

# Civil Society in Conflict-Ridden Countries: The Case of Ukraine's Military Volunteers

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## ABSTRACT

The ongoing armed conflict in the Eastern Ukraine, that started in 2014, has involved various non-state actors. This research explores the roles civil society organizations play in the conflict environment. The object of the study is Ukrainian military volunteer groups, formal and informal civil society organizations, that provide supplies to the Ukrainian armed forces.

Initially, due the state's lack warfare preparation, the Ukrainian military volunteer movement emerged as a rapid response to the needs of paramilitary and regular armed forces, undertaking the conventional security function of the state. Within the several years of a protracted conflict, military volunteers continue to assist the armed forces with material provisions, despite decreased urgency for the supplies. This study aims to explore the narrative of the military volunteers, as a non-state actor that continues to be involved in the conflict dynamics.

First, I examine whether the activities of the volunteers have undergone any changes, and if so, how their work has transformed. Then, the relations between volunteers and other actors involved in the conflict are analyzed. Lastly, I explore the motivations of military volunteers to continue their work.

Supply provision to the armed forces is not considered to be a conventional civil society role in the conflict, as opposed to peacebuilding initiatives. The study seeks to expand the existing theoretical and empirical knowledge on the capacity of civil society in the context of a protracted armed conflict by providing insights on how Ukrainian military volunteers organize their activities.

Key words: civil society, non-state actor, armed conflict, Ukraine, Donbas war.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DNR	Donetsk People's Republic ( <i>Donestkaya Narodnaya Respublika</i> )
LNR	Lugansk People's Republic ( <i>Luganskaya Narodnaya Respublika</i> )
EU	European Union
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
ATO	Anti-Terrorist Operation
OSCE	Organization of Security and Co-Operation in Europe
OOC	Joint Forces Operation ( <i>Operaciya Obyednanyh Syl</i> )
IDPs	Internal Displaced People
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OUN	Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists
CSO	Civil society organizations

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Research background**

It is said that currently, the world is at its most peaceful times. Indeed, the number of people dying due to the armed conflicts is immensely smaller compared to the 1940s or even the 1960s. Yet, despite the decrease of the casualties, people worldwide are still suffering from a violent disorder – wars, frozen conflicts, or political instabilities. Apart from human losses, violent clashes influence geopolitical trends and impact migration, environment, and other social issues. Governments, international institutions, and academia devote their efforts to studying armed conflicts – causes, ramifications, and various actors involved.

One of the most notable current armed conflicts would be the one in Eastern Ukraine – immense turbulence in Europe since the Yugoslav Wars. In 2013 peaceful anti-government protests called Euromaidan started the events that led to the clashes between the Ukrainian army and separatists' groups in the Eastern regions of Ukraine, Donetsk, and Lugansk. Months after the end of the protests, pro-Russian separatist groups in the Eastern part claimed independence from the Ukrainian state, which led to first, an Anti-Terrorist operation and later to an armed conflict with series of combat fights. The armed conflict soon was labeled as the Donbas War, named after the region where the fighting occurred. On one side of the war, there are Ukrainian armed forces and pro-Ukrainian paramilitary groups and other separatists supported by the Russian Federation. Some researchers go as far as naming the conflict a Russia's war in Ukraine (Bertelsen, 2017).

The protracted war of seven years received much attention in the media and is regarded as one of the impactful conflicts to watch not only due to its significance for the domestic environment but also due to its influence on relations between world superpowers (International Crisis Group, 2020). Ukraine was also put under a brighter spotlight in the academic community. Hence the research on the Ukrainian crisis is rather extensive.

The scholarship covers this conflict in the context of regional and world politics, mostly as a confrontation between the West and Russia (Gil, 2020; Heller, 2018; Centrella, 2020; Shevtsova, 2020) or the impact the Ukrainian crisis has on the European and world security (Berryman, 2017; Rieker et al., 2016; Polyakov, 2018). Other perspectives on the crisis include domestic processes - development of the Ukrainian nationalism as a result of the external aggression, the role of the nationalism and far-right movements, and their influence on the conflict dynamics (Lazarenko, 2020; Ischenko, 2020; Hariss, 2020; Clarke, 2018; Josticova, 2017).

Moreover, the Donbas conflict is often regarded as an example of a hybrid war (Lanozka, 2016; Hrebeniuk et al., 2018). Compared to conventional wars, hybrid conflicts involve a range of non-state actors. Therefore, studies also focus on various forces such as pro-Ukrainian paramilitary groups, Russian proxies in Donetsk and Luhansk, and Russian special forces in Crimea (Likhachev, 2016; Dolia, 2018; Bukkvol, 2016). Overall, there are multiple perspectives on the unfolding conflict, and it is crucial to comprehend all of the narratives in order to understand the conflict dynamics fully. Only by including the narratives of all actors, both global and local, can the conflict in Ukraine be understood and consequently resolved.

The Ukrainian crisis had a significant impact on the consolidation of civil society (Shapovalova, 2018; Shvets, 2018;), especially in creating a military volunteer movement that has been a part of the Donbas war since 2014. A military volunteer movement<sup>1</sup> emerged back in 2014 in Ukraine after the mass anti-government series of protests called Euromaidan. The military volunteer movement is recognized to be the public response to the armed conflict and the state's lack of preparation in terms of necessary military provisions and human resources, to be exact. Military volunteers or *volontery* in Ukrainian are individuals who began to support

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<sup>1</sup> Sometimes it is also referred to as “defense volunteer movement” (see Keudel, 2020) or “ATO volunteering” (see Zhuzha, 2015).

the Ukrainian armed forces or paramilitary groups almost immediately after the armed conflict in Donbas. The support consisted of providing basic supplies, such as ammunition, food, uniforms. The movement was immediately labeled an unprecedented phenomenon mainly for two reasons – 1) it is rather uncommon for civil society to take over the state's function of security and defence (Puglisi, 2015; Krystapovych, 2015; Zarembo, 2017) and 2) although Ukraine had previously experienced mass public mobilization, its civil society is still considered to be weak, unsustainable and apolitical; thus the appearance of this vibrant movement is a new development in the discussion on Ukrainian civil society (Lutsevych, 2013; Smaglyi, 2017; Tregub, 2019).

### **Research gap and research questions**

Most scholarly articles regarded military volunteers as a necessary state substitution when the government could not perform its functions due to political crisis and unexpected foreign aggression (Krystapovych, 2015; Puglisi, 2015; Vasylenko, 2018; Worschech, 2017). Nevertheless, several years into the war, the political crisis had passed, and although the conflict is protracted, the actual number of combat and casualties decreased. Furthermore, although the number of military volunteers decreased over time, four years after the beginning of the armed conflict, the organizations continue to operate despite that the initial urgency of their presence has passed. The case of military volunteers in Ukraine is somewhat novel, and therefore naturally understudied in the context of an ongoing conflict. Most of the studies analyzed the primary functions of military volunteers and focused on well-established registered organizations, overlooking the role of informal groups. Some studies looked into other tasks that military volunteers might perform outside the war domain. That included their possible role in state's and nation-building (Oleinik, 2018), reform processes (Zarembo, 2017), and democratization (Worschech, 2017). The scholars assume that the military volunteers who supplied necessary provisions to the army either disappeared or changed their focus of

activities. However, after a series of preliminary interviews and fieldwork in Ukraine, it was clear that military volunteers continue their initial activities years after the start of the conflict.

Ukrainian researchers have also examined the phenomenon of military volunteers. Similar to Western scholars, Ukrainian scholarship also tends to focus on the role of volunteers in terms of state substitution and high level of the future potential of the volunteer movement (Madryga, 2018). Moreover, the motivations of the volunteers are barely studied, and the rationale of their activities is simply explained by the rise of patriotic feelings as a result of Russian aggression (Vasylenko, 2018). Thus, the military movement needs to be reassessed and researched under the current conditions of a protracted conflict. Therefore, this research is set to identify what type of military volunteer organizations continue to be active, systemize their work, and analyze if and how their functions have changed since the start of the armed conflict. Thus, the central question of this research is:

*What are the main features of the Ukrainian military volunteer movement?*

To address the main research question, it was further divided into three sub-questions:

1. Have the activities of military volunteers changed in the course of the ongoing conflict in the Eastern Ukraine? If so, how the activities have transformed?
2. What are the motives of the military volunteers to continue their activities?
3. What are the relations between military volunteers and other actors involved in the conflict?

In this research, I show that the Ukrainian military movement, its relations with the state has underwent significant transformations since the start of the armed conflict and its rationale is far more complex than the role of supply provision. Overall, the activities of the volunteers can be described as enhanced professionalized material support, medical and emotional assistance to the military personnel.

The activities of the military volunteers do not present a conventional case of the role of civil society in the armed conflict. They are not substituting the state any longer, are involved

in the combat fighting or conducting any peacebuilding initiatives. Yet, due to established trustworthy relations with the military, they can be described as an outreach institution between the military and Ukrainian society overall. The emotional aspect of being involved in the war, as well as worsened relations with the state have influenced the motivations of volunteers to continue their activities despite the decreased amount combat in the war zone and consequently, the reduced necessity of their involvement.

### **Methodology and timeline of the research**

When I first got interested in the recent developments of civil society in Ukraine, there have been few mentions of military volunteers in scholar works and some studies on the post-Euromaidan civil society. Military volunteers were not the primary object of my research; first, my focus was on the changes in the Ukrainian civil society after Euromaidan. Hence, to fully comprehend the contemporary changes in society, I conducted my first field trip back in 2017. The early stage of my research resembles the inductive method, meaning that I had no hypothesis before collecting data and doing the fieldwork. In other words, following the inductive method, I approached my primary fieldwork with little knowledge on the research topic with no predictions on possible outcomes. Qualitative research method, in-depth semi-structured interviews were used in the study to gain an extensive understanding of the new phenomena. I conducted my first preliminary interviews with the representatives of civil society and government, attended several conferences organized by the Kyiv municipal government and civil society organizations to identify what new features of Ukrainian civil society have emerged as the result of an ongoing armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

After analyzing the preliminary interview and the second round of the literature review, the research gap was evident. Therefore, this study focused on a specific aspect of the post-Euromaidan civil society – military volunteer movement. This study focuses on specific civil society organizations – thirteen military volunteer groups, both formal and informal, that

support the armed military and paramilitary forces in the conflict zone. All of the organizations are based in Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, and were active since the start of the conflict in 2014. The interviews were conducted in summer 2018, meaning that the chosen organizations had been active for at least four years. Since I was set to include informal groups into the narrative, I used the purposive and snowball sampling method – I was referred to most informal groups with the help of contacts established during preliminary interviews. Another qualitative way of research was added to support and validate obtained data – participant observations. Although most of the interviews were conducted in the organizations' offices, to comprehend the work of military volunteers fully, it was essential to observe their work in the field – the conflict zone. Thus, as a part of my fieldwork, I joined one of the military volunteer groups on its three-day trip to the conflict zone to deliver provisions to the military. There, I studied the interactions between the military and the volunteer group, the actions of the volunteer group, and its communication with the locals. Lastly, the collected interviews were interpreted with thematic analysis method, reported and discussed, referring to the existing literature and conceptual frameworks on civil society.

Military volunteers operate within two dimensions – they are an essential segment of the contemporary Ukrainian civil society and an actor that plays a role in the armed conflict in Donbas. Therefore, the concepts of civil society, its functions, and relations with the state both in a tranquil environment and an armed conflict setting were used in this research. However, if the notion of civil society in tranquil conditions has been studied intensively since the times of Greek philosophers, its conceptualization in the times of violence and war is still ongoing. The framework of analysis suggests by Marchetti and Tocci (2009) was used as a starting point for understanding the concept of civil society during the conflict. Their factors of analysis served as a basis for semi-structured interviews conducted during the field trip.

Although acknowledging the ongoing nature of the chosen topic, the timeframe of the research is from the year of 2014 up until the end of 2018. The year 2014 marks the beginning of the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine and can be considered the bloodiest in the course of the war with such devastating battles as Ilovaisk and Debaltsevo. The first three years of the conflict, 2014, 2015, and 2016 were the most active in terms of combat fights and, as mentioned by the interviewed groups, military volunteer activities. Since the research inquiries into the work of volunteers after the demand for their help decreased, it was rather logical to wait a few years before starting the interviews. The year of 2018 also marks the transformation of the armed conflict in Donbas from the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) to Joint Forces Operation (Operaciya Obyednanyh Syl). It is also the last year of President's Petro Poroshenko term, succeeded by Volodymyr Zelenskyi in May 2019. The treatment of the conflict and military volunteers by both Presidents are somewhat different (for more, see Chapter IV). Therefore, the year 2018 serves as another margin for this research.

### **Research originality**

The originality of this study lies in contributing primarily to empirical findings in two dimensions. Firstly, since military volunteers are an important segment of the modern Ukrainian civil society, this research contributes to the discussion on the development of civil society in Ukraine. Secondly, military volunteers operated initially and are still working within the context of armed conflict. Most of the literature that examines civil society and conflict focuses on the peacebuilding and mediation functions of civil society and rarely analyzes organizations that operate outside those functions. Reasonably, due to the dangerous environment of the armed conflict, it is difficult to provide an in-depth investigation of the activities of those organizations that work specifically in the conflict zone, especially the informal civil society groups. Therefore, this research contributes to understanding how civil

society's work can vary in the framework of the armed conflict by introducing the case of military volunteers in the pool of academic literature.

Moreover, the study contributes to the theory of civil society, expanding the existing understanding of the functions of civil society when it comes to armed conflict dynamics. Most of the academic scholarship that does focus on the role of civil society in the conflict analyzes it with regards to its peacebuilding and conflict transformation aspects. It is widely suggested that civil society actors can be instruments in bringing the conflicting parties to the dialogue (Irene&Majekudumni, 2017; Witt&Balfe, 2016; Mikhelidze & Pirozzi, 2008; Barnes, 2009; Hultin, 2014; Boonpunth, 2015). Due to the complexity of both subjects, civil society, and conflict, the connection between the two is "ambivalent and ambiguous" (Hultin, 2014, p. 208). Due to the diversity of conceptualization of civil society in general and its role in the conflict, there has been an increasing number of studies aimed at analyzing civil society organizations that work in the conflict outside of the peacebuilding and conflict transformation perspectives.

In the course of my fieldwork, I uncovered several informal groups of military volunteers, activities of which were previously overseen by the existing literature. My field trip to the conflict zone, together with one of such groups, allowed me to understand the relations between military volunteers and the army personnel. To my knowledge, when studying civil society in conflict settings, it is rare for a researcher to accompany the groups to the combat area due to security reasons. In fact, in studies on Ukrainian military volunteers, I believe I am the first to include such field trips in my research methodology. Therefore, this particular part of my data collection provides more in-depth insights on the research topic and employs a new method for studying the role of civil society in the conflict.

## **Chapters overview**

Chapter I is devoted to the conceptual framework of the research. Firstly, it tackles the most used notion of this research – the concept of volunteering. Then I continue with the conceptual framework of civil society. Although this study focuses on civil society in the context of armed conflict, first and foremost, it is essential to provide the theoretical foundation of the term civil society. Then it explains the traditional and modern understanding of civil society as well as its relations with the state. Later in the chapter, I present the existing approaches to studying civil society in the context of armed conflict. The chapter also covers the research completed on civil society's role in other countries during and after conflict. It establishes that majority of the empirical and theoretical studies have been done on civil society's role in peacebuilding or conflict management, which creates a significant literature gap.

Chapter II presents the qualitative approach used for this study: in-depth semi-structured interviews and participant observations. It describes the limitations of the research and other aspects of the data collection, such as the process and challenges of the fieldwork. Lastly, I explain how the collected interview was analyzed using the thematic analysis approach.

Chapter III looks into the causes of the Donbas war in terms of available approaches – role of historical myths, international and domestic aspects. I explain that the confrontation between Ukraine and Russia dates back to the origins of both countries. As a result, the Crimean annexation and Donbas war is not merely territorial dispute but cultural and ideological. Here I also explore the role of various actors involved in the hybrid war between Russia and Ukraine, explicitly focusing on the nationalists' groups, whose activities are strongly linked to military volunteers. I conclude that despite continuing to be an active actor

of the conflict, the narrative of the military volunteers is excluded from the discussion and therefore needs to be studied.

Chapter IV explains the context within which military volunteers operate - conflict in Eastern Ukraine. It provides a brief overview of the war and its proceedings, current state of the conflict, the role of volunteer battalions in Donbas war, and reasons why the military volunteer movement occurred. Most importantly, I explain how I narrowed down the existing military volunteer groups to thirteen organizations and provide brief information about the chosen organizations.

Chapter V provides an overview of the development of civil society in Ukraine and existing coverage on military volunteers. First, it analyses the studies on the Ukrainian civil society since the country's independence up to the armed conflict in the East, and ultimately the scholarship on military volunteer movement. It suggests that so far, there is still has been little done on the Post-Euromaidan civil society and specifically military volunteers. Despite contradicting views on the movement, most of the scholars regard military volunteers as a substitute of the state. However, I conclude that with the conflict protraction, the role of the movement has changed and needs to be reassessed.

Chapter VI is dedicated to the analysis of the collected data. In order to answer the research questions, this chapter is organized into the following subsections:

1. Activities of the military volunteer organizations.
2. Relations between military volunteers and other actors, particularly with the Ukrainian state, international donors, diaspora and the nationalist groups.
3. Military volunteers' motives to continue working.

First, in this chapter, I identify and provide a detailed assessment of the main functions of the interviewed military volunteer organizations - material, emotional and medical aid. Analysis of the emotional support that military volunteers provide to the army also covers the

role of the church in the Ukrainian conflict, specifically the work of military chaplains. Following that, relations between military volunteers, international actors, Ukrainian diaspora are explored. Then I explain how interactions between military volunteers and the Ukrainian authorities have changed since the beginning of the conflict, as well as how military volunteers position themselves with regard to the state. Finally, I explain the motivations behind the remaining volunteer movement.

The paper concludes with the discussion of the analyzed findings, how these findings answered the research questions and summarizes the review of the study's contributions.

## **CHAPTER I CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will mainly cover the concepts used in this dissertation, particularly the notion of volunteerism and civil society. I also explain why due to societal and political context of Ukraine, in the course of this research, I use these two concepts interchangeably. Since the object of this research is directly involved in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine, sufficient conceptual theories on the work of the civil society in the conflict are also provided in this chapter.

#### **1.1. Concept of volunteering**

The word “volunteer” can be undoubtedly considered as the most used term throughout the entire study, not only it is one of the concepts present in the title, but it also stands for the subject of this research, Ukrainian military volunteers. Although this terminology is far more familiar to a general audience than other concepts used in social science due to popularity of the modern volunteer movement in Western society, it is essential to clarify the conceptuality of this term and its relation to the study.

It is curious that the word volunteer had strictly military connotation up until the mid-nineteenth century, usually referring to young men willingly enlisting for service. It is also believed that Red Cross organization was the first volunteer movement, initially formed to help wounded soldiers on a battlefield. Thus, although the word *volunteer* to most of the readers means a modern variation of philanthropical activities, its origin lies within the realm of modern armed conflict. Yet, the concept of volunteering in the form of caring and providing for the deprived and disadvantaged is argued to be as old as human history since altruism and helping those in need are encouraged in most major world religions (Hodgkinson, 2003). Nowadays, volunteering is recognized as a global phenomenon that contributes to solving

social, economic, cultural, humanitarian and peace-building matters, following the United Nations declaration of the year 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers.

However, when it comes to the academic definition of volunteering, the opinions of researchers differ, some of them offer rather broad and inclusive concepts, others are quite strict on what the components of volunteering should be. Perhaps the most used and cited stand on volunteering in recent literature was produced by Wilson. The author describes volunteering as “any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group, or organization” (Wilson, 2000, p. 2015). This definition does sound rather broad since researchers have an ongoing debate on what this concept constitutes. In 1996 researchers Cnaan, Handy and Wadsworth attempted to clarify the main perspectives on volunteering and identified up to eleven different definitions of volunteering (Cnaan et al., 1996). The notion of volunteering was analyzed through four dimensions: remuneration, voluntary nature, context and beneficiary. Ideally, only strangers should profit from a volunteer’s activities; however, some researchers recognize that self-help groups and people with similar background might also be considered as a beneficiary. The purest definition also insists that a volunteer should not be coerced, and his actions must be entirely non-compulsory, as opposed to mandatory volunteering as in high schools, for instance. Volunteer activities can also be either conventional, meaning work in a formal organization (Scheier, 1980) or informal, as simple as “giving unpaid help as an individual to people who are not relatives” (Rochester et al., 2016, p. 20).

The most argued dimension of volunteering is payment. Some researchers believe that volunteers can be considered as such only if they donate time and efforts without being paid (Adams, 1985; Shure, 1991; Smith, 1982), while Wilson argues that his definition allows volunteers to be reimbursed (Wilson, 2000). Yet, the prevalent perspective holds that volunteering is purely an unpaid work, it is approached as a non-profitable activity particularly

in the UK, the USA and other developed countries, focusing on large non-profitable organizations (Rochester et al., 2016). Another somewhat forgotten perspective is the idea of volunteering as serious leisure (Sachsman, 2017). Although nowadays the word leisure is widely associated with holidays and relaxation, Stebbins identified that “serious leisure” can be considered a systematic volunteer activity that “foster the acquisition and expression of a combination of special skills, knowledge, and experience” (Stebbins, 1996, p. 211).

One more view on volunteering is from civil society perspective, which can be observed in European and Latin regions (Rochester et al., 2016). Ever since the end of the Cold War, researchers renewed their interest in the communities struggling to build democratic societies, which subsequently put civil society in the centre of the analysis. Thus, instead of examining volunteering and civil society as separate matters, researchers suggest looking at how they relate to each other. Volunteering is considered to be directly linked to the establishment and development of civil society (Wilson & Musick, 1999). According to the civil society perspective of volunteering is seen as a driving factor for social change and correlates to the concept of social activism. The main difference between volunteering and social activism lies in the main function of the two activities- volunteerism pursues helping individuals in need and activism strives for a social change in the community. To be more specific, volunteerism is usually associated with philanthropy and providing services and help such as working in a soup kitchen, hospitals or charities. Examples of social activism include advocacy work, public demonstrations and even mass protests. Yet, these two concepts are not mutually exclusive; the roles of a volunteer and a social activist are usually socially constructed (Wilson, 2000) and are encouraged to be analyzed together (Marwell & Oliver, 1993; Henriksen & Svedberg, 2010).

As mentioned earlier, the concept of volunteering is often socially constructed, which is relevant to this research. Civil society did not exist in Soviet Union in its conventional Western connotation due to the state’s control of all the voluntary and self-organization spheres

(Evans, 2006). Yet, during Soviet period, people did provide unpaid services, however, the idea of volunteering one's time was closely connected to people's devotion to the USSR. One of the examples of volunteering could be considered youth organizations of Young Pioneers for children and teenagers, and Young Communist League for university students. The pioneers provided support to elderly, people with disabilities or animals during their free time and with no payment. Citizens also participated in Subbotnik, the days they helped with community services or cleaning. The participants' motivation to join and voluntary element of these volunteer activities can be questionable since the gatherings were organized by the Communist Party (Sillo, 2016). Yet the idea of helping the others without any remuneration, which is the core component of volunteering, was present in the extra-curricular activities of Soviet people.

In post-Soviet Ukraine, volunteering initially was seen as one of the institutions of civil society and was recognized as such in the state's legislation. Volunteering was legally acknowledged in Ukraine only in 2011 with the Parliament's law "About Volunteer Movement"<sup>2</sup>. Initially, the 2011 law required organizations to obtain the status of a "volunteer organization", which is one of the institutions of civil society according to the Ukrainian legislation. Still, as of 2011, only ten per cent of Ukrainians were involved in volunteering activities (Vasylenko, 2018). The peak of Ukrainian volunteer movement was reached with the emergence of military volunteers.

In 2015, due to the increasing number of military volunteers, the law was revised and now allows one individual to register as a volunteer and provide his or her services without affiliation to any civil society organizations. Moreover, the influence of military volunteer movement on the Ukrainian society was so massive that the revised law specifically included military volunteers into the definition of volunteering. If the 2011 version of the Ukrainian law "About Volunteer Movement" defines volunteer as a "person who voluntarily engages in

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<sup>2</sup> See this law at <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3236-17#Text>

charitable non-profitable activities that are useful for the society”, the later edition added specific actions of military volunteers to the general definition of a volunteer. Now a volunteer can be an individual who is “...rendering volunteer assistance to the Armed Forces of Ukraine, other military formations, law enforcement agencies, state authorities during the special period, legal regimes of emergency or martial law, conducting the anti-terrorist operation, taking measures to ensure national security and defense, repelling and deterring the Russian Federation's aggression in Donetsk and Luhansk regions...”. Another evidence of state’s acknowledgement of the significance of military volunteers is the remuneration provided by the state to a volunteer or his/her family in case of a volunteer’s death or injury.

In addition, it is also essential to clarify that although the organizations and civil society groups that are represented in this study are called volunteers, they do not necessarily fit the description suggested by the scholars and are indeed not an example of the purest definition of a volunteer that was presented earlier. For instance, despite the voluntary and unsalaried dimension present in the work of some of the thirteen organizations, others appeared to rely not only on the unpaid labour of its members but also full-time workers who receive monthly remuneration. Now, as discussed earlier, the purest concept of volunteerism implies the non-profitable work of the individual that benefits the certain cause. This was true for the Ukrainian military volunteers at the start of the armed conflict when most of their work was less organized and involved a substantially more prominent number of people. Hence, the Ukrainian public and media identified the people who were helping the army as volunteers. By the time of this research, however, the majority of interviewed volunteers grouped into foundations, organizations or charities with full or part-time workers who receive remuneration. Hence, although the Ukrainian society still refers to these groups as military volunteers, at the legislative level, the military volunteers are mostly registered as civil society organizations or other types of institutions. The two concepts of volunteering and civil society are closely

connected in this research and at some point, are even interchangeable. To support that, all of the analyzed Ukrainian academic literature also refers to volunteering as a form of civil society and social activism. Therefore, having already discussed the notion of volunteering, I will also be dealing with the concept of civil society in the next subchapter.

## **1.2.Traditional definitions of civil society**

The question of what civil society is and what are its functions is still open to debate since there is no coherent definition on which all scholars would agree. To understand the contemporary explanations of civil society, it is essential to look into its traditional meanings. One of the major Western explanations of civil society is liberal or Lockean; civil society is viewed as a self-regulated body that has the right and power to form and change the government. John Locke in his “Second Treatise” explains civil society as part of a state and created based on “mutual contract and consent among people and democratic participation”, however at the same time subordinate to the state’s authority (Csengeri, 2013, p. 8). Continuing the liberal thought, Montesquieu suggests that civil society is a unity of independent bodies, European affluent autonomous towns that limit the absolute power of the state. For Tocqueville, who constructed his idea of civil society by studying American society, these independent bodies are voluntary association among citizens. Thus, we can see two explanations of civil society – civil society as self-regulated apolitical body and politically engaged civil society that educated population and stimulates the effectiveness of the government.

Opposing liberalist view philosophers of critical theory examined the concept of civil society in a third way. For Hegel, people are driven only by self-interest thus he considered that civil society should be regulated by the state (Glasius, 2004; Kumar, 1993). For another critical thinker Marx, civil society is the partner of the bourgeois class in terms of keeping property rights. Italian philosopher Gramsci similarly to Marx, sees civil society as an

instrument of state to sustain hegemony. Hence, according to traditional theories, the concept of civil society can be viewed in four different ways, and this kind of undeniably influenced the contemporary understanding of civil society.

### **1.3. Contemporary definitions of civil society**

Modern scholars also give different definitions of civil society depending on the historical, theoretical and empirical context. Jensen (2006), for example, denies the idea that all of the definitions of civil society bear one common core idea and explains the idea of civil society either through its function or sphere. The concept of the sphere was first introduced by Rosenblum and Post who argued that contemporary society is composed of different spheres or “realms” with the state being one sphere and civil society - the other one (Rosenblum and Post, 2002; Jensen, 2006). According to this view, civil society and state are separate realms, state-public sphere and civil society-private. The functionalism approach explains civil society based on the responsibilities, tasks and functions (Jensen, 2006).

Hall suggests that civil society is self-organization of society that can cooperate with the state but still be distinguished as a separate body (Hall, 1998). On the contrary, Diamond sees civil society as “the realm of organized social life that is open, voluntary, self-generating, at least partially self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules” (Diamond, 1999). For Cavatorta, it is “a zone of voluntary associative life beyond family and clan affiliations but separate from the state and the market” (Zank, 2016, p. 211).

Contemporary political sociologists Cohen and Arato argue that civil society supposed to be an inseparable part of the democratic system, and can be generated through self-mobilizations as well as institutionalization by the legislature (Cohen & Arato, 1994).

According to Ottaway, civil society can be traditional-informal not structured organizations that are not entirely separate from the state and family, and modern-

professionalized NGOs that have clear boundaries from other parts of society. Regarding state-civil society relations, she suggests that if the state is strong then civil society is more likely to be modern, and a traditional one is more common for weak states since it is up to civil society organizations to fulfil the duties of the state (Ottaway, 2002).

Simply to give a practical example of modern civil society organizations (CSOs):

- “labour unions or worker organizations
- Social entrepreneurs employing innovative and/or market-oriented approaches for social and environmental outcomes
- grassroots associations and activities at local level
- cooperatives owned and democratically controlled by their members
- youth clubs
- independent radio, television, print and electronic media
- neighbourhood or community-based coalitions
- academic and research institutions
- organisations of indigenous peoples” (Cooper, 2018),

#### **1.4. Civil society and the state**

Having looked at the various definitions of civil society, it is clear that whether it is a traditional or contemporary approach, civil society is looked at the prism of its relationship with the state. Nowadays, researchers mostly focus on the role of civil society in relation with the state, and not so much its independence from economy (Chambers & Kopstein, 2006).

Based on liberal tradition, civil society is viewed as a realm separate from the state. According to Locke, there is no need for civil society neither to oppose the state nor to support it, since civil society is the body that regulates the boundaries of governmental rule (Tuckness, 2005). Civil society is supposed to protect the rights and freedoms of an individual from the

despotic state, however not necessarily confront the state. In other words, similarly to the idea of “check and balances”, civil society’s main role is to counterbalance the power of the state (Abele, 2008). Autonomy plays a crucial role when discussing civil society since only being autonomous from both state and market, can civil society institutions hold the state accountable and consolidate society (Fukuyama, 1997; Keane, 2005).

The Aristotelian vision of unity between state and civil society had its impact on modern theory. By all means, contemporary scholars do not consider complete unification of two realms; however, some emphasize on the high level of cooperation between state and civil society. For instance, Henderson writes that despite the common belief that civil society is completely separate from and even opposed to the state, most of the NGOs cooperate with the state, and “cooperation is as much a part of state-society relations as is confrontation” (Henderson, 2011, p. 6). The most recent combination of civil society and state was during communist rule in Eastern Europe. Societal interests were represented by the government that consisted of members of the ruling party thus the “integration of state and society was not achieved from the bottom up by means of vigorous civil society, but from the top down using the heavy hand of bureaucracy” (Hann & Dunn, 1996, p. 81). Most of contemporary Russian scholars, for instance, Ruminatsev, Avtonomov, Dogadailo and others, stress on the connection of civil society and “law governed state” or ‘law based state’, in other words “the rule of law”. According to them, civil society serves as a base for “law governed state”. Thus, there is no clear line between civil society and the state; on the contrary, these two concepts complete each other (Domrin, 2003). Another aspect of state-civil society relations is the appearance of a new type of civil society organizations, government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs).

The other type of relationship that civil society can have with the state is opposition. Foley and Edwards, conclude that the other “civil society” that is different from an apolitical

liberal one “focuses on politically mobilized social actors outside customary political associations”. This type of civil society discards the traditional and political civil society organizations since they are more likely to cooperate with the state and urges new types of associations to resist the tyranny of the state. Thus, the more robust civil society is, the more it should confront the state (Foley & Edwards, 1996). This interpretation of the theory was given special emphasis during democratic movements in Eastern Europe and Latin America. The civil society played an important role in anti-state protests, change of government and transition to democracy (Ekiert & Kubik, 2001; Hann & Dunn, 1996). In other words, the concepts “civil society” and “democracy” are often used interchangeably (Diamond, 1994; Putnam, Leonardo & Nanetti, 1993).

In cases when the state is not able to provide services to the population suitably, it might transfer some of the functions to civil society organizations. A state might also happen to delegate some of its functions in order to establish its legitimacy with the help of civil society. In such situations, civil society is in partnership with the state (Chambers & Kopstein, 2008).

An ideal type of civil society and state relations is dialogue. In this case, the state would take into considerations the interests and issues voiced by civil society. Civil society would create a public sphere – a space where the concerns are voiced by the civil society representatives and taken into account by the state. Following this approach, social movements would generate political change and a ground for future activism. This type of relationship is what communities should reach for, however, nowadays it is mostly used as a perfect example to compare to while criticizing the condition of civil society with the regards to a state (Chambers & Kopstein, 2008).

### **1.5. Functions of civil society**

Theorists also suggest various roles that civil society can play in the community. Traditionally, civil society might perform political, economic and democratic functions.

Putnam, in his 1990 study, argued that developed civic networks influence economic growth, a notion debated by other scholars – Olson, Callaghy, for example. It is widely recognized though that voluntary associations also produce a higher level of trust and cooperation among citizens, according to Tocqueville and Putnam. Civil society also works on involving more population into the public sphere, enhancing political participation of citizens (Muller, 2006) as well as raising the issues of the marginalized and oppressed (Cooper, 2008). Another essential function of civil society lies in its connection to democracy, when civil society plays the role of a “watchdog”, holding the government accountable and counterbalancing the state (Muller, 2006). Lastly, civil society can also be a service provider, especially in the context when the state is not capable of guaranteeing necessary welfare (Cooper, 2008).

On top of the traditional functions of civil society, we also need to acknowledge that civil society organizations are capable of engaging in violent activities (Stacey & Meyer, 2005). The concept of civil society does not include only positive organizations, but depending on the context, also malicious groups. The function of security, however is a traditionally a prerogative of the state – it is the state that has the exclusive right to use violence in order to protect its national interests (Bowden, 2006). Yet, when the state is weak and unable to protect its citizens, it is natural for civil society to come up with the immediate solutions, such as vigilante or other armed groups (Ottaway, 2004). This understanding of civil society is especially applicable in the context of armed conflicts, which will be discussed next.

### **1.6.Civil society in the conflict**

Having looked at contemporary definitions of civil society, it becomes clear that most of the definitions are formed on the premises that civil society would operate in a democracy with well-functioning state power. Therefore, when it comes to characterizing civil society in a not peaceful environment, there have been only a few attempts to conceptualize the matter (Kryshtapovych, 2016).

The world armed conflicts have been undoubtedly accompanied by various non-state actors - militias, religious groups, civil society, international NGOs. Wars might also trigger the expansion of civil society or even its origins since civil society is created on the basis of the modern state, war preparations contribute to establishing a well-functioning state (Keane, 2009). Yet, despite the long history of the study of civil society and a considerable amount of scholarship written on it, there has not been much attention devoted to the work of local civil society organizations under the condition of an armed conflict (Marchetti & Tocci, 2009).

The importance of defining civil society that operates in a tranquil environment lies in the difficulties of its definition during the conflict setting. Given various views on what civil society constitutes, the first dilemma is whether to include anti-government violent groups as a part of it (Keane, 2013). Hultin suggests that it is unwise to exclude violent groups from civil society since the activities and viewpoints of CSOs change over time in response to the broader sociopolitical context (Hultin, 2014). Also, civil society in the context of conflict should not be constrained by family or ethical kinship (Hultin, 2014). Hence, the context of the conflict widens the understanding of civil society and what it is comprised of.

Civil society actors can be both a factor in the conflict's escalation, as well as force for peace (Barnes, 2005). Catherine Barnes distinguishes three main directions that are motivating civil society groups to work on conflict-related issues:

1. Preexisting groups that feel obliged to work on conflict despite apathy to do so
2. Groups that focus on addressing the structural issues of the conflict
3. Groups that focus on responding to specific conflict situations (Barnes, 2005).

Conflict transformation theory, for instance, suggests that civil society actors are potential mediators since they have access to different parties of the conflict (Azar & Burton, 1986). Further, Barnes introduces the main functions of civil society in peacebuilding:

- waging constructively;

- shifting conflict attitudes;
- defining the peace agenda;
- mobilizing constituencies for peace;
- reducing violence and promoting stability;
- peacemaking/conflict resolution;
- community-level peacemaking;
- changing root causes and building cultures of peace. (Barnes, 2009).

With regards to the role of civil society organizations in wars, researchers have previously looked at reconciliation and prevention of the conflict. Civil society organizations are mostly occupied either in discussions that precede an armed conflict, pro or antiwar activities, campaigns to establish rules of war (Kryshtapovych, 2016). Yet, most of the works focus on the role of civil society organizations specifically in peacebuilding and conflict resolution process - cases of Yugoslavia (Schweitzer, 2010), Sri Lanka (Orjuela, 2003), Basque peace movement (Gago Anton, 2011), Thailand (Boonpunth, 2015), post-war Burundi (Poplewell, 2017) and post-war Liberia (Duo, 2011), Ghana (Mr, 2017), Nigeria (Mudasiru & Moshood, 2017) to name a few. As for the armed conflicts in the Post-Soviet Space, the scholarship also covers the role of the local civil society organizations in peacebuilding efforts, peace education and maintaining the status quo of the conflict (Mikhelidze & Pirozzi, 2008). For instance, civil society play three main functions in the conflict in Abkhazia: communicating with the Georgian side (either in Gali or in Georgia itself); (2) supporting internal democratization in Abkhazia; (3) informing the citizens of Abkhazia about events related to the conflict (Tomáš et al., 2017).

As for the role of civil society in the conflict escalation, there are some mentions in the works of Hultin and Marchetti. Hultin supports his research with the examples from Africa – hunting societies *kumajors* that were used by the government in Sierra Leone as support in

fighting against the rebels and protectors of the local communities in Core d'Ivoire. These groups were often accused in violating human rights, therefore balancing between the concepts of civility and uncivility. Another example he gives is Nigeria's Bakassi Boys – mobilized group that turned into a violent gang. Hultin argues that this type of organizations is what constitutes the difficulty is defining what civil society is. In addition, he says, these organizations might drift in and out of state's influence. These organizations might also justify its violence by turning to international norms and ideologies. In conclusion, the author argues, that it is unwise to exclude these organizations from the discussion on civil society in conflict, since the role of the civil society changes together with shifts in the socio-political context (Hultin, 2014).

Marchetti's viewpoint somewhat corresponds to the one of Hultin. Marchetti suggests that civil society organizations might play a crucial role in the conflict escalation – by “organizing and activating combatant groups and guerillas” (Marchetti, 2015). Some studies do explore the connections between the armed groups and other civil society associations. The guerrilla groups are argued to use the service provision to the local population as one of the ways to increase their legitimacy in the community and establish trust. Rebel groups, Hizballah in Lebanon and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, perform the functions of non-profit service provider to win the community's support (Flanigan, 2008). To support that, another study suggests that in Peru and Nicaragua the support of voluntary associations, such as religious groups, unions, youth associations, means more success for guerrilla groups (Goldman, 2013). The most notorious rebel group that combines military activities with social welfare is Dawa, the non-militant wing of Hamas, a Palestinian militant resistance, that was proclaimed a terrorist organization by the US and the European Union. Although Hamas's aid is not as big as the help of United Nations Relief and Works Agency or the Palestinian state (Szekely, 2015), it does provide medical and educational services to the local population worth millions of

dollars and helps Palestinians in times when Palestinian authorities are unable to do so (Roy, 2011). On the other hand, it is argued that Dawa enables terrorism through the system of social provision (Levitt&Ross, 2006). Therefore, the idea of service provision to the communities by local non-state actors in the context of conflict may be understudied, and yet not novel.

Moreover, historically, Ukrainian military volunteers are not first civilian mobilization in the times of war. During World War I and World War II, volunteers gathered donations and supplies, provided medical help. As mentioned before, the most famous military volunteer initiative would be a Red Cross Foundation, that has been active in almost all modern armed conflicts. The narrative of wartime volunteers is naturally understudied due to the dangerous environment or lack of empirical data. The stories of World War military volunteers in Australia has just been recently analyzed – like Ukrainian military volunteers, Australian military volunteers pushed for changes in the political sphere, for example– advocating for the welfare of the soldiers and their families (Oppenheimer, 2002).

As can be seen, the existing literature mostly provides the analysis of the role of civil society in peacebuilding, conflict escalation, and yet no specific studies on voluntary organizations supporting the state's army with supplies. Therefore, the literature gap in both theoretical and empirical studies on the role of civil society in the conflict is evident. Therefore

As literature analysis has shown, the eruption of the conflict always triggers the change of the activities of the country's civil society or the emergence of new organizations that would focus their work on the conflict. In order to differentiate between the civil society that operates in a tranquil entwinement and civil society that is shaped by the conflict, Marchetti and Tocci suggest a term “conflict society” (Marchetti & Tocci, 2009).

“Conflict society” would include all of the civil organizations, local and international, that operate within the framework of the specific conflict. The researchers suggest that due to the nature of the most conflicts, the term “conflict society” comprises both “civil” and “uncivil”

organizations. “Civil society” is what usually perceived as “good” organizations that are working on lobbying, policymaking, human rights. However, when it comes to the “uncivil” element in “conflict society”, there is no clear consensus among the scholars on what type of organizations belong to it. Some scholars argue that the term is unsuitable and cannot be used to describe some empirical data (Rumford, 2001), others suggest that extreme-right groups are perfect example of the “uncivil society” and some researchers go even further claiming that involuntary organizations (that were so common in the Soviet Union) should definitely be considered as “uncivil” (Kopecky & Muddle, 2003). However, most of the scholars agree that “uncivil” organizations are the ones that use violence in order to reach their goals, and this study adapts the last definition.

If applying the concept of “conflict society” to the Ukrainian context, both civil and uncivil organizations can be spotted. The “civil” component would include organizations that assist IDPs, provide legal support to the veterans or are involved in human rights initiatives. As for the “uncivil” organizations, the volunteer paramilitary battalions that are fighting in the combat zone, such as ultra-nationalist organization Right Sector fit the concept.

Moreover, the scholars adapt the originally Diamond and McDonald track diplomacy model and propose a typology of the organizations that they think constitutes the conflict society (see Table 1). However, this typology is limited in terms of the types of track diplomacy. Thus, this research does not agree with the suitability of the Marcetti and Tocci (2009) typology, however, it does suggest developing it further based on the results of the analysis of the work of the military volunteer organizations.

Table 1. Types of CoSOs

<b>Type of track diplomacy</b>	<b>Actors</b>
Professional	Technical experts, consultants
Business	Businessmen
Trade unions	Professional associations, organized crime networks
Private citizens	Individual citizens, diaspora groups, families and clans
Research, training and education	Special interest research centers, think tanks, universities
Activism	NGOs, lobby groups, grassroots, social movements, local communities, combatant groups
Religion	Spiritual communities, charities, religious movements
Funding	Foundations, individual philanthropists
Communication	Media operators

Source: (Marchetti & Tocci, 2009).

In his study on Western African civil society in the conflict, Hultin suggests three themes that can be used in order to analyze assess the role of the civil society in the conflict areas. The first theme corresponds with the Marchetti and Tocci suggestion of formulating the term “conflict society”, that is to look beyond the Western ideas of what constitutes civil society. Another theme is also seen in the Marchetti and Tocci assessment – the idea that civil society actors might violate the ideas of peace and democracy in the context of the conflict. This idea corresponds with the previously discussed “uncivil” component of the “conflict society”. The third important theme for the analysis is the presence of the local norms, meaning how the activities of the organizations are understood in a particular local context (Hultin,

2014). The last point is very crucial for the assessment of the military volunteer organizations in the context of the Ukrainian conflict, and it will be addressed a bit later.

Another framework of analysis is suggested by Marchetti and Tocci (2009). However, before discussing the variables used to analyze the role of civil society in the conflict, researchers argue that the context has a significant effect on civil society. By context, they first identify the nature of the state, whether the state is failed or failing. Marchetti and Tocci argue that in this case, the lines between the state and civil society functions get blurred. If the state is not failing, they propose looking at the nature of the state, the degree of the democracy of the state. The link between democracy and civil society is clear. When the rights and freedoms are restricted, it is likely that civil society will develop outside of the legal boundaries and have little desire to interact with the state. In this case, there is more chance of the overlap between civil and uncivil actors. The socio-economic underdevelopment of the state would result into the presence of more traditional civil society than modern. Lastly, the presence of the international actors can shape the country's civil society, by encouraging them to undertake certain functions, such as peacebuilding, or providing financial support to certain civil society groups.

The variables suggested by Marchetti and Tocci to analyze the role of the civil society in the conflict are as follows:

- 1) identity of the civil society organizations – whether the group is open to include people of various ethnicities as its members. This distinction significantly influences the identity of the organization in question.
- 2) framework of action of the civil society group. The researchers analyze how the civil society actor operate within four main frameworks - conflict escalation, conflict management, conflict resolution, conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

3) political opportunities structure in which the organizations operate. This variable is divided into four structural features – timing, existence of domestic institutions, overall domestic development and the role of the international system and of the actors operating within it. Timing is the connections between the action and the right moment to it, for instance in the phase of the conflict escalation, the actions of the racist civils society organizations will be more effective than of the others. Domestic institutions can influence the impact of the civil society due to the nature of the constitutional and legal frameworks, presence of the public institutions and actors operating within them. Domestic development in political, economic, social and cultural spheres play an important role in the impact of the civil society in the conflict – for instance, the public’s cultural approval of the political actions taken by the civil society actors can influence the strengthening of the civil society. Last, the point of view of the international actors might give some local civil society actors certain priorities. For instance, if the international community concentrates on the war, the political and material help will be given to the combatant groups, and not the pacifist organizations (Marchetti & Tocci, Conflict society: understanding the role of civil society in conflict, 2009)

These suggestions of how civil society might behave in the context of an armed conflict and what other actors are usually studied with the regards to civil society organizations served as a good start for my interview questions with the Ukrainian military volunteers. Of course, Marchetti and Tocci’s framework is focused primarily on the ethnopolitical conflict. It includes variables such as identity, which is not relevant to this research since the Donbas war is not regarded as an ethnic conflict. However, like other variables as frameworks of actions and the role of international actors were taken into account when creating the interview questions.

## **CHAPTER II. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Data collection**

The qualitative method was chosen for this research since it was essential to grasp the broader and more in-depth understanding of the practices and the new developments of the new types of civil society organizations in Ukraine. Indeed, using the qualitative method, “the researcher’s primary goal is an understanding of social processes rather than obtaining a representative sample” (Henn et al., 2006, p. 157). The researcher plays an active role in the research design and data collection. As a result, this approach also makes emphasis on the researcher’s involvement in the given study (Denscombe, 1998). Military volunteers are a new phenomenon in the context of Ukrainian society; thus I decided to focus on deep understating of their feelings, views and perspectives. In order to so, two types of qualitative approach were applied in this study – semi-structured in-depth interviews and participant observation. Combining two methods of analysis is quite common in a social science since it increases the validity of obtained data since it received from different sources.

As mentioned earlier, this study is more inductive than deductive – when I decided to look into the new developments of Ukrainian civil society, I had no established hypothesis. Since the chosen topic is rrelatively new, at the time of formulation of this research back in 2016, there has not been sufficient literature on the new aspects of Ukrainian civil society. Thus, I realized that I would need to conduct preliminary interviews before narrowing the focus of the research. Military volunteers were not the object of my study before analyzing preliminary interviews, but the new developments in civil society in general.

Preliminary interviews were conducted in March 2017 during my one month stay in Kyiv. The goal of the preliminary interviews was to understand better the developments of the Post-Euromaidan civil society in Ukraine and therefore identify a possible research gap.

On the level of the preliminary data collection, I conducted semi-structured interviews with several civil society organizations and government officials as well as attended two round tables between civil society representatives and government officials – one organized by OSCE (March, 2017) and the other one held by Kyiv City State Administration (March, 2017)

Overall, I conducted five interviews:

1. Government representative who is working with civil society (Petro Zakharchenko).
2. Registered civil society organization that is supporting the armed forces (Batalion Sitka).
3. Unregistered civil society organization that is supporting the armed forces (informal group of Raisa Shmatko).
4. Registered civil society organization that is focused on social problems.
5. Representative Kyiv Administration Council of Civil Society (Olga).

After listening to the preliminary interviews and careful another round of literature review, certain observations and assumptions were made, and later I was able to narrow down the research focus from a broad scope of Post-Euromaidan civil society to the civil society organizations that are continuing to support the armed forces, in other words – military volunteers.

I chose in-depth one-to-one semi-structured interviews as the method of collection of the primary data. Semi-structured interviews differ from structured questionnaires in the way that the researcher can ask the follow-up and clarifying questions in the course of the interview. In other words, although I came prepared with the interview questions, this method leaves a room for a natural conversation with the interviewee. The semi-structured interviews aim to gain a complete comprehension of the respondent's point of view of the issue and "explore issues in detail with the interviewee, using probes, prompts, and flexible questioning styles

(both in terms of the ways in which questions are asked and the order in which they are delivered)” (Henn et al., 2006, p. 162).

Overall, during my preliminary and then primary data collection, I conducted 19 face-to-face interviews. On average, the interviews were two hours long, conducted either at the organization’s office, café or any other places suggested by the respondents. Interview with People’s Project Ukraine was via Skype due to the busy schedule of the respondent during my stay in Ukraine. During the interviews, I took notes, as well as used voice recorded and mobile phone device to record the interviews. The interviews were held either in Ukrainian or Russian languages.

In order to fully comprehend the work of the civil society that are helping the Ukrainian army/volunteer battalions and support my findings base on the conducted interviews, I decided to use another method of data collection – observation. Given the logistics and sensitivity of the research topic, only the participant observation was possible. If observation method meant a researcher watching remotely the behaviour and activities of the group or a certain situation in particular, the participant observation proposes a researcher to become a part of the group or situation (Henn et al., 2006). Participant observation as an additional method not only allowed me to validate my findings by using a different type of data, but also provided me with various advantages that helped me to better comprehend the work of military volunteers. I was able to check who and how military volunteers interact with during their work and how much time they were spending on specific activities. There are different types of observations – descriptive, focused and selective. I chose the descriptive type, in other words, to document and take notes of everything I see or hear, due to several reasons – 1) that was my first time going to the conflict zone 2) my first time observing the work of military volunteers in their natural environment and 3) I have not come across any study that would at least slightly prepare me of what to expect in the conflict zone.

One of the informal volunteer groups, a group led by Olesya Naumovska, invited me to join one of their regular trips to the conflict zone. The purpose of the trip was to bring the provisions to specific military brigades. It was a three-day trip in summer 2018 with a group of four, excluding me. The stops were as follows: Kyiv (departure 13 July 2018), layover in Bahmut (13 July 2018), Avdiivka (delivering supplies to two brigades, 14 July 2018), Pokrovsk (delivering the supplies, 14 July 2018), layover in Izyum (14 July 2018), departure from Izyum to Kyiv (15 July 2018). Due to security reasons, the exact locations of the brigades that were visited will not be disclosed. During those three days, I observed and took notes of the activities of the volunteer group, their interactions with the local people, military personnel at the brigades and checkpoints, their reactions to the military and reactions of the military to the volunteers. Considering the dangerous environment in most parts of the conflict zone, as well the rapid development of events during those three days, I had to combine two ways of taking notes – verbally using the voice recorder and textually in my fieldwork notebook.

This research used purposive and snowball sampling. After conducting the preliminary interviews, the study decided to focus specifically on the civil society organizations that are supporting the army/volunteer battalions. Snowball sampling allows the researcher to find “hidden populations,” that is, groups not easily accessible to researchers through other sampling strategies” (Mack et al., 2005). Snowball sampling means that I was referred to other organizations/groups by the people who I already interviewed. Although I could narrow down the list of the organizations for the interviews after analyzing media and academic literature, snowball sampling enabled me to reach out to the informal groups that form a significant part of the civil society that was not represented in the analyzed literature on the subject.

As mentioned above, relying on the results of preliminary interviews, research focused on civil society organizations that are supporting the Ukrainian army, in other words – military volunteers. My main fieldwork, interviews and participant observations, was conducted in

summer 2018. First, it was necessary to establish the number of military volunteer organizations that are still active. The list of the registered volunteer organizations that are supporting the army was available at the website of the Ministry of Information Policy of Ukraine. This list however contained organizations that appeared not to be active anymore; thus I decided to check the media accounts and websites that are in free access in order to make sure that the organizations that I intend to contact are still working. In addition, analysis of the literature review on the Post-Euromaidan civil society also gave me an overview of the active organizations that are providing support to the armed forces.

Before I started the fieldwork, I analyzed the existing literature on the civil society in general and civil society in a conflict in order to familiarize myself with the existing conceptual frameworks that were used in similar studies. The concepts of civil society, how it is defined and what other actors are considered in the studies on civil society, helped me to create an outline of interview questions. Most of the interviews were conducted in the offices of the organizations or the locations where they operate.

For the organizational purpose, all of the interviewed actors are shown in the table in Appendix B with their basic information. Other interviews included a church and diaspora representative, individual volunteers and military personnel. It should be noted that a conversation with the military personal was not an in-depth interview, but rather a short conversation during the field trip to the conflict zone. All of the ethical guidelines were maintained, and the military personnel was contacted one more time via Facebook Messenger to receive additional comments. The list of interviewed organizations includes their formal or informal status, number of followers on social media, availability of the organization's website and financial reports, and date of the interview (Appendix B). Since previous studies already mention well-known military volunteer organizations, it was one of the major goals and contributions of this study to cover both renowned groups as well as informal military

volunteers. Usually, the number of employees at a certain organization is one of the indicators of its capacity, and by capacity, I mean, the amount of assistance they provide, organization's resources and public recognition. However, in the case of military volunteer's organizations, number of employees or people involved in the activities does not provide an exact representation of the organization's merit. For instance, Come Back Alive and Maskuval'na Sitka Na Vezhi both engage eight people, yet they incredibly different number of social media followers – 1.2 million and 1002 followersn respectively. Therefore, including such factor as social media presence provides a better understanding of the diversity of the interviewed organizations.

## **2.2. Thematic analysis**

According to Matshall and Rossman (1999), there are six stages of thematic analysis:

- Organization of the data
- Making categories
- Coding of the data
- Testing the data
- Searching for other explanation of the data
- Reporting.

After collecting the data, it is a common practice to listen to the interviews one more time in order to gain a general understanding of the themes that came up during the conversation. This process is called familiarization with the data. After having a general idea of the contents of the interviews, they were transcribed and translated into English. In addition, the participant observation notes were transformed into a form of a story. It needs to be noted that none of the steps of data analysis was outsourced; thus everything was done by me manually, without using any software. The next step was rereading the transcribed interviews and making memos on the aspects that were very shocking or unusual. Since at this stage, it is

usual to organize the data for a researcher's convenience, I divided the transcripts into two sets – interviews with 1) registered organizations and 2) informal groups/individuals.

My next step of data analysis was categorization. Since the interviews were semi-structured, I could pre-categorize the data in following groups based on the interview questions: activities, relations with other actors (state, business, international actors) and motivations. Next, I proceeded to manual coding of the interviews– wrote a code next to the highlighted passage that represented a theme. For example, in the category of activities, I would have a code for basic supplies, medical help, specialized help. Accordingly, in the category of relations of the state, I came up with the following codes – criticism, opposition, support, indifference etc. As for motivations, the following codes were used – victory, Russia, patriotism, undecided. Naturally, since the interviews were in the form of an open-ended conversation, other themes emerged during the analysis that were not meant to answer the research questions, but still contributed to the overall discussion and understanding of the narrative. These themes include relations among the volunteers, feelings towards Russia, relations with the paramilitary groups.

The next step is to theoretically test the understanding of the data. Having a clearer idea of the content of the data, I could come back to the conceptual framework of the study – concepts of civil society, its functions, relations with the state in a tranquil environment and the situation of an armed conflict – and placed my initial findings within the existing theoretical foundations. For example, while going over the existing functions of civil society in the settings of the conflict suggested by previous studies, and comparing those to my initial findings, I could identify an activity that was not mentioned previously by the scholars.

Before proceeding to the last stage of the data analysis, I did my best to critically evaluate my interpretation of the codes and categories of the data and search for alternative explanations. Finally, I moved to reporting my findings in the form of discussion with

references to the existing pool of literature and conceptual studies mentioned in the previous chapters.

### **2.3. Challenges**

The biggest challenges of this fieldwork were to locate the unregistered civil society groups and to prove my credibility to the contacted organizations. Due to the sensitivity of the research topic and the lack of this type of research method in Ukrainian academia, some respondents were very suspicious of the goals and interpretation of the interviews. In some cases, I was asked directly if I would write the results of the interview in a pro-Russian interpretation. In all of the cases, I referred to the ethics of the research, explaining the aim of the research and later on supplying the respondents with my documentation. Another obstacle that I encountered was lack of willingness among the organizations to participate in the research. As a result, some organizations either ignored the inquiries to make an interview or disappeared after already agreeing to the interview.

It should also be noted that I am a Ukrainian, who was born and raised in Kyiv, however, I spent last 6 years (starting from March 2014) studying in Japan. As noted in Chapter III, I was present during the events of the Euromaidan, however I already left the country when the armed conflict started. From the start of this research always reminded myself of the possible complications due to “being native”, thus paid special attention to my neutrality during field research and data analysis. Positioning myself as a part of the overall researched group, that is Ukrainians, had several assets that need to be mentioned. Firstly, an obvious advantage was my ability to establish a connection with the respondents based on my belonging to their nation. Understanding of the culture and behaviour of the Ukrainians was useful when arranging the interviews, especially when the respondents were not inclined to be interviewed due to security reasons. Moreover, being a Ukrainian, I already possess basic knowledge of not only the recent developments of the conflict, but also the events in the country; thus interviewees looked more

comfortable and relaxed when they realized that I understand the events, terms, abbreviations and certain phenomena that they were referring to during the interviews. Lastly, being raised in the capital, I am a native speaker of both Ukrainian and Russian, which came as an advantage not only when conducting, transcribing and analyzing interviews but also during the participant observation fieldwork in the conflict zone.

#### **2.4. Research Limitations**

Certainly, the qualitative approach has inevitable criticism. Thus, I completely agree that this research does have some limitations that might have affected the overall validity of the results. The following subchapter will focus on the possible research limitations of this study.

It is commonly suggested to write a reflexive diary in order to deal with the problems of the research limitations. According to Henn et al. (2006), that means that the researcher should note such things as:

- “your values and assumptions, and the ways in which you observe that they may be impacting upon the research;
- the choices you make in the research (and your reasons for doing so);
- the strategies you develop in the course of the research;
- the various roles that you adopt;
- the relationships with the people you observe;
- any evidence of reactivity;
- the context of data collection (physical, social, and temporal) that you think may affect the data gathered;
- the processes of gaining access to the research field, the negotiations you make along the way, and the impact that this has on your initial research design and plans” (Henn et al., 2006, p. 179).

Thus, I paid special attention to disclosing the way I received access to the organization and the field trip to the conflict zone.

One of the limitations is the method's subjectivity that was partially touched upon when discussing the researcher "being native" to the group that is being studied. While conducting interviews and observations, there is a slight chance that the researcher might develop certain empathy to the interview and might not see the matters objectively. Also, the interview is able to coherence the interviewee to the desired answers, if not being careful with "revealing their own views on the matter, the questioning style used, the body language displayed, the behaviour and conduct throughout the interview" (Henn et al., 2006, p. 161).

Although there is much debate among social scientists, on whether it is ethical to disclose to the subject of the observations that they are being observed, during the participant observation I disclosed my information, the goal and content of my research to the volunteer group that I was a part of. Knowing that they are being watched, the group might have changed their behavior and reactions, this concept is called reactivity. According to Henn, "people may consciously or unconsciously alter the way they behave or modify what they say if they are aware that they are being researched" (Henn et al., 2006, p. 176).

Due to the limited time-frame and previously discussed challenges during my fieldtrip, only organizations that were based in the capital, Kyiv, were interviewed. Although it can be argued that this matter was not crucial to the research, since the most prominent organizations were based in Kyiv only, it should be mentioned that this geographical constraint might have been an obstacle to the generalization of the results of the study.

Another limitation that needs to be acknowledged is the possible invalidity of the answers of the respondents. It needs to be understood that the research is focused on the ongoing conflict and this topic might be very sensitive to some respondents. In addition, the interviews contained the questions that concern the funding of civil society organizations and

their relations with the authorities. Hence, since these aspects might have been sensitive topics to the respondents, research accepts the risks of incomplete accuracy of the responses.

In order to minimize this limitation of the qualitative approach, the research used triangulation. Triangulation is used to back up the information received during the interview. This can be done by referring to the documents, other interviews or observations. (Denscombe, 1998) In the case of this research, I used the findings from the participant observation field work, interviews with other organizations and documents available at the websites of the interviewed organizations.

## **2.5. Ethics of the research**

All of the literature on a methodology for social sciences emphasize the importance of the ethical guidelines. The qualitative approach, in particular, has risks of “misleading people, pretending to be genuinely interested, using contacts to gain confidential information, betraying confidences, and consequentiality” (Henn et al., 2006, p. 178). Thus, I made sure all of the ethical guidelines were followed on every stage of the research.

Firstly, when first contacting the organizations (via email, Facebook messages or phone), I properly introduced myself, the institution I belong to, the topic and aims of the research and only then proceeded to the inquiry about the possible interview. Before the start of the interview, I presented the respondents with my documentation, my contacts (in case they have any questions or concerns later) and repeated the topic and goals of my research, as well as a general overview of the interview questions. Before the interview, I made sure to get permission to record our conversation and showed them my recording devices. Already, audio recording, I shortly introduced myself and the research topic again, and received once again the verbal permission to record the conversation. I also clarified to the respondents that the interviews will be confidential, can be anonymized if they wish, and that they have the right not to answer any question they do not wish to, as well as stop the interview at any time. After

making sure that the respondents had no questions, I proceeded to the interview. Out of 20 conducted interviews, only one wished to remain anonymous. At the end of the interview, I usually asked for permission to take pictures of the office of the organization and use the information and photos from the organization's Facebook page. All organizations granted their permission in a verbal form that were recorded at the start of each interview.

## **CHAPTER III DELAYERING THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS**

### **3.1. Historical narratives and myths**

To understand the reasons behind the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, it is essential to look into the history of Russo - Ukrainian relations and, most importantly, countries' interpretations of the past. The Ukrainian nation had always fought for being recognized as independent from Russia, triggering multiple protests and disobedience to Russian rule throughout centuries. National identity is a crucial aspect of Donbas war dynamics, and its shaping can be understood through a historical perspective. For instance, in 1995, nearly 20 years before the Donbas War, Andrew Wilson already predicted the possibility of the conflict in Donbas due to Ukraine and Russia's different perspectives on history and the use of historical myths about the region (Wilson, 1995).

In addition to a violent modern state of affairs between Ukraine and Russia, the turbulent relationship between the two countries goes back to claim the origins of both states. Both countries, along with Belarus, claim to be the descendants of an ancient state, Kyivan Rus. However, the primary debate on the legitimacy of cultural and historical heritage is between Russia and Ukraine since Belarus still struggles to fight the hegemony of Russian historical interpretation (Smith et al., 1998). Kyivan Rus was an ancient state in the Eastern part of Europe from the 8th to 14th centuries, covering modern Ukraine, Belarus, and part of Russia. During Medieval times, it was a cultural and political center and its rulers developed diplomatic relationships with Western Europe using marriage ties. Kyivan ruler Volodymyr the Great renounced paganism and adopted Orthodox Christianity in all territory of Kyivan Rus' in 988. Christianization of Rus' is a significant cultural development since its day is still widely celebrated in Ukraine and Russia. The role of the Church also plays an essential role in the debate of cultural superiority.

To begin with, the origins of the state is still being debated with two main theories out there – Normanist and non- Normanist. Normanists, Gerhard Muller argues that the Kyivan state was established by the Varangians, traders from Scandinavia. According to this theory, the name Rus' is derived from a Finnish word Ruotsi, translated as Swedes. On the other hand, Normanists insist that Slavic tribes that lived on the territory could have united themselves without external help. Politically, the Normanist approach is crucial since it highlights Slavs' independence in terms of establishing a strong state. Therefore, most of the Ukrainian, Russian and Soviet historians share the Normanists views. Normanists insist that the name Rus' is connected to the river Ros that runs close to Kyiv. Another unpopular opinion is the link with the Sarmatian tribe Roxolany that occupied Ukraine's southern territory at that time. Roxolany comes from an Iranian word rhos that mean light, presumably describing the locals' hair colour. Neither of the theories has been recognized as the correct one, and over time both of them had been adopted by historians of Ukraine and Russia.

There are three main approaches when it comes to claiming the heritage of Kyivan Rus' – Russian, Ukrainian, and Soviet (Pelenski, 1992). Russian approach was mainly developed by historians during Imperial Russia and viewed Kyivan Rus' as one of the Russian state development stages. It claims that after the Mongolian siege of Kyiv in 1240, the principality of Vladimir Suzdal became the successor to Kyivan Rus, and then eventually followed by the Grand Duchy of Moscow. The goal of the rulers of Vladimir was not to continue the glory of Kyiv but to undermine its authority and take over as the center of Rus'. In addition to two attempts of invasions, the Vladimir rulers tried to establish a separate ideology by building new churches and inventing new celebration days. The criticism of the Russian approach was always discarded, even when it came from Russian historians (Pelenski, 1992).

According to the Ukrainian approach, Kyivan Rus' was the start of the formation of Ukrainian statehood, the first stage of state and nation-building, followed by three more –

Cossack State, Ukrainian National Republic, and Independent Ukraine. History of Ukraine was viewed through the prism of Russian historians and was understandably disregarded as a separate state. However, in 1898 Mykhailo Hrushevsky published a what would become the foundation of modern Ukrainian history – a ten-volume monographic series called *Ukraina - Rus'*, which in its name already focuses on a direct connection between Kyivan Rus' and the Ukrainian state. Hrushevsky argued that after Kyiv lost its position as the center of Rus', it was transferred to Galicia and Volhynia, a Western Ukraine state. Later on, after a period of integration into the Kingdom of Poland and Grand Duchy of Lithuania during the 14th century, Ukraine entered the next stage of its statehood, that is the Cossack Hetmanet.

Cossack Hetmanet, founded by Bohdan Khmelnytskyi, was a military formation at first but later developed into a semi-independent body that unified Ukrainians and led a liberation movement against the Polish rule. With Poland in the West and dominant Ottoman Empire in the South, having no choice but securing allies, Khmelnytskyi signs a 1654 Treaty with Tsarist Russia in Pereyaslav, obtaining military support to wage war with the Kingdom of Poland. Expecting the Tsar to hold on to the bilateral agreement, Cossack leader hoped that Russia would still respect the Cossack state's independence; however, for Russia, the treaty and vulnerability of the Cossack state was the perfect opportunity to expand its territory (Morrison, 1993). Nevertheless, the signed Pereyaslav Theses would signify the beginning of the new period in Ukrainian history – as a vassal of the Russian Empire. The Treaty of Pereyaslav is extremely important not only because it is a historical event, but also since for many Russian historians and politicians Pereyslav treaty became the day of reunification of Ukraine and Russia and the legacy of this historical moment has been used to establish a political agenda towards Ukraine up until modern times.

The term reunification was widely used during Soviet times, underlying that it was in Preyaslav when Ukraine finally reunited with Russia and therefore acknowledging the

existence of a separate Ukrainian state. Another opinion belongs to Russian historian Samuilov who argued that the Pereyaslav treaty was not a reunification of Ukraine and Russia, but a reunion of Russian people, naming Ukrainians as Little Rus' (*malorosy* in Russian). The name Little Rus' was an official name for the Ukrainian territories in Tsarist Russia. They were one of the three nations that constituted Imperial Russia, together with Big Rus' (*velikorosy* in Russian) and Belarus. Suggesting that it was the Ukrainian people who wanted to rejoin Russia, the historian contends that the incorporation was entirely voluntary and most importantly, not decided by one person, but the whole nation. The Imperial treatment of Ukrainians and Belarussians is the starting point of the pan-Russian ideology – a unity of three sub-nations that comprise one Russian nation. This ideology was later used to some degree in the Soviet Union and the contemporary Russian political agenda.

The Ukrainian side has slightly different feelings towards the Pereyaslav Treaty. The centuries followed by the treaty are the dark ages for the Ukrainian nation due to mass russification in cultural, social, and economic spheres. Although the Cossacks were given the status of Russian nobility, within the time, they assimilated with the Russian society, and later on, the Cossack State was completely eliminated by the empress Catherine the Great. Russian Orthodox Church, represented by Moscow Patriarchy, took over the Kyiv Metropole in 1686, establishing its power throughout the whole Empire. Ukraine language was banned from use in literature or schools by Valuev and Ems orders and reduced it to the unofficial status of village tongue.

Moreover, due to the industrial development of some regions such as Donbas, many people relocated to Eastern Ukraine from other parts of the Empire. As a result, the population in those regions of Ukraine did not identify themselves as Ukrainians and spread Russian language usage. In other words, the imperial policies were set to destroy any claim Ukraine might have over the Kyivan Rus' heritage and eliminate Ukrainian identity as a separate one.

Even the most famous Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko, a symbol of the nation's resistance and fight for freedom in Imperial Russia, scolds Khmelnytskyi for the mistake he made by signing the treaty:

If only you, Bohdan the drunk

If you could see Pereyaslav now

And looked at that ruined fort

You would drink and drink again!

...

If only you weren't born at all

Or drank yourself to death in cradle

(Parts of the poem of Taras Shevchenko, 1859).

Therefore, Pereyaslav Treaty has completely different connotations for Russians and Ukrainians – for one nation, it was a triumph and beginning of the state's expansion. For the other, it was a start of 350 years of colonization.

Nevertheless, although oppressed under the Russian Empire's rule, Ukrainians did show some attempts of anti-Russian protests. With the Age of Enlightenment, the ideas of nation and national identity slowly made their way into Ukrainian society. From the late 18th century up until the beginning of the 20th century, the long process of Ukrainian National Revival took place. The ultimate goal of the revival was to establish equal rights between the nations inside the Russian Empire. During the revival, the previously mentioned first Ukrainian historiography

was published by Hrushevskyi who challenged the imperial interpretation of Kyivan Rus' history; secret political societies were formed - the first brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius and later Brotherhood of Tarasovs; writers and poets set to promote the Ukrainian language despite the abolishment publish their works in Ukrainian. In the 1900s, the first political parties are formed to advocate the independence of the Ukrainian state, and the leaders of the Ukrainian movement were included in the lists of opposition parties during the 1906 Russian elections. After being elected to the Russian Parliament or Duma, the Ukrainians created a coalition to promote the cultural and territorial independence of Ukraine. Thus, when the Imperial rule was weakened by the revolution of 1917, the leaders seized the long-awaited opportunity of independence and created its first government body, Central Council— and thus, the formation of Ukraine National Republic began. Although Ukrainian independence was short-lived, it existed for only four years; it is undoubtedly considered one of the stages of the Ukrainian statehood formation. In the time of UNR, leaders passed laws and policies that were focused on establishing Ukraine's sovereignty and freedom – the creation of Ukrainian Central Council, the appointment of the President, the adoption of national currency, and symbol. Having almost no military powers, the UNR was soon defeated by the Russian Bolsheviks, which resulted in Ukraine joining the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1921. The next chance for independence Ukraine will have only after the collapse of the Soviet Union – this time, Ukraine declared independence from the USSR and remained a sovereign state. The post-Soviet declaration of independence is considered the last stage of Ukrainian statehood, however, indeed not the last stage of nation-building.

Going back to the approaches to Kyivan Rus' heritage, the third viewpoint is Soviet. Unlike the Russophile claim on a solely Russian inheritance of cultural and political legacy of Kyivan Rus', the Soviet ideology was based on a shared past. Three Slavic nations are the successors of Kyivan Rus' – Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Unlike the Russophile approach,

Soviet doctrine acknowledges the existence of a separate Ukrainian state. However, this perspective is still more beneficial to Russia than to Ukraine (Pelenski, 1992). Although a separate state, Russian nation was still considered to be the dominant one, the big brother, Russia, watching over the younger brother, Ukraine. The formation of these three nations took place in the 14th and 15th centuries, the time when the Russian influence and power were the strongest and Ukraine was under Polish and Lithuanian rule. Therefore, the Russian nation was the primary guardian of Kyivan Rus' legacy (Pelenski, 1992).

To sum up, the ideology of three brotherly nations destined to stay united is found on historical myths (Smith et al., 1998). First, the myth of common origin – Ukraine and Russia are the descendants of Kyivan Rus'. Due to foreign influence, for a couple of centuries, the nations were separated and then reunited in 1654, resulting in the myths of separation and reunification. Lastly, the myth of common Orthodoxy is based on the idea of the shared Orthodox Church that originated in Kyiv with Prince Volodymyr. However, within the time, the jurisdiction has been shifted to Moscow. The aspect of the common Church has been a center of political debates after starting the conflict in Donbas; however, this point will be touched upon later in the chapter.

### **3.2. Understanding the Crimea dispute**

The Russian perspective on the "three united nations" ideology is essential to comprehend since it is directly connected to the transfer of the Crimean Peninsula from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to the Ukrainian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic<sup>3</sup>. The Soviet ideology of reunification was officially presented in 1964 when the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet transferred Crimea to Ukrainian SSR, commemorating the

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<sup>3</sup> See the original and translated document at <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/why-did-russia-give-away-crimea-sixty-years-ago>

300 years of Pereyaslav Treaty, a reunion of Ukraine and Russia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Crimea remained an administrative region on Ukraine with partial autonomy – the republic had its constitution and parliament with no legislative power but the right to allocate its budget.

The brief announcement of the transfer stated that Crimea is being relocated to the "brotherly" Ukraine due to its geographical proximity and cultural and economic ties with Crimea. The transfer proceedings also emphasized that "the Ukrainian nation has chosen to share its destiny with the Russian people and the centuries-long friendship between two nations had been strengthened by mutual struggles against imperialism, capitalist and foreign invaders." The transfer date was specifically chosen to highlight the reunification of Russia and Ukraine, a historical event that "had contributed greatly to the development of Ukrainian and Russian nations in the political, cultural and economic sense".

In 2013 in Ukraine, anti-government protests erupted, focused mainly only on a pro-European choice of the nation; however, they also had rather anti-Russian sentiments. As have been mentioned earlier, for centuries, Russian, Soviet, and even some Ukrainian historians have been establishing the narrative of the unity of brotherly people. Therefore, it is safe to assume that for Russian people and the Russian government, it was difficult to grasp the idea of Ukraine's desire to leave the Russian sphere of influence. In Russia's view, Southern and Eastern territories historically belong to Russia since the country is the direct successor of the Russian Empire, and these territories are populated by Russian speakers. When talking about the political situation in Ukraine or Russia's involvement in the conflict, President Vladimir Putin refers to the Eastern and Southern Ukraine as lands historically belonging to Russia (see Address by President of the Russian Federation, 2014). In the speech delivered after the Crimean referendum results, which proceeded with Crimea becoming a federal district of the

Russian Federation, Putin undeniably turns to nationalistic ideas (Tsygankov, 2015). He congratulates the citizens for reinstating historical justice and returning the territories to Russia:

“In people’s hearts and minds, Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia. This firm conviction is based on truth and justice and was passed from generation to generation, over time, under any circumstances, despite all the dramatic changes our country went through during the entire 20th century.

After the revolution, the Bolsheviks, for several reasons – may God judge them – added large sections of the historical South of Russia to the Republic of Ukraine. This was done with no consideration for the ethnic make-up of the population, and today these areas form the southeast of Ukraine. Then, in 1954, a decision was made to transfer Crimean Region to Ukraine, along with Sevastopol, despite the fact that it was a federal city. This was the personal initiative of the Communist Party head Nikita Khrushchev. What stood behind this decision of his – a desire to win the support of the Ukrainian political establishment or to atone for the mass repressions of the 1930’s in Ukraine – is for historians to figure out” (Address by President of the Russian Federation, 2014).

True, the specific reasoning behind the transfer remains unclear and is still debated. Apart from the official document released in 1954, there has not been any other official statement that would help determine the causes of such a decision. Some historians suggest that it was indeed because of the peninsula's territorial proximity to Ukraine's mainland and possible economic benefits. At the time of the transfer, Nikita Khrushchev was the First Secretary at the presidium. When recalling the 1954 act, his son Sergei mentions the hydroelectric power station's construction as one of the possible causes for the transfer:

“After Stalin’s death father had to take on the entire country, including Ukraine and Crimea. The question of Crimea came up sharply during the discussion of the construction of a cascade of hydroelectric power stations on the Dnieper. The plan was to dig irrigation canals from the lowest of the stations; the South-Ukrainian canal to Donbass and the North-Crimean canal to Crimea, naturally. The Ukrainian SSR was responsible for building the hydroelectric power stations and digging the canals. This is when the new Ukrainian Party Secretary Kirichenko started talking with my father about Crimea. He asked him to transfer Crimea to Kiev’s jurisdiction, because otherwise the work would not go smoothly” (Sergey Khrushchev on Crimea [excerpt], 2010).

Another possible explanation for the transfer was Nikita Khrushchev’s intention to strengthen the Ukrainian local government's loyalty to Soviet authorities (Salushev, 2014), especially after the civil war with the annexed Western regions of Ukraine – Volynia, and Galicia. Nevertheless, these assumptions of what led the transfer remain assumptions even with all the current international crisis that the decision on 1954 might have caused. In his Crimean address, Putin also questions the legality of the Crimean transfer in 1954:

“What matters now is that this decision was made in clear violation of the constitutional norms that were in place even then. The decision was made behind the scenes” (Address by President of the Russian Federation, 2014).

This statement, however, is inaccurate. Given that the Soviet Union was an authoritarian state, the transfer procedure was not difficult and quick. The proceedings of the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium indicate that the relocation of Crimea was done according to the 1936 Soviet

Constitution. Both republics, Russian and Ukrainian, agreed with the decision (Kramer, Wilson Center).

Furthermore, as one of the justifications for the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Putin brings up the prevailing Russian or Russian-speaking population of Crimea and historical ties between Russia and Crimea, even though the peninsula became under the control of Russian Empire only in 1783. Putin states that Grand Prince of Kyiv, Volodymyr, converted to Christianity in an ancient Khersones, now city of Sevastopol in Crimea:

“Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptized. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilization, and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus” (Address by President of the Russian Federation, 2014).

Here Putin uses the historical myth of common origin to legitimize the long-time relations between Russia and Crimea. Same as in the time of Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union, the current Russian government revisits its claim to Kyivan Rus’ heritage in order to reestablish a narrative of a united pan-Russian nation. To support that, in 2016, Moscow city authorities constructed a monument to Volodymyr the Great, indicating that Moscow is the successor of Slavic Christian culture, not Kyiv. Undoubtedly, this was a political move on behalf of Russia – a counterattack to Ukraine's actions to strengthen its right to Kyivan Rus’ legacy. One year before the President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko issued a decree commemorating the 1000th anniversary of Volodymyr’s death in as a way “to preserve and establish the traditions of Ukrainian statehood, remind of the role of the historical heritage of Russia-Ukraine in their formation, recognize the importance of accepting Christianity for the development of Ukrainian society as an integral part of European civilization, honoring the memory of

Volodymyr the Great - prominent statesman and politician, Prince of Kyiv, the creator of the medieval European state of Rus-Ukraine”.

It needs to be noted that Nikita Khrushchev, who initiated transfer, was a Ukrainian, and he never did provide specific reasons for the decision (Saluschev, 2014). Therefore, Russia, the state that claims to be the heir of the Soviet Union, might view the transfer as unjust. Overall, the Russian President always emphasizes on the historical connection between Russia and the peninsula (Biersack & O’Lear, 2014). Therefore, the loss of Crimea to Ukraine in 1991 was perceived by Russians as a “trauma” connected to overall tragedy of the collapse of the USSR (Suslov, 2014, p.5). In the Russian view, Crimea has been “betrayed” by Russia when the peninsula was given to Ukraine (Marples, 2016, p. 6). The reunification of Russia with Crimea is regarded as correcting historical mistakes and “curing historical trauma of exile and dismembering of the country” (Suslov, 2014, p. 5).

However, even with all possible ambiguity of the Crimean transfer, the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 still violated international law norms and two treaties. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, despite the possible bitter sentiment of losing Crimea, the government did sign two treaties that indicated their acknowledgment of Ukraine's sovereignty. First, it was the Belovezha Accords in 1991 – a treaty between Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia to establish the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), an entity somewhat similar USSR. Among many other articles in the document, the countries agreed to respect each other sovereignty and not interfere in the states' internal affairs. Second, the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 – an agreement that secured the territorial sovereignty of Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan in exchange for giving up the nuclear weapons. The memorandum was signed by the world's most significant nuclear powers – Russian Federation, the USA, and the UK. Hence, when Russia annexed Crimea, it not only broke its promises to Ukraine but also triggered a

massive response from the international community. When raising the question of the illegality of Russia's actions, Ukraine refers to the international treaties (Marxsen, 2014).

### **3.3. “Russian World” vs. Ukrainian National Revival 2.0**

As mentioned earlier, the claim of being a legitimate heir to Kyivan Rus is significant to both countries, Ukraine and Russia, in terms of establishing a cultural, political, and national identity. However, if in the Soviet Union, the official ideology was the previously discussed myth of reunification, the contemporary Russian leaders formulated the concept of "Russian World" (*Russkiy Mir*). In 2007, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation founded a non-governmental organization, fund “Russian World” that would promote Russian culture and language. Within time, the "Russian World" doctrine became a suitable course of action in foreign affairs (Suslov, 2018). "Russian World “considers the Russian language, Orthodox Christianity, and Russian culture to be the key aspects of a "Russian World" community within the country and outside its borders. As mentioned by the head of Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus are the basis for the "Russian World" since these countries comprised Christian Rus’ (Feklyunina, 2016). Yet again, the Russian political and national identity is formed based on contested historical narrative.

However, in Ukraine, there has not been an official response to this Russian ideology until the annexation of the Crimea and Donbas war in 2014. The Ukrainian authorities had not shown a strong anti-Russian sentiment since the country's independence in 1991. After the Orange Revolution in 2004, a pro-Western candidate Viktor Yushenko took office, his foreign policy was rather pro-EU and NATO than openly anti-Russian. However, with the Crimean annexation and start of the armed conflict, the Russian Federation was officially acknowledged as an aggressor, and Ukraine's foreign policy has turned into anti-Russian or occasionally anti-

Putin. For instance, in his celebratory speech on Ukraine gaining visa-free travel to EU, President Petro Poroshenko emphasized the importance of that day not only because Ukraine was one step closer to the Western world but most importantly it was finally “breaking up” with Imperial Russia. To indicate that he cited Russian poet Lermontov:

“Goodbye unwashed Russia

Land of slaves, land of masters

And you blue uniforms

And you, their loyal people”.

During his term from 2014-2019 Poroshenko repeatedly criticized the “Russian World” and indicated the connection between this Russian ideology and Ukrainian crisis. At Munich Security Conference, for example, Poroshenko warned the international community of the dangers of “Russian World” and how “everything turns to ruins” when the “Russian World” stepped into such places as Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, occupied Crimea and Donbas<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, Russian aggression and its policies towards Ukraine came after the expansion of Russian culture and language. Therefore, during Poroshenko's term Ukrainian government, business and society adopted policies and campaigns to boost the Ukrainian national identity and, most importantly, differentiate it from the Russian culture.

Ultimately, because of Russian actions in Crimea and Donbas the rebirth of Ukrainian national identity was not based on "being a Ukrainian", but rather "not being a Russian" (Molchanov, 2015). Shaping Ukrainian national identity through the Russian “other” is not an entirely new concept. Ukraine has already viewed its culture as democratic and European instead of authoritarian and Asian Russia (Smith et al., 1998). Yet, reinforcement of Ukrainian

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<sup>4</sup> See the President’s speech at <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/videos/vistup-prezidenta-ukrayini-petra-poroshenka-na-myunhenskij-k-65>

national unity was due to the Russian aggression and crisis inside the country in the following years. Ukraine's antagonism of Russia plays a significant role in consolidation of the country's national identity (Veira-Ramos & Liubyva, 2020), even in government controlled regions of Donbas, people give preference to a united Ukraine, rather than associate themselves with a separate local identity (Haram et al, 2019).

Given that the significant aspects of the "Russian World" are Russian language and Russian Church, the Ukrainian government aimed to promote the Ukrainian language and detach a Ukrainian Orthodox church from Moscow's control. The parliament increased quotas for the Ukrainian language a national and local TV channels and radio, increasing the amount of Ukrainian spoken shows to 75% from overall screen time. By the year 2024, this amount should reach 90%. As for the printed press, the quotas do not concern other languages of the EU, meaning that the policy does target mainly the Russian language as the language of an aggressor. The Ukrainian reaction is foreseeable and can be regarded as a security measure since Putin repeatedly stated that Russia would "always protect those people in Ukraine who feel a connection to Russian culture and language" (Washington Post, 2014). While the Ukrainian state has taken a rather strong stand on the language issue, the general population express conflicting opinions. The Ukrainian speaking population of the country perceive Russian language negatively, although they could tolerate it in everyday use. On the contrary, there is still a strong support for Russian language among Russian native speakers and complete disapproval of the Ukrainian language (Veira-Ramos & Liubyva, 2020). The polarization of the language issue in Ukraine is not novel. Starting from 1994 Presidential elections, votes for candidates were divided between Ukrainian speaking population in the Western part of the country and Russian speaking southeastern regions. It has been clear that the country has been often divided on the basis of language preference and consequently sympathies with Russia (Arel, 2018). Hence, the Russian/Ukrainian language struggle will probably continue to be

politicized and cause further destabilization in the country, especially in the times of current armed conflict.

Moreover, in 2018 President Petro Poroshenko began the battle for an independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church. In 2019 the country received Tomos in Constantinople, which made the Ukrainian Church self-governed and free from Russia's control. President Yushchenko had previous attempts to gain independence for the Ukraine Church; however, it was Poroshenko who put all how political power to obtain Tomos for Ukraine. Ukraine gaining an independent Church meant one step further from the ideas of “Russian World” and Russian culture and political influence (Shestopalets, 2020a). The independence of the Ukrainian Church sets to contradict the narrative of the common Orthodoxy of the three brotherly nations and serves as a symbol of strengthening Ukrainian statehood and national identity.

The newly gained autocephaly of the Ukrainian Church is directly linked to the Ukrainian Crisis, and therefore understanding the feud between the two Churches will also lead to a better apprehension of the armed conflict (Adler et al, 2020). Both Russian Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are involved in the Donbas War. The official policy of the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church during the events of Euromaidan and the current Donbas war is to establish peace. Patriarch Kirill, for example, had urged for a prisoner's swap between Ukraine and Donetsk and Luhansk republics. However, the leaders of local churches in Ukraine repeatedly criticized the Ukraine armed forces and paramilitary groups and portrayed them as neo-Nazis and described the Russian role in the Ukrainian crisis as a battle against the “global evil” (Kudors, 2018).

Having said that, the Ukrainian Churches have been also involved in the ongoing crisis and publicly condemned Russian invasion of Ukraine (Clark&Vovk, 2019). In Ukraine religious organizations of major churches, including Russian Orthodox, are very active in terms of providing humanitarian aid to IDPs and people effected by the conflict (Glatzer&Manuel,

2020). As a result of the conflict the Military Chaplaincy Agency was formed, allowing priests of all churches but Russian Orthodox to be assigned to the units of the Ukrainian armed forces (Verhovna Rada Ukrainy, 2016).). However, in addition to that, the role of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church institutions in the fight against the separatists in Eastern Ukraine cannot be underestimated. In the course of the interviews for this study, it was uncovered that military chaplains also were among the first ones to join the volunteer forces to bring supplies to the army before the Chaplaincy Agency was introduced. Although I know one local priest of the Russian Orthodox Church, who provided shelter to the wounded protestors during Euromaidan, there has not been any evidence that Russian Orthodox priests supported the Ukrainian army. The interviewed military chaplain condemned the priests of Russian orthodox for being for the “other side”. Nevertheless, although other churches, such as Ukrainian Catholics, should be represented and stationed in the conflict zone and provide pastoral care as military chaplains, it is only the Ukrainian Orthodox Church representatives who were aspired to do so (taken from my interview with the military chaplain, 2018).

On the other hand, some researchers argue that the independent Ukrainian church was securitized as a response to Russia’s image of an enemy (Shestopalets, 2020b). Clearly, the state’s interference in religious matters was dictated by political situation in the country and Poroshenko’s desire to oppose the threat of Russian Church and its possible influence on the Ukrainian society. Most of Ukrainians, about 64 percent, had either positive or neutral attitude towards the formation of an independent Ukrainian Church (TSN, 2018), however the matter was not socially pressing. Therefore, Poroshenko’s political agenda behind the state’s policies suggest the rise of possible religious nationalism (Shestopalets, 2020a).

It is not only the policies of the government but also the public's campaigns that focused on stimulating Ukrainian identity. For instance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a campaign for English media to start transliterating names of Ukrainian cities according to rules

of the Ukrainian language and not the Russian language as it was done before. The Ukrainian public immediately joined the campaign with hashtags #KyivnotKiev all over the social media. Within years of the start of the conflict, the Ukrainian cinematography had focused on Ukrainian films about the country's struggle with Russia, either during Soviet time or the current war in Donbas. That would be films such as "Kruty" about volunteer student army that fought Bolsheviks in 1918, "Cyborgs" that described a Donetsk Airport battle between Ukrainian paramilitaries and Russian forces, or "Stus" that talks about a Ukrainian poet who opposed the Soviet regime. Military personnel in the conflict zone preferred to greet each other with an old Ukrainian greeting "Glory to Ukraine" (*Slava Ukraini*), that was mainly used by an Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists in Soviet period. Hence, in 2018 the parliament recognized it as an official greeting for the Ukrainian regular army and police. As a result of all the policies and advocacies described above, Ukrainian society had experienced a robust Ukrainization process following external aggression.

Unexpectedly the Ukrainian public's attitude towards Russian people was 77% positive in 2019, while Russian authorities received only 13 percent of favorable opinion (KMIC, 2019). It is the actions of the Russian government that triggered such a massive anti-Russian reaction. The Ukrainian government's actions could be interpreted as the country's crusade to break free from the Russian and Soviet narratives of the Pan-Russian nation and "three brotherly states". Substantially, Ukraine's immediate emotions to Russia's actions could be described by a poem that went viral immediately after Crimean annexation:

We will never be brothers

neither in the homeland nor in the mother.

You have no spirit to be free -

we will not be even stepbrothers (Anastasiya Dmytruk, 2014).

### **3.4. Gaining perspectives on the Ukrainian crisis**

In the past several years, academic scholarship has covered various perspectives on the ongoing Ukrainian crisis, and its impact on global and domestic affairs. As discussed earlier in the chapters, Euromaidan protests and consequently, the Donbas war involved a wide range of actors and can be interpreted from multiple viewpoints. Historical myths and debates, regional power struggle, the rise of nationalism and use of hybrid war tactics – all these factors contribute to the complexity of the Donbas war.

The pro-European sentiments and particularly public's desire to join the European Union were the driving force behind the Euromaidan protests (Chayinska et al., 2018). In Ukrainian political discourse, Ukrainian nation made a choice to join the “civilized” European world and run away from “barbarians” Russians (Ponomariov, 2019). Having discussed the historical myths and frameworks earlier, it does not come as a surprise that Russia considers Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries to be under Kremlin's dominance. For Russia, these countries are “near abroad” states, and cannot be completely independent (Stent, 2019). Moreover, although the tensions between Europe and Russia were high long before Euromaidan, it was the events in Ukraine that triggered Russia to protect its “security interests against the spread of the Western-dominated order” (Raik, 2019). Russia is seen as a leader in Eastern and Central Europe and opposed when the status quo was endangered (Mezhuyev, 2018).

Yet, there is more to Russian actions than just establishing dominance in the region – its intervention in Ukraine aims to demonstrate that Russia has its own narrative of global balance and it needs to be regarded as equal by other world superpowers (Heller, 2019). Russian actions in the Crimea and Donbas mark the end of the post -Cold war order and challenge the idea of United States being the dominant global power and NATO security arrangements (Gil, 2020; Semeni, 2019). Resorting to previously mentioned historical

frameworks, Russia's assertive behaviour in Ukraine might be dictated by the rise of Russian nationalism and historical myths of unity with the brotherly Ukrainian nation, or so-called "little Russians". Pisciotta (2020) summarized that Russia's actions in Ukraine, as well as during Russo-Georgian<sup>5</sup> aimed to strengthen its position concerning neighbouring countries; to regain territories lost in the dismemberment of the USSR; to assume the recognized and unchallenged role of dominant regional power in the sphere of a space of Eurasian integration; and above all to put an end to USA expansion in the post-Soviet space (Pisciotta, 2020).

On the other hand, Dzarasov and Gritsenko argue that it was the Western powers that provoked Euromaidan in order to take over Ukraine's economic capital and turn Ukraine into the European periphery. Combine that with the security threat of NATO enlargement to the Crimean Peninsula, Russia had no choice but to stop the Western takeover of the Ukrainian land (Dzarasov & Gritsenko, 2020). According to the approach, the United States organized the protests at Maidan aiming to move Ukraine out of the Russian sphere of influence and capture the naval bases in Crimea, something that Kremlin perceived as a real threat to its security (Bandeira, 2019).

Moving on to domestic drivers of the conflict, as it has been suggested before the war in Ukraine consists of various non-conventional actors and is considered to be a hybrid war (Nubel, 2020). Based on obtained military experience in Georgia and Chechnya<sup>6</sup>, Russia mastered methods of warfare that require minimum usage of military confrontation and "exploit opponents' vulnerabilities" (Beehner & Collins, 2020). Therefore, when discussing the warfare in Eastern Ukraine, the researchers focus on informational war and propaganda

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<sup>5</sup> For more on Russo-Georgian war see

Karagiannis, E. (2013). The 2008 Russian-Georgian war via the lens of Offensive Realism. *European Security*, 22(1), 74-93.

Friedman, G. (2008). The Russo-Georgian War and the Balance of Power. *Geopolitical Intelligence Report*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Second Chechen War or Second Chechen Campaign was an armed conflict between Russian Federation and Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. It lasted from 1999 to 2009  
For more see *Huerou&Regamey, 2008*

technologies (Hetmanchuk & Zazuliak, 2019; Roigas, 2018; Richey, 2018) or paramilitary and militia formations that are present on both sides of the conflict.

The narrative of separatist forces of DNR and LNR has also been represented in academic literature (see Torc & Nahikian, 2020), however, it is the paramilitary forces that sparked much controversy among scholars as well Ukrainian society. As explained in the previous chapter, the paramilitary forces that fought or are still fighting in Donbas were mostly formed during or right after the events of Euromaidan. In the period of Euromaidan, amongst peaceful protestors, two groups identified themselves as nationalistic – Right Sector and Svoboda (meaning “freedom” in the Ukrainian language).

Euromaidan protests and Donbas war had influenced the society significantly in terms shaping the national ideology – the war helped to build an “idea of the Ukrainians, whose community inhabits the territory of Ukraine, controlled by the Ukrainian state” (Kaihko, 2017, p. 6). However, the post- Euromaidan national revival had a dubious effect, on the one hand Ukraine experienced the rise of national ideology, on the other - popularization of nationalist organizations.

Historically, the notion of Ukrainian nationalism referred to the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists led by Stepan Bandera in the first half of the twentieth century. The main goal of the organization was the liberation of Ukraine from the Soviet rule. The OUN was blamed for collaboration with Nazis during the Second World War, and up to this date, the Soviet and Russian connotation of the organization is exceptionally negative<sup>7</sup>. The Russian media and authorities repeatedly claimed that Ukrainian nationalists destabilize the fragile political situation in Ukraine by prosecuting Russians or Russian speakers. This modern negative connotation might be because it was the Ukrainian nationalist organizations, such as Azov, OUN and Right Sector who volunteered to defend Eastern Ukrainian borders in 2014.

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<sup>7</sup> Major Russian state channels refer to Ukrainian nationalists as “Benderas” or “neo-Nazis”.

Before discussing the role of nationalist organizations in the armed conflict, it needs to be mentioned that these organizations were the violent force behind the Euromaidan protests. Right Sector's leader Dmytro Yarosh admitted that long before Euromaidan, the organization had been training and preparing for a window opening to start the national revolution (Likhachev, 2016). Hence, when peaceful Euromaidan protests proved to be ineffective, the nationalist organizations, such as Right Sector and Svoboda, were more than ready to use violence to pressure the government (Ishchenko, 2020). Right Sector took over the governmental building of Kyiv City Council, and its members were involved in clashes with the state police with the use of Molotov cocktail and burning of tires (Likhachev, 2016).

With the start of the conflict in the East, the Euromaidan radicals were among the first to form volunteer paramilitary groups and join the fight in Donbas. The roots of the military volunteer movement, which is the object of this study, also go back to the times of Euromaidan. During the protests, people would bring the medical and food provisions, take care of the wounded – in other words, the same activities military volunteers would perform in later during the armed conflict (Madryga, 2019).

The status of Ukrainian paramilitaries and far-right organizations is rather dubious. On the one hand, the influence of these organizations on Ukrainian politics cannot be underestimated – they are well-liked since it was the radicals who overthrew the Yanukovich regime during the Euromaidan (Katchanovski, 2020). Rosaria Puglisi refers to paramilitaries as *heroes* (Puglisi, 2015), who first stood up to protect the sovereignty of Ukraine, risking their lives, patriots who possess the ability to change the political landscape of the country. When the regular Ukrainian army lacked resources, it was the volunteer battalions which “at the price of incredible efforts and courage, not only restrained the enemy but tried to reverse the situation from the first days of the conflict” (Klymenko, 2018, p.167).

On the other hand, the organizations often take matters in their own hands and pursue vigilante agenda and beat up certain politicians, for instance (Unian, 2014). Moreover, although the government is fully aware of the paramilitary's actions, the threat to democratic justice in Ukraine is evident (Zabyelina, 2019). Some scholars suggest that radical organizations obtained a monopoly over the use of force (Charap & Colton, 2018), and therefore with time the Ukrainian government grew nervous of the forces that paramilitary forces obtain and had to minimize the risks of possible uncontrolled violence.

Due to rising security risks, the paramilitary groups were gradually intergraded into regular Armed Forces of Ukraine, a decision that was not well received by some combatants and well as military volunteers (from a private conversation with military volunteer Raisa Shmatko, 2018). The representatives of the nationalists merged with the government, police and secret service (Katchanovski, 2020) and continue to play an essential role in the conflict dynamics and Ukrainian society.

Yet, with the integration of these paramilitary groups into the Ukrainian regular forces, the radical nationalism has not disappeared in the Ukrainian society. Indeed, apart from nationalist pro-government militias, several conservative groups gained significant popularity among the Ukrainian people in post-Euromaidan period, those are far-right organizations and radical religious groups (Shapovalova, 2018). A nationalist organization C14 violently protests LGBT and feminism movements and terrorizes the dwellings of Roma people in Ukraine. The latter was severely criticized by the international community and yet, despite clear radical nationalism, the organization is not regarded as “neo-Nazi”. In fact, the Ukrainian court ordered *Hromadske* media portal to apologize to the organization for calling them so. Moreover, in 2017 the Kyiv authorities cooperate with C14 – the radical organization patrols the city streets as a special municipal guard.

The Right Sector and other former paramilitary forces regularly participate in nationalist demonstrations, for example, an annual March of the Defenders – an alternative to a state-organized parade for the Independence Day. The march was first held after Volodymyr Zelenskiy came to power and aims to commemorate the fallen soldiers during the Donbas war and celebrate the country's independence (Pravda, 2020). It is important to note, that all of the interviewed military volunteers have been present at these marches alongside the representatives and symbols of Right Sector organization<sup>8</sup>. The nationalists have also been recognized and normalized by the authorities. The organizations positioned themselves as the ones protecting the Ukrainian interests in the armed conflict and even established “No Capitulation” campaign as a response to Zelenskiy's attempts of conflict de-escalation (Torc & Nahikian, 2020).

The further ambiguity of paramilitary organizations is based on their representation in other scholarly literature. The nationalists, such as Right Sector, Spilna Sprava and Svoboda, are blamed for overthrowing the legitimate government of Yanukovych and as a result causing the separatists movement in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine (Tsyganok, 2015). Nationalists' adverse treatment of anything remotely Russian frightened the Russian-speaking population of Crimea and Donbas. This fright of the radical groups might have also been used by the Western powers to fuel the tensions inside the country and escalate the conflict. Moreover, Ishin (2019) and Gudimenko (2015) suggest the malicious effect of the Ukrainian nationalists on global affairs. The state's support of these organizations aids the spread of xenophobia towards Russian, Jewish and Roma population in Ukraine, which consequently contributes to already uneasy political situation in Europe. The Ukrainian nationalists, Gudimenko (2015) argues, have taken over some of the key positions in the government and therefore are also accountable

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<sup>8</sup> The information was obtained from social media pages of the military volunteers. All the rights were granted during the interviews.

for the possible escalation of violence in Europe that would further worsen the relationship between Russia and NATO.

Nevertheless, despite an established image of the power the nationalists hold, the Ukrainian population does not support far-right nationalist organizations. It became apparent during the 2019 Presidential, and Parliament elections – the candidate from the united nationalist organizations received only 1.9 per cent of votes. Later in the year, the nationalist could not pass the 5 per cent bar to enter the Parliament.

To conclude, since the war in Ukraine carries a hybrid character, naturally, it would involve various actors whose roles and narratives need to be assessed (Rauta, 2019). As demonstrated above, there are a few perspectives on the unfolding of the Ukrainian crisis from international and domestic viewpoints. When it comes to examining the role of unconventional non-state actors, much attention is paid to the paramilitary forces. Yet, the appearance of paramilitary groups in the Ukrainian society is directly connected to the origins of military volunteer movement<sup>9</sup>. Though studied at the beginning of the conflict, there has been little research done on the changes that military volunteer movement has experienced. Despite the protracted nature of the conflict military volunteers continue to be a significant actor in the war with their own motivations and rationale; the movement has also become an essential part of Ukrainian civil society, and therefore their narrative needs to be explored alongside other key players.

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<sup>9</sup> More on that see Chapter III

## CHAPTER IV ORIGIN OF MILITARY VOLUNTEERS IN UKRAINE

### Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine, and gradually unfolds how military volunteers emerged. I conclude the chapter with a detailed overview of specific military volunteer groups that were used in this research. At the time of writing of this dissertation, the conflict is still ongoing; thus most of the resources used to write this specific chapter are news articles and television news, political speeches in English, Ukrainian and Russian. It should be noted that this dissertation however, does not focus on the study of the conflict, its causes or solutions. I am writing this chapter merely for the reader's comprehension of the situation in Ukraine and the framework of the work of military volunteers that are in the scope of this research.

For ethical reasons it should also be noted that although main sources of the information for this chapter were media articles, government statements and academic scholarship, I also use my own recollections, primarily when describing the events of the Euromaidan since I was present there from the first days of the protests. In this chapter, I attempt to reconstruct the subsequence of the events myself, however, there are already compiled detailed timelines of the Ukrainian crisis compiled by other researchers or media outlets <sup>10</sup>. To fully comprehend the developments of the armed conflict in the Eastern Ukraine, it is essential to also explain the events in the country that preceded it.

### 4.1. Euromaidan and the Crimea dispute

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<sup>10</sup>For example, see Geir Flikke, *A Timeline for The Conflict and War in Ukraine*

<https://www.atlanterhavskomiteen.no/files/dnak/Documents/Publikasjoner/2015/Sikkerhetspolitisk%20Bibliotek/NR%204-15%2014.%20august.pdf>

The chain of events that is considered to have resulted into this conflict goes back to the so- called Euromaidan (November 2013 – February 2014), also referred to as Revolution of Dignity by the media and citizens<sup>11</sup>. The Euromaidan was a long-lasting series of protest that took place in different cities of Ukraine. The name of the revolution relates to the overall importance of the defence of human dignity for the protestors in Kyiv (Nikolayenko, 2020). Such motivation is common for relatively recent mass mobilizations in other countries as well – Arab Spring Revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011 or Gezi Park movements in 2013 (Nikolayenko, 2020).

Leading to the Euromaidan, on 21 November 2013 the Cabinet of Ministries of Ukraine surprised the nation with a sudden decision to stop the preparations for the upcoming signing of the association agreement with the EU, promising to “re-establish the active dialogue with Russian Federation and other countries of the Customs Union and CIS countries for activization of the trade and economic relations with the aim of preserving and strengthening joint efforts of the economic potential of the state” (Official Web Portal of Parliament of Ukraine, 2013). This statement had provoked a massive reaction among Ukrainian citizens on social media with posts with the hashtags “#euromaidan” and “#maidan” appealing to the population to gather on maidan<sup>12</sup> and protest the government decision. Social media played a crucial role in mobilizing the society during Euromaidan due to the “lack of strong political or

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<sup>11</sup> See articles by *Al Jazeera*, *Washington Post*, *Foreign Policy*.

<sup>12</sup>The word *maidan* (“square” in Ukrainian) can be referred to *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* - the main square of the Ukraine’s capital Kyiv or after the civil protests od 2013 it is commonly referred to as “massive protest and civil unrest”, e.g. “gather a maidan”

civic organizations behind the protests, or the seeming absence of a popularly recognized leader(s) calling people to action” (Bogdanova, 2014, p. 134)<sup>13</sup>.

As a result, the next day media reported hundreds of Ukrainians showing up in the capital’s centre and staying there overnight “till the end” and small maidans popping up in other parts of the country, Western - cities of Uzhgorod, Ivano-Frankivsk, Luts’k, Lviv, as well as Eastern – Donetsk city. In the course of the next week, thousands of people took part in the protests in different cities in the country, reaching one hundred thousand people in Kyiv on Sunday, 23 November 2013 (TSN, 2013). However, the number of the Euromaidan protestors have extremely decreased during the weekdays, for instance, on Tuesday, 26 November, it was reported that only dozen of people were still present at the Kyiv’s Maidan of Nezalezhnosti (TSN, 2013). Against the Euromaidan’s aspirations, on 29 November 2013 in Vilnius Ukraine’s back then President Viktor Yanukovich has declared that the country will hold off on a trade deal with the EU and did not sign the previously discussed partnership declaration while other countries of Eastern European Partnership countries, Georgia and Moldova, did proceed with the deal.

Up until the night of 30 November 2013, the situation in Kyiv was relatively calm without any violence from neither the protestor’s nor the police sides. However, approximately at 4:30 am Ukrainian police attacked the protesters, who were mainly students, claiming that the protesters were interfering with the installation of the Christmas tree at the city’s square, thus justifying its violence. The reaction of the population was substantial – in the morning the city saw yet another immense protest of around 10 000 people, but if before the riots were comprised by mostly students, now it was the parents of the young generation that took their

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<sup>13</sup> The usage of social media during mass mobilization has been previously discussed in reference to other revolutions, i.e. Tunisia, Egypt, Libiya. For Tunisia, see Breuer et al, 2015; For Libiya and Egypt, see Ale et al, 2013.

outrage to the streets<sup>14</sup>. That day laid the beginning of a protest movement concentrated on Kyiv's Maidan Nezalezhnosti; protest movement that was not about singing the European deal anymore, but about demands of government resignation for violating human rights and high level of corruption in the country, freedom of speech and punishment of the police that had beaten up the peaceful protestors (BBC, 2013). Maidan soon turned from peaceful to violent with clashes between protestors and the police on Hrushevsky street, police using traumatic and pomp weapons, spilling the first blood of the Euromaidan – death of two protestors Sergiy Nigoyan and Mikhail Gisniewski (ZNAJ, 2014). The clashes continued and reached its bloodiest point on February 20<sup>th</sup>, when the police snipers shot down the protestors on the Instytutska street.

Following that, the things proceed extremely fast – the opposition and President Yanukovych with European politicians mediating, reach an agreement for parliamentary and presidential reelections, Yanukovych flees first the capital and then the country the next day, Ukrainian Parliament appoints Turchynov as a speaker and active head of the country (Flikke, 2015). In a couple of days, the pro-Russian protestors in Crimea<sup>15</sup> started riots demanding the peninsula's authorities not to comply with the newly appointed government of Ukraine and organize a referendum to join the Russian Federation (Flikke, 2015). Consequently, on 16 March 2014 a referendum for joining Russian Federation was held with almost 97 per cent in favor and two days later President of Russian Federation Vladimir Putin and the heads of the Republic of Crimea signed an agreement that signified the new beginning for the Crimea – as a federal subject of the Russian Federation.

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<sup>14</sup> From my personal recollections

<sup>15</sup> Republic of Crimea is a peninsula in the Eastern Europe surrounded by the Black sea and Sea of Azov. From 1921 was a part of USSR Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialists Republic. In 1954 it was transferred to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialists Republic. At the moment of this research, Crimea remains a disputed territory with majority of the international community recognizing it as an occupied territory.

## **4.2. First separatists' protests**

Now while the attention of the international community was devoted to the Crimea annexation, Ukrainian government preparing to the new elections and dealing with the “post-revolution” chaos, and the nation mourning people killed at maidan, people in the Eastern and Southern cities of the country were not planning on accepting the leave of the former President Yanukovich and newly appointed governors of the regions (RIA, 2014). Anti-government protests at the beginning of March in a month turned into the seizure of government buildings in the Eastern cities – Donetsk, Luhansk and Kharkiv, demanding to hold a referendum for the independence of the regions and declaring the People's Republics -Donetsk and People's Republic of Kharkiv (Al Jazeera, 2014). Ukrainian police forces managed to take over the control of the Kharkiv buildings detaining around 70 people (RIA, 2014). On 12 April 2014, the protestors gained control of the government building in a small city of Slavyansk, which followed the acting President Turchynov's decision to start the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) in the Eastern cities of Ukraine (BBC, 2015). ATO was hoped to last a couple of months, instead, it turned into one of the most dangerous conflicts in the world, continuing for six years so far and taking lives of more than ten thousand people.

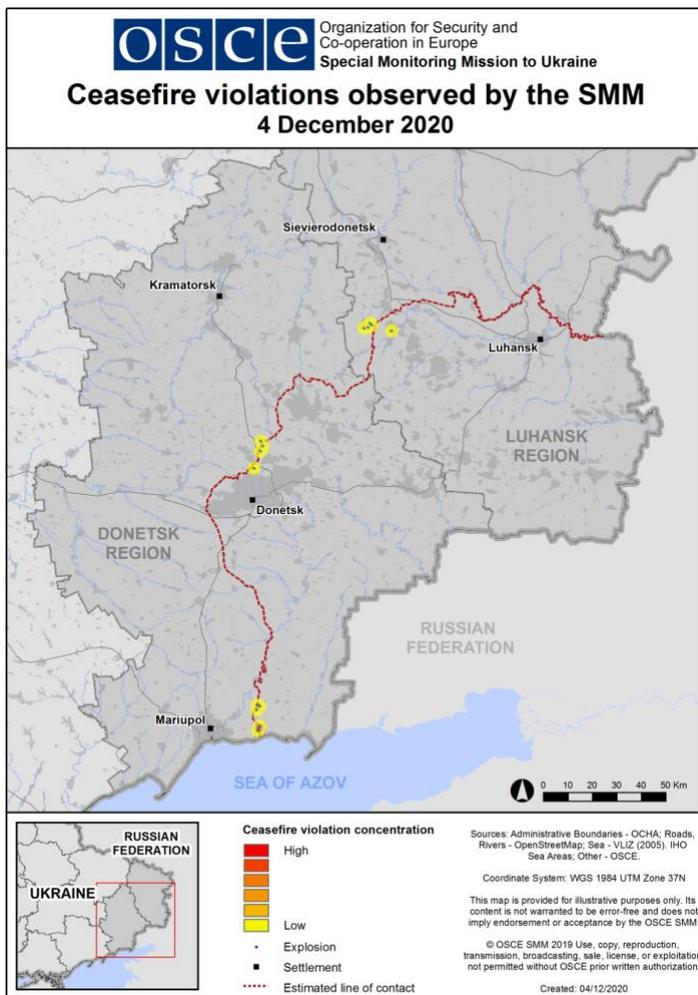
## **4.3. Outline of the conflict**

From the very beginning of the conflict, the fighting was taking place in different parts of the two *oblasts*<sup>16</sup> – Donetsk and Luhansk (Official Web Portal of Parliament of Ukraine, 2014). The two regions declared its independence from Ukraine in May of 2014 at the unrecognized referendums, declaring themselves the independent states of Donetsk National Republic (DNR) and Luhansk National Republic (LNR).

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<sup>16</sup> *oblast* is a territorial unit in Ukraine. Overall Ukraine is divided in 24 oblast and Autonomous Republic of Crimea

Figure 1. Map of recorded ceasefire violations, December 2020



Source: OSCE, 2020.

In the course of the conflict, around ten thousand people died, and 1.6 million people had to leave their homes to escape the fighting (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2017).

There have been several attempts of the peace talks in different formats. In September 2014 after the first terrifying months of the conflict, the first Minsk peace talks in the capital of Belarus were conducted by the trilateral contact group – representatives of Ukraine, Russia and OSCE, with the DNR and LNR delegates present. Minsk agreement contained twelve points, most importantly, however, it obliged both sides to an immediate ceasefire (OSCE,

2014). Yet, the fragile peace was violated multiple times when the separatists seized new territories and Donetsk Airport and (European Union, 2015). Consequently, on 12 February 2015 another format of the meeting was introduced. This time it was not only President Poroshenko and President Putin sitting at the table, but also France's Francois Hollande and German's Angela Merkel. The agreement that included ceasefire and withdrawal of the heavy weapons was also signed by the representatives of DNR and LNR. (European Union, 2015). The ceasefire after Minsk II, however, did not last very long as well. Up to now, both sides are still reporting about their casualties and constant violation of the peace agreement (OSCE, 2018).

After four years of the conflict, on 30 May 2018, the Ukrainian government decided to change the format of the ATO to OOC (eng. Joint Forces Operations). Although this change has not influenced the flow of the conflict so far, it did bring changes to the structure of the Ukrainian forces. Mainly, now the General Staff (*Heneralnyi Shtab*) is in command of the operation, and not the Security Service of Ukraine as it was before, and the Ukrainian forces have special power on the territory of the *OOC*. Overall, the new law gave more authority to the military forces without actually introducing martial law.

Despite all the efforts and negotiations, peace is still far away from Eastern Ukraine. Both sides of the conflict had publicly urged for conflict de-escalation, however, political compromise is not likely to be achieved (Sanders & Tuck, 2020). Moreover, the studies have shown that the majority of the Ukrainian population is hoping for a long-awaited diplomatic solution to the current crisis (Haran et al., 2019). Many have thought that change of leadership will bring some developments to the conflict dynamics, however as of the beginning of 2020, one year after an overwhelming victory of Volodymyr Zelensky in the presidential election, there are only a few changes done. During his presidential campaign, Zelensky claimed that he would stop the war despite lack of a concrete plan to achieve peace (Dreyfus & Vilmer, 2019).

In order to establish a ceasefire, both – Ukrainian troops and Russian-backed separatists pulled back from three towns in October 2019, thus expanding a conflict-free zone. Withdrawal of troops was President Putin’s demand in order to proceed with the peace talks in the Normandy format, meaning having Germany and France present at the negotiation table. With prisoner’s swap in September, Zelenskiy might have established grounds for the conflict de-escalation, yet many Ukrainians perceived his actions as giving in to the “aggressor” Russia (BBC, 2019). Even with the troops’ withdrawal, however, the ceasefire is yet to be over – only in 2020, while I am still writing this chapter (as of July 2020), 31 Ukrainian soldiers died in the conflict zone. Overall, out of 13 articles presented at Minsk II, only few were implemented to some extent and it seems that the existing agreements between the parties “will not bring the Donbas conflict to peaceful resolution” (Atland, 2020), and unfortunately the Ukrainian conflict might become a “forgotten issue” (Dreyfus & Vilmer, 2019).

#### **4.4. Role of Russia in the conflict**

Anti-Western tendency in the Pro-Kremlin Russian media was clearly present during the Ukrainian crisis in 2014 (Hutchings & Szostek, 2015), so it came to no surprise when President Vladimir Putin authorities accused the West in planning the Euromaidan and training its participants. He considers the results of the Euromaidan an unconstitutional coup d’état<sup>17</sup> President Putin claims that Russia does not consider its fault in what is happening in Ukraine, denies the presence of the Russian army<sup>18</sup>. In fact, the Russian side refers to the armed

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<sup>17</sup> Press conference with President Vladimir Putin about the situation in Ukraine. Taken from the website of the Administration of the president. Accessed September 3, 2018

<http://kremlin.ru/catalog/countries/UA/events/20366>

<sup>18</sup> Taken from the press conference with president Putin. Accessed September 3, 2018 <https://www.segodnya.ua/politics/press-konferenciya-putina-rossiya-ne-vinovata-v-voyne-v-ukraine-782508.html>

<https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-42356417>

conflict in Eastern Ukraine as a civil war<sup>19</sup>. Although Russian Federation has never admitted its involvement in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine, and there has not been enough proof to categorize the Donbas War as an “internationalized” conflict (Bellal, 2015). Russia is treated by both Ukraine and most of the international community, as one of the sides in the conflict. The Russian government did acknowledge the presence of “Russian volunteers” who are fighting voluntarily on the side of the separatists, as well sending tons of humanitarian aid to the conflict zone, however, the country denies sending regular army or ammunition. Moreover, during several peace talks and negotiations, for instance, in Minsk or Paris, Russia always represents separatist and lobbies their demands.

As for the Russian citizens, according to Levada Center, the biggest Russian independent sociological center, majority of Russians (27 per cent) consider the Ukrainian conflict as a result of nationalistic politics of the Ukrainian authorities, 15 per cent believe that the reason is the protest of the population of Eastern Ukraine and only 4 per cent think that Russia’s interference resulted into the current situation<sup>20</sup>. Opposite to that, half of Ukrainians see Russia behind the conflict, and around 15 per cent blame the Ukrainian government for the events in Donbass (Detektor Hromads'ka Organizaciya, 2018). Moreover, Ukraine officially declared the Russian Federation an aggressor with the regards to the conflict in Donbas and the Crimean Peninsula temporary occupied by Russia triggering an immediate outrage from the Russian side<sup>21</sup>. Understanding Russian involvement in the conflict is essential not only to fully grasp the overall conflict development but also when it comes to references to this country by

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<sup>19</sup> Taken from the interview with President Vladimir Putin

<https://ria.ru/world/20150126/1044360467.html>

<sup>20</sup> Information is taken from the statistical reports of the Levada Center

<https://www.levada.ru/2015/07/28/kto-voyuet-v-donbasse/>

Accessed September 3, 2018

<sup>21</sup> See the law at <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2268-19>

military volunteers later on in this text.

#### **4.5. Ukrainian volunteer battalions and military volunteers**

One of the peculiar and essential to these research elements of the conflict is the presence of the *dobrovolchi bataliony* (eng. volunteer battalions) or *dobrobaty* – military, police and paramilitary group that took or still are taking part in the Donbas war at the time of this research. These combat volunteers took over the state’s defence role, thus making it “a unique phenomenon in the history of modern Europe (Bulakh et al., 2017). Back in 2014, the regular Ukrainian army was not prepared to provide a proper response to the foreign aggression and separatist movement in Donbas (Wilk, 2017). Post-Euromaidan political crisis, lack of leadership and most importantly decades of corruption in the country effected the state’s ability to face a sudden military threat (Wood, 2019). As later admitted by the former head of Ukraine, Oleksandr Turchynov, the state was unable to mobilize regular army rapidly; thus, the paramilitary volunteer groups were formed by the Ministry of Defense and Internal Affairs and sent to the combat zone before the national mobilization.

Most of the combat volunteer groups were formed based on the already existing self-defence units of the Euromaidan, and almost right away joined the fighting in the East. Although some of them dissolved later, as of 2015 there were 84 battalions, that could have been divided into three groups:

1. Battalions formed within Ministry of Internal affairs of Ukraine: assault battalions the National Guard of Ukraine and patrol police special task battalions
2. Battalions formed within Ministry of Defense of Ukraine: territorial defense battalions and the armed forces of Ukraine battalions
3. Independent battalions that have not integrated with the government institutions.

The most discussed and disputable battalions are, of course, the self-governed and self-financed paramilitaries that refused to merge with the Ministries – Ukrainian Volunteer Corps Right Sector and Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) battalions. Although in April 2015, the Ministry of Defense claimed that all of the battalions have integrated within the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and an agreement was made with the head of Right Sector Dmytro Yarosh, as of August 2018, they are still fighting as an independent organization and are not being controlled by the government. Although not operating heavy machinery, the battalions of Right Sector have been in the epicentre of the hottest battles throughout the conflict in Pisky, Donetsk Airport, Avdiivka, Mariinka. During the interviews for this research, Right Sector battalions were mentioned several times, including their current position in the conflict zone, I can verify that the battalions indeed are at the conflict's frontline, however for security measures, the exact location will not be disclosed. Since these battalions do not belong to any institution, the state cannot provide them with any supplies, a lot is given by the volunteers (clothes, food, ammunition), they can however, leave the trophy weapons they “won” during the battles. There in the conflict zone, Right Sector have their own training centre for new fighters as well, since if sent to the front line, the fighters have to spend at least two months there before rotation (volunteer Zhenya, 2018; volunteer group Raisa Shmatko, 2018; volunteer group of Olesya Naumovska, 2018).

The emergence of volunteer battalions led to the mass mobilization of civilians, individuals who would provide the combatants with medical help food and ammunition – around 60-70 percent of provisions was donated by common Ukrainian citizens (Cohen & Green, 2016). The regular aid to the combatant turned into a massive military volunteer movement (*volonters'kyi ruh*) that played a substantial role in the conflict dynamics, and the state of the Ukrainian army (Oleinik, 2018). This new type of volunteer organizations that support Ukrainian armed forces during the Donbas war is a unique feature of the civil society

in conflict-ridden Ukraine (Puglisi, 2015). These military volunteers or *viys'kovi volontery* are the object of this study.

Throughout conducting my fieldwork it became clear that the number of the groups that helped the military forces have significantly decreased. Thus, it was necessary to establish which groups are still active. The list of the registered military volunteer organizations that are supporting the army was available at the website of the Ministry of Information Policy of Ukraine. This list, however, contained organizations that appeared not to be active anymore; thus I decided to check the media accounts and websites that are in free access in order to make sure that the organizations that I intend to contact are still working. In addition, analysis of the literature review on the post-Euromaidan civil society also gave me an overview of the active organizations that are providing support to the armed forces. For instance, Zarembo, in her recent analysis on the role of the civil volunteer organizations in defence reform in Ukraine, identified the largest volunteer organizations that are providing help to the armed forces based on four criteria:

1. “public acknowledgement, i. e. being listed among the most important volunteer organizations by the media, experts and the government;
2. 2014 as the starting year of the operation;
3. a working website and transparent financial accountability;
4. no declared affiliations with a political force” (Zarembo, 2017, p.52).

It needs to be mentioned that some of the organizations that were chosen for Zarembo’s study - Wings of Phoenix (*Kryla Feniksa*), Come Back Alive (*Povernys Zhyvym*), The People’s Home Front (*Narodnyi Tyl*), Army SOS (*Armiya SOS*), and The People’s Project (*Narodnyi Proekt*) were also listed by the Ministry of Information Policy.

Among the organizations mentioned above, only Wings of Phoenix appeared not to be active anymore, judging by the content of their website and Facebook page. Thus, I contacted

the other three organizations and the organizations that were active via email, Facebook messages and phone, to the Come Back Alive organization I was referred to by another organization I interviewed. People's Home Front and Army SOS did not respond to the inquires, even after I was referred to them by other organizations. Having established that, the research is looking into the work of 13 civil society organizations, both register and unregistered groups. Here I provide a brief overview of each interviewed military volunteer group in order for the reader to have an understanding of who military volunteers are and what they do in the context of the armed conflict.

### **1. Come Back Alive (*Povernys Zhyvym*)**

Founded in 2014, the organization is supporting specific subunits of the army by providing them with ammunition (for instance, thermographic camera, thermographic, quadcopter, machines sights etc.), teaching snipers and artillery, repairing the cars that are used at the front line. So far, they have collected around 125 million hryvnias for the army's support. They have delivered to the army more than 1 000 thermographic cameras and optical sights, more than 500 tablets with software for artillery, about 60 machines, more than 40 quadcopters and drones.

### **2. People's Project Ukraine**

Founded in 2014, a crowdfunding platform that allows people of Ukraine to donate money to various social, medical and military projects. Having started with the support to certain sub units of the armed forces, they have so far raised around 100 million hryvnias for their projects.

### **3. Fund "Myr I Ko"**

Founded in 2014, the organization is supplying food, ammunition, clothing and footwear, equipment to military units and volunteer battalions. It also provides

medicines for wounded soldiers in hospitals, helps infants of orphanages and internally displaced people.

**4. International Volunteer Fund** (*Mizhnarodnyi Volonterskyi Fond*)

Registered in 2016, the organization however was active before. The main goal of the organization is making campaigns in order to support the people who need help. The organization is providing supplies to the armed forces as well humanitarian help to the population in the conflict zone.

**5. “Common Work”** (*Spilna Sprava*)

Founded in 2010, the organization is a radical opposition group. The interview was conducted with the representative of a smaller group inside the organization that is focused on providing help to the military, particularly volunteer battalion “Pravyi sektor”.

**6. International Alliance of Fellowship Assistance** (*Mizhnarodnyi Alians Bratskoi Dopomogy*)

Registered organization that is providing help to the army, particularly to the volunteer battalion Right Sector. The organization also provides help to the veterans of the conflict with a job search and regularly visits the conflict zone.

**7. Battalion Sitka**

Founded in 2014, the organization provided help to the army and volunteer battalions mainly with making masking nets for the heavy machinery and people. The organization also support the children of the deceased soldiers and provided social and psychological rehabilitation to the soldiers.

**8. Tower above Dnipro** (*Vezha Nad Dniprom*)

Active since 2014, unregistered volunteer group that is based in Kyiv. The group's main activity is making masking nets for heavy machinery and people for the armed forces and volunteer battalions.

**9. Raisa Shmatko/informal volunteer group/advisory body to the district administration**

Unregistered volunteer group led by Raisa Shmatko, founder of the "Ukrainian Women Movement" Organization. The group was active since the beginning of the conflict, it provides help to the armed forces, particularly to volunteer battalion "Pravyi Sektor". They also provide humanitarian help to the orphanages in the conflict zone and IDPs in Kyiv. The group regularly visits the conflict zone to deliver the supplies.

**10. Your way (*Tviy Shlyah*)**

Active since 2014, this registered organization first provided the armed forces with supplies however at the moment focuses on supporting the orphanages in the conflict zones and organizing camps for the orphaned children from the area.

**11. Maskuvalna Sitka na Vezhi**

Active since 2014, unregistered volunteer group that is based in Kyiv. The group mostly consists of women, who are making masking nets for heavy machinery and people for the armed forces and volunteer battalions.

**12. Olesya Naumovska, a volunteer group**

Active since 2014, unregistered volunteer group provides supplies to the armed forces in the conflict zone. The group uses Facebook page to collect money and inform about the needs of the army. The group regularly visits the conflict zone to deliver the supplies. I joined this volunteer group for my participant observation trip to the conflict zone.

**13. Medical Assistance group "Viterec"**

Active since 2014, the volunteer group is providing medical assistance to the armed forces at the front line. Currently, the group is being supported by the above-mentioned organization “Come back Alive”.

As it can be observed, the interviewed organizations differ in terms of the type of activity, size and even formal registration. Yet, all of them are the remaining representatives of the Ukrainian military volunteer movement. The analysis of the interviews with these thirteen organizations combined with talks with other representatives of the movement served as the main source to present the narrative of Ukrainian military volunteers who continue to be involved in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

## **CHAPTER V MILITARY VOLUNTEERS AS PART OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

### **Introduction**

This chapter covers the existing academic literature and other available sources in order to position military volunteers within the scope of post-Soviet Ukrainian civil society as well as in the similar context of an armed conflict or violent environment in other countries. First, I discuss the development of the Ukrainian civil society from Ukraine's independence in 1991 up to the conflict in the Eastern part of the country. After discussing the changes in Ukrainian civil society after two major upheavals, Orange Revolution and Revolution of Dignity, I discuss scholarship on military volunteers. Since military volunteers is considered to be a phenomenon that emerged as a result of an armed conflict, I move on to the studies done on the role of civil society in the armed conflict worldwide in order to place Ukrainian military volunteers in the global context. The purpose of this literature review is to demonstrate that despite numerous studies, there is lack of literature on post-Euromaidan civil society, specifically military volunteer movement and an insufficient amount of empirical research on the role of local civil society in the armed conflict. Since the phenomenon of military volunteers is rather new and the armed conflict in Ukraine is far from being resolved, there are more and more studies conducted in this field. Thus, I had to draw a line in terms of timeframe for my literature review. I also need to mention that my research was formulated back in 2016, hence it was a rather risky endeavour since there were almost no studies done on the topic and therefore surely new scholarship was being developed by other researchers concurrently with mine. The following overview of civil society in Ukraine and its role in the armed conflicts worldwide is based on scholarship published up until August 2020, which would be two years after I finished conducting interviews for this study.

### **5.1. Modern Ukrainian civil society**

Although Ukraine is considered to have the most active civil society sector within the Post-Soviet space (Mulford, 2016), it took several steps and political crises for the civil society to evolve. Within this relatively short period, Ukraine has witnessed several major upheavals that affected the country - Hunger Strike or Revolution on the Granite in 1990, Orange Revolution in 2004 and Revolution of Dignity in 2013.

In the last years of the Soviet Union, Ukraine had a substantial social movement for its independence from the USSR. This movement consisted of several demonstrations, such as “human chain” from Kyiv to L’viv in January 1990, students’ 16 days hunger strike on Maidan square in Kyiv in October 1990 and Donbas workers strike in March-April 1991 (Brzechczyn, 2007). This movement was not only the “first step toward Ukrainian independence” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2015) but also the first large-scale movement in the history of contemporary Ukraine that marks the beginning of the civil society development in the country. However, despite numerous independence movements preceding the fall of the regime, for more than a decade, post-communist civil society, including the Ukrainian, was described as weak. The label “weak” is usually referred to as the major cross-national study done by Marc Howard (2003) and presented in his book “The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe”. The author suggests several specific reasons for his argument. Firstly, post-soviet people tend to doubt any kind of voluntary groups due to a long history of mistrust for communist organizations. Although the term civil society was not existent in communist countries, the government did allow and even encouraged organizations as long as they did not tangle with any political matters or threaten the power of the state. However, participation in these organizations was mandatory; the Komsomol (Communist Youth League), for example, was a youth organization that promoted the political doctrine of the Communist Party and students had no choice but to join it (Evans et al. 2006). Secondly, Howard (2003) suggests

that people in communist countries could only rely on their small circle of friends, due to the overall atmosphere of fear and secrecy. It was common to use personal ties to obtain various goods due to the overall scarcity of products in communist countries. Thus, if in Western societies, people tend to join voluntary organizations or assemblies in order to make friends and socialize, post-communist individuals prefer to communicate within their established social groups. Moreover, Howard also argues that after the fall of the communist regime, idealistically people were expecting a change for good and when that did not happen, society was a disappointment with the political and economic development, which only strengthened their disinterest in activism (Howard, 2002, 2003). Therefore, Howard states, post-Soviet civil society is not only weak, but also doomed to stay like so. Yet, few years after Howard's thesis, several post-Soviet countries experienced mass mobilizations among civilians that surprised the West and renewed interest in civil society in that part of the world.

In Ukraine, the first significant social mobilization that laid the foundation to civil society development was the Orange Revolution in 2004, one of the so-called coloured revolutions in the Post-Soviet space, the others taking place in Georgia in 2003– Rose Revolution and Kyrgyzstan in 2005 – Tulip Revolution. The Orange Revolution was a series of long-term protest movements for the support of one of the presidential candidates Viktor Yuschenko. After another candidate, Viktor Yanukovich, was proclaimed a winner of the presidential race, the public called for re-elections claiming that the results were falsified. The mass mobilization is argued not to be impromptu but rather guided by the leaders of Western funded non-governmental NGOs; namely, the youth civic organization It's Time (*Pora*) was founded to oppose the government of President Leonid Kuchma<sup>22</sup> (Lane, 2008). The strikes took over almost half of the country, mostly Western part, and resulted in the rerun of the elections with Yuschenko winning with 52 per cent of votes (Wilson, 2009). The Orange

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<sup>22</sup> Leonid Kuchma is the second president of independent Ukraine, serving two terms from 1994 till 2005.

Revolution was just still the first step towards gaining impact on the policymaking process, according to the CIVICUS Civil Society Index Report 2006, at that time civil society organizations still lacked significance in policymaking (CIVICUS, 2006). Thus, while Orange Revolution sparked massive civil mobilization across the country after protestors achieved their goal and reelections took place, the previously active citizens returned to a rather apolitical life, and Ukrainian civil society did not undergo any qualitative breakthrough (Biermann et al., 2014; Smagliy 2017).

Since the Orange Revolution, the quantity of the registered civil society increased greatly. By the year 2010, 75 000 non-governmental organizations were registered, however, only about 4000 were active, the rest existed on paper at most (Solonenko, 2014). Moreover, as of 2005, one year after the revolution, only 84 per cent of Ukrainians were listed as members of any civil society organization (Panina, 2006, as cited in Lane, 2008) – thus, when discussing the qualitative development of post-Orange Revolution Ukrainian civil society, most researchers are rather critical. The West, however, saw the revolution as a victory that brought another post-communist society closer to establishing democracy. To support that, in 2006 Freedom House, a well-known U.S. non-profit organization moved Ukraine from “partially free” to “free” countries for the first time since the country’s independence. Given the victorious peaceful protests, experts improved the countries stand in the categories of civic right and political participation, stating that Ukraine has a “vibrant civil society” and “massive protest demonstrated the strength of civil society”. In general, international indices, such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (CSOSI), improved Ukraine’s stand with the regards to the development

of civil society<sup>23</sup>. Yet, although there was a slight qualitative change of the development of Ukrainian civil society since the Orange Revolution and civil society organizations were showing sufficient change in terms of the relations with the state, external actors and society in general (Solonenko, 2014), researchers use Orange Revolution as an example of mass movement that failed to bring sufficient changes to the development of civil society (Shapovalova & Burlyuk, 2018). Post-Orange revolution civil society was described as “NGO-cracy”, meaning that it was mostly centered around Western-funded NGOs that had little engagement with local people (Lutsevych, 2013). The West decided to encourage the developing civil society after the revolution by providing grants to certain professional NGOs, while those were “networking with Western embassies rather than engaging with their fellow citizens” which resulted in only 29.9 per cent of Ukrainians to know the name of their local organizations (Smaglyi, 2017, p. 2). The elite circle of NGOs is the dominant feature of the post-Orange Revolution civil society. Although this network of NGOs did play a minor role in guiding the protests in 2013, overall Orange revolution brought little change to the qualitative development of Ukrainian civil society.

Thereafter, 2013 political crisis followed by the armed conflict in the Eastern part of Ukraine has been the most decisive and at the same time challenging time for the development of Ukrainian civil society. Without doubt, previous protest movements of 1991 and 2004 had an impact on the course of events of the 2013 political crisis since there already existed the network of activists that would help to lead the protest movements and share their experience (Rights & Matters, 2014). Yet, unlike the Orange Revolution where civil society organizations

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. USAID, 2013 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia, 17th Edition – June 2014, pp. 223-230, at:

<http://www.ngo.ee/sites/default/files/files/+E&E%202013%20CSOSI%20Full%20Report.pdf>.

cooperated with the leaders of the opposition, during Euromaidan civil society refused to affiliate with any political power and followed their own agenda (Khmelko & Pereguda, 2014). Although still sceptical about the overall quality of post-Euromaidan civil society, most researchers acknowledge positive drastic changes in the development of the third sector. It seemed that the Ukrainians learned their lesson with the failure of the previous revolution and this time continued to consolidate their effort even after the victory of Euromaidan. Given the start of the armed conflict in Donbas<sup>24</sup> and society's long-awaited desire for political changes, civil society organizations focused on two areas of work, humanitarian response to the conflict and realization of reforms. Civil society groups have formed political parties, such as Democratic Alliance, Power of the People, Civic Movement Khvylya and Mikheil Saakashvili's The New Forces Movement. Democratic Alliance took seats in Kyiv City Council in the following city elections. Moreover, for the first time, civil society organizations were invited to take part in anti-corruption and reform processes in addition to individual representatives being appointed in the executive branch. Overall, 82 NGOs and 22 expert groups formed a Reanimation Package of Reforms (RPR), an initiative that developed and controlled the implementations of reforms in economic, judicial and anti-corruption sectors. Civil society representatives were also members of the commission that appointed the head of National Anti-Corruption Agency (NABU) and provided assistance in establishing other anti-corruption institutions such as the National Agency for Prevention of Corruption (NAPC), the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO), and the High Anti-Corruption Court (HACC). Overall the post-Euromaidan civil society initiatives were regarded as a significant improvement and were well received by both, the Ukrainian government and the international community (Tregub, 2019).

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<sup>24</sup> For more information on the conflict in Eastern Ukraine refer to Chapter III: Origins of Ukrainian Military Volunteers

Even so, civil society had finally become a force behind major political changes, and it had successfully cooperated with the government implementing those changes, a couple of years following the events of Euromaidan we can see clear deterioration with the regards to civil society's role in holding the government accountable. After the wave of public attention had passed and the level of nations' optimism decayed, the Ukrainian government began to block civil society's initiatives, even the ones it helped to execute. NABU, for instance, had successfully arrested several corrupted politicians and government officials, yet only a few if any were imprisoned. Moreover, in 2017 the parliament attempted to simplify the procedure of appointing the head of NABU, thus enabling the government to be in control of the agency. Another example is the scandal in NAPC when its official accused President Poroshenko's administration was attempting to control the work of the agency. Overall civil society members were disappointed by the government's treatment, and it seems the political elites have pushed out civil society from the reforms processes and took over (Tregub, 2019).

Furthermore, NGOs repeated their mistake of Post-Orange Revolution era and again directed their efforts at obtaining Western grants and not establishing relations with the locals. Moreover, we can observe patron-client relations between Ukrainian NGOs and oligarchs, when the latter has recognized civil society's influence in the society and used the organizations to promote their own agenda (Smagliy, 2017). Thus, although evolved, Ukrainian civil society still faces various challenges even after years of fighting for its place in society. Given that, some researchers characterize the contemporary Ukrainian civil society as "hybrid" – meaning that its fails to control and hold the government accountable, yet when the government is absent civil society mobilizes and steps in to take on the state's role, the novel military movement being an example (German & Karagiannis, 2017). As mentioned in previous chapters, another significant aspect of civil society after the events of Euromaidan and outbreak of the conflict

is the rise of far-right and extremist organizations (Kutuyev et al., 2019). The next subchapter will focus on the existing literature in the notion of Ukrainian military volunteer movement.

## **5.2. Military volunteer movement in Ukraine**

Volunteer movement had its start already during the Euromaidan, where people donated money and goods, provided their time to cook, patrol and treat the wounded (Solonenko, 2017). However, in 2015 due to post-revolutionary political crisis as well as unexpected foreign aggression in Crimea and Donbas, the Ukrainian government was unable to securitize basic needs of the population and perform its functions effectively, thus causing rapid development of the volunteer movement (Mahnachova et al., 2019). According to GfK Ukraine analysis supported by the United Nations Ukraine, the most common activity of the Ukrainian volunteers was the support of the army – 70 percent of the respondents (United Nations Report, 2015).

Initially, in the context of Ukrainian civil society, military volunteers are civilians who provided necessary humanitarian aid to either combat volunteers, that joined the army forces and paramilitary groups, or individuals affected by the conflict (Hunter, 2018). The movement was an informal bottom-up initiative (Oleinik, 2018), and with time volunteers formed into informal groups or founded civil society organizations. The emergence of this type of organizations is regarded as a novelty in Ukrainian civil society and modern volunteer movements (Worschech, 2017). In fact, given that for decades, Ukrainian civil society had been considered weak and spiritless, the current military volunteer movement is regarded in the literature as the main transformation and “central element” of Ukrainian civil society, an “unprecedented phenomenon” (Tregub, 2019; Vasylenko, 2019; Hurska-Kowalczyk, 2018; Oleinik, 2018). On top of that, military volunteers managed to gain the highest level of trust among the population, achievement that Ukrainian NGOs have never been able to accomplish. According to the Razumkov Center, voluntary organizations are the most trusted among all

Ukrainian institutions<sup>25</sup>. In addition to that, the percentage of Ukrainians doing volunteer work rose to 23 per cent in 2014, compared to 11 per cent in 2011 (United Nations, 2015). Helping the military involved in the conflict was the most widespread form of volunteer activity – 70 per cent (United Nations, 2015). Thus, perhaps the modern military volunteer movement is the first one to represent purely “Ukrainian” civil society, meaning that unlike other organizations that came before, military volunteers have emerged not as Western grassroots organizations, supported and funded by foreign grants, but entirely due to the enthusiasm, contributions and demand of the local Ukrainian population.

Having stressed the importance of the military movement as a sensation in the evolution of Ukrainian civil society, I will focus on their representation in scholarly literature. Firstly, there is a noticeable lack of literature explicitly on the Ukrainian military movement (Kryshtapovych, 2016) with scholars still focusing on the development of civil society during the Orange Revolution and Euromaidan as two markers of civil society’s evolution (Solonenko, 2015; Kuzio, 2015). Still, there few notable studies done on military volunteers, especially right after the beginning of the conflict. Most of the scholarship look at military volunteers as self-organization and social mobilization that substituted the weak state, thus performing the government’s function of security and defence (Hurska-Kowalczyk, 2018; Kryshtapovych, 2016; Lelich, 2016; Madrigal, 2018; Vasylenko, 2018). Rosaria Puglisi can be considered as one of the first researchers to look into military volunteer movement and suggest that it was military volunteers that filled in the security and defence function of the Ukrainian state thus undertaking a role traditionally performed by the state (Puglisi, 2016). Corresponding to that, Ukrainian literature also usually regards military volunteers as service providers and view their activities only in the context of the conflict (Madryga, 2018; Zhuzha, 2015) At the beginning of the conflict, activities of volunteers could be divided into several categories:

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<sup>25</sup> See the report at <http://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/socio/Press1017.pdf>

- supplying necessary items to the regular army or paramilitary groups in the conflict zone;
- aid in fixing and innovating technical equipment;
- medical help to the regular army or paramilitary groups in the conflict zone;
- help to the IDPs, including humanitarian, legal and psychological;
- search of the persons missing in the conflict zone (Madryga, 2018; Hurska-Kowalczyk, 2018).

Going further, the more the military movement developed, the more attention its activities received in academia. So far, there have been several general analysis of what humanitarian aid volunteers provide to the conflict zone and their possible involvement in other areas: peacebuilding, defence reform, democracy and state-building.

The movement is argued to produce new leaders in Ukrainian civil society, who were either appointed to governmental positions or elected to the Parliament, and therefore significantly contributed to the Ukrainian state and national building (Oleinik, 2018). Indeed, at the 2014 Parliament elections, almost all parties would include either a military volunteer, Euromaidan activist or a Donbas war veteran. Thus, researchers began to question if military volunteers, who played such an essential role in the conflict, would also undertake other functions in society. Thereafter, Puglisi, as well as Zarembo, suggest that the organizations that are supporting the armed forces with provisions can also play a significant role in the defence reform in Ukraine (Zarembo, 2017). Having established that military volunteers aided the state in terms of defence, Zarembo argues that the state both benefited and as well as found themselves in a disadvantage. Surely, the state improved its ability in terms of basic provision – food and ammunition but at the same time state could not take over the technical provision that was provided so efficiently by the volunteers, thus remaining weak and continuing to rely on the volunteer movement (Zarembo, 2017). To note, there have not been many studies done

on state-military volunteers relationship. The main thesis is that state and civil society modifies its relation from the opposition during Euromaidan, to cooperation in the context of armed conflict. Naturally, cooperation is inevitable when civil society partially substituted the state and later on even partnered with the state when military volunteers formed an advisory body within the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense.

Experts also consider the military volunteers to be the force behind the dialogue between the state and the society; thus taking over the function of political cooperation between the government and the people (Burdiak, 2018). Yet, there is still more to be studied with the regards to state- military volunteers relations (Kryshtapovych, 2016; Zarembo, 2017). Generally speaking, military volunteers show signs of all types of state-civil society relations - civil society in partnership, in dialogue, in support, apart and against the state with partnership and dialogue dominating among volunteers involved with the Ministry and formal volunteers correspondingly. Overall, from the viewpoint of volunteers, their interactions with the state is rather negative and volunteers are not satisfied with how they are being treated (Kryshtapovych, 2016).

Another view on the novel civic activism was done in terms of democratization function of civil society - Susann Worschech analyzed the activities of the new volunteer movement that appeared as a result of the conflict, focusing on the organizations that provide army assistance and aid IDPs (Worschech, 2017). She argues that apart from their main activities, the military volunteers managed to generate a significant amount of trust connections and social capital, thus endorsing democratization processes and proving that the new volunteer movement is also capable of performing traditional Tocquevillean<sup>26</sup> functions of civil society.

Since military volunteers are already involved in the conflict, they also potentially can undertake peacebuilding activities, yet most of civil society organizations still focus on their

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<sup>26</sup> Traditional definitions and functions of civil society are discussed in Chapter II

main role - humanitarian and service supply, thus their role in peacebuilding processes is yet to be explored (Kyselova, 2019). In 2019 mostly, civil society organizations that were involved in aiding IDPs continued to assist people affected by the conflict, however, some organizations also started mediation and peacebuilding trainings within the communities (Kyselova, 2019).

On the contrary to the affirmation of the significant role of military volunteers in Ukraine, some academic literature does not pay attention to this movement as an actor in the conflict. When it comes to domestic aspects of the Donbas war, some researchers focus on radical nationalists as one of the primary causes and influences on the conflict dynamics and yet exclude volunteers from the narrative<sup>27</sup>. Though as mentioned in earlier chapters and will also be brought be in the next one, there is a strong connection between these two actors. Tsyganok (2015) for example, goes as far as completely contradicting the necessity of military volunteers, and that being so their presence. The author states that it was the DNR and LNR army that had limited resources and managed to stop the superior Ukrainian forces. Similar to other Russian authors, he suggests the involvement of Western powers, particularly the US and contradicts the established portrayal of Ukrainian army that needed basic supplies at the beginning of the war. The US provided extraordinary aid to the Ukrainian army, making it better equipped compared to the separatist forces (Tsyganok, 2015). This narrative contradicts the previously explored statements of Ukrainian politicians and military personnel<sup>28</sup>, Western and Ukrainian researchers that underline the impact of the military volunteer movement.

Curiously, there are signs of similar aid to the military forces among the civilians in Donetsk and Luhansk Republics. To my knowledge, there is no mention of such groups or

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<sup>27</sup> See Chapter III for a discussion on the role of radical groups in the armed conflict in Ukraine

<sup>28</sup> See media articles with statements of Ukrainian military personnel and Ukrainian politician Oleksandr Turchynov. In the second article, Turchynov refers to military volunteers as “the heart of a nation”

<http://www.radiosvoboda.org/media/video/26731952.html>

<https://www.unn.com.ua/uk/news/1527249-o-turchinov-volonter-sertse-derzhavi>

organizations in academic scholarship, however there are several online groups<sup>29</sup> in Russian social network Vkontakte which collect donations to support the separatist militias. It is difficult to measure the number of such groups or the extent of their work, therefore it is impossible to compare the discovered online groups to Ukrainian military volunteer movement. Yet, mere existence of such crowdsourcing groups among separatists' forces indicate an unexpected parallel between two sides of the conflict.

Combined with an unfavorable portrayal of Ukrainian paramilitary forces as radical nationalists in Russian academic scholarship (Babenko, 2014; Gudimenko, 2015; Ishin, 2019; Matishev, 2016), Russian media sources as well are hostile towards the paramilitary groups involved in the conflict and other nationalist organizations. Russian state channels often refer to such groups as fascists or *banderovtsi* (synonym of neo-nazi) and imply that they are a threat to Russian speaking population in Ukraine (Khaladova, 2019). When it comes to the Ukrainian volunteer movement, an article in a Russian state-owned news agency portal "RIA" openly mocked volunteers in a caricature<sup>30</sup>. Following what is assumed to be a state's stand on the matter, the article suggests that volunteer movement does not have a substantial support among the population and radical nationalist organization force the population to donate money to military volunteer organizations and hence contradicting the crowdsourcing nature of the movement. Again, military volunteers are shown to have close ties with the radical organizations, such as previously mentioned Right Sector.

The contrasting viewpoint of the military movement can also be observed in reports made by Andriy Portnov, an ally of a former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. After returning to Ukraine from Russia in 2019, Portnov started what could be called a war with

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<sup>29</sup> For example, social media pages of "Humanitarian volunteers of Novorossiia" or "Help to wounded soldiers" <https://vk.com/russkiedonbassa>  
<https://vk.com/gumanitaria>

<sup>30</sup> See the article <https://ria.ru/20140918/1024627576.html?in=t>. Accessed on 23 September 2020.

notorious military volunteers – the politician published reports, analyzing income of two volunteers, Vitaliy Deinega from Come Back Alive (an organization that I also interviewed for this study) and Yuriy Kasianov (Vesti, 2020). Relying on the income declarations of the mentioned individuals, the politician calls the military volunteers “thieves who use donations to travel and live a luxurious life”<sup>31</sup>. Portnov’s goal is to “expose the phenomenon of military movement as people who earn money on war”. Indeed, volunteer fraud was rather common, especially back at the start of the conflict. Media channels even warned the population not to trust pseudo volunteers who were collecting donations on the streets<sup>32</sup>. Military volunteer Myroslav Gai (one of the interviewees of this study) admitted to one of the media reporters that there are various attempts “to discredit the movement and it was Russia who would benefit most”<sup>33</sup>.

To conclude, although military volunteers emerged as mainly provision suppliers as a result of the armed conflict in Donbas. Although their potential in other areas, such as state-building, democratization and peacebuilding, has also been slightly analyzed, due to the novelty of the military movement, there is still much to learn about this phenomenon. Ukrainian military movement continue to transform together with the conflict dynamics in Donbas and political changes nationwide. If in 2014-2015, about 20 formally organized military volunteer organizations were actively supporting the army, several years later, some of them ceased to

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<sup>31</sup> The web page of the report was unavailable at the moment of writing this chapter. Therefore, media articles served as references. See

[https://24tv.ua/ru/portnov\\_vs\\_volontery\\_rezonansnye\\_razoblachenija\\_ot\\_posobnika\\_janukovicha\\_n1293590](https://24tv.ua/ru/portnov_vs_volontery_rezonansnye_razoblachenija_ot_posobnika_janukovicha_n1293590)

<https://vesti.ua/strana/patriot-volonter-vor-portnov-rasskazal-o-dohodah-dejnegi>

[https://zik.ua/blogs/andrii\\_portnov\\_yak\\_hore\\_volonter\\_yurii\\_kasianov\\_zarobliav\\_hroshi\\_na\\_viini\\_960624](https://zik.ua/blogs/andrii_portnov_yak_hore_volonter_yurii_kasianov_zarobliav_hroshi_na_viini_960624)

<sup>32</sup> See media articles

[https://zik.ua/news/2017/05/02/shahrai\\_dyskredytuyut\\_volontersky\\_ruh\\_v\\_ukraini\\_eksperty\\_1089253](https://zik.ua/news/2017/05/02/shahrai_dyskredytuyut_volontersky_ruh_v_ukraini_eksperty_1089253)

<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/26955530.html>

<sup>33</sup> See <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/ye-pytannya-volontery/30422334.html>

exist. Having relied on the population's donations, and since it is natural people grow tired of war and run out of money, organizations stopped operating due to the decline of financial support. Moreover, Zarembo (2017) argues that since the state did overtake the work of military volunteers that were in charge of basic supplies, that type of military volunteers disappeared. I am rather critical of this suggestion since the results of my preliminary interviews proved that those military volunteers continue to be active. In fact, the studies mentioned earlier tend to focus on the work of well-established formal organizations and overlook the role of unregistered informal groups. That might be natural since overall, it is difficult to locate many of the new organizations (Udovyk, 2017), and yet informal groups are excluded from the narrative.

Moreover, there are different views on the rationale of the military movement. On the one hand, military volunteers are regarded as "heroes" who stepped up and took over the state's defence function. Contrary to that, a more critical approach of their work portrays military volunteers as opportunists who took advantage of the armed conflict to make money.

Ultimately, in 2018, several years after the conflict erupted, the Ukrainian state seems to have much more control over the situation. Moreover, having looked at the conflict dynamics in the first chapter, we can observe that although the combat is still ongoing, the number of battles in 2018 had decreased significantly compared to the brutal situation in 2014-2015 when the presence of military volunteers was crucial. Therefore, multiple questions immediately arise. Why do the remaining military volunteers continue to provide supplies to the Ukrainian forces and paramilitary groups? What are their motivations to continue their activities? Have their activities changed after years of work, and if so, how? Do they continue to interact with the other actors, the Ukrainian government, for example, after negative experiences in the past? By answering these and other questions, my study contributes to the existing pool of literature on military volunteers. Since volunteer movement is at core of post- Euromaidan civil society

transformation, my research will add on to a growing scholarship on the evolution of Ukrainian civil society.

## **CHAPTER VI MAIN FEATURES OF UKRAINIAN MILITARY VOLUNTEER MOVEMENT**

*Come Back Alive Foundation are indifferent Ukrainians.*

*We are ordinary people who in the spring of 2014 had to change our activities.*

- From the website of an interviewed military volunteer organization “Come back Alive”  
(*Povernys’ Zhyvym*)

The main goal of this study was to revisit the phenomenon of the Post-Euromaidan, a military volunteer movement that emerged as a response to Russian aggression towards Ukraine in 2014. Like any other social movement, Ukrainian military volunteer movement is made of people, individuals who shifted their life activities and focused on aiding the military in the armed conflict in the Eastern Ukraine. This study set out to explore the people who were at the foundation of the military volunteer movement and still continue to play a key role in its development.

The research is based on the premises that the volunteer movement has undergone notable changes in terms of their activities and motivations. Volunteers continue to be conscientiously involved in the armed conflict and political life in Ukraine, and yet few studies inquired into their work after the first two years of active combat in the Eastern Ukraine. Several years after the start of the war, military volunteers can be considered more than just “state substitution” and their rationale is more complex.

This chapter first explains the development of military movement and how their activities have transformed. Then, I will discuss the relations between volunteers and other actors, such as the state and international organizations, and how these relations influence the concept of military volunteer movement. Lastly, the possible drivers of volunteers’ work are explored. In this chapter I use material received during interviews with volunteers as well as

my own recollections from participate observations field trip to the conflict zone in Donbas. To give prominence to the voices of people who has been behind the military volunteer movement, the quotes from my interviews with them are italicized.

### **6.1. Roles of military volunteers in the Ukrainian conflict**

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the Ukrainian army troops and self-organized paramilitary groups have significantly relied on the help of volunteers. Admitted by the government representatives, it was also claimed by the interviewed organizations that the army was "completely disoriented ... completely not equipped" (People's Project, 2018). Majority of the interviewed organizations did not exist or were inactive before the massive mobilization to support Ukrainian troops in the East.

Most of the military volunteers share a common story of how their organization or group was created – first military volunteers aimed to support individual soldiers or paramilitary members who were relatives, friends or acquaintances. Later on, their help expanded to battalions, brigades. Four years later in 2018, at the moment of interviews, work of some military volunteer organizations was so immense that the Ukrainian troops and paramilitaries themselves are reaching out directly to them for the supplies. For instance, "People' Project" which is considered to be one of the most influential military volunteer groups now, started with two people assisting Ukrainian military who were stationed between the Crimean Peninsula and mainland, then moved on to supplying a specific brigade<sup>34</sup> and now is focusing its work projects that require significant amount of money without limiting the help to specific brigades. As their representative mentioned:

"...I remember, that at the beginning there was a situation that everyone had volunteers, like a volunteer of the 55th brigade or 78th brigade, and they were coming to us, like

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<sup>34</sup> Although brigades' specific numbers or names were given during the interviews, those will not be mentioned here due to security reasons.

that is my brigade, they need that, so we were opening a project to collect money for that brigade, we need have some limitations like to buy one million of some cloth, we were not doing that, but been like from the beginning of 2016 we stopped delivering clothes, socks etc., because first of all, the army started working, and second of all, our capabilities and possibilities were big, so we concentrated on making something hard for "small" volunteers, socks and shirts can be collected by people on Facebook, but our platform was collecting big sums of money, and for "small volunteers" it is hard to collect money for thermographic cameras or some technical appliances, so after some time we concentrated on "expensive" help and more technical" (People's Project, 2018).

All of the interviewed organizations started assisting the army with providing items of immediate necessity - water, socks, food, uniforms, tissues and other supplies. Raisa Shmatko, head of one of the military volunteer group, recalls that in 2014 soldiers had to go into battle wearing sandals. Furthermore, although military volunteers admit the Ministry of Defense indeed provided weapons, it was a volunteer's job to supply the soldiers with everything else. Volunteers' perception of their role in supplying the army at the start of the war is described to be approximately 70-90 per cent. Majority of the volunteers suggest that in the first two years of the conflict they were the ones to provide "everything" apart from the weapons for the army (People's Project, 2018; Raisa Shmatko, 2018; Mizhanrodneyi Allians Bratskoi Dopomogy, 2018). Hence, as suggested by other scholars (Puglisi, 2015; Worschech, 2017), military volunteers performed a security function, that is conventionally attributed to the state.

It is almost impossible to establish the validity of the volunteer's statement on the amount of their help compared to the state's supply. The assistance provided by volunteers in the first years of the conflict was somewhat chaotic, and only a few organizations were filing official paperwork (e.g., People's Project, Come Back Alive). The state also does not provide any reports on the exact number of volunteers help, apart from occasional statements of

political or governmental officials. An example of state's recognition of the role of volunteers can be considered national awards presented by the government, e.g., to Vitaliy Deinega (the head of Come Back Alive fund from 2014 to 2020) and David Arahamiya (head of People's Project from 2014 to 2020) and many other military volunteers who received presidential honours<sup>35</sup>. Besides, in his statement, former Ukrainian President Poroshenko mentioned the contribution of military volunteers in strengthening Ukrainian army, alongside Ukrainian soldiers and generals, military volunteer battalions and employees of defence departments<sup>36</sup>. However, no specific data is available to either support or contradict volunteer's assessment of the volume of their help, which is assumed to be the majority of all supply for the armed forces.

However, with conflict continuing for years, the Ukrainian government has improved the overall supply for the armed forces, as well as integrated paramilitary groups into the regular army. Therefore, military volunteers have altered their work. As the representative from Mizhnarodnyi Volonterskyi Fond admitted – "there is no need to supply the army anymore, apart from the paramilitary groups, the regular Ukrainian forces are well equipped" (Mizhnarodnyi Volonterskyi Fond, 2018). Moreover, if at the beginning of the conflict civilians were continually donating money to military volunteers, which even prompted some scholars to call this phenomenon as "crowdfunding" for the war or defence<sup>37</sup>, after a couple of years the support decreased and thus the number of military volunteer groups also reduced. This assumption is based on the interviews with all of the volunteers who also did not provide any specific numbers but shared their observations.

Again, it is hard to evaluate the quantitative change of the volunteer movement since 2014, since most of the volunteers assisted somewhat chaotically during the most turbulent times of the conflict. Moreover, not all of them registered as formal organizations. During my

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<sup>35</sup> See decrees at <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/676/2014#Text>  
<https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/27/2015#Text>

<sup>36</sup> See Presidential Statement at <https://www.mil.gov.ua/special/news.html?article=23185>

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Hunter, 2018; Wood, 2019

fieldwork in Ukraine in 2018, only a few of the formal organizations that were presented on the website<sup>38</sup> of the Ministry of Culture and Informational Policy remained active. Hence, it was essential to uncover the informal volunteer groups that continued working in order to see the complete picture of the state of the military volunteer movement in Ukraine during a protracted conflict.

One primary reason for the decrease in volunteers' number is lack of financing. As admitted by all of the volunteers during the interviews, the financial support of the Ukrainian public is gradually reducing. Donations from the population in Ukraine as well as ordinary citizens abroad, which is usually Ukrainian diaspora, remains to be the primary source of funding of volunteer organizations. Therefore, the second reason for the drop in numbers is the matter of trust to volunteer organizations in the course of the last few years. Alongside, media speculations<sup>39</sup> on dishonest military volunteers, the interviewed organizations also support this revelation stating that indeed some volunteers lost the trust of the public (Raisa Shmatko, 2018; People's Project, 2018; Come Back Alive, 2018). Most of the organizations provide regular financial reports as well as pictures of the delivered goods to the military either on their website or Facebook page (see Appendix B). As explained by the People's Project:

"At the very beginning we already emphasized on complete transparency, we understood that that sort of hype of trust would pass (referring to the first few months of the conflict), and there will always be [people] who will try to benefit on someone else's misfortune, so at the very beginning we needed to build our reputation, build trust to our fund, that can be done only by being transparent, so we were working on our transparency. Moreover, another priority we had was okay, in one or two months of the war it became clear that there are different people everywhere and whatever we are

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<sup>38</sup> See the list at <https://mkip.gov.ua/content/volonterski--organizacii.html>

<sup>39</sup> More on that refer to Chapter V

delivering must be documented..., so everything that we are giving out needs to be counted for so that later on there would be no cases. Unfortunately, we need to admit, that there were situations when the volunteers give something to the soldiers and they take it, then take now or a bit later take it home, sell it and use the money for whatever they think is better. In order to avoid all that, everything we delivered [was] with documents..." (People's Project, 2018).

It is possible to assume that there have other reasons specific volunteer organizations stopped their work. Yet, the notion of establishing trustful relations with the civilian donors through either personal communication or through online reports could have played a significant role in the "survival" of the remaining military volunteers. For example, during my fieldwork, I witnessed how volunteer groups of Raisa Shmatko, Batallion Sikta expressed gratitude to the civilians who made donations to their cause. The organizations interviewed for this research had been active for four years at the time of my fieldwork in 2018, and the majority of them continue their activities as of December 2020. Organizations Your Way and Mizhnarodnyi Volonterskyi Fund are assumed to shut their operations due to no activity on social media or other online sources.

The research focused specifically on military volunteers that specifically continue providing or used to provide till recently (as of the time of the fieldwork 2018) supplies to the armed conflict zone in Donbas. Therefore, all of the organizations presented in this chapter are supplying the army to some extent; however as it was uncovered the nature of their supplies, quantity and quality substantially differs. Based on the data received during the interviews, I am dividing organizations into three major subgroups:

1. Volunteers whose major function remains supply provisions. However, since the quality of the supplies is different compared to basic assistance in 2014 at the start

of the conflict, I further clarify the types of material support volunteer groups provide. The organizations are further split into:

- Core volunteer organizations<sup>40</sup>, three volunteer groups, Come Back Alive, People's Project, Fond Myr I Ko. The assistance of these organizations is rather technical and specific, and furthermore, some of the other interviewed organizations tend to either join the core organizations or cooperate with them.
- Masking nets groups. These volunteers, Battalion Sitka, Vezha nad Dniprom and Maskovalna Sitka Na Vezhi, focused on supplying mainly masking nets to the armed groups. Although the scope of their activities is notably smaller compared to core organizations in terms of the quality of provisions and financial resources, these groups have a narrow focus of help. In addition, however, masking nets groups still continue to provide other basic goods to the armed forces, such as food, clothing and other basic provisions.
- Small scale material support. These are organizations that mainly continue to provide basic supplies and on occasion, some technical provisions. The groups are Mizhnarodnyi Volonterskyi Fund, Spilna Sprava, Mizhnarodnyi Allians Bratskoi Dopomogy, Raisa Shmatko volunteer group, Naumovska volunteer group.

2. Medical assistance groups. In Ukraine, there are only a few groups left (taken from personal communication with Viterec, 2018) that are stationed in the armed conflict

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<sup>40</sup> Zarembo (2017) and Worschech (2018) also refer to these organizations as central among military volunteers. Although they didn't label the organizations in any way, I prefer to call them "core" for reader's better comprehension of the structure and relations among the military volunteers.

zone and assist the army with medical aid or medical supplies. Volunteer group Viterec is a representative of medical volunteers.

3. Volunteer groups that provide emotional support to the armed forces. This subgroup includes previously small-scale volunteers, church capelan and most importantly, so called “wild volunteers”, military volunteers who continue visiting the armed conflict zone to deliver the supplies. These organizations are Raisa Shmatko group, Spilna Sprava, Naumovaska volunteer group, Mizhnarodnyi Allians Bratskoi dopomogy and occasionally, Battallion Sitka.

### **Material Support**

Specific military volunteer organizations have advanced their activities in terms of the quality of the services and supplies they provide. The core organizations are evolving in their work as military suppliers to a professional level:

“...we are constantly studying... people who we invite to our group, they are professionals in their field. So, if we take analysts to our team, that would be analysts with experience, specifically in the military area. We provide courses and education opportunities to our colleagues... if we are talking about communication, public relations, for example, our colleague in summer finished course on communications for non-profit sector, that is provided by the fund” (Come Back Alive, 2018).

Though these three organizations started their activities by delivering goods to the front line, they soon developed into each organization, providing specialized support for the armed forces<sup>41</sup>. For instance, People’s Project and Come Back Alive are in charge of thermographic

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<sup>41</sup> Similar assumption was made by Zarembo (2017)

cameras, aerial vehicles and sniper equipment, Myr i Ko supply military with computers, tablets and other appliances, Armiya SOS<sup>42</sup> assists with installing special military software.

According to Come Back Alive and Myr i Ko this division of activities proved to be a perfect way to assist the military quickly and efficiently. Moreover, these organizations are not substituting the Ukrainian state or performing its function, but merely assisting the state when needed. Yet, it is crucial that Myr i Ko continues to assist the state. Since for Ministry, it takes several steps and a lengthy bureaucratic procedure to deliver computers to brigades, in urgent situations, the government turns to Myr i Ko since military volunteers can deliver supplies faster. The state provides most of the supplies. For instance, organizations have developed communication with the government as well as established a long-term contract with a various business that continue to provide military volunteers with a significant amount of help. Though the majority of these companies' desire to remain confidential, it can be acknowledged that Myr i Ko, regularly receives goods from companies, e.g. recently (at the time of my fieldwork) it was ten tons of mosquito spray or five hundred thousand litres of milk. People's Project obtains regular discount when purchasing thermographic cameras with the specific company due to an established relationship with the company's owner.

The organizations continue to advance with new projects and ideas to support not only the armed forces anymore but also Ukrainian society in general. For instance, People's Project has started a new campaign to improve operating rooms in Ukraine's hospitals. So far (as of September 2018) there have been only two renovated rooms, however, they plan to continue this project in the future. Myr i Ko also focus on producing patriotic videos and social commercials about the conflict and military in order to raise awareness among the Ukrainian population.

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<sup>42</sup> This organization is not among the interviewed groups, however it was mentioned repeatedly during the interviews with the other volunteer groups.



Figure 2. Inside the office of the “Myr I Ko” fund. Orange boxes are the mosquito sprays that soon will be delivered to the military by a volunteer group of Olesya Naumovska (personal photo, 2018).

As for the other military volunteer groups, they continue to provide basic supplies, yet on a much smaller scale. These organizations are mostly unregistered informal groups that support specific brigades and aid them with basic supplies, e.g. food, clothes, gasoline. Mostly, these are also the groups that, unlike the core organizations, continue to make visits to the conflict zone and deliver goods personally. Although Zarembo (2017) had previously suggested that such organizations ceased to exist due to the lack of need for basic supplies, many groups continue to spend time and resources to deliver supplies.

Another surprising discovery of my fieldwork is the existence of a special category of military volunteers — groups that are making masking nets to cover tanks or body. These are Vezha nad Dniplom, Batallion Sitka and Sitka na Vezhi. These organizations produce a highly needed masking nets, and that is one of the few items that Ministry of Defence failed to provide to the military and therefore, various military brigades continue to request these organizations

to produce nets. Battalion Sitka, for example, consists of around a dozen people and yet, by 2017 they have made almost five tons of nets (Batallion Sitka, 2018). The other two groups have made a similar amount.



Figure 3. After the interview with the informal civil society group Maskovalna Sitka na Vezhi. The group is making masking nets for tanks and soldiers (personal photo, 2018)

Since the majority of military volunteers have known each other since the times of Maidan, it was expected to find a well-developed network of communication between both formal and informal military volunteer groups regularly exchange goods with each other and provide assistance to each other with delivering items to the front line. For instance, Myr i Ko sends their computers to Armiya SOS to install special software and at the same time helps Vezha nad Dniprom with delivering masking nets to the front line.

## **Medical assistance**

Another type of activities that military volunteers perform is providing medical assistance for the Ukrainian military in the front line. Although in 2014 there was a significant number of medical volunteers, due to lack of finances and human resources, by 2018, when their research was conducted, only three major groups have stayed active — Viterec, ASAP Hottabych and Hospitaliery. This subchapter on the work of medical volunteers is based on the interview with Galyna Almazova, a head of medical team Viterec and a recipient of an award “National Hero of Ukraine”.

Same as other military volunteers, Galyna had a significant civil engagement, even before Maidan. At Maidan she joined a medical team that provided first aid to protestors, thus naturally when the conflict broke out, Almazova joined military volunteers in supplying the army with everything needed. However, in a couple of months, Almazova was offered to drive a medical vehicle that would provide first aid to wounded soldiers since many soldiers were dying because of the blood loss right at the battle. As a result, Galyna Almazova has created a non-registered organization Viterec that now has two medical teams located in the conflict’s hotspots, and in five years has helped thousands of soldiers and civilians. Viterec has one-two doctors and one driver who are part of the team on a regular basis, the rest of the doctors join Viterec when they get vacation or days off at their jobs. All in all, teams are comprised of around 30 people. Galyna Almazova used to be a driver of one of the cars, however now she manages these two teams from Kyiv where she has a full-time job as a commercial director and visits to the conflict zone once per month to bring new supplies and make sure everything runs smoothly.

The main tasks of Viterec is to pick up wounded soldiers during combat, provide first aid and bring them to the nearest hospital. Moreover, medical volunteers often organize first aid trainings for soldiers and provide day-to-day medical help, for example, treating flues,

stomach aches, headaches and other regular health issues. Due to lack of organization of the work of military volunteers at the front line, in 2014 Viterec chose themselves where to locate their teams. They were helping both the regular Ukrainian army, as well as volunteering battalions Right Sector and for some time Viterec was positioned in city Pisky, near notorious Donetsk Airport, place of one of the longest battles between Ukrainian army and separatists. However, in 2017, Viterec joined their forces with well-known and well-financed volunteers: organization Come Back Alive. Two organizations have been cooperating since the beginning of the conflict, so when Viterec started to struggle financially due to decrease of donations from civilians, Come Back Alive suggested to take Almazova and her crew into the organization. Come Back Alive is one of the previously mentioned five biggest military volunteer organizations in Ukraine, and as well as the other has a close cooperation with the government. Thus, since joining this organization, Viterec coordinates its work with the Ministry of Defence. Meaning that, the Ministry decides where to send the teams as well as not allowing them to be right at the battlefield as they used to before. It is important to mention that given the recent attempts of the government to control the presence of both military volunteers and volunteering battalions in the conflict zone, medical volunteers are the only volunteer groups that are allowed to stay there permanently.

Apart from the core organizations, medical team Viterec receives substantial financial help out of all interviewed organizations. If at first, Almazova was fundraising majority of the money on her Facebook page, later on a remarkable number of companies, civil society organizations and private individuals expressed their wish to support Viterec. For example, the popular band “Okean Elzy” supports them financially, taxi company “Uklon” gives not only money but also supplies machine parts, charity fund “Dolyna” presented them with two ambulance cars. To my surprise, there were no previous mentions of the donations of these companies, and Almazova admits that a lot of other companies and individuals who help

them, try not to make it a public knowledge. Viterec has no shortage of medicine due to generous donations, and since they joined Come Back Alive they have no trouble with every day expenses , e.g. gas, minor repairs.

It was mentioned before that the supplies provided by the government had significantly improved, and that includes medical assistance as well. First of all, now the government provides bulletproof medical cars that allows doctors of the Armed Forces of Ukraine to pick up wounded soldiers and deliver him to her to a safe place. There Viterec provides first aid, takes him or her to the hospital. Therefore, now Viterec usually is waiting at a safe distance since before they were located right in the combat zone where with cannonades and mines blowing up. Also, now there are more Armed Forces medical cars than the ones of military volunteers due to lack of finances and most importantly, dangerous character of such work - almost all medical volunteers had injuries and sometimes the injuries were lethal. Regardless of that, “medical volunteers are still needed at the front line. First of all, the Armed Forces do not have cars that could take soldiers to the hospitals very fast. Secondly, the main motivation of volunteers is to save soldiers at the front line. Thus, they get ready in two minutes and can go to any location, however dangerous it might be. Doctors of the Armed Forces are all new and contract-based, meaning that they receive a salary, thus in some situations they might be too scared to drive into the middle of the battle. Almazova recalls that once near village Krymske they were woken up after a shift to pick up the wounded. “Why us,” she asked? She was told because it was dangerous, and the personnel know that Viterec will go anywhere (Viterec, 2018).

Another important aspect of the work of medical volunteers is that they are the only ones who were able to establish contact with the locals. Though first suspicious, due to nonexistence of pharmacies and hospitals around, locals started to come for medical help to Viterec and later on thanking them by bringing food. That is the only case among interviewed

organizations when volunteers managed to establish some communication with the local population.

### **Emotional support**

The work of some informal organizations or groups begins to contain some aspects of providing emotional support to the military personnel. This discovery was based on the insights from interviews with organizations and my field trip to the conflict zone with one of the informal volunteer groups. While following up the results of the interviews and fieldtrip, another significant actor in the military volunteer movement was uncovered – military chaplains. Thus, the analysis of the emotional support function is based on the interviews with military volunteers, Orthodox military chaplain Fr. Oleksandr, soldiers at the front line and my research field trip to the conflict zone with one of the volunteer groups.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, at the beginning of the conflict, military volunteer organizations were providing material help to the Ukrainian troops. Since the logistics were underdeveloped, the only way to deliver the aid was by going to the conflict zone and meeting with soldiers personally. However, at the time this research was conducted, the logistics have already been well-established, and it was possible to send the items via Ukrainian post service “Nova Poshta”. “Nova Poshta” also provides a special discount system for parcels sent by registered organizations, consequently, majority of interviewed organizations are using this discount system to send all of the items to the post nearest to army’s location. Thus, majority of military volunteers are using this way of delivering help in order to save time and resources. Yet, in the course of the research, I discovered that some interviewed military volunteer organizations from time to time choose to bring help to the military personally. And if in 2014, at the beginning of the war, the purpose of such trips was merely delivering goods, in 2018, at the moment of this research, it has changed to providing emotional support to the Ukrainian army.

Moreover, military volunteers that continue to visit the conflict zone can be divided into two categories - registered organizations and “wild volunteers”. Wild volunteers can be a group of people, friends or family, that is not registered as civil society organizations and takes frequent trips to the conflict zone to deliver goods to the military. The organization that prefers to focus its time and finances on material aid exclusively, admits however the importance of such military volunteer groups:

“I thought that is more or less useless, till I saw how the boys [soldiers] reacted to the artists coming and I realized that it is very important, and they are happy, and you just want to distract them from that, from how they live there”

(People’s Project Ukraine, 2018).

Raisa Shmatko visits the conflict zone once per one or two months, and also insists on the importance of such trips:

“{When we come}..they understand that they are needed... We are like psychologists for them. They are happy as kids. They are happy to receive toys, letters from kids... they are happier about those things than what we bring them.” (from the interview

with Raisa Shmatko, 2018)

Military volunteers try to make visits around holidays, e.g. on Easter, they try to bring Easter cakes and eggs and perform carols and songs around Christmas time. According to them, holidays are the times when soldiers need cheering up the most. Moreover, Alians Bratskoi Dopomogy often tries to visit paramilitary battalion Right Sector simply to have some BBQ with soldiers and communicate.

From my own recollections, it is relatively easy to enter the conflict zone, cars of military volunteers sometimes are not even being checked. So far, there is no evidence of how

many military volunteers pass through the conflict zone. Moreover, it is impossible to calculate how many military volunteer organizations used to take trips to the conflict zone in 2014, however, representatives of 11 out of 13 interviewed organizations at the certain time participated in delivering items at the beginning of the conflict. However, the moment of this study, only five volunteer organizations continued to visit the military in the conflict zone, yet the frequency of these visits has decreased significantly. Two of the organizations have altered their main activities; for example, Your Way assists orphanages near the conflict zone and Viterec focuses on providing medical assistance to the military at the front line. To support that, soldier, interviewed during my trip to the front line, recalls that at the beginning of the conflict military volunteers came every week, and by 2018 they come once per three months to brigades located at the second line of the conflict and once per month to the front line (from personal communication, 2018).

My participant observations during my visit in the conflict zone, specifically, the interactions between Olesya Naumovska's group and soldiers prove an assumption that not material but emotional aid is a primary role of military volunteers that continue to visit the military in the East. Naumovska's group has been active since Maidan protests and continued providing help to the Ukrainian army when the conflict started. Thus, at the moment of this research, Naumovska's group already has significant support on social media (Facebook page) and experience visiting the conflict zone.

In order to prepare for the trip, firstly Naumovska contacted brigades located in Avdiivka and Pokrovsk to establish which items are needed at the frontline. Naumovska was acquainted only with one of the brigades in Pokrovsk, the other two were unknown to her. However, since her group for some time used to visit brigades located in Avdiivka, they prefer to continue to help brigades located there. Thus, it can be assumed that every military volunteer group usually has a specific brigade or location they tend to make visits to. Due to security

reasons, military volunteers meet with soldiers outside of brigade's position, usually somewhere in the center of Avdiivka. After unloading the car and passing on the items, Naumovska's group spent about an hour talking to soldiers. It was mostly soldiers who did the talking about their families back home and their life in the army. One brigade even asked Naumovska to stay and "talk to us a little bit" (personal observation, 2018). During these talks, soldiers mostly talk about their families, show pictures and ask about life in the peaceful part of Ukraine. I noticed that soldiers seemed to be more excited by military volunteers coming to bring items than about items itself. An essential ritual of every meeting with soldiers is to take a group photo with every brigade and soldiers signing the Ukrainian flag. I noticed that soldiers seemed enthusiastic to leave a memory of themselves, even something like a message on the flag.

Moreover, Naumovska admits that she keeps in touch with some soldiers and often talks with them through Facebook messages. Thus, I had an impression that these rare opportunities of interaction with the outside world that is represented by volunteers are of incredible importance to soldiers at the front line. As one of the interviewed soldiers put it: "Military volunteers are our connection to the other side, the one outside of the conflict" (from personal communication, 2018). Perception of the soldiers by the locals contribute to the lack of communication between military and civilians. When Naumovska's group entered city Izyum on their way to brigades, the I could see that the local staff at the road restaurant tend to avoid any communication with Naumovska and her group, and overall, the atmosphere was intense and hardly welcoming. Same goes for interactions between locals and soldiers. According to soldiers, the majority of the locals continue to show pro-separatist feelings and thus disapprove of the presence of Ukrainian military in their city.

However, not all volunteers agree with the necessity of the trips to the conflict zone. After several years of the war, it is the systematic changes that are needed in the army, and the

spontaneous trips to the conflict zone do not play any role in improving the Ukrainian army. Therefore, there has been a division among the volunteers – the professionalized organizations that focus on big scale reforms in the armed forces and groups that continue with the same activities as in 2014. Come Back Alive, one of the professionalized organizations, that it is more important to focus volunteer efforts on army reforms rather than trips ton conflict zone with basic supplies. Moreover, this type of trips constructs an image of an unsupplied army, which has not been so for a several years as of 2018 (Come Back Alive, 2018). Since the start of the armed conflict, there had many efforts and financial support to the armed forces both from the government and civil society sector, therefore when volunteers continue to bring basic supplies that undermine the reputation of the Ukrainian Armed Forces.



Figure 4. Supplies delivered to the 1<sup>st</sup> line of the conflict zone by Naumovska volunteer group (personal photo, taken during the fieldwork in the conflict zone, 2018)

The existing literature overlooks and to somewhat underestimates the role of the informal military volunteers. Zarembo (2017) argued that since the state now is capable of supplying the armed forces, the informal groups in charge of supplying basic goods to the military ceased to exist. As a result of my fieldwork, it became clear that this assumption is far from the truth. Although such groups' funding decreased substantially, they continue to contact military brigades in the conflict zone and send or deliver the goods, such as coffee, napkins, yoghurt, and other provisions. However, if at the beginning of the war, this provision represented the security function of military volunteers, their work can now be described as emotional support.

These informal volunteers or sometimes referred to as “wild volunteers”, take long trips to the conflict zone with supplies to show that the Ukrainian population has not forgotten the military, chat with the soldiers, and cheer them up. These groups regularly visit or send tokens, cakes, or postcards on National holidays, such as Easter, Christmas, and National Day of the Ukrainian Army.

The necessity of emotional support is also evident through the work of military chaplains. Military chaplains also started as basic provision volunteers. However, in 2017 their presence in the conflict zone was institutionalized within the National Guard of Ukraine as a necessary psychological aid for the military personnel. The story of Fr. Oleksandr started very similarly to the ones of many interviewed military volunteers – from Maidan. Together with the parishioners of his church he was bringing food, medicine and other provisions to protestors during Maidan in Kyiv. He continued supporting volunteering battalion Donbas that was composed of mainly men from Maidan. In 2017 Ukrainian Ministry of Defense would establish a position of a military chaplain within the armed forces, allowing each unit to have two-three chaplains from different churches. However, before that, priests, including Fr. Oleksandr, were bringing material supplies to the armed forces same as volunteers – going to the conflict zone

for two-three days and then coming back to their duties in the church. Ukrainian Church, however, soon fully supported priests in their desire to assist the army and allowed them to stay in the conflict zone for one month and come back there in two-three months. Though this system gave a start to the work of military chaplains, it had to be improved. According to Fr. Oleksandr it was difficult to fully dive into the work of a chaplain in such a short time, “because it is hard to establish a contact with military personnel who went through some military campaigns, they don’t trust a stranger that arrived even if this person is a priest. And this trust needs to be earned. Not every priest could do it in one month and then have to go already. Well, as I say, these volunteer-priests did lay the foundation...” (Fr.Oleksandr, 2018) Fr. Oleksandr joined his brigade after almost six months of hesitation because as he says: ““God, If I don’t go there, no one will go there, indeed, and that brigade will not have anyone” and stayed with them since then (Fr. Oleksandr, 2018).

When asked about his work as a chaplain Father said one thing: hard. It took him around two months to establish trust with personnel that didn’t know him and consisted of mostly Catholic parishioners. It is important to clarify that Ukraine has multiple churches and patriarchies. For instance, the Catholic church is predominant in the Western part of Ukraine, from where the majority of the soldiers come from. There is also a separation of Eastern Orthodox Church into Kyiv Patriarch and Moscow Patriarch. This difference between the churches is important since Father Oleksadr comes from Kyiv Patriarchy Orthodox Church and that to some extent, was the first obstacle to overcome in order to establish contact with every soldier.

As Father puts it himself, his main job is not only to work as a psychologist for soldiers but primarily have a friendly relationship with them. In order to do that, military chaplain does not focus on conducting services but having everyday small talks with soldiers or helping them out with machinery repair or other small tasks. Small interactions like that later on developed into

establishing contact with all soldier, regardless of their religion, which church they belong and whether they believe in God at all. When in two months a Catholic soldier, who before complaint that Fr. Oleksandr was a priest of Kyiv orthodox Church, called him “our Father” when talking to other solders, Fr. Oleksandr was moved to tears. As a result, Father noticed that with time, the amount of people who attend services had increased significantly, and the probable reason is soldiers having confidence in the military chaplain. Fr. Oleksandr does admit that he needs to be more sensitive with soldiers compared to his work with regular parishioners of his church. Although in both settings he takes the role of a psychologist, soldiers, he says, are more like children — more vulnerable and thus, it is important to find approach to each person

The reason why military chaplains have to take on the role of a psychologist is a general mistrust among soldiers towards officers and military psychologists. Psychologists employed by the military usually evaluate soldiers and send reports to the headquarters. Thus, soldiers avoid any communications with a psychologist. A military chaplain, however, does report to anyone and thus keeps to himself information shared with him by soldiers. Moreover, although there should be a military chaplain system of subordination similar to the army system, so far it has not been implemented. Therefore, military chaplain acts independently and do not have to take orders or report to anyone. In case of Fr. Oleksandr, has the right to present special church awards to Muslim soldiers or soldiers that were not approved by the chiefs, which also might have gained his approval and trust among the soldiers.

Majority of military chaplains belong to the Orthodox of Kyiv Patriarch, that unlike to Moscow Patriarch had previously supported protestors at Maidan and later on the Ukrainian forces in the conflict in the East. Church itself encouraged priests to take a position of a military chaplain, even paying salaries up until it was taken up by the Ministry of Defense. Therefore,

it is not the individual military chaplain, that plays a significant role in the conflict, but a Ukrainian Orthodox Church as a civil society institution.

### **Military volunteers – intermediary between society and war?**

Having looked at the specific roles that military volunteers play in the Donbas war, the question of positioning Ukrainian military volunteer movement within the global literature on the role of civil society in conflict proves to be challenging. As suggested by the literature on conceptualizing civil society in the context of armed conflict<sup>43</sup>, the conventional role of civil society would be the involvement in peacebuilding processes. In addition to that, the setting of the armed conflict allows for the emergence of so-called uncivil groups, paramilitary or other armed forces that use violence.

The activities of military volunteers lie somewhat in between the conventional understanding of civil society and involvement in the fighting. Indeed, the small-scale provision groups started to undertake other initiatives outside of supply assistance to the army, such as aiding IDPs, orphanages, and the local population in or close to the conflict zone. Other scholars previously mentioned military volunteers' role in supporting the IDPs in the context of Ukrainian civil society. It was previously mentioned by Worschech (2017) that military volunteers could develop trust and strengthen social capital; however, her study focused on the organizations working with the IDPs and not the local population in Donbas. The engagement of military volunteers with the local population in the front line is yet to be analyzed. Some of the interviewed organizations support schools, orphanages, and local populations in Donbas by helping with finances, food, or clothes (Raisa Shmatko group, Your Way, Mizhnarodnyi Allians Bratskoi Dopomogy).

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<sup>43</sup> See Chapter I

Moreover, medical volunteers often help locals with medical assistance and pharmaceuticals. The Donbas war includes various issues, and complex relations between a pro-Russian population and pro-Ukrainian government is one of the widely discussed problems. It is too early to state that military volunteers established trustworthy relations with the local population. However, they are developing positive relations and do not limit their help only to the Ukrainian armed forces. However, it needs to be emphasized that although military volunteers can possibly play a peacebuilding role in the future due to their proximity to the local population in the front line <sup>44</sup>, the current activities do not have any peacebuilding or conflict de-escalation agenda.

On the other hand, unlike paramilitary groups and regular army, military volunteers do not directly participate in the combat in Donbas. They do, however, at times, supply specific technical items to snipers, or provide technical training to the military personnel. It can be argued that by providing this technical help, as well as basic provisions to the armed forces, the military volunteers to some extent sustain the combat and the status of quo of the armed conflict. According to the interviews and reports provided by the organizations, the volunteers do not cross the line of being directly connected to the violence, meaning that although they might provide some equipment used in the combat, they will not be buying the weapons or be directly involved in the fighting.

The above said, however, makes the conceptualizing military volunteering far more complex compared to the conventional roles of civil society in the context of armed conflict. If we take Marchetti and Tocci's<sup>45</sup> suggested frameworks of the role of civil society in the conflict, it is challenging to position military volunteers either in conflict escalation, conflict management, conflict resolution, conflict transformation, and peacebuilding. It is clear that

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<sup>44</sup> See Kyselova, 2019

<sup>45</sup> See Marchetti and Tocci, 2009

military volunteers do not promote peacebuilding agenda at the moment, nor are they part of any mediation processes. Their activities might be closer to conflict escalation since they are directly assisting the armed forces, yet military volunteers never use the violence themselves. They believe that they are helping the Ukrainian army to win the war, and therefore establishing peace.

This research views military volunteers as the intermediary between the violence of the war in Donbas and the Ukrainian society in general. This assumption is based on the perception of military volunteers' own role and their activities outside of the conflict domain. Military volunteers might not be a part of the armed forces officially; however, they do perceive themselves as a “representative of the of the military”, unlike the Ukrainian state that “represents the taxpayers” (People’s Project, 2018). In fact, volunteers have an “inside track” to the military personnel, specifically on the lower levels. According to the interviews, even military volunteers of core organizations predominately cooperate not with the generals in the high positions in the Ministry of Defense but the with the heads of brigades in lower ranking positions. This type of cooperation allows volunteers to understand the needs to the soldiers specifically in the front lines. When discussing the involvement of volunteers in state’s military strategies, Come Back Alive suggest the importance of their input.

“...we are involved in work of different committees [within the Ministry of Defense], we are experts, we know these people, we understand the situation in the frontline... it is important and they [the Ministry of Defense officials] can listen to it take into account...”(Come Back Alive, 2018).

Moreover, due to the long-standing cooperation and established personal ties with the military volunteers have a deep understanding of the issues and problems that soldiers face. I will not disclose all of the issues mentioned by the volunteers due to the sensitivity of the topic, however, one major problem that majority of the interviewed representatives raised is a high

number of cancer-related health issues among the military personnel due to specific conditions at the frontlines. This information was not found anywhere in government reports or statements; however, it is difficult to say that only volunteers have this knowledge. Yet, combined with other issues raised during the interviews, it can be assumed that military volunteers are in a unique position of a link between what is happening in the frontline and the Ukrainian society. Volunteers themselves admit that their specific knowledge of the frontline situation might be of use to the government when or is the military reform comes into action (Fund Myr I Ko,2018; People’s Project, 2018; Come Back Alive, 2018).

Another example of the intermediary role of volunteers can be their work to communicate the events of the war to the general public. The core organizations use their online platforms to provide overviews of recent events at the front line, publish interviews with the veterans and current military personnel. Other organizations, such as Battalion Sitka and Raisa Shmatko group, frequently visit local schools to educate the students on the history and current developments of the conflict. They often organize contests on the “best painting for the soldiers” or even show the student used shells from the weaponry during the meetings<sup>46</sup>.

Moreover, organizations recently started to invest their time and resources outside in the activities outside of the conflict domain. Myk I Ko shoots patriotic movies and promotion videos, People's Project is taking on social projects such as hospitals reconstruction and Come Back Alive plans to implement other ideas, "not connected to the conflict at all” (Come Back Alive, 2018), Raisa Shamtko group and Mizhnarodnyi Fond Bratskoy Dopomogy provides help to the orphanages in the front line. Therefore, it can be assumed that although their primary role in the conflict is not as essential as before, the organizations do not intend to cease their activities and limit their work to service supplies to the armed forces. Although still known

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<sup>46</sup> When interviewing Raisa Shmatko, I myself was presented with the shell painted by the students of the local school

as military volunteers, the organizations also adjust their work to perform other duties, which are usually the functions of civil society outside of the conflict domain - service provision, for instance. Therefore, military volunteer organizations can also be regarded as an established part of the modern Ukrainian civil society, not just an actor in the conflict in Donbas.

### **Summary**

At the start of the armed conflict in Ukraine, the primary function of the military volunteers was to provide supplies to the conflict zone. The military volunteers still provide supplies to some extent. However, new functions have emerged alongside the provisional one. In the context of the protracted conflict in Eastern Ukraine, the roles of the military volunteers had changed. There three main functions performed by the military volunteers: professionalized, medical and emotional support.

The professionalized support is mostly provided by the core organizations, well-known formal volunteer groups with steady donations from the public. The medical function is performed by the group stationed in the conflict zone itself. The emotional support is provided by the wild volunteers or other informal groups that continue to take trips to the conflict zone, despite the trips are no longer necessary due to the developed logistics in the conflict zone.

The complexity of the roles that military volunteers play in the conflict makes it difficult to conceptualize the notion of military volunteers. They are not involved in the combat; however, they do assist the military personnel. Moreover, they do not engage in any peacebuilding initiatives. Nevertheless, based on the unique access to the military and established a trustworthy position in Ukrainian society, I consider the military volunteers as a concept in between war and civil life. Given their activities to publicize the events of war and stories of soldiers, and well-developed personal relations with the military personnel, the study views them as an intermediary actor. In other words, military volunteers are the army's representative in Ukrainian society.

## **6.2. Military volunteers and other actors**

The second research questions aimed to understand what type of relationship military volunteers have with other actors involved in the conflict. Conceptualism of the terms civil society is usually done through its relation with the state. The literature on civil society and armed conflict also refers to the presence of international organizations at the site and the significant humanitarian and military role they might undertake<sup>47</sup>. Moreover, in the course of the fieldwork, I discovered the reoccurring theme of the connection between military volunteers and pro-government paramilitary formations that constitute a large proportion of Ukraine nationalist organizations. Therefore, in this subchapter, I will talk about military volunteers' experience with three major actors – the Ukrainian government, international organizations and nationalist groups.

### **Military volunteers and the Ukrainian state**

Based on the experiences and perspective of the interviewed volunteers, there is no one type of relations between the volunteers and the state. However, it is possible to identify certain tendencies of how volunteers view the state. It needs to be clarified that I am analyzing the experiences of volunteers four years into the conflict after the decrease in the number of the combat battles and state's improved capabilities of warfare supply. Back in 2014, the Ministry of Defense launched *Rada Volonteriv* (Volunteers' Council), an institution comprised of military volunteers to assist the Ministry with the military defence reform. Core organizations, Come Back Alive, People's project and Myr i Ko, also have been participating in *Rada Volonteriv* to some extent.

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<sup>47</sup> See Marchetti & Tocci, 2009

Furthermore, other volunteer organizations have received substantial support from the local authorities. Battalion Sitka, Maskovalna Sitka nad Dniprom, Raisa Shmatko group, Mizhnarodnyi Allians Dopomogy were provided with the office space to support their activities. In fact, I conducted interviews in their respective offices in 2018. Moreover, local volunteer council were also created, and the majority of the volunteers, Raisa Shmatko, Battalion Sitka and Mizhnarodnyi Allians Dopomogy were engaged in the discussions with the local government. Hence, overall, at start of the conflict and during the period of the most necessity of the work of military volunteers, the state involved volunteers in the decision making and the relations back then can be described as cooperation.

The situation in 2018, four years into the war, was somewhat different. Indeed, core organizations (People's project, Come Back Alive, Myr I Ko) either cooperate and coordinate their activities with the Ministry of Defence or express approval or necessity for such cooperation. According to Come Back Alive, they assist the Ministry of Defense with the military reform or other informational support. Myr I Ko coordinate their activities with the Ministry of Defence, so the state is aware of the specific work details of the organization. According to Myr I Ko, such coordination is a rather useful strategy since their organization can effectively help out in the situation when the state is not able due to some reasons. Myr I Ko can provide assistance to the armed forces faster since the organization has fewer bureaucratic steps (Myr I Ko, 2018).

On the contrary to the core organizations, the rest of the volunteers either antagonize the state authorities or have to desire to have any contact with them. Even one of the core organizations, People's Project expressed the disappoint of previous collaboration with the Ministry of Defence representatives, mentioning lack of transparency as one of the reasons:

“...I think, in my opinion we still have a situation when they have no desire to listen and we have no desire well, not desire, but no reasons to trust...the cooperation is important but for now it is complicated...we hope with that we will work, well because to be honest it’s not that we are asking something for us, we are asking for the support, not material, not financial, well, we will see., for now it is still complicated because volunteers are trying to get into something that they are not supposed to get into, but well, there a lot of decisions that we are being deceived with, like the closed purchases...” (People’s Project, 2018).

The theme of lack of trust is also observed in conversations with other military volunteers (Battalion Sitka, 2018; Raisa Shmatko, 2018; Borys Penchuk, 2018). The volunteers consider the state’s aid to the armed forces and veterans not sufficient enough. Moreover, Battalion Sitka criticizes the authorities for all the bureaucratic paperwork needed for the organization to function and even hypothesized that these were done on purpose to eliminate the volunteer organizations (Battalion Sitka, 2018). The groups of Raisa Shmatko showed considerable criticism and distrust towards national authorities because “they lied about the number of fallen soldiers, and they do not care about the Ukrainian soldiers at all” (Raisa Shmatko, 2018). The rest of the organizations showed no interest of cooperation with the state and did not consider it a necessity (Maskuvalna Sitka na Vezhi, 2018; Maskuvalna Sitka nad Dniprom, 2018; Borys Penchuk, 2018; Olesya Naumovska, 2018).

### **Military volunteers and international actors**

The volunteers` relations with the international actors are relatively non-existent. Except for a few cases, the organizations both formal and informal do not cooperate with international organizations (Come Back Alive exchanges analytical reports with NATO in Ukraine). On the one hand, the informal groups have no desire themselves to reach out to the

international organizations to establish contact. When asked, most of the informal groups were taken back by the question and regarded the idea as futile:

“Why do we need international organizations to make military masking nets?” (Sitkana Vezhi, 2018)

“Write them by myself...? No time...People at the front are waiting for us” (Raisa Shmatko, 2018).

On the other hand, the organization that does wish to cooperate with the international agencies, and most importantly receive funding for their cause, meet a wall of indifference from the other side. As People`s Project representative explained:

“...the most important is that, no one will give you a grant to buy thermographic cameras and really that is not needed, it is just such a shame to go around and ask money for the thermographic cameras. As for other serious things, yes, we have some, I cannot really tell you, we do have some thoughts, have some systematic projects, but we just want if do apply for the grant, we want some systematic project that would not just like a “dyrka zatykatelstvo” (“filling in a hole”), but would be long running, and project aiming at more global changes”( People`s project, 2018).

Understandably, the international agencies and NGOs do not suggest grants to organizations that are focused on providing thermographic cameras or other combat supplies to the army. These are special appliances that can be used during combat. However, even organization *Your way*, that supports orphaned children in the conflict zone also noted that little available funding from international donors. Since the work of Your Way “does not fit main targets that the international agencies wish to finance, such as LGBT rights, democracy

development” (Your Way, 2018). Mizhnarodnyi Allians Dopomogy tried to establish at least any cooperation with the United Nations agencies in Mariupol through personal connections. However, that was unsuccessful. Moreover, the organization is reluctant to apply for any international grants since again, military volunteers are sure that international donors would not finance their projects. Besides the lack of financial support, majority of the interviewed organizations claimed that they have no communication whatsoever with the international agencies or NGOs that are present in the country and working on the conflict issues in the Eastern Ukraine – UN, OSCE, Red Cross.

Yet, although not an international organization but rather an international actor, Ukrainian diaspora should also be mentioned as a sturdy partner of military volunteers. Almost all of the volunteers have well-developed connections with Ukrainian diaspora in various countries. For instance, United help Ukraine from the US support Myr I Ko, Raisa Shmatko, and International Alliance, Spanish and Italian diasporas regularly help Viterec with medical supplies.

Most of the volunteers have been receiving help from abroad since the start of Euromaidan. However, in 2018, several years after the start of the war, the local support of volunteers had decreased substantially. Therefore, Ukrainian military volunteers started to rely on financial and material assistance from abroad.

“If it wasn’t people from abroad...we would not manage it” (Raisa Shmatko, 2018)

The amount of donations from Ukrainian diaspora can indeed impress:

“we had a project, a hard one – “Krovomobil”, a car that is operated there in the front by the anesthetist and lots of death is due to the blood loss, so he is charge of delivering, so that the process starting from getting wounded to blood transfusion, to make this

distance as short as possible. And the project was going to an end, and we needed to just a bit, just a bit... USD 10 000 dollars, and in certain moment USD 10 000 came from Malta. A person is not, well we were writing, trying but the person didn't want to disclose everything, just, well, we have minimum of information saved, so you can see that the person has Ukrainian last name, but well, sometimes these unexpected surprises happen and from abroad, from the citizens of Ukraine or ethnical Ukrainians (People's project, 2018).

Military volunteers do not rely on funding from international donors, only on donations received from the Ukrainian population or diaspora. In this sense, military volunteers are fundamentally different from other Ukrainian civil society organizations. It is widely argued that the post-Soviet Ukrainian civil society is grant oriented and therefore has little connections with the local population (Tregub, 2017; Smagliy, 2017). Military volunteers are the exact opposite – they do not rely on grants and have little interest in establishing connections with international agencies. Essentially that means that for the first time in the history of Ukrainian civil society, we see organizations that can focus on their activities and not hunting for grants. The core organizations admit that there is a possibility for grants in the future.

Nevertheless, they understand that international donors will not be funding any project that is created to provide any means of support to the armed forces. Although the organizations did not wish to disclose the details of the future projects, it can be assumed that core military volunteers will be expanding a focus of their activities and take on other projects outside of the conflict domain. This proves the objective of the transformative roles of military volunteers, presented earlier in the chapter.

The distrust of military volunteers towards international organizations is somewhat mutual. Volunteers show a general distrust of the operations of the international agencies that

are working in the conflict zone. Mainly, it was mentioned by Raisa Shmatko, Battalion Sitka, Mizhnarodnyi Allinac Dopomogy that international organizations such as the OSCE and Red Cross are “taking a Russian side” and there is “no trust to the organizations that are working on both sides”. Viterec recalls that all of the soldiers joke in the front line: “Oh, the OSCE just left. So, it means that in five minutes the cannonades will start” (Viterec, 2018), meaning that OSCE deliberately acknowledges the pro-Russian separatists when they leave so that the separatists can start firing again.

### **Military volunteers and nationalists’ groups**

As mentioned in one of the previous chapters, it was pro-government paramilitary groups immediately volunteered to defend the country’s borders. Notorious nationalist organizations such as the Pravyi Sector (Right Sector), Azov, Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) were stationed together with the regular armed forces at the frontline. These organizations were driven by nationalist motivation and proved to be more resilient compared to those soldiers who were forced to join the army<sup>48</sup>. Many of the paramilitary groups later either formed or joined the modern Ukrainian nationalist organizations. There has been much discussion on the ambiguity of the paramilitary groups and consequently nationalists, their role during Euromaidan, the Donbas war and after the merge of paramilitary forces with the regular Ukrainian army.<sup>49</sup> There has been no discussion on the connection between these groups and military volunteers. Although I did not intend to explore this matter at the beginning of the research, in the course of the field work, this particular theme has surfaced.

All of the military volunteers have positive attitude towards the mentioned nationalist organizations – none of the organizations draw a line between paramilitary groups and regular armed forces when it comes to providing supplies. On the contrary, Raisa Shmatko and

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<sup>48</sup> See Likhachev, 2016

<sup>49</sup> See Charap & Colton, 2018; Zabyelina, 2019; Katchanovski, 2020; Shapovalova, 2018; Tsyganok, 2015; Gudimenko, 2015.

Mizhdarodnyi Allians give preference to aid the paramilitary since they are not given the same benefits and supplies as regular army. For Shamtko, the paramilitary groups were the first to mobilize and answer the call - “where would be now if it wasn’t for them?” (Raisa Shmatko, 2018). Yet, throughout my field work none of the military volunteers had shown any of Ukrainian chauvinism, ethnic or language nationalism. Quite the opposite, some of them shared a rather critical view of Ukrainians, claiming that Ukrainians “cannot unite” and “much more change is needed in the society” (Raisa Shmatko, 2018 and Vezha Nad Dniprom, 2018). Most of the volunteers rather focused on working towards possible improvement in the Ukrainian society after they “kick out the enemy” – dealing with issues such as corruption and political reforms or developing the volunteer movement.

Furthermore, after analyzing the webpages and social media posts of the interviewed groups, I can state that they do not openly take part in radical protests against LGBT movements, anti-immigrant protests or support the ideology of far-right organization such as C14. Yet, most of the interviewed organizations promoted and participated in movements for an independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church and Ukrainian language legislative acts. However, as seen during the interviews, the rationale of Ukrainian military volunteers is not guided by the hostility towards Russian language or Russian people, but rather to protect the national identity of Ukraine from the external enemy.

The link between the paramilitary forces and military volunteers is rather interesting. The emergence and popularization of both go back to roughly the same time and circumstances – Euromaidan and Donbas war. Military volunteers also have developed close ties with the paramilitary forces and are often seen together at demonstrators and marches<sup>50</sup>. In addition to having established contacts with the Right Sector and nationalist groups, interviewed representatives, informal groups in particular, condemn the government’s decision to merge

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<sup>50</sup> More on that in Chapters III and IV

paramilitary forces and regular Ukrainian army (Raisa Shmatko, 2018; Borys Penchuk, 2018). It was obvious that some volunteers have more trust in paramilitary, whose ambiguous nature has been discussed before, than in conventional state armed forces.

Despite the clear connection between the informal volunteer groups and nationalist groups, there is not much discussion on the complexity of actions of military volunteers. On one hand, the Ukrainian public provide them with the highest level of trust as opposed to nationalist organizations, on the other hand military volunteers often appear as rather violent actor. Only few interviewees mentioned possibility of establishing peace talks with the separatist side, most of the military volunteers are convinced that the only way to achieve peace is to win the war with separatists.

Furthermore, the representatives of DNR and LNR do not distinguish between regular army, nationalists paramilitaries or military volunteers. Most of the military volunteers are included in an assassination list formed by the authorities of Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics "Tribunal". Pro-Russian separatists view the military volunteers in the same way as regular armed forces or Ukrainian paramilitary groups. The separatists name military volunteers as assistants to Ukrainian punishers. Interestingly enough, the army of the Donetsk People's Republic also had a somewhat similar volunteer movement back in 2014 at the beginning of the war<sup>51</sup>. However, this matter doesn't stop the DNR and LNR forces to analogize the pro-Ukrainian paramilitary forces and volunteers' formations – in the view of separatists, these are similar actors.

## **Summary**

Overall, the military volunteers are rather alienated from the other actors involved in the conflict. Core organizations tend to cooperate with the representatives of the government as well as they also expressed interest in collaborating with international organizations. The

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<sup>51</sup> There are several crowdsourcing online groups on a Russian social media platform Vkontakte.ru

core organizations have been in cooperation with the state on a national level, Ministry of Defence, while the rest of the volunteers have been supported by the local government. Yet overall, the experience of the volunteers in terms of relations with the state has worsened compared to the start of the war. Majority of the volunteers do not trust the authorities. Apart from core organizations, the volunteers either criticize the state or conduct the activities separate from the state with no contact.

Majority of the volunteers, who visit the conflict zone do not trust international organizations there. Again, apart from core organizations, military volunteers do not have an interest in cooperating with the international organizations. Similarly, there is outreach to the military volunteers on behalf of the international agencies due to the volunteers providing support to the armed forces. Combined with the volunteers' close connections with the paramilitaries, the notion of military volunteers can be perceived as ambiguous.

### **6.3. Motivations of military volunteers**

The last question this research inquired into was the motivations behind the work of military volunteers. What is the driven force for the organizations and informal groups to continue spend their time and effort in assisting the Ukrainian armed forces and paramilitary groups? The Donbas war started in 2014 and mobilized the Ukrainian society immediately, and it is doubtful if volunteers ever questioned and analyzed the reasons behind their selfless acts. I use the word “selfless” since still majority of volunteers do not receive any remuneration. Naturally, the informal groups do not have any financial benefits from their work due to limited funding – at times they use their own resources to purchase the supplies. Yet, even registered organizations with donations that reach millions of dollars <sup>52</sup>such as Come Back Alive or Myr

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<sup>52</sup> According to financial statements of Come Back Alive, the organization collected 158 million UAH (approx. 5 million dollars) as of October 2020.

See <https://savelife.in.ua>

I Ko, either started to provide remuneration only recently (as of 2018) or to only certain team members.

Financial gain as a motivator for volunteers was considered when analyzing their rationale. Given some criticism in the media and allocations of fraud and personal profit made by Ukrainian politician Portnov<sup>53</sup>, this explanation of volunteers' motivations was rather possible. However, this assumption does not hold due to several factors.

First, the remaining organizations admitted that it was crucial keep their credibility in order to continue receiving financial support from the public and businesses. After analyzing the social media profiles and websites of the organizations, it was observed that all of the interviewed organizations make regular reports of purchases and received funds. Moreover, the professionalized organizations, that I labeled "core" groups earlier in this chapter, file official reports when transferring purchased military equipment to units in the conflict zone. The filing of official reports is one of the major characteristics of the professionalism in the work of these core organizations - volunteers do it not only to keep track of their supplies but also to establish trustworthy relationship with the Ministry of Defence. Moreover, Come Back Alive several times held a conference where they publicly discussed the work of their organization, including financial part.

The other type of volunteers – informal groups that provide supplies on a smaller scale – inform the public of all the financial transactions via Facebook posts. These posts include detailed information of the donations made to their account (sometimes the names of donors and gratitude to them), as well as how these funds are allocated<sup>54</sup>. Military volunteers who visit the soldiers in the conflict zone usually provide pictures from the visit in order to prove that the supplies were delivered. When I joined Naumovska's group on the trip to the conflict

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<sup>53</sup> See Chapter IV, subchapter 1.

<sup>54</sup> See posts of Olesya Naumovska, Spilna Sprava, Sitka na Vezhi, Maskuvalna Sitka and Raisa Shmatko

zone, I did notice that the gas and other fees were paid personally by Naumovska since the donor funds were used to buy the supplies for soldiers. In general, the amount of donations made to these informal groups has decreased over the years, and frequently volunteers use their own savings to buy the provisions. Considering previous statements, volunteers' effort of financial transparency is evident.

Secondly, most of the military volunteers have day-time jobs with paid salaries. Olesya Naumovska is a professor at a university, Olga Semenova from Come Back Alive is a psychologist, Galyna Almazova and Myroslav Gai have their own businesses. When asked about his income, Myroslav Gai admitted that it is an expected inquiry since his volunteer work is unpaid and he needs to support his family. "Not everyone could do it" – he says with the regards to time and energy spent on volunteering activities (Myroslav Gai, 2018). To support that, Raisa Shmatko, a senior citizen herself, even suggested that it should be retired population who does the volunteer work since they do have government pensions and a lot of free time. Yet, some interviewed volunteers are paid. However, the paid volunteers are the ones working for the core organizations and their funding come from separate donations from specific benefactors that allocate funds for salaries (Come back Alive, 2018).

To sum up, it is difficult to assume in what ways military volunteers could have a financial benefit. Both type of military volunteers that were analyzed in this study – professionalized organizations and informal groups – make an effort to establish trustworthy relations with the public and therefore consistently provide financial reports on their social media accounts or websites. In addition to that, informal groups more often receive donations in a form of goods rather than money (clothes, personal hygiene items, foods), therefore they do not necessarily have access to hard cash. For the reasons mentioned above, I eliminated the financial gain as a driving force for volunteers' activities and explored other possibilities.

## **Emotional attachment to the war**

When I asked about their motivations, most of volunteers paused for a second or two before responding or repeated my question, as if they were still thinking what to reply. Based on the stories told by volunteers during the interviews, it was clear that their work has not been easy in both physical or psychological aspects – some volunteers were overwhelmed by emotions and started to cry during the interviews, mostly the representatives of groups who still visit the conflict zone. Certain volunteer groups at some point came under the fire in the conflict zone or get attacked far away from war. The names of most of the interviewed volunteers, and even sometimes their addresses are posted on the website of the DNR and LNR in order to be “terminated” (likvidorovan). In addition, several recent criminal cases were opened against former volunteers on different charges, suggesting that the political prosecution of the volunteers has started. On the other hand, the military volunteers are affected psychologically as well by the human loss they experience during the war. As one of them puts it:

“Volunteers are actually dying because of stress. It is hard to bury people, we have connections with soldiers... it is very painful”

(Raisa Shmatko, 2018).

Despite the dangers of their work, military volunteers continue to support the army either from their offices in Kyiv or going to the conflict zone. As admitted by multiple interviewees, the number of volunteers did decrease substantially, however that allowed the “unmotivated people to drop out” (Raisa Shmatko, 2018). Hence, in Kyiv there is a rather tight community of volunteers that developed interpersonal networks and cooperate with each other.

Therefore, with time the motivations of volunteer did change, compared to the reasons back in 2014. When the conflict erupted, it was the desire to provide to the army's needs the remaining fuel of Euromaidan's unity as well. However, with time, the basic army's needs were met and yet, the work of military volunteers continued. As mentioned earlier, military volunteers had naturally transformed into subcategories – core organizations that provide specific technical aid and informal groups that continue to focus on certain basic commodities. The latter group take trips to the conflict zone once a month or two, while the core organizations either don't visit at all or do it very seldom. As admitted by Come Back Alive representative, there is no need to go to the conflict zone compared to “military tourism” in 2014. My “military tourism she means “baking pies and bringing it to the soldiers”. Four years into the war, the situation and motivation undoubtedly changed – when Come Back Alive travels to the war zone, it is mainly due to “pleasant communications with the soldiers” or some specific combat trainings the organizations provide to the military. Yet, the shift in volunteers' motivations did take place – from the need to provide the necessities to an emotional devotion. As Oleksandra from People's project put it:

“...at first, there was different motivation, you understand that help is needed, you think you might be useful and you are doing it, but after all these years, it is also that, apart from that you already know how to do it, people are finding you and you cannot refuse, you understand that there some needs and that encourages you, emm, also a big, you cannot underestimate a psychological moment when people, volunteers, solve with this their psychological issues, issues of, how to say it, of compete uselessness of the existence, so you live and there is some usefulness and that well, maybe that is not the motivation itself, but it is a string motivator (People's Project, 2018)

The narrative of “being useful” and personal emotional gain is seen in other interviews as well:

“When I go there, there is a feeling of a celebration, different mood, you know, there is black and white there. You come back and see this dirt... these lies ... it's is horrible”  
(Raisa Shmatko, 2018)

In fact, in the subchapter above I discuss the role of emotional support that volunteers started to perform unintentionally. However, the feeling of personal satisfaction of volunteers plays a major role in their rationale. During my field trip to the conflict zone wild volunteer Naumovska admits that after months or so, she feels an urge to come back to the conflict zone and visit soldiers. To my surprise, the rest of the group felt that this trip was also needed for them to feel better for themselves. They suggested that, in Kyiv they constantly feel uncomfortable and upset about not doing anything for the army, and visiting soldiers gives them a feeling of being useful. Naumovska believes that since there are different military volunteer groups, every group has their own role to play and their group is doing what they can.

Similar to other volunteers who spend significant time in the conflict zone, medical team Viterec have developed personal relationship with a lot of soldiers. After leaving the army, veterans invite Viterec to birthday celebrations. baby showers and other events. Even the families of the deceased, soldiers who Viterec carried out of the battle, continue to keep in touch with Almazova and the crew. At one of such events, a veteran came to Almazova and thanked her for saving his arm. And although, Almazova admits that entering the territory controlled by separatist and not knowing if she will be shot at, holding a hand of soldier who had 80 percent of his body burnt, talking to wounded young boys in order to keep them conscious - these moments make her scared and close to giving up. However, it is when soldiers

come to her to thank, when they call her and ask to come to the front line - these moments make Viterec return to the front line until “the end” (Viterec, 2018).

Throughout the interviews an emotional aspect is rather evident. The military volunteers constantly mention some type of personal connection to the armed conflict. Myroslav Gai (Myr I Ko) and anonymous volunteer Zhenya, for example, fought in the war before returning and organizing aid to his comrades. Olena from Sitka Nad Dniptom is originally from Donetsk and considers the conflict a personal matter. Borys Penchuk, Donetsk native as well, supports the statement:

“That is my land there, my parents are there ... my everything is there” (Borys Penchuk, 2018)

Moreover, it is clear that the remaining volunteers, specifically the groups that continue to take trips to the conflict zones, have developed close connections with the army and paramilitary and therefore cannot imagine “leaving them now”. Raisa Shmatko considers trips of her group to the zone as “visiting friends” since they have been supporting the same brigades for years.

### **Defense against the enemy and orientation towards the violence**

Another significant narrative present in the volunteers’ rationale is “protecting our home from the enemy”. All of the volunteers consider the conflict to be a war between Ukraine and Russia. None of the interviewees referred to the conflict as civil war – in fact, one group Sitka Na Vezhi engaged in a deep discussion why the Donbas war is not a civil war, but a war with the Russian Federation. Most of the volunteers stated that they themselves had either seen captured Russian soldiers with the military identity cards<sup>55</sup> (voennyi bilet) or held the military dog tags<sup>56</sup> of Russian regular army (People’s Project, 2018; Come Back Alive, 2018; Allians

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<sup>55</sup> Military identity cards are issued to soldiers of regular armed forces in most world countries.

<sup>56</sup> Common identification tag worn on neck by military personnel.

Bratskoi Dopomogy,2018; Raisa Shmatko, 2018; Viterec, 2018). For military volunteers, Russia is using different tactics in the attempts to “destroy Ukraine” and “restore the imperial Russia” (People’s Project,2018; Sitka Nad Dniprom, 2018; Sitka Na Vezhi, 2018). Therefore, an anti-Russian sentiment was present during all of the interviews, however it was more in the context of defending the Ukraine’s territory from the enemy represented by the Russian Federation and its policies rather than hostility towards the Russian people:

“I am a Ukrainian, that is my, our land. Here an enemy came, to tell us how to live, in my home...” (Raisa Shmatko, 2018)

“If someone, any country, any group of people attacks your country, every person has the right, not they have to defend themselves” (Sitka Na Vezhi, 2018)

Moreover, I noticed another interesting point during my field work in Ukraine – although evident antagonism of Russia, almost all of the interviewed volunteers would switch from Ukrainian to Russian language during the interview. Furthermore, some of the volunteers spoke highly about Russians who fight among the Ukrainian paramilitaries or made donations to the volunteers’ cause (Raisa Shmatko, 2018 and Borys PENCHUK, 2018). Moreover, the volunteers consider the Donbas people on the territory of LNR and DNR as part of Ukrainian nations - “these are also our people” (Come Back Alive, 2018).

## **Summary**

The emotional aspect is also present in the volunteers’ motivations to continue their activities in the protracted conflict. The rationale of Ukrainian military volunteers is different from the cases of Hizballah in Lebanon and Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. In those cases, the

service provision in conflict was done to increase the legitimacy of a non-state actor among the community<sup>57</sup>. The two main motivations for the military volunteers in Ukraine is the personal attachment to the military personnel and protection the homeland against external aggression.

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<sup>57</sup> See Flanigan, 2008

## CONCLUSION

At the moment of finishing this study, the war in Ukraine has been taking lives for seven long years. The armed conflict in Ukraine has various meanings – personnel tragedy for almost every family in Ukraine, the rise of nationalism in the country, demolished relations with Russia, global political crisis. Given the gravity of the Donbas war in the local, regional and global context, there has been significant academic attention devoted to various aspects of the conflict, its causes, drivers and actors involved.

This study intended to revisit the forgotten element of the war – Ukrainian military volunteers – and focus on their narrative of the conflict. Since it is only by understanding all of the actors involved in the violence, can we hope to achieve peace. One of the first academic articles on military volunteers referred to them as heroes who risked their lives to protect their homes. This view on military volunteers reflected the public's opinion – Ukrainians trusted them more than any other institution and supported them with donations from all over the world.

The study of military volunteers can be considered two dimensional. On the one hand, the research attempted to tackle the complex question of the possible roles civil society organizations might play in the context of an armed conflict. At the same time, military volunteers are a domestic phenomenon, that continues to develop and therefore the research aimed to show the transformation of the institution of the Ukrainian military volunteering and the new roles the movement undertakes in the conflict dynamics as well as in Ukrainian society overall.

In the course of the conflict since 2014, the concept of military volunteers has experienced significant changes. Military volunteer movement started as a spontaneous self-organized force that primarily focused on delivering basic provisions to poorly equipped Ukrainian paramilitary groups and the regular army. As suggested by other scholars, they indeed, to some extent, substituted the state taking over the security function. Within the next

few years, the number of military volunteers decreased due to an untrustworthy reputation, lack of finances, or irrelevance of their work. From the start of the war in Donbas, volunteers had been regarded as the highest level of self-mobilization of society that managed to substitute the state in times of crisis.

Due to the complexity of the roles of military volunteers, it is challenging to position them within the existing conceptual frameworks for civil society in the context of armed conflict. Military volunteers do not use violence per se, nor they supply weapons to the conflict zone. Yet, they do provide supplies to the military and paramilitary groups that engage in violence. On the other hand, there is no indication of any peacebuilding initiatives among the wide range of their activities. Military volunteers need to be regarded as an entity in between the war and general society – an intermediary actor. As an intermediary actor, military volunteers act a “representative of the military forces” due their established trustworthy relationships with the military personnel and as for civilians unique access to the issues of the frontline.

When analyzing the specific activities, the military volunteers undertake in a protracted conflict, the research established that the main role is not provision of basic supplies. The functions of the volunteers changed into three main activities: professionalized, medical and emotional support.

The remaining organizations, labeled as “core organizations” in this paper, evolved to become professionalized military volunteers. Each of the organization focus on providing one or two services or product. In the case of these professionalized organizations, they no longer substitute the state as suggested by the studies done at the onset of the conflict, but rather cooperate with the state in terms of providing the supplies more efficiently in the times of war.

Medical volunteers are the smallest volunteer groups due to apparent dangers of providing medical help at the frontline as well as state’s complete control over the position and

movement of medical volunteers. Yet, the medical volunteers have a well-developed communication with the state authorities compared to other volunteer groups. Moreover, they also have a proximity to the local population at the frontline and direct contact with the population, which can be rather significant in terms of establishing communication between the civilians in the area close to the conflict zone and the Ukrainian society at large.

The third important aspect of the work of military volunteers is the emotional support they provide to the military personnel. This support is mostly provided by the small-scale organizations, military church chaplain or wild volunteers who take trips to the front line. Although the other core volunteer organizations have critically assessed the need for such trips, the emotional support aims to comfort the military personnel and boost their morale during the protracted conflict.

The function of emotional support to the armed forces during a war has so far been overlooked by scholars when it comes to discussing the role of civil society in the context of armed conflict. Thus, by introducing a new role that civil society can play in the context of the conflict, this research broadens the overall understanding of the civil society in a war setting.

The ambiguous nature of volunteers is also represented by their ties and support for nationalistic and right-wing paramilitary organizations that are involved in the conflict. There has been significant discussion on the dubiety of such organizations in terms of use of violence and right-wing ideology. Military volunteers strongly approve of the paramilitary organizations and openly confront the state on this matter. Therefore, military volunteers' connections to these organizations in terms of emotional attachment as well as partnership in work activities suggest the possibility of the uncertainty of what the volunteers stand for.

The military volunteer movement representatives also feel that they are somewhat ignored by the international agencies that are present in Ukraine. The international agencies repeatedly informed them that they are not eligible for funding or any other support from

international donors and NGOs. Given that these organizations are officially registered in Ukraine as civil society organizations, and the most significant donors for civil society organizations remain international agencies and institutions it seems that the international understanding of civil society is to some extent controversial.

Furthermore, the relations between the military volunteers and the Ukrainian state has changed since the start of the war. Apart from the core organizations, there is little cooperation or interaction between military volunteers and the state authorities. Moreover, military volunteers do not trust the state to be truthful about the events at the frontline and further support of the armed personnel. This general distrust might also be a factor why the military volunteers continue their activities.

Also, the emotional aspect and personal connections to the military personnel in the conflict zone plays a significant role in terms of volunteers' rationale and motivation. Despite the financial challenges, health and emotional exhaustion the volunteers face, close personal connections to the military personnel as well as overall goal to win the war by returning the territories of Donbas are the main drivers of volunteers' work. It can only be assumed that given the protracted nature of the conflict, volunteers' will continue to be involved in the conflict dynamics since their attachment to the war is not driven by necessity per se but rather personal sentiments.

Overall, this study provided the narrative of the phenomenon in modern warfare – the Ukrainian volunteer movement. The study showed that the role of civil society could undergo significant changes in the context of a protracted conflict. Hence, the further theoretical conceptualization of this current phenomenon, as well as comparison to other empirical cases could be an exciting topic for future academic research.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A. Interview questions (English and Ukrainian language versions)

1. Is your organization registered? If not, why?
2. How many people does your organization have?
3. How did you start your work? What were your main activities at the beginning of the conflict?
4. What are your activities now?
5. What are your relations with the government?
6. What are your relations with the business?
7. What are your relations with the international organizations?
8. Do you get any support from abroad? If yes, how?
9. What is the motivation of your organization to continue your work with helping the army?
10. How does your organization name the armed conflict that is going on in the Eastern Ukraine?

1. Чи зареєстрована ваша організація? Якщо ні, то чому?
2. Скільки людей у вашій організації?
3. Як ви розпочали свою роботу? Якою була ваша основна діяльність на початку конфлікту?
4. Яка ваша діяльність зараз?
5. Які у вас стосунки з урядом?
6. Які у вас стосунки з бізнесом?
7. Які у вас стосунки з міжнародними організаціями?
8. Чи отримуєте Ви підтримку з-за кордону? Якщо так, то як?

9. Якою є мотивація вашої організації продовжувати свою роботу, допомагаючи армії?
10. Як ваша організація називає збройний конфлікт, що триває на Сході України?

## Appendix B. Interviewed organizations with basic information

Name of the organization	Registered	Facebook Followers (31 July, 2018)	Financial Reports	Website	Date of the Interview
Come Back Alive	yes	1.2 million	yes	yes	23 July 2018
People's Project	yes	41 thousand	yes	yes	1 August 2018
Fond Myr I Ko	yes	6 676	yes	yes	11 July 2018
Mizhnarodnyi Volonterskyi Fond	yes	239	n/a	n/a	23 July 2018
Spilna Sprava (Borys Penchuk)	yes	15 thousand	yes	n/a	27 July 2018
Mizhnarodnyi Alians Bratskoi Dopomogy	yes	1445	n/a	n/a	25 July 2018
Batallion Sitka	yes	2149	yes	n/a	20 March 2017
Vezha Nad Dniprom	no	644	yes	n/a	11 July 2018
Shmatko	no	8372	yes	n/a	19 July 2018
Your way	yes	166	n/a	n/a	10 July 2018
Maskovalna Sitka na vezhi	no	1002	yes	n/a	3 July 2018
Naumovska	no	2806	yes	n/a	13 July 2018
Viterec	no	1607	n/a	n/a	4 July 2018
Church priest	yes	n/a	n/a	n/a	12 July 2018
Olga (individual volunteer)	no	455	n/a	n/a	20March2017
Zhenya (individual volunteer)	no	n/a	n/a	n/a	14 June 2018

Diaspora member (anonymous)	no	n/a	n/a	n/a	4 July 2018
Petro Zakharchenko, government representative	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	13 March 2017

## **Appendix C. Interview transcripts (samples)**

Semi structured person to person interviews conducted during field research for a doctoral dissertation “Civil Society in Conflict-ridden countries: Case of Ukraine” by Roksolana Lavrinenko (University of Tsukuba).

Location of the interviews: Kyiv, conflict zone in the Donetsk oblast (various cities), Skype.

Number of interviews: 20.

Language of the interviews: Ukrainian, Russian.

Translation and transcription done by Roksolana Lavrinenko.

Special notes:

The respondents were shortening the names of the battles, events, titles and phenomena related to the conflict to a one-word name or a name known to the Ukrainian audience. For a better comprehension of the context, the transcriber provides explanations of such contractions in the brackets. In addition, common Ukrainian sayings and aphorisms used by the respondents are also explained in the brackets.

These are verbatim transcripts. The transcription of the interviews was done in a way to preserve the authentic flow and emotions of the conversation.

In the transcripts the following abbreviations are used:

I – interviewer

R – respondent.

## **People's Project (full interview)**

Interview with the representative of "People's Projects".

Date: 1, August

Respondent – Oleksandra Zinchenko.

Skype interview.

Duration: 2 hours 44 minutes

Special notes: the interview had email correspondence with the respondent prior to the interview about the general overview of the questions of the interview. Interviewer was at home; the respondent was at the organization's office.

Interviewer: Please tell me about your organization, how it was created, how many people were part of the organization when it was created, as well if you can describe how the structure of your organization has changed since it was created.

respondent: Everything started when the conflict started, the army that was completely disoriented, moreover it was completely not equipped, had to protect the security of Ukraine, and in the city Mykolaiv, there are several very active people, including David Arakhamiya who is the CEO of the company called "Templatemonster" as well as a local activist Valerie Kiselnik who is a very cool crossfit trainer, the owner of a crossfit club, in the past, by the way, her was a paratrooper, if I am not mistaken, so they went to see the boys who were stuck between the Crimea and Ukraine, emmm, mainland and see what the boys have, and they had almost nothing, so they started helping, later he understood that his personal resources will not be enough because that was a large amount of help that was really needed and they decided to

for 79th brigade, organize like a crowdfunding, like a money gathering, emmm, so since that well, David is actually from IT sphere so he quickly created this website, it was a one page website at first, emm, but that gave an opportunity to pay right, that was like for that time, very progressive that you can pay online right away, make that donation, you can see right away the report, that was our strong position, to make it transparent. And in that way everything started from that one page website and then it was like a snowball, you understand that help is needed more and more and more, then later the boys already came to Kyiv, they understood that it could be done here easier, then I joined around in August, in September people, just like volunteers, they came to help, later it appeared that it was a full time job, since then, the main people of the organization were really like 3 people, we from 2104 are with this project, and later more and more projects came, and now there are more than 100 projects.

interviewer: so at the beginning there was 3 people?

respondent: :at first there was just David, later 3 people came, later more people came, well at different we had maximum around 5 or 6 people a think, but that was when the most busy days and there was the biggest support and necessity, when there was an emm airport battle (remark: Donetsk Airport), emm battle of Debaltsevo and Ilovaisk, there were more people helping, and well, a lot of people, more people plus that's just the people, I am telling you about these people, that are in charge of the platform, reports, purchases, but there is also a range of volunteers who, how to say, worked with us, they are like somewhere in the field, they are letting us know about the necessities, they are going to the conflict zone, we are also going, but less, because we really need, it is very and very important to take care of the financial reports in order not to lose people's trust, to make it a transparent project, so that's why there are some

people, like me, I am mostly in Kyiv, I am making sure that the website is in order, report, purchases, transfers are in order, all of the process that are concerning the realization of the project is in order, and there are people, who are our , so to say, part- time volunteers, they are going around the conflict zone, they are transferring what we bought, or letting us know the necessities of the boys, they are coordinated only, at different times they could be 10 -15 people but they were not working with us inclusively, so they could transfer their own deliveries or deliveries of other organizations. The main body of the organization, that was 6 people.

i:Okay, you said, you moved to Kyiv because it was better for the organization. Why was it better?

respondent: : Well, first of all, well, David till that time he was trying, well he is an active person and there was a lot of volunteers , who appeared, who were well successful businessmen, and they wanted to suggest their help to the Ministry of Defense in order to systematically solve certain problems, we even had , we made a “volunteer paratroopers” group, they were trying to change it from the inside, yeah thought they will come, they have experience, they have experience of the managing mad completion of the successful projects, experience of making a business form scratch, and they well decided they can be of use on order for MO (remark:Ministry of Defense) to start working more effective, so that there was no need in that sort of universal help form the society, well, something was successful, something was not, I am not ready to comment on that, you better talk to David about it, since there several people whose contacts I can give you who were part of that project, they can tell you how it was, why not everything was successful and there was an opposition form inside but well, that was one of the reasons why they decide, why David decided to go to Kyiv because he wanted to emm like lots of other people then, make system changes, well, something was successful,

something was not, here, it's not my place to talk about, it's better if people who were a part of that, talk about it, if you interested.

interviewer: Yes, sure. When did you register as an organisation? I am talking about the "People's project"

Well yes, we had a fund, very long time ago, it was not a fund, well it was registered as a fund, a non-profit organisation, it was registered a long time ago, but people had no need to use it, so when that times came when really there was a need, so there was already ready emm a legal entity, "Mizhregionalnyi fond blagochestya", emm the name "People's Project" is like a brand name emm, it appeared at the beginning of war, well, around Spring, April there was an idea to call it like that, because to name the website "Blagochestya" that would be strange, that is our legal entity that buys everything, transfers everything, that is called "Blagochestya", and the project name, name of the website is "People's Project" appeared at the beginning of war.

interviewer: So you are not registered as "People's Project"?

respondent: :No, no, that is just a registered website, registered name but legal entity is "Mizhregionalnyi fond blagochestya".

interviewer:

Could you please tell me about the activities of your organizations at the beginning of war, could you please describe your projects?

respondent: :Well, actually, it was mostly, projects of supply, emm then there was nothing at that time, so we were doing everything, starting from warm socks to *Unmanned aerial vehicle NVDs (night vision devices)*, **thermographic cameras**, we needed everything and that was medicine and well, I don't know, and some (...incomprehensible) parts of the cars, so basically we needed absolutely everything and the projects were not so much technical, well apart for the few exceptions, the project were about the supply , there was a need to buy and transfer some things to the army. That was almost all of the projects of the first few years, well, 90% percent, they were concentrated on the supply.

I: That was till 2016?

R: Well, at the end of 2015, there was more like systematic projects, well in 2016 there was like projects like “crossfit for the army”, well that was projects like not with things like “bought socks and sent it” but a quality help. Well, 2014 and the first half of 2015 well that was definitely “buy an send”. And well, at the same time we had a very serious project on making and now it's still going on, just have different phases of this project, making of *NVDs*, *emm*, there is a separate organization that came out from ours that is specializing on making *NVDs*.

R:Who was going to the conflict zone and transported the supplies?

I: Emm, well, depends. Then Maksym Ryabokon' was going there, he is now the coordinator and the chief of the project, sometimes, couple of times I was going but generally, at the beginning of war there was no problem of passing something (to the conflict zone), everyday almost, from Kyiv or oblast, through Kyiv, there was a car leaving, carrying food to their people from the same village or friends, and on their way take something from us like

**thermographic cameras**, so there was no problem to deliver something to the conflict zone, there was a problem to deliver something through mail, only later when the borders of the conflict were defined did “Nova Poshta” (private delivery company”) open their offices , and now there is no need to go there, boys can just go to the nearest office, but when the borderline was moving, back and forth, like we are taking Lysychansk (city in Luhansk region), and then we are retreating, then at that time, there was a lot of volunteers going there. But we need to understand that there were volunteers as we call them “volunteers on the wheels” who were going there back and forth, and the ones who were collecting money, sometimes same people were doing these two things, but we concentrated our efforts on finding proper provisioners, so that we can save the money, well, properly use the resources that we were given to us. At the very beginning we already emphasized on complete transparency, we understood that that sort of hype of trust will pass, and will be always who will try to benefit on someone else’s misfortune, so at the very beginning we needed to build our “renome” (reputation), build a trust to our fund, that can be done only by being transparent, so we were working on our transparency. And another priority we had was well, in one or 2 months of war it became clear that there are different people everywhere and whatever we are delivering must be documented., so everything that we are giving out needs to be counted for, so that later on there would be no cases like, unfortunately, we need to admit, admit that there were situations when the volunteers give something to the soldiers and they take it, then take now or a bit later it home, sell it and use the money for whatever they think is better. In order to avoid all that, everything we delivered with documents, and there was always people willing to bring it to the conflict zone.

I: You mean, you are using delivery receipts?

R: Act of reception-transmission, so yes, and also, we had a person who is in charge, well that's our 007 agent (laughs), he is in charge of making sure that everything is put on the balance of the military unit, so just signing the act is not very important, well for us that's important, but for the military unit it is important to put everything in their financial balance. So, if the thing we gave them has disappeared, so that's it becomes a problem to explain, otherwise that would be a vicious circle, there will be never enough money or resources, you know for people. Lots of people, not like refuse to work with us, but their motivation decreases, like they call us and ask can you give us something, of course we can but we have some rules, like we need an official request and guarantee that you will put everything on balance, we need the acts to be signed, we need reports, and some people are like, well majority of course agree to that, no problem, but there are some people who are like, no, thank you, that's not for us, that's not interesting for us, so yeah, sorry, we have our rules. We can do it only this way, that's our standpoint.

I: You used documents from the very beginning? Since at the beginning there were a lot of paramilitaries.

R: yes, we were doing it from the very beginning, because, first of all, we are legal entity and we need to report to the tax office, but we need to understand that there two different types of the donation – first, money donated to our account, that we reported from the very beginning, we used acts etc., but at the very beginning there was a lot of cases when people were just bringing like, sights, or laser rangefinder, and they asked to give to someone who needs it the most, so of course at the very beginning, first 2-3 months of 2014, we could some of these stuffs give to the boys, but we soon stopped it, and then even these things that people were bringing we were documenting, but the first, but since summer (remark 2014), we are giving

everything and documenting it, only maybe few exceptions when someone asks to give something to someone through our fund, and we just give it to the person, but all the money that is being donated are documented.

I: Why did you decide to stop taking donations from people without documenting it?

R: We stopped transferring without acts, we decided to do it, well, first of all, because there was a lot of talk between volunteers that not all patriots are equally patriotic, to put it like that, so of course there are people who go there with good intentions but anyway, people break when they see the opportunity to (...pause, respondent received a call). Sorry, someone called me. So, right, and first of all, no need to test people, no need to tempt people, so we decided to document it officially, and of course our desire of transparency played a big role.

I: How did you decide which who to help first?

R: 2014-2015 we were helping everyone, who called us and agreed to sign the documents, and the war at the time was very dynamic, so the amount of battalions that were there and everyone was fighting, so there was no need to think about expedience of the help, of course some soldiers were more active, they gave more info about what they need, so they could get more from us only because they called us more often, but basically, others, everyone who were coming... like I remember, that at the beginning there was situation that everyone had a volunteers, like a volunteer of the 55<sup>th</sup> brigade or 78<sup>th</sup> brigade, and they were coming to us, like that is my brigade, they need that, so we were opening a project to collect money for that brigade, we need have some limitations, like to buy one million of some cloth, we were not doing that, but been like from the beginning of 2016 we stopped delivering clothes, socks etc, because first of all, the army started working, and second of all, our capabilities and

possibilities were big, so we concentrated on making something that is hard for “small” volunteers, socks and shirts can be collected by people on Facebook, but our platform was collecting big sums of money, and for “small volunteers” it is hard to collect money for **thermographic cameras**, or some technical appliances, so after some time we concentrated on “expensive” help and more technical”.

I: So, in 2014 and 2015, you were helping the paramilitaries as well?

R: Yes, of course, we were helping them, like to “Donbass”, “Myrotvorec” etc.

I: When you were going to the East, you were going to specific brigade or going there with supplies and deciding there who to give it to?

R: Both, I would say. Majority the military were asking us, and emm sometimes, there were situations when I knew who was there (in the East), and asked them if you boys need something, and yes, they needed something, but yes, majority of objects were done after were asked by the military. So when we were going to the military that was already with the documents that need to be signed, and then volunteer or us were delivering things to the conflict zone to specific brigades, but there were cases when the donors, we had some serious donors, a person bought 200-300 walkie-talkies, so we need to understand that at that time they had some sort of radio stations that could be easily wired by a school student, that was horrible, so the person bought walkie talkie in States (incomprehensible), and gave us to give away, I don't really remember the number, well around 500 walkie talkie, so then we were just going to the borderline of the conflict and saw where it was needed so we were giving these walkie-talkies to different sub-subunits, but that was like a unique case, usually it was after an official request to us, or emm

well, or when we were finding some sub-subunits, we were told about them, like there are boys there, great boys, but they have nothing, so we could get in touch with them but all the deliveries were made 99% according to the discussed needs and official paperwork, so were going there prepared.

I: You mentioned that in 2014-2015 already people knew about you, and you could collect big sums of money. How did people get to know about you? Did you promote your organization somehow?

R: No, we were never promoting us, not on Facebook a swell, it's just that that was the time when just the Revolution of Dignity has finished, 2014, people still were, well, I myself was active during the revolution, so can judge looking at myself, so I see that people more or less the same reaction, so people were at that high patriotic wave, there was a desire to do something, to change something, and then the war started, well, first the annexation of Crimea, but people were still in that very, they were after one stress, and then another stress started, so basically, this united people a lot, so basically that part of the population, that part of civil society who were ready to help, they themselves were looking someone to do it through, that is the time "Kryla Feniksa" (civil society organization) appeared, "Narodnyi Front" and others, well now as far as I understand "Kryla Feniksa" are not functioning any more, other organizations are still there, and then like "Sestry Peremogy" were there, people were finding someone you can use to help (the army). Our advantage was that we never had an open office, where people could come, talk to us, bring something, that was one of our standpoints, since there were lots of threats, and a desire to ...(incomprehensible), let's get together and talk, so those sort of situations, so we decided not to make an office, but we had an opportunity to donate money directly through the system leak pay, online, no need to go anywhere, you have a card so just

with your phone or computer, just donate, it's very comfortable for people from abroad, from the all Ukraine, so I think that even with no advertising, we of course had reports, but not only we did reports, but also our advantage was that we took this question seriously, so the fact that David is an owner of a big business, he right away thought of future risks, reputation risks including so from the very beginning he was serious about this project, he had an idea before the war started, to make a project crowdfunding project, charity, that would give people an opportunity to solve issues, like social, put a bench in the yard, to give but the idea was ready when the war started, but just changed the direction, so we had a one page website, then it grew, we had all the reports, everything about us, our projects etc., so we didn't have any marketing promotion, but we had some advantages , and people trusted us. Maybe also because it was convenient, lots of people started helping through us

I: You said, there was no office back then, what about now?

R: We just at our, there is no office of the organization, just our friends let us stay at their office, so we just come, we have our workplaces, but we don't have an office of the organization where you can come, well, there is no need, we can also work distantly, online, we are going on a meeting to someone, lots of work.

I: So can people still bring you things? I mean, like thermographic cameras etc.

R: Yes, of course, they can. We would be meeting them, we bring the paperwork, we are also registered in Mykolaiv, we have people there who are doing the same things.

I: You friends that are letting you use their office, is it another civil society organization?

R: No, no, just business.

I: In your opinion, to what extent was the army supplied by volunteers?

R: Well, I think, I mean I don't have statically data, but based on my observations, the first years of war, right, the beginning of the paramilitaries, apart from the guns and gun ammunition, I think everything else was provided by volunteers , of course, something was bought by themselves, some people were coming with their own guns, like with their hunting guns, like **double-barreled shotgun** (laughs) and emm like they didn't have even guns provided, but everything else, starting from the cloths, like uniform up to the a sight, so if we don't consider guns, that's like 95%. Even food was brought by volunteers.

I: What are you doing now? What are your projects now?

R: Well, now we have lots. First of all, we are doing social projects as well. We had a very interesting project, last year we finished it, a trainer for military. So our friends, one of the inspirations of the People'Project, Valerii, in Mykolaiv in his sport club, was training boys, of course we can't train everyone, but the military sub-subunits were delegating their representatives who were in good physical shape, were or are still are well fit, and Valerii and his assistant were giving them a course on trainer's preparations, so that if they did this course in normal life, that would be too expensive, but for army they did it for free, and of course we were collecting money in order to some of their expenses, so they don't have to pay, like electricity and others, funny numbers, but the support of the society was needed, so also they had to take something with them, like CrossFit is good, since you don' really need much. So

there were 3 courses, they taught around 40 trainers, and those people came back to the units and now they can train others, their colleagues and upgrade the physical level of our soldiers. That's the project we are proud of. Then we gave a united project, school for military divers, created by the military diver, who can't join the army due to health reasons, and since all of the divers resources were left in Crimea, but we still have a water border with the aggressor and we need to control it, and there not many skilled divers, it is becoming popular among military so they take these divers courses, so we help them. That's about the army projects. Then we have a project to make multicopters for the military, boys who were starting as volunteers, now they became a separate organization who are in charge of creating the multicopters, so we are ordering from them, that's about the ones that changed. Of course, we still have projects of supply. Because there are still some things that are not being provided to the military. For example, partly they started to buy thermographic cameras, more like it was a humanitarian help, but first of all honestly I don't know maybe somewhere they are, but I haven't heard if any brigade any actually got them, I don't want to blame anyone, maybe just the brigades I am working with, but yes, there is a still a need of these cameras, sights, car repairs, most of the cars are still provided by the volunteers, given like in 2014 -2015, so they are still being repaired, and lots of times boys are calling like, we already bought one set of winter tires, but we need one more, so of course, lots of them buy things with their own money, but that's their job, we don't want them to spend their own money, they are protecting us, so they get a salary, so we are trying to help with these things. Blindages. We have actually a huge project, we already have done a lot, it an old project, it is a project on making blindages. Actually, still all of the walls they are made like, you take a chainsaw, cut down the woods, take staples and that's where they live. The blindages we are delivering to the boys, they are designed by the engineers, that is a completely different system, more comfortable, they bring the parts of it, and the boys have to put it together, of course it also needs to be done by hands,

but it is way more better than just a chainsaw. Plus, we have a project for snipers, providing sights. Then we have just a project, like you know “prompt response”, so like if there is something urgently needed, we could solve it right away. And then we have a project that started long time ago, and that’s the longest project we have, that’s the rehabilitation of the soldiers, that’s the doctor with his special methods who is treating soldiers with fractures. There are some boys, who were supposed to amputation, since the bone was fragmented, but at this project we are saving them from amputation, that’s is the project we reaa proud the most, almost 80 people were part of the project. Of course, it takes time, sometimes it takes years, but o is worth t, because it will save the legs of the person, it is a very painful project. It is of course connected to the army, since we are treating soldiers, but that is like more of a systemic project. Well, plus, we had couple of social projects, from small ones, like we were buying Easter cakes for people who live in the retirement houses, well there it’s just there was nothing there, there was a project when we were congratulating our Paralympics participants, we were putting posters of them in the subway so that somehow to make people of Ukraine aware that people with disabilities they are here, around us, and that fact that we don’t see them, theta s huge social problem,, So of course we don’t want to leave the military projects, since we still have the war going on , but as the boys are there buying, we are also trying to change the situation here. And like these days we started a project on the control of the military fuel, so for non-military might not be understandable, but the fuel in army is like currency , so to say, and it is one thing when at the battlefield like somehow to use, it is hard to control it, but when the rear forces use the unreal sum of fuel, like last year, there was a huge scandal, in Odessa, couple of people were fired form the military, charged with criminal charges etc., they stole like an unreal sum of fuel, tones of it, thousandi of tones are being stolen, so we are helping, like Ukrainian engineers came to us, they came up with the system that would disable the misuses of the fuel, so in 98% or 97% the system will show how much actually was used (the fuel), so there would

be no excuses later, you know, there the car broke, and so on, and that is like a help to army a swell, we think that since we are taxpayers, and since army uses our taxes, we think that it's emm like our obligation to control how they are being used, this is very important now, the war is going on, and not effective army cannot win, and just by filling in the wholes, we cannot help, you need to understand that we cannot vitiate the army leadership this way, they need to understand that everything will not be solved by volunteers, that is not normal, so we are showing that we can also control, not just help. Well, that is regarding the army. Ah we also the project, last year a surgeon called us from Cherkasy, he said that their ORs are bad equipped that their last surgery was cancelled sine the operational table would not move, it just broke under the table, so they showed a video, when a surgeon with his hands, and you know that's his most important tool – his hands, they are trying to sort of lift or fix the table, and the table is like so old, it was during Grandpa Lenin's time, they didn't have the lights, one nurse was holding that lamp, so we bought them , we equipped three operational rooms with tables and lighting, and later on in two – three month the city administration bought also lighting, of course we didn't help wo that, we helped the authorities to see the necessities and decided to help. Partially we used the money donated by the people, and part of the money came from the fun “Dopomagaty Prosto” (“helping is Easy”), that is our partners, fund organized by Privat Bank, long time ago, they helped us a lot, to treat the soldiers, they took care of several soldiers completely, gather money for the surgeons, first we thought to equip at least one OR, but then when we saw what was going on there, of course, we have war, but people still need to get some medical help outside the war. So that was our medical projects. Now our projects that are constantly running are Biotech Rehabilitation, project helping the Cherkasy Hospital finished, another one was that huge ambitious project – a doctor, Alexander Kulik called us, Nodos clinic, near Kyiv, a private clinic, but from the beginning of war they started treating soldiers who had neurological disorders after the wound, so they needed, they first were using

their own resources, then they said they couldn't manage it anymore, they asked to help purchase a machine that cost more than a million hryvnias (Ukrainian currency), but I need to mention that the distributors gave us a huge discount, despite the fact that they were representatives of the foreign company. A machine that helps the soldiers treat the hand motility, that was very useful for people who have near stroke disorders, since like head wounds can cause lots of problems, also for people who are learning to use the bionic prostheses, because you need to work on that motility in order so that bionic hand was not just pretty but also useful. So that are our .. or and now we have plans for a project of help to 3<sup>rd</sup> Kyiv maternity hospital, they need for babies that are born premature, it's called I think oxygen analyzer, well that's like a basic need for the children's reanimation so that's the doctors understand how to save the child because well the amount of oxygen or not enough oxygen can be equally harmful, especially for premature born kids, can be very serious consequences of the brain development, so like next week or in two weeks, I very hope we will launch this project, because we really need these kind of things. This what (..incomprehensible). That's what we are doing right now.

I: You have a lot of medical projects, why did you focus on medicine?

R: Well, how to say, medicine is a very painful problem for Ukraine, we have good professionals, but we have problems with system, like I know lots of people who come from abroad for treatment but only to Kyiv, in Kyiv there is an opportunity if you have money, acquaintance, you can somewhere, but there is no system., we have different relations with the Ministry of Health but as citizen we hope that there will be proper reform and it will work. But now there are a lot of situation, where we couldn't wait, like boys from biotech rehabilitation, they don't have time, whether they start now, or they just say, of course you can live with income, you can live with prostheses, but we understand that doesn't add health,

emmm that anyway it is a lot, any person that losses legs or hands, you can ask them if they want they want their limbs back, of course ye, so there are people who live perfectly fine with the prostheses but of course if there is an opportunity to save limbs, we decided that this project had potential, especially the technology of the doctor in charge , he is always invited abroad to tell about that technology, actually that technology is like 15 year-old, he is from Donetsk, and he was treating miners at first, who were hurt at the production, there were lots of cases, when the war started he came to Kyiv and started treating soldiers. There are people who have like 7 sm of bone are missing, it will not grow again without help, but he is together with biotechnologies, he is making it happen, so when we first asked about doing the project, the head of the clinic where the doctor is working, we agree right away, to be honest, first we thought, that's like how is it possible, in Ukraine. That project started because we wanted to overcome that disbelief in ourselves, people were saying really in Ukraine you will grow bones, we are still treating everything with zelenka, but when the first success came, the people started thinking, I mean I myself when the project started, I believe we can do everything, but I was skeptic deep inside, but then if you saw our boys, when they are running, jumping, they came back to normal life, started to do the martial arts, well kike you se that everything you were doing have results, so we are really happy that it helps in that way, and the rest of our projects, is because people are asking, doctors – we need help, like we can wait for the authorities to do it, but we underastand that the budget is limited, when people are criticizing the authorities I understand that partially that is a true criticism but we are forgetting that our country is poor, and we really do not have the resources, and they can't buy that oxygen analyzer, we can scream , talk about it, that Poroshenko should buy it etc. or whatever people write, but the people who are suffering not the people who are doing something wrong but children, parents of the children who need help now, and the same stories with the rest of the projects, very often people write to us, like why you are not doing that, why Poroshenko is not doing that, why the

authorities are not doing that, well we don't know, we do not have any resources to influence them, like for example, "Povernys Zhyvym" after the publication of the tax declarations, they, Vitalik (note: the co-founder of the "Povernys Zhyvym" organization), they turned to all the deputaty with a favor to donate a part of their money to the army, but even among the society there was a controversial reaction, like why are you counting someone else's money, no one is saying that they were counting money of the people who were government workers their whole life and honestly don not have an (incomprehensible), so the process should go on, but to wait for the day when someone's conscious appears or the processes change or the institution start working, we can't wait for that because the help is needed now, so now we are trying to gather around us people who think the same way and donate part of their income to the support of the army, of course, we understand that it will not solve global issues, but well, it might sound posh but we saved lives of people and not just us, we the people who donate, even if one person is saved, it was worth it, so that why we were always taking the medical projects when people ask us always, not that we are happy that our help is needed, it's just that we never say no to these projects, only when we understand that well we can't manage it, so when it's about systematic changes, in other cases- we always agree.

I: Do you get support from the authorities in these projects?

R: No, we do not get any support from the authorities. Sometimes we received help from the representatives of the government, but it was private anonymous donations, company owned by them or they themselves were helping, or calling like we saw you need that and that, we are ready to provide it under your responsibility so that you report how you used it. But there is no systematic help from the institutions, from the representatives – yes, but not institutions.

I: How can you describe your relations with authorities?

R: Well, how to say, we cooperate on some projects, with the representatives of the authorities, we have not bad relations with the Ukrainian Naval forces, we are helping them with the school of the military divers, but it's more like we are helping and we can communicate with them, and they can give us an opportunity to like, I don't know to test the sights, like we bought the sights, we are calling to, yes, we have good relations the authorities of the proving ground "Desna", we bought the sights, if need somewhere to shoot, they would be – sure, come and shoot, but that's like, of course like they are also government representatives, but the support is more like *tochkova* (very specialized), no relations with the government institutions, so just the military and like the heads of the military, we have fine relations with them, because we have been helping them for a long time, so they see that we absolutely don't have a desire to get something from the, some guns or something, so that's why they treat us okay, so we can work with them, but the rest – we don't have any relations with the authorities, absolutely.

I: How has the process of helping the army changed?

R: Well, we have from the very beginning, the "Nova Poshta" company, they took a very strong standpoint, and first they were giving promocodes to the volunteers that they could use, and later they were changing the system how they were working with volunteers, were making it more controlled, more strict, some say, but I understand, that is a private company, they were trying to secure themselves from the misuses of some people, but now when the conflict border line is more or less stable, so on the territory controlled by Ukraine almost everywhere "Nova Poshta" is working, now it became way easier, no need to send, so we stopped completely spending money on the deliver, we are doing it free, for us it's free, so "Nova Poshta" is delivering all of our packages to the conflict zone, so that solved all of our problems in terms of delivery, through "Nova Poshta", starting from the paperwork to like, once were delivering

huge, just enormous, in Mariupol, for the military divers the training machines that were made for us in the Paton institute, all that we sent due to “Nova Poshta”.

I: What is the procedure of helping the battalions, in the paperwork are you putting *ZSU* (National army of Ukraine) or are you working directly with the heads of battalions?

R: Well, we are working emmm, brrrrmmm, wait hold on, like for example a unit is calling us, and every unit has an officer so we are taking usually the smallest level that is able to sign the papers and document everything. More often that is usually the heads of the military unit numbers, battalions or sub-units units, that's is not global, the only exception is when we are working with the units for special operations, Alfa, that sort of subunit that no one has to know about, they have a like a long procedure, everything is centralized, but concerning the *ZSU*, they do it easier in some things, so we reaa working directly with the heads of the brigade, battalions, or military units.

I: And why are you working with the heads of the battalions etc. and not the higher representatives of *ZSU*? For example, generals?

R: Well, in terms of paperwork, brigade or paperwork, they need to do it. So that is why that's a question of expediency. Second of all, there are some subunits, how to say, we are trying to work with people, after all this time, even you can understand by phone how adequately the person understands what we want from the, which documents we want and why, for us it is important that all this help that we are giving to army, that is given to the people who can use it, and usually the brigade chief knows which subunits is more effective, the chief of the subunit know which squadron is more effective and the chief of squadron knows which soldiers can

use our help the best. So we are trying all that way, like we cannot be responsible, we are not there, in the front line, so we don't know who is cooler – Petya Vasechkin or Vasya Petechkin, but his chief knows. And generals - we have too many of them, I don't want to say anything, of course we have the military generals, and a lot of the boys get the position directly from the front line, but lots of people are in the rear, staying in the headquarters and know nothing what is going on inside the army, so we are working directly with the subunits who are at the front line, fighting and their chiefs.

I: Are you helping just the ZSU or also *dobrobaty* (volunteers battalions)?

R: Well, there no more *dobrobaty* in its original way, they all merged with the ZSU or NGU. So *Donbass* now is part of (National Guard of Ukraine), we are not working with them right now, we are working with the sub unit of snipers, some battalions, now it's a part of 53<sup>rd</sup> brigade – 24<sup>th</sup> battalion *Kyivska Rus'*, completely a volunteering battalion that was not very famous like *Donbass* or *Aidar*, but it was also a battalion composed of volunteers and they took part in a lot of like, for example they were in Debaltsevo, they are all part of ZSU or NGU, so we are working them, emm but these *dobrovolchi battalions* for example like, the left overs Pravyi sector, now we are nor working the Pravyi Sector anymore, we were helping but larer a part of it became, some part of people joined army, and part of the people, stayed in the sort of , I don't even know what status they have, but the problem is that the ones who do not have official status, we cannot help them by law, because we can never ..(incomprehensible). And the rest – who merged with the units, also we need to understand that not all *dobrovolchi battalions* had the status of like being by themselves, battalion *Kulchytskyi* which is part of NGU – was composed of just volunteers, battalions of some brigade also were made of volunteers. By the way, a lot of people, at the beginning of war, emm, we were going I don't remember, well not

the beginning, it was like 2015 or 2106, I was in 55<sup>th</sup> brigade, then they started pulling out the artillery, we were talking, and I am saying that well, were there with the *dobrovolci* (soldier of the volunteering battalion), and they turn around and they – well, you are offending us, we are also dobrovolci, but we joined not the *dobrobat* but the ZSU, like 2 people, young but not that much, so to say, and they say, at our age we would not be mobilized, they were like 45 or 46 years old, but we re in the army when were young, and they we voluntarily went to the military commissariat, no one called us so we are dobrovolci, why are you calling dobrovolci only the ones from Pravyi Sektor, so they were really offended. So that is why we are trying to not to divided ours, so we have the ones that are official units – we can help them, and the ones that unfortunately we cannot help, because they have other status. But actually, there some volunteers that are working with those battalions, with those sub units, that have more possibilities, like they are not limited in their actions in term of paperwork, like us, and we are helping ZSU, NGU, MNS etc.

I: What is the number of the sub units or battalions that you provided help to, in the past month or 2?

R: Well, the last two months would not be that much, let me tell you, (laughs, the last two months will three or four, counting the number of brigades, uh, maybe 6 in the last two months. But in general, a lot, I don't know, I don't know a brigade that we didn't help – special forces are ours, and brigade staring from 55<sup>th</sup>, 79<sup>th</sup> we helped a lot, 53<sup>rd</sup>, 55<sup>th</sup> or for instance the ones we helped a lot, 79<sup>th</sup> – everything started with them, and we even had couple of projects made specially for them – lots of it, for couple of years, we were giving them clothes and shoes

I: Why did it start with them?

R: Everything started with them, because as I was saying...when David and Valera went to Chengar, they met with Evheniy Zhukov, call sign Marshal, he is very famous, he was in DAP (Donetsk airport) couple of rotation, he is a hero, his unit was , if you remember, at the beginning of war part of the military was stuck on the border with Russia, they were being gunned from all sides, can't remember the city, but it was, when the war was starting, well that was as if we were watching a movie, and boys there was that Zhenya Zhukov, and he is very active and a real military, and the boys came to them, they are Mykolaiv brigade, project from Mykolaiv, the connection was established, we need to understand that it is important that when you are providing help, and you see that people are using it and people are grateful to people who collected money, that is also a very important moment, of course, we bought, we delivered, but people, some gave 10 hryvnias, some 10 thousand hryvnias, and for us, since we are mediators, we need to know that everything that everything we are delivering that should be valued, that boys understand that people are supporting them and that they are using it properly, so that 79<sup>th</sup> brigade, we met them and boys were very active and righteous and we helped them a lot. Plus in Mykolaiv, that is a paradox of the southern cities, they have lots of so called *vatne* (pro- Russian) population, I do not know how to call it more politically or diplomatically correct, but maybe because of that the patriotically oriented part of the city becomes so united, so active, so well, such a string force, and they were actively helping their brigades. So, in Mykolaiv, really a very ambiguous city, and I think that if at the beginning of the conflict Russian mercenaries put more resources towards that city so there, of course there is a big part of population who would support them but the volunteers, well later they became volunteers, that pro-Ukrainian people ,emm, citizens they appeared to be so active that they were not expecting from themselves, that is why the 79<sup>th</sup> brigade, we had to open and open new projects

for them because volunteers were calling from the city and asking – our brigade needs that and that and they were very active, the citizens were helping us a lot.

I: So the number of brigades that you are helping hasn't changed in the past 4 years?

R: Well, no, it's just that someone, we'll, we are trying to help the ones on the front line, so if they are entering the front line – we are helping, they left – if they need our help, well, to buy now the sights to the ones that, well only if they are learning, so if the left and they are learning and they need help with that, so of course we understand that we need to prepare people, but someone else is entering the front line, so constantly more or less the same amount of brigade that we are helping.

I: So they are the one who are contacting you?

R: Some – yes, some we just know, like one brigade left and the other one came in, so if we know the chiefs or we can just call and ask so what do you need, now it is easier, everything became more systematic, so the fighting is still going on, so when they write that 39 bombardment were today, we need to understand that it is not that our military was gunned 39 times, one bombardment can last for couple hours so the war is going on, but nevertheless, emm because it has more of defensive features, there is no panic, so everything can be done in a calm and rational manner, plus now we have experience, like at the beginning of the war I had no idea how thermographic camera is different from emm some night thermographic camera, or what is the difference, now we understand, the difference between sights and googles, plus we started to understand when people are trying to misuse our help, they ask that and that and that, they need everything , and we understand that it is not true, that that sub unit does not need that appliances, they will not use at all. So now we also can contact them , look

at the, talk to them, and help it kore systematic, so it is not like, they are attacking or we are attacking, so we have a chance to do it calmly.

I: Okay, what is a procedure of buying the thermographic cameras or sights, and do you have any problems in terms of that?

R: Uh, well we have... okay, in terms of thermographic cameras, we were buying for a long time in couple of places, now we have one provider, well people who are just, they themselves are buying these things in different places, but they are not making profit in us, they know we are volunteers, we know each other for a long time, because we are buying not in cash, everything is working like that, and they not only take more money from us but also they are always advising us and just really help us. That is our constant provider, so to say. And well, when we receive a request, and when enough of money on our account is accumulated, well of course, when the request comes, we are making a post about people, boys form that brigade need that and that, so we want people to understand that, so that people also used critical thinking, of course we try to give as much information as we can, of course we cannot disclose the position, we do not know them themselves usually, because there are things that no one can know, but we are trying to choose enough information so that they can evaluate how much help is needed, and after that when enough if money is accumulated, we are buying it. The problems are, well, the cameras we are buying, now because it is more affordable, we are buying in Pulsar, Pulsar is a Belarusian company, we would like to buy Archer which is Ukrainian, but they are more expensive, of course they are way better, but well, there is a possibility to buy one Archer and help one sub unit or two Pulsar, and it happened that everyone is okay with that, all volunteers are buying Pulsar. So the problem, as recently we were told, that there was some problem with the Matrix at the production and so for a long time we had to wait, but that

is maybe the only case of, but basically, after these couple of years – we have, well, I call to a specific person, he is like, kay, Sasha what do you want if in need an consultation, he is giving me one, if I need to buy something, he tells me how long it takes to get this appliance to Ukraine or maybe if they have, that is all worked out, so there are no problems apart from a product not being in stock.

I: And the rest is also bought abroad or in Ukraine?

R: There are lots of things we buy here, there are like, laser rangefinders, but it is still produced abroad, in States, Germany, emm, little things that are, there was a project on our platform, they might be doing something now, thermographic cameras, “ТепловізорUA”, that was the initiative, they were still buying the most part of the technical part abroad, but were putting everything together here, so they were trying to make it cheaper, so make it in Ukraine, so we opened a project to collect money, so we ordered 10 or more from them, but still most of these kind of things are made not in Ukraine, there are the manufacturers, Archer, but as I said, they are expensive. So they are doing the discount, it is not that they don't want to make a discount, but when you are making something good, you just cannot sell in professional amount for small money. Another question is why they are not being systematically supplied by the Ministry of Defense, that is I don't know, I don't know answer to this question.

I: So you did not have problems at the customs?

R: Well, if we were buying everything by ourselves – we would have problems, but since we have the intermediaries, so we are lucky that they are doing that, well that is the volunteering contribution, they spend their own resources, well they have, well, people just have the license, the ones that are buying it for a long time – so we never had a necessity to do it ourselves,

customs etc. at the beginning of course we didn't have that kind of opportunities – people well, even Sinitsyn Roma was writing about it, that they were buying everything anywhere they could find, and was looking which country use to fly through, to check the criminal charges of the country, in order to get less years to serve if they are caught with that appliances, we had a very quick, well first of all, we had a sponsor, well we still have him, right, a person who is helping not very publicly, who was bringing tones of help to the army, including thermographic cameras for them, sights, and lots of things, at first, lots of things, most of the technical things we were supplying was because of that person, and then later, like six months later, the situation became more stable, the people who are, well all those thermographic cameras they have a hunting function, so people started to buy more, so there was no need to look for it, bring it and the suppliers have the (...incomprehensible). Of course, there was time when we were waiting like a week, two three, but of course there were moments when we're buying like more expensive because we couldn't wait, or were waiting, when there was an airport (battle for Donetsk Airport) for example, the situation with the airport, we had two projects with the airport, airport one and airport 2017, I think, where there were *dobrobaty* there, Tanya Rychkova, a very famous volunteer asked us, who now went to make changes, so to say, in the system, I hope she can do it, so she was in charge of them, the brigade, and everything was needed for “the day before yesterday” (very urgently), so of course then you buy everything there is, so you are not paying attention, like, thank God, the support of the society at that time was big, so it was really easy to collect one million hryvnya in one week, so that is why were writing that on Facebook that we are buying everything there is, like the boys need the thermographic cameras, so everything there is, in the whole Ukraine, we were calling to everyone so we were collecting from everyone, but thank God, you know, it was like, you know, that was period when everyone, people were helping, the suppliers themselves, there was no need for people like, sometimes I was calling and saying I need three thermographic

cameras, they were asking, are you a volunteer, yes, volunteer, okay, so for you that is the sum, so you understand that the person gave you like 20 percent discount, so there was no need even to, no one was asking you, are you sure, what are doing exactly, how will you prove that you are volunteer or not. Now of course, it is more problematic, well people can't be blamed for that, there are lots of , well, really a lot of examples of the misuses , and since out people are not used to trust anyone in general, so it's already, well, we have our own reputation, so it is easier for us, but in general, well, people are not that willing to trust anymore.

I: Well, sure, everything is built on trust. And are you cooperating with other civil society organizations?

R: Well, yes, we are working with them quite often, we have good relations with the mentioned "Narodnyi Front" ... (incomprehensible)

I: You mean "Narodnyi Tyl"?

R: Yes. Yes, I meant "Narodnyi Tyl", Roman Sinitsyn, well, we have been working with them a lot, especially at the beginning. Then there is a project "Peremozhci", we were helping to gather money for the prostheses, emm, then we had lots of projects with small volunteers, emm, we worked with "Sestry Peremogy" in helping the 55<sup>th</sup> brigade, that was sort of, they were taking care of that brigade, we were helping them, the artillery, we were helping them when they were in Debaltsevo, and then when they left it, they were so torn apart, ridiculous, they had nothing, so were also helping them. Then the organizations, let me remember, I need to look at the project, when the Paralympics, when our Paralympics .. (incomprehensible), organization that works with spreading the awareness of this problem, called us and we were gathering the posters for printing. We had also lots of others, I just can't really remember, well,

our constant partners, “School of military divers”, that is what I was talking about, that is organized by one person who is always inviting people who are ready to help him that is a big initiative, they are actually doing a really good job. Emm, well, basically, we worked with lots of organizations on different levels, well just some joint projects, well, we need to understand that there is no, well, sort of jealousy among us, people think we are having some kind of completion among us, but actually we don’t have anything like that, we are all communicating if there is a need, we understand that we are doing one thing, of course, one important thing is, what we are watching for, when there are not a lot of organizations, strong, well strong, well - known, it is important for us to protect our reputation, because the problem of one (organization) will affect the reputation of the others, because people don’t really distinguish, people will be : oh, all of the volunteers are like that, so of course, we are all friends with the people, time tested, because we all understand that we all need one after another work, so none of us deceives, none of us sort of, of course there are people, who need not reasons, they will say, that we are all here driving Lamborghini, we are all in gold, at first, there was lots of it, at first it was kinda upsetting, but now we understand that there are people like that, and there “ordered” articles, paid for, but part of it, you just don’t pay attention, but the time tested ones, yes, ah, also “Armiya SOS”, I always forget about someone, we are always working with them, since they are still the only ones who are installing software, we are collecting money for the tablets and then take them (the tablets) to them, there boys and girls are doing everything, and then we, so they are our constant partners.

I: About cooperation with the “big” organization, are you cooperating in terms of exchange of products or more of informational cooperation?

R: Both, so with “Armiya Sos”, they are installing software for us all of the tablets, well not just for us, they are doing that for everyone, they are the only is doing that, divers choo, we are helping them to organize their classes, with “Narodnyi Tyl”, they had a storage to which our sponsor put lots of different things for us, that was at the beginning of war, clothes etc., we gave everything to them, because they had opportunity and resources to distribute al of the, just joint projects with volunteers when they collected part of the money, we collected part of the money, when the amount was big and we were not sure that one channel would be enough to collect the money, so we were making a project and we were showing according to the new reports system, that part of the money was collected by that volunteers, part was collected by us, that is how we, that was I think was the project about, oh my god, first aid kits for the military, different cooperation, there are volunteers who are making the products and they are calling us, asking that if they can collect money on our platform, so we right away, we also have very strict conditions, we are collecting only by cashless account, ours, the one we own, because that I sour platform, our name, we need to have an opportunity to report everything, every hryvnya, and then later, emm according to previously discussed budget, we buy everything and give the acts (documents) to the people who are supposed to receive it. So basically, everyone who is asking us and we see that these people are adequate, well, or we know them, we work with them. And small volunteers, ... incomprehensible, I can't really remember the name, from Kherson, but small volunteers, very active, we were working with them, for the Eastern baskets for people who emm are living in the elderly houses, maybe.. (incomprehensible, connection lost)

I: They asked you for the financial help?

R: Yes, yes, mostly its financial or emmm or when people need a consultancy help, because they don't know how to start the process of the project, and emm we are take all of the processes,

or people have a desire to help, change something, they need something , (incomprehensible) and so they ask that we put their project on our platform and we lead this project, because mostly , well, most of the cases we are in charge of buying and reports etc., so people emm, well, we are doing everything right and its good for us, and we can also kind of help people, so that they are not doing something that they don't know and they don't need.

I: So as far as I understood, at the moment, you are cooperating much with the other organizations? For example, the big ones that you mentioned?

R: Now? No, now, no.

I: In one article that I was reading about your organization, it was mentioned that at the moment big civil society organization that are still active in Ukraine, sort of divided their responsibilities, and each organization is sort of in charge of its own field of work. It was mentioned that this division is quite effective. Do you think it is? And if yes, to which extent is it effective?

R: Well, I not sure, if everyone has their own field, but yes, maybe yes, there is a tendency, for example, "Narodnyi Tyl" has a project "Families of Narodnyi Tyl", big project, they are doing really a great job, because they taking care of these kids. Of course, it is effective, because people can't, a person can't do good everything, a person cannot do everything, resources are very limited, human resources of every initiative like that, you need to understand that as well, emm, we , for example, we have been doing various medical projects for a long time, let's say that this is like our, we already have suppliers, people who know us, who are ready to help us, I think this is our advantage, of course there are some moments, at some time,

someone completed a certain project, he learnt a specific topic and he starts to do it, so what is the point for everyone to do the same, if we can divide between ourselves more professionally so to say, for example, “Armiya SOS” who are working with installing the software of the tablets, they have spent long time, resources for the development of that software, emm, it works, everyone likes it (the software), what is the point for them to gather money for the thermographic cameras or for the help to someone if there are other volunteers that will do it, they are doing what they are doing best, everyone is contacting them for help, and they at the same time, we, the rest of volunteers, there is no need to take care of, look for these software’s, to be honest, I think that it is very effective, like this sort, emm, let’s say, a natural process of when people everyone takes their own field of work, moreover we are not competing organizations, that are emm are fighting for a part of the market, we are just people who are doing, we have a common goal, and for us it is very beneficial to divide the fields of work, maybe divide it even more, since to focus on something specific – it is easier for the organization and more understandable for the .. vygodonadobuvachiv? seekers for the benefits? (incomprehensible) for example “Volonterska Sotnya” (Volunteers Hundred), the “Yurydychna Sotnya” (“Legal Hundred”), so everyone know that if there are some legal issues, they need they will go not to us, not to “Armiya SOS”, but they will go to the “Yurydychna Sotnya”, so more or less everything is divided. Plus, there are a lot, well not a lot, some several organizations appeared, the veteran unions, they are taking care of the veterans, help to the military, legal and everything, but that is all, well, I think that one way or another of the institutions start working, only they will remain because that is rational.

I: Could you please tell me about the financing of your organization? Is online donations the only resource of the funding?

R: Yes, well, that was people, individuals, legal entity, everything is through the online donations. The funding of all the projects is only this way, well, like any crowdfunding.

I: What about your relations with the business? Apart from the “Nova Poshta”?

R: Well, yes, there are several companies that were helping us at some point, well they were doing it, let's put it like this, I cannot tell you their names because they were doing it anonymously, and the ones I can name you, that was the fund created by the “Privat Bank”, what I was telling you at the beginning, we write about them, they just created, so I think that when they saw their help is very needed, they just created separate fund, to help ..(incomprehensible), and they are also helping us. In terms of big business, there separate business companies that are helping us one way or another, emm, but it's just that during one project it might be very big sum, big percentage, half, 50 percent of the overall money collected, but that does not happen often, of course they are able to help with one big sum, but still , business first of all, are discounts, we have several networks of the military ammunitions, guns, discounts are quite big, they make maximum possible. Or like “Nova Poshta”, that is a business organization, that is, if you count how much money they saved us that we never had to pay for the delivery, I think that is like ten or hundred thousand hryvnias, it is hard to count now. Emm, business is helping more like with providing us with their services for free, or give us big discounts, maximum possible for the purchases, well, mostly it's like this, very seldomly business is helping with money.

I: Did the amount money donated to your organization decrease compared to 2014? If yes, to what extent?

R: Well, the amount decreased of course, but that is completely natural process, but, it is hard to say, emm, well, the flow of the money during the active military actions was also not stable, when certain situations happened, like Debaltsevo or Illovaisk, or airport, DAP, you open a project that was targeting people that are there, so right away, money that we were collecting in two months, we could collect in 2 days, emm, now, luckily, there are no abrupt necessities like that, so it is just constant, well, it is really not much different, so if you take an average calm month of 2015 or 2016, that is not that less of money, I think it is around 70 percent, really differs, emm but there are less needs, there are no immediate needs, so we mostly have systematic projects, so it is hard to compare these things. Overall, all of the projects, well, we have less projects overall, we could have 30 projects at the same time active, well, maybe not 30, but 15-20, now it is less, and well, that is why the flow decreased, plus there are no these horrible outbursts.

I: The amount of the help from business had also decreased?

R: Well, the help from business just became like, then everything was just starting and every business wanted to find more convenient form of help, so let's say, it is now stable, well, stable processes, I know that again, "Nova Poshta" delivers for free, that store sells us something without making profit, that ones are selling us the other things, that ones are making these for us, that ones are shooting for us, taking pictures, so just emm, we are asking them for help a lot, but not, it is already the relations when, well, we need less help from , we are asking less, plus, all of the processes became more understandable, at the beginning, maybe the money , maybe like that, maybe like this, because a lot of business that are helping are small, and they really often don't have an opportunity to help financially, so they are helping us with discounts, so we agreed that this is the way they are helping us. So our needs became less, we need less help plus, we worked out stable schemes of the cooperation.

I: You said that the amount of money donations from people had decreased. When, which year approximately did it happen?

R: Well, you know it just, well, projects like biotech rehabilitation of the wounded, well, that was till recently has not changed, just changed a bit, like 10-15 percent, but now it is summer so, it is always ... (incomprehensible), some project, projects where emmm supply, maybe decreased for 30 percent, somewhere more, somewhere less, when we have immediate needs, the activeness of the people increases, when everything is calm and we don't ask anything actively, just say that we have needs, but it is not today or tomorrow, so of course the activeness decreases a bit, I think that a lot of who, what I am noticing.. (pause)..well, a lot of people who started to save money, of incase of something, so that they have saving, like seriously, I just see that people became more careful in their needs, including the help of the army, but nevertheless, there are a lot of people who like actively help, there are less of them now, but they still are here, and at some point the help even decreased, we have some people who started to give more, we had lots of cases when people, IDPs, are writing to us saying: I will find a job, and will start helping you more, the find it and really start helping more, well, so there are people who are helping more, but overall the amount decreased, but depends on the months, I am not ready, I need to calculate, so I can say about all of the projects overall, but not critically, so to say.

I: So that decrease happened starting from 2016-2017 when there were no active military actions?

R: Well, started from 2017, started to become calmer, 2014 and 2015, the beginning of 2016 was really a lot of, if there was a real need, we were collecting very fast and now well, there was a little bit of hysteria, and now it is more like, maybe someone calmed down too much, but, well, I think, God forbid, that if now there was a really immediate need, I think that people would still ...(incomprehensible).. collect the necessary money.

I: Could please tell me if you are working with international organizations?

R: Emm, how to say, we had a volunteer organization, registered in States, we had a joint project with them, but that is just an organization with our natives (diaspora). As for the international organizations like ...(incomprehensible) , we don't have grants, like there are different organizations, like UN and others, we don't have any of them yet.

I: Why not? Why are you not applying for grants?

R: Well, first of all, we are only few people. That is, let's say a painstaking and serious work, to write a grant application, write everything down, then we would need resources for reporting everything under this grant. But nevertheless, the most important is that, no one will give you a grant to buy thermographic cameras and really that is not needed, it is just such a shame to go around and ask money for the thermographic cameras. As for other serious things, yes, we have some, I cannot really tell you, we do have some thoughts, have some systematic projects , but we just want if do apply for the grant, we want some systematic project that would not just like a "dyrka zatykatelstvo" ("filling in a hole"), but would be long running, and project aiming at more global changes, well, like, like in rehabilitation or military in general, plus we have very limited, well, want to do a lot, but really some grants, some processes can be initiated only the state, what we can initiate, now we have. Let's say, we already gave the outline of a new

project, which we will be making with several representatives, well, if everything goes well, so the representatives of several volunteer organizations will be involved, so if everything is okay, goes well, we will be asking for a grant ...(incomprehensible).. and plus we will be asking for help from the state, but that is just, concerning the rehabilitation of the military, because that is a huge problem, actually, now there are two big problems, well, apart from the rest, there are two big ones – that is cancer among the military, a lot of, really a lot of people, I don't even know, we want to make statistics about it, we cannot find official statistics about it, plus since we have really really bad medical evaluation before the acceptance to the army, it is really hard to prove that it is all connected, emm, and the level of the medical treatment is very low, so, even we have bad doctors, just no support, so the boys have to buy almost everything by themselves, and every time collect money for the chemo for the person who came from war, I think it is just a shame, so we, well, we don't know what to do actually, we are now thinking, trying to make some sort of a system for that, and plus, there are moments of the psychological rehabilitation for the fighters, the systematic one. So these projects, if everything, if we can find some sort of the clear frame for the cooperation and work out some sort of system, so then we will be applying for the grants and the help from the government.

I: You mentioned that no one will give you a grant for the thermographic cameras, why not?

R: Well, first of all, a lot of international organizations help the veterans, help the IDPs, help the promotion of the civil society in the regions and the regions itself, but helping in any way that can be used in the war, since now we have officially truce, I don't know, maybe that's there some internal processes or procedures, but there has been no positive decision for these sort of applications, we ourselves have not applied, but we know several, there were several tries from other different volunteers, but never, they don't even open any programs, so when

they were asking for help directly – no help, there was no even programs opened, so nevertheless if there is a grant, if there is an announcement that they are ready to give some money, they still well, give sort of an image for what exactly they are ready to give money for. In terms of, military support, this sort of support, buy something for the front, well, that doesn't even appear. As for the social, I mean physiological help, well, there are people who know about it better, I know that it is hard to measure the progress, because there are no information at the moment of entrance, so there is no input information at all, emm, phycologists are not working with the conscript, phycologists are not making any emm, not collecting any information at the moment of entering the military, so to understand to what extent was the deviation of the person who his/her norm, so when people or organization are giving money for that, it is hard to show them the progress because you don't have the input information, so as far as I know even for this less money is given.

I: You mentioned that some organizations applied for the grants, if it is not a secret, what were the organizations?

R: Unfortunately, I cannot give this information. That is private.

I: Okay, let's move on. What are your relations with the diaspora? Are you in contact with them?

R: We have more of the point contact, yes, we have contacts with diaspora, I will tell you now, emm, helped us a lot, there was support from Canada, but more like *tochkova* help (point by point), from the Ukrainians in Italy, Spain, different organizations, and Portugal, but that is mostly if we can call it, it is a bit wrong to call them diaspora, Canada, yes that is diaspora –

citizens of Canada but of Ukrainian roots, live there for a long time, but in terms of Italy, Spain and Portugal, many people who are there, who are helping, actually they are citizens of Ukraine that are working there, so they are not really representatives of diaspora, but among them there are people who settled down there, married, had kids, so it's like that, but we don't have like constant flow, maybe that is our fault, we were not doing that, they are the ones who reached out to us, or were helping one specific soldier, very often they were helping who is on our wounded biotech rehabilitation program, or a person went to the treatment and became friends with the representatives of the Ukrainian diaspora, who are there, comes back and starts getting treatment here, and people who already know, who live abroad continues helping him through our fund, or just contact us, there was a moment, when we don't even know who that was.. (laughs), we had a project, emm hard one – “Krovomobil”, a car that is operated there in the front by the anesthetist and lots of death is due to the blood loss, so he is charge of delivering, so that the process starting from getting wounded to blood transfusion, to make this distance as short as possible. And the project was going to an end, and we needed to just a bit, emm yeah, just a bit..(laughs), 10 thousand dollars, and in certain moment 10 thousand dollars come from Malta. Emm a person is not, well we were writing, trying but the person didn't want to open everything, just, well, we have minimum of information saved, so you can see that the person has Ukrainian last name, but well, sometimes these unexpected surprises happen and from abroad, from the citizens of Ukraine or ethnical Ukrainians, sometimes happen.

I: Does Facebook play an important role in your work?

R: Yes, sure, Facebook, social networks that are our first, well it wasn't for Facebook, I have lots of complaints about blocking of the posts of the volunteers, a lot of things, but there are many complaints because that is well, emm almost the only effective way of communicating with ones well, let's say audience. People come to the website, donate money to you only when

they know you, they know you through Facebook, if Facebook doesn't work – then Twitter works, but nevertheless, Facebook is on the first place, all of the volunteers are trying to be active on Facebook and otherwise that would be hard to get support from people, Facebook is very important, very, it is even hard to overestimate it.

I: Have you been using it since very beginning, from 2014-2015?

R: Well, 2014 and 2015 we sort of less, that is our fault maybe, at that time we were using Facebook less as a source, it was more like people themselves were finding us, but later yes, we started first report on Facebook about our activities and draw people's attention to some needs because, well, majority of the new audience is Facebook.

I: Are you using Facebook to communicate with the other civil society organizations?

R: Well, maybe just with the messenger, but most of the time that's a live communication.

I: How did you meet the other volunteers?

R: Well, at first there were lots of different meeting with the volunteers, we were meeting there, someone was meeting on their way to the military, someone was just calling saying: I heard about you, you are normal, cool want to do project with you. Well, the last ones were the most different ones, the meeting, lots of moments, just, eeeem, there were lots of meeting with volunteers, when the problems started, and the Ministry of Defense was fathering, lots of people met there, and just volunteers saw each other on Facebook, and lots of, there even, let's say the core of the volunteers – the hospital volunteers, people who were meeting at the hospital

and helping there. So almost everyone, and that is I am talking mostly about Kyiv people, other cities, maybe it's easier to meet there, but in Kyiv, there are a lot of people who were just contacting each other, so just heard that there are people who are helping someone, and then was asking for help the ones he/she is in charge of, that is if they are small volunteers, or emm, with a request to help with a bigger project.

I: And are you using other social networks? You mentioned twitter?

R: Twitter, yes, but now less, we just don't have human resources for that. But Twitter used a lot before, now less, emm, there was a short period of time when we were trying to post things on Instagram, but Instagram is hard to take care of, you need to have nice pictures, so our most powerful way of communicating with the audience is through Facebook.

I: Okay, in your opinion in terms of the conflict related issues, is everything taken care of?

R: No, no... (smiles) it's hard to say, what is missing is the reform, but here I cannot take a responsibility to say, I have my own opinion about that, that there is not enough work with the personnel, there is not enough motivation among people, they have their own motivation, but also you need some external one, but as for the supply, of course there are new weapons, what is really missing are motor vehicles, small ones, like small cars, lots of missing like basic front line things, so people at the front line have to live maximum comfortable, we all understand that it's the front line, that they didn't go there to, even some military was saying: we didn't go there for a vacation, but in general, there is no, I think that's very important that the everyday life at the front line is maximum comfortable, there are lots of examples from abroad, like American army, British, lots of different appliances that can make the life of military easier, so that just doesn't exist, so sleeping mats, everything like that was first bought by volunteers,

now the military themselves, they ask for something, something is given to them, but still we are asked for the stoves, heaters, emm, what's that, emm, duvets, so everything concerning the everyday life of the military, here that's a big missing point, and plus, some small things that everyone should have, like thermographic cameras, like emm, for example, snipers need meteorological stations, small ones, now these things are bought by volunteers, emm, or boys somehow learnt how to go around without these things, yes, the weapons are better, ammunition is there, they are giving them clothes, more or less, although sometimes there are problems with that as well, I understand that you can't jump over the head, I don't want to talk in details about, because it's like word of mouth, military is telling us their dissatisfactions, like how some big military vehicles are being repaired, but I have no proof for that, that's just the words of the people I talk to and I trust. But what I can see, there is not supply of the everyday life appliances, and there is no desire to make the life easier with small, quite expensive but necessary appliances.

I: What about non-material things?

R: What do you mean?

I: For example, you mentioned, the lack of psychological evaluation...

R: Ah, work with military personnel. Well, you know, there it all depends, well, maybe there some kind of a system, that doesn't work, maybe Ministry of Defense things that there is a system, but as far as I see, and based on my experience of communication with the people we are taking care of as well as just our friends that are there, everything depends on the chief, of the chief is normal, so the boys have some sort of support, if a person, well, a person can be

adequate but has no idea how necessary it is, of course, its understandable that it is army, and a lot of people there, they are old school and they were taught like “you don’t like something, be quite”, they said to fight – you fight, they told you to sit – you sit, and that is why actually, a big problem is drinking in the army, because no one is working, there is no systematic work with the personnel, and that is very important, especially, when there is no active fighting, when there is active fighting, when boys are attacking or retreating, emm, they are busy, first of all, second of all, that is a big adrenalin, so they have no possibility to drink, there is no physical possibility, but now our war is in the phase lets’ say, slow running, and people have possibilities to rest and drinking is a big problem, very big problem, unfortunately.

I: Does anything else come to your mind, in terms of non-material support?

R: Oh well, it’s very hard to say, because we have a very very long list of things that we are lacking, so it’s understandable that a military reform is needed, phycological help is lacking, work with, well, you are taking a person from his/her life, you are taking a person to the military a person cannot judge, none of us can evaluate how strong we are psychologically, unless we go through it, later a person is let go form the military, he she comes back to the peaceful, well, let’s say, conditionally peaceful life, that come back also need to be dine maximum smooth for the person and his/her family, because the family also is not ready emm , often people are just not ready ..(someone called to the respondent pause)...sorry, emm, just first of all, no one is working with that, but still we have lot of documents, nevertheless, we don’t have much of let’s say adequate and medical help, emm, in the hospitals they are doing a great job, they are taking care of the boys, and volunteers are there and emm people are doing their best, but systemic changes are needed, like for example to register the procedure how to treat people with cancer, as I said that is a huge problem, also there is a problem emm with training, actually still, what they teach, well, first of all the amount of emm different cases, horrible during

training, with ..(incomprehensible) brigade, despite that they have a great chief of brigade, I have met him for several times, well, for me he is really, he gave me an impression of a great person, he was studying, he was sent to study, he was there for a year or two, that is a person with English skills, young, good at fighting, he is a hero of Ukraine, and everything, at the beginning of war we were doing, there was, how to day , they did the longest marching into the enemy's territory, so that is the person who really, Serhii Sopko, he is really cool, and well, people who meet him, everyone had good opinions about him, but he also cannot do everything in his 128<sup>th</sup> brigade, recently at the trainings couple of people died, because, no one knows what it was, whether the weapon itself was broken, or double charged weapon, at Desna also was a situation when during training they gave wrong coordinates, so there is no system, a great and well-worked out training and still unfortunately, for several yards of war, there are situations when boys well, they have some sort of idea of what they are supposed to do at war, but the trainings that is abroad, well here we have a kindergarten, yes, foreigners come they are all satisfied, impressed, but they are impressed by the people's spirit and they (foreigners) are impressed with how little of materials they (Ukrainian military) have in order to do, complete some tasks and well, here I think, a lot of changes are needed in terms of preparations and supply, in terms of motivation of the boys, because, I am sorry, but people are risking their lives and also it is very important, I think, uhh, you need to teach, there should be, I have some acquaintances who I met already during war, the boys are very great, they are from small cities or from villages, they appeared to be very systematic, and very advantageous for the army, and army needs to keep them, and for that you need to teach people, you need to increase their overall level of education, because that also influence the quality of war, and all those changes, only with these changes you can change qualitatively the personnel and overall ell, the army, because it starts with people anyway, and grown a soldier into a sergeant, and there is no need for so many chiefs as we have. Well, I understand, that it is easier for me to judge than for

those who are inside, but well, after all those years, I think I have a right to at least my own opinion about that.

I: Good, I will come back a little bit. When you were talking about working with other organizations, there are still so called “wild volunteers”, at least this is how they are called in the media, the ones who just get together and go to the east to specific brigades, are you working with them? How?

R: Now, very seldom, but sometimes happens, but only with those who we know because we are giving the expensive things, and just give them to someone we cannot, some people we know, and if they are going to a subunit that we need, so lots of with who we have some personal contacts, just we either know from them or through common acquaintances that they are going that brigade, we have for them like thermographic cameras, well, for example, so we are asking them right away to give the, give the paperwork, sign it, well, that is the only way to cooperate now, but with time it's less and less need for that and actually, recently I really seldom meet their activities, mostly, these are the ones who are going to their people, just to see them , like that, talk to them, this is also what boys miss, in 2016, 2017, lots of people were going there, people who would just talk, artists, now- less, of course there are people who go there, I thought that is more or less useless, till I saw how the boys reacted to the artists coming and I realized that it is very important and they are happy, and you just want to distract them from that, from how they live there, we might pass something through them, otherwise I don't think there any other ways of cooperating with wild volunteers.

I: And you mentioned that their amount decreased, right?

R: Well, as far as I see, yes. Well, there is no need at all, now you can send everything and well the major “wildness” was that they were going there, right, but now first of all, they don’t let in, and actually it’s normal that now it is way harder to get in to the ATO (anti-terrorist operation) zone, that almost everywhere only accredited journalists can go, just like that you, I mean you can but it is way harder, emm, so you need someone to meet you, it is just that before, there was nothing , so people were bringing, I am sorry, cookies, but now bringing cookies and spend 10 or 15 thousand hryvnias for the gas, well, there is no, no need for that and people understand that it is not very urgent.

I: When was the last time you were giving something to the wild volunteers?

R: Hard to say, I can’t even remember, I think that this year it has not happened yet. Soldiers were coming to us to pick up things, but this year didn’t happen.

I: And there is still an opportunity for military to come and pick things up?

R: Yes, there is an opportunity, there is Desna, not far away from Kyiv, that is a training center, and a lot of people are going through it during the rotation and then when they are going back home, they can come to Kyiv in their way, and we can meet up and can give it to them.

I: Alright, two last questions. What is the motivation of your organization? Why do you keep doing what you are doing?

R: Well, there is a need, first of all, second of all, I can tell you honestly, there is a really, we all live in the society, everyone goes to work, does something and at some point, everyone, and

some people, have a question what is the point of everything that is happening to you, right, what are you doing, how ... (incomprehensible)... how important is what you do. And at first, there was different motivation, you understand that help is needed, you think you might be useful and you are doing it, but after all these years, it is also that, apart from that you already know how to do it, people are finding you and you cannot refuse, you understand that there some needs and that encourages you, emm, also a big, you cannot underestimate a psychological moment when people, volunteers, solve with this their psychological issues, issues of, how to say it, of compete uselessness of the existence, so you live and there is some usefulness and that well, maybe that is not the motivation itself, but it is a string motivator. And lots of people just cannot stop, I can judge by myself, and people, volunteers I am talking to, just people constantly are asking you for help and saying to them: sorry, the store is closed, well that is impossible, and constantly there are requests, and somehow it continues and continues and continues, doesn't stop. Something like that.

I: Sorry, one more question on top of that. "Rada Volonteriv" (Council of Volunteers), were a part of it?

R: Rada Volonteriv, we had so many, to be honest I am not really, our David, I think he was everywhere, he was doing all of that, but later, he just had to do business, it cannot wait. Rada Volonteriv, I think we were part of it, I know for sure, we were a part of that one at the Ministry of Defense emm in Desant Volonterskyi, but now we are not really, maybe we were a part of it, need to check, I think yes, but mostly David and Maksym were doing that, but it is hard to catch them.

I: And now why wouldn't you join?

R: Now we are not anywhere, I think that there are no meetings like that, just if there is a need to meet, we meet without any “rad”, actually a lot of people just left, in terms of emm, different events at the Ministry, just people left that because there was a lot of scandal, when volunteers, Roman Synitsyn including, was involved in the reassessment of the MVD (Ministry of Internal Forces), emm new, and completely ignored all of their summery, well, decided not to be the cover screen for sort of like pseudo reform, so that’s now volunteers are very very careful to all of these rad or some ..(incomprehensible).. at the ministries, they just to decide by themselves.

I: Do you think it is important to cooperate with the authorities at this stage?

R: Ehh, hard to say, no, if there is an opportunity – of course, if the authorities is open for a communication, and if we have an opportunity to help, so of course we need to do everything to make the situation better. But well, that is if someone is open for a communication, and if there is a desire from the authorities’ side as well, there was a precedent when including Maksym, Roman Sinitsyn, Deinega, all volunteers active when the head of the MVD was being taken down, because first of all, there were a lot of question about him refusing their help with the supply, he has someone in Crimea, daughter or someone, anyway, there were lots of questions for the country that has war, that was very well, they listened to us, then that was sort of alternative form, they wrote a letter, a new head was put, new chief, emm, so you can say that that was a cooperation, we called them and our request was granted, but we., I think that the cooperation is important, but you need very clearly emm divide emm, these moments, volunteers in order to be, volunteers have to represent the military and the tax payers, well, the Ministry is ..(incomprehensible) we need to control them, they need to listen to us, sort of, but you need to understand that, first of all, we might also have inadequate requests and we might not understand something, that is why emm, the desire to listen and trust each other, that is

very important I think, in my opinion we still have a situation when they have no desire to listen and we have no desire well, not desire, but no reasons to trust, also we don't have, that I why the cooperation is important but for now it is complicated, but still I say that we have hopes if we do develop some structure, scheme emm ...(incomprehensible) that we will be supported, if not by the Ministry of Defense but maybe it will concerning the Ministry of Social Policy and we hope with that we will work, well because to be honest it's not that we asking something for us, we are asking for the support, not material, not financial, well, we will see., for now it is still complicated because volunteers are trying to get into something that they are not supposed to get into, but well, there a lot of decisions that we are being deceived with , like the closed purchases, that are not, that is not a secret what cars you buying, everyone sees that later, but the tenders are still closed, that's just a huge filed for misuses, and of course we don't like it, because well, no one will like it, not because we are volunteers, because we have information and we are tax payers, and that's it, there are a lot of decision that are deceive us, and make the cooperation almost impossible, let's put it like this (laughs).

I: But in your opinion, the cooperation is important? I mean if there is a need for the cooperation with the authorities?

R: Emm, yes, of course, there is neccessity, if there are volunteers, and people are calling us , it says that the Ministry of Defense still doesn't cope with everything, emm the cooperation is needed, maybe even phycological so that they talk to us and say, so we know you are doing this, but we cannot now do this, but in the future, in 4-10-20 years, we will be buying that and that and that, they might ask us what are we supplying the most in order to understand where they have holes, well, there are moments when I think that volunteers might help with the

reform, but, for now, I think they are building more modern Soviet army and well that just a little bit irritates, let's put it like that.

I: Okay, last question now, for sure. Emm in your opinion, your organizations' what is happening in the Eastern Ukraine? How do you call this armed conflict?

R: We are calling that war because we have a lot of proof, we saw a lot of documents that were shown to us, the documents of the Russian soldiers. There are proofs from our friends, "Infornopravo", that is also another organization that we worked with, we were helping them, Informopravo, I am sure you know about them, that are people who are working with open source intelligence, and they gathered lots of information, even their head, Roman Butko, no one sees him, I mean someone from the outside, because he is always threatened, and they find just precious information, so for us that is not a question, war that is some sort of a hybrid conflict of Ukraine with Russia, on order to somehow, to cover it up, they activated the marginalized part of the population, told them some fairytale that there was some other ..(incomprehensible) that didn't exist, my whole family from father's side is from Donbass, and I know that before part of my relatives they live on the territory of the Belohorod region, they have lived there always, and my family from Donbass is all Ukrainian speaking and telling me that there are some originally Russian territory, I don't need that and all the same I understand that basically no matter how scary it sounds, if the political technologies have worked with any oblast of the county, it could be done the same as Donbass, I also don't believe that Donbass has some unique people who are all bad, or don't love Ukraine, I also have a lot of friends who had to flee from that territory and who are helping the army, who have a very strong standpoint on this matter, but just that was not lucky, that the region, well,

it is always easier to influence the industrial region, that is an industrial region that was chosen a point to use to destabilize and that's all, for us that is war, hybrid war.

I: Okay, great, thank you. I also wanted to ask your permission to use information and maybe photo from your Facebook page.

R: You mean, the page of our fund?

I: yes.

R: Yes, sure, People Project, our site, our Facebook, you can use

### **Military Chaplain (extract)**

Interviewer: This is an interview for a doctoral dissertation “Civil Society of Ukraine during the armed conflict: case of Ukraine” written at the University of Tsukuba. Could you please name yourself? Meaning how can name you in my dissertation?

R: Well, I am a military chaplain for the military unit ...(incomprehensible) and at the same time I am parson, priest Oleksandr of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Kiev Patriarchate.

I: So you at the moment you are acting as a priest?

R: Yes.

I: And what is a military chaplain?

R:

That is a military priest.

I: And how long have you been at the front lines?

R: Officially well, 14 months, officially and if not officially from the beginning of war.

I: Why not officially? Could you please elaborate on that?

R: Because at that time when the war with Russia started, then there was no idea that well, first of all, there was no position for military chaplains in the Ukrainian army, Soviet army emm and

priests who were, let's say felt the pain , the ones who were at Maidan or helped at Maidan, they all went, either went as volunteers or in some way got to the boys through the civil society organizations of volunteer organizations , they somehow got to the boys and there helped out how they could. As volunteers.

I: So they basically were staying there?

R: First, they were just going there, not staying there, maybe for 2-3 days, and later our churches officially permitted, they made some sort of a volunteer rotation, so you could go there for a month and stay there, then come back and then in 2-3 months come back there again for the rotation. Well, that was at first had some positive let's say moments, but it was impossible to dive into the chaplain work in one month or it is just very hard. Because it is hard to establish a contact with military personnel who went through some military campaigns, they don't trust a stranger that arrived even if this person is a priest. And this trust needs to be earned. Not every priest could do it in one month and then have to go already. Well, as I say, these volunteer-priests did lay the foundation and finally the highest level of authority, Ministry of Defense, made a decision to make a decree that all military units have the right to have a chaplain position in their personnel. If the unit is big, then 2 chaplains, maybe 3 chaplains, and some have one, that they made as an experiment because they themselves didn't know what these chaplains should do, chaplain's task and basically we were doing that by ourselves, the methods and everything else were done when were there working, meaning since last year, beginning of 2017, that order was passed in the army and heads of military units started to get in touch with that priests who were visiting them, who were volunteers there, who were known and trusted. Well, almost for six months they were trying to convincing me, I was pretending that I had bad hearing, that I was busy, I told him that I would just visit them, no need to make

it official, I was promised that would be allowed to do anything and, let's say that convinced me, they said something that made me agree to official chaplain position, they said: "If not you, then who? There is no one". And I thought, indeed, at that time, the boys were just leaving polygon, the training to join the ATO zone (Anti-Terrorist Operation) and I was thinking: "God, If I don't go there, no one will go there, indeed, and that brigade will not have anyone". And that's exactly what happened, by the way. Later on, after 6 months another chaplain joined, who also was going there. But at the beginning it was just me, and that's how things were. That's the story.

I: That is ZSU? (Armed forces of Ukraine) Or National Guard?

R: That was ZSU.

I: What about the volunteering battalions?

R: They don't exist anymore.

I: What about Pravyi? (Pravyi Sektor – The Right Sector). UNA? (UNA UNSO)

R: One is left.

I: Yes, well, at that time when they did exist, the system worked the same?

R: The system was based only on volunteering. Officially, it wasn't... Now, I am sorry, now we still have Donbass (volunteering battalion) emm, they did stood up for themselves but they are not dobrobat anymore (volunteering battalion), they are a part of ZSU but a separate battalion, they have their own chiefs, everything is separate and surprisingky, Donbass has changed and I can say that it changed, and from the beginning of the war I started with the, I started with Donbass, yes, I started with the head of Donbass, when there was nothing, when they were just starting to form, we were bringing them everything, starting from helmets, clothes, protection systems, lots of things, and when emm, we had very close relations with Semenchenko (former head of Donbass battalion) and so on, and when they joined the National Guard, and went to Semenchenko, came again and said that I respected you but I would not be visiting you(battalion) any more.

I: Why?

R: Well, because I, my personal opinion of the National Guard, and National Guard is the former Internal Troops and now they perform they function on police, military police, and no, not even that, they have no right to call themselves the military police, that is more like police for people in a sort of a severe form, there are special units to provide as they say public order, there are people who are standing between democratic society and corrupted authorities, that is sort of militarized class, that unfortunately, during war was given weapons better that in most civilized counties. 70 percent, even more, let's say 70 percent of all expenses for army were not spent on the army, but to National Army, oh sorry, National Guard.

R: So then I told him, I don't have a very positive attitude to this work. If you joined them, I will reform, and others will be visiting you, I will not. He took with understanding, the only

thing is that he said he was very sorry. And at that time he was not a member of the parliament yet, he was just running for the elections, and he said that he wanted to.. and actually he did that, he was one of the people who pushing the law on (military) chaplains, so, and basically that he should be praised that Ministry of Defense agreed to having chaplains , so he kept his word. He should be praised for that. He said: “Well, we would make it official, you would be with us. My units will not take part in what you think they would”. To that I said that I didn’t believe in that because I let’s say have a special opinion about communist government because I come from the repressed family and I don’t like them very much.

I: And why did you start working with Donbass in the first place? Since Maidan?

R: Yes, from Maidan, they were taking in boys from Maidan, first boys went there from Maidan.

I: And you as well, joined them from Maidan?

R: No, I didn’t join them from Maidan. When everyone left Maidan, they all went directly to the front lines. I didn’t even have time, I was at Maidan as a volunteer, I was helping, parishioners of my church, a lot of them were at Maidan, and I was bringing them a lot of things, was bringing them, taking them from there. And later on, when the first volunteers gathered (for the war) they got together very fast and left, no one even had the time to react. And Donbass was not formed right away, Donbass was formed near Kyiv, and I was told about it at Maidan and I went there immediately. Emm, I met Semenchenko right one, told him who I am and he said that It was great and they would be glad to see anytime and so on. Let’s be together. So that is how we got with Donbass for one year and a half.

I: So the “military chaplain law” was lobbied by him, or anyone else? Did church take any part in it?

R: Church took active part in it, Kyiv Patriarch was the main lobbyist of this law, yeah, it is needed to say, that who was the Minister of Defense at that time, the who is today I guess, and he cooperated because this law was lobbied even before that, and all previous ministers didn't care much, if they were ministers then I am a ballerina, I am sorry. Well, they didn't understand why it is needed, they were the soviet officers, well, and they didn't care. But it needs to be said that this minister of defense cooperated and basically he , there was a situation that ZSU had submit the petition to Verhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) and ohh to Cabinet of Ministers and they did so they all cooperated although everyone was scared about it and there was no one like that, because the army structure was soviet. Well, later in when I finished with Donbass, I started bringing clothes, food etc. to volunteer battalions they remained

I: Which year was that?

R: That was 2016. Then in the middle of 2016 I learnt that in the suburbs of Kiev a new brigade is being formed and this brigade will soon leave for ATO. And they didn't have anything as always, and as a volunteer I was touched by that. I came there, met the head of brigade, he was young, normal, cool guy, well, the chiefs were okay, absolutely in a positive way. I was given a list that they lack, a list of 3 pages (laughs). Well, and I understood that there will be a lot of work. And they left Kyiv to go to ATO for the first time, and I started going there as a volunteer, bringing them thing they lacked, well, something like that. Well, eventually, I told them that maybe I shouldn't just come, but maybe I should make a prayer or maybe stay with the boys, and they didn't object to it. That sort of connection remained, while I was visiting them, when they left Kurahove, and came back to their military deployment location to the proving ground for training, and I was visiting there, and they started calling me, saying that, you know, there

is already a decree that we can have a military chaplain. So, I say, really, yes, I know. So, they, say maybe you should think about it. And I say, stop it, I am already old. And they say, stop kidding. Well, anyway for six months they were pressuring me, up until that time when a commissioner at the proving ground made me agree when he said that thing. He said: “We are leaving for ATO and there will be no one, and we don’t want strangers, we want a priest who is trusted at least by a commander”. And thought, really, that’s how it will be, and this is how I became, I applied and became a military chaplain officially. Honestly, I didn’t think it would be that hard...well

I: Why hard?

R: Hard because first of all, it’s establishment of trust. Those who saw me there since 2016, they perceived me well, but not all of them saw me, because there was a lot of units, located far away, I wasn’t visiting all of them. Second of all, the brigade was formed with people, almost 90% of who belonged to Greek-Catholic church. And when they learnt that an Orthodox priest came, they just ignored, ignored me. And even sometimes they were asking: “And where is our priest? Why our priest is not here?”. So, in this way, showing me that I am not really theirs. So, one time, I lost my patience, and I told them: “You know boys, there was your chaplain, he came, put army plates on the car and no one saw him. Another one, one of yours, he wrote that due to his health he cannot be in dangerous situations, he cannot get nervous. So, I am sorry boys, you should eat what you are given. And they, well, basically, I shamed them, and they started looking at not which church you belong but who you truly are. And when I started visiting them when cannonades started, and when they were screaming: “Father, don’t come, we are being gunned. And I say: “Right, I am almost there, another hour and a half left”. They say: “Don’t be crazy, stay there, don’t go”. And I say: “It’s not discussable. I am going

to you". You know, that started to change things. Started change things and I then when, I was going on my tank(car) on the field and we got stuck in the mud, and that it was impossible to go further, and thanks God I could go back a bit, but I couldn't turn because it was autumn, and there was so much mud. So where can u turn, he says, go back, they we came, back back and a small planting. He says, stop, why did you go back so sudden into that planting, I say: "why?". And they say: "That's the minefield". And I say: "You know boys, you humor is inappropriate". What humor, they say. Why don't you tell me earlier that its minefield, I say. And he says: " I didn't know that you would drive there so fast". So those small moments... and the other time, we were gunned by snipers a little bit. I was visiting them, tries to talk and honestly, I didn't see any opposition, well, later om, no objections, and you know, now in winter I again visited them, was leaving the unit, it was dark already, in winter it gets dark fast, and it was around six in the evening, it was such a blizzard. And I was driving the road I knew, through the fields, I thought, I needed to reach my unit, and I couldn't reach, I got stuck in the snowdrift, and I am calling them saying that I couldn't get to them. They say: "okay, we will bring the car now and pull you out". I am waiting for an hour, hour and a half, then call then saying: "boys, are you joking, I am in the fields". They say: "We are sorry, Ural got stuck, didn't reach you". And I can hear in the phone, well the officer was telling me that Ural got stuck but could also hear the voice of the boy saying: " Officer, just I came, let's start Savushka and get him". Officer says: "I am not sure". The boy says: "What do you mean? The Father is sitting there", Officer says: "You just came back from the service". The boy says: "It's okay, don't worry". And you know, these sort of talks, I hear, and I understand that I did do my work there. That they, during a blizzard a person who just finished his military task, really tired, and they drive not even a tank, but a huge cannon on a caterpillar and he is taking it thought the fields, and actually you couldn't show that those cannons were located close to the front line. And nevertheless, officers understood that this could have been a problem, and that was the

unit of those cannons, but they allowed it and boys came in an hour or so and pulled me. And you know, I was really touched because officers risked their jobs, boys risked with lots of things, they could have been put in other units but they risked, because like a Father was sitting there in the fields, and I don't know, at that time, I was really touched, really.

R: When did you understand that the bits started treating you differently? In how many months?

I: Well, maybe in two months. It was understood when I came to one unit, and the cannonade started, well a light one. Well, it was just a machine gun, not artillery. And I saw, all boys jumped to the ground, including the commanders, well, started ordering around. I am standing near the tree and look at them. They scream at me to lie down, and I am asking why, it is safer here. So, they saw that, well, not that I am not scared, I look at it philosophically. And the moment I reached the other unite, and you know, army is just like a big village (rumors go fast), so I was already told, that I was summoned by the commissar. oh no, I was driving there, and they are calling me saying I am summoned, like now. I come there, ask what happened, he starts to complain, why did I have to be hero, what I was trying to show etc. I am confused, what was I showing, where, and then I realize that, they are such narks. So I am asking who ratted me out. He says, no one, I needed to know everything. I am saying, yeah, sure. You know, imagine, I just left that place and they already started to spread that there was a cannonade and chaplain was standing there and smiling. The moment cannonade stopped, boys took phones and started telling other units. You know, like a big village. And that became sort of a turning point, because when I came back to Kyiv afyer that, because I was there for one week, and then come here (Kyiv) because I have sermons here as well and that was not that easy physically, but it was uplifting in the sense that, well, I am a stubborn person and I wanted to do something that the boys could hear that there was a chaplain there. And so I am going to

see them again, in two weeks, coming to the first unit, at the barrier boys are standing and one of those Greek-Catholics who at first times didn't really perceive me and even tried to teach that the sermons are not being conducted like that in their church, I of course didn't react to it, said well, we will learn from each other and so on, I replied politely. So, when I came, I see that he is coming to me, he knows my car. He come to my car, I am sitting in the car, not coming out. And he is approaching and meanwhile says in walkie-talkie: "First, first, out father came". You know, to hear from him "our father", that was a lot for me. I was sitting there thinking: "wow". That is a reward, and that was when things changed. There were so many moments, as always, we have the best machinery belongs to National Guard, and the ones who are fighting there, that is horrible. Especially, with usual cars, well, it is considered that army is not supposed to have cars, but I am sorry, what will be used to transport officers? Kraz (trucks)? That can be seen from 10 km and is very easy to target. So I, as a cabman, take 6 of them in my Nissan and slowly drive. So, and that is how we sort of developed. And then such a situation – I put my car and left to find an officer who works with personnel and two projectiles were fired. I came out and there was no one, everyone already hid in the trenches. And I am thinking that I should move the car, I wasn't even thinking about myself, I need to come back to Kyiv, so I need to move it. So I enter my car, start an engine and I hear another "boom". Now I really need to move it, I start an engine, and something touch my car, I came out, looked around, looks okay. And those ones (military) are waving at me to move away, so I moved the car to the bushes, and then come out and see a flat tire. Hm, what was that. And a piece of projectile was stuck into the tire. So boys, they didn't have a jack so, that was incredible, when 6 boys are holding my car, 2 are taking the tire, they took out the piece of projectile, and are asking how are you going to go. It has a whole. They say, that there will be a car now and they can do tire fitting in the closest city. So those are holding it, others were putting bricks underneath it. So that was so caring, they went there, found a car, found the

service, made everything, so to be honest I felt care, I was so touched. So everytime, those small moments, maybe they started to see that chaplain is not the one who is somewhere there with the chiefs but the one who is near them. So that really worked and melted the hearts if the “cool” ones. And even more, the heads of units that were making small chapel, and he is an Odessa born Jew. Listen, that was such a personality, He even talked like emm

I: like a person form Odessa?

R: exactly! Like, (changes his voice) “Excuse me, of course, I am not a religious person, I really don’t understand the point of all of it”. Ans I say, “Well it’s not for you, I am here for the boys”. And he, “You think they need it?”. I say, “I think it is needed”. And then we started building a small chapel and that was winter, and he was summoned, ah, he was in the hospital. So, he came back from the hospital and calls me, and I already left ATO. So, he calls and says: “Excuse me, could you bring candles?”. “You won’t believe, I came back from the hospital and I thought that chapel is gone, full of snow. Listen, everything around it full of snow, but the road to chapel is clean, even grass turned out. They burnt out all of the candles. Please bring, I didn’t know it was so serious”. So we were laughing, but really even those officers, well, all of them are soviet, the chiefs are all from soviet army, they are good boys, but in terms of spiritual option there is only commissioner. That’s all, the only priest is commissioner. And for them it was strange what is priest doing in the unit. But to be honest, even their heart melted down. They saw that boys want that, they saw some changes, even that unit, the ones I am was talking about, he said: “you know, I want you to give awards to two of my avatars (military personnel that consumes alcoholic beverages during the service)”. And I am saying\* “Hold on, how can I give them awards?”. Avatars are people who like horilka a bit (Ukrainian strong alcohol). And I am saying, how can award them? He says, you won’t believe, they quit drinking,

that two boys are the ones who built the chapel. I am saying: “No way”. He says, “I am shocked as well. They quit drinking, for days they were chopping there something, building, go there and look, it is almost like a church”. So, for him it was so strange and that people who because of some psychological problems turned to drinking stopped drinking and started doing those things. So, I gave awards, although there were heated discussions with the chiefs.

I: Because you awarded at all, or awarded those two?

R: Because I awarded those two, why I didn't ask for their advice, like “they were reprimanded by the chiefs and you are giving out church awards to them, what are you thinking, how can you do it?”. And I say, I can, those are different things. You know, one thing is that boys are fighting a war, and you are the ones who can award them for that. And in terms of spiritual qualities – that is me, you know. And you can't tell, if I decided to award them, to push them to do smth, to encourage them, to show them that they are not forgotten, that like that. So we had some tensions with the chiefs but, well..

I: Okay, and who are you report to? Inside ZSU do you have a chief above you?

R: Well, I will say like that. To be honest, inside ZSU they still haven't developed the system of subordination. That should be like a parallel structure. Like now there is a new law in discussion about military chaplain, even special titles. So for example, there is a brigade, brigade chaplain will report to the brigade chief, only to him/her. He will be in charge of regiment chaplain, they will be in charge of battalion chaplain. So that will be a parallel. Like there is a military structure, and that will be the same system but parallel. They will not be reporting to commissioner, only to the chaplain who is above them. That is being discussed now, and we, well, as always, now we report to commissioner. So, we have some heat between us, because I give awards to the boys who are being reprimanded, because I covered some

things up, or otherwise, when they punished for something and I disagreed with that, that they can't punish people so harshly. So, they were saying that it is none of my business, that I am not a physiologist, that it's not my job, and I was saying that it is my job. Well, those moments, the tensions were high. And I am not a very easy-going person, meaning that if I see something wrong I go there and say it. So, they didn't like it, it doesn't work like that in the army, in the army you can't say directly, so, well, they had to be patient.

I: You mentioned that you are a psychologist, but what exactly is your job? How do you see it?

R: Job is, you know, a psychologist is a person who helps you get out of a bad situation, bad mood or comprehend complicated life situations.

I: So, you think that you are performing a function of a psychologist?

R: I perform it in church, it's not a new role. I am not doing something new. For me, it is the same – people at my church or boys from the units. Maybe I am treating boys more tenderly, with more sensitivity because they are very vulnerable. If here I can say something strictly, that you can't do something, but there I cannot do that. There well, they are very vulnerable, like children, you know, but I need to talk to them, talk it out, the things that they cannot say. Sometimes the methods are not smooth, you know...

I: So, you trying to find an approach to each person.

R: Of course, there were different situations, Once, there was something like "I don't want live, everything is bad, I see no sense in life, country is getting worse". And I say, okay sure, but

you should die with some use. He looks at me and doesn't say anything. I am saying, it doesn't matter for you, you want to die anyway, so might be useful, separatists are trying to locate our unit (Ukrainian side) for a long time. So be useful, walk for a kilometer, there is minefield there, go there, so at the same time you will do what you want and also you will help secure the location of you comrades. Separatists will not shoot at them, but minefield, they will think there is something there. He looks at me, thinks for some time. And then says: "Can you actually tell me thinks like that?" And I say: "Wait, what should I tell you? You wanted to kill yourself, right? So what's the problem?" He says: "Well you should convince me". Well, convince in what? I am saying, die with some use, I will sign anything and say that you are a hero. He says: "I understood everything". He walked away, and you know what, did he kill himself? No, he is still fighting and does it pretty well, received awards. Although that conversation came up later, he complaint about me. Said, you know what chaplain told me. There people laughed, of course and then, as I say, that is a village, so everything spreads very quickly.

I: But of course, you would say things like that in peaceful times. That was a special approach?

R: Yes, of course. But as I say, depends who is standing in front of you. I had to work as a phycologist, not as a priest. Go around with serious expression, give a sermon etc. But as a phycologist. Especially at the beginning, when there was no contact, I saw that there were lots of issues. And by the way, army has very few phycologists, people who work there as phycologists don't even have a degree. They graduate some courses etc., they write reports, do bureaucratic things. But they are almost never work with military personnel. And that I understand, should be done by chaplains. And it's not something that should be done but must be done. Because if the trust is established, boys will go to chaplain and not to phycologists,

because psychologist is an officer, he will rattle you out right away. You know what is the task of a psychologists in the army?

R: No, what is it?

I: evaluate every serviceman and report it. And everyone knows it, soldiers, officers. So that is why no one communicates with him. At all. He is there, he conducts surveys, passes out some papers and boys fill them in. But no one is talking to him. Because they know that all of it will be reported to the chiefs. And with me they talk because they know that nothing will be reported. Although there were attempts. The head of a unit, he was: "You will be going there, it's a complicated unit, work with them and tell me later what you think". And I say: "Stop, stop, stop. Here let's stop". Why stop? I say: "Let's stop from the word "tell me"". And he says: "So why are you going there?". And I say: "I am not a psychologist, you told me that, that means that I will not report to you. I am a priest. That is a secrecy of a confession". He says: "That's not confession, it is just your evaluation". I say: "But where it is written that my duty is to report you and evaluate people? I am like a priest, military priest. Nothing? So sorry". And here again, tensions, again he doesn't like me. Because, well because, But, you know, trust from the military personnel, in a more, hm, just trust is and will be only for chaplains. No one else will have that sort of trust. Well, maybe officers who went through with boys some period of war and recommended themselves as humane, that they worry about personnel and ready to die for them. There are few of those officers. Thank God, they exist, but only few. So they have the same trust, boys can come to them and talk, say that you know, at home I have this and that. And there are only few of them. Most officers don't do it. So the only ones who can be approached and talked to are chaplains.

I: What about atheists?

R: The same. Absolutely. Including atheists. I will tell you, that after six months since I started going there, when I say, well, when I come, and they are in alignment in the morning, so I say, you know boys, I will be in the chapel, so after the alignment, if you want we can pray. So first of all, I was against obligatory prayers, when they are ordered that they will pray now. For me that is unacceptable. I understand when it is a formal event, when everyone is standing in alignment, that is okay, that is acceptable, but when in the units you can't do it. I told everyone, officers, who wants to come, can come. And at first, there were 3 people, but in half a year, I came to the same unit where I was when we started making the first chapel and what can I say. There was a destroyed house, there they made a chapel, prepared a room and everything was very nice. So the chapel was full, and the halls was full of people. So I didn't invite anyone, they came by themselves, and by the way, the boys who came, the never visited church before war, they considered themselves not even, as you say atheists, they didn't how to say...

I: Care?

R: Exactly. But they did come, came and were standing, and at the end (of sermon) I was blessing with holy water, so I enter the hall and I see that there are so many people and they all squeeze so that at least a little bit of water touches him, you know. So they needed it, they were coming by themselves, without anyone's orders. The same, when blessing the machinery, I come, the first thing "You know father, we had a car repaired, please bless it. I will not drive it unless.". Or someone calls me and asks: "Are you here?". I say: "Yes, I am". "Can you please come to us? Two cars came from repair shop and boys are screaming that chaplain should come and bless it and then they will drive". So things like that. You know, they just saw that it works. Those cars that I blessed, they were all safe. Well, safe meaning, of course with

holes but boys were all safe. And they remember everything. So, it even started that they refused to operate if I was in the front line, they say: “No, no, no. He should come and bless it. And officers call me and say, yes, they made an ultimatum. And there is no extra (machinery)”. And I say, okay, I am coming. So, they, for them tats I important I come and I see that boys are from those ones who don’t attend sermons or anything. But they are standing. And I say: “Boys, zhim- zhim?” And they say: “Why zhim -zhim? Isn’t it pleasant for you?” I say, of course. (laughs). But as I say, they see that it works. Even the machinery that was blessed, I say that it’s not a guarantee of a car’s safety but more of your life. And that all works, really. Even for those ones who are so far from all that. It touches them, you can’t imagine. It is clearly seen. So yes, people who don’t believe in God, they also come back. Even more, I can tell you that there was an officer, Muslim, and I was told at the very beginning that he is Muslim, so don’t really push him because you know, you are of different religion. And then I started talking to him, I got curious why this Muslim is fighting with us.

I: He was a foreigner?

R: No, he is ours, a Ukrainian. But he took Islam. He isn’t even Ukrainian, he is Russian.

I: Even so?

R: Yes, he is an ethnic Russian, he is from Kazan and he is Muslim.

I: Tatar?

R: Yes. Well, no, he just lives there but he Russian. Not Tatar but Muslim. So I started asking why he is fighting with us, you know, such a personality and when I was told that he since war

came to ZSU from a volunteering battalion, I was so shocked, you know and I heard other officer's opinion about him, soldiers who worked with him, and I was impressed that he is one of those officers who soldiers really love. So he never screams at soldiers, he never offends colleagues, he rarely uses curse words, almost never swears. So basically, just super positive opinions. That he was wounded, that he could retire with disability and get an amazing pension and could leave, but he came back to the front line. So, I thought that I need to meet him. What's the difference, if he is Muslim? How can I do that? Maybe like that? So, boys ... it was his birthday and one unit was going to congratulate him and he was invited there because somewhere boys got meat and they will make shashlyk. And I was like, do you want to invite me? They say, of course. So, come there and he also comes, and I say that it was lamb and he could eat it, right? He says: "Well, at the front line I can eat even pork". I say, no way! So, we were sitting around and laughing and somehow, we established good relationship. I didn't ask him why he is Muslim, it didn't really bother me, it's more that he is ethnically Russian. From one hand I understand that there are a lot of Muslim in Kazan, so maybe that is, well, I will tell you this later. That is my personal opinion. But I thought that the boy is fighting the war, and does in a such decent way, so honest, he is fighting for Ukraine, so I came to Kiev went to see the main priest and I say: "Here is a situation, there is an officer, Muslim who is fighting from the very beginning of war and told a little bit about him and so on". So, the priest says: "So what do you want?" You know, I have an idea. I want to give him an award. "What award?". Well, we have a medal for love and sacrifice for Ukraine. It really suits him. The priest thought for a while and says: "Okay, if you want, write down a request and I will sign it. So, I come back, call his friends from the unit and ask them to invite him. They ask me what was going on. I told them just to invite him and I will explain everything later. Okay. I come there, they are standing in lines, I am awarding from the name of Kyiv Patriarch and myself personally, I say his last name. Everyone is shocked. He comes closer to me, I show him the

award, he takes it, looks at it and says: "What do I need to say?". I say: "I serve the Ukrainian nation. As always". He repeats, and everyone starts laughing. I am asking everyone what's so funny. So, you know, here everyone's mind was blown. I was summoned, the commissioner was asking, why I decided everything by myself, why I was awarding him, that awarded Muslim. And I say, why does it bother you? I am not giving out military awards, it's a church award. He was asking what church award that was. What it was. And I say, it is in the name, award for the love and sacrifice to Ukraine.

I: So, no connection to church at all. Doesn't matter which religion.

R: That's how it's called. I say: "Do you think that that officer is a bad soldier? Can you say that? No right? So why does it matter, who he is?". He says: "yeah, I don't understand anything. So, if you don't understand. So, there was a huge wave of discussions in the unit, but, oh, that was interesting. It was Easter, there was a sermon, and then next day I went to the East, so of course I loaded a lot of Easter cakes and eggs, I was bringing around three thousand eggs, Easter cakes were everywhere, starting from the front sit, excuse me... (answers the phone). So, I came to the unit with those cakes. They were waiting for me, they knew I would bring them it. They are just like kids, you know. They knew I will bring the cakes, so they were so happy, so glad. So, I come with these cakes, chose one of the most interesting and go and find that, enter the cabinet where that Muslim officer works and carry the cake. Everyone turns around and there are 5 people there and he stands up, and I say: "The Christ was reborn!" and him the cake. And he looks at me, smiles and say: "Well, if you say so, then He is risen indeed!". And that's it, everyone was laughing so hard that walls were shaking. But he didn't refuse, you know, but he didn't refuse. You know, he took it so kindly. "Well, if you say so, then He is risen indeed!". So basically, these sorts of moments comprise the work of chaplain. So, to connect not only

with the orthodox believers but with everyone who is there and first of all, to show, well, in my opinion, maybe it is very subjective, to show that chaplain is the person who is providing physiological help to people. Despite people's opinion, and even religion. Not even which church they belong, or their view of God and so on. I never imposed my opinions, I never said that orthodox was the best church. But when I was staying overnight at some unit, I can even say that in four months there were fights between about where I would be staying for the night. I say: "Well, I am going there". And they ask me why there? You can come sleep at our unit, So, they start to be displeased that I don't go to their unit to sleep and so on. So, when I come, well, first of all, they start to take care of me so much, feed me, when I know where I am going to sleep, they call me and ask me what they should cook for dinner, maybe fried potatoes. I say, boys, you are spoiling me, I will be ordering you food soon. So, I come, have dinner, talked, and some time I need to pray. I didn't make anyone go with me, I quietly, even happened that when there was so many people, so went outside and prayed there, or walked around in the cold quietly prayed. So, without any explanation, I come and near my backpack there are some notes with names. And I ask if that's for me. Yes, it is. So, I don't even know who wrote those notes, if the boys were believers. Or they just wrote the names on top of the head, names of their family members or boys they serve with. Are they orthodox, or maybe they are not even baptized. I don't know but I prayed for everyone. The notes I took, I went quietly to pray for each name. They knew I would take the notes and pray quietly and that is and should be the work of chaplain that would give, show soldiers that there is someone who will pray for them despite their religion, or which church they belong to. Someone who prays for them, who cares about them or who can hear out their complaints about officers who are intimidating, you know. So that is like that. That is ...

I: Communication?

R: That is a job of a psychologist, job of a priest, that is just friendly relationship. That is when, you know, you see that boys are breaking down the caterpillars with hammers, that is a very hard work. So, you can pass them, or you can hold something for them. I understand that there is always a need to give a hand. You come, hold something, they hammered it, finished, and they come back satisfied. So, nothing hard, nothing happened. But actually happened. Because when in autumn I helped with the caterpillar and after month and a half I was caught in a blizzard, so did happen. And they all risked a lot, of the chiefs found out then of course, everyone would be in trouble. Really in trouble. But everyone was risking, officers and boys, the drivers. “Because father is getting cold, we need to get him out”. Right. And you know, when it became really apparent to me that I maybe do the right thing. When there was a commission from the headquarters, group called “Alfa”. They are checking everywhere, ZSU and it includes independent chaplain, a psychologist, an economist and a lawyer., Those 4 people have great power, they can go to any unit, stay there as long as they want. And they came, I was in the ATO zone, and a commissioner calls me: “Father Oleksandr, please come quickly, group “Alfa” came, and a chaplain is a monster. Please meet him because they will write something about our unit”. I go there, thinking, what kind of monster is there. I come, open the door, and the chaplain is a priest from our Kyiv Patriarch who I met in 2016 near Artemivsk. He was volunteer there. And he tells me: “I was thinking, father Oleksandr, rings a bell”. I say: “No way. And I was told that you are such a scary chaplain”. We were laughing so hard, so. He asks me how it is. I tell him that, to be honest, hard, because there should be 3 chaplain staff, but it is just me. So, I know you will check everything now, so please don't judge strictly. Well, meaning that I did what could. In the end, you will go and see. We drank coffee and I left. And they were going around the units, looking around and then they gave out surveys in every unit. And on of the questions was to evaluate the work of a chaplain who they

consider to be the best chaplain. And that was, of course, For me, it was a furor, because they out the results of this survey on the table of the head of the military base and they said that will consider this base as one of the best bases in terms of chaplain work. But that was you know, I was not interested in it. I was interested in the results of survey, so 98 percent of the soldiers in the brigade said that the best chaplain was father Oleksandr and evaluated my work for 100 percent. For me, it was, honestly, I was almost crying. I was touched because there were some units where I couldn't reach. In these months, I couldn't reach. They are so far, and weather condition, there was no transport. But they got the surveys and boys who saw me only from the side or heard about me from other boys evaluated me so highly. I was very impressed and that was the highest praise for me when I heard that. So something like that.

### **Come Back Alive (extract)**

Interview date– August, 2018

Place – café in Kyiv, Ukraine

Duration: 1 hour 25 min

Respondent – Olga Semenova

Interviewer – Roksolana Lavrinenko

Transcribed and translated by Roksolana Lavrinenko

I: Please tell me if you don't mind being recorded, would you like to stay anonymous or can I state your name?

R: Yes, you can. It's Semenova Olga Viktorivna. You can record me, I am a representative of the fund "Povernys' Zhyvym", I can't clearly explain my position there, but we can say that I combine different duties there, that is HR, we talk about working with people and we also talk

about working with grants and projects, different applications because the fund works with various institutions. And also, I am coordinating the work of psychological assistance to the military. So, basically, I am a psychologist by education, that is my main job. In some way, I am working in several areas.

R: Could you please tell me about your organization, your fund.

I: Basically, it's called international charity fund Povernys' Zhyvym, it was founded, and its head is Vitaliy Deinega. They started their activities in May 2014 and officially it was registered in 2015. Ask me more concrete questions, I am not sure what to tell you.

R: No, that is perfect.

I: I am working in the fund, emm, it's been two years because before I was doing other things. Also, I was working with military, but mostly with veterans.

I: How many people work in your fund at the moment?

R: We have many people involved but, the ones who constantly work, if we are talking about our group, that is a dozen of people and couple of dozens are volunteers in the country and outside. So, we have volunteers who are helping, but they are in States. The key group consists of 10 people.

I: And your office is located on Lva Tolstogo, right?

R: Yes, there but we hope to move, find something else since we don't fit in there anymore. Because it's not just office there, people also come there to communicate, drop the money and some help, and there we have a storage partially, so that is a big chunk of work, and it takes space, and there is not enough space.

I: And what do you do now? In 2014 volunteers were providing the army with everything, from water to...

R: Our fund was never providing so to say, "socks", water, emm, citrus fruits on holidays, or presents or candies. Something like that. It was never out help, sometimes, volunteers could put something together with the main provisions to the front, but we don't have that, and it was never there. So, I can state that for sure. We do technical provisions, thermographic supplies, that is different technical parts, so aside from thermographic, it can be some rangefinders, it can be even sights (note: aiming devices for guns), ammunition, such as body armor but now the supply is way better, that can be armor, it can unmanned aerial vehicle of different kinds. So that is still the major part of the fund's work, the supply and its rotation, meaning that we understand that it doesn't just go no nowhere, it stays, they keep it responsibly with all the documentation, officially, so the military unit registers it, and then when there is a rotation, so one brigade, for example, leaves the zone, so it go to the shooting range, we take the provisions for attendance, and what are they doing there (note: café workers moving and background noise) and after the attendance we give it back to another brigade, so we distribute again. That is a major part. Another major part is military education, we have different types, instruction to sappers, snipers and artillery. And now that is the major areas, but we plan to widen the scope, emm, maybe other type of instructions, but that depends on what type of instructors we can get or, we are talking about the quantity of military personnel who can study- we have

professional instructors, who are not part of the army anymore, but they have enough if qualifications and we take some units, application from the units that yes, they need this course, we also provide them with (incompressible word), if we are talking about the sappers, and our instructor goes there and teaches a course. Meaning we are boosting the qualifications of the military units.

I: And what is the scope of this?

R: Hundreds of people every month. Overall, that is couple of thousands of people. Our instructors in logistics when they bring the appliances to the front, they also teach how to use it, because you can also see and buy a drone on Rozetka (note: popular online store in Ukraine), but that doesn't mean that you can, well, effectively use it, especially when you need for military intelligence, right. They teach how to use it, they teach maintenance as well, or also a thermographic camera, a new one, you need to know how to use, at least at minimum by yourself in case it breaks down. So, they also do it all. Also, another area of our work is analytics. Before Vitalik (founder of the organization) used to do analytical projects in Transparency international, because it is a rather famous organization in terms of different corruption schemes and smuggling in the zone, because you understand that there is some trade with that zone, it stays there. Now, I am not going to say what exactly, but till the end of the year, we hope to publish out first analytical report that concerns the defense sphere. Also, another type of work we do is advocacy. Here we are talking about us functioning as an observer. For example, in terms of professional and qualitative appointment on the post, emm, when we are talking about military personnel, right, officers. Or when we are talking about adoption of a law, or its lobbying, laws that concern either military service or demobilized personnel, so the protection of the veterans' rights and their families. So that is also another

part of the fund's work. This type of work is less known to the public, on our page or in media, less compared to the amount we do, but we are working on that, so that there is more (incomprehensible) of our nation.

I: So, you are working together with the government? You are part of Rada?

R: At the moment, officially we are not a member of the Rada (note:Council) of Volunteers at Ministry of Defense. But more or less, we are invited to the meetings of some committees or councils, of course, since we have the expertise, we know that people, we understand what is going on now at the frontline, that is very important. And it is important to listen these opinions and take into the account.