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articles



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## Hungarian Mercenaries in Italy in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century: An Analysis of a Mercenary Contract of 1361

**Summary:** Hungarian mercenaries began to operate in Italy in the 1340s. The reason for their appearance in the Kingdom of Naples was the planned dynastic link between the Neapolitan and the Hungarian branches of the Angevin family. Hungarian warriors arrived in Italy in greater numbers during the campaigns of King Louis I, who intended to occupy the Neapolitan kingdom for himself after the assassination of his younger brother, Andrew, by accomplices of his wife, Joan of Naples. After the failure of these campaigns, a considerable number of Hungarian warriors stayed in Italy and undertook mercenary service there. This study seeks to analyse a mercenary contract surviving from 1361, which was concluded by the king and queen of Naples and the mercenary company called *Magna Societas Ungarorum*. The text provides us with an excellent insight into the conditions under which these warriors fought and the expectations on behalf of the contracting parties. It also allows us to conclude to what extent the points of the agreement could be put into practice.

**Keywords:** Hungarian mercenaries, Kingdom of Naples, *Magna Societas Ungarorum*, mercenary contract, conditions of mercenary warfare

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The first mention of Hungarian mercenaries operating in 14<sup>th</sup>-century Italy appears at the start of the 1340s. King Louis I the Great aimed to forge a dynastic alliance with the Kingdom of Naples. To accomplish this, he followed in the footsteps of his father, King Charles I of the Angevin lineage, who had come to Hungary as a child in 1300. After a lengthy and challenging struggle for power, he secured the Kingdom

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of Hungary and established stability by the mid-1320s. It was he who proposed marrying his younger son, Prince Andrew, to Joan of Naples, aiming to unite the kingdoms of southern Italy and Hungary in Central Europe under one dynasty — the French-origin Angevin family. King Charles I journeyed to Italy in 1333 to facilitate his son's marriage. Accompanying him were some Hungarian knights and warriors, marking the start of 14<sup>th</sup>-century Hungarian-Italian military ties. However, it was not until the early 1340s, when Prince Andrew travelled to Italy, that Hungarian soldiers began to participate actively in the Kingdom of Naples as part of the prince's retinue.

The real onslaught of Hungarian military culture in Italy is associated with a tragic event. In September 1345, Prince Andrew was murdered in Aversa, which was probably instigated by his wife.<sup>1</sup> King Louis I swore vengeance against the killers of his brother and decided to lead a campaign to Italy to conquer the Kingdom of Naples with sheer force and take this realm under his rule. As it turned out later, this idea was doomed to be a failure, but the king was quite determined to achieve his goal. He led his first campaign to Naples on land. Hungarian troops arrived in Italy at the beginning of autumn in 1347, while the king himself followed them in November. This first campaign soon turned out to be a successful one. The king occupied the Kingdom of Naples, Queen Joan and her lover managed to escape, and only pockets of resistance remained behind. However, the pope refused to accept Louis as the king of Naples and was also reluctant to accept the idea of the Queen's liability for the murder of Prince Andrew. King Louis returned from Italy in the spring of 1348, leaving Hungarian garrisons in the strongholds of the Kingdom of Naples.<sup>2</sup> His return coincided with the outbreak of the black death, which caused the most devastating epidemic in Europe in the Middle Ages.

After the king's return, his troops were led by István Lackfi, voivode of Transylvania, a capable military leader, who successfully fought against the armies of Queen Joan and Louis of Taranto in 1348 and 1349, but it became necessary for King Louis I to intervene in person in 1350. This time he travelled across the Adriatic Sea and landed in the Kingdom of Naples, but the main body of his army may have gone along the peninsula following approximately the original route taken in 1347. King Louis I's second campaign turned out to be an inconclusive one, leaving no other solution open than establishing a peace treaty in 1352. In this treaty, the king acknowledged the Kingdom of Naples to be the inheritance of Queen Joan and her husband, Louis of Taranto, but retained his claim to the Neapolitan throne.

The Hungarian way of warfare experienced by the Neapolitan forces was a complete surprise for warriors who had been accustomed to the contemporary Western European fighting traditions. Though by this time, the ways the Hungarians fought had

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1 Weisz B. (ed.), 2023, 263.

2 Hermann R. (ed.), 2017, 203–206.

changed a lot after the establishment of the Christian state by King Saint Stephen in the year 1000 and became more and more similar to that of Western Europe, having elements of heavy cavalry, the members of which wore knightly armour and carried the same weapons as their western European counterparts, the Hungarian army still retained certain characteristics, which had been parts of east European nomadic fighting tradition.<sup>3</sup> The most important elements of this fighting culture were the relatively high numbers of light cavalry in the Hungarian army, whose main weapon was the reflex bow, with which they could shoot from horseback, even when galloping, and shoot backwards when feigning retreat, they tried to encircle their opponents and kill them with a hail of arrows. This tactic, combined with the assault of heavy cavalry and foot soldiers, proved to be a very effective one on the battlefields of Italy. This light cavalry consisted of Cumanians, Szeklers, and Hungarians and became a much sought-after contingent in several mercenary companies after the completion of King Louis I's wars in Italy, when a substantial number of Hungarian warriors remained in Italy and offered their services to different employers as mercenaries.<sup>4</sup> This activity became a certain possibility of a career, to achieve fame and financial enrichment. In the coming decades, the influx of Hungarian warriors into the Italian mercenary market can be documented. This also offered a way for a rise in social status for those members of Hungarian society (coming from all walks of life) who were willing to take the financial burdens of becoming a mercenary and the risks involved in this way of life.<sup>5</sup> A well-known example of this type of career is that of Miklós (*Nicholas*) Toldi, whose exact social origin cannot be established due to the rarity of sources,<sup>6</sup> he certainly became the vice-comes of Pozsony County, perhaps the most significant Hungarian territorial unit in northwestern Hungary, before his mercenary service. He also achieved financial success while serving in Italy, where Hungarian warriors were part of the *Magna Societas Ungarorum* and *Alba Societas*. Toldi himself fought alongside one of the most renowned mercenaries of the time, Sir John Hawkwood. At the peak of his military career, Toldi commanded approximately 1,600 to 1,800 men.

To shed light on the conditions and circumstances in which these mercenaries served, it is worth analysing a contract that I came across while preparing a source publication volume, which was meant to contain all the charters and documents relating to Hungarian history from the year 1361.<sup>7</sup> The project was part of a larger-scale endeavour, which aims at publishing about 80,000 charters surviving from the age of the Angevin rule in Hungary (1301–1387) in the form of Hungarian language

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3 Hermann R. (ed.), 2017, 192.

4 Hermann R. (ed.), 2017, 206–209.

5 Bárány A. (ed.), 2024, 191–214; 215–244; 265–272.

6 Mályusz E. 2003, 108–130.

7 Sebők F. (ed.), 2024, 159–161, no. 254.

excerpts.<sup>8</sup> As I was preparing these charters for publication, I found the text of the contract, which I would like to describe and analyse now for better insights into this aspect of military history.

The contract was known for Hungarian historiography as it had been published in extenso in the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>9</sup> but it has not been analysed extensively yet. The text was discovered by Gusztáv Wenzel in the archive of Florence, and he included it in his well-known source collection. The contract came into being between the king and queen of the Kingdom of Naples on the one hand and leaders of the *Magna Societas Ungarorum* on the other hand in Amalfi, on April 25, 1361. It was written in two copies, one for the king and queen, and one for the leaders of the *Societas*.

The contract names the leaders of the *Societas*, including the captain, Miklós (*Nicholas*) Atyinai, and this provides us with the first piece of interesting information. Though the name of the mercenary company is *Magna Societas Ungarorum*, among the leaders, who must be high-ranking members of the company, as they represent the whole of the unit, there are two German *marescalli*, so we can conclude — and it is also confirmed by the text of the contract — that the company did not exclusively consist of Hungarian mercenaries. The expressions used to describe the leaders of the company are *marescalli*, *consiliari*, *comestabuli* and *caporales*.

The contract refers to the fact that the kings of Hungary and Naples came to a peace treaty, so there is no hindrance for Hungarian subjects to serve the king of Naples, the former foe of their ruler. The contract aims to expel all the Germans and members serving with them in the *Societas Annichini de Mongardo* (another mercenary company) from the territories of the Kingdom of Naples. The captives and the dead are to be handed over to the king of Naples or his representative. The captives would be held for possible ransom or perhaps for re-employment in the army of Naples. As regards the dead, their belongings, armour, and weapons could be of value, and this may explain this item in the agreement. The leaders of the *Magna Societas Ungarorum* promised to destroy the *Societas Annichini de Mongardo*, if they did not fulfil this obligation, they would be regarded as traitors both to the Hungarian and Neapolitanian kings. They also agree not to ravage the territories of the Neapolitan king and his vassals, not to cause damage, not to commit injuries and robberies, and to pay for their victuals. Taking into consideration the conduct of other mercenary companies before and after 1361, we cannot be surprised at the inclusion of this point in the contract. The question was to what extent it could be put into practice during the campaign, and we can have no doubts that this point was not observed in the letter. After the completion of the expulsion of the Germans, they agreed to leave the kingdom without causing any damage. They would serve the king against any of his enemies, and after leaving the

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<sup>8</sup> Almási T. et al., 1990.

<sup>9</sup> Wenzel G. (ed.), 1875. 2, 571–578, no. 417.

kingdom, they would not attack it and would not serve the enemies of the king for five years. This was a customary element in contemporary mercenary contracts, but not necessarily observed in all cases. The leaders made a vow putting their hand on the Holy Scripture, that they would serve the king in Italy, on the island of Sicily, Provence, Avignon, in the *comitatus* of Venice, and in defence of the pope, the cardinals, and all the territories of the church for the usual amount of mercenary fee, which is customary in Italy. They promised to obey the commands of the Neapolitan king and his chief commander in the same way as they would obey the king of Hungary. This item is a strong testament to the fact that, though serving in Italy as mercenaries, these soldiers ultimately considered themselves subjects of the Hungarian king. If they do not fulfil this part of the contract, they should be regarded as traitors to God and the two kings. Whenever the Neapolitan troops want to depart from them, they will not obstruct them and will not cause damage to them. This point illustrates the fact that in the case of royal and mercenary troops fighting together, there may be a certain amount of distrust among the troops, which should be prevented for the success of the campaign. The leaders promised not to come to any agreement with the enemy during the campaign, the points of which would be contradictory to the items of the present contract. They agreed to make a vow in the hand of the Neapolitan king's Seneschall, touching the Holy Scripture, that all members of the *Societas* would obey these points and would not defy the commands of the king and his military leaders. In return for their services, the king of Naples will pay 37,000 golden florins in the following way: the king will pay 18,000 when he raises his flag, and they will defeat the Germans. The rest (19,000) will be paid at the final destruction and complete expulsion of the Germans from the Kingdom of Naples. After completing their task, the king will provide them with further special favours, but if they fail to perform the above-mentioned services, they cannot demand anything besides the mentioned 18,000 golden florins. The loot, horses, weapons, money, and goods taken during the campaign will belong to the Hungarians. This was perhaps the most important part of the contract because rank-and-file members of the company were the most interested in the possible loot besides their payment. This is also true for the captives, whose issue was dealt with in the next point. According to it, the Neapolitan king or his representative may select fifty high-ranking and noble captives; the rest will belong to the Hungarians. To prevent possible debates, the contract also includes the point that Neapolitan troops fighting side by side with the Hungarians may retain their part of the booty from the Germans. The next point reveals the multi-national character of the *Societas*. According to this point, German members of the *Societas* will be pardoned by the king, the queen, and their subjects for their earlier misdeeds and excesses, and the fines imposed on them will be revoked. The king, within 12 days of the destruction of the Germans, will pay the remaining 19,000 golden florins to the Hungarians in the castle of Amalfi. The king promises in the name of himself and his subjects not to cause any harm to

the Hungarians after the sum is paid. If he does not comply with this, the captain and members of the company may complain to the Pope, the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, and the king of Hungary. This copy, which is sealed with the king's secret annular seal and is retained by the leaders (*capolares*) of the *Societas*, who will also put their seals on that copy, which will belong to the king. There is a point relating to misbehaving elements of the company as well. If certain parts of the company avoid clashing with the Germans during the campaign and enter the territory controlled by Louis of Durazzo, who is currently in revolt against the king, the leaders of the *Societas* will compel them to fulfil the points of the contract. The last item deals with the issue of the wounded and ill members of the *Societas*. They may enter the territory under the king's control and heal and buy the necessary items for themselves; however, in all of these cases, they have to pay for their cure and the goods.

Analysing the points of the contract, we can arrive at the following conclusions. The contracting parties were quite precise in laying down the exact conditions and their expectations concerning the content of the contract. The most important points deal with the aim (expulsion of the Germans from the Kingdom of Naples), the costs involved on behalf of the king (37,000 golden florins), the conditions under which this sum is paid (18,000 in advance, 19,000 on completion of the task), and share of the booty (including captives and horses, armour, weapons, etc.). The contract also carefully defines how the fulfilment of the task should be secured, what course of action should be followed if the mercenaries fail to comply with the aim of the contract, and prescribes the vow their leaders are required to make. In this respect, the contract can be regarded as a carefully worded business agreement.

There are also striking shortcomings of it, which are possible to explain in my opinion. The first is that the contract does not contain a time frame; that is, the deadline for achieving the mentioned task is not prescribed. The reason for this can be the following. In case of war, exact time limits cannot be included in the contract, because the fortunes of war can quickly change, and it is next to impossible to decide when hostilities can be ceased. The other reason may hide in the character of the contract; the first part of the agreed sum is paid in advance, and the mercenaries will receive the second instalment on completion of the task, so it is in their interest to finish it by the soonest possible date. This may explain why no exact deadline is recorded in the agreement.

The second missing point is that there are no conditions set in the contract about how many warriors the company leaders should field, what the proportion of cavalry (heavy and light) and infantry should be, how the warriors should be equipped, and what weapons and armour they should carry. Again, these missing points can be explained. When the king came to this agreement with the leaders of the *Societas*, he must have had a clear picture of the number of warriors in the company (which he may have deemed enough for his purposes) and also of their equipment. If he had not

been satisfied with what he had been informed of, he would not have entered into this contract with the leaders of the *Societas*. In other words, he must have been confident that the mercenary company he was about to contract was capable of achieving the task it undertook.

On the other hand, it was the company leaders' responsibility to equip their warriors in a way that would enable them to reach their goals laid out in the contract. The other party in the contract, the mercenaries, were also confident they could expel the Germans from the Kingdom of Naples. These considerations explain why these points were not included in the contract.

The contract clearly illustrates the fact that Hungarian warriors, who appeared first in Italy as mercenaries in the 1340s and fought in the wars of King Louis I, by the 1350s and early 1360s of the century, became highly valued members of the mercenary market in Italy.<sup>10</sup> Their number made it possible to form mercenary companies, which did not exclusively consist of Hungarian warriors, as we could observe, but in certain companies made a substantial, in the case of the *Magna Societas Ungarorum*, a predominant part of the company. In the coming decades, there was a constant flow of warriors coming from the Kingdom of Hungary to Italy, which lent a special flavour to the wars fought in the Apennine Peninsula well into the 1380s. The military experience of these soldiers gained in Italy helped the modernisation of Central European warfare, as the time of the Hundred Years' War and the age of the Great Companies<sup>11</sup> in Italy marked a turning point in medieval warfare, from which the states of Central Europe could profit in reforming their armed forces and adapting themselves to the challenges of the next century.

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<sup>10</sup> Kristó Gy. (ed.), 1994, 752–753.

<sup>11</sup> Fowler K. 2001, 297–301.

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## The Bored Cossack: The Way of a Ukrainian Warrior

**Summary:** The article examines Ukrainian folk paintings of *Cossack Mamai* as the most complete visual archetype of the Cossack, a professional warrior of the Early Modern period. It argues that Mamai's static posture and melancholic expression should not be interpreted solely as reflection or sadness, but primarily as a state of boredom, understood in the philosophical sense developed by Martin Heidegger. This boredom emerges from the Cossack's relationship with time, the steppe landscape, and a psychotype shaped by warfare, isolation, and environmental monotony. An iconographic analysis of key elements (the tree, horse, weapons, bandura, and utensils) shows Mamai as a wealthy, mobile warrior immobilised by enforced rest. The figure is interpreted as one of existential suspension: bored, waiting, aware of purpose yet unable to realise it. In this reading, Mamai becomes a symbol of Ukrainian mentality and of a long-term historical search for identity and meaning.

**Keywords:** Cossack Mamai, boredom, Ukrainian folk art, social anthropology, Early Modern period, military culture

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*The wide prairie's my kin,  
My sword and pipe are my related,  
The grey colt is my twin<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

A series of Ukrainian folk paintings entitled 'Cossack Mamai' presents an archetype of the professional Ukrainian warrior of the Modern Period — the Cossack — more effectively than any other visual source. While some scholars seek the roots of Mamai in various

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<sup>1</sup> Shashkevych A. 1888.

world art traditions, the artistic image of Mamai originated in Ukraine.<sup>2</sup> ‘Cossack Mamai’ was not only an oil painting. It was extremely popular among Ukrainians, who often decorated parts of their houses, furniture, tiles, and even utensils with images of Mamai.<sup>3</sup>

The eastern name ‘Mamai’, closely related to Ukrainian surnames, toponyms, and hydronyms, was given to images only from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, due to the captions ‘Cossack Mamai’ found on a few later paintings. The central figure in Mamai paintings is the professional Ukrainian warrior of the Early Modern Period — the Cossack, sitting with legs crossed near a tree, playing a bandura or making a distinctive hand gesture. Common features of most Mamai paintings include a horse, weapons, a bandura, a pipe, a hat, a bag, and occasionally a bottle or a cup. Some paintings feature additional figures interacting with the Cossack in various ways, ranging from flirtatious girls to rebellious peasants executing their enemies.

The oldest known paintings of Mamai date back to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, during which the iconographic basis of this image was formed. According to Zholtovskyyi, the first portraits of Mamai depicted actual representatives of grassroots Cossack society.<sup>4</sup> In the third quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the compositions began to include scenes featuring Haidamaks (rebellious peasants).<sup>5</sup> It was only at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that the ‘lyrical version of the Cossack-bandurist’ appeared, surrounded by a diverse material entourage.<sup>6</sup>

The paintings are sometimes accompanied by inscriptions and even quite extensive texts that echo folk songs, apt aphorisms, proverbs, and sayings, where humour and satire intertwine with serious lyrical, elegiac, and dramatic moods.<sup>7</sup> The combination of word and image in artistic work is quite common in Ukrainian art.<sup>8</sup>

After more than one hundred years of studying, several scholars thoroughly explored the different aspects of Mamai images — from art history to ethnography, the history of material culture, and even the mystical. Now it is time to study Cossack Mamai in terms of social anthropology and modern philosophy.

## Problem Statement

During the whole period of studying Cossack Mamai, scholars were often surprised by the static position of the Mamai figure and his ‘sad’ and ‘apathetic’ mood. So, researchers present Mamai as a serious, upset, or tragic character. The paintings were considered

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2 Bushak S. 2008, 8.

3 Bushak S. 2008, 8; Laska I.M. 2007, 405.

4 Zholtovskyyi P. 1978, 298.

5 The appearance of these scenes related to the “Koliivshchyna” — Cossack and peasant national liberation uprising in the Right Bank Ukraine in 1768–1769.

6 Zholtovskyyi P. 1978, 290, 298.

7 Bushak S. 2008, 117.

8 Bushak S. 2008, 110.

to be full of elegiac reflection, and sorrow for the Cossacks' past,<sup>9</sup> and Mamai himself was seen as a former peasant who longed for home.<sup>10</sup> Almost a saint who meditates, 'elusive' and 'whimsical'...

It seems that nobody dares to categorically deny that the psychological state of Mamai (the expression of his face, figure, etc.) is very similar to boredom, one of the most studied human mental states in philosophy and sociopsychology.

The problems related to boredom in history, philosophy, sociology, physics, and psychology are well studied, and the number of publications on the topic is growing rapidly. Nowadays, researchers pay much more attention to the physical and neurophysiological aspects of boredom as an original psychological state or a secondary symptom of others.<sup>11</sup>

Heidegger thoroughly explored boredom as a philosophical category and psychological state in his *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*.<sup>12</sup> Heidegger deliberately avoided the formal universal definition of boredom<sup>13</sup> and until now, the fundamental and unified definition is absent. The applied sciences, like physiology and psychology, suffer mostly because of this.<sup>14</sup> Generally, they treated boredom as a 'state of core motivational deficits accompanied by a phenomenological experience of a lack of interest or affective engagement'.<sup>15</sup>

Anyway, the most general definitions were formulated years before Heidegger's book was published. Modern dictionaries define boredom as 'the state of being weary and restless through lack of interest';<sup>16</sup> a state caused by inactivity, lack of entertainment, sadness, or annoyance; and a state caused by the monotony of the environment and lack of interest in the surroundings, occupations etc.<sup>17</sup>

After many years of study, boredom was also defined as the feeling of having no interest or purpose,<sup>18</sup> or as a state in which a desire to engage with the world yields little success.<sup>19</sup>

The majority of the above-mentioned definitions are too brief, and most importantly, they do not take into account the dependencies and relationships between human beings and time, which is extremely important for this study. Thus, a working definition of boredom is needed, based on the postulates of Heidegger.

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9 Zholtovskiy P. 1978, 294.

10 Biletskyi P. 1997, 28–35.

11 Goldberg Y.K. et al. 2011, 648.

12 Heidegger M. 1995, 74–167.

13 Heidegger M. 1995, 153.

14 Goldberg Y.K. et al. 2011, 648.

15 Goldberg Y.K. et al. 2011, 649.

16 *Boredom*.

17 Nud'ha 1974, 452.

18 Mills C.W. 1959.

19 Fenichel O. 1951, 349–361.

Boredom — the state of binding, holding by time our current existence (so-called ‘Dasein’<sup>20</sup>) in limbo, thus making it (i.e. ‘Dasein’) inessential, oppressive, and leaving us empty.<sup>21</sup>

After exploration of the relationship between boredom and three phenomenologically related states — apathy, anhedonia, and depression — researchers revealed that although related to each state to varying degrees, boredom is empirically distinct.<sup>22</sup> This fact is quite important for this study, as it shapes the bizarre concept of ‘boredom’ into a well-learned clinical state. Researchers propose many theories trying to explain the process of initiation of boredom,<sup>23</sup> but the task of this article is not to conclude a medical diagnosis (which is obviously impossible) but to identify a bored person, given their general psychotype and using the analytical tools of Heidegger.

Modern researchers often pay attention to the creativity of boredom. For instance, the state of boredom, caused by an excess of inactivity, stimulates new creative activity.<sup>24</sup> Recent studies also demonstrate how a basic emotion, such as boredom, can shape both rudimentary and complex human thoughts, feelings, and behaviour.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, boredom is not just another set of medical symptoms. As an important state that encourages the individual to develop, it provides inner inspiration, and it needs to be understood as a social and philosophical phenomenon of civilisation that is closely related to the problems of social anthropology and modern philosophy. The ‘history of boredom’ reveals a huge layer of unstudied historical topics — from the forms of leisure to the motivating factors of the people of the past, as well as a large number of emotional states — from the ‘routine despair of not wanting to do anything in particular’<sup>26</sup> and the forms of time passing, to profound boredom as a ‘fundamental mood’.<sup>27</sup> After all, the meaning of ‘boredom’ as it is used now has appeared only since 1853.<sup>28</sup>

As a universal human experience, ‘boredom’ must have been inherent in *Homo sapiens* since prehistoric times. But how people experienced boredom in the later periods of the studied history, how they escaped it and generally understood this state — we still do not have clear answers.

The main intention of this article is to define the emotional and mental states of the Cossack Mamai and to try to understand what he aspires to. Is he bored or occupied

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20 Dasein [da:zam] (“being-there” or “there-being”) adopted by Heidegger from the vernacular German word meaning ‘existence’.

21 Heidegger M. 1995, 74–167.

22 Goldberg Y.K. et al. 2011, 647–666.

23 Goldberg Y.K. et al. 2011, 648–649.

24 *Nuda...* 2018.

25 van Tilburg W.A.P., Igou E.R. 2019, 11–35.

26 Kingwell M. 2019, 4.

27 Heidegger M. 1995, 160.

28 Boredom.

by another psychological state — meditation, reflection, longing, arrogance, indifference to the surrounding characters and related events, etc.? Another question — what is the possible meaning and significance of boredom in the compositional concept of Mamai's image?

So, the tasks of the article are to analyse Cossacks in socio-psychological and historical contexts and to identify the main psychological, professional, and domestic tendencies and preferences of Mamai. Next, to analyse the plot in detail, including the environmental objects and composition. Then, to find out what a Cossack does and how he treats his occupations, and, finally, to discover what symbolic content the classic 'Mamai' plot retains?

The author believes that this article will reveal the first, most general basis for understanding the nature and meaning of boredom in Cossack society and shed some light on specific aspects of everyday life in the Early Modern period.

### **Historical Background**

In Ukraine, the beginnings of the Cossacks date back to the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, although the Cossacks' way of life was known since the Medieval Kyiv Rus' state period. Peculiarities of local life and constant invasions of the Turkic-speaking nomadic population (Tatars) from Crimea into Ukraine through sparsely populated wild steppes contributed to the fact that the Ukrainian population of various social groups and ranks resorted to the so-called 'Cossack way' — a way of life that included plunder, deep raids into Tatar territory in the southern steppe regions of Ukraine, and isolation from the rest of society in border fortresses and fortified camps — so-called 'Sich'.

As a new special estate, Cossacks established themselves in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as personally free, armed vassals of the Polish king. Cossacks treated themselves as 'Ukrainian men-at-arms' who survived from the spoils of war and claimed the right to elect a new overlord and protector under certain circumstances.<sup>29</sup> They assimilated some elements of knightly culture, and their leaders perceived themselves as nobles and real knights from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Many of them had a high social status and occupied high official positions.

In the late 16<sup>th</sup> century Cossacks developed so much that they posed a serious threat to the Ottomans. The acceptance of the Cossacks by European rulers as a 'knight-like' estate is largely due to their fight against the Ottoman-Tatar threat and the defence of the southern frontier, led by 'steppe knights', often well-known and wealthy nobles, who also held prominent administrative positions in the Polish-Lithuanian state.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Chukhlib T. 2003, 47.

<sup>30</sup> Brekhunenko V. 2011, 281.

After gaining independence from the Commonwealth in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Cossacks became the foundation of a new Ukrainian state, where they acquired a privileged elite position.

During the existence of the Cossacks, some of them lived in cities, where they were registered by the government and obeyed the official orders and the law, and some lived in the Sich, on the wild southern steppe border of Ukraine, engaging in military affairs at their own discretion.

Life in the Sich was not easy, fighting daily against nature and enemies and constrained by the strict rules of the men's military community. The Cossacks spent most of their lives in military campaigns. The key to Cossack freedom and the military-economic efficiency of their society was a hierarchical system of autonomy that was based on the principles of military democracy.

In terms of military specialisation, the Cossacks were universal soldiers — infantry, dragoons, sappers, sailors, and light cavalry — but in battle they mostly represented a powerful, well-organised infantry, extremely effective gunners who operated mainly under the cover of a movable wagon camp or trenches. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Cossack cavalry was also created instead of hiring a Tatar one. Generally, Cossack military affairs of the 16<sup>th</sup> – early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries combined Western European, Ottoman and Tatar military traditions.

After Ukraine's accession to the Russian Empire, the Cossacks were used in the Russian army, mostly as auxiliary units, and after the final destruction of the Sich in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, they were relocated to the Kuban, where the last Cossacks lost direct contact with Ukraine.

### **Socio-Psychological Background. Impact of Nature, Characteristics of Society, Formation of Ethnic Character**

Researchers note that among all types of sensory perception related to geopsychic impact, vision is the most important.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the climatic zones, landscapes, and nature of Ukraine played a significant role in the formation of the specific mentality of the Cossack warriors. Ukraine included the three types of landscapes — steppe, forest-steppe, and forest. As in Cossack times (15<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> centuries), the huge steppe area formed the wild southern frontier of Ukraine, where the 'real' Cossacks lived, isolated from other civilisations.

The Ukrainian steppe has two contrasting aspects — bleak and monotonous in autumn and winter, yet experiencing a brief majestic revival in spring. The oppressively monotonous arid steppe, with only a short-term spring revival and significant

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31 Rybchyn I. 1970, 7.

differences in day and night temperatures, makes the Ukrainian steppes similar to deserts, to some extent.

Scholars have written about the strong influence that both states of nature have on the national mentality and character of Ukrainians. Čyževskij believes that the influence of the charm and majesty of the spring steppe contributed to the formation of an unusually active and mobile type of Ukrainian. Rybchyn, on the other hand, emphasised that the only long-term phenomena are infinite visual distance, monotony, the depressing indifference of the empty landscape, the terrifying infinity of space, and its impact on the mind, which leaves a strong, lasting impression.<sup>32</sup>

Steppe monotony and the lack of visible dynamics could initiate the effect of ‘slowing down’ or ‘dragging’ of time, related to the effect of ‘being held in limbo’ described by Heidegger,<sup>33</sup> and, accordingly, the accumulation of internal emotional tension. The growth of emotions and the accumulation of energy during isolation in the monotonous steppe boost mental dynamics, but, at the same time, ‘lock’ this tension, postponing the moment of the discharge of these accumulated emotions, which occurs at the proper time and is dramatically powerful.

The effect of ‘time that is going slowly’ (*Langeweile*<sup>34</sup>) also contributes to the feeling of existential emptiness and the need to fill it permanently. The incomplete relaxation of an ordinary ‘peaceful life’ cannot quench the appetites of the emptiness of the steppe and only causes the effect of ‘stopped’ time with subsequent disappointment and mental oppression.

As a result, an unquenchable desire to discharge accumulated emotions was formed in the mental life of the steppe man, along with a tendency towards hyperactive compensation of this ‘emptiness’, which the Cossacks often found in fierce battles with enemies<sup>35</sup> (Tatars, Ottomans, Poles, and Muscovites during the 15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> centuries).

In the extreme conditions of the steppe, the importance of belonging to a local group of similar people is very high. The chances of survival increase compared to those of an individual, and the inner dynamic of the group gives its members a chance to partly regain mental balance<sup>36</sup> during intragroup communication.

Modern scientific research shows that people’s ability to form stable coalitions was formed during intergroup conflicts and is based on a combination of opposite characteristics within the individual — altruism towards members of one’s group and hostility (so-called parochialism) towards others. Combined in a single behavioural

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32 Rybchyn I. 1970, 9.

33 Heidegger M. 1995, 99.

34 ‘Langeweile’ another German word adopted by Heidegger, meaning “ennui” a feeling of being bored, tired, and generally dissatisfied because nothing interesting is happening. Langeweile; Heidegger M. 1995, 96–97.

35 Rybchyn I. 1970, 9–10.

36 Rybchyn I. 1970, 10.

complex, militancy (towards competitors) together with friendliness (towards one's own) gives the group the best chances for survival.<sup>37</sup>

The important conditions for the formation of such a behavioural complex are the high intensity of intergroup hostilities and a significant number of outstanding 'altruists' — heroes capable of a feat who are ready to sacrifice themselves for the victory of the group.<sup>38</sup> Heroism, military valour, and even peaceful concern for every member of the group increase the popularity of 'altruists' and their social rank. This well-studied mechanism of evolutionary ethics<sup>39</sup> is perfectly illustrated by the organisation and everyday life of Sich Cossack society.

The Cossacks had a full set of characteristics of the Parochial Altruism Society, including a system of control and punishment of 'parasites' — 'zrada' (betrayal) — and religious principles that strengthen every system of parochial altruism,<sup>40</sup> so the defence of the Orthodox faith by Cossacks gains a new meaning. Finally, there is a propensity for egalitarianism, which also develops in such closed militant groups in parallel with altruism and parochialism.<sup>41</sup>

So, the need to fight for survival in extreme conditions in a closed group, as well as the geopsychic influence of such a hostile, static, and at times fleeting steppe, created a common psychotype of the Sich Cossack — a mobile (active, dynamic), freedom-loving, cruel warrior, ready for heroic feats and thirsting for glory (as the highest values of the Zaporozhian community), prone to egalitarianism, and an extremist and survivor loyal to 'his own' religious, national, or other group. Over time, these traits have become an integral part of the Ukrainian mentality.

### **Analysis of Image and Plot**

The basis of the Mamai paintings is a frontal, invariably static figure of a Cossack, who sits with legs crossed under a tree, playing the bandura or holding hands in a specific gesture. The standard features of most Mamai paintings are a horse, weapons, a bandura, a pipe, a hat, a bag, a bottle and a cup. An analysis of these items emphasises that Mamai is a wealthy nobleman and a respected leader of Cossack society. He is depicted at rest during a long distance journey.

This is related to the traditions of Ukrainian folk icon painting, which, together with the so-called Sarmatian portrait, undoubtedly influenced the composition and the image of Mamai.<sup>42</sup>

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37 Choi J.K., Bowles S. 2007, 636–640.

38 Bowles S. 2009, 1293–1298.

39 See: Alexander R.D. 1987.

40 Markov A.

41 Fehr E., Bernhard H., Rockenbach B. 2008, 1079–1083.

42 Butnyk-Siverskyj B. (ed.), 7.

The oldest items (depicted on the oldest paintings) should be highlighted first, as they give us the keys to understanding the origin and social status of Mamai. In addition, some items carry significant symbolic meaning.

A **tree** (usually an oak) under which Mamai rests is presented in almost every Mamai painting. It is one of the traditional symbols of Ukraine, embodying strength and durability. It is also a symbol of the ‘world tree’ of tribal ancestors.<sup>43</sup> For this study, the tree is interesting because it emphasises the presence of Mamai in an unusual environment for him: the forest or forest-steppe instead of his native steppe.

A **horse** — faithful companion and comrade of the Cossack. On the one hand, the presence of a horse, including its temporary leash, proves that Mamai travels and also hints at his steppe origins. The horse also symbolises virtues highly valued in Sich Cossack society: devotion, love of freedom, and self-sacrifice.

**Symbols.** As mentioned above, the important symbolism of the horse and its image is used in some paintings as the main heraldic figure, depicted on an oval-shaped ‘Cossack coat of arms’, which, along with other military equipment, hangs on a tree. The horse, as a heraldic figure, plays a multifaceted role, informing the viewer about the noble status of Mamai, the chivalrous nature of his nobility, and ‘truly Cossack’ virtues. In later images, sometimes the Russian Emperor symbols — the two-headed eagle or the monogram of the names of Russian tsars—appear on the Cossack bag. These symbols were the regular features of the military equipment of the Russian imperial army of the 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>44</sup> and indicate that Mamai is a regular Cossack in Russian military service.

Rich **clothing** testifies to Islamic<sup>45</sup> (Ottoman) influences and emphasises the high material status of Mamai. Sometimes one can see on the portraits the tightly stuffed wallet of Mamai. A hat with a rounded or segmented top, popular in Ukraine since the 1740s, stressed that Mamai belongs to the so-called ‘elected’ regular Cossacks or unregistered Zaporizhia Cossacks.<sup>46</sup>

**Weapons and military equipment** are represented by a spear, sabre, musket, pistols, bow and arrow, bag, and powder keg. The Cossacks’ armaments reflect a blend of Western and Eastern military traditions, a common characteristic of their culture. The sabre became the main long-bladed weapon of the Cossack from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, taking over all the main sacred ‘noble’ functions of the sword as a knight’s weapon.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, the bow and arrow emphasise the connection of Mamai with the steppe.

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43 Marchenko-Poshyvailo T. 1999, 34.

44 See: Viskovatov A. (ed.), 1841–1862.

45 Halenko O. 2009, 156.

46 Slavutych Y. 2012, 54–55.

47 Toichkin D. 2013, 130.

According to several researchers, a spear with a flag represents ‘Cossack glory’ and ‘mourning for the dead’.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, a spear with a flag is just a demonstration of the endurance of the Cossack chivalric traditions from the heavy hussar cavalry of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where many Ukrainians served. Of course, the traditional ‘Cossack’ military service was significantly different from that of the heavy hussar cavalry, and the universal spear, popular among the Cossacks, was significantly different from the highly specialised hussar lance. By the time the ‘Cossack Mamai’ canon was formed, the glory of the Polish hussars was already a thing of the past. The ‘new life’ of the Cossack spear began in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, after the transformation of the Cossack troops into irregular light cavalry regiments of pikemen, along with other ‘natural horsemen’ in the Russian Imperial army. During this period, the main elements of a Cossack’s armament complex were firearms, pikes, and sabres or broadswords of Russian regular patterns.

**Utensils** — bowls, ladles, cups, bottles, and glasses — are not just ‘road props’, which once again testifies to the long journey of Mamai to lands far from his native steppe. A metal bowl with wine is one of the most archaic items. It demonstrates Mamai’s relation with the steppe communities and testifies to his high social status.<sup>49</sup>

A special detail of the Cossack entourage is the Ukrainian folk string instrument — the **bandura**. Bandura, kobza and lyre players for centuries preserved and spread the Cossack spiritual heritage in the form of *duma*<sup>50</sup> and songs. The bandura was such an organic part of Cossack life that it was sometimes called ‘travel’, i.e., it was taken on the road.<sup>51</sup> The fact that Mamai has an excellent bandura and can play it points to his education and wealth.

The same is evidenced by the Mamai **pipe**: many paintings depict not a simple clay pipe, like those found in large numbers by Ukrainian archaeologists, but rather complex, even bizarre, accessories.

Let’s explore what Cossack Mamai is doing with these items and what he might be feeling. In most paintings, the Cossack smokes a pipe and plays the bandura. Sometimes the bandura lies next to him, and then Mamai ‘beat the lice’. Occasionally, another character offers Mamai ‘gorilka’ (alcohol), but the Cossack maintains his famous calm.

In many paintings, the central figure of Mamai is surrounded by small (obviously distant) figures of other characters — girls, other Cossacks, etc. They are engaged in various activities that do not disturb the Cossack, even if Mamai is indirectly involved. No character can significantly affect the mood or activities of Mamai, who has removed himself from the fussy environment.

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48 Marchenko-Poshyvailo T. 1999, 34; Biletskyi P. 1997, 34.

49 Halenko O. 2009, 157.

50 *Duma* — a genre of purely Ukrainian recitative folk and heroic epic performed by itinerant singers-musicians.

51 Bushak S. 2008, 31.

In some paintings, Mamai seems to participate in the activities around him; sometimes, with a fake smile, he seems to be actively spending his leisure time, yet this incomprehensible melancholy, some inner emptiness, always follows him. His gaze is faraway; for the most part, the Cossack does not look at the viewer at all.

In general, Mamai's facial expressions and posture create the impression of a person completely focused on himself and his problems and deeply bored with the current situation and his forced 'leisure'.



Fig. 1. Cossack Sharpylo, 19<sup>th</sup> c. (Nogaïsk, now Prymorsk, Zaporizhzhia Oblast. National Art Museum of Ukraine, Inv. no. Zh-803)

## Conclusions

1. The series of Mamai paintings represents a Cossack in a mental state of boredom. One can find all the main (according to Heidegger) signs of boredom of the first and second types in the paintings:
  - a) Boredom of the first type ('bored by'<sup>52</sup>) — the Cossack is being held by time. Surrounding things and even events refuse themselves to the Cossack,<sup>53</sup> and thus can't alleviate his boredom. Mamai is not interested in the surrounding events, other people's problems, or the expensive items around him. Therefore, the Cossack is deeply irritated and bored here (Fig. 1, 2).
  - b) Mamai's boredom of the second type ('bored with'<sup>54</sup>) is mixed with boredom of the first type: after all, the most formal participation of the Cossack in background events is also a form of the passing of time. So, at some point, time stops for the Cossack, and he has a little fun (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 2.** Cossack Mamai from Zhalko, 19<sup>th</sup> c. (Central State Archive Museum of Literature and Art of Ukraine, Inv. no. KV-6190/Zh-176)

52 See: Heidegger M. 1995, 92–105.

53 For details about “Refusal of things” see: Heidegger M. 1995, 103.

54 See: Heidegger M. 1995, 106–131.



Fig. 3. Hopak (Ukrainian Dance), late 18<sup>th</sup> – early 19<sup>th</sup> c. (Dnipropetrovsk Art Museum, Inv. no. Zh-567)



Fig. 4. Cossack – A True Soul, 19<sup>th</sup> c. (National Art Museum of Ukraine, Inv. no. Zh-810)

- c) The paintings represent the passing of time<sup>55</sup> of both types — from outright boredom to ‘following social rules’ (ranging from the lonely strumming of his bandura to formal participation in surrounding events).
- d) In a few paintings, one can find even the boredom of the third type — a global, profound boredom as the ‘fundamental mood’. The Cossack is particularly vulnerable to this condition, being profoundly affected by the enduring visual and

55 For definition of passing of time see: Heidegger M. 1995, 95.

geopsychic impact of the steppe landscape. According to one modern neurophysiological theory, boredom is externally driven — an affective response to impoverished external stimuli,<sup>56</sup> as in the Mamai case, visually.

Anyway, Mamai is far beyond all the situations that occur around him, which is typical for boredom of the third type. Since profound boredom is not associated with the passing of time, it may be better to look for it in portraits where the Cossack fighting lice as an activity can be almost unconscious and automatic. In a few paintings, one can find even the boredom of the third type — a global, profound boredom as the ‘fundamental mood’ (Fig. 4).

2. So, the Cossack shows outright boredom; it is the driving force of Mamai and the key to understanding him. But what does the Cossack expect? It is expedient to distinguish two layers of composition related to time and space.
  - a) ‘Cossack and time’. The boredom of the first type is related to waiting.<sup>57</sup> So Mamai is taken out of the context of the activity of his dreams. What is he waiting for? Mamai is bored, impatiently awaiting the continuation of his journey. We have already established the restless and hyperactive nature of the Cossack psychotype. Permanent travel is the way for him, where he hopes to eventually find something that can quench his emotional thirst. But where is he going? What is the final point of this journey? Mamai is a rich and respectable warrior; he seems to have everything that he needs. Does he go in search of new victories, valour, and glory!? It seems that this journey has no end; the Cossack feeds and reduces his inner tension on every new ‘real’ or ‘true’ event on this endless road. Yet every delay contradicts the very nature of the Cossack, causing unbearable boredom.
  - b) ‘Cossack and space’. Formally joining some of the affairs offered to him by the background characters (‘Bored With’), Mamai remains dissatisfied with the external problems he is involved in. Deep inside, the Cossack knows something greater, the above-mentioned ‘real thing’ for him.<sup>58</sup> However, someone or something delays him on his way. The composition does not answer the existential question of who or what holds Mamai. There are only indistinct hints: nobles, revolted peasants, girls — in fact, the global world. Mamai has nowhere to escape from the annoying environment, so he tries to ignore it, turning to no less trivial matters, which is very disappointing. This is the tragedy of Mamai: he has no answer to who is to blame for his problems and what to do about it.

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56 Goldberg Y.K. 2011, 648.

57 Heidegger M. 1995, 93–94.

58 What is this thing, so “real” and “true” for a Cossack? The authors of paintings never answer and left it to the viewer’s guess: this is a big mystery of the image of the Cossack.

3. Conceptuality of the image. Cossack Mamai paintings truly represent ‘the reflections of the Ukrainian people about their ethnic essence’, as Marchenko stated.<sup>59</sup> The image of Mamai embodies the collective Ukrainian mentality: there is an internal understanding of the right objectives and direction, but there is no clear plan, no understanding of how or what to do. The image of Mamai resembles a bored lion in captivity: he sees no way out of the cage — wherever he goes, whatever he does, the vicious circle closes again and again. And the worst part is that the Cossack has no idea how to fix it here and now. But mentally he has already mounted his horse and is ready to run away from the problem to the Sich of his dreams. The conclusions above are related primarily to the classical, canonical image of Mamai, elements of which, however, can be found even in the most innovative works. Their number is rapidly growing: the historical and cultural longevity and inextinguishable relevance of the image of Mamai persist in contemporary Ukrainian art, and the famous ‘Mamai’s boredom’ and postmodern irony are not only present in modern painting.<sup>60</sup> It seems that the explanation for the widespread popularity of Mamai should be sought in the Ukrainian mentality.

Despite the transition to a qualitatively new stage of state independence, Ukrainians have not fully grasped their path, groping for it in small steps, almost blindly, searching for fragments of national identity scattered over centuries and assembling them into a complex puzzle of modern independent Ukraine. In this respect, Mamai indeed reflects the historical consciousness of the Ukrainian people.

Latest discoveries place boredom at a pivotal position in modern society, revealing this unfairly trivialised emotion as nothing less than a reminder of the vital human quest for meaning in life<sup>61</sup> and a fundamental means of comprehending our relationship with the world.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps the modern Cossacks and, at the same time, all Ukrainians, should find their way through the creative potential of Cossack boredom?

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60 There are so many culture projects in Ukraine related to Cossack Mamai in last decades — in literature: poems of Gustav Vodichka (Густав Водичка), Yuri Andruhovich (Юрій Андрухович), poetical group “Бу-Ба-Бу” (“Бу-Ба-Бу”) etc.; in paintings: launching of the all-Ukrainian fests “Mamai Unite Ukraine” and “Mamai-fest”, collective exhibitions of the modern Ukrainian painters, sculptures, even monuments. See: Hodenko-Nakonechna O. 2010, 90–94; Moly N. 2017, 123–132.

61 van Tilburg W.A.P., Igou E.R. 2019, 11–35.

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## The Concept of Occidentalism by Dmytro Dontsov as a Methodological Basis for Analysing the Contemporary Russia-Ukraine War

**Summary:** The concept of Occidentalism developed by Dmytro Dontsov serves as a significant analytical tool for understanding the Russia-Ukraine war (2014–2025), viewed as a confrontation between two fundamentally different civilisational models. His methodology incorporates four key components that establish a unified foundation for analysing this conflict, not only as a geopolitical struggle but also as a deeply rooted historical and cultural dichotomy.

This article presents a comprehensive analysis of Dontsov's works on Occidentalism, covering cultural-historical aspects, a critical deconstruction of Russian narratives, a dialectical interpretation of existential confrontation, and an examination of global processes. This approach not only reveals deep civilisational contradictions but also provides an opportunity to assess the prospects for forming a stable international order in the region.

Dontsov viewed Ukraine's historical mission as a crucial factor in European security. His concept holds dual significance: first, it reaffirms Ukraine's historical role as a buffer between different civilisational models, and second, it stimulates integration processes, fostering new alliances and partnerships in response to external threats.

The article highlights that the prolonged Occidental confrontation with Russia remains a struggle for sovereignty and national identity. Modern international coalitions opposing Russian aggression, when analysed through the prism of Dontsov's Occidentalism, demonstrate both historical experience and the potential for establishing new alliances that ensure Ukraine's security and independence. Dontsov's Occidentalist concept continues to be relevant to understanding modern geopolitics.

**Keywords:** Occidentalism, Dmytro Dontsov, Russia-Ukraine War (2014–2025), existential nature, historical-geopolitical uniqueness

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## Introduction

Occidentalism is a concept that reflects the distinctive perception of the East toward the West as a socio-cultural system. In the works of Dontsov, one of the most influential Ukrainian publicists and thinkers of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Occidentalism serves as a central element of ideology. The scholar emphasises Ukraine's orientation toward Western civilisation as a bearer of high cultural and spiritual values.

Dontsov contrasts these values with the influence of the East, particularly Russian imperialism, considering them the main threat to national identity. The relevance of this topic lies in addressing Dontsov's vision of Ukraine's alignment with Western civilisation as a carrier of high cultural and spiritual ideals, providing a foundation for critically assessing modern geopolitical challenges, especially in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war.

The opposition of these values to Eastern influence establishes a methodological framework for analysing the mechanisms of societal mobilisation and legitimisation of power, which becomes particularly significant in the conditions of modern Russian aggression.

## Data Analysis and Results

The article aims to explore the concept of Occidentalism by Dontsov as a methodological foundation for analysing the contemporary Russia-Ukraine war, specifically to reveal the existential nature of Ukraine's confrontation as a Western civilisation against imperial Russia in a hybrid war.

Western scholars studying the concept of Occidentalism, including James Carrier, Avishai Margalit, and Ian Buruma, perceive this phenomenon as a conceptual antithesis to Orientalism. They interpret Occidentalism as the East's perception of the West, shaped through a socio-cultural lens in which the West is portrayed as a society driven by materialistic values and individualistic perceptions. In particular, researcher J. Carrier analyses how the self-image of the West determines its perception by representatives of other cultures, leading to the emergence of stereotypical images of Western civilisation.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, A. Margalit and I. Buruma emphasise that Occidentalism is a reaction to the dominant Western ideology and cultural expansion,

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1 Carrier J.G. 1992.

acquiring a negative connotation in the context of criticism of hostility and imperialistic approaches.<sup>2</sup> While these scholars do not focus directly on Dontsov's Occidentalism, their works contribute to shaping a general scholarly paradigm for understanding this phenomenon within the global cultural context.

Ukrainian scholars have examined Dontsov's concept of Occidentalism in the context of political, philosophical, and cultural paradigms of modernity. For instance, Oleh Bahan analyses the specificity of Dontsov's cultural Occidentalism, emphasising the distinction between his approach and modern interpretations of the term. Dontsov viewed Occidentalism as an organic component of Ukrainian mentality, shaped by historical trials and influenced by Western traditions, contrasting with despotic Eastern influences.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, Viktoriya Kolkutina focuses on the essayistic, nation-centred, and hermeneutic aspects of his works, highlighting the synthesis of nation-centric, voluntarist, and heroic ideas, which form the basis of Dontsov's Occidentalist views.<sup>4</sup>

In Serhiy Kvit's research, Dontsov's Occidentalism is presented as a key element in the ideology of 'will-driven nationalism', fostering the development of a new Ukrainian national identity through the implementation of Western ideas in political thought.<sup>5</sup> Oleksandr Zaitsev views Occidentalism as an integral part of Dontsov's ideological system, aimed at integrating Western cultural-spiritual values and resisting Eastern imperialism, which conceptually justifies strategies for building strong national consciousness.<sup>6</sup>

In his monograph *The Ukrainian National Idea in the Interwar Period: An Analysis of Selected Concepts*, Polish scholar Tomasz Stryjek places particular emphasis on the Occidentalist dimension of Dontsov's thought — that is, on his consistent orientation towards the Western civilisational model as an alternative to the Russian imperial sphere. The historian underscores that, for Dontsov, the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation is not merely a geopolitical conflict but a metaphysical clash between two worlds. Stryjek highlights that Dontsov's position was shaped by historical traumas, particularly the loss of Ukrainian statehood, and emerged as a response to the threat of Bolshevik expansion, which, in Dontsov's view, brought not only political subjugation but also spiritual degradation. In Stryjek's interpretation, Dontsov's concept of Occidentalism serves as a key to understanding not only his nationalist doctrine but also the broader civilisational choice facing Ukraine in the context of its confrontation with Russia.<sup>7</sup>

However, despite the significant attention given to Dontsov's Occidentalist theory, there remains ample space for further reconsideration of existing ideas and the development of new conceptual approaches.

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2 Buruma I., Margalit A. 2004.

3 Bagan O. 2015.

4 Kolkutina V. 2015.

5 Kvit S. 2013, 119–120.

6 Zaitsev O. 2013.

7 Zaitsev O. 2000.

The scientific novelty of the approach we present lies in the application of Dontsov's concept of Occidentalism as a methodological basis for analysing the contemporary Russia-Ukraine war. The integration of traditional Occidentalism ideas with an analysis of modern political conflicts opens new perspectives for understanding the transformations of global political processes and the interaction of cultural narratives with national self-determination strategies.

### Results of the Study

Occidentalism is a concept that reflects the distinctive perception of the East toward the West as a socio-cultural system, characterised by innovation, material values, individualism, secularisation, and democratic ideals. The term originates from the Latin words *occidens* (West) and *occidentalis* (Western), emphasising the geographical and ideological-cultural orientation of this approach.

Occidentalism, as a study of Western cultural identity images, emerged in the theoretical explorations of Ukrainian nationalists during the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–1920, when the first forms of Ukrainian statehood appeared. This approach, concerning both Dontsov's concept of state-building and the understanding of civilisational confrontations, does not function as a separate monographic position but rather permeates the entire spectrum of his journalistic legacy.

In particular, the fundamental theoretical principles of Dontsov's Occidentalism are found in his extensive journalism, including:

- *The History of the Development of the Ukrainian State Idea* (1917)
- *The International Position of Ukraine and Russia* (1918)
- *Ukrainian State Thought and Europe* (1918)
- *The Foundations of Our Politics* (1921)

He emphasised Ukraine's belonging to Western civilisation (the Occident), contrasting it with the Eastern (Asian) model, which he associated with Russian imperialism.

The concept of Occidentalism developed by Dmytro Dontsov is based on the combination of historical-philosophical analysis with a critical re-evaluation of Western (Occidental) ideological narratives. According to Dontsov, statehood and national self-awareness are shaped not by universal ideals of modernism but through a specific historical experience, spiritual traditions, and the cultural uniqueness of the Ukrainian people. This perspective provides grounds to view the current Russia-Ukraine war not merely as a territorial or military conflict but as an expression of a deep civilisational and ideological struggle.

The analysis of the 2014–2025 war from the standpoint of Dontsov's theory of Occidentalism allows the identification of the following key methodological components:

- The dichotomy between the West and the East and the imperial distribution of power
- Ukraine's civilisational alignment with Western Europe

- Strategic models of international alliances
- Ukraine's historical-geopolitical mission

Dmytro Dontsov's work *The History of the Development of the Ukrainian State Idea* represents the first systematic articulation of his Occidentalist orientation — that is, an ideological commitment to the Western civilisational model as a source of political culture, spiritual strength, and national self-assertion. In this work, the author consistently substantiates Ukraine's belonging to Western civilisation, contrasting it with Eastern, and particularly Russian, despotism. Dontsov emphasises that Ukraine was 'a typical example of a Western European country.'<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, the Ukrainian state idea should be regarded not merely as a political project but as a deeply rooted worldview grounded in willpower, individualism, spiritual autonomy, and the aspiration for independence — values that are fundamental to the Western political tradition. In this context, the author emphasises that the historical development of Ukrainian territories occurred under the significant influence of Western European institutions, cultural norms, and educational practices, particularly during the period when Ukraine was part of the First Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

One of the key arguments presented by Dontsov is the transfer of Western values through the political and educational integration of Ukrainian territories into the Western European sphere. During the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, a significant portion of Ukrainian lands — namely the regions of Kyiv, Volhynia, and Podillia — were part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, a state that operated on the principles of noble democracy, legal culture, and religious pluralism. In urban centres, Magdeburg Law was in effect, granting communities the right to self-governance, judicial independence, and the election of local authorities. These institutional practices shaped the population's understanding of rights, freedoms, and civic responsibility — foundational principles of Western political culture. In the field of education, a clear orientation toward Western standards can be observed: Latin was actively taught in Ukrainian schools and universities, as it was the principal language of science and philosophy throughout Europe. A particularly illustrative example is the higher educational institution in Kyiv, where Latin was a mandatory subject, reflecting deep integration into the European educational tradition. In contrast, Latin remained largely unfamiliar in Russia, indicating the limited influence of the Western educational model there.<sup>9</sup>

In a broader political context, Dontsov emphasises that the Ukrainian state idea has always been orientated toward the attainment of full independence, rather than autonomy or federation within imperial formations. He argues that only a sovereign

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<sup>8</sup> Dontsov D. 1991, 36.

<sup>9</sup> Dontsov D. 1991, 37.

state can ensure the development of Ukrainian culture, language, and national spirit. In this sense, the Ukrainian idea is not merely political but also civilisational — it envisions Ukraine's integration into the European space as an equal subject that shares common values of freedom, dignity, and the rule of law.

Thus, Occidentalism in Dontsov's thought is not merely a geopolitical inclination but a profound conviction that the Ukrainian nation can realise its full potential only within the framework of the Western civilisational paradigm.

The starting point of Dontsov's Occidentalist reflections in his article *The International Position and Ukraine* was the analysis of the directions of World War I through the lens of imperial confrontations, which defined the new political dynamics of the European continent. He regards Austria-Hungary as a state with a deep historical heritage but burdened by internal contradictions and national divisions, significantly limiting its ability to adapt to the new challenges of a multipolar world.

In contrast, Germany demonstrates determination and economic energy, directing its efforts towards exploring new directions with strategic potential, particularly through southern routes, marking a shift in imperial balance. Nevertheless, according to Dontsov, the West is characterised as a regular, adaptive, and economically dynamic entity in global politics.

At that time, Russia was perceived by him as a state whose foreign policy strategy is based on expansionist ambitions and the strategy of exploiting internal contradictions in neighbouring states. It is worth emphasising that, from Dontsov's point of view, it was precisely Russia's expansionist ambitions, which shaped its foreign policy strategy, that served as the direct catalyst for the outbreak of the First World War: 'The direct cause of the current war was given by Russia.'<sup>10</sup>

In 1914, Russia was a great power whose strength was recognised by all states, and its diplomacy, marked by swift adaptability, a precise set of tactics, and characteristic Asiatic cunning, systematically ensured a series of successes in international relations: 'Skillful, indiscriminate in its means, diplomacy, its purely Asiatic cunning and deceit secured success after success for this diplomacy. The method remained the same for hundreds of years: to destroy its neighbour with the help of another neighbour.'<sup>11</sup>

Russia's long-term strategy, which consisted of weakening its opponents through manipulation of interstate relations, had contributed for centuries to the shifting of the geopolitical balance in Europe. Indeed, as a result of the political processes of the sixteenth century — particularly following the conclusion of the Union of Lublin — the Ukrainian lands lost the characteristics of an independent subject of international politics, which led to their disappearance from the European political map as a distinct

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<sup>10</sup> Dontsov D. 2011, 92.

<sup>11</sup> Dontsov D. 2011, 92.

state entity.<sup>12</sup> Similar strategies included plans for the partitioning of Germany with France and the reorganisation of Austria through influence over the Balkan Slavs, as well as complex actions concerning other regions, demonstrating Russia's systematic orientation toward altering the traditional balance of power.

The concept of Dontsov, which considers Russia as an expansionist state, becomes particularly relevant in the context of the modern Russia-Ukraine war. In the current war, Russia's strategy manifests through the use of destabilisation methods, informational manipulation, and military actions aimed at weakening Ukraine and its allies. The aggressive foreign policy strategy of the Russian state apparatus contradicts the efforts of Western countries that are forming a coalition to support Ukraine. In this context, Ukraine is perceived not only as an object of conflict but also as a strategic buffer capable of maintaining equilibrium between two imperial models.

Such an approach allows us to view the conflict as an expression of deep historical and civilisational contradictions that have developed over centuries.

In his study, *The Foundations of Our Politics*, Dontsov distinguishes between two civilisations — the Latin-Germanic civilisation, which includes Western Slavs and Ukrainians, and the Moscow civilisation. The Western world is characterised by historical dynamism, the role of individuals, and the priority of law and logic, while the Moscow world stands out for its primitive social structure, collectivism, and excessive role of the state.

The thinker emphasises the differences in the structure of family and church institutions, highlighting the dependence of the Russian Church on political power, which led to the formation of a cult of formalism and absolutism in Russia.

The primitivism of the entire social ideal of the nation, the suppression of the individual, the underdevelopment of autonomous morality and legal consciousness, the boundless cult of the masses — this is the general idea that has turned the Muscovite people into a nation of slaves, a horde incapable of resisting any will imposed from above; a mass that, by its sheer numbers, poses a terrible danger to the Occidental world; a mass that opposes activity with chaos, human energy with the energy of nature, which it cannot even master, organization with brutality, the primacy of reason and will with obedience and instinct, the complexity of forms with Muscovite formlessness in everything, both in social and interpersonal life.<sup>13</sup>

According to Dontsov, this is precisely where the geopolitical antagonism between Russia and Europe lies, rooted in Russia's hostility towards European values. Russian society, amorphous by nature, requires absolutist governance, whereas the independent

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<sup>12</sup> Dontsov D. 1991, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Dontsov D. 1957, 62.

and self-sufficient European community is based on the principles of individualism, law, and self-organisation.

Ukraine, in turn, has always culturally belonged to Europe. Despite the negative influence of Russian ideology, European values remain at the core of the social, political, spiritual, and religious life of the Ukrainian people — values such as co-operation, an understanding of political freedom, the development of individuality, and legal consciousness.

Dontsov emphasises that these values are the key to national development and serve as a counterbalance to the aggressive influence from the East.<sup>14</sup>

Dontsov emphasised that national identity grows from historical memory, spiritual traditions, and cultural values, which cannot be universalised or reduced to the standards of Western liberalism.

In Dontsov's understanding, 'Ukraine appears as a people with its own (predominantly drawn from the West) culture, its own language, a strong sense of unity and distinctiveness...'<sup>15</sup>

Occidental differences between the Western world, to which Ukraine belongs, and the Eastern world, embodied by Russia, are examined by Dontsov in the context of Ukrainian history, where political, state-building, and ecclesiastical processes demonstrate a consistent orientation towards Western European ideals of freedom, self-governance, and cultural autonomy.

Thus, the Russification policy in Ukrainian territories, which began in 1734 in the Left Bank and intensified in the Right Bank from 1793, allows Ukraine to be considered an element of the Occidental space. At the core of Occidentalism, as well as of modern academic discussions about civilisational confrontations, lies the idea of preserving, developing, and protecting European political, legal, and cultural norms. Ukrainian political tradition of that period exhibited a clear break from the centralised despotism of the Muscovite monarchy, defending aristocratic-republican principles as the foundation of its own system. During the implementation of the Pereyaslav Agreement, Ukrainian political elites insisted on the recognition of the inviolability of regional rights — a demand that sharply contrasted with the Muscovite view of relations between the sovereign and his subjects. Thus, the Ukrainian experience demonstrates a tendency towards Occidental principles of collective will and legal autonomy.

A distinctive feature of Ukrainian statehood was the formation of institutions that reflected a certain synthesis of European political tradition and local historical conditions. Compared to the model of absolutism characteristic of Moscow, Ukrainian political structures exhibited elements of democratic choice and independence in decision-making. The Hetmanate represented yet another unique variant of power

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<sup>14</sup> Dontsov D. 1957, 84.

<sup>15</sup> Dontsov D. 2011b, 137.

organisation: the elected figure of the Hetman, having gained societal support, was not subject to formal institutional constraints, allowing them to act based on personal authority and a patriotic mission.

The church structure also became an arena for the implementation of Occidental ideals. Ukrainian society, shaped under the influence of Western European cultural traditions, rejected subordination to the central authority of Moscow patriarchs, symbolising a protest against Caesaropapist models of spiritual governance. Both the Union and the Orthodox tradition in Ukraine experienced influences from both Eastern and Western elements, indicating the multidimensional process of civilisational formation.

The historical analysis of Ukraine's social organisation, conducted by Dontsov through the lens of Occidentalist theory, confirms the orientation of Ukrainian society towards Western European principles. Ukrainian political, administrative, and cultural institutions created a space dominated by pluralism, legal self-determination, and free will — characteristic of the Western scheme, in contrast to the centralised, vertically organised autocracy inherent in Russia's Eastern system.

In Ukrainian lands, unlike the Russian model of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, various political estates emerged, not only participating in public life but also actively constructing their class interests. The landowning nobility, senior leadership (the foundation of the future 'Little Russian aristocracy'), peasants, and the urban population of free cities are examples of such decentralised power. They represent the Occidental paradigm, a society where each social group is characterised by the ability to defend its rights and ideals, which contrasts with the Russian tradition, dominated by the image of 'Tsar's slaves' without clear estate organisation and disregard for class dignity.

Urban formations in Ukraine functioned as living organisms, developing in accordance with the principles of Magdeburg law. Such a city, with a developed administrative, cultural, and economic foundation, is a clear expression of Occidental models of civilisational development. In contrast, Russian cities, which functioned solely as defensive-administrative and military centres, reflect primitiveness, characteristic of the Eastern governance model, where the spatial manifestation of public self-government was limited.

As Dontsov notes, the education system and cultural development in Ukraine evolved under the direct influence of Western European civilisation. Until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Ukrainian schools for clerics and the Kyiv Academy, where Latin and Greek were taught, contributed to the growth of erudition among the local clergy and the formation of national cultural consciousness. Against this backdrop, the Muscovite state, which viewed Western cultural elements as foreign, imposed administrative and cultural restrictions, significantly hindering the free development of art and science.

The psychology of citizenship, according to Dontsov, also reflects the Occidental character of Ukrainian society. Activity, expressed in the conscious defence of rights and participation in political life, was evident in numerous uprisings. This activity

is a classic example of the Occidental spirit of independence and resistance to autocratic methods of governance, which dominated Russian tradition, where inertia and a tendency toward submission to autocracy shaped the perception of state structure.

Thus, Ukraine's confrontation with Russia takes on the characteristics of an existential struggle between universal, often imposed Russian concepts and the authentic, historically formed essence of Ukrainian existence. The events of 2014–2025 became the culmination of years of accumulated historical, cultural, and political contradictions caused by the dichotomy between the West and the East.

Dontsov's words about the existential confrontation with Russia — 'on the social, familial, political, religious, and spiritual-cultural fields'<sup>16</sup> — reinforce the idea that this struggle operates at all levels of societal life. Today, in the Russia-Ukraine war, this has been realised through Russia's hybrid warfare, which employs non-military combined influence methods, covering political, social, informational, cultural, and psychological spheres, alongside traditional military operations. Dontsov foresaw this approach, highlighting in his comparison of Ukrainian and Russian mentalities that Russia seeks to influence all aspects of public life — from family values to religious beliefs and cultural traditions. Thus, the Russia-Ukraine war (2014–2025) acquires a multidimensional character, significantly complicating Ukraine's defence.

According to Dontsov's Occidentalist theory, Ukraine's political position in 1918 served as a key element in countering Russia's revanchist ambitions through the formation of dynamic international coalitions.

In Dontsov's concept, Germany during this period acted as a guarantor of stability for Ukraine, temporarily countering Moscow's expansionist aspirations. However, this cooperation was conditional and temporary: if the geopolitical landscape changed and Russia, pushed out of the European space, began seeking new strategic footholds, the formation of alternative alliances would be possible, including those based on shared antagonism towards Great Britain.

An analysis of alternative scenarios suggests that Ukraine's orientation towards the Western vector could lead to its integration into existing blocs of Central Powers with Turkey, forming a protective barrier against potential German expansion towards Asia Minor, Persia, and India. Additionally, potential cooperation with Great Britain would allow Ukraine to act as a restraining factor against Russia's efforts to expand its influence in the Black and Mediterranean Seas, as well as in India, given that Britain has traditionally recognised the strategic role of buffer states.

This approach allows Dontsov to position the Ukrainian question at the centre of geopolitical reconfiguration, viewing it not merely as a regional issue but as a key element in global shifts in the balance of power. He emphasises that, in 1918, Ukraine's territory served as a strategic space where the interests of major conflicting forces

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16 Dontsov D. 1957, 29.

intersected. Moreover, Dontsov defines Ukraine not as a peripheral region but as a central arena, where contradictory imperial ambitions clash and new geopolitical power distributions emerge.<sup>17</sup>

The signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918 created a new political situation in which Ukraine effectively became an independent state, protected by the German army from the aggressive actions of its former metropolis. Based on this political reality, Dontsov formulated two possible paths for Ukraine's future: one leading to full state sovereignty and the other entailing a closer political or economic connection with Russia.

A crucial element of Dontsov's Occidental concept is his criticism of the idea of Ukraine's federation with Russia. He emphasises that, considering Russia's ethnographic conditions and traditionally defined economic priorities, the Russian state is predominantly orientated toward a south-eastern vector, which clearly contradicts the integration processes natural to Ukraine's territory.

Dontsov compared the possibilities of political unity in the manner of a federation between Austria-Hungary and Germany, pointing out that such unity is based on shared economic-geographical conditions, which do not exist in the case of Ukraine and Russia. He argued that the distinct river system of the Dnipro serves as a defining factor, proving the authenticity of Ukraine's economic-geographical conditions, which prevent its integration into a structure built on the principles of Russian imperial expansionism.

Dontsov highlights the danger of Ukraine becoming a tool of Moscow's policy. According to Dontsov, accepting such a role would strengthen Moscow's position against Western civilisation. Meanwhile, Kyiv's refusal to act as Moscow's vanguard increases the Western world's ability to resist Russian influence.

Dontsov defines the main principles of Ukrainian policy as complete separation from Russia and the preservation of national independence, which he views as a necessary condition for fulfilling Ukraine's historical mission. He emphasises the importance of adapting Ukraine's social, political, and cultural life to European standards, ensuring the nation's resilience against external threats.

At the same time, Dontsov warns that control over Ukraine's territory has always been regarded by Russia as a key factor in manifesting its expansionist ambitions. However:

Russia will not be able to keep Ukraine in its hands. One state after another has fought Moscow for possession of this land, realising that such possession is the foundation of Russia's colossal preponderance, dangerous to the existence of its neighbours. First, it was Poland, then Turkey, later Sweden, and now Austria and Germany.

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17 Dontsov D. 2011a, 91–92.

Blood was shed over Ukraine for generations, like spring waters! And he who thinks it would be different now if Ukraine were once again taken by Russia is mistaken.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, Dontsov viewed the Ukrainian question not merely as a regional issue but as part of the global geopolitical balance. This is confirmed by modern international support for Ukraine, which places it at the centre of Europe's security architecture.

According to the Occidentalism concept, Ukraine must continue its integration into the European space and counteract Russian influence through the consolidation of state and military resources. In current conditions, this approach is reflected in the strategy of Western countries, which are actively uniting to support Ukraine against Russian imperialism. The 2014–2025 war has become an arena for the realisation of multilateral alliances, where defensive cooperation and the shared use of informational, economic, and military resources strengthen Ukraine's position on the international stage, confirming the theoretical foundations of strategic cooperation outlined by Dontsov.

The modern security paradigm requires the active formation of strategic alliances and partnerships. For Ukraine, this means not only integration into already existing Western structures (such as the European Union and NATO) but also creating its own partnership model, which accounts for all aspects of modern threats — from traditional military challenges to informational and cyber warfare.

Such a strategic model allows Ukraine to combine internal mobilisation with external diplomacy, establishing a reliable front against aggressive imperialist ambitions and ensuring Ukraine's active role in maintaining regional stability.

In his study, *Ukrainian State Thought and Europe*, Dontsov focuses on another component of his Occidentalism concept — the definition of Ukraine's historical mission as a factor in European equilibrium.<sup>19</sup> Relying on historical and political studies of his time, Dontsov argues that concepts of state thought directed against the imperialist ambitions of European centres were justified and legitimised by the idea of political balance. Each such concept contained not only foreign policy objectives but also a defined historical mission, aimed at preserving the balance of power on the international stage. Within this framework, a particular example is the role of certain states as protective barriers. Belgium, on one hand, was understood as a strategic barrier for Germany against French influence, while the Habsburg monarchy, on the other, served as the first line of defence for Western Europe against Ottoman expansion. This approach demonstrates how state ideology and political rhetoric served as tools for justifying foreign policy strategies. A similar conceptual model, according to Dontsov, can be observed in the Ukrainian question. Ukraine's historical

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<sup>18</sup> Dontsov D. 2011a, 99.

<sup>19</sup> Dontsov D. 2011b, 105.

mission was shaped by the foundations of European equilibrium, which was seen as a guarantee of preserving the West and the entire Occidental culture in the face of the threat of Pan-Muscovism.

Dontsov emphasises that Ukraine has played a key role in curbing the expansion of Russian absolutism towards the West, which has had far-reaching consequences for European civilisation. The fifty-year struggle of Ukraine (1654–1711) delayed the dominance of Russian absolutism in regions such as Central and Eastern Europe for centuries. Similarly, the religious conflict between the Orthodox Kyiv Metropolis and the Moscow Patriarchate in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries limited the ideological influence of the Moscow Church on the western territories, thereby safeguarding the intellectual space of Europe. According to Dontsov, the preservation of the autonomy of the Kyiv Metropolis represents a factor of civilisational resistance.

According to Dontsov, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ukraine once again found itself at the centre of a struggle between two principles — the European one, based on the right of nations to self-determination, and the Russian one, which embodies the principle of ochlocracy and absolutism.

Dontsov highlights Ukraine's historical mission as Europe's bastion against Russian expansion, regardless of whether that expansion manifested politically, socially, culturally, or religiously. Ukraine's victory in this struggle is decisive for ensuring European superiority: 'Victory in defending our national independence is inseparable for us from Europe's victory over Russia.'<sup>20</sup>

In the historical context of Russia's continuous geostrategic activity, aimed at expanding its influence and establishing political hegemony in Europe, the question of Ukrainian statehood has gained particular relevance. Historically a part of the Russian Empire, Ukraine, with its high economic and territorial significance, has functioned as a boundary between Russia, the Black Sea, and the Western world. Thus, the Ukrainian state idea, perceived as a protective barrier against Russian expansion, maintains its importance as a key postulate of political balance in Europe.

## Conclusions

The concept of Occidentalism developed by Dontsov serves as an important analytical tool for examining modern events, allowing the Russia-Ukraine war (2014–2025) to be understood as a confrontation between two fundamentally different civilisational models. In their entirety, the four components of Dontsov's Occidentalism form a unified methodological basis for analysing the 2014–2025 war, not only as a geopolitical struggle but also as a deeply rooted historical and cultural dichotomy.

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20 Dontsov D. 1957, 89.

Dontsov's Occidentalism concept offers a comprehensive analysis, integrating cultural-historical aspects, a critical deconstruction of Russian narratives, a dialectical examination of existential confrontation, and an understanding of contemporary global processes.

At the same time, the methodological foundation of Occidentalism not only reveals deep civilisational contradictions but also provides a framework for assessing the prospects for establishing a secure and stable international order in the region. According to Dontsov, Ukraine's historical mission transforms its territorial uniqueness into a distinct factor in Europe's security balance. This approach has a dual significance:

- It confirms the historical legitimacy of Ukraine's position as a buffer state between different civilisational models.
- It stimulates integration processes, contributing to the formation of new alliances and partnerships in response to external threats.

As before, the Occidental confrontation with Russia, which continues today, is a continuation of the struggle for sovereignty and the protection of national identity.

Modern international coalitions opposing Russia, viewed through the lens of Occidentalism theory, demonstrate historical experience and the potential for establishing new international alliances that ensure Ukraine's security and sovereignty.

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## Those Who Must Not Be Remembered: The Romanian Germanophiles and Their Historiographical Posterity

**Summary:** In the aftermath of the Great War, following the victory of the Entente and the fulfilment of the national ideal, the former internal enemy — represented by all those who had sided with the Central Powers — was gradually erased from the Romanian public space and social memory, after initially serving as the scapegoat for almost all the misfortunes and shortcomings of those difficult years. Blamed and demonised for their opinions expressed before and after Romania's entry into the war, the intellectuals, politicians, journalists, and business owners generally known as 'Germanophiles' had to suffer the consequences for having chosen the wrong side in the war. Seen and despised as traitors to national interests, these Germanophiles were condemned by both public opinion and in historical writing. This text seeks to offer an overview of how Romanian historiography is understood to have dealt with this delicate issue, which emerged in the years of the Great War and had long-lasting effects.

**Keywords:** First World War, Romanian Kingdom, Germanophiles, Romanian historiography, public memory, posterity

The historiographical posterity of the Romanian Germanophiles is a very complex and delicate issue, with profound implications for the correct understanding of the general evolution of Romania during the years of the Great War and immediately after. For almost a century, mainly because of various ideological and political circumstances, it was practically impossible to approach it with the necessary objectivity and thoroughness. Following the realisation of the national ideal in 1918, the discourse

promoted by the victors in the public space was dominated by hatred and a desire for revenge against those who had betrayed Romanian national interests or collaborated with the occupiers. This rupture, which had emerged in Romanian society during the Great War, could only be healed through the exemplary punishment that these traitors — these friends of the Germans — had to suffer. Their voices should no longer have been heard; the reasons that had led them to act against the majority of the people were wrong and, as such, reprehensible in the eyes of their fellow countrymen and of history.

In certain moments, the desire for vengeance and the condemnation of those who had sided with the Central Powers resembled a veritable public and media lynching. The punishment of the traitors should have been drastic, particularly harsh, and capable of alleviating, at least partially, the suffering endured by the Romanians who remained under occupation, as well as the hardships of those who had been in Moldavia during the refuge. However, to the disappointment of some, the punitive action was incomplete, focusing only on those who had engaged in the Germanophile propaganda, particularly in the press, as illustrated by the notorious trial of journalists in 1919. Absent from the trial were those whom many would have preferred to see accused: the politicians. This had rather the opposite effect to that which the authorities had hoped for, with most of the press rallying to the defence of the accused.

Nevertheless, beyond the punishments imposed on some of the charged journalists, and beyond the arrests or public blaming of all Germanophiles, posterity would prove to be much harsher and more unfair in providing a correct and impartial analysis of their involvement in the troubled years of the Great War. Immediately after the end of the world conflict, Romanian society was deeply divided over the responsibilities for the war and to whom they were attributed.<sup>1</sup> Somewhat paradoxically, substantiating and presenting the victory, in which few still believed in the first months of 1918, proved very difficult.<sup>2</sup> Not only the gains, but also the terrible losses and destruction that the country had suffered needed to be justified. Explanations deemed acceptable to public opinion for leading the war were also required, especially in its first part, when two-thirds of the Romanian Kingdom had been occupied by the enemy. Credible arguments were needed to account for the manner in which a significant part of the country had been abandoned, for the poor equipping of the army in 1916, and for the inadequate and, at times, duplicitous handling of the national issue as a whole.

Within the tense context following the reinstatement of the Romanian administration in the occupied territories, the question of responsibilities proved to be a very difficult one, all the more so as, beyond the wartime rhetoric used by the Germanophiles

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1 Kostaki L. 2020, 39.

2 Topor C.-L. 2020a, 23–24.

to blame the authorities who had taken refuge in Moldavia, there were real grievances about the way in which a part of the political and administrative elite had conducted themselves towards those they had abandoned under enemy occupation:

Those politically employed bureaucrats, sinecure-holders, false statesmen, whose courage had not sufficiently impelled them to face the enemy in the country, subsequently excelled in glorifying their «contribution» to the history that was happening before their eyes. At the end of the war, after a long lull, their voice miraculously revived. Many had taken their reins of power in the new Romania. They labelled themselves as «patriots» who had sacrificed themselves for the accomplishment of the great national ideal and claimed honours. Immediately after the end of the conflagration, these officials became some of the most vehement accusers. They were demanding an explanation for the decisions and behaviour of those who remained in the occupied territory, and were finding irregularities in the financial records. The semantics of the term «traitor» took on new nuances.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, the post-war public space was dominated by the discourse of the victors. There was no place for the others who, by their own choice, had found themselves on the wrong side of history. They were deemed guilty not only for remaining in the enemy-occupied territory but also for not renouncing their opinions and convictions, even as the nation endured great suffering. Therefore, they could only be traitors and country sell-outs, enemies of the national ideal, even if, in their own way, they were still patriots and still Romanians — perhaps even more devoted Romanians than many of their former opponents. Considering these aspects, the historian Lucian Boia concluded that, after the war, ‘traitors do not deserve to be mentioned by name either’,<sup>4</sup> a remark which also inspired the title of this paper.

With few and insignificant exceptions, the issue as such was fully reflected in the Romanian historical writing for almost a century, as previously mentioned. The Germanophiles were not to be remembered, only discredited and blamed for choosing the wrong side. Since the unfolding of the war had resulted in Romania emerging victorious and realising the unexpected fulfilment of the national ideal, Romania’s entry into the war in August 1916 could only be justified. The triumph of the Greater Romania project admitted no perspective other than that of the victors.

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3 ‘Acei birocrați angajați politic, abonați la sinecure, falși bărbați de stat, pe care curajul nu îi îndemna să dea piept în țară cu dușmanul, s-au întrecut ulterior în glorificarea «contribuției» la istoria petrecută sub ochii lor. La sfârșitul războiului, după o lungă acalmie, vocea lor a renăscut miraculos. Mulți preluaseră frâiele puterii în noua Românie. Și-au lipit eticheta de «patrioți» care se jertfiseră pentru înfăptuirea marelui ideal național și pretindeau onoruri. Acei funcționari au devenit, imediat după încheierea conflagrației, printre cei mai vehemenți acuzatori. Cereau socoteală pentru deciziile și comportamentul celor rămași în teritoriul ocupat, găseau nereguli în registrele financiare. Semantica termenului de «trădător» prindea alte tușe’. Kostaki L. 2020, 41.

4 Boia L. 2017, 14. Romanian original: “Trădătorii nu merită să le fie pomenit nici numele”.

Several years after the war, Constantin Kirişescu published the first and probably the best-known historical synthesis in Romania regarding the Great War to the present day.<sup>5</sup> Although containing a great deal of information, the book is in line with the general resentments towards the Germanophiles. Their leaders (C-tin Stere, Alexandru Marghiloman, Petre P. Carp, Virgil Arion and others) were treated without restraint and condemned for adhering to their Germanophile beliefs or for being bought with German funds. Moreover, trying to minimise the importance of the Germanophile trend, Kirişescu argued that ‘apart from the opportunists, whose most characteristic representative was the head of the Conservative Party, Alexandru Marghiloman, the Germanophile movement counted only a few sincere and even fanatical supporters’.<sup>6</sup>

In the aftermath of the Second World War, during the 1950s, under communist rule, the Romanian historiography was confronted with the anti-national approaches of the time, which condemned the First World War as a whole because of its imperialist character and its unfairness to participants on both sides. The supporters of the Central Powers and of the Entente were equally blamed, with communist historians of the period arguing that the only correct solution would have been the transformation of the imperialist war into a war against the bourgeoisie.<sup>7</sup>

Following this Stalinist and anti-Romanian phase came the so-called *national communist* period, and although it kept the idea of imperialist war, it emphasised the just and legitimate nature of Romania’s participation in the conflict. Nevertheless, in the works of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the Germanophile movement continued to be ignored, with only some of its leaders being mentioned without a proper analysis or presentation of their choices. Not even the authors of monographs dedicated to certain cultural personalities, with an obvious Germanophile background, provided a clear explanation of their opinions and the reasons that made them determined to maintain their convictions.<sup>8</sup>

After the revolutionary events in December 1989, Romanian historiography was freed from all official ideological constraints, and Romanian historians could finally elaborate and publish their works without fear of censorship. Nevertheless, at least in the 1990s and in the early 2000s, when dealing with the Great War, the involvement of Romania in the conflict, and the three Unions of 1918,<sup>9</sup> many scholars preferred

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5 Kirişescu C. 1989, the book had two editions during the interwar period (first edition, two volumes, 1922–1924; second edition, three volumes, 1925–1927) and a third edition in communist Romania in 1989 (two volumes).

6 Kirişescu C. 1989, 127.

7 Boia L. 2017, 15.

8 Zub Al. 1974; Bărcă G., Băcescu M. 1969; Vatamaniuc D. 1968.

9 27 March/ 9 April 1918 – the Union of Bessarabia with the Romanian Kingdom; 15/28 November 1918 – the Union of Bucovina with the Romanian Kingdom; 18 November/ 1 December 1918 – the Union of Transylvania with the Romanian Kingdom.

to maintain the general lines of the previous period, without paying proper attention to the need for an impartial reassessment of documents and historical facts.<sup>10</sup> This situation is easily understandable if we consider that quite a number of them were also active before 1990, during the communist regime. Not even the official text, represented by the treatise on the history of the Romanians, published under the auspices of the Romanian Academy in 2003, opened the way for a much-needed re-evaluation.<sup>11</sup>

Certain changes were noticeable in the works of an important historian like Florin Constantiniu during the 1990s.<sup>12</sup> However, it was not until 2009 that things really started to change in this regard. In that year, a book written by Lucian Boia was published, which was of direct relevance to the subject. Lucian Boia, a former professor at the University of Bucharest and arguably one of the most controversial contemporary Romanian historians, played a decisive role in the 'official' opening of the Germanophile dossier within Romanian historiography today. He did that by writing and publishing a very useful book, entitled *The Germanophiles: The Romanian Intellectual Elite in the Years of the First World War*. His analysis clearly proves that the Germanophile segment of Romanian society, although not very numerous, was not actually insignificant, as many other historians previously stated. The book provides very interesting insight into the individuals whose choices were directed towards the Central Powers. Lucian Boia also underlines that the red thread which connects all the dots for all Romanian Germanophiles, whether they were supporters of Germany or Austria-Hungary, and whether their feelings or convictions were genuine or not, was the fear of Russia, 'the enemy ally'<sup>13</sup> which constantly provoked anxiety and worry among Romanians, especially after the Bessarabian episode in 1878.

In his book, Boia expressed the belief that 'from young historians one can finally expect a break away from the well-trodden paths of interpretations of the First World War'.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, after this breaking point represented by the appearance of his book, the subject started to attract and to reveal its importance for those interested in correctly understanding Romania's involvement in the war and the political and military calculations of that time.

There is quite a growing number of historians and researchers who have begun to contribute to a better understanding of the subject concerning the Germanophiles, from various points of view. We can thus mention several works regarding the press history and the 1919 trial of Romanian journalists who collaborated with

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10 Atanasiu V. 1997; Răcilă E. 2005.

11 Iordache A. 2003, 395–461.

12 Constantiniu F. 1997.

13 Monkevitz N.A., Vinogradski A.N. 2019. The book valorises the memoirs of the Russian generals Monkevitz and Vinogradski, published in French after the end of the Great War, in 1919 and 1926.

14 Boia L. 2017, 31.

the German occupation authorities,<sup>15</sup> as well as political, social, administrative, institutional, and diplomatic history,<sup>16</sup> propaganda, mentalities, and mutual perceptions of the enemies.<sup>17</sup> And let us not forget the increasingly generous efforts dedicated to the (re)publishing of the correspondence, memoirs, and impressions of various military personnel and civilians from both sides who were involved in the Great War and had to deal with its harsh realities.<sup>18</sup>

In our opinion, considering all the aspects mentioned so far, a name that should be mentioned immediately after Lucian Boia is Claudiu-Lucian Topor, a historian and professor at the Faculty of History of 'Alexandru Ioan Cuza' University of Iași. His contributions and analyses were first directed towards the Balkan Wars in 1912–1913 and international relations at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>. Within the last decade and a half, his main focus has shifted towards military history, and during his research he began to acknowledge the importance of the Germanophile circles in Romania before and during the First World War. His latest books and articles benefit from thorough research of various archival collections in Romania and Germany, bringing to the forefront previously unknown documents and offering many interpretations that can be regarded as challenging for the official line of Romanian historiography.<sup>19</sup> After all, one should understand that there is a clear need to contest this official discourse in order to take a step further and try to reveal the hidden and avoided realities of a matter such as the one concerning the Romanian Germanophiles:

Historical justice is very relative and depends less on the past than on the point of view of the present. At the end of the First World War, justice was proclaimed by those who had spoken out in favour of action against the Central Powers; the opponents of this solution were regarded as misguided, if not traitors.<sup>20</sup>

In conclusion, one should say that this brief presentation on the posterity of the Romanian Germanophiles is intended to be an invitation to reflect upon the instrumentalisation of historical writing and the necessity of correctly analysing and understanding

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15 Szabó L.V. 2018; Contoman O.A. 2017, 129–140; Ghenghea M.-C. 2022, 61–78; Ghenghea M.-C. 2024, 455–467; Ghenghea M.-C. 2025, 549–558; Bolovan I. 2025.

16 Dinu R. 2011, 63–188; Dinu R. 2016, 5–28; Popescu C. 2014; Iorga F.-L. 2015; Sora A.F. 2017, 63–87; Buruiană O. 2022, 515–542.

17 Negustor G. 2012, 59–70; Otu P., Georgescu M. 2011; Pintilie S. 2016, 79–86; Buruiană O. 2022; Ionescu A.-S. 2016–2017, 95–130; Popa B., Tudorancea R. (eds), 2018; Mihalache C., Roman N. (eds), 2020; Ghenghea M.-C. 2023a, 327–348; Ghenghea M.-C. 2023b, 41–56.

18 Only a few examples here: Polizu-Micșunești N. 2017; Velburg G. 2018; Kostaki L. 2020; Ionescu C. 2021.

19 Topor C.-L. 2010, 97–118; Topor C.-L. 2011, 70–79; Topor C.-L. 2012, 145–154; Topor C.-L. 2017a, 59–67; Topor C.-L. 2017b; Topor C.-L. 2020a; Topor C.-L. 2020b, 83–100; Topor C.-L. 2021, 23–34; Topor C.-L. 2022, 207–218; Topor C.-L. 2003, 119–134.

20 Boia L. 2017, 409–410.

the facts within their specific historical context. After all, more than 100 years later, the Germanophiles fully deserve a well-balanced and accurate historiographical approach, which would allow historians to properly establish the role they played in the troubled history of Romania during the Great War. Various nuances and aspects are still waiting to be researched and properly understood within the complicated context of those difficult years. The neutrality (1914–1916) and the occupation of almost two-thirds of the Old Romanian Kingdom still provide numerous possibilities for analysis and interpretation, greatly enhanced when referring to this interesting topic of the Romanian Germanophiles.

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## The Influence of France on the Economic Development of the Second Polish Republic in the First Years after Regaining Independence: An Outline of the Problem

**Summary:** This text aims to highlight the issue of building Polish-French economic relations in the first years after Poland regained independence. For the Polish state at that time, a key concern was securing French support in the political, military, and economic spheres. For victorious France, however, economic matters were at least as important as political issues, and perhaps even more significant in relations with Poland. This was evident when the Republic of Poland was contesting the eastern territories or asserting its rights in Silesia. Primarily, the French side — particularly entrepreneurs with influence over politicians — was interested in investing capital, which consequently translated into pressure during negotiations with the Polish government. Poland did not acquiesce to all demands; nevertheless, it was keen to finalise economic agreements and conclude a trade treaty, the signing of which was made conditional upon the implementation of the political accord and the secret military convention of 1921. Another important aspect of economic relations was the exchange of goods and the principles governing such exchanges. Commercial transactions were based chiefly on preferential customs concessions granted to the French side. The negotiations culminated in the signing of the trade treaty in 1922, which stipulated numerous benefits and privileges for the French state.

**Keywords:** Second Polish Republic, Third French Republic, economy, trade, exchange, politics

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### Introduction

The regaining of independence by Poland was a pivotal moment in the process of state reconstruction. The consolidation of territories following the partitions was, at that time, a key issue. The Second Republic of Poland also faced the task of securing

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external financial resources, as well as political support. It should be added that the only realistic ally capable of supporting Poland was France. For the French state, the Second Republic represented a counterbalance to Bolshevism, creating the so-called *cordon sanitaire* within the security system. The French had lost their former ally, Tsarist Russia, in which they had invested substantial financial resources. Although France emerged victorious from the war, it suffered enormous human and economic losses.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, strengthening an independent Poland was expected to yield tangible political and economic benefits.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, as Jerzy Łazor notes, the authorities in Warsaw had to contend with five different commercial law systems and currencies (including in Eastern Galicia).<sup>3</sup> The Polish government required foreign capital for the reconstruction and development of the country. However, investing in Poland posed a challenge for foreign states, who regarded Poland as a ‘seasonal’, primarily due to its still unsettled borders.<sup>4</sup>

This text aims to highlight the issues concerning the development of economic relations between Poland and France. The subject matter addressed in this article pertains to the beginnings of such relations through a series of negotiations not only on economic matters but also on political and military ones. These issues were interconnected, particularly where French capital was involved, as it was also a subject of political negotiation. Economic relations between the two sides comprised multiple components, and ongoing scholarly research will in the future make it possible to gain a comprehensive understanding of Polish-French economic relations.

### **The Influence of France on the Economic Development of the Second Polish Republic**

The French side became interested in the Polish economy in the spring of 1919, within the framework of the Inter-Allied Commission for the Investigation of Polish Affairs. Its task was to develop analyses concerning the condition and economic potential of the Polish state. The presence of the mission’s representatives was directly linked to the Polish-Ukrainian conflict, as well as the ongoing Polish-Bolshevik War. In March 1919, the economic attaché André Vicaire presented a report on the state of the Polish economy during wartime. The aim was to assess opportunities for potential investment by French companies so that any market penetration undertaken would be effective.

To this end, at the initiative of the mission, Prime Minister Ignacy Paderewski was approached to remove all obstacles faced by French companies still operating under

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1 Ambrochowicz-Gajownik A. 2024, 129–143.

2 Ambrochowicz-Gajownik A. 2023, 227–248.

3 From this place, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Jerzy Łazor from the SHG in Warsaw for providing me with a copy of the book. Łazor J. 2024, 3.

4 Ambrochowicz-Gajownik A. 2019.

conditions inherited from the partitioning powers on Polish territory.<sup>5</sup> There is no doubt that the Polish government required the support of the French Third Republic, not only in terms of military assistance — which entailed France granting loans for the purchase of armaments, uniforms, and other equipment — but also in economic matters. It is worth noting that from April 1919, the French Military Mission in Poland, headed by General Paul Henrys, commenced its activities.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, credit agreements were concluded for the purchase of war materials from French reserves, totalling 300 million French francs, demonstrating the tangible and practical nature of French assistance. It should, however, be borne in mind that Poland's assumption of this obligation was necessary to continue fighting on the front and was made at the cost of acquiescing to French demands. The activities of the French Military Mission in Poland were intended not only to support the Polish army but also to strengthen French influence, with significant attention to economic matters.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, as early as June 1919, a French industrialist and commander of a reserve artillery squadron arrived in Poland with the mission of assessing the situation on the agricultural machinery market. He was also tasked with investigating flax production for the French linen industry and flaxseed for farmers. Additionally, the industrialist was instructed to examine the beekeeping market.<sup>8</sup>

France, being keenly interested in the course of the Polish-Ukrainian conflict, closely monitored the situation in Eastern Galicia due to its oil deposits. Beyond the state authorities, the stabilisation of the region also attracted the attention of a capital group centred around the International Committee based in London, which sought to protect English, French, and Belgian oil interests in Galicia.<sup>9</sup> Its French shareholders, led by Senators Henri Berenger and Léon Mougeot, who controlled capital amounting to approximately 300 million French francs, lobbied for government support of Polish claims to Eastern Galicia.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, in France there prevailed a strong conviction of the need to resolve the conflict as quickly as possible and to establish a demarcation line.<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that French interest in Ukrainian lands had already emerged by 1917, prompted by concerns over potential control of the area by the Central Powers, followed by the actual occupation by German forces, and in 1918 due to the interest of Bolshevik Russia. Unfortunately, the military intervention undertaken in Ukraine failed, leading to France's withdrawal from pursuing a direct policy in the region. At that point, Paris shifted its approach from active engagement

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5 Kukułka J. 1970, 48.

6 Mróz M. 2019, 82–111; see: Schramm T. 1987.

7 Wandycz P. 2017, 3–15.

8 AAN MSZ. *Ministère*, 10–11.

9 Ambrochowicz-Gajownik A. 2023, 99–100.

10 Kukułka J. 1970, 51; Pisuliński J. 2013, 146.

11 Mrocza L. 1998, 150.

to supporting countries in open conflict with Bolshevik Russia.<sup>12</sup> However, it should be emphasised that in this matter, France made decisions with consideration of the position of Great Britain, which viewed its military actions with disfavour. Moreover, both states competed for the acquisition of the largest possible shares in the Galician oil industry. This dispute was resolved favourably for France with the initialling of an oil agreement with Great Britain on 21 December 1919.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the Polish state conducted economic negotiations with Symon Petliura, the Ataman and leader of the Ukrainian People's Republic. Poland's interest was focused on the exchange of Ukrainian grain and sugar for oil and salt.<sup>14</sup> These negotiations coincided with French interest in the economic exploitation of Ukraine. Through Poland as its agent, France sought to obtain specific economic concessions in the region.<sup>15</sup> Evidence of this is found in the exchange of views between the French envoy in Warsaw, Hector de Panafieu, and the Deputy Minister of Military Affairs, General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, concerning Polish victories in Ukraine. Panafieu elaborated on the possibilities of cooperation in territories occupied by Polish forces, indicating that it was in both Polish and French interests for 'Poland to develop an economic protectorate over Russia and thereby become an agent of French economic penetration in Russia'.<sup>16</sup> Paris thus sent an unambiguous signal of its desire to participate in the division of 'future profits'. As a means of pressure in the event of Polish refusal, it was noted that substantial stocks of arms and ammunition remained in France, intended for shipment to Poland. The French began emphasising that further deliveries would need to be paid for in the form of specific trade concessions in favour of the French state, effectively requiring Poland to forgo Ukrainian grain, sugar, or oil.<sup>17</sup>

During the offensive in Ukraine, the Polish Military Purchases Mission in Paris<sup>18</sup> took control of the 'Groddek' sugar factory and requisitioned the sugar produced there, in which the French side held shares. This situation provoked a reaction from France, which demanded compensation equal to the value of the 'seized' sugar, amounting to 6 million French francs (calculated according to the market value prevailing in France). The Polish side paid 20 million Polish marks, which also corresponded to the price of the requisitioned sugar. The Ministry of the Treasury considered this sum sufficient, particularly as the Polish government had granted the sugar factory a loan of 20 million marks to maintain its beet plantations, which had not been repaid.<sup>19</sup>

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12 Olszewski P. 2011, 76–94.

13 Kukułka J. 1970, 52–53.

14 Pisuliński J. 2013, 184.

15 Hovi K. 1984, 47.

16 Kukułka J. 1970, 177.

17 Wandycz P. 1962, 147; Kukułka J. 1970, 177.

18 Uwijała P. 2019, 203–228.

19 AAN MSZ. *Pismo*, 5–11.

It was estimated that French capital in Eastern Galicia amounted to 600 million French francs, thanks to the acquisition of German and Austrian shares by several major groups financing the oil industry.<sup>20</sup> At that time, suspicions arose on the Polish side as to whether France might, in fact, serve as a ‘protector’ for German interests.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, there were also positive opinions regarding the French investment in the refinery at Limanowa. The Polish side believed that French entrepreneurs were primarily ‘chasing quick profits’ while simultaneously exerting considerable influence over politicians — deputies and senators — and, through them, over the government.<sup>22</sup>

In the autumn of 1920, the Minister of the Treasury, Władysław Grabski, visited Paris once again to conduct economic negotiations. Grabski already perceived that the French government based its decisions on the interests of industrialists, particularly those in the oil refinery sector.<sup>23</sup> The French side’s stipulations effectively appropriated foreign currency earned by Poland from oil exports, leaving it in the hands of French oil enterprises, which sought to eliminate any state interference in oil matters and to minimise production at the state refinery in Drohobycz.<sup>24</sup> It is worth noting that French entrepreneurs were supported in negotiations by the ambassadors Joseph Noulens and Jules Cambon.<sup>25</sup> Noulens, in exchange for backing the demands of the French ‘oilmen’, was prepared to grant Poland a loan of 2 million French francs under the so-called financial advancement scheme, solely to satisfy their interests in the Polish oil industry rather than to focus on the delivery of oil. The minister rejected these demands but agreed to the delivery of sugar. Before discussing the issue of sugar in detail, it is important to mention the economic negotiations between the parties which took place in Paris during the summer of 1920.

The negotiations with the French were conducted by Minister Grabski, Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade Henryk Strasburger, and Commercial Counsellor Franciszek Doleżał. This meeting was significant for several reasons. The primary objective was to secure the signing of a trade convention regulating bilateral economic relations between the two states. The convention was to be of particular importance due to provisions concerning the settlement of debts arising from military deliveries. France guaranteed Poland greater customs concessions than those granted to Czechoslovakia. This information reached the public domain and consequently caused dissatisfaction in the United Kingdom and Italy over the preferential treatment and special

20 The most prominent groups operated within the framework of the *Société Française des Pétales*, the *Consortium du Nord*, and *Auerbach*. The latter was reportedly in control of the *Premier Oil and Pipeline Co. Ltd.*, having purchased mines in Harkłowa from German owners and cooperating closely with German capital. AAN MSZ. *Referat*, 30–44; Gmurczyk-Wrońska M. 2023, 165–181.

21 AAN MSZ. *Referat*, 30–44.

22 AAN MSZ. *Referat*, 30–44.

23 AAN MSZ. *Referat*, 30–44.

24 AAN MSZ. *Referat*, 30–44.

25 AAN MSZ. *Referat*, 30–44.

privileges in Polish-French trade. Mindful of its relations with Czechoslovakia, the United Kingdom, and Italy, the French side rejected the draft convention, introducing a link between the economic convention and the bilateral agreement on the one hand and the oil agreement — which Grabski did not sign — on the other, as well as the issue of French government guarantees regarding financial advancement against sugar deliveries.<sup>26</sup> Following consultations upon his return to Warsaw, Grabski concluded that matters relating to sugar sales should be handled separately. Consequently, Commercial Counsellor Franciszek Doleżał signed an agreement with the French company *David Gravis et Fils* for the sale of 15 tonnes of sugar, to be delivered in batches of 5,000 tonnes from January to March 1921. The Polish government undertook to supply sugar produced by Polish sugar factories or refineries in sacks containing a net weight of 100 kg.<sup>27</sup> The agreement was drafted in great detail, specifying the various obligations of both sellers and buyers, including customs duties. Payments were to be made through the Banque Franco-Polonaise, with which the Polish government had concluded a direct contract.<sup>28</sup> At that time, Grabski sought to link the conclusion of the oil agreement with the introduction of Polish credit on the Parisian market.<sup>29</sup> Negotiations concerning the oil agreement continued, as did discussions on the conclusion of the trade convention. The backdrop to these negotiations also included international events involving Poland, which were closely monitored by France.

When the preliminary agreement and armistice were concluded on 12 October 1920, Poland and Bolshevik Russia granted each other the right to free transit of goods through their respective territories. The Polish side reserved the right to regulate the conditions of transit for goods of German and Austrian origin transported to Bolshevik Russia.<sup>30</sup> This arrangement caused evident dissatisfaction on the French side. At that time, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Georges Leygues emphasised that the signing of the Polish-Bolshevik armistice would only be possible after the conclusion of a trade agreement with France.<sup>31</sup> As can be observed, the French side effectively controlled Poland's actions in its negotiations with the Bolsheviks. Preliminary trade agreements (to be discussed below) with France were concluded before the signing of the Treaty of Riga on 18 March 1921. As early as February 1921, the Polish government urged the Polish envoy in France, Maurycy Zamoyski, to do everything possible to persuade France to finalise the trade agreements, upon which the implementation of the political and military arrangements depended. In March, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs instructed Zamoyski to reject any proposals regarding the oil

26 AAN MSZ. *Referat*, 30–44.

27 AdC. *Warunki*, 70–74.

28 AAN MSZ. *Referat*, 30–44.

29 Gmurczyk-Wrońska M. 2023, 165–181.

30 Borzęcki J. 2012, 320.

31 AdC. *Ministère*, 78; Borzęcki J. 2012.

agreement, which would have been detrimental to Polish interests. Foreign Minister Eustachy Sapieha wrote that 'any attempts to make the Polish-French alliance an object of commercial bargaining constitute a diminution of its value'.<sup>32</sup>

Another matter of major importance for Poland was the issue of Upper Silesia. Warsaw expected support from the Western powers regarding the recovery of these territories. Such declarations were obtained only in France. At the time, France aimed to weaken Germany, and this was further motivated by the placement of the French capital in the region, as evidenced by the agreement signed on 17 January 1920 and supplemented on 20 February 1921. Subsequently, on 1 March 1921, both parties signed an accord granting France a 36-year lease of Polish coal mines, while Poland obtained a loan for their exploitation. Both sides were entitled to half of the shares, though the rental payments were received by the French as part of the repayment of Polish debts. In the second half of March 1921, Poland and France signed an agreement concerning the acquisition of private mining and metallurgical enterprises. This facilitated the granting of three loans to Poland for the establishment of the 'Skarboferm' enterprise, the purchase of German-owned companies, and the creation of a Franco-Polish bank in Upper Silesia.<sup>33</sup> It is worth noting that, in anticipation of the upcoming plebiscite in Upper Silesia, Artur Benis was sent to Paris on 1 December 1920 as the Polish government's representative to offer economic concessions and shares in the Silesian company in exchange for support in decision-making regarding the province's future. The Polish side offered concessions, including the creation of an international bank and the linking of revenues from German properties in Upper Silesia to reparations payments. The French were aware of the value of the state-owned mines, and industrial circles sought to exploit them for maximum profit. Notably, the French had conducted discussions with German representatives on this matter long before engaging with Benis.<sup>34</sup> Benis believed that the new French capital would not invest domestically unless guarantees were provided to ensure both profitability and security.<sup>35</sup> Subsequently, in June 1921, Zamoyski telegraphed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the signing of the oil agreement and all related treaties had been delayed by France for political reasons, primarily concerning the Upper Silesian plebiscite. France was willing to conclude the trade agreement, but only if Poland took steps to mitigate the conflict.<sup>36</sup> Overall, negotiations regarding investments in Upper Silesia continued until the signing of the 1922 trade treaty, which regulated all economic matters between Poland and France.

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32 AAN APP, 34.

33 AAN MSZ. *W. Olszewicz*, 1–4; Ambrochowicz-Gajownik A. 2019, 206; Ambrochowicz-Gajownik A. 2020, 166–167; Łazor J. 2024, 123–132; Łazor J. 2020, 289–320.

34 Łazor J. 2024, 121.

35 AAN MSZ. *Referat*, 30–44.

36 AAN MSZ. *Hr. M. Zamoyski*, 25.

## Trade Exchange

An important issue in trade exchange was the establishment of rules governing the shipment of products. The most financially and logistically advantageous route was maritime transport. Before the Gdynia–Le Havre shipping line was established, the company *Worms et Cie* expressed interest in the exchange of goods, declaring that it would be beneficial for both countries to establish a regular shipping route from Gdańsk to Dunkirk, Le Havre, and Bordeaux. Consequently, a representative of the company informed Noulens of its intention to open a branch in Gdańsk and an office in Warsaw.<sup>37</sup> With the creation of the Polish-French Consortium, the Gdynia–Le Havre maritime line was inaugurated.<sup>38</sup>

Polish goods reached the French market mainly on ships belonging to *Worms et Cie*, as well as to the German companies *Deutsche Levante Linie*, *Svenska Lloyd*, and certain Amsterdam-based firms.<sup>39</sup> Between April and May 1920, Poland managed to export 450 tonnes of products to France, while imports from France to Poland amounted to 1,400 tonnes. Statistical records were at that time very limited, but they were compared with those regarding Polish-German trade.<sup>40</sup>

According to French reports, the Polish government was making systematic efforts to develop and organise its export trade in order to improve the country's overall financial situation. However, Poland lacked both substantial reserves and sufficient supplies of manufactured goods. It could export little beyond raw materials and basic products, and even then had to limit exports to avoid depriving its own industry of essential resources. Conversely, it needed to import certain raw materials — such as wool and cotton — for domestic consumption as well as for the re-export of finished goods, which would provide employment to many Polish workers and the unemployed. In these circumstances, the Polish government decided to impose strict controls on imports, given the country's limited export capacity. The French considered that the Polish authorities should introduce strict control over both imports and exports so that equilibrium in foreign trade could be achieved until exports exceeded imports. Additionally, trade was hindered by the weakness of the Polish mark and by the lack of cooperation between Polish and French entrepreneurs. French products — particularly luxury goods and phosphates — posed a further difficulty for the Polish state, especially since the French side sought to obtain customs concessions for its

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37 AdC. *Worms*, 7–8.

38 AdC. *Note*, 138–140.

39 AdC. *Nota*, 7.

40 AdC. *Notatka*, 81. In the quarter from November 1919 to January 1920, imports from Germany amounted to 90,778 tonnes. Between April and June 1920, German imports reached 302,225 tonnes, of which coal accounted for 237,666 tonnes, or 70% of the total import volume. Furthermore, in the first quarter of 1920, goods of German origin represented a total value of 4,702,000 Swiss francs, corresponding to 20% of the total import value of 23,535,000 Swiss francs.

merchandise. At that time, the Polish authorities were engaged in negotiations with the French association *Linière*, which sought to purchase flax from Polish harvests, particularly from the Lithuanian territories administered by Poland, in exchange for African phosphates. The quantities and prices were to be specified in a contract between representatives of French buyers and the company *Kresolen*, responsible for the sale of flax from the eastern territories. Revenues from flax sales in French francs were to be used to pay for deliveries of Algerian phosphates to Poland until the due date. A credit line equal to the proceeds from the sales was to be opened simultaneously for the Polish government for a period of six months. The French envoy in Warsaw, Eugène Pralon, considered this operation to be highly advantageous, as it provided French merchants in Poland with defined working conditions and a relative stabilisation of exchange-rate risks. The Head of the Commercial Relations Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Quai d'Orsay*), Jacques Seydoux, sought to be informed of the entire operation, requesting the Chief of the Financial Section, Albert Kammerer, to determine the measures to be taken in order to facilitate trade between France and Poland.<sup>41</sup>

## Conclusion

France's influence on the reconstruction of the Second Polish Republic after the First World War was directly linked to the political situation of the Polish state. Political and military matters were closely intertwined with economic issues, a fact that the French side skilfully exploited. Poland required French assistance, while France took advantage of this dependency by negotiating preferential treatment for itself in trade agreements concerning its capital investments in Poland and in commercial exchange — particularly regarding the pricing of goods. France was willing to provide loans for the reconstruction of the economy, including for military purposes, but always under specific conditions. Consequently, the two sides signed a trade treaty only in 1922. This treaty regulated all economic relations between them and enabled the political agreement and the secret military convention of 1921 to enter into force.

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## Use of Panzerfaust-Type Grenade Launchers by German and Soviet Soldiers during the Fighting for Pomerania in 1945

**Summary:** The mass use of anti-tank grenade launchers known as Panzerfausts (armoured fists) by the German Wehrmacht in the final phase of the Second World War in Europe made them an immediately formidable weapon. Faced with dramatic shortages of fuel needed for the mobility of armoured forces, as well as tungsten as a component for the production of steel plates and ammunition, new ideas were sought for fighting tanks. Thus, the combat-proven effectiveness of shaped-charge projectiles fired from a hand-held tubular launcher was exploited, together with the ease of their production and their low unit cost compared with tanks and other armoured vehicles, which they immobilised and sometimes outright destroyed. Mass training in the handling of this weapon was undertaken, and even improvised tank-destroyer units armed only with grenade launchers and equipped with bicycles were created. The successes achieved by the Germans in defensive fighting, thanks to the use of Panzerfausts, also galvanised the opponent. In the spring of 1945, the Red Army issued an order to recover captured weapons of this type and to provide instruction on their operation. Their employment in combat, however, looked different because Soviet troops readily used grenade launchers during assaults on fortified strongpoints, especially masonry structures. A specific adaptation of the Panzerfaust to fighting in urban areas was the construction of makeshift devices for firing salvos. At the same time, Soviet engineers attempted to develop their own grenade launchers with characteristics similar to the German ones, but they achieved satisfactory results only after the war.

**Keywords:** Panzerfaust, grenade launcher, shaped-charge projectile, improving combat, Pomerania, 1945

The development of individual anti-tank weapons during the Second World War was dynamic. Initially, long-barrelled anti-tank rifles and muskets using hardened-steel bullets were preferred, followed subsequently by various types of carriers for shaped-charge projectiles. In the German Wehrmacht, successive technical solutions were introduced — starting with Schiessbecher attachments for the Mauser infantry rifle, together with special projectiles for them.<sup>1</sup> Next came a series of hand-thrown anti-tank grenades and simple sapper charges magnetically affixed to tank armour. In the final stage of the fighting, one-man, recoilless tube launchers were preferred, including both single-use models called Faustpatrone (later *Panzerfaust*) as well as multi-shot Panzerschreck launchers (*Ofenrohr*).<sup>2</sup>

The action of the shaped-charge projectile employed in Panzerfausts relied on the strong concentration and direction of the jet of gas produced by the burning explosive material — in this case, a mixture of RDX and TNT — formed into a conically hollowed charge or having an insert of that shape made of soft metal. The gases, at a very high velocity and temperature, pierced the steel armour of an enemy tank or the concrete of fortifications. The striking power and penetration depended on the size of the main charge used, while the velocity and effective range also depended on the propelling charge and the diameter of the launcher tube employed. The shot was initiated by a small fuse, and the main charge was fitted with a percussion detonator.<sup>3</sup>

The design of single-use tube launchers emphasised simplicity of operation. Projectiles were slipped on from the front, with a wooden shaft with metal fins inserted into the tube to stabilise flight. Aiming was done with one lever, while a second formed a simple trigger mechanism. The system was protected by a rotating safety. When fired, a strong jet of propellant gases and flame escaped to the rear of the launcher, requiring particular attention to safety behind the operator. At the same time, this produced an almost recoilless shot, which facilitated an accurate strike on the target.<sup>4</sup>

In 1942, the Germans took notice of American Bazooka launchers used in North Africa and decided to copy the idea. In the test version of the Gretchen project, short launchers were created; these were followed by the short-range, low-power Faustpatrone 30 and 30 Klein, the latter being successfully produced from mid-1943 to the end of the war. The developmental version — Panzerfaust 60 — was already implemented in the autumn of that year. The next step was to design a launcher with

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1 TsAMO, f. 973, op. 1, d. 359, list. 41.

2 See: Rościszewski L. 1993.

3 German operating manuals for the 30 Klein, 60, and 100 grenade launcher versions. Published in summer–autumn 1944, print runs: 100,000–150,000 copies. TsAMO, f. 500, op. 12451, d. 194.

4 Russian-language versions of grenade-launcher operating manuals aimed at soldiers of the Red Army. TsAMO, f. 1124, op. 1, d. 59, list. 7; f. 1676, op. 1, d. 71, list. 4–5; f. 208, op. 2511, d. 3135, list. 30.

even greater range and power, the Panzerfaust 100. This entered mass production at the end of 1944. In March 1945, the Panzerfaust 150, with further improved parameters — including a lighter, reshaped projectile, a fragmentation version, and a reusable launcher — went into production, but this weapon reached the front only in negligible numbers. In total, nearly 7 million Panzerfausts were produced in Germany. Quite a few test versions were also created, which were taken over by the victors and helped lay the groundwork for the development of Soviet anti-tank grenade launchers (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** Panzerfausts began to be widely used on the Eastern Front in mid-1943. Photo from the spring of 1944 (Source: BA DB. Sign. 101I-710-0371-20)

In postwar Germany, new versions of grenade launchers have referenced their famous predecessors, bearing the designations Panzerfaust 44 and — the model still used today — Panzerfaust 3. Meanwhile, already in early 1945, Soviet special units tested the RPG-1 launcher, copied from the Panzerfaust, during the fighting for Tolkmicko, as well as in other places. This equipment, considered a secret weapon, was tested there by a detached special-purpose unit the size of an NKVD battalion, the forerunner of the later famous spetsnaz. After the war, the Panzerfaust 150, in turn, served as the basis for the next version, the RPG-2, with the development programme culminating in the RPG-7, produced from the 1960s onwards and used in various parts of the world to this day.<sup>5</sup>

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5 See: Instruction manual for the most common variant of the Soviet RPG-7: *Наставление...* 1983.

### **Elbląg (*Elbing*) — Effective Trials in the City**

In the final phase of the war, during defensive fighting on German territory, Panzerfausts were employed on a massive scale and were often more readily available than classic small arms. A model example of their use in the defence of cities and river bridgeheads is Elbląg, which was located at that time on the border of East and West Prussia. On the evening of 23 January 1945, only a few days after the launch of the Red Army's winter offensive, several Soviet tanks from the spearhead of the 5<sup>th</sup> Guards Tank Army, advancing at the head of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Belorussian Front commanded by Marshal Konstantin Rokossowski, unexpectedly appeared on the city's streets. The German commandant of Elbląg, Colonel Eberhard Schöpffer, had to react instantly to this dangerous and unexpected Soviet move. In the presence of Wehrmacht generals visiting the garrison at the time, he ordered tank-destroyer groups equipped with Panzerfausts into action. He later reported that he had had to use them since the enemy was already in the streets. He ordered the Soviet vehicles destroyed as a matter of urgency and posts armed with grenade launchers to be set up at the river bridges to prevent the crossings from being seized. Schöpffer also mentioned another danger:

I was worried that enemy tanks might reach the area of the railway station, where there were columns of refugees that could make an excellent target for them.<sup>6</sup>

Soon a report arrived that one of the anti-tank groups had destroyed an enemy tank in the Old Market. In the commandant's office, the shots from the intruders' guns and the explosions of armoured fist rounds were distinctly audible. Shortly thereafter, further information came in that three more Soviet tanks had been hit. The remaining vehicles headed north and paused for a moment near the brewery, after which they left the city, still pursued by intervention groups with Panzerfausts in their hands. According to the colonel, it turned out that during the night yet another Soviet tank had become unfit for combat and was abandoned by its crew on the northern edge of the city. In his combat report, Schöpffer concluded that the successes of the first clashes were due to the alarm sub-units, who, armed with shaped-charge projectiles, drove the enemy from the streets and then resisted them in the suburbs:

The enemy's intention was undoubtedly to seize Elbląg by a surprise attack. Thwarting that intention, we owe it to the energetic action of a well-trained group of tank destroyers. Young recruits, still inexperienced in combat, under the command of good NCOs, carried out their task.<sup>7</sup>

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6 Schöpffer E. 2005.

7 Schöpffer E. 2005.

Curth Günther, a lieutenant from the German garrison, confirmed that enemy armoured vehicles had opened fire in the city and, although there were no major losses in personnel, they had destroyed many horse-drawn carts belonging to civilian refugees along the crowded streets. According to him, two tanks were knocked out by shots from Panzerfausts, while the remaining five rolled along Browarna Street. They remained stationary until morning at the turnoff to Nowakowo, north of the Mudra barracks, blocking the road, the railway line, and the river's outlet to the Vistula Lagoon.<sup>8</sup>

Certainly present in Elbląg at that time were the tanks of the reconnaissance platoon of Junior Lieutenant Pavel Byeryegov, belonging to the battalion commanded by Captain Gennadiy Diachenko of the 31<sup>st</sup> Tank Brigade.<sup>9</sup> The war correspondent Yevgeny Kriger quoted the accounts of their crews. For a change, they noticed only one vehicle lost in action:

We dash into the narrow streets of the Old Town. Lieutenant Aleynikov's tank rams the enemy's transport column. He is supported by the tanks of Isajev and Yefimyenko.<sup>10</sup> We bypass the bridge, turning onto the first street. From the front, we received fire from anti-tank guns and Panzerfausts. The lead vehicle of our column is hit. The driver was burned alive. The rest of the crew quickly transferred to another tank. We leave the burning wreck and at full throttle, head for the northern edge of the city.<sup>11</sup>

Walking home shortly after the tanks had passed through were Gertrude Tuschewska and a friend. The Old Town was dark, as the streetlights had been deliberately turned off. Under the Market Gate stood a sailor armed with a Panzerfaust, and another a little further on. In the Old Market, the girls saw a Russian tank burning noisily. The sky above it glowed red, and every so often, detonations and columns of fire erupted from inside.<sup>12</sup>

In the opening moments of the fighting for Elbląg, Colonel Schöpffer commanded a city garrison that was still inexperienced and poorly armed. However, the strength of the German resistance quickly solidified, and the chaotic initial clashes turned into three weeks of fierce fighting. The city commandant praised the willpower of his soldiers:

At this point, I want to mention a young boy from the Hitlerjugend, covered in dust. This sixteen-year-old youth — I forgot his name — was in a strike group that volunteered to recapture the Gallwitz barracks earlier seized by the Russians. Suddenly,

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8 Günther C. 1954, 54–62.

9 See: Gliniecki T. 2021.

10 Incorrect surname; actually Yefimov.

11 Kriger E. 1968, 160.

12 Tuschewski G. 2007, 16.

he found himself alone facing one of the Soviet tanks that was heading toward our positions. He instantly decided to fire a Panzerfaust and blew the armoured colossus into the air. In the official communiqués, it was then stated that already more than 30 tanks had been destroyed during the fighting for Elbląg. The next morning the matter was reported officially and I awarded that boy the Iron Cross, 2<sup>nd</sup> Class.<sup>13</sup>

A report from the German 2<sup>nd</sup> Army at the beginning of February confirmed that in Elbląg many tanks had been destroyed in the first few days of fighting, and one of the first tanks was taken out by a Hitlerjugend youth using a Panzerfaust, for which he was awarded the Iron Cross.<sup>14</sup> The name of the brave youth was probably remembered by a Luftwaffe officer, who noted in his account:

The youth perform best. Little Schmit hits three tanks accurately. The boys assault every house occupied by the Russians, often with only a Panzerfaust in hand.<sup>15</sup>

The defenders of Elbląg did not lack anti-tank grenade launchers, but they could not compensate for the lack of other necessary types of weapons. Alfred Neubert noted this when writing about the final period of the fighting, just before the German garrison withdrew beyond the river:

On 9 February the situation in particular sectors was no longer tenable. Our losses and lack of ammunition proved impossible to make up for. Heavy weapons fired only sporadically. The soldiers had no ammunition for the last few machine guns. Only small arms and Panzerfaust grenade launchers remained to them.<sup>16</sup>

Similar combat results were reported by the commandant of the Poznań fortress between 13 January and 1 February, who informed of the destruction of 56 Soviet tanks, including 14 destroyed by Panzerfausts. Inside the city, of the seven vehicles destroyed in the streets, five were eliminated with these uncomplicated launchers.<sup>17</sup>

### **Gdańsk — Tank Destroyers Perfect their Skills**

From 26 January 1945, after another reorganisation of the Wehrmacht's defensive forces, the formation of the so-called Panzer-Jagd Division began on threatened sectors of the front. These were improvised units divided into small groups, mainly of youths

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13 Schöpffer E. 2005.

14 CAW. T311, 7219069.

15 *Die Kämpfe um Elbing...*

16 Neubert A. 2009.

17 CAW. T311, 7218856.

and old men conscripted into the *Volkssturm* (Fig. 2), armed with single-use grenade launchers mounted on bicycles, because no other means of transport were provided for them.<sup>18</sup> Lieutenant Hans Schäuffler described such a group in his account of the defensive fighting in Pomerania around Gdańsk:

One day a company of tank destroyers was attached to the 12<sup>th</sup> Panzergrenadier Regiment: fourteen members of the Hitlerjugend from Gdańsk, equipped with bicycles and Panzerfausts. The boys tried to make a very manly impression, being under the influence of the importance of the task assigned to them. Great seriousness was written on their childish faces. The grenadiers fed them, discreetly took away the Panzerfausts, and allowed them a long sleep at the defensive positions. And then they sent them home, to their mothers, where they belonged.<sup>19</sup>

Also, within armoured units, composite sub-units called *Panzervernichtungskompanie* were formed in armoured units from the crews of vehicles already unserviceable or deprived of fuel. In the 35<sup>th</sup> Panzer Regiment of the 4<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division, such a company was commanded by the one-armed Second Lieutenant Klaus Schiller. Having just recovered from wounds, he voluntarily returned to the front and, at Jasień (*Nenkau*) near Gdańsk, personally engaged Soviet tanks with Panzerfausts, later describing the extreme emotions that he experienced:

The approaching clatter of tracks suddenly broke off with a short creak. We clearly made out a T-34 standing at the edge of the street, which menacingly raised its gun and rotated it, seeking a target. In that state, the steel colossus was least dangerous for us. Despite careful observation, we noticed no Soviet infantry in the area. So — to work!

We crept cautiously ever closer to the steel monster: 50 meters... 40... 30... and we found ourselves in a shell crater. From this perspective, the armoured opponent stood out clearly against the background of the paling night sky.

The fiery tail of our Panzerfaust sharply lit up the darkness... Then two seconds during which my heart literally froze motionless! And then a bright flash and a hard impact. A perfect hit!

A few screams, a hatch cover flung open violently, and several figures tumbled from the interior into the surrounding void, only to disappear limping into the night's darkness a moment later. We did not fire after them. Flames appeared in the tank; a moment later it burned, shaken by shells exploding inside it.<sup>20</sup>

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18 TsAMO, f. 500, op. 12451, d. 499, 1–4.

19 Schäuffler H. 2010, 83.

20 Schäuffler H. 2010, 90.

In the Gdańsk Fortified Region, the German anti-tank fortifications consisted mainly of anti-tank ditches, barriers, and barricades. In some places, reinforced-concrete partitions were also erected.<sup>21</sup> Near these fortifications, numerous positions were prepared for Panzerfaust operators, as the weapon represented the simplest and most accessible means of defence.<sup>22</sup> The second weapon tasked with the bulk of anti-tank combat was the 8.8 cm anti-aircraft gun, which was employed against ground targets. For Soviet tanks, this was a very dangerous opponent, because the coastal hills covering the approaches to the ports and shipyards were heavily saturated with anti-aircraft batteries, and the high velocity of projectiles fired from the long-barrelled guns easily penetrated the armour of even the most durable enemy vehicles.<sup>23</sup>



**Fig. 2.** Training in the use of the launcher for members of the German militia — the *Volkssturm*. March 1944 (Source: BA DB. Sign. 146-1973-001-36)

Grenade launchers were also used to provide anti-tank protection on the edges of cities. In Oliwa (*Oliva*), every house located on the outskirts was defended and equipped with heavy machine guns and Panzerfausts, which were most often fired from basement windows and attics.<sup>24</sup> The sector along the anti-tank ditch running

21 TsAMO, f. 46, op. 2394, d. 1613.

22 TsAMO, f. 46, op. 2394, d. 1526, 30.

23 TsAMO, f. 11122, op. 1, d. 27, list. 262.

24 TsAMO, f. 404, op. 9711, d. 555, dok. 99OP, 68–73, 124.

along the highway and railway line between Wrzeszcz (*Langfuhr*) and Oliwa, defended by a battalion of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, was attacked simultaneously by almost 30 Soviet T-34 tanks. The grenadiers destroyed a significant number of them with Panzerfausts, but when heavy JS-2 tanks joined the attack, there was no chance of stopping them with projectiles from hand-held launchers. The unit commander, Colonel Karl Brassert, then ordered a withdrawal toward the centre of the locality.<sup>25</sup>

Beginning urban fighting in the southern districts of the port cities, the Wehrmacht based its defence on fortified facilities and massive buildings, from whose basements and attics it effectively eliminated Soviet tanks with Panzerfausts, but it also realised the necessity of fighting against the enemy's superior forces.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, composite alarm units were hastily formed, into which were drafted convalescents from military hospitals, soldiers on leave unable to return to their units, and finally representatives of various militarised professions such as policemen and railwaymen. The soldiers were equipped with any small arms still available in depots. From prisoners' testimonies and documents captured by Red Army soldiers, it was revealed that the enemy was hastily throwing into battle reserves from Gdańsk and Tczew, because it was precisely there that the rapid formation and training of composite battle groups, including tank-destroyer units, was being carried out.<sup>27</sup>

One such reserve sub-unit was initially the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 68<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, which was located in the Orunia (*Ohra*) area. It was later transferred to Ujeścisko (*Wonneberg*) with the task of defending the highway leading toward Gdańsk. In this battalion, there were four companies of about 40–50 men each; each received three light machine guns and 15–20 Panzerfausts.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, in Western Pomerania, where the German units defending the bridgehead near Szczecin (*Stettin-Alt-damm*) were reinforced by the 108<sup>th</sup> Assault Gun Brigade, five battalions of large-calibre artillery, and an anti-tank unit which, in addition to thirty-six 7.5 cm guns, had three companies of tank destroyers armed with Panzerfausts.<sup>29</sup>

German soldiers improved their use of grenade launchers in combat. Special badges were increasingly awarded for destroying a tank with handheld weapons. Five such silver distinctions, signifying the personal destruction of the same number of Soviet armoured vehicles, resulted in the award of the badge in gold. Second Lieutenant Schiller claimed that during the last days of the fighting for Gdańsk, in the course of street clashes, his men had become proficient in an effective tactic of group destruction of enemy vehicles:

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25 *Der Danzig-Einsatz...*, 2–3.

26 Dieckert K., Grossmann H. 2011, 284.

27 TsAMO, f. 309, op. 4073, d. 812, 7, 9.

28 TsAMO, f. 309, op. 4073, d. 844, 415–418.

29 Zavyalov A., Kalyadin T. 1960, 200.

Through attics and lofts connected with one another for anti-aircraft defence reasons, we approached covertly right up to the Soviet armoured vanguards. As security, at a little roof window, we left a gunner with a submachine gun. Then, through the smoke outlets, with our Panzerfausts we took the enemy tank under fire. When some T-34 unexpectedly flew into the air, it usually made a stunning impression on the Soviets. Next, we exploited the opponent's confusion to disappear unnoticed and look for a new target. In this way, we forced the Soviets to move more slowly and cautiously. Every hour, every day won, was unbelievably important for the refugees. Fortunately, we did not lack Panzerfausts. They could literally be found everywhere. It was worse, however, with provisions.<sup>30</sup>

In the spring of 1945, the use of Panzerfausts to hold back enemy forces became the norm in German anti-tank operations. In infantry units, even every third rifleman was equipped with a launcher for shaped-charge grenades. In the case of operating Panzerschrecks, combat teams of three (*Trupp*) or six men (*Gruppe*) were formed.<sup>31</sup> Another commonly used method of fighting Soviet tanks was to lay roadside improvised explosive devices made from unused artillery ammunition.<sup>32</sup>

A Wehrmacht intelligence report summarising the fierce clashes of 25 March stated that in Gdynia and Gdańsk, and along the coast of the Vistula Lagoon, an exceptionally large number — as many as 153 — of Soviet tanks had been destroyed. On a single defensive sector of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, 24 vehicles were eliminated at that time through the use of Panzerfausts.<sup>33</sup>

Colonel General Erhard Raus, commanding the 3<sup>rd</sup> Panzer Army, after the March fighting in Western Pomerania — despite the defenders' defeat — enthusiastically reported to Adolf Hitler the results of employing the launchers:

As for particular facts from the Pomeranian battle, I can report that of the 580 enemy tanks destroyed so far, 380 — i.e., two-thirds — were destroyed with Panzerfausts, that is, thanks to the courage of individual soldiers. Never before has an army achieved such great successes thanks to the use of this weapon.<sup>34</sup>

'It was a pity about those brave soldiers', General Heinz Guderian — an armour specialist and at the time Chief of Staff of the Army High Command (OKH), responsible for German operations on the Eastern Front — summed up briefly the shocking blood toll.

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30 Schäuffler H. 2010, 92.

31 TsAMO, f. 500, op. 12451, d. 157, letter 40 and ff.

32 TsAMO, f. 233, op. 2356, d. 771, 9–10.

33 TsAMO, f. 500, op. 12454, d. 556, 63.

34 Raus E. 2007, 226.

Those looking at matters soberly knew that too often the price for destroying tanks was the life of the launcher operators, who by necessity had to approach very close to the target and were thus exposed to effective enemy fire.<sup>35</sup>

### **Red Army Soldiers with Captured Weapons**

At the start of the 1945 offensive, the Red Army was surprised by the large scale of Panzerfaust use, as well as by their effectiveness, combined with the extreme fanaticism exhibited by the youngest and oldest Germans alike. It was not insignificant for Soviet armoured commanders that many users of anti-tank grenade launchers were thoroughly imbued with the anti-Soviet propaganda of the Third Reich and were ready to die in defence of a homeland threatened by the enemy. It was not a coincidence that every German leaflet instructing operators of 'armoured fists' referred to the figure of the sixteenth-century knight Götz von Berlichingen, who fought with a steel prosthetic hand.<sup>36</sup> All this gave rise to fears of a loss of combat capability in attacking tank and self-propelled artillery units. The problems were noted by Marshal Ivan Konev, commander of one of the forces striking central Germany:

For the first time in the entire war, we encountered enemy defences densely saturated with anti-tank fists, for which methods of combat had not yet been sufficiently developed.<sup>37</sup>

Marshal Konstanty Rokossowski, whose 2<sup>nd</sup> Belorussian Front was attacking Pomerania around Gdańsk, had already, in February, ordered tanks to be particularly protected. In Directive no. 4283–4285/sz, dated 21 February 1945, the Front command stated:

The high density of buildings in the northwestern regions of Poland favours the operation of tank destroyers and creates the need for more thorough protection of the vehicles. Above all, tanks and self-propelled guns should cooperate with fusiliers, and the latter must protect the vehicles by neutralising the operators of Panzerfaust launchers. Therefore, fusiliers should operate in small groups, be placed under the command of tank and self-propelled gun commanders. As often as possible, sub-machine gunners should be treated as a landing party and carried on the hulls of vehicles. Do not allow enemy operators closer than 40 m. Establish simple signals of communication between the vehicle and the landing party on it. Use riflemen

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35 Guderian H. 2024, 320.

36 Popularized in the drama by Goethe J.W. 1877.

37 Koniew I. 1968, 74.

from armoured and mechanised units primarily to protect the vehicles. Teach the crews simple ways to extinguish vehicle fires using water, earth, or soldiers' capes.<sup>38</sup>

During the fighting for Pomerania in March, Red Army soldiers became increasingly aware of the Germans' widespread use of grenade launchers, leading to improved protection of vehicles against such threats. Approaches to bridges, forest edges, street intersections, and city alleys, where anti-tank teams might hide, were carefully checked. Soviet infantry rode on the hulls of tanks as mounted detachments, protecting the vehicles from German launcher operators. A makeshift shield for the armoured vehicles involved hanging screens on the vehicles that triggered earlier detonation and diminished the effectiveness of the shaped charge fired from the launchers. Ingenious tank crews used fence mesh, mattress springs, and even metal beds for this purpose. Tests with wire-mesh screens demonstrated that the armour of a heavy JS-2 tank, when protected in this way, remained unperforated despite four hits from Panzerfaust projectiles.<sup>39</sup>

The Red Army also quickly utilised captured equipment for its own use. Above all, in the occupied territories, a large number of serviceable launchers were seized, and the simplicity of their operation favoured the training of Soviet soldiers to fire them. In preparation for the fighting for Gdańsk, in just one of the dozen-odd rifle corps participating in these battles, training was provided to 170 men from the 193<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Division, 85 from the 44<sup>th</sup> Guards Rifle Division, and 90 from the 354<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division. In total, this amounted to thousands of soldiers familiar with the weapon — mostly serving in engineer-sapper battalions. Anticipating urban combat, considerable stocks were collected: 600–700 'armoured fists' per division. In the 295<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, during two weeks of fighting, 2,300 captured Panzerfausts were collected, 1,700 of which were used for training and initial engagements. Another 100 were handed over to the corps, leaving 500 units for the division's own sub-units.<sup>40</sup>

From 12 to 27 March 1945, the engineering battalions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Shock Army prepared for the assault on Gdańsk, conducting exercises with newly formed assault groups, as well as instructing general-purpose sub-units how to handle Panzerfausts and captured submachine guns (Fig. 3). The assault teams consisted of four assault troops and four flamethrower operators, including two reserves. Three operators of 'armoured-fist' launchers also operated with each group. Sappers did not belong to the groups trained as infantry. Destroyed buildings and captured fortifications served as assault training objectives. These exercises demonstrated that captured grenade launchers could serve as effective weapons for taking localities. Typically, an assault group approached the

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38 TsAMO, f. 1131, op. 1, d. 45, list. 60.

39 TsAMO, f. 3168, op. 1, d. 31, list. 29.

40 TsAMO, f. 896, op. 1, d. 414, list. 86.

objective to within 50–60 m. From that distance, on a predetermined signal, several armoured fists were fired and, taking advantage of the effect of surprise, resistance points were quickly attacked, with hand grenades thrown into windows and doors, fire delivered from submachine guns, and the objective set alight with flamethrowers. During the exercises, the experience gained in the fighting for Elbląg and Grudziądz was maximised. Each session ended with a discussion of actions and an indication of strengths and weaknesses. In addition, the entire personnel of the battalions familiarised themselves with the specifics and operation of Panzerfausts, including test firing. Those who belonged to the assault groups as launcher operators conducted daily firing drills to develop automaticity and accuracy. At the same time, salvo fire was tested, and devices allowing the simultaneous firing of up to ten grenades were constructed. For this purpose, several metal and wooden boxes were built. Training salvo firing clearly confirmed the advisability of such use of Panzerfausts in city assaults and the need to collect specimens of captured weapons.<sup>41</sup>

Flamethrower operators and sappers from the assault group, when coming under fire from strongpoints or when the fighting moved inside buildings, fought like the other assault troops—with submachine guns and hand grenades—and only rarely using Panzerfausts and flamethrowers. However, in fighting for entire city blocks, the role of support weapons increased. Then the sappers advanced 100–200 m ahead and, with Panzerfausts, neutralised or suppressed strongpoints that blocked the approach to the objective.<sup>42</sup>

The launchers were used in combat quite often, and each day the groups expended a total of 200–250 rounds. They proved to be an effective weapon in close combat, at a distance from the enemy of no more than 200 m. Models with the greatest explosive power were usually used. Accuracy was limited, but usually two or three shots were enough to eliminate enemy strongpoints. Reduced effectiveness was noted when firing at an opponent occupying positions in trenches. In some cases, Panzerfaust operators were transported to the forward edge of the battle line on tanks and then advanced on foot to positions from which they could strike strongpoints inaccessible to tank gun fire. The device for salvo fire at longer distances, with rapid changes of position and with the use of a larger number of tanks, was not used very often, but this did not exclude its use in the future. However, it was necessary to improve the portability of the position and to make it possible to fire from it from occupied trenches.<sup>43</sup> The conclusions were also that in the future exercises should be conducted for the full complements of assault groups and that training in the operation of grenade launchers should be expanded to all personnel.<sup>44</sup>

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41 Photographs of devices for salvo firing from ten Panzerfausts in: TsAMO, f. 404, op. 9711, d. 555, dok. 99OP, 122.

42 TsAMO, f. 309, op. 4073, d. 812, 53.

43 TsAMO, f. 421, op. 6562, d. 183, 9–10.

44 TsAMO, f. 309, op. 4073, d. 812, 54.

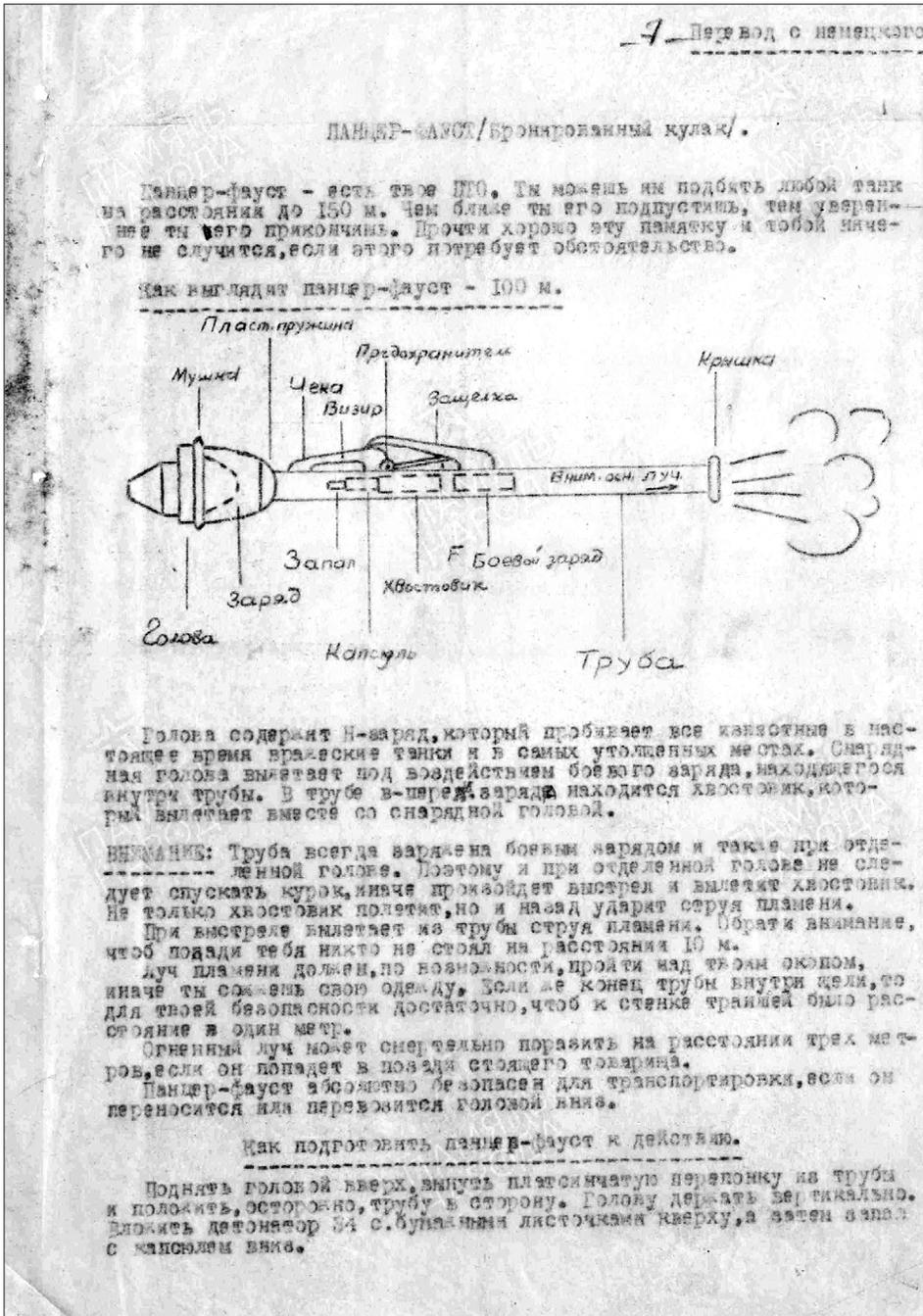


Fig. 3. Panzerfaust operating manual translated for the needs of Red Army soldiers (Source: TsAMO)

Typically, a defended building had a garrison of about thirty men equipped with two machine guns. For example, an assault group of the 636<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 193<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Division, supported by one gun and a heavy machine gun whose fire was coordinated to sustain the attack continuously, moved toward the building. The enemy responded with little accuracy, which allowed a close approach. The walls were breached with Panzerfausts, whereupon the group burst inside and, after 40 minutes of fighting, seized the objective.<sup>45</sup> Reports from the 193<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Division also noted problems caused by Panzerfausts fired by German soldiers from narrow street manholes. They were only neutralised by firing guns at nearby structures, thereby hitting the launcher operators with fragments of falling bricks and tiles.<sup>46</sup>

Also in other formations, for example, in the 49<sup>th</sup> Army, the engineer battalions trained in the specifics of combat before entering the city streets. Captured Panzerfausts were used for exercises, with instruction in their operation.<sup>47</sup> After the battle, it was concluded that infantry sub-units cooperated skilfully in the city with their own tanks and self-propelled guns, clearing the way for them and protecting them from launcher operators on the German side. The tanks, in turn, eliminated enemy firing points that halted the advance of the infantry.<sup>48</sup>

In cooperation with two rifle corps of the 49<sup>th</sup> Army, on 13 March, the vehicles of the 1<sup>st</sup> Guards Tank Corps entered the fighting near Sopot. At the beginning, the Germans held them back on a line running along the edges of the forested massifs. Tanks were then used only in small groups, and their manoeuvrability, because of the thaw, was limited to the main roads. On many occasions, the assigned route could be traversed only in one direction, and attempts to return resulted in vehicles bogging down in the mud. Some vehicles attempted to break straight through the forest, but there they became easy targets for operators of shaped-charge grenade launchers.<sup>49</sup>

Similarly, the poor results of the 8<sup>th</sup> Guards Tank Corps were also attributed to the effects of the spring thaw and by operating in hilly terrain, where armoured manoeuvre was limited. The tanks were forced to use only the paved roads, and any attempt to leave them resulted in becoming stuck in the mud. This not only reduced the pace of the attack but also led to losses, because immobilised tanks were excellent targets for the enemy. Soviet infantry did not neutralise Panzerfaust positions in time, which also led to the loss of tanks.<sup>50</sup>

When the 8<sup>th</sup> Guards Tank Corps was introduced into the fighting, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Guards Detached Assault Engineer-Sapper Battalion was assigned to secure the tanks' route.

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45 TsAMO, f. 46, op. 2394, d. 1549, 1-3, 22-23.

46 TsAMO, f. 997, op. 1, d. 320, list. 210.

47 TsAMO, f. 309, op. 4073, d. 844, 324-325, 414.

48 TsAMO, f. 404, op. 9711, d. 555, dok. 99OP, 152.

49 TsAMO, f. 46, op. 2394, d. 1186, 269-280.

50 TsAMO, f. 309, op. 4073, d. 812, 18-19.

On the approaches to Gdańsk, the corps was additionally assigned the 27<sup>th</sup> Guards Engineer-Sapper Battalion. Due to an insufficient number of motor vehicles, some of the sappers were seated on tank hulls. The rest moved on foot and could not be fully utilised. Despite the difficulties, they cleared 78 km of roads of mines, removed 800 mines, dismantled 40 blockades and barriers, and eliminated 41 Panzerfaust operators.<sup>51</sup>

The fighting for Gdańsk demonstrated the uselessness of employing large numbers of tanks and self-propelled guns in a major city. Narrow streets, which were blocked by barricades, barriers, and collapsed buildings, favoured the operations of anti-tank forces, including a large number of soldiers armed with hand-held grenade launchers. It was impossible to manoeuvre and to use a larger number of vehicles at one time. Fighting in the city also resulted in numerous fires and smoke, which prevented tank crews from properly observing the battlefield.<sup>52</sup>

Even during the clashes for the outer defensive ring of Gdańsk and Gdynia, tanks were allocated by armoured brigades to particular infantry divisions. There was ample time to prepare the cooperation of units, specify tasks, and plan actions. Yet this was not done, leaving matters at the stage of telephone conversations and map markings. The results of such merely formal cooperation were lamentable. Uncoordinated movements of troops led to unprecedented losses of tanks destroyed by enemy Panzerfausts. One of the armoured brigades supporting the 70<sup>th</sup> Army at that time had to strike eight destroyed vehicles from its rolls and bury 68 men killed in action.<sup>53</sup>

It even happened that the vehicles of the 8<sup>th</sup> Guards Tank Corps assaulted suburban hills without rifle protection and thus became easy targets for Panzerfausts fired from ambushes.<sup>54</sup> More serious problems arose when German armoured weapons — especially the heavy Königstiger tanks — and tank-destroyer groups with grenade launchers ambushed entire columns of Soviet T-34s, which, confident of easy victory, moved in a marching formation without security and engineering reconnaissance. Sapper Lev Sverdlov recalled this when describing the end of a tank column purchased with donations from the inhabitants of Uzbekistan:

In the vicinity of Sopot I remember a certain terrible sight. Lined up on the road stands an entire column of our tanks, about 20 machines, burned by German Panzerfaust operators. On the tanks, the inscription '20 years of the Uzbek SSR'. The column was a 'gift'...<sup>55</sup>

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51 TsAMO, f. 309, op. 4073, d. 812, 48.

52 TsAMO, f. 46, op. 2404, d. 29, 24, 41.

53 TsAMO, f. 427, op. 11105, d. 462, 70–75, 171.

54 TsAMO, f. 46, op. 2404, d. 30, 14–15.

55 Koyfman G. 2011.

Most Soviet armoured units were halted before the assault on the central districts of the cities. During street fighting, within the assault groups, vehicles participated only in subgroups of two or three, providing infantry with cover from fire while gaining protection themselves from launcher operators. The effect was a reduction in the number of vehicles lost.<sup>56</sup> After the clashes, the installation of anti-aircraft machine guns was recommended, for example, on the ISU-122 self-propelled guns, which had performed poorly in urban combat, to give them better protection against Panzerfausts and other simple anti-tank weapons.<sup>57</sup>

## Conclusion

Much of what happened in Pomerania occurred along the entire German-Soviet front. To familiarise their own troops with captured equipment, texts under the heading “Learn the Enemy’s Technology” described combat properties, parts of the launcher, and preparation for firing. They indicated how to make the launcher safe and how to fire it lying down, standing, and from a trench. They discussed the actions of a sub-unit during an operation, safety measures, and the choice of position.<sup>58</sup> German leaflets *Die Panzerfaust* were translated into Russian, and diagrams of the weapon were disseminated.<sup>59</sup>

Marshal Georgy Zhukov, commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Belorussian Front, also issued a special order on the necessity of learning the operation, collection, and use of the Panzerfaust as an effective weapon:

In the recent fighting, the enemy has used a significant number of Panzerfausts, and not only old models but also new ones. These grenades have great destructive power; they pierce the steel plates of tanks and other vehicles, crush bunkers, and break walls of brick, concrete, and stone. Lightness and simplicity of operation, the possibility of accurate fire up to 50 m, and significant destructive power mean that they are a convenient weapon for street fighting at short distances. Consequently, captured ‘Panzerfaust’ launchers in the hands of a well-trained Red Army soldier can be effectively used in fighting the enemy’s tanks, in street battles for larger localities with dense buildings, and in neutralising fortified areas saturated with permanent fortifications, from caponiers to forts. I order the collection of all Panzerfausts found and their transfer to the authority of the divisional artillery commander, who will distribute them further to sub-units. In each company, training in the operation

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56 TsAMO, f. 404, op. 9711, d. 555, dok. 99OP, 172 and following pages.

57 TsAMO, f. 46, op. 2404, d. 29, 6–8.

58 Vladimirov A. 1945.

59 TsAMO, f. 1124, op. 1, d. 59, list 7; f. 1676, op. 1, d. 71, list. 45; f. 208, op. 2511, d. 3135, list. 30.

of the launchers is to be organised, to be completed within ten days. To train and command the group of launcher operators, designate one of the company's officers. In training, use the leaflet issued by the Operations Department of the Front in 1945. During training, practice firing at armoured vehicles and at fortification walls.<sup>60</sup>

In the divisions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Belorussian Front, further instructions were prepared on the basis of this order, mainly on forming groups of operators and providing several days of training in the handling of the weapon.<sup>61</sup> Shortly thereafter, the 96<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 274<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division reported that Panzerfaust training had been provided to 56 men in the first battalion and 48 in the second, 63 in the fusilier company, 11 scouts, and 9 sappers. In total, 187 soldiers in the regiment became acquainted with the new weapon.<sup>62</sup> In mid-March, in each rifle company of the 89<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, groups of operators were organised, consisting of eight men each. A two-day training for commanders was conducted. Thirty people were trained, including ten officers. For ten days, meanwhile, the operation of the launcher was practised, with the training cycle concluding in live firing on the front line. After this training, however, only a few weapons remained in particular regiments.<sup>63</sup>

Red Army soldiers operating the launchers were a valuable asset, because the grenades they used detonated with great force, causing not only equipment losses but also a decline in German morale, as they were struck by a weapon that had until recently been their own. When striking at short range, there was no sound of shots, and the explosions took the defenders by surprise. Thus, on 17 April, scouts from the 362<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Division captured a serviceable mortar battery after its crew had fled following a salvo fired simultaneously from 12 Panzerfausts.

However, the weak points of the captured launchers were also noted. They revealed the operator's position because, at the moment of firing, they emitted flame and smoke. In addition, the shooter often had to leave cover so that the backblast would not endanger other soldiers. Sometimes, aiming was inaccurate, and as a result, the grenades failed to hit the target.<sup>64</sup>

Reports increasingly mentioned the Germans' use of launchers with fragmentation projectiles. In the 61<sup>st</sup> Army of the 1<sup>st</sup> Belorussian Front, it was ordered to collect and send to the army's combat training department, as quickly as possible, two specimens of each type of launcher. The department, immediately upon receiving them and testing their operation, was to prepare recommendations for use by Red Army

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60 TsAMO, f. 1684, op. 1, d. 144, list. 285.

61 TsAMO, f. 7617, op. 70036, d. 1, list. 63.

62 TsAMO, f. 1569, op. 1, d. 103, list. 38.

63 TsAMO, f. 1251, op. 1, d. 27, list. 120.

64 TsAMO, f. 1682, op. 1, d. 177, list. 353.

soldiers.<sup>65</sup> Soviet units began to use them, noting the greater effectiveness achieved at night and the need for precise aiming. In the press and in leaflets, the dimensions and technical descriptions of the weapon were published.<sup>66</sup> It was also observed that among the Germans, one operator was designated from each platoon, or several-person groups were created in companies.<sup>67</sup>

Sometimes, however, too broad a dissemination of the launchers captured from the enemy was refused. The command of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Army responded to a request from the 94<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps, stating that it did not agree to the additional publication of instructions for their operation in the army bulletin. 'If you want, print it at your own expense', subordinates were advised.<sup>68</sup>

In sum, the German hand-held launchers for shaped-charge grenades of the Panzerfaust type were very quickly disseminated within Wehrmacht units during the final period of the war as simple and effective anti-tank weapons. They proved particularly useful during fighting in densely urbanised terrain, where close-range fire and the element of surprise were effectively exploited. The armoured units of the Red Army immediately introduced methods of protection against shaped-charge grenades, regarding the use of their own infantry as riding detachments to eliminate enemy launcher operators as the best. Soviet troops also made extensive use of captured Panzerfausts as an offensive weapon in urban assaults, training sappers in the operation of the new equipment. The use of this weapon by both sides during the fighting for Pomerania in 1945 was primarily associated with clashes in cities and along lines of communication. It was characterised by the rapid application of the personnel's acquired experience, ingenuity in use, and improvements in the operation of the launchers. The skills gained were also used in the postwar period in introducing developmental projects for individual anti-tank launchers.

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65 TsAMO, f. 973, op. 1, d. 257, list. 561.

66 TsAMO, f. 402, op. 9575, d. 921, list. 553.

67 TsAMO, f. 208, op. 2511, d. 3135, list. 29–30.

68 TsAMO, f. 986, op. 1, d. 252, list. 296.

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## Building Civil Society in Wartime: Opportunities and Challenges on the Example of the Military Crisis in Ukraine in 2014–2023

**Summary:** The article examines the development of diverse forms of activism within Ukrainian society and how citizens have been mobilised in response to oppressive authorities and war. Although the war has triggered a profound humanitarian and political crisis, it has simultaneously fostered an unprecedented strengthening of resilience within civil society. The first two decades following the declaration of Independence cannot be regarded as pivotal for civil society-building; however, the situation changed markedly after the events of the Euromaidan and the Revolution of Dignity. The scale of the Revolution of Dignity, together with the subsequent military actions and the sense of agency gained by citizens who catalysed far-reaching political and social change, exerted a considerable influence on those involved. As a result, some participants formed organisations that continue to operate to this day.

Nevertheless, significant challenges persist in the functioning of Ukrainian civil society. These include the absence of long-term solutions to the ongoing humanitarian crisis, the discontinuity of reform processes, and the inability of the third sector to transform deeply entrenched corruption within state institutions. At present, many Ukrainian NGOs are undertaking functions that should properly fall within the remit of the state. This article therefore seeks to explore both the opportunities and the challenges facing civil society in Ukraine amid the ongoing war with Russia.

**Keywords:** Civil Society, Russo-Ukrainian war, Civil Society Organizations, Hubs of Engagement, humanitarian crisis

The term civil society is inherently complex and has been the subject of extensive scholarly debate, resulting in a multitude of interpretations and definitions. This complexity stems from its historical evolution and the varying contexts in which it is applied, ranging from democratic to authoritarian societies and from developed to developing nations. Civil society can encompass a broad spectrum of entities, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community groups, social movements, volunteer organisations, and other forms of collective citizen action.<sup>1</sup>

In this article, we adopt the definition provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which conceptualises civil society as ‘a domain of social relations beyond the household, state, and business sectors, where people get together to satisfy and/or promote joint interests and to defend common values’.<sup>2</sup>

The issues related to civil society in Ukraine during the war, analysed from various perspectives, have been addressed by a wide range of scholars. It should be noted that their work focused on selected dimensions of civil society, such as grassroots social movements (studied by Orysia Lutsevych),<sup>3</sup> youth activism (examined by Olena Nikolayenko),<sup>4</sup> and volunteer movements (investigated by Kateryna Zarembo).<sup>5</sup> This article represents an attempt to address the question of how civil society in Ukraine is developing during the war with Russia and what challenges arise from this process.

During the first two decades following Ukraine’s proclamation of independence in 1991, the development of a robust civil society was significantly hindered by a combination of historical, political, economic, and social factors, rendering this period less pivotal for civil society building.<sup>6</sup> The legacy of Soviet rule had a significant impact in this regard, as the suppression of freedom of association and independent civic activity during that period led to an underdeveloped civil society infrastructure and a widespread mistrust of non-governmental organisations.<sup>7</sup> The economic difficulties

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1 A comprehensive review of definitions of civil society was carried out by: Zarembo K., Martin E. 2024, 206–209.

2 UNDP 2017.

3 Lutsevych O. 2013.

4 Nikolayenko O. 2019.

5 Zarembo K. 2017, 47–70.

6 There were legal provisions, including the Law on the Association of Citizens (1992), which enabled the development of non-governmental organizations. However, several specific regulations restricted their growth, such as the requirement for dual registration, limitations on conducting commercial activities, and the prohibition on forming joint associations and mixed corporations. See: Bilan Y., Bilan S. 2011, 78–86.

7 Researchers identify these elements as characteristic features of post-communist societies. Furthermore, they emphasise the absence of an organisational system typical of civil societies. See: Stepanenko V. 2006, 577; Howard M.M. 2002, 160–163. Howard is indicated that the reluctance in post-communist countries, including Ukraine, towards organisational activity stems from the prohibition on independent operation of organisations during the communist era. Furthermore, citizens in these states were often channelled into structures entirely controlled by the system. Equally significant were the established networks of personal relationships and the shared disappointment with the outcomes brought about by democratisation.

following the restoration of independence, including the deep crisis, hyperinflation, and unemployment, focused society's attention on securing basic needs, thereby limiting both the resources available for civic initiatives and citizens' capacity to participate in them. The low level of civic participation and trust, resulting from historical repression and persistent corruption, led to apathy and scepticism regarding the effectiveness of collective action in the process of social change. However, this situation underwent a radical transformation following the events of Euromaidan and the so-called Revolution of Dignity. The term 'Euromaidan' refers to the initial protests and social unrest that began in November 2013 — triggered by the Ukrainian government's decision to suspend the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union — reflecting the widespread desire of society for closer integration with Europe and opposition to corruption and authoritarianism. In contrast, the so-called Revolution of Dignity encompasses a broader movement that followed, including the escalation of demonstrations, clashes with security forces, and the eventual removal of President Viktor Yanukovich from power in February 2014.<sup>8</sup> These events became the first instance of how society in Ukraine collectively responded to the challenges that it faced. This phenomenon — referred to as the 'Maidan energy' — symbolised the collective effort of hundreds of thousands of people working to address social issues and indicates that a sense of individual responsibility for the further democratic development of the state emerged within Ukrainian society.<sup>9</sup> As Anton Oleinyk, points out:

These people contributed to their common goals financially, materially (e.g., bringing food, clothing, fuel, and other supplies), and through volunteer work [...]. The current massive civic action movement was born during the Maidan protests of 2013–14 and became even more robust and active after the start of hostilities between Russia and Ukraine in February of 2014.<sup>10</sup>

Both during and after Maidan, Ukraine's blossoming civil society was made up of people from different strata of society with different financial statuses, education, and cultural backgrounds. However, one crucial aspect can be noticed — the wave of initiatives for change usually came from the youth. Young adults were the main body of those who first came out on the streets with pro-EU slogans.<sup>11</sup> It was precisely young

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8 See: Krapfl J., Kuhn von Burgsdorf E. 2023, 325–334; Kotsiuk V., Hutsalo L., Hryhorchak I., Havrysh A., Stadnyk O. 2025, 599–607.

9 As K. Zarembo and E. Martin indicate, Euromaidan prompted scholars to reinterpret the thesis concerning the weakness of Ukrainian civil society and to move away from linking social activism exclusively with organisational activity. They point to the existence of a 'society without organisations' in Ukraine. Zarembo K., Martin E. 2024, 208; Matviychuk O. 2024.

10 Matviychuk O. 2024.

11 Data presented by the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation and the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology indicate that approximately 40% of those participating in the protests were young people, primarily students. Maidan-mitynh 2013.

adults who constituted the main group of people to take to the streets first, carrying pro-European slogans. The realisation of their own political powerlessness within a governance system still largely rooted in the legacy of the Soviet Union became a decisive factor in the engagement of young people in these actions in 2014. The absence of transparent mechanisms for youth participation in public life, the highly hierarchical structure of state institutions, the influence of the country's Soviet past, and the expansion of bureaucracy all contributed to a sense of helplessness and futility among the new generation — young enough not to remember the Soviet era, yet simultaneously aware of its pervasive influence. This is one of the reasons why young people tend to avoid state institutions and instead channel their potential into volunteer initiatives and the non-governmental sector.<sup>12</sup> The third sector, not dominated by hierarchy and bureaucracy, also provides young people with a sense of community with fellow citizens.

The scale of the Revolution of Dignity and the military actions that followed it, together with the power that young people gained by provoking drastic changes in both politics and society, had such a significant influence on the people involved that some of them united into the organisations that are still in operation. Moreover, following the onset of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022, their level of activity has been greater than at any point previously. Ukraine's experience in sustaining civil society is unique, as the scale of the crisis the country has faced since 2014 is the largest in Europe since the Second World War and has adversely affected all aspects of daily life, including the economy, housing, food security, mental health, and gender equality. At the same time, this crisis has acted as a catalyst for cooperation and for the unification of Ukrainians within their communities. Not only has the resilience of civil society organisations not weakened following 2014 and the subsequent full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, but it has, in fact, been strengthened, rising from 3.4 in 2013 to 3.2 in 2022.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, as statistics show,<sup>14</sup> by December 2021, the total number of registered public associations (PAs) had reached 96,258 — an increase of 19,193, or 25%, since 2013. Likewise, registered charitable organisations (COs) experienced steady growth over the past decade, rising to 20,499 by the end of 2021, which is 5,598 more than in 2013 (a 38% increase). The full-scale invasion in 2022 led to fewer new PAs while sharply boosting the formation of new COs. Specifically, 2,760 PAs were established in 2022 (down from 4,360 in 2021, 3,739 in 2020, and 4,905 in 2019), whereas 6,367 new COs emerged in 2022, a notable jump from 830 in 2021, 723 in 2020, and 654 in 2019. The greatest concentration of these newly formed COs and PAs in 2022

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<sup>12</sup> *Ukrainska molod* 2018.

<sup>13</sup> CSO 2023.

<sup>14</sup> *Hromadianske suspiilstvo Ukrainy* 2024.

was found in Kyiv and the Kyiv region, as well as in the Lviv, Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, and Odesa regions.<sup>15</sup>

One notable example of such an organisation is the Come Back Alive Foundation, which provides a wide range of professional support to the military. Since 2014, they have helped the Armed Forces of Ukraine become more efficient — therefore not only systematically countering the enemy but also saving the lives of military personnel. The latter motive — to take care of Ukrainian soldiers and ensure that as few Ukrainians as possible must sacrifice their lives in defence of their country — has been the primary goal of civil society. People are united in their will to help the army, and the way engagement hubs function reflects this.

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion in February 2022, we have multiplied our military assistance and supported the defenders of Ukraine, who changed their everyday lives and joined the line of defence. The Foundation purchases equipment that helps save the lives of the military, including thermal imaging optics, quadcopters, cars, security, and intelligence systems. Since 2014, the Foundation has raised over UAH 4,5 billion or over USD 130 million for the needs of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and trained over 10,000 highly qualified military specialists.<sup>16</sup>

The colossal amount of money donated to these organisations testifies to the trust that Come Back Alive and similar organisations have gained since 2014. It is hard to find someone in Ukraine nowadays who wouldn't join the activities of such organisations, at least by donating. But it is not only big NGOs that raise money for charity — individual citizens as well come up with initiatives to cover the needs of someone from the military and fundraise without turning to state institutions or large-scale NGOs for help. Such individuals are called 'volontery' (*волонтери*); usually, they announce the fundraising on their private social media platforms and collect money through Banka, a tool created specifically for this kind of transaction by one of the biggest banks in Ukraine (Monobank). This tool allows donations to be collected legally and without the obligation to pay taxes. In these ways, by participating in big fundraisers and local ones, Ukrainian society is firmly united in resisting the invader.

The attitude of Ukrainians toward charity has changed. As the research project *Charity in times of war*<sup>17</sup> demonstrates, 84% of Ukrainians noted that the scale of charity is growing, and they notice its rapid development. This also applies to trust in charitable institutions: if previously the level of trust was 'mediocre' (estimated at 2.66 points out of a possible 5 points in 2021), now it is 'rather high' (3.77 out of 5). The involvement of Ukrainians in charity has increased significantly — 86% of Ukrainian residents have donated to charity during the last year. The number of volunteers has

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<sup>15</sup> *Hromadianske suspiilstvo Ukrainy* 2024.

<sup>16</sup> *Come Back Alive* 2023.

<sup>17</sup> *Blahodiinist u chasy viiny* 2023.

also increased. If in 2021 it was 5% of the population, then now it is about one-third. Together with changes in behaviour, there is also a change in motivation. Although compassion and awareness of the struggles of fellow citizens are still the most important factors that push people to action, new elements have appeared in the research: a sense of patriotism, a desire to participate in the solution of significant problems, and an awareness of one's duty to society.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Challenges that Ukrainian Civil Society Faces**

Civil society organisations in post-Maidan Ukraine gained respect and trust. With that, the third sector became highly influential and powerful. Their activities are not limited to solving particular military or humanitarian issues but also include initiating social reforms, public oversight of the government, documentation of violations of human rights, and reporting crimes in the areas of armed conflict. In this way, civil society in Ukraine became a 'parallel state,'<sup>19</sup> cooperating with government institutions, sometimes substituting for them, and in particular cases opposing them. However, there are specific problems with how the civil society in Ukraine is functioning: the third sector is failing to translate its vital activity into much-needed reform of the state institutions that are deciding the country's future. Currently, NGOs in Ukraine are performing many of the activities that state institutions should be.

As Evgeny Hlibovetskyi, an expert on long-term strategies and the values of Ukrainian society, points out:

We are constantly putting patches on the tattered body of Ukrainian state institutions [...]. We must finally move on to creating institutions that are not post-Soviet but those that we need for the future [...]. It seems to me that Ukrainian society has desensitised this process, advancing trust in state institutions. We must prepare for the next period. This next period is the creation of new institutions, new rules, new systems of rules and institutions that oversee them.<sup>20</sup>

This can be considered a logical end to the complete cycle of changes that were initiated as a part of EuroMaidan resolutions — society has to build a new system, a new set of rules and ways in which the country functions that will enable civil society to act strategically, instead of constantly putting out fires and solving urgent problems by doing what is supposed to be done by government institutions in a well-thought-out and planned manner.

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<sup>18</sup> *Blahodiinist u chasy viiny* 2023.

<sup>19</sup> *Civil Society in Ukraine*.

<sup>20</sup> *Yak hromadianske suspilstvo* 2022.

Another challenge is the need to pay attention to the continuity of reforms. Reform shouldn't be postponed simply by blaming the war. According to the Vox Ukraine poll regarding the importance of the reforms at the current stage of the crisis, the vast majority of respondents (81%) identify the fight against corruption as the most vital issue. Of next importance are health care reform (52%), judicial reform (47%), education reform (41%), and pension reform (40%). In the future, citizens expect the reforms to reduce corruption or embezzlement of the budget (71%), increase well-being (63%), and use public funds more efficiently (39%). At the same time, corruption and misuse of public funds (78%) and the war with Russia (53%) are viewed as the major obstacles to reforms.<sup>21</sup>

An equally important problem from the point of view of building civil society is the restriction of the activities of civil rights organisations in times of war, in favour of humanitarian organisations. As statistics show, the main domain of activity for Civil Society Organisations is supporting the army, veterans (43,2%), while only 13% of organisations were involved in protecting human rights.<sup>22</sup> Representatives of such organisations also note a decline in public interest and participation in this area. Marina Khromykh, executive director of the DEJURE Foundation, says: 'Today, we cannot afford to postpone reforms or the demand of justice for those enemies who are here in the rear, who, unfortunately, feel absolutely safe, because all the attention of society and the international community is focused on the war.'<sup>23</sup> A significant part of society expects, not NGOs, but the military, which has gained respect and trust through serving their country in the most challenging way, to come back from the battlefield and starting changes in the political system, law enforcement agencies, the judicial system, and local governments. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that many engagement hubs that, before the war, were performing in the field of human rights activism, youth, education, and gender equality switched their focus to assisting the Armed forces, forming and supplying volunteer battalions, and providing support for internally displaced people. The Kyiv International Institute of Sociology shows that only a quarter (24,7%) of civil society organisations that started their work before the full-scale war continued to work exclusively in their usual fields after the invasion began. 18.8% of organisations reoriented their activity to meet new challenges, while the majority (56.4%) of civil society organisations combined the priorities of pre-war work with new fields.<sup>24</sup>

Civil society must resist aggression without becoming an authoritarian state, and be wary of the significant dehumanisation, radicalisation, and polarisation which

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21 Sologoub I. 2023.

22 *Hromadianske suspiilstvo Ukrainy* 2024.

23 Matviychuk O. 2024.

24 *Ukrainian Civil Society* 2023.

can occur as a result of a full-scale war and the tragic events that follow. This underscores a critical threat to the development of a resilient and inclusive civil society in Ukraine, as ongoing conflict and the resulting societal fatigue undermine civic engagement, erode trust in democratic institutions, and make it increasingly difficult to maintain the openness and cooperation essential for building a healthy public sphere.

Even the humanitarian sphere, which receives significant attention from NGOs, faces acute problems and challenges that still lack systematic solutions. In particular, the field of support for internally displaced persons is especially problematic. According to data from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as of February 10, 2023, over 17.7 million Ukrainians in Ukraine needed humanitarian assistance, and 13.4 million had been forced to leave their homes temporarily or long-term, or in many cases permanently. Engagement hubs operating in this sector have yet to move from the constant distribution of humanitarian aid to the systematic and large-scale creation of employment opportunities so that families of displaced persons can provide for themselves. Such employment is also vital to creating a sense of fulfilment among displaced people and to combating feelings of frustration and loss.

This task has been challenging because many international partners of humanitarian Civil Society Organisations in Ukraine only knew humanitarian aid in certain countries of Africa or Asia, with no specific understanding of Ukraine or its development and context. Even today, these aspects do not allow international organisations to develop the most effective cooperation with local state and public partners. On the other hand, the Ukrainian civil society itself was not prepared for the scale of the disaster that had to be faced, as well as for the scale of work and cooperation with foreign partners and did not understand the challenges associated with it.

In order to solve the humanitarian crisis issues, changes in the way civil society institutions function should be implemented. As the specialists at the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs suggest,<sup>25</sup> the most crucial difference is that humanitarian aid needs to be seen as development work from a visionary, contextual, and strategic perspective. The goal of humanitarian help is to prevent the victim from deteriorating, primarily morally and physically. The purpose of the aid is not to make a person dependent but to create favourable conditions so that they can help themselves and others in close cooperation with local authorities, entrepreneurs, and public organisations.

Another critical point that Ukrainian and some international organisations comment on is that the humanitarian aid methods of the past years have become over-bureaucratised, conceptually outdated, and, unfortunately, not always

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<sup>25</sup> *Ukraine Humanitarian Response 2023*.

humanitarian-centric, which often harms the environment in the broadest sense of the word.<sup>26</sup> Such assistance requires too much unnecessary paperwork that consumes both human and material resources. A significant part of the financial, human, and communication resources is spent on the organisation alone — ideally, these resources should be applied more innovatively and effectively. Ideally, those resources should be directed to local organisations, making it possible for them to hire employees on a more permanent basis and for a more extended period. This would, on the one hand, strengthen their professional, institutional development and institutional memory, and on the other hand, support the state and society through the payment of taxes for each full-time employee.

Another important aspect is that humanitarian aid should be focused (as much as circumstances allow) on the education of both children and adults, as the irreplaceable investment into the strategic solutions of both wartime issues and hypothetical post-war problems. ‘It is education that is the backbone of hope for the future and resilience, and it is the children of today, and the adults of tomorrow, who will be the ones who will rebuild the country for decades to come after the Russian aggression.’<sup>27</sup> Education is a critical factor in creating new jobs and innovative enterprises, taking care of international visibility, and enhancing cooperation. Funding for the education sector should be increased to meet the educational needs of Ukrainian children and adults and to develop relevant educational institutions and initiatives.

While strengthening education systems represents a strategic investment in the long-term resilience and innovative capacity of Ukrainian society, sustainable progress also requires a robust legal and institutional framework to support and guide these developments. It is in this context that the creation and advancement of the Map of Legal Reforms<sup>28</sup> emerges as a crucial step toward optimising the functioning of Ukraine’s civil society. This document, the first and only of its kind, united over 150 NGOs and charitable organisations from all the regions of Ukraine; 250 experts worked together on the map for six months. As a result, the co-authors formed a reform agenda for civil society in Ukraine, which not only contains a detailed picture of the problems, difficulties, and obstacles faced by the public sector but also offers a set of steps that will allow these problems to be solved. The Map identified 91 issues that currently concern public and charitable organisations, self-organisation bodies of the population, and initiative groups, and offered 307 solutions to solve the problems stated. Among the questions raised by the co-authors of the Map, the most important ones are:

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26 Lutsevych O. 2023.

27 Lutsevych O. 2023.

28 *Karta pravovykh reform 2023.*

- Lack of a favourable legal environment for the development of civil society in Ukraine
- Absence of transparent procedures and tenders referring to the distribution of the budget funds allocated for CSOs
- Unfavourable tax environment for NGOs, charitable and volunteer organisations
- The existence of real threats to the life and health of Ukrainian activists

The very existence of such risks and obstacles has created a predisposition for developing the Map of Legal Reforms. The National Strategy for Civil Society in Ukraine for 2021–2025 is based on the Map's provisions and proposals.

### **Conclusions**

According to the results of the study *Ukrainian Civil Society During Wartime*,<sup>29</sup> the expectations about how civil society will function after a war do not depend on how long the war lasts. As long as military action continues, the main request from the society will be the satisfaction of basic needs. Focus shifts to reforms and reconstruction only when military action is over. As most of the survey participants agree, reconstruction is not possible without civil society support.

In this process, the most essential tasks of civil society will be:

- Re-establishing the mechanisms of local democracy
- Creating a dialogue between the community, business, and government
- Consulting local and state institutions on a wide range of issues (depending on the specifics of Civil Society Organisation competency)
- Taking part in creating amendments to legislation, control, and advocacy of implementing changes
- Representing the needs of all interested parties in the process of restoration
- Control over the authorities' actions
- Ensuring restoration decisions and funding distribution are open and honest

Only by making sure that these roles are fulfilled can Ukrainian society expect the restoration to be successful. It is important to mention that Ukraine will not be starting its recovery from scratch. Before the Russian invasion in February 2022, Ukrainian civil society was already working to increase the involvement of citizens in policy-making and governance processes. Since 2010, Ukrainian legislation has provided for public consultations in the process of developing all new state policy documents and regulatory legal acts at the national and regional levels. Cities have incorporated various participatory tools into their charters, including community consultations, public hearings, and participatory budgeting, allowing citizens to use digital technology to vote on projects they believe are worthy of municipal funding. Launched in 2017,

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<sup>29</sup> *Ukrainian Civil Society 2023*.

the ‘Transparent Cities’ initiative<sup>30</sup> encourages local authorities to work more openly, mainly through reporting of all expenses, live broadcasting of meetings of councils at various levels, and the publication of all laws and regulations.

Currently, many active youth and volunteer councils contribute to the creation of jobs for internally displaced persons and assist young migrants. The recent experience of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, which proved the possibility of practical cooperation between CSOs, the private sector, and local authorities, allowed for rapid mobilisation to provide support to the civilian population as soon as Russia launched the full-scale invasion.<sup>31</sup>

Having a successful experience of cooperation between the state and civil society in the preparation and implementation of transformational reforms, Ukraine will be able to fully control the reconstruction process. Its citizens have shown remarkable courage and powerful resilience in the face of an existential threat. The subsequent recovery work must build on these advantages, designed also to reduce the risks that could threaten Ukraine’s post-war future.

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30 *Research of transparency* 2023.

31 Lutsevych O. 2020.

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## **'Our Folk Who Have (Not) Become Foreign...': Political Loyalties in the Donbas During the War of 2014–2024 (In Light of Oral History Sources)**

**Summary:** The military conflict that started in the Donbas in 2014, which, in 2022, turned into a full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war, has created a specific way in which it is remembered. This article is based on more than sixty interviews with residents of the Donbas and other regions of Ukraine who fled the country in the period between 2014 and 2024. It addresses the distinctive way in which the events of 2014–2024 affected the formation and evolution of political loyalties; characterises the key factors that have influenced the circumstances of the refugees; analyses the specifics of adaptation in a new place and the practicalities of interaction with the environment; and identifies key socio-political challenges that the region may face after the war.

The gathered recollections paint a complex picture of the political positioning of the Donbas populace in the context of the 2014–2024 war. Worldview attitudes formed over the years, propaganda influences from opposing sides, as well as the direct military experience of the region's residents were crucial to the formation of different models of political loyalties. It is noteworthy that the decision to flee or to stay in the Donbas was determined by several factors, such as the physical security situation, family circumstances, opportunities for adaptation in a new place, the ability to find new accommodation and a job, fear of discrimination, political and ideological preferences, etc. Situations in which some refugees were forced to return home, to the combat zone, demonstrate a set of problems related to the lack of a consistent state policy towards this category of the population. It is emphasised that a fully representative depiction of the formation and evolution of the system of political loyalties requires that, in the future, the experiences of people who have left for Russia or Belarus and those who continue to live in the occupied territory should also be taken into account.

**Keywords:** political loyalty, the Donbas, war, internally displaced persons, refugees, oral history sources

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## Introduction

Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of August 2023, the Ukrainian sociological group Rating conducted an anonymous survey on the occasion of Ukraine's Independence Day. It analysed the problems and challenges facing Ukrainian society. Among other things, it raised the question of Ukrainian citizens' attitudes towards several categories of their compatriots: 59% of respondents expressed an unfriendly attitude towards residents of the 'people's republics' of the Donbas, while only 5% expressed an unfriendly attitude towards residents of the occupied territories of the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia oblast, as well as towards internally displaced persons.<sup>1</sup> There is no representative sociological research on the mood in the non-government controlled territory of the Donbas, but the author's personal observations during her last trip to Donetsk in July–August 2019, monitoring of the 'DPR/LPR' media resources, as well as constant contact with relatives and friends who still live in the Donbas, allow her to observe a growing trend of alienation among the population of the occupied Donbas region in relation to residents of other regions of Ukraine. Thus, it is logical to assume that several factors have been developing over the years, and these are now influencing the socio-political discourse, including the formation of perceptions of each other.

The political cataclysms of 2013–2014 were accompanied by the formation of two quasi-state entities in parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts — the Donetsk and Luhansk 'people's republics'. Active hostilities in the region from the spring of 2014 have resulted in massive migration. In the years 2014–2021, about 2.5 million people left their homes, and a new category of people emerged — the so-called 'internally displaced persons' (hereinafter: IDPs) from the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, whose number was about 1.5 million (about 1 million people fled abroad, mainly to Russia and Belarus).<sup>2</sup> Given that at the beginning of 2014, the population of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts was about 6.6 million people,<sup>3</sup> the scale of migration of residents from one region was unprecedented in the history of Europe after 1945. According to preliminary estimates, by the end of 2021, around 14,000 persons had lost their lives on both sides of the frontline, including about 3,500 civilians, while about 40,000 people

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1 *Sotsiologichne doslidzhennia...*

2 Gulina O. 2015, 135.

3 *Chyselnist naseleennia...*

were wounded.<sup>4</sup> The experience of hundreds of thousands of children in the region, whose socialisation since 2014 has taken place amidst the military conflict, has been traumatic and long-lasting.<sup>5</sup> The losses of industrial potential are colossal, as is the ruination of housing and social infrastructure. There are serious problems with securing the basic rights of people who have either left the region or remained. All of this suggests that the population of the Donbas (both in the territory of the 'people's republics' and in the territory controlled by the Ukrainian government), having been involved in military confrontation since 2014, had developed a specific wartime experience and a corresponding worldview by 2022.

The full-scale war that began in February 2022 has only deepened this experience, leading to the total exodus of virtually the entire population of the most affected settlements (Bakhmut, Popasna, Kreminna, Avdiivka, Maryinka, Soledar, Vuhledar, etc.) and to a sharp increase in the number of casualties in cities such as Mariupol, Volnovakha, Donetsk, and Horlivka. Hundreds of thousands of residents of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, who had already experienced internal displacement (*de facto* refugee status) between 2014 and February 2022, had to go through the refugee experience for the second time. They were forced to leave the frontline areas and either move further west within the country or flee abroad. Fatal human losses on both sides of the Donbas conflict since 2014 are estimated at several tens of thousands of lives.

It is fair to conclude that by 2022, the events in the Donbas had reshaped many stereotypes and perceptions of 'our folk' and 'foreign' and formed an 'image of the enemy' for many people, which was reflected in the political, psychological, and moral evaluations of millions of people who have lived on opposing sides of the frontline since 2014, within different systems of political coordinates. These features were partially reflected in interviews conducted with participants in commemorative events dedicated to the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the victory over Nazism,<sup>6</sup> local residents who witnessed World War II personally,<sup>7</sup> residents who crossed the line of contact demarcating parts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts controlled by the Ukrainian and separatist sides,<sup>8</sup> as well as residents of the region who were interviewed at the behest of the Rinat Akhmetov Voices of the Peaceful Museum Foundation.<sup>9</sup> A book dedicated to analysing the key myths that were formed around the Donbas<sup>10</sup> utilised extensive interviews on various aspects of the pre-war reality in the Donbas.

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4 *Conflict-related...*

5 Tytarenko O. 2017, 225–229.

6 Hellbeck J., Pastushenko T., Tytarenko D. 2017, 41–66.

7 Tytarenko D. 2021, 146–179.

8 *Monitorynh kontrolnykh punktiv...*

9 *Museum of Civilian Voices...*

10 Bilokobylskyi O. et al. (eds), 2024.

Since February 2022, the new phase of the war has prompted a number of academic and civic initiatives aimed at collecting the memories of war witnesses, including oral histories of refugees from Ukraine. At the same time, it has become apparent that analytical research on the long-term and multidimensional experiences of residents of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, who have been at the epicentre of the war since 2014, is lacking. This often leads to the falsification and dissemination of inaccurate information in the media, the manipulation of public opinion in Ukraine, Russia, and the West, stereotyping, the use of hate speech, and mistakes in developing a strategy for reintegrating the Donbas into the Ukrainian state.

In view of this, the oral history project 'Their Ten Years of War...', initiated in 2023 at the Department of Public History at the Fern University in Hagen (Germany) — as part of the international project 'Witnessing the Now' — has considerable potential. It aims to analyse the specifics of social transformations, political loyalties, and survival strategies of the Donbas population between 2014–2023, based on oral history interviews.<sup>11</sup> The key objectives of this article are as follows: to describe the impact of the military and political events of the last ten years on the formation and evolution of political loyalties; to highlight the key factors that influenced the refugee situation; to analyse the specifics of adaptation in a new place and the practices of interaction with the environment; and to identify key socio-political challenges that the region may face after the war from the respondents' perspective.

### **The Project 'Their Ten Years of War...' — Donbas Residents During the 2014–2024 War: Methodological Aspects**

During the course of the project, 50 interviews were conducted with residents of the Donbas region, as well as 12 interviews with residents of other regions of Ukraine. Additionally, four of the interviews were conducted with people who did not give permission to keep the audio recordings in the project archive but nevertheless allowed the author to use the material for research purposes on the condition of anonymity. The respondents were given the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the purpose of the interview and the list of questions prepared by the project in advance. One of the key methodological challenges of the project was to ensure maximum representativeness. To this end, the experiences taken into account were those of men and women alike, representing various social, professional, and age groups (with the exception, for ethical reasons, of persons under the age of 18).

The respondents consisted of people who lived in the government-controlled areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and other regions of Ukraine, as well as in

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<sup>11</sup> The interviews were recorded by a team from the Public History Department at Fern Universität Hagen within the international documentation project: '24.02.22, 5 am: Testimonies from the war.'

the non-government-controlled/occupied territory ('DPR/LPR') between 2014 and 2022. However, the vast majority of respondents interviewed in Germany and Poland had, until they fled the country in 2022, lived in the Ukrainian government-controlled territory since 2014. The general consensus, however, is that a fully representative view of the formation and evolution of political loyalty systems can only be made in the future, when the experiences of people who left for Russia or Belarus, as well as those who continue to remain in the occupied territory, have also been taken into account.

Given that the study was conducted as part of a wider project, the questionnaire did not include a separate set of questions related to the political views or political sympathies or antipathies of the interviewees. At the same time, as the interviews formed part of autobiographical narratives, most respondents addressed these issues by themselves, either openly or implicitly. During the interviews, most respondents deliberately limited the content of their stories. The main reasons for this were the risks of pressure and persecution from the Ukrainian or Russian authorities and special services and fear of social isolation should those opinions, which did not conform to the 'mainstream', become known to others. In some cases, the interviewees felt pressured by their kin (children, wives, husbands), who were present at the time of the interview, to express officially accepted and socially approved opinions. These and other factors interacted and triggered mechanisms of self-censorship. During the interviews, most of the respondents tried to integrate their autobiographical narratives into the framework of official discourse. At the same time, the narrators became more frank and willing to analyse many events and phenomena, especially those of a political nature, after the recorder was turned off. This allows us to recognise certain limitations of oral history sources in terms of reconstructing the socio-political atmosphere and the respondents' attitudes towards certain political processes. Moreover, this situation opens up an interesting research perspective for conducting repeated interviews with these respondents after the war to analyse the evolution of their worldviews.

One important aspect is confronting information from official sources with one's own experience: 'What was shown on TV at the time and what was happening in our city were different things. [...] What they say is one thing. What people see in reality is altogether another thing.'<sup>12</sup> Given the high level of potential risk for the respondents, all of them were assured of anonymity and confidentiality regarding their participation in the project; any information that could potentially identify them was removed from the quoted interview fragments. It should be noted that this approach is followed by other researchers working on similar issues.<sup>13</sup>

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12 Interview with a woman, born in 1988, lived in Kramatorsk. Place and time of the interview: Munich, 18.01.2024.

13 Schäfer K. 2024, 50.

## Fractured Donbas: The Events of 2014–2024 as a (Dis)integrating Factor

It would be a simplification to present the political, social, and cultural landscape of the Donbas as homogeneous or static. From the very beginning, the region was populated by people with different political views, life experiences, and visions of the future. The first signs of the country's polarisation appeared in Ukraine back in 2004 during the presidential elections, when foreign policy factors demonstrated the significant influence from the Russian (pro-Russian) political vector.<sup>14</sup> The events of 2013–2014 gave a new stimulus to the manifestation of dissent among the populace, which regional and global political actors successfully exploited. This was the time of clear demonstration of political disloyalty by a part of the population of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, which for a long time had not only shared a border with Russia but also a long historical tradition of coexistence. The percentage of Russians in the 2001 census was 38% in Donetsk and 39% in Luhansk,<sup>15</sup> while the level of intermarriage was extremely high. The language issue raised after the victory of Euromaidan, as noted by several respondents, became one of the catalysts for the radicalisation of sentiment in the region and the formation of an anti-government stance: 'Why can't I speak Russian? People were afraid that they would immediately be oppressed. When people are told that they will not be able to speak Russian, it scares them.'<sup>16</sup>

One of the key factors, if not the key factor, in destabilising the situation and turning it into a violent confrontation was the external interference, which was all too obvious to many respondents, in particular the arrival of provocateurs from Russia to the region:

Everyone saw how it developed gradually. No one came to these rallies at first [...]. No one went to them — the rallies against Ukraine, for Russia. Gradually, it was gaining steam. Then I personally saw lots of buses coming to Donetsk from the Rostov region with crowds — we call them 'titushki' — but they were full of grim-faced men dressed in grey and black... You could tell that these people were the lowest of the low. In short, they came to Donetsk and staged rallies.<sup>17</sup>

This phenomenon of instigating anti-Ukrainian demonstrations was observed not only in Donetsk:

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14 Nahorna S. 2008, 223.

15 *Natsionalnyi sklad naselelnia...*, 56.

16 Interview with a woman 1, born in 1984, who lived in Donetsk.

17 Interview with a man, born in 1963, who lived in Donetsk, later – Mariupol.

I stayed in Bakhmut — then Artemivsk — during the entire period of occupation by pro-Russian mercenaries [...]. I saw it all, this 'Russian spring'. Rallies in the central square. I have never seen such rallies in Bakhmut. No one has ever gathered in such numbers before! These people were brought in. There were, of course, some local crazies.<sup>18</sup>

The most significant events in terms of their consequences were those in Sloviansk and Kramatorsk, which, according to eyewitness accounts and supported by analysts' findings, were marked by the participation of numerous militant groups in armed confrontations, groups consisting of both Russians and local residents, many of whom hailed from marginalised groups.<sup>19</sup>

The recollections show the rapid process of changing political identities and loyalties, which is generally characteristic of major social upheavals. At the same time, the question remains: to what extent was this a consequence of shifts in mentality, and to what extent was it a manifestation of conformism in the face of real or potential threats? According to the respondents, symbolic space was an important external marker of political positioning:

Our school headmaster immediately began to repaint the railings from yellow and blue to blue, white and red. The stairsteps were repainted in the national flags of this upcoming DPR [...]. One of my friends, when I met him in the city, said: Look what I've got", and he pulled out a yellow and blue flag on one side. From one pocket. And from the other pocket, he pulled out a St. George's ribbon [...]. People were changing their colours, of course, they were changing them on a large scale. Those who were pro-Ukrainian became pro-Russian in a matter of two or three weeks.<sup>20</sup> In this situation of uncertainty, the respondents felt threatened:

The feeling that you will be betrayed everywhere [...]. People seemed to have gone mad. People who were quite normal, but they suddenly became angry and started to betray one another, they saw everyone as a potential Ukrainian. For speaking Ukrainian over there, you could be sent to the basement.<sup>21</sup>

At the same time, it should be noted that for many residents of the region, especially the older generation, the issue of ethnic identity has always played a secondary role compared to preserving the memory of the Soviet identity that integrated them in the past.

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18 Interview with a woman, born in 1979, lived in Bakhmut.

19 Mitrokhin N. 2020, 113–144.

20 Interview with a man, born in 1963, who lived in Donetsk, later in Mariupol.

21 Interview with a man, born in 1962, who lived in Luhansk.

Luhansk sociologist Ilya Kononov described the events that took place in the spring of 2014 in the Donbas, particularly in Luhansk, as the 'Luhansk syndrome.'<sup>22</sup> Similar processes took place in the Donetsk region. Stereotypes and phobias that had been accumulating for decades pushed people seeking existential safety towards the aggressor. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that political loyalty as '[...] a complex phenomenon that cumulatively reflects the relations of power, trust, identity, tolerance, legitimacy, solidarity'<sup>23</sup> could not be secured either by the old, politically compromised elites or by the new ones, elites incapable of integrating the society split apart by the political events of 2013–2014. This found its manifestation in the rather large participation of the inhabitants of the Donbas in the 'referendum' of 11 May 2014.

We received a piece of paper inviting us to our usual polling station. [...] And on the day of that pseudo-referendum, I was also in the centre, in that English office, and I sat outside all morning and looked at the crowd – well, not a crowd, people were going in files to this central area, the polling station. And I remember my thought: when you see an educated, cultured person, they are dressed and look completely different. Those people were dressed in low-quality, synthetic clothes, they just dressed their best clothes and went out. You could see a parade of people with bad teeth, dumb faces, I just sat there for several hours, looking at these citizens of our city – who were these people?<sup>24</sup>

The respondent emphasising the unattractive appearance of people and their allegedly limited intellectual capabilities is nothing new in terms of social psychology. This approach should be viewed in the context of building a dehumanised image of one's enemy.

The respondents' comments noted increasing levels of radicalism on the street towards real or perceived opponents:

I remember one day I was teaching extra English classes near Central Square and I saw those people and I shouted "Assholes!" or something like that. They ran up to me, so I locked myself in my office. It had an iron door, and they were knocking on it, but we had a back door to the other side. I went out through that door afterwards, sat there, waited, but they were not yet warmed up, it was still March. It was in the centre of Bakhmut.<sup>25</sup>

Respondents were particularly disappointed with the shift in political views among those who taught the Ukrainian language or promoted Ukrainian history or culture:

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22 Kononov I.F. 2016.

23 Khanstantynov V.O. 2014, 63.

24 Interview with a woman, born in 1979, who lived in Bakhmut.

25 Interview with a woman, born in 1979, who lived in Bakhmut.

When only yesterday you were teaching Ukrainian at a university or school, when you were advocating for national Ukrainian culture, and today, literally a month and a half later, you are already running around with a St. George's ribbon. How can you respect such people?<sup>26</sup>

It is an obvious mistake to explain the socio-political split that has been observed in the Donbas since 2014 solely by external propaganda factors. Analysis of socio-political reactions should take into account age, generational characteristics, and the specifics of political socialisation, even within the same family: 'Even Mariupol was divided, as it were, into two camps. Each family had two camps. That is, some were ardently supporting Russia, while others were for Ukraine.'<sup>27</sup>

In everyday reality, the family is traditionally seen as a defence against the negative influence of the outside world.<sup>28</sup> However, as the wartime actions in the Donbas show, this stereotype is not always valid: 'I have two brothers. One is married to a pro-Russian woman, and I don't communicate with the other because I am a "Ukrofascist".<sup>29</sup> We have no contact with him.'<sup>30</sup>

When describing the overall atmosphere of political division, the respondents generally illustrated this with examples from their immediate environment: neighbours, work colleagues, relatives, including even the closest people — parents.

In 2014, our neighbours' parents had a very strong fight with their son on this issue... They were pro-Ukrainian, and their son was pro-Russian. They did not speak for several years after that.<sup>31</sup>

My mother went to Russia to live with my sister. They fled to Russia in 2014 because her husband supported the DPR. One can say, we ceased communicating with her on those grounds.<sup>32</sup>

The prolonged nature of the military-political conflict has only exacerbated the breakdown of contacts between family members. Having one's close relatives or friends in the ranks of the opposing army has become a typical phenomenon in the Donbas since 2014:

The war has taken away not only material things from us – it has divided our relatives into two camps. My relatives are fighting on the side of the Ukrainian Armed

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26 Interview with a man, born in 1963, who lived in Donetsk, later in Mariupol.

27 Interview with a man, born in 1955, who lived in Mariupol.

28 Uehling G.L. 2023, 86.

29 A pejorative label that has become widespread since 2014.

30 Interview with a woman, born in 1988, who lived in Mariupol.

31 Interview with a woman, born in 1979, who lived in Sloviansk.

32 Interview with a woman, born in 1988, who lived in Kramatorsk.

Forces, my husband's relatives are on the side of the occupiers. I want them (the DPR) to get what they deserve.<sup>33</sup>

As the state lost control of the situation and power went into the hands of separatist groups, certain forms of protest activity emerged:

We were also posting stickers, walking around — we had these printed somewhere else; “Artemivsk is Ukraine”. And we'd go around at night in pairs and put them up along the trolleybus routes. We also spray-painted Ukrainian flags. That was very scary. Because we understood that if someone saw us now, they would send a car and take us away, and we would disappear. So we were very careful.<sup>34</sup>

However, these forms of protest did not become widespread in the uncontrolled territory due to demoralisation and disorientation of the local community. In total, since 2014, 6.5 million residents of the region have found themselves in separate military-political, socio-economic, and cultural realities, developing different forms of political loyalty, adopting or conforming to defiant ways of activity, and deciding to temporarily or permanently leave their 'little homeland'.

### **Stay, Leave, or Return? — The Challenges of Displacement**

One of the popular markers, widely perceived as a manifestation of ideological sympathies and political views, and an indicator of political loyalty and patriotism, is the act of staying in (or fleeing from) the territory under the jurisdiction of a particular regime.

The factors that prompted people to stay in the NGCA varied. Key amongst them were fears of changing their everyday surroundings, losing their homes, discrimination in a new place, having sick or elderly relatives who needed care, negative experiences of those who had left earlier and later returned, and finally, the expectation that the war would soon end and Ukrainian control over the territory would be restored. In most cases, these factors acted in combination.

Starting from the 15<sup>th</sup>, we all saw that it was going to be a long time. I really believed every year that it was about to end. And then we all got used to it. The reason I didn't leave right away was because I lived with my grandmother. My grandmother... she was like a mother. Like any old person, she didn't want to leave her husband's grave... The stories of many of us who left in 2014 were being told, and many of my

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33 Interview with a woman, born in 1980, who lived in Donetsk.

34 Interview with a woman, born in 1979, who lived in Bakhmut.

friends went to Kyiv... and they started to return... Ukraine couldn't support the IDPs properly. It was hard to settle in a new place and I saw it all... When the 14<sup>th</sup> year happened, I really didn't think it would last... If I knew it would last as long as it did, I would have taken my grandmother and everything I could [take] to Ukraine, of course. I waited every year. And there are a lot of people like us, by the way...<sup>35</sup>

The opinion about the significant number of pro-Ukrainian residents, at least in the first years of the military confrontation, is shared by Ukrainian journalist S. Aseejev, who lived in the uncontrolled territory for several years and observed the processes taking place in the territory of the 'people's republics.'<sup>36</sup>

The motives for leaving varied. The analysis of the interviews shows that the key motivation for Donbas residents who began moving to other regions of Ukraine in 2014 was the desire to ensure their own, and their families', safety. In some cases, the impetus was the feeling of the lack of freedom in seemingly basic everyday situations:

The most dramatic moment was when we were celebrating a big family holiday in a restaurant. It was a restaurant called 'Bavarian cuisine' in Donetsk... And the essence of this restaurant is Tyrolean and Bavarian tunes... And then one day a particular audience comes in — maybe 8 people in burnt camouflage overalls... They were probably the first to arrive after the capture of Sloviansk. And the first person who came to this restaurant made a sign of the cross and said to everyone 'stop playing these fascist tunes, let's play something of ours...' The waiter said that we will play what they asked for, like 'Vladimir Central' (a popular Russian chanson song — O.T.)<sup>37</sup>

Situations of moral turmoil and emergent existential threats influenced the decision to leave for many respondents. In some cases, the decision to leave was facilitated by the fact that relatives, friends, and colleagues had already left and thus they lost their familiar and comfortable social environment.

The key date that put an end to the hopes of many people who had maintained pro-Ukrainian sentiments while living in the territory of the 'people's republics' since 2014 was 2022:

After [20]22 years, the [pro-Russian] percentage started to grow. Many started to work in the education system, many started to serve, and they and their families support the DPR, Russia... I left Donetsk only because when they started to take people

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35 Interview with a man, born in 1980, who lived in Donetsk.

36 Aseejev S. 2020.

37 Interview with a man, born in 1963, who lived in Donetsk, later in Mariupol.

away by force on 18 February, I heard that there were even videos of people being snatched. They started snatching people in the city to enlist them.<sup>38</sup>

Oral history sources are seen as an important tool for studying the evolution of human spirituality. Also, it would be unwise to dismiss their role in reconstructing certain historical phenomena that are not reflected, for example, in other sources. For example, information about unsuccessful attempts by the Donbas refugees to obtain legal refugee status in Europe in 2014–2022 is virtually unobtainable.<sup>39</sup> The reason for the refusal was the official position of the Ukrainian government, which did not report the scale of refugee flows from eastern Ukraine and did not ask for European support in this regard.

### **Strangers Among Our Own**

The events of 2014, which marked the first wave of refugees from the Donbas, made it difficult to adapt to new places of residence. The state's response to the challenges of 2014 was superficial and inadequate. It was only in 2016 that the Ministry for the Temporarily Occupied Territories was established. The issue of compliance with anti-discrimination legislation and key principles of tolerance, as well as the fulfilment of the state's obligations, has always been a hot topic in relation to the IDPs. The mere fact of coming from a region that has been stigmatised as 'separatist' has, in many cases, served as the basis for political accusations from ordinary citizens living in other regions.

Sheer physical distance from the military events led to psychological alienation towards Donbas residents and contributed to the formation and consolidation of perceptions of the region's inhabitants as imaginary or latent 'separatists', as 'foreign', which was noted in the statements made by residents of other regions: 'There was a feeling that it wasn't about us, that this was happening somewhere far away... This was not just in statistics but in everyday life. When I studied at university from 2019 to 2023, I met a few Donbas-born people... So I can say that after having had conversations with them, after what I heard, my attitude changed. Many of those people just didn't want to talk about it, as if they were afraid of something. But for us at the time, they seemed pro-Russian. It was outrageous and caused a very strong negative feeling. When you met people from that region and they said "It's not all so clear-cut", we took a prejudiced and cautious stance with these people'.<sup>40</sup> The tendency to ignore the circumstances that forced people to stay in the uncontrolled territory became the

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38 Interview with a man, born in 1980, who lived in Donetsk.

39 Interview with a woman, born in 1968, who lived in Donetsk.

40 Interview with a man, born in 2004, who lived in Chernihiv.

norm, bearing in mind the silence from government officials, the unpopularity of the topic in the media, the lack of a clear position of the Ombudsman, and the lack of influence of human rights organisations:

There was an unfriendly attitude, it was common in my environment. They were simply called separatists, residents of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. It didn't cross anyone's mind if they could leave or it was their own choice.<sup>41</sup>

Even relocating to Ukrainian government-controlled territories to continue living and working in the region did not save IDPs from discrimination and, in some cases, open hostility, based solely on their place of birth or registration:

As I said, they wouldn't rent apartments. They didn't even want to hire me when they saw my residence permit. They didn't want to hire me once they saw my Donetsk residence permit. They said: 'Sorry, the job is taken.'<sup>42</sup>

In some situations, the causes and manifestations of aggression against IDPs from the NGCA were more complex. For example, one of the respondents, who had worked in one of Donetsk's municipal enterprises until 2014, moved to Kramatorsk in early 2015. After finding a job there a few months later, she was forced to resign and return to Donetsk. The reason was a life-threatening surgery she underwent in the summer of 2015 while visiting relatives in the uncontrolled territory. The refusal of her employer (a higher education institution relocated from Donetsk!) to recognise her sick leave, as well as the rude accusation by a colleague in Kramatorsk that 'the war started because of you, Donetsk people' — clear acts of discrimination and gross violation of her rights<sup>43</sup> — caused a deep moral shock to that person. Accusations of alleged political disloyalty and latent separatism became widespread in 2014–2022, according to respondents' memoirs, in particular when looking for a job or housing, enrolling children in school or kindergarten, studying at university, or completing documents, etc.<sup>44</sup> As a result of such difficulties, IDPs from the Donbas found themselves in situations where their identity and origin worked against them, shutting off or significantly limiting their social and economic opportunities.<sup>45</sup>

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41 Interview with a man, born in 2004, who lived in Chernihiv.

42 Interview with a woman 3, born in 1984, who lived in Donetsk.

43 Interview with a woman, born in 1971, who lived in Donetsk.

44 Interview with a woman 2, born in 1978, who lived in Donetsk; Interview with a woman 1, born in 1978, who lived in Donetsk; Interview with a woman, born in 1991, who lived in Donetsk, after 2014 in Dnipro.

45 Gyidel E. 2022, 118.

The situation with pension payments was an important factor that contributed to the growth of distrust of and disloyalty to the state. Since the summer of 2014, payments to pensioners living in the uncontrolled territory have been suspended. According to the current Ukrainian legislation at that time, pension payments could be resumed only for those who had left the uncontrolled territory, re-registered at a new place of residence, and actually stayed there (this position of the Ukrainian government drew criticism from many international human rights organisations).<sup>46</sup> A similar opinion was expressed by some influential representatives of Ukrainian politics.<sup>47</sup> The key factors that negatively affected levels of loyalty to both the Ukrainian state and the separatist quasi-state entities were the hours-long artificial queues at checkpoints (often under fire, on mined roadsides, and during weather disasters), humiliating frisk searches, and sometimes dismissive and rude attitudes of border guards and customs officers:

I used to go to Makiivka very often... I have my mother in Makiivka, my brother stayed there... And we would stand in these queues at the checkpoints, and we heard the attitude of the military towards us. They even called us cattle! 'These are cattle! Why are you talking to them? They are cattle!'<sup>48</sup>

A particularly depressing impression was made by systemic corruption on the part of law enforcement and controlling structures at the checkpoints:

This war has become a source of profit on both sides of the border. Anyone who has not seen what was happening at the checkpoints in the Donbas will not understand this war. How can you mock your citizens like this? How can we trust this state?<sup>49</sup>

The perception of state institutions in Ukraine, the 'DPR/LPR', Russia, Germany, and Poland was significantly influenced by the presence or absence of problems in obtaining IDP/refugee status, finding a job, the level of social protection, the possibility of exercising electoral rights, and the spread of hate speech by representatives of official structures. The facts of direct and indirect discrimination against internally displaced persons were recorded by human rights advocates who appealed to Ukraine's obligations to increase protection of human rights of internally displaced persons.<sup>50</sup> In some cases, problems in exercising their rights caused frustration among IDPs and

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46 Tytarenko D. 2021, 173–175.

47 Schuller K. 2016.

48 Interview with a woman, born in 1983, who lived in Mariupol.

49 Interview with a woman, born in 1946, who lived in Donetsk.

50 *Natsionalna sudova praktyka...*, 34.

forced them to return to the uncontrolled territory, providing their housing had not been damaged during the hostilities:

But, again, a large-scale war started here... And when you come to Kyiv and see life is quiet there, while you are already somebody else, you have changed, and you look at people from a different angle, and you realise that you are not understood and you do not understand them, you do not understand how one can live so quietly, yes, as if we live in the same state. But you are already a stranger to them... I mean, I was the most ardent patriot of Ukraine in Donetsk... as ridiculous as it may sound... When I came to Kyiv... my patriotism faded a little bit, [we lived] in this wait-and-survive mode for a very long time. You lived unwanted there for eight, nine months, however long we were there.<sup>51</sup>

Obviously, many IDPs/refugees from the Donbas faced similar difficult life situations related to the exercise of their rights in the Russian Federation. Under these conditions, state and political loyalty became a highly variable category that could be determined not only by one's political views and beliefs, but also by the specific experience of interacting with state and social institutions. There have been numerous cases where Donbas residents, having arrived in Russia, would later return to Ukraine. Such non-linear situations require thorough and methodologically balanced work with the memory resources of such refugees in the future.

### **'The War is Elsewhere...' — Reactions to Military Events from Other Regions**

Until February 2022, the majority of the population, especially in western and central Ukraine, was removed from the military conflict zone both geographically and mentally. This reduced the sense of immediate threat or impact of events on their daily lives:

The attitude towards people from these regions (Donetsk and Luhansk) was... People and people, nothing special. I lived in Kyiv. People reacted: It's over there. They kept saying it was somewhere in the East... A lot of people were guided by: My house is far away. They chose not to know.<sup>52</sup>

One of the reasons for the lack of understanding of the events that took place in the Donbas from 2014 to 2022, implicitly articulated by respondents, was the lack of

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51 Interview with a woman, born in 1976, who lived in Donetsk.

52 Interview with a woman, born in 2002, who lived in Kyiv.

experience of war in the environment in which they found themselves. Only the events of 2022 prompted residents of other regions to reconsider their views and assessments:

Life was normal. The war was out there. Not here. Our attitude toward them (people from Donetsk and Luhansk regions) was absolutely different... After the full-scale invasion, I reconsidered my views.<sup>53</sup>

Paradoxically, in some cases (at least until February 2022), this type of attitude could be found even among residents of large cities in the Donbas that were in close proximity to the line of contact. Living in an area that was under constant shelling proved the decisive factor in assessing the war, including its political goals. In particular, living in such districts of Donetsk as Petrovsky, Kyivsky, Kuibyshevsky, and the neighbourhood of Tekstilnyk, which were constantly under fire, contributed to a more expressive articulation of certain radical political views (with responsibility being placed on one side or the other, depending on the political views of the interlocutors). The author also noticed this phenomenon in her communication with friends and former colleagues during a trip to Donetsk in the summer of 2019.

Even in cases where respondents refrained from making political assessments of what was happening, everyday life contributed to the formation of a double reality:

When there are very expensive cars on Pushkin Boulevard, beautiful women in mink coats walking around, smelling of perfume, cafeterias and restaurants working, life is in full swing, some institutes and universities. You know, something there, something so civilised, beautiful, pretentious. And just around the corner, across the bridge, there's the Kirovsky district, yes, it's under constant fire, something is constantly collapsing, and someone is dying all the time, over there... I mean, the city is divided into the area of total madness and mayhem, yes, ruination and the area where people pretend that nothing is happening.<sup>54</sup>

A certain sense of disconnect from the war was observed among people living in urban areas relatively distant from the frontline, for example, in Mariupol prior to 2022, although several dozen residents of the city became victims of hostilities between 2014 and January 2022: 'It's their war in Donetsk — we don't have a war here'<sup>55</sup> (this assessment often depended on the presence or absence of personal wartime experience — for example, the main reason for the author's family's refusal to accept the

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53 Interview with a woman, born in 2002, who lived in Kharkiv.

54 Interview with a woman, born in 1985, who lived in Kharkiv.

55 Interview with a woman, born in 1971, who lived in Mariupol.

official housing provided to them in Mariupol in the spring of 2021<sup>56</sup> was the night-time artillery cannonade and the unwillingness to relive the wartime experience of 2014).

The events of February 2022, which initiated a new and much larger wave of internal migration and refugee flows, gave rise to the phenomenon of 'victim competition', which is new to this war. Different levels of traumatic experience, and varying geographic origins of refugees, as well as the socio-cultural characteristics of refugees from different regions, in some cases led to conflicts among them and to instances of 'hate speech'. The language of communication could be one of the contributing factors for such reactions:

We went to the store with the child. At home, we speak Russian. So the dialogue between me and my child is naturally in Russian. Well, we just went to the supermarket... And he was telling me something, talking to me... And one woman came up and said, 'Hey, you Muscovite, — she said, — grab your freak and get the fuck out of here.' I left the store shaking.<sup>57</sup>

### **Life After the War**

The respondents' various plans for their lives after the war are important elements of their testimonies. Many of them tried to avoid answering this question. The absolute uncertainty about the course of military and political events, the presence of relatives in the Donbas (on one side or the other of the frontline), and the fear of harming them through openness were the main reasons for this. Since February 2022, there has been a noticeable trend of increasing radical anti-Russian sentiment, even among those who, before the events of 2022, did not consider Russia a hostile state due to their ethnicity,<sup>58</sup> family ties or the fact that Russian is their primary language of communication.<sup>59</sup> Some respondents, especially those who completely lost their property during the war, are considering options to remain in the host countries. Some are considering returning to Ukraine, although their readiness to do so is inversely proportional to the duration of the war (this trend is also evidenced by the results of sociological studies conducted with Ukrainian refugees).<sup>60</sup>

At the same time, there is a high level of concern about the prospects for returning among those who left for Germany after 2022 from the territory of the Donbas,

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56 This house, along with the apartment, was destroyed in the spring of 2022.

57 Interview with a woman, born in 1992, who lived in Kramatorsk.

58 According to the 2001 census, more than 38% of the population of Donbas identified themselves as Russians, with the vast majority of families having representatives of two or more nationalities.

59 According to the 2001 census, 75% of the population of Donbas declared Russian as their mother tongue. Its use as a language of everyday communication, especially in urban areas, was much higher than this.

60 *Pres-reliz...*; *Bizhentsi...*

which has been under the control of the 'DPR/LPR' since 2014, and was officially incorporated into Russia in the autumn of 2022. The situation of these people seems to be the most difficult, given the risk of persecution by two political and legal systems. If Russia retains control (which is seen as the most likely scenario), they fear a ban on entry to Russia (and thus the Donbas), or potentially persecution for travelling to the territory of 'unfriendly states' if they attempt to return.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, in the event of a return from Germany to Ukraine, or the restoration of Ukrainian control over the territory of the Donbas, these respondents' fears are related to possible stigmatisation and discrimination by their compatriots, as well as repression by state authorities for living and working in the non-government controlled area until 2022.<sup>62</sup> It is noteworthy that they expressed their disbelief in the injustice of what they believe to be a totally corrupt and politically biased Ukrainian justice system.<sup>63</sup> This is compounded by information available in the media regarding convictions on charges of collaboration, as well as reports from international human rights organisations concerning the indiscriminate application of criminal code articles that provide for liability for collaboration,<sup>64</sup> reinforcing their doubts about the possibility of fair decisions:

I am afraid that Ukraine will come to my Yenakiyev. I don't know what Ukraine will do. I'm just afraid... What will they do to us, who have been under Russia for ten years and did not leave, and received these Russian DPR passports... They are accused of being separatists. I'm scared for my mother if Ukraine comes there... My mother's friend lives near Mariupol and says 'Finally, the Russians have come.'<sup>65</sup>

Obviously, such concerns are much more widespread among residents of the 'DPR/LPR'.<sup>66</sup>

An important factor that could influence the decision to return to the Donbas after the war is the availability or loss of housing. Some respondents stated that they would be willing to return to their hometowns if they could recover their homes. Respondents gave examples of Mariupol residents they knew who left the city during the hostilities in 2022 and ended up in Germany but returned to occupied Mariupol because their houses remained undamaged.<sup>67</sup> Examples of this kind demonstrate

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61 Interview with a woman, born in 1946, who lived in Donetsk; Interview with a woman, born in 1971, who lived in Donetsk.

62 Interview with a woman, born in 1946, who lived in Donetsk; Interview with a woman, born in 1971, who lived in Donetsk.

63 Interview with a woman, born in 1946, who lived in Donetsk; Interview with a woman, born in 1971, who lived in Donetsk.

64 2022. *Country Reports...*; Mykhailov D. 2024.

65 Interview with a woman 1, born in 1984, who lived in Donetsk.

66 This thesis is based on the author's experience of communication with acquaintances who currently live in the annexed territory of Donbas or have left for Russia.

67 Interview with a woman, born in 1983, who lived in Mariupol.

a state of deep uncertainty about a future abroad and, probably, disillusionment with the system of social and political values of Western countries or Ukraine, as well as nostalgia for their homeland.

The comments reveal the coexistence of differentiated images of the homeland — namely, the state and the place of birth or pre-war residence. Respondents tend to demonstrate a stronger sense of nostalgia for the small — cosy, familial, and comfortable — homeland, where different peoples and cultures interacted: 'What Donetsk was like. A city of mining waste heaps and roses... My dad came from Russia, by the way, and my mother was Ukrainian — and life went on... The city provided very comfortable surroundings and no horrors.'<sup>68</sup> It is the image of the pre-war city that refugees cherish, extrapolated to the present and serving as a key incentive for them to consider the prospects of returning to the city that has already undergone devastating changes:

My situation is very simple — [I will just grab] my suitcase and goodbye, farewell. And I will not be going to anywhere within the territory of Ukraine. I will go to my city, I will continue to work there, I will continue to develop there. And I will do everything there. But it will be the city where I grew up, where I studied... As my grandfather says "Where you were born, you are useful. That's it!". When we get back home, everything will be fine, everything will be fine in any case. I have a clear goal — I will survive here, and then I'll just go live there. That's it.<sup>69</sup>

Some respondents attributed the irreversible loss of their familiar and comfortable space to the political events of 2013–2014, which, in their opinion, triggered destructive processes in their personal lives, within Ukrainian society, and specifically in their local communities. Both sides were responsible for this:

[...] the Maidan split Ukraine because those who came to power by bloody means thought not about the country, but about how to seize power and plunder the country even more. Human life did not matter to them at all. We have felt this well in the Donbas since 2014. I feel sorry for ordinary people who were forced by politicians on both sides to hate and kill each other for their own interests. The Donbas was being murdered from all sides.<sup>70</sup>

Taking into account the entire spectrum of opinions, it is clear that the Donbas, which was 'peaceful' in the past but now 'destroyed and lost' (temporarily or permanently),

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68 Interview with a woman, born in 1969, who lived in Mariupol

69 Interview with a woman, born in 1969, who lived in Kramatorsk.

70 Interview with a woman, born in 1946, who lived in Donetsk.

will remain the paradigmatic image of the Motherland in the memories of a significant number of residents of the region, regardless of their place of residence and political views.

## Conclusions

The military events that began in 2014 in the Donbas — accompanied by devastating material damage and loss of life — resulted in the formation of certain features within the region's collective memory and, accordingly, an oral history tradition. The phenomenon of refugeeism of Donbas residents, and the decision to stay or leave the war zone, as evidenced by the interview materials, was a combination of personal, social, political, economic, and psychological factors. Each case is unique, and it is possible to understand the motivation of a particular person only by considering the full range of circumstances in which they found themselves.

According to the materials of the interviews, by 2022, the events in the Donbas had already actualised many stereotypes and ideas about 'own folk' and 'foreigners', and had formed an 'image of the enemy' for many people, which was reflected in the political, psychological, moral and value orientations of millions of people who had been living on opposing sides of the frontline in different political coordinate systems since 2014. Their comments reflect a complex and varied picture of the political positioning of the region's population in the context of the 2014–2024 war. A key role in the formation of different models of political loyalty was played not only by the world-view attitudes that had been formed over the years, but also by propaganda influences from different sides and the direct military experience of the region's residents.

The decision to flee or stay in the Donbas was determined by a number of factors: the physical security situation, family circumstances, opportunities for adaptation in a new place, the ability to find housing or a job, fear of discrimination, and political or ideological preferences. The circumstances in which some refugees were forced to return home to the war zone demonstrate a systemic failure related to the lack of a consistent state policy on internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The challenges faced by IDPs during 2014–2022 could have significantly affected the evolution of political loyalties, in some cases creating a sense of distrust towards the Ukrainian state and towards a part of Ukrainian society that, in their opinion, lived without noticing the war. The full-scale invasion of 2022 led to significant changes in the political attitudes of the population of the Donbas, which was particularly affected by the war.

According to oral history research, the competing experiences of the war in the Donbas — which began in 2014 and has gained a new, more destructive impetus since February 2022 — have significantly affected their vision of the future. This outlook is the result of profound suffering, the loss of thousands of lives, aggravated

by competing propaganda from each side, and the daily realities of interaction between people from different regions. Some residents of the region, especially those who lost their property and homes because of the war, expressed a desire to stay and integrate into the states that hosted them. Others expressed a desire to return, guided primarily by idealised and nostalgic images of their pre-war lives. A phenomenon revealed during the interviews that should not be underestimated, and which requires an appropriate response, is the fear of some refugees from the territories not controlled by Ukraine since 2014 to return to Ukraine due to the risk of being prosecuted for 'collaboration'.

It is obvious that the problematic issues and visions of the future voiced by the respondents must be taken into account by the state when developing realistic scenarios for the implementation of social, humanitarian, and legal policies in the Donbas.

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## Keeping the Memory Alive: Ukrainian Commemoration Practices in Public Spaces Amid the War with Russia in 2025

**Summary:** On 24 February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, marking a dramatic escalation of the conflict that had been simmering since 2014. Russian troops advanced into Ukrainian territory from Russia, Belarus and the occupied Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea. According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 14,200–14,400 people were killed between 14 April 2014 and 31 December 2021. Additionally, 12,500 civilians and 45,100 soldiers have been killed since the full-scale invasion, prompting efforts to commemorate those who perished in the war. This article discusses and shows images of different commemorative practices that take place in Ukraine during the ongoing war, including Independence Square in Kyiv, the Field of Mars and Saints Peter and Paul Garrison Church in Lviv and the Alley of Glory in Ivano-Frankivsk. The results show many forms of commemoration, such as the installation of national flags and cubic frames displaying banners with the faces of soldiers who died due to Russian aggression.

**Keywords:** Ukraine, commemoration, photography, Kyiv, Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk

<p>... One, two... She notices me and stops. “Go away,” she says. “Write your texts. Stay out of my game.” I go,</p>	<p>so heavy, like on an autumn road, knee-deep in mud, one endless night in Donbas, one endless approach to the position,</p>	<p>a backpack on my shoulders stuffed with stories that press on my memory, dragging me down with the untold and the unlive.</p>
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Fedir Rudy<sup>1</sup>

1 Rudy F. 2025.

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Russian military forces entered the country from Russia, Belarus and Crimea.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Ukraine's air defence system had to ward off a huge missile and airstrike, which damaged nearly 75% of its stationary air defence facilities within the first 48 hours.<sup>3</sup> The ongoing war has resulted in a refugee crisis involving 3.6 million internally displaced people and 6.8 million Ukrainians who have fled abroad, as well as 12,500 civilian deaths.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, since the full-scale invasion, Ukraine has lost over 45,100 soldiers on the battlefield.<sup>5</sup>

Prior to the full-scale invasion, there had already been an ongoing war in Eastern Ukraine between Ukrainian government forces and separatists supported by Russia.<sup>6</sup> Following the anti-government protests known as the Euromaidan 2013–2014, pro-Russia separatists took control of governmental buildings on Crimea and raised the Russian flag on 27 February 2014.<sup>7</sup> Since then, Russia has maintained control over the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea and supported pro-Russian separatist forces who took control of parts of Donetsk and Luhansk later that year.<sup>8</sup> According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights,<sup>9</sup> 14,200 to 14,400 people were killed between 14 April 2014 and 31 December 2021, including at least 3,404 civilians, an estimated 4,400 Ukrainian forces and 6,500 members of armed groups.

The number of lives lost in a war is more than a statistic. Behind these numbers are human beings with families and stories whose demise leaves behind deep sorrow and long-lasting consequences. Because war and armed conflicts persist, individual and collective commemorative practices are carried out to remember and honour those who have died.<sup>10</sup>

This article discusses and shows images of different commemorative practices carried out by Ukrainians during the ongoing war in their country. For this purpose, the background of the photographs is explained. Afterwards, central terminologies are clarified before different public commemoration sites are shown, including Independence Square in Kyiv, Saints Peter and Paul Garrison Church and Field of Mars in Lviv and the Alley of Glory in Ivano-Frankivsk. Finally, a conclusion is drawn.

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2 Walker N. 2023, 4.

3 Kharuk A. 2024, 143.

4 *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2025, 4.*

5 Basmat D. 2025.

6 Walker N. 2023, 4.

7 Walker N. 2023, 4.

8 Walker N. 2023, 4–5.

9 OHCHR 2022.

10 Mitima-Verloop H. et al. 2020, 2; referring to Hunt N. 2010.

## Background of the Photographs

All journeys to Ukraine were undertaken in a private capacity.<sup>11</sup> The photographs included in this article did not contribute to a systematic or comparative approach to studying different commemorative practices. All locations shown in this publication are open to the public. There were no safety concerns associated with visiting these places, apart from the possibility of Russian air strikes.

The photos included in this article were taken at different times throughout 2025. The photos of Independence Square were taken on 29 and 31 August (Fig. 1–6), those of Saints Peter and Paul Garrison Church were captured on 18 April and 28 August (Fig. 7–10), those of the Field of Mars were taken in the early evening hours of 18 April (Fig. 11–14) and those of the Alley of Glory<sup>12</sup> in Ivano-Frankivsk were taken on 20 and 22 April (Fig. 15–18). Some locations are official commemorative spaces initiated by a city's mayor (e.g. Alley of Glory), while others were started by the families of fallen Azov soldiers (e.g. Independence Square). All these locations are commonly known as commemorative spaces. In addition to the locations shown here, there are public memorials in almost every village and town, as well as many modern forms of remembrance, such as graffiti/stencils, billboards on country roads and memorial museums at music festivals, such as at Faine Misto Festival in Lviv.<sup>13</sup>

## Commemorative Practices

Commemoration can be defined as a practice involving 'a ritual or a display destined to celebrate the memory of a person, a group or an event'.<sup>14</sup> Gilbert et al.<sup>15</sup> distinguish three forms of commemoration: textual commemoration (e.g. written words), memorial commemoration (e.g. sculptures, museums and gravestones) and aural

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11 The main emphasis of the various journeys to Ukraine was on producing social reports within the scope of my work as a freelance journalist. Activities included, for example, visits to an organisation distributing food to internally displaced persons in Khmelnytskyi Oblast, as well as to a kindergarten in Ivano-Frankivsk, where children's play was interrupted by an air raid siren (Beck K.F. 2025a). In addition, I engaged in private cooperation with colleagues at Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University in Ivano-Frankivsk, which included delivering lectures at the university.

12 Numerous cafes and shops can be found on both sides of the Alley. A young Ukrainian woman said that some people don't like 'the view', drinking their coffee and eating their cake while looking at the portraits of the fallen soldiers standing just a few metres away, but she followed with: 'If it bothers you, then it's just right' (Beck K.F. 2025b). The picture showing a cigarette in the opening of a grave-light was taken on 22 April 2025. A young man kneeled in front of a portrait at the Alley of Glory and lit two cigarettes. While he placed one cigarette in the grave-light before the portrait, he smoked the other himself, as if they were smoking a cigarette together. When he left the memorial site, the deceased's cigarette continued to burn.

13 Beck K.F. 2025c.

14 Glew A. 2022, 27; referring to Denis P. 2015.

15 Gilbert C. et al. 2020, 3.

commemoration (e.g. music, sound and silence). However, they acknowledge that this is not an exhaustive list and additionally mention ceremonial forms of commemoration. To summarise, commemoration includes all public and private actions that have as their intention ‘keep[ing] the memory of a person or a thing alive’.<sup>16</sup> They are seen as a ‘call to remembrance’, hence, to letting a person, thing or event ‘continue to have a trace in the world’, and is ‘founded on, and therefore an expression of, our values’.<sup>17</sup> Specifically for the Ukrainian context, A. Kharuk and L. Kharuk write that ‘dignified commemoration of the fallen and their farewell on their final earthly journey is a matter of profound importance, touching not only the families of the deceased but also their local communities and Ukrainian society as a whole.’<sup>18</sup>

Glew<sup>19</sup> clarifies that the existing literature is mostly focused on commemoration after a violent conflict has ended, hence, ‘when it is [already] possible to establish which side won or lost, or at least to assess the general outcome of a conflict’. In contrast, commemorative practices during an ongoing war are under-researched.

### **Kyiv — Independence Square**

Independence Square, or Maidan Nezalezhnosti, is the central square of Kyiv. In 2022, changes were observed in the means of commemoration in public spaces and the organisation of memorial complexes.<sup>20</sup> Hence, the installation of national flags, each representing a fallen defender and often bearing their name and date of death, has emerged as a public initiative dedicated to commemoration. These flags are visible in the central areas of many cities in Ukraine, such as Independence Square in Kyiv. Popova<sup>21</sup> considers the National Memory Lawn on Independence Square, organised by the families of fallen Azov soldiers in June 2022, ‘one of the most visible spontaneous memorials’. Subsequently, more people joined the initiative, placing flags inscribed with the names of those killed by Russian aggression. Alongside numerous Ukrainian flags, flags from Poland, Germany, Finland, Argentina, Colombia and the United States are displayed, among many other countries. Thus, according to Popova,<sup>22</sup> ‘[this] growing sea of tributes gradually transformed the square into a powerful space of collective mourning’.

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16 Mitima-Verloop H. et al. 2020, 2; referring to Bomba 2016, 7.

17 Gilbert C. et al. 2020, 1.

18 Kharuk A., Kharuk L. 2026.

19 Glew A. 2022, 185.

20 Nikolaienko V.A. et al. 2025, 758.

21 Popova V. 2025, 7; referring to Titorchuk V. 2024.

22 Popova V. 2025, 7.



Fig. 1. Memorial at Maidan Square, Kyiv (Photo: Beck K.F. 2025)



Fig. 2. Memorial at Maidan Square, Kyiv (Photo: Beck K.F. 2025)



Fig. 3. Memorial at Maidan Square, Kyiv (Photo: Beck K.F. 2025)



Fig. 4. Memorial at Maidan Square, Kyiv (Photo: Beck K.F. 2025)



Fig. 5. Memorial at Maidan Square, Kyiv (Photo: Beck K.F. 2025)



Fig. 6. Memorial at Maidan Square, Kyiv (Photo: Beck K.F. 2025)

## Lviv — Saints Peter and Paul Garrison Church

Saints Peter and Paul Garrison Church in Lviv is one of Ukraine's most significant spaces for commemorating soldiers killed in the Russian aggression. Originally a Jesuit church<sup>23</sup> from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, it was reconsecrated as the principal military church of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church and was placed under the care of the Center for Military Chaplaincy.<sup>24</sup>

According to Ben,<sup>25</sup> the church has served as a central site for public military funerals since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Inside the church, many portraits of fallen soldiers can be found. In addition, there is a 3-meter birch cross that withstood heavy shelling by the Smerch Multiple Launch Rocket System in 2014 in Pobeda Village, Luhansk Oblast; it was brought to the church by Lviv natives of the 80<sup>th</sup> airborne brigade.<sup>26</sup> Destroyed military equipment and shell fragments are arranged on the floor surrounding the cross, and paper doves hang from the ceiling. According to the church priests, the doves, which were created by children in 2014, will remain in place until Ukraine attains victory against Russia. Pictures of children who have lost their fathers in the war since 2014 are also displayed.<sup>27</sup>



**Fig. 7.** Birch cross from Pobeda Village, Luhansk Oblast, in the Saints Peter and Paul Garrison Church, Lviv (Photo: Beck K.F. 2025)

23 Druzdiev O. 2021, 85.

24 Chraibi C. 2021.

25 Ben B. 2022.

26 Ben B. 2022.

27 Ben B. 2022.



Fig. 8. Saints Peter and Paul Garrison Church, Lviv (Photo: Beck K.F. 2025)



Fig. 9. Paper doves created by children in the Saints Peter and Paul Garrison Church, Lviv (Photo: Beck K.F. 2025)



Fig.10. Saints Peter and Paul Garrison Church, Lviv (Photo: Beck K.F. 2025)

### Lviv — Field of Mars

New commemoration sites are associated with soldiers who fell in the war, including new military cemeteries, such as the reactivated Field of Mars near the Lychakiv Cemetery in Lviv.<sup>28</sup> According to Holyk,<sup>29</sup> the Field of Mars (or Mars Field) illustrates the shifting memory policies and commemorative spaces in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Eastern Europe. Originally established in Lviv during World War I, it functioned as a military cemetery for soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After World War II, the remains of Austrian soldiers were exhumed, and representatives of the Soviet armed forces were interred in their place. Beginning in February 2022, the cemetery's role shifted once again when it became the burial site for Ukrainian soldiers who had fallen while fighting against the Russian army. Dulyaba<sup>30</sup> points out that, as of this writing, plans are underway to establish a memorial complex for military graves, comprising a cemetery, a memorial square, a museum, a monument to the unknown soldiers, a chapel, and a columbarium (a place for urns containing ashes).

28 Holyk R. 2024, 39.

29 Holyk R. 2024, 39–40.

30 Dulyaba N. 2024.



Fig. 11. Field of Mars, Lviv (Photo: Beck K.F. 2025)



Fig. 12. Field of Mars, Lviv (Photo: Beck K.F. 2025)



Fig. 13. Field of Mars, Lviv (Photo: Beck K.F. 2025)



Fig. 14. Field of Mars, Lviv (Photo: Beck K.F. 2025)



Fig. 15. The Alley of Glory, Ivano-Frankivsk (Photo: Beck K.F. 2025)



Fig. 16. The Alley of Glory, Ivano-Frankivsk (Photo: Beck K.F. 2025)



Fig. 17. The Alley of Glory, Ivano-Frankivsk (Photo: Beck K.F. 2025)



Fig. 18. The Alley of Glory, Ivano-Frankivsk (Photo: Beck K.F. 2025)

## Ivano-Frankivsk — Alley of Glory

Ivano-Frankivsk lies in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains and, with a population of just under 240,000, ranks among the smallest regional capitals in Ukraine. In the autumn of 2022, Ivano-Frankivsk began to create the Alley of Glory to honour the defenders who had fallen since 2014. Along one of the main pedestrian streets, cubic frames were installed, displaying banners with the faces of soldiers who had lost their lives due to Russian aggression. Each portrait is accompanied by the soldier's name and a brief note acknowledging their service and sacrifice.<sup>31</sup>

## Conclusion

Since the onset of the Russia-Ukraine war, a significant number of casualties have been reported in Ukraine. Existing literature predominantly focuses on commemoration after a violent conflict has ended. In contrast, commemorative practices during an ongoing war are under-researched.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the objective of this article was to provide a visual documentation of some commemorative practices that have emerged in the context of the ongoing war. For this purpose, the background of the photographs was explained. Afterwards, central terminologies were clarified before public commemoration sites were shown, including Independence Square in Kyiv, Saints Peter and Paul Garrison Church and Field of Mars in Lviv and the Alley of Glory in Ivano-Frankivsk. As mentioned in the introduction, the number of lives lost is not just a statistic but represents human beings with families and stories. Their deaths have an impact and cause deep sorrow, prompting efforts to commemorate them. The results show various forms of commemoration, such as flags bearing the names and dates of death of defenders, and frames displaying the faces of soldiers who lost their lives to Russian aggression.

*'Why did the war take my dad?  
I hate the war!'*

Pylyp Grytsenyuk, 5 years old

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<sup>31</sup> Derevianko N. 2023.

<sup>32</sup> Glew A. 2022, 185.

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