, other military formations, and law enforcement agencies formed in accordance with Ukrainian laws.”⁵⁸

Ukraine has had a register of volunteers since 2014. Registration is not mandatory and its main purpose is to protect volunteers from unfair accusations and minimize all risks in matters of taxation.⁵⁹ The co-operation of the state and the volunteer movement has also been marked by the passage of the aforementioned Law No. 2519-IX of 2022 “On Amendments to the Law of Ukraine ‘On volunteer activity’ to Support Volunteering.”⁶⁰ In particular, from now on the law allows for additional volunteer assistance during wartime for the following areas: for central

and local authorities and self-governing bodies; for enterprises, institutions, and organizations; for associations of citizens as well as private persons; and for the protection and rescue of animals, among other things. The law also stipulates that volunteer assistance can be provided online via the Internet or other telecommunication networks.⁶¹ Other important changes are:

If a volunteer receives reimbursement for travel expenses or medical exams or vaccinations, this money will not be considered as income. Accordingly, the volunteer will not pay taxes on them: Personal Income Tax (PIT) and Unified Social Tax (UST). Also, there will be no tax on the costs of participation in events organized by NGOs, Charity Organizations, which is important when it comes to, for example, training volunteers (and not only) in first aid, psychological adaptation, work with PTSD.⁶²

There have been mixed opinions about the “politicization” of Ukrainian volunteering. While noting the undoubted benefits of popularizing the very idea of voluntary activity for the benefit of society, it is often argued that getting even the most reputable volunteers into the “caste of politicians” is unlikely to allow them to change the existing system. Nevertheless, they can significantly undermine confidence in the public sector as a whole, since recognition of the volunteers’ merits has demonstrated to the general public the attractiveness of volunteering, factually replacing the non-working “social elevators.”⁶³ Beyond the criticism of co-optation, it is also noted that, while individual volunteer initiatives have been very effective, without a clear organization of interaction between the public and the authorities the potential effect is lost.⁶⁴

3.2. ‘Oligarchic volunteering’ and possible side effects

In its early stages, the volunteer movement as a new phenomenon had positive elements but was also fraught with problems. According to expert opinion of the above-mentioned Kuras Institute the latter has included the abuse of volunteer status, non-transparent accounting, fundraising to support the army by pseudo-volunteers, the secret resale of volunteer military aid and the facts of its disappearance, misappropriations during demobilization, refusal of the military leadership to register the devices and special equipment provided by volunteers, and the photographing of the locations of individual military units, available military equipment, and the faces of soldiers and their disclosure in public reports, etc. Some of these negative phenomena were typical for the first stages of a war and were subsequently minimized, while others appeared later.⁶⁵

A special phenomenon has been “political oligarchic volunteering” which concerns the creation and activities of humanitarian and charitable foundations set

up by Ukrainian oligarchs such as Rinat Akhmetov, Ihor Kolomoisky, Hennadiy Korban, and others.⁶⁶ In 2014 the country's oligarchs were at the forefront of Ukraine's response to the Russian annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the separatist war in the Donbas region. The business elite financed volunteer battalions and several oligarchs were appointed to serve as governors of unstable regions. Thus, Ihor Kolomoisky was appointed governor of his native Dnipropetrovsk region, which borders the breakaway Donbas, Serhiy Taruta was appointed governor of the Donetsk region. As reported in the *Financial Times*, "They used their authority, resources and media power to mobilise the population against Russia's attempt to destabilise and break up the country."⁶⁷ In 2022, with Ukraine's army now battle-hardened, the country's oligarchs have been playing a more passive role in the nation's defense, donating money and supplies like millions of others of their compatriots.

Within a few years after the Revolution of Dignity, the malign influence of oligarchs in Ukraine had become so problematic that the U.S. Helsinki Commission concluded that "Oligarchs have captured the Ukrainian state, crowding out non-corrupt political parties and competing with one another to steal Ukraine's wealth."⁶⁸ President Zelensky launched a "de-oligarchization campaign" in early 2021 to insulate political processes and the media from the undue influence of the business elites.⁶⁹ According to Andrew Lohsen, on the one hand

Ukraine's richest individuals are almost uniformly backing the government in the war against Russia. This suggests they understand not only that a Russian takeover would be detrimental to their business interests, but also that the crisis provides an opportunity to improve their standing. So far, oligarchs have provided substantial donations to help Ukraine meet defense and humanitarian needs and have signaled their willingness to play a role in the country's eventual recovery.⁷⁰

On the other hand, as the past eight years have shown, oligarchs have the capacity to block reforms to root out corruption and to undermine Ukraine's path to Euro-Atlantic integration in an effort to protect their personal wealth and influence.

A week after Russian troops poured into Ukraine, a group of volunteers repurposed a large house outside the capital as field hospital. The owner, Viktor Pinchuk, one of Ukraine's richest men, like many of his fellow oligarchs had left the country at the outset of the war. Pinchuk, who has made return visits to Ukraine since then, initially agreed to allow the activists to use the unoccupied building, but the volunteers soon overstayed their welcome and resisted their removal: "We are here until the victory."⁷¹

The level of volunteering among the Ukrainian population is such that it may well be associated in the future with the problem of the social and post-traumatic adaptation of volunteers, especially the return to a peaceful life on the

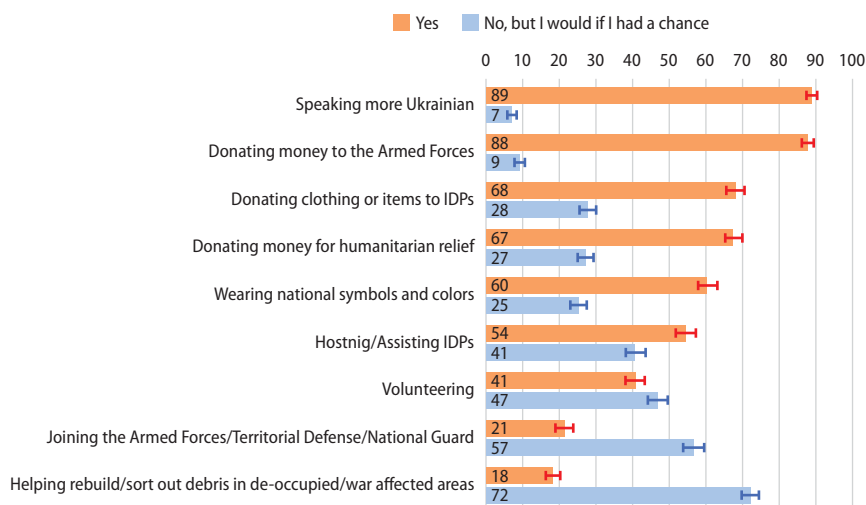
part of “frontline volunteers.” They may encounter problems in their personal lives, experience various psychological disorders, and may exhibit an increased level of aggression and intolerance.⁷²

4. Total defense and the civil volunteer movement after the full-scale Russian invasion (2022–)

According to Daniel N. Posner, there are two models of civil society: the “advocacy” or “watchdog” model, which aims at controlling the state, and the “substitution” model, which aims at providing social welfare.⁷³ Kateryna Zarembo, who has examined the role of volunteers in defense reform, has pointed to a double effect: volunteering strengthens state defense capacities while also weakening them, mainly by substituting for the state, which is a feature of fragile polities. On the one hand, state capacities have increased in areas where supply and procurement were hampered, and on the other hand, the provision of services more efficiently than the state or substitution for the state has been seen as having a weakening effect. As a result, smaller voluntary initiatives have ceased to operate, while larger forces have reoriented themselves towards meeting basic needs on the front line.⁷⁴

A survey by the Razumkov Centre in September-October 2022 offers critical assessments of how Ukraine was developing before the start of Russia’s full-scale military aggression. Thus, in December 2021, the majority (65.5%) of respondents believed that events in Ukraine were developing in the wrong direction. Ten months later, at the time of the above-mentioned survey, the share of respondents having this view had decreased significantly, and 51% of respondents now believe that events in Ukraine are developing in the right direction. Among social institutions, Ukrainians have the greatest trust in the Armed Forces (96%), the President of Ukraine (82%), humanitarian and charitable organizations (78%), and the Church (70%), whereas distrust is most often expressed in political parties (77%), the courts (72%), banks (66%), and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (60%). In choosing between two models of social development, European and Russian, 70% prefer the European model, while only 0.5% favor the Russian one (in 2017, these figures were 58% and 4% respectively). The share of respondents giving a positive answer regarding the readiness to fight for their country in time of war has steadily increased, from 40% in 2011 to 57% in 2020 and to 71% in 2022.⁷⁵

According to a survey conducted by the National Democratic Institute in cooperation with the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology on January 4-16, 2023, 41% of the population of Ukraine has been involved in volunteering, while other forms of assistance also showed exceptionally high values, as shown in the graph below (Figure 1).⁷⁶

Figure 1. Have you done any of these since the start of the full-scale war? (January 2023).

Source: NDI.

Since February 24, 2022, the volunteer movement in Ukraine has intensified significantly and the Volunteer Platform⁷⁷ has become one of the main sources of finding opportunities. The platform was launched back in March 2021 by the Ukrainian Volunteer Service, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the IT company SoftServe with the support of the Ministry of Youth and Sports in order to unite volunteers and organizations from all over Ukraine.⁷⁸

“Now in Ukraine everyone is a volunteer objectively,” says Natalia Povtar, a lawyer with the Centre for Democracy and Rule of Law.⁷⁹ In his evening address video of December 4, 2022, President Zelensky put it this way: “[...] we have to help each other more than ever and care for each other even more. And please don’t ask if you can help, and how. Just help when you see you can.”⁸⁰ The next day, Zelensky signed Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 825 of 2022 establishing the Golden Heart award of the President of Ukraine

with the aim of recognizing the significant contribution of volunteers to the provision of assistance and the development of the volunteer movement, in particular during the implementation of measures to ensure the defense of Ukraine, the protection of the safety of the population and the interests of the state in connection with the military aggression of Russia Federation against Ukraine and overcoming its consequences.⁸¹

There have also been reports in the press about the emergence in Russia of volunteering to help the Russian army and war-stricken civilians, but this remained the exception in 2022. According to a co-founder of one volunteer group, volunteering

provided participants a form of psychological relief, adding that “they feel as though they have the power to make a difficult situation better.”⁸²

Taras Kuzio believes that during the first decades of independence, Ukraine was an “immobile state,” which its roots are weak national unity, weak state capacity, lack of serious reforms, political instability.⁸³ Then in 2014 the political authorities once again proved unable to manage the fateful crisis, and the country was only saved from rapid collapse by the rapidly established paramilitary units—questioning the state monopoly on the use of force, which is one of cornerstones of modern statehood—and the growing role of civilian volunteers.⁸⁴ As a result of Russian aggression “volunteers may simultaneously be focused on alleviating immediate needs while also laying the foundation for broader cultural and political change.”⁸⁵ However, at the present moment, the democratizing function of civil society obviously recedes into the background when the country has to deal with humanitarian crises and military defense.⁸⁶ Anne Applebaum draws attention to the fact that

Ukraine is not a nation of saints. Not everyone with a Ukrainian passport is fighting for the country, or even planning to remain in the country. Not everyone is active, brave, or optimistic. [...] But what matters is what comes next, and voices like those will not be the decisive ones in postwar Ukraine. [...] The *volonteri* will create Ukraine’s postwar culture [...].⁸⁷

Unusual as it may seem, part of the assistance provided by NGOs to the army is the purchase of weapons. Such militarism would normally be distasteful among civilians, but at most an activist will quietly add, behind the backs of others, that he does not like it when they wish Russians dead, stating that “we should learn to kill without hatred, so that we do not become like them.”⁸⁸ At the beginning of the massive Russian attacks on the civilian infrastructure, Ukrainians were more active in supporting the armed forces. According to data from Opendatabot in October 2022 alone, donations to three popular charitable foundations of the country—United24, Come Back Alive, and Charity Foundation of Serhiy Pritula—amounted to UAH 1.5 billion (around USD 41 million). More than 80 percent of the aid went to support the army, while the rest went to humanitarian aid and health care.⁸⁹ Natalia Shapovalova’s assessment of civic voluntarism during Euromaidan is valid even in 2022 too: “Ukraine’s new form of civic activism is striking in its sources of support and its tactics for reaching out to society. Unlike traditional NGOs that depend on foreign funding or support from oligarchs or private donors, new movements engage in crowdfunding and use social media, reaching out to thousands of Ukrainians and encouraging them to participate by giving.”⁹⁰

The Ukraine Reform Conference (URC) is an international event organized annually since 2017, the purpose of which is to discuss the progress of reforms in Ukraine with the participation of Ukrainian and foreign officials, including

representatives of the European Union, NATO, G7, civil society, and the private sector. The URC 2022 conference in Lugano was originally planned as the fifth conference, but against the backdrop of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, it was reoriented into a broad political process known as the Ukraine Recovery Conference. The end of the conference civil society members presented the Civil Society Manifesto 2022 (Lugano Declaration).⁹¹ Commenting on the declaration, Svitlana Sova, representative of the Union for Responsible Citizens, said on December 2022 that

We have declared the framework and principles of development. Development in Ukraine is not possible without the principles we have noted in this manifesto—Ukraine with a European identity, with representative democracy, and where decision making processes are transparent, inclusive and participative. We have stated the red lines that cannot be crossed.... To date over 250 organisations have signed this manifesto.⁹²

In 2022 the brave people of Ukraine represented by their President, elected leaders, and civil society, were awarded the European Parliaments 2022 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought.⁹³ Emine Ziyatdinova Crimean Tatar documentary photographer from Ukraine formulated the following reflection:

[...] in addition to the army, Ukraine's current success is mainly due to civil society. Every single person I know is doing something to help the common cause. And you don't have to think of it in a vertical system where somebody would have told them that this is their duty. Moreover, they are not afraid to take to the streets, war or no war, if they see injustice in the system, they will take to the streets right now.⁹⁴

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