



## REPORT

# FIRST ON THE FRONT LINES

THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEERS IN COUNTERING RUSSIA'S  
MILITARY AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the impact of the paramilitary groups that became known as “volunteer battalions” in Ukraine. In the context of a new government and severely lacking military reform, Russian aggression in 2014 gave way to the birth of a mass volunteer movement that saw unprecedented amounts of self-organisation in defence. The report focuses on the evolution of the volunteer movement as well as its significant role in countering aggression and shaping Ukraine’s future both in terms of social change and reform of the security and defence sector.

The analysis is based on the work of an interdisciplinary research team, who devised and carried out direct anonymous questionnaire surveys, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and numerous focus groups across a wide range of different security stakeholders in Ukraine. It aims to provide perspective into the poorly-understood area of how a volunteer military movement can be formed during a chaotic period of active military operations by tracking the evolution of the movement and constructing a profile of typical volunteers in order to serve as a starting point for future research and expert discussion.

The rapid escalation of conflict in the east of Ukraine necessitated a swift response, for which the Ukrainian state security and defence sector was unprepared. Capitalising on their right to self-defence, the volunteer movement featured effective communication, self-organisation and discipline. The efforts of the volunteers proved to be decisive in maintaining the integrity of the Ukrainian state and its national defence system, and in mobilizing an effective response to the increasing demands incurred by Russian aggression. The strong reputation built among Ukrainian society enabled the volunteer movement to legitimise and establish itself, resulting in the sustained effort by the Ukrainian government to integrate the volunteer battalions into the official military and security structure of the state.

The effective self-organisation of volunteers was placed in stark contrast to the disarray of the Ukrainian state military and security structures, making clear the drastic need for security and defence reform. Since the inception of the volunteer movement, the Ukrainian government has explicitly attempted to create a legal basis for the volunteers and to integrate the units into official state structures. However, despite increasing professional training and reforms in the security and defence sector, volunteers largely expressed disappointment with the proposals for and the results of integration. The findings in this report indicate that the difficulties associated with the uncertain legal status of volunteers as well as gaps and inconsistencies and government’s approach to integration have complicated both wider societal and self-perceptions of the legitimacy and motivation of the volunteer movement. The unique socio-political and military ecosystem created by the volunteers remains a significant part of both security and defence sector reform and Ukrainian public debate overall.

The evidence presented in the report provides an in-depth perspective into the make-up, motivations and perceptions of volunteers. Volunteers are generally young, and include both native Ukrainian and Russian speakers from across entire country. Personal motivation played a fundamental role



in the decision to volunteer, fuelled by patriotic feelings and the desire to protect their homes, families and values. Further motivating the phenomenon of self-organisation was the generally poor perception of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and overall low public confidence in the military. Volunteer units were seen as a more attractive option, as their organisation was seen as more efficient and more reflective of volunteers' own personal values and aspirations.

The report concludes that volunteers have already changed Ukrainian society and will continue to impact overall socio-economic and political expectations. The volunteer movement aided in articulating clearer expectations and demands for security and defence sector reforms. The report emphasises the need for effective reform that includes a full-fledged dialogue among all security stakeholders, including civil society, and clarifies a useful approach to attracting, retaining and developing security and defence personnel from the ranks of volunteers.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB – Area Defence Battalion  
AFU – Armed Forces of Ukraine  
ATO – Anti-Terrorist Operation  
EU – European Union  
ICDS – International Centre for Defence and Security  
KORD – Rapid Operational Response Unit (Корпус Оперативно-Раптової Дії, КОРД)  
MoD – Ministry of Defence  
MoI – Ministry of the Interior  
NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation  
NSCU – National Security Council of Ukraine  
SBU – Security Service of Ukraine (Служба Безпеки України, СБУ)  
SPB – Special Purpose Battalion





## INTRODUCTION

Over the past three years several analyses of the political and socio-economic aspects of Russia's war against Ukraine have been published, whether in academic works aimed at a general audience, policy analyses, or scholarly reports.<sup>1</sup> In 2016, the war in the east of Ukraine was the most important issue of concern for 72 % of Ukraine's population, according to sociological surveys.<sup>2</sup> The military dimension of this war became a real challenge for all of Ukrainian society; in particular, the new authorities that emerged from the Revolution of Dignity were not prepared to defend the territorial integrity of the country and failed to conduct the necessary rapid reform of the armed forces. This reform was not carried out for three main reasons: an inadequate analysis of relevant military threats, a lack of experience in modern military conflicts, and a policy of neutrality adopted by the previous political leadership.<sup>3</sup> The country inherited all of its military infrastructure, equipment and training systems from the Soviet armed forces; accordingly, most

Ukrainian military bases are located in the western part of the country, along the old Soviet western border.

The obsolete structure of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU)—rooted in regular professional contact with the Russian military, joint military training exercises with Russia and Belarus, low levels of combat ability and training, and widespread corruption—left military personnel unprepared to respond effectively to the aggressive actions of a neighbouring (and formerly friendly) state.<sup>4</sup> An emergency decision of the National Security Council of Ukraine (NSCU) brought the armed forces to full combat alert in order to protect the country's eastern border, but the political leadership was unable to introduce martial law.<sup>5</sup> The main reasons for this included: (1) concern for the opinions of international partners, (2) the neglected state and low level of readiness of the AFU, (3) fear of escalation of the armed conflict, and (4) the manifest technical superiority of the Russian military.

Russia's military aggression gave rise to many spontaneous social and economic developments in Ukraine. At this critical moment, and against the backdrop of a series of dramatic events – the Revolution of Dignity in 2013–2014, the subsequent annexation of Crimea, and the armed conflict in the east of the country that developed from artificially provoked separatist sentiments directed from outside the region – people showed a strong will to self-organise, albeit for a short period of time. Thus, one can say that the birth of the mass volunteer movement played a decisive role in preserving the integrity of the Ukrainian state, thereby meeting the demands of the period of crisis. The patriotically-minded population, aware of the significant dangers posed by ongoing events, sought to fill the gaps of leadership that existed not only in

1. Igor Rushchenko, *Rosiis'ko-ukrains'ka gibridna viina: pogliad sotsiologa*. [Russian-Ukrainian hybrid war: a sociologist's view]. (Kharkiv: FOP Pavlenko, 2015); Evgeni Magda, *Gibridnaia Voina. Vyzhit' i pobedit'* [Hybrid War. To Survive and to Win]. (Kharkiv: Vivat, 2015); "Russia's Actions against Ukraine", International Centre for Defence and Security. Last modified June 30, 2014, accessed February 1, 2017. [www.icds.ee/publications/article/russias-actions-against-ukraine](http://www.icds.ee/publications/article/russias-actions-against-ukraine); Marek Menkiszak, *Russia's Long War on Ukraine*. (Washington: Transatlantic Academy, 2016), [www.transatlanticacademy.org/sites/default/files/publications/Menkiszak\\_RussiasLongWar\\_Feb16\\_web.pdf](http://www.transatlanticacademy.org/sites/default/files/publications/Menkiszak_RussiasLongWar_Feb16_web.pdf) (accessed February 1, 2017).
2. "Sotsiologi: ukraintsev bolshe vsego bespokoit voina na Donbasse, menshe vsego—status russkogo iazyka" [Sociologists: Ukrainians are most concerned about the war in Donbas, least—about the status of the Russian language], *UNIAN*, June 27, 2016, [www.unian.net/society/1439608-sotsiologi-ukraintsev-bolshe-vsego-bespokoit-voyna-na-donbasse-menshe-vsego-status-russkogo-zyzyka.html](http://www.unian.net/society/1439608-sotsiologi-ukraintsev-bolshe-vsego-bespokoit-voyna-na-donbasse-menshe-vsego-status-russkogo-zyzyka.html) (accessed February 1, 2017).
3. Diana Mikhailova, "Sostoianie ukrainskoi armii do i posle ATO" [The state of the Ukrainian army before and after the ATO], *RIA Novosti Ukraina*, October 2, 2014, <http://rian.com.ua/analyt-ics/20141002/357774790.html> (accessed February 1, 2017).

4. "Ucheniia desantnikov 'Slavianskoe sodruzhestvo' startuiut na Ukraine" [Paratroopers' exercise 'Slavic Commonwealth' commences in Ukraine], *RIA Novosti*, July 23, 2012, [http://ria.ru/defense\\_safety/20120723/706530096.html](http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20120723/706530096.html) (accessed February 1, 2017); David Marples, "The Ukrainian Army is unprepared for war", *Euromaidan Press*, August 6, 2014, <http://euromaidanpress.com/2014/08/06/the-ukrainian-army-is-unprepared-for-war> (accessed February 1, 2017).
5. "Rassekrechennaia stenogramma zasedaniia SNBO vo vremia anneksii Kryma" [A declassified transcript of the NSCU meeting during the annexation of the Crimea], *Krym. Realii—Nastoiashchee Vremia*, February 23, 2016, <http://ru.krymr.com/a/27567700.html> (accessed February 1, 2017).

political and socio-economic realms, but also in defence and national security. The voluntary movement thus partly assumed several functions of a government that had shown itself unable to respond effectively to hybrid threats—making it a unique phenomenon in the history of modern Europe. But just who were these volunteers? What motivated them and brought them together? How could ordinary people spontaneously organise themselves to contain the military threat—and to be first on the front lines?

To explore such questions, ICDS established an interdisciplinary research team to study the involvement of volunteers in defending Ukraine against Russia's aggression. Recognising that our study cannot cover every single aspect of this complex phenomenon, our objective instead has been a more modest one: to provide the public with an outside perspective that can foster deeper understanding of how a volunteer military movement can be formed during a chaotic period of active military operations. We hope that this analysis will be useful to the Baltic states, where volunteers are already extensively involved in national defence.

Our field research, which was conducted in several stages from October 2015 to November 2016, covers formation of the volunteer units and the subsequent integration of their members into Ukraine's regular military and security structures. In order to create a complete profile of typical military volunteers, data were collected through direct anonymous questionnaire surveys, in-depth semi-structured interviews with a wide range of different parties, and numerous focus groups including representatives of state institutions and volunteer organisations as well as military personnel, civilian activists, independent experts and ordinary residents of eastern Ukraine.

In addition to collecting, consolidating and analysing the relevant literature and media reports, the ICDS research team made four study trips to Ukraine totalling 40 working

days, and repeatedly visited Kyiv, Mariupol, Dnipro, Kharkiv, Lviv, Kramatorsk, Slovyansk, Lysychansk and Severodonetsk, as well as several places in the frontline anti-terrorist operation (ATO) zone. The main task of the research trips was to collect first-hand information from both former and current frontline military volunteers. We collected some 396 completed responses to our anonymous questionnaire, with respondents coming from the Armed Forces (specifically the Yavoriv, and Shyrokyi Lan training areas), units of the National Guard and the Ministry of the Interior and the forward deployed bases of several volunteer battalions (for example, Azov, Dnipro-1, Donbas, the Right Sector Ukrainian Volunteer Corps, Aidar, Skhidnyi Korpus, etc.). In addition, 123 people

*The voluntary movement thus partly assumed several functions of a government—making it a unique phenomenon in the history of modern Europe*

participated in the above-mentioned expert meetings, in-depth interviews and focus groups. The quantitative and qualitative data obtained from the questionnaires and focus groups were significantly supplemented with the opinions, views and assessments of interlocutors and stakeholders representing all levels (national, regional, and local) and all sectors (political, administrative, military, expert, media and civil society).

As expected, when we started the project we found that the phenomenon of military volunteers in Ukraine had been rather thinly studied. It is thus welcome that some publications covering and highlighting this topic have been released during our research period.<sup>6</sup> It should also be noted that the personal stories of those who were “first on the front lines” still carry enormous emotional weight. In a country that is de facto still at war, it is difficult to track, fully understand, or reliably analyse complex processes such

6. Oleg Pokalchuk, Dmitro Gromakov et al, *Dobrohati: Istoriia podvigu batal'ioniv, shcho vriatuvai krainu* [Volunteer Battalions: A story of the exploits of the battalions that were saving the country]. (Kharkiv: Folio, 2016).



as the volunteer movement. Accordingly, our work required the development of an effective and objective approach to analysing the processes of creating, developing and integrating volunteer units. We hope that this report will serve as a starting point for further research and expert discussion.

This report is organised into five chapters. Chapter 1 gives an overview of how the phenomenon of volunteer battalions arose and evolved; chapter 2 looks into the public perception of this phenomenon and also

how it extends well beyond the volunteer units themselves; chapter 3 examines the motivation of individuals to join volunteer battalions and their experience of serving in them; chapter 4 considers the image of the volunteer and regular forces as factors influencing the attractiveness of military service for members of society; chapter 5 addresses the uncertainties regarding the future role and impact of the volunteer battalions and broader volunteer movement on the development of Ukraine's national defence and security sector.





## 1. THE RIGHT TO SELF-DEFENCE

The military indecisiveness of Ukraine's political leadership provided the impetus to the emergence of the paramilitary groups that became known as "volunteer battalions" (which not only played a vital and timely role in counteracting aggression against Ukraine, but also helped to ensure law and order within the country). In organising the battalions, the Ukrainian people were exercising their right to self-defence, thereby offering hope that successful resistance to the aggressor and further development of a sovereign Ukraine were possible.<sup>7</sup> As early as summer 2014, the names of volunteer units such as Azov, Aidar, Donbas, Dnipro-1, the Right Sector Volunteer Corps, Sich and OUN began appearing in many news sources regarding their military activity in the Donbas. In order to understand the scale of the volunteer military movement, one should consider two figures. First, during the declared ATO, the volunteer battalions of just the Ministry of the Interior (Mol) of Ukraine have carried out about 600 special operations.<sup>8</sup> Second, more than 100,000 volunteers joined the ranks of the AFU since the beginning of the Russian aggression in the east of the country, the overwhelming majority of whom currently remain in the operational active reserve.<sup>9</sup>

It should be clarified here that the widely-used term of "volunteer battalions" does not reflect numerical strength and also refers to four distinct types of units:<sup>10</sup>

- territorial area defence battalions (ADBs) under the control of the Ministry of Defence (MoD);
- reserve battalions of the National Guard of Ukraine;
- special-purpose battalions (SPBs) of the Mol;
- the Right Sector Volunteer Corps, which was not subordinated to any official structures.

As fierce fighting broke out in eastern Ukraine, volunteer self-defence formations began emerging throughout the country. The first wave of volunteers was predominantly made up of active participants in the events of the Kyiv Maidan in 2013-2014 as well as of local-level confrontations which took place in April 2014. These active citizens mainly joined the Mol SPBs or National Guard units. It was reported that, by autumn 2014, there were 44 ADBs under the MoD, 32 battalions under the Mol and 3 battalions of the National Guard that had been already created or were at the formation stage.<sup>11</sup>

The SPBs were officially introduced into Ukrainian law by a decision of the Minister of the Interior, pursuant to legislation enabling the creation of so-called special police patrol service units. An Mol department specifically tasked with coordinating and managing the activity of such units was created in July 2014. As of 1 March 2015, there were already 37

7. "Dobrovol'chi batal'ioni zaklali ideologiiu rozvitku sil'noi patriotichnoi nezaleznoi kraini" [Volunteer battalions have set out an ideology for a strong patriotic independent country], *Cenzor.Net*, January 27, 2017, [http://ua.censor.net.ua/photo\\_news/425325/dobrovolchi\\_bataliony\\_zaklaly\\_ideologiyu\\_rozvytku\\_sylnoyi\\_patriotichnoyi\\_nezaleznoyi\\_krayiny\\_turchynov](http://ua.censor.net.ua/photo_news/425325/dobrovolchi_bataliony_zaklaly_ideologiyu_rozvytku_sylnoyi_patriotichnoyi_nezaleznoyi_krayiny_turchynov) (accessed February 1, 2017).

8. "Poroshenko: v khode ATO dobrovol'cheskie batal'ony MVD proveli okolo 600 spetsoperatsii" [Poroshenko: in the course of the ATO, the volunteer battalions of the Mol conducted around 600 special operations], *RBK-Ukraina*, April 15, 2016, [www.rbc.ua/rus/news/poroshenko-hode-ato-dobrovolcheskie-batalony-1460719975.html](http://www.rbc.ua/rus/news/poroshenko-hode-ato-dobrovolcheskie-batalony-1460719975.html) (accessed February 1, 2017).

9. "V Minoborony podschitali kolichestvo dobrovol'tsev" [The number of volunteers calculated by the Ministry of Defence], *Vechernii Kharkov*, March 14, 2017, <http://vecherniy.kharkov.ua/news/130502> (accessed March 19, 2017).

10. Yuri Butusov, "Dobrovol'cheskie batal'ony: struktura, strakhi, problemy boevogo primeneniia" [Volunteer battalions: structure, fears, problems of combat use], *Zerkalo Nedeli*, August, 29, 2014, <http://gazeta.zn.ua/internal/dobrovolcheskie-batalony-struktura-strakhi-problemy-boevogo-primeneniya.html> (accessed February 1, 2017); Agneshka Gural'ska, "Zvit: Dobrovol'chi batal'oni: Viniknennia, diialnist', superechnosti" [Report: Volunteer battalions. Occurrence, activity, contradictions], *Antikor*, March, 11, 2015, [http://antikor.com.ua/articles/46226-zvit\\_dobrovoljchi\\_batalijoni\\_viniknennja\\_dijalnistj\\_superechnosti](http://antikor.com.ua/articles/46226-zvit_dobrovoljchi_batalijoni_viniknennja_dijalnistj_superechnosti) (accessed February 1, 2017).

11. "37 batal'onov uchastvuyut v ATO: infografika" [37 battalions participate in the ATO: infographics], *LIGABiznesInform*, September 3, 2014, [http://news.liga.net/news/politics/3155678-37\\_batalonov\\_uchastvuyut\\_v\\_ato\\_infografika.htm](http://news.liga.net/news/politics/3155678-37_batalonov_uchastvuyut_v_ato_infografika.htm) (accessed February 1, 2017).



such units, with an active strength of more than 6,500.<sup>12</sup> The most famous such unit is the Dnipro-1 regiment; the Azov regiment was initially in this category but was transferred to the National Guard in November 2014.

The creation of the area defence battalions (ADBs) was provided for in the mobilisation plan of the General Staff, which appointed ADB officers at each military registration and enlistment office. Several ADBs (for example, the 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion [Dnipropetrovsk Region], the Kyivan Rus 11th Battalion [Kyiv Region], the Aidar 24th Battalion [Luhansk Region]) consisted entirely of self-motivated and self-organized volunteers, but other units could also include a conscript element. According to legislation introduced by the President at the beginning of the conflict, ADBs were not intended to participate in battles in the conflict zone. According to the law, the objectives of the area defence battalions were:

1. to protect important facilities and communications;
2. to carry out military police tasks;

12. From an in-depth interview with a representative of the Ministry of the Interior, Kyiv, March 9, 2016.

3. to maintain checkpoints;
4. to combat sabotage and reconnaissance groups as well as marauders and anti-state, illegal armed formations;
5. to ensure security and the rule of law.<sup>13</sup>

The MoD eventually controlled a total of about 50 separate units created as volunteer ADBs.<sup>14</sup> Unlike the ADBs, the reserve battalions of the National Guard were initially created to maintain public order within as well as outside the ATO zone. As of spring 2015, there were four such units in place: battalions Donbas, Kruk and S. Kulchinskyi as well as Azov regiment.<sup>15</sup> The National Guard was virtually a new organisation, having been revived in March 2014 after a 13-year absence; accordingly, almost everything had

13. "Zakon Ukraini pro oboronu Ukraini: Statia 18. Territorial'na oborona Ukraini" [The Law of Ukraine on the Defence of Ukraine: Article 18. Territorial Defence of Ukraine], Verkhovna Rada Ukraini, accessed February 1, 2017, [http://kodeksy.com.ua/pro\\_oboronu\\_ukrayini/statja-18.htm](http://kodeksy.com.ua/pro_oboronu_ukrayini/statja-18.htm).

14. Dmitrii Siniak, "Boitsy nevidemogo fronta. Skol'ko v Ukrainie karmannykh armii" [Fighters on an invisible front: How many pocket armies in Ukraine], *Fokus*, April 21, 2015, <https://fokus.ua/country/327967> (accessed February 1, 2017).

15. Siniak, "Boitsy nevidemogo fronta".

to be created from scratch.<sup>16</sup> National Guard units, just as ADBs, were equipped solely with light infantry weapons.<sup>17</sup> Volunteers started to receive armoured vehicles and mortars only during combat operations, sometimes thanks to the efforts of non-governmental organisations. The poor quality of armament and equipment of some voluntary battalions was often met with criticism.<sup>18</sup>

Although from the beginning patriotically-minded Ukrainians supported the volunteer organisations fairly strongly, several issues concerning their legal authority still caused controversy both for the Ukrainian government and its international partners, from screening new volunteers, to subordinating the armed volunteer units to existing official structures—the latter motivated by the government’s desire to preserve its monopoly on the use of force.<sup>19</sup>

Despite many myths regarding the creation of the battalions and their legal status—some the result of active disinformation efforts—all volunteer units had registration systems that enabled them to check and screen the flow of

new recruits.<sup>20</sup> Certainly, the rapid escalation of the conflict did not allow time either for comprehensive training of or full supervision over all the newly created units. While this may have been justified by the urgency of the military situation, it could not continue without changes. In November 2014, President (and Commander-in-Chief) Petro Poroshenko proposed disbanding all the volunteer units and incorporating them all into the AFU.<sup>21</sup>

Although that proposal was not accepted in its original form, integration of the volunteer units into official state structures eventually went ahead: by October 2015, there were 24 battalions, which were decided to be fully integrated into the special-purpose units of the National Guard of Ukraine, into the police as part of the Rapid Operational Response Unit (KORD) or into police line units. The high degree of public trust in the new National

*The rapid escalation of the conflict did not allow time either for comprehensive training of or full supervision over all the newly created units*

Police was cited as one of the reasons for making volunteers part of KORD.<sup>22</sup> Even though many volunteer units had already been formally subordinated to either the MoD, MoI or National Guard, as part of this initiative all volunteers had to repeat the process of re-certification and contract formalisation,

16. “Zakon Ukraini pro Natsional’nu gvardiiu Ukraini” [The Law of Ukraine on the National Guard of Ukraine], Verkhovna Rada Ukraini, accessed February 1, 2017 <http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/876-18>; “U Natsgvardii ne bylo nichego, i my vse nachinali postavlyat’ s nulya, no eto mizer ot nashikh potrebnosti” [The National Guard had nothing, and we started supplying from scratch, but this was just a tiny portion of our needs], *Censor.Net*, December 27, 2016, [http://censor.net.ua/news/421228/u\\_natsgvardii\\_ne\\_bylo\\_nichego\\_i\\_my\\_vse\\_nachinali\\_postavlyat\\_s\\_nulya\\_no\\_eto\\_mizer\\_ot\\_nashih\\_potrebnosteyi](http://censor.net.ua/news/421228/u_natsgvardii_ne_bylo_nichego_i_my_vse_nachinali_postavlyat_s_nulya_no_eto_mizer_ot_nashih_potrebnosteyi) (accessed February 1, 2017).
17. Yuri Butusov, “Dobrovol’cheskie batal’ony”.
18. “Potok dobrovol’tsev v riady sil ATO uvelichilsia v dva raza” [The flow of volunteers to the ATO forces has doubled], *112.ua*, September 3, 2014, <http://112.ua/obshchestvo/potok-dobrovolcev-v-ryady-sil-ato-uvelichilsia-v-dva-raza-semenchenko-109947.html> (accessed February 1, 2017); Denis Kazanski, “Boets’ batal’ionu OUN: Voiemo iak v Pervshu svitovu” [Fighter of the OUN battalion: We are fighting as during the First World War], *Tizhden.ua*, March 10, 2015, <http://tyzhden.ua/Society/131633> (accessed February 1, 2017).
19. Aleksandr Komarovski, “Mnenie: evoliutsiia dobrovol’chesko-go dvizheniia v Ukraine” [Opinion: evolution of volunteer movement in Ukraine], *Glavnoe*, October 24, 2016, <http://glavnoe.ua/news/n287478> (accessed February 1, 2017); “Reuters: U Kieva problemy s kontrolem otbivshikhsia ot ruk batal’onov” [Reuters: Kyiv has problems with worn-down battalions], *InfoRezist*, July 29, 2015, <https://inforesist.org/reuters-u-kieva-problemy-s-kontrolem-otbivshixsia-ot-ruk-batalonov> (accessed February 1, 2017).

20. Lesia Vasilenko, “Vichne pitannia dobrovol’tsivm” [An eternal question for volunteers], *Tizhden.ua*, March 11, 2016, <http://tyzhden.ua/Society/160362> (accessed February 1, 2017); Viktor Diachenko, “Ukrainu zakhlestnula Atamanshchina” [Ukraine inundated by Atamanshchina (irregulars)], *Novosti Ukrainy*, November 19, 2014, <http://from-ua.com/articles/330251-ukrainu-zahlestnula-atamanschina.html> (accessed February 1, 2017).
21. “Poroshenko rassmatrivaet dobrovol’cheskie batal’ony kak vnutripoliticheskuiu ugrozu” [Poroshenko regards volunteer battalions as an internal political threat], *RBK-Ukraina*, November 9, 2014, [www.rbc.ua/rus/news/poroshenko-rassmatrivaet-dobrovolcheskie-batalony-kak-09112014180100](http://www.rbc.ua/rus/news/poroshenko-rassmatrivaet-dobrovolcheskie-batalony-kak-09112014180100) (accessed February 1, 2017).
22. “Osnovoi KORDa dolzhny stat’ dobrovol’tsy, kotorye voshli v sostav MVD” [The KORD should be based upon volunteers who joined the MoI], *Censor.Net*, October 20, 2015, [http://censor.net.ua/news/357003/osnovoyi\\_korda\\_dolzhny\\_stat\\_dobrovoltsy\\_kotorye\\_voshli\\_v\\_sostav\\_mvd\\_yatsenyuk](http://censor.net.ua/news/357003/osnovoyi_korda_dolzhny_stat_dobrovoltsy_kotorye_voshli_v_sostav_mvd_yatsenyuk) (accessed February 1, 2017).



attracting criticism and causing a great deal of discontent.<sup>23</sup>

At a critical moment, the citizens of Ukraine decided to exercise their right to defend themselves. Thanks to the fairly effective self-organisation, they managed to ensure the continued functioning of the national defence system. From the very beginning, the state tried to create a legal basis for the volunteer movement, starting a process that ultimately led to the integration of all units into official state structures. However, it is important to understand that the phenomenon of volunteer battalions is broader than just a collection of organisational units – it also has a special place in the society of Ukraine. The next chapter looks into how the volunteer units were perceived by society and identifies the constituent elements of this phenomenon.

## 2. POPULAR (DIS)AFFECTION

The growing popularity of volunteers in general and of volunteer military units in particular was remarked on by many observers of the post-Maidan situation in Ukraine. Military volunteers were often called the winners of hybrid war, their acts of bravery were lionized, and they were given credit for Ukraine's ability to withstand outside aggression at such a critical moment.<sup>24</sup> As the process of integrating volunteer units continues, their reputation plays a

positive role; however, it also leaves them vulnerable to disinformation campaigns.<sup>25</sup>

The popular perceptions, however, are more nuanced, complex and ambiguous than meets the eye, and they have also evolved over time, often in a negative direction. From 2014–2016, the situation of the volunteer military units in Ukraine was very complex, and accordingly received very mixed press coverage.<sup>26</sup> The ambiguous public perception is also explained by the fact that it is rather difficult to track the process of creating and developing each unit, for several reasons:

1. Military events in Ukraine were developing rapidly; to date, investigations of the key military operations have not yet been fully carried out and are disputed by the parties involved;
2. There was a high level of hostile propaganda aimed at discrediting volunteer units;<sup>27</sup>
3. Government policy towards the volunteer units constantly changed;<sup>28</sup>
4. There was a lack of reliable and open information available to the public regarding the sources of funding of particular volunteer units (They received funding from four different sources: the government, public organisations, private donations, as well as from commercial structures<sup>29</sup>).

23. "Pochti vse dobrovol'tsy proshli pereattestatsiiu" [Almost all volunteers have passed re-certification], *LB.ua*, November 7, 2016, [https://lb.ua/news/2016/11/07/350055\\_pochti\\_dobrovoltsi\\_proshli.html](https://lb.ua/news/2016/11/07/350055_pochti_dobrovoltsi_proshli.html) (accessed February 1, 2017); Yana Stepankovskaia, "Avangard natsii. Kuda ischezli dobrovol'cheskie batal'ony" [Vanguard of the nation. Where volunteer battalions disappeared], *LIGABiznesInform*, February 10, 2017, [http://news.liga.net/articles/politics/14686585-avangard\\_natsii\\_kuda\\_ischezli\\_dobrovolcheskie\\_batalony.htm](http://news.liga.net/articles/politics/14686585-avangard_natsii_kuda_ischezli_dobrovolcheskie_batalony.htm) (accessed February 10, 2017).

24. Timur Vorona, "Ukraina—rodina volonterov, ili kak IT-dobrovol'tsy pomogali strane v 2014 godu" [Ukraine – the motherland of volunteers, or how IT-volunteers helped the country in 2014], *AiN.UA*, January, 8, 2015, <https://ain.ua/2015/01/08/ukraina-strana-volonterov-ili-kak-it-dobrovolcy-pomogali-strane-v-2014-godu> (accessed February 10, 2017); Yaroslav Tinchenko, "Podvig batal'ionu 'Donbas'" [A deed of the 'Donbas' battalion], *Tizhden.ua*, April 4, 2015, <http://tyzhden.ua/Society/133497> (accessed February 1, 2017); Aleksandr Voronin, "Ekspert: Blagodaria dobrovol'cheskim batal'onam my i vystoiali" [Expert: Thanks to volunteer battalions, we have survived], *Krymskie Novosti*, June 9, 2016, <http://qha.com.ua/ru/analitika/ekspert-blagodarya-dobrovolcheskim-batalonam-mi-i-vystoiali/160745> (accessed February 1, 2017).

25. "OON vydala otchet s rezkoi kritikoi ukrainskikh dobrobatov" [The UN released a report containing sharp criticism of the Ukrainian volunteer battalions], *Ukrainskaia Pravda*, July 8, 2016, [www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2016/06/8/7111169/](http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2016/06/8/7111169/) (accessed February 1, 2017).

26. Andreas Umland, "Dobrovol'cheskie vooruzhennye formirovaniia i radikalnyi natsionalizm v poslemaidannoi Ukraine" [Volunteer armed formations and radical nationalism in post-Maidan Ukraine], *Politichna Kritika—Ukraina*, March 15, 2016, <http://ukraine.politicalcritique.org/2016/03/dobrovolcheskie-vooruzhyonnye-formirovaniya-i-radikalnyj-natsionalizm-v-poslemaidannoi-ukraine> (accessed February 1, 2017).

27. Agneshka Gural'ska, "Zvit: Dobrovol'chi batal'oni."

28. Nolan Peterson, "As War Escalates, Ukrainian Volunteer Battalion Remains Sidelined", *The Daily Signal*, August 27, 2016, <http://dailysignal.com/2015/08/27/as-war-escalates-ukrainian-volunteer-battalion-remains-sidelined> (accessed February 1, 2017).

29. Adrian Karatnycky, "Warlords and armed groups threaten Ukraine's rebuilding", *The Washington Post*, December 30, 2014, [www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-rise-of-warlords-threatens-ukraines-recovery/2014/12/30/a23b2d36-8f7b-11e4-a412-4b735edc7175\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.18654e346956](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-rise-of-warlords-threatens-ukraines-recovery/2014/12/30/a23b2d36-8f7b-11e4-a412-4b735edc7175_story.html?utm_term=.18654e346956) (accessed February 1, 2017).





When we consider the relative popularity of different Ukrainian government institutions, it is valuable to trace the dynamics of the so-called population confidence index. In 2014, the highest confidence index was that of volunteers in general (7.3 points out of a possible 10), followed by volunteer battalions (7), the military (6.4) and the president (5.3).<sup>30</sup>

By the end of 2015, the situation had slightly changed, but in general, volunteers (military and non-military) still enjoyed the trust of 57 % of Ukraine's population.<sup>31</sup> Slightly less than a year later, survey results revealed a changing dynamic: the level of trust in volunteers began to decline, while the figure for the AFU increased significantly.<sup>32</sup>

There are several sets of reasons for this trend. First, although public trust in volunteers began to decline only later, the aggressor carried out active and hostile informational and psychological efforts to discredit them by labelling and creating false myths about volunteers from the very beginning.<sup>33</sup> In addition, as mentioned above, the Ukrainian government was unable to formulate a stable position towards volunteer units at the beginning of the conflict, thereby facilitating these efforts by the hostile party. On the other hand, as was repeatedly mentioned during our research focus groups, there

were several instances in which a dignified and useful volunteer undertaking was fully commercialised and used to obtain personal material benefits. Furthermore, the

*The aggressor carried out active and hostile informational and psychological efforts to discredit volunteers from the very beginning*

involvement of some volunteer unit leaders in politics, as well as the inclusion of battalion commanders on lists of political parties and the creation of separate political structures under the guise of volunteer movement also had a negative impact on the public opinion.<sup>34</sup>

The hostile influence attempts pushed volunteer movement into responding with active communication efforts of their own, which in turn increased their prestige and popularity both inside and outside Ukraine—thereby attracting new recruits and donations.<sup>35</sup> The units became more than military organisations, developing strong “brands” as they formed entire networks of public and civic volunteer organisations dedicated to both paramilitary and completely non-military activities.

Certainly, disagreements were rife both inside and among the units, their political sponsors, and the government.<sup>36</sup> From a historical perspective, it seemed that part of the volunteer movement in Ukraine was thus repeating some mistakes of the more distant past.<sup>37</sup>

30. “Grazhdane Ukrainy gorazdo bol'she veriat v sebia, chem v izbrannykh imi zhe kormchikh” [Citizens of Ukraine trust themselves much more than the stewards they elected], *Zerkalo Nedeli*, January 2, 2015, <http://opros2014.zn.ua/authority> (accessed February 1, 2017).

31. “Doverie k sotsialnym institutsiiam i gruppam” [Trust in social institutions and groups], Kyiv Institute of Sociology, last modified January 15, 2016, accessed February 1, 2017, [www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=rus&cat=reports&id=579&page=4](http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=rus&cat=reports&id=579&page=4).

32. “Doverie k sotsialnym institutam” [Trust in social institutions], Kyiv Institute of Sociology, last modified February 1, 2017, accessed February 1, 2017, [www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=rus&cat=reports&id=678&page=1](http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=rus&cat=reports&id=678&page=1).

33. Pavel Sheremet, “Azov, otvetsvennost' i dobrobaty” [‘Azov’, responsibility and volunteer battalions], *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, July 17, 2016, <http://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/sheremet/578b-240b93ecf> (accessed February 1, 2017); “Boeviki rasprostraniat slukhi o protivostoianii podrazdelenii VSU i ‘dobrobatov’” [Fighters are spreading rumours of confrontation between the AFU and ‘volunteer battalions’], *Khvilia*, May 24, 2016, <http://hvylya.net/news/exclusive/boeviki-rasprostranyayut-sluhi-o-protivostoyanii-podrazdeleniy-vsu-i-dobrobatov.html> (accessed February 1, 2017).

34. “Azovtsy vybrali Belet'skogo glavoi partii Natsional'nyi korpus” [Azov members elected Belet'ski to be head of the National Corps party], *Novoe Vremia*, October 14, 2016, <http://nv.ua/ukraine/events/azovtsy-vybrali-belet'skogo-glavoi-partii-natsionalnyj-korpus-244307.html> (accessed February 1, 2017).

35. Christian Borys, “Ukraine’s angry volunteer brigades at the war front”, *Al Jazeera Media Network*, October 19, 2016, [www.aljazeera.com/indepth/inpictures/2016/10/ukraine-angry-volunteer-brigades-war-front-161017082634137.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/inpictures/2016/10/ukraine-angry-volunteer-brigades-war-front-161017082634137.html) (accessed February 1, 2017).

36. Vladislav Bulatchik, “Dobrovol'cheskie batal'ony: legalizatsiia i vnutrennie konfliktly” [Volunteer battalions: legalisation and internal conflicts], *OstroV*, April 29, 2015, [www.ostro.org/general/politics/articles/469325](http://www.ostro.org/general/politics/articles/469325) (accessed February 1, 2017).

37. Igor Kopytin and Oleksandr Kiriienko, “Volunteers in the Ukrainian Army: Continuing a Tradition”, *Diplomaatia*, No. 149/150, February 2016, [www.diplomaatia.ee/en/article/volunteers-in-the-ukrainian-army-continuing-a-tradition](http://www.diplomaatia.ee/en/article/volunteers-in-the-ukrainian-army-continuing-a-tradition) (accessed February 1, 2017).





Figure 1. "Comet-like" ecosystem of volunteer units.

Nonetheless, the volunteer battalions were on the whole successful not just in creating their brands but in promoting themselves through social networks, traditional media, political figures, business people, and civil society activists.<sup>38</sup> Very often, such coverage attracted international attention, drawing Ukraine's foreign partners into the discussion.<sup>39</sup> It must be noted that the activities of some volunteer units were studied by military experts from NATO and European Union states.<sup>40</sup>

The involvement of an active civil society in supporting volunteers on the front lines created strong links that were able to endure despite negative coverage in local or foreign media as well as opposition from the

government.<sup>41</sup> Due to this set of actions, a kind of "comet tail" emerged from the volunteer units, as shown in Figure 1; like comets' tails, these additional elements were not part of the core but definitely shaped the visual perception of the whole. Thus, within a relatively short period of time, the volunteer units formed a unique socio-political and military ecosystem that gained significant importance not only in Ukraine's public debate, but also in the ongoing reform process of the country's security and defence sector.

Yet, at the heart of all this is an individual soldier—a volunteer who joined one of the units and thus came to the rescue of a faltering state in a critical situation. Understanding the motivation, experience, perceptions and intentions of the individual members of volunteer units is important in understanding the overall impact and potential of this phenomenon in shaping Ukraine's security and defence. This is the focus of the next chapter of our report.

38. "Dobrovol'tsev, vooruzhennykh avtomatami, zastavliaiut vypolniat zadachi, kotorye dolzhny byt' postavleny pered brontankovoi brigadoi" [Volunteers armed with assault rifles are being forced to perform tasks which should be given to an armoured brigade], *iPress.ua*, August 21, 2014, [http://ipress.ua/ru/news/gerashchenko\\_ozvuchyl\\_potery\\_syl\\_ato\\_pod\\_ylovayskom\\_81067.html](http://ipress.ua/ru/news/gerashchenko_ozvuchyl_potery_syl_ato_pod_ylovayskom_81067.html) (accessed February 1, 2017); Sergei Ruzhinski, "Zachem Petr Poroshenko unichtozhaet dobrovol'cheskie batal'ony?" [Why is Poroshenko destroying the volunteer battalions?], *iPress.ua*, August 21, 2014, [http://ipress.ua/ru/articles/zachem\\_petr\\_poroshenko\\_unychtozhaet\\_dobrovolcheskye\\_bataloni\\_81095.html](http://ipress.ua/ru/articles/zachem_petr_poroshenko_unychtozhaet_dobrovolcheskye_bataloni_81095.html) (accessed February 1, 2017).

39. Nolan Peterson, "As War Escalates".

40. Michael Cohen and Matthew Green, "Ukraine's Volunteer Battalions", *Infantry*, April-July 2016, 66-69, [http://www.benning.army.mil/infantry/magazine/issues/2016/APR-JUL/pdf/16\)%20Cohen\\_UkraineVolunteers.pdf](http://www.benning.army.mil/infantry/magazine/issues/2016/APR-JUL/pdf/16)%20Cohen_UkraineVolunteers.pdf) (accessed February 1, 2017); Margarete Klein, "Ukraine's volunteer battalions – advantages and challenges", Swedish Defence Research Agency, RUFBS Briefing No. 27, April 2015, <https://www.foi.se/download/18.2bc30cfb157f5e989c3181f/1477482863677/RUFBS+Briefing+No.+27+.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2017).

41. Shaun Walker, "Azov fighters are Ukraine's greatest weapon and may be its greatest threat", *The Guardian*, October 10, 2014, [www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/10/azov-far-right-fighters-ukraine-neo-nazis](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/10/azov-far-right-fighters-ukraine-neo-nazis) (accessed February 1, 2017); Anastasiia Rafal, "Sistema protiv dobrobatov. Skhvatka nomer 2. Obolon'" [The system against volunteer battalions. Battle number 2. Obolon], *Strana.ua*, August 3, 2016, <https://strana.ua/articles/analysis/25662-pyat-voprosov-po-tornado.html> (accessed February 1, 2017).



### 3. PEOPLE OF GOOD WILL

In establishing the difficult objective of reforming and integrating the volunteer military units into regular government security and defence structures, the Ukrainian government was not only responding to political pressure, but was also taking into account the views of military experts and even of the volunteers themselves.<sup>42</sup>

The evolution of the volunteer movement itself, as explained above, was very dynamic,

dictated not only by the demands of the war in the east but also by domestic factors.<sup>43</sup> While it was asked as early as in 2014 whether the volunteer battalions could become the nucleus of new armed forces, by the end of 2016 it was still unclear whether Ukraine had made the most of the volunteer movement's potential to contribute to national defence and security.<sup>44</sup> Of course, a full use of such potential is possible only if there is reliable information on military volunteers, as well as their expectations regarding their service. To that end, we have compiled the following demographic profile (see Figure 2).

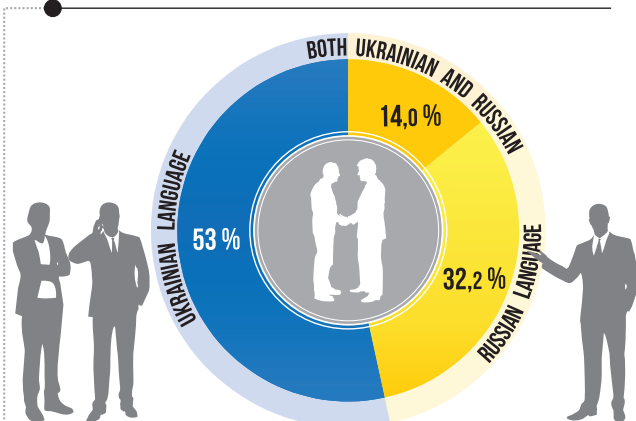
First, the largest share is made up of those aged 20–29 (40%) and 30–39 years (30%). A clear majority (80%) have obtained higher or technical education. Worth noting is that 83% of all respondents had no military training, no combat or other military experience before to joining voluntary military service. At the

42. Alena Potaeva, "Poriadok radi spokoistviia: Pochemu Poroshenko voiet s dobrovol'cheskimi batal'onami" [Order for the sake of calm: Why Poroshenko is waging a war against the volunteer battalions], *Golos.Ua*, March 30, 2015, [http://ru.golos.ua/social\\_problem/poryadok\\_radi\\_spoikoistviya\\_pochemu\\_poroshenko\\_voyuet\\_s\\_dobrovolcheskimi\\_batalonami\\_5](http://ru.golos.ua/social_problem/poryadok_radi_spoikoistviya_pochemu_poroshenko_voyuet_s_dobrovolcheskimi_batalonami_5) (accessed February 1, 2017); Roman Chernyshev, "Dikie batal'ony nado rasformirovat'. Interviu s ofitserami ATO" [Wild battalions should be disbanded. Interview with officers of the ATO], *LIGABiznesInform*, August 11, 2015, [http://news.liga.net/interview/politics/6349063-dikie\\_batalony\\_nado\\_rasformirovat\\_intervyu\\_s\\_ofitserami\\_ato.htm](http://news.liga.net/interview/politics/6349063-dikie_batalony_nado_rasformirovat_intervyu_s_ofitserami_ato.htm) (accessed February 1, 2017); Tatiana Zarovnaia, "'Kiborg' obi'asnil, pochemu epokha dobrobatov dolzhna uiti v proshloe" ['Cyborg' explained, why the era of volunteer battalions should be left in the past], *Obozrevatel'*, June 11, 2015, [www.obozrevatel.com/politics/20596-kiborg-zayavil-cto-epoha-dobrobatov-dolzhna-uiti-v-proshloe.htm](http://www.obozrevatel.com/politics/20596-kiborg-zayavil-cto-epoha-dobrobatov-dolzhna-uiti-v-proshloe.htm) (accessed February 1, 2017).

43. Aleksandr Komarovski, "Mnenie: evoliutsiia dobrovol'cheskogo dvizheniia v Ukraine" [Opinion: evolution of volunteer movement in Ukraine], *Glavnoe*, October 24, 2016, <http://glavnoe.ua/news/n287478> (accessed February 1, 2017).

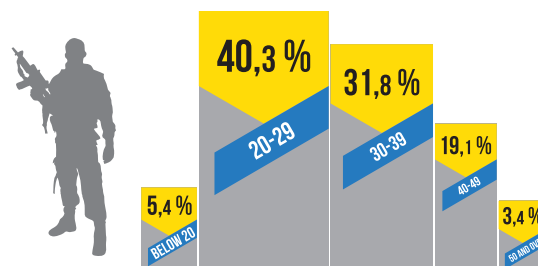
44. Oleg Karpiak, "Stanut li dobrovol'cheskie batal'ony iadrom novoi armii" [Will the volunteer battalions become a core of a new army?], *BBC Ukraina*, August 6, 2014, [http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/ukraine\\_in\\_russian/2014/08/140806\\_ru\\_s\\_volunteer\\_battalions](http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/ukraine_in_russian/2014/08/140806_ru_s_volunteer_battalions), accessed February 1, 2017.

## NATIVE LANGUAGE / LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME

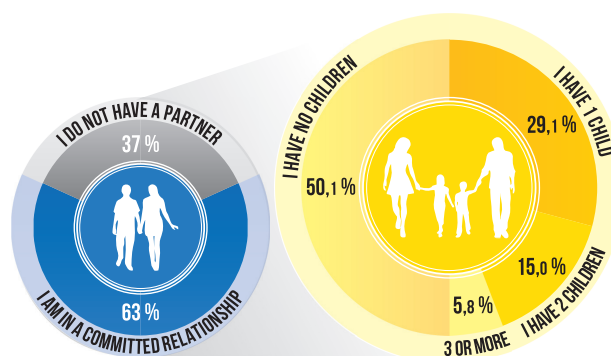


**NOTE**  
FOR 0,8% OF RESPONDENTS, NEITHER RUSSIAN NOR UKRAINIAN  
IS THEIR NATIVE LANGUAGE / LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME

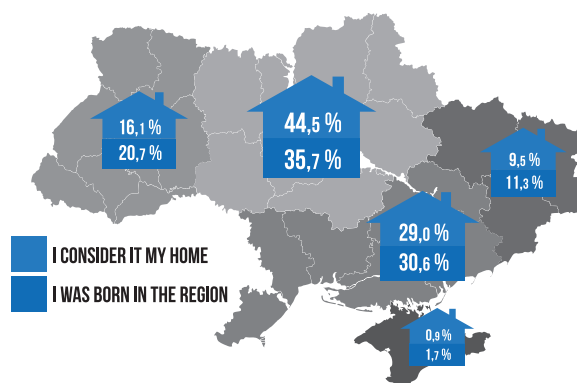
## AGE



## MARITAL STATUS AND NUMBER OF CHILDREN



## REGION



## COMBAT EXPERIENCE



## EDUCATION

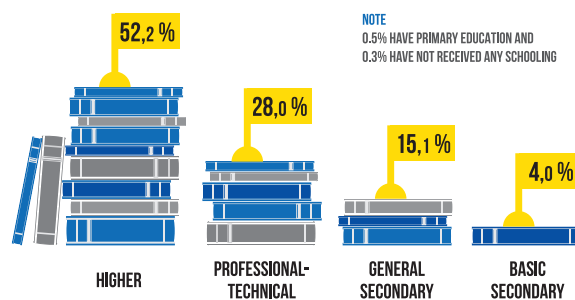


Figure 2. Generic profile of a military volunteer in Ukraine.



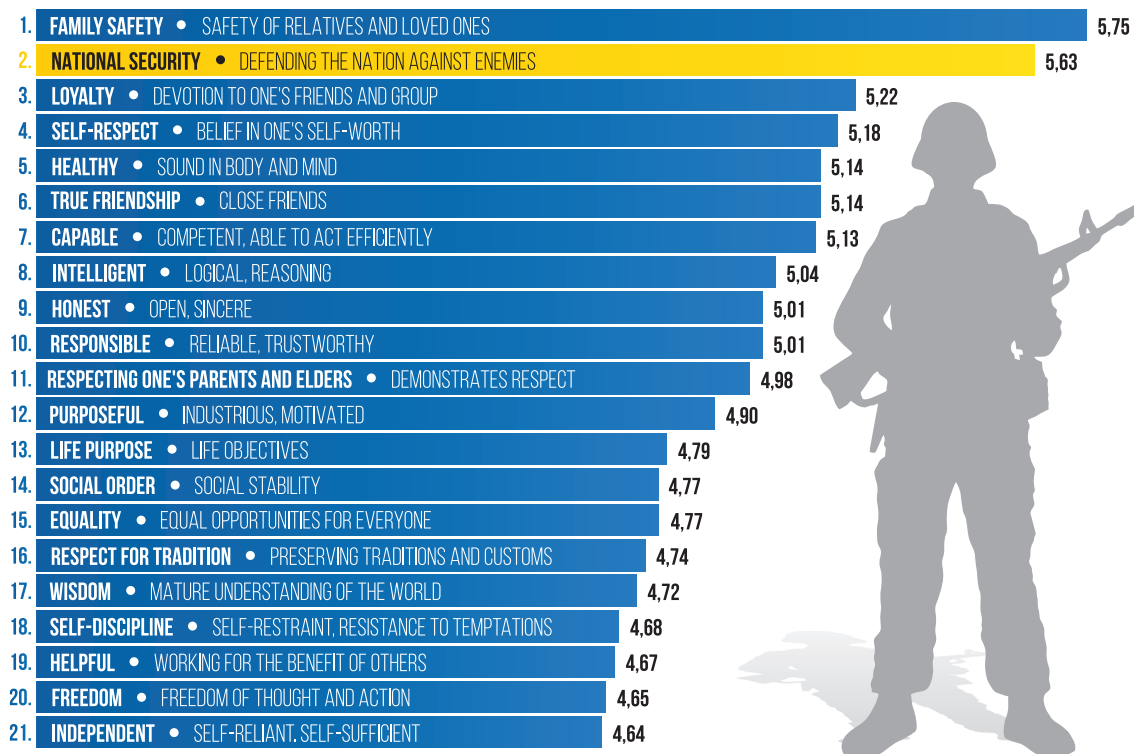


Figure 3. Factors of personal motivation.

time of the survey, 62% were in a committed relationship and 50% had children. As can be

*The significant percentage of native Russian-speaking volunteers undermines the widespread myth that the volunteer battalions are purely Ukrainian-speaking*

seen from the responses, most volunteers thus had something—and someone—to defend.

Special mention should be made of the language data, according to which the Ukrainian is the sole mother tongue of 53% of the volunteers surveyed, while Russian is that of 33%, with 14% of respondents considering both languages to be their native ones. The significant percentage of native Russian-speaking volunteers undermines the widespread myth that the volunteer battalions are purely Ukrainian-speaking. In addition, it is useful to consider the regional origin of the volunteers; 75% were residents of central and southern Ukraine, despite the previous prevailing and erroneous view that they mostly came from the western regions of the

country. Earlier, the MoD of Ukraine pointed out that equal numbers of volunteers from western and eastern Ukraine went to the ATO zone.<sup>45</sup> In other words, the first ones to volunteer for the front lines were not motivated by ethnic or linguistic considerations, but rather by patriotic feelings and by the desire to protect their values.<sup>46</sup>

Personal motivation clearly played a fundamental role in the formation and development of the volunteer movement.<sup>47</sup>

45. "V zony ATO poshlo odinakove kolichstvo dobrovol'tsev kak s zapada, tak i vosto-ka Ukrainy—Minoborony" [Equal numbers of volunteers from the west and east of Ukraine go to the ATO zone—Ministry of Defence], *InfoResist*, October 16, 2014, <https://inforesist.org/v-zonu-ato-poshlo-odinak-ovoe-kolichstvo-dobrovolcev-kak-s-zapada-tak-i-s-vosto-ka-ukrainy-minoborony/> (accessed February 1, 2017).

46. Oleg Konstantinov, "V boyu patrioty proiavliaiut sebja poroi luchshe, chem professionaly" [In combat, patriots sometimes show themselves better than professionals], *Argument*, April 29, 2015, <http://argumentua.com/stati/v-boyu-patrioty-proyavlyayut-sebja-poroi-luchshe-chem-professionalny> (accessed February 1, 2017).

47. Violetta Kirtoka, "Ukraine neobkhodimo eshche tisiach dvadtsat' dobrovol'tsev, chtoby bistro i uspeshno zakon-chit' etu voynu" [Ukraine needs another twenty thousand volunteers to complete this war quickly and successfully], *Fakty i Kommentarii*, August 13, 2014, <http://fakty.ua/186270-ukraine-neobkhodimo-ecshe-tysyach-dvadcat-dobrovolcev-chtoby-bystro-i-uspeshno-zakonchit-etu-voynu> (accessed February 1, 2017).

As shown in Figure 3, our study identifies the personal values that motivated volunteers to serve.<sup>48</sup> In summary, their desire to defend the country stems from five essential values: family safety, national security, loyalty, self-respect, and health.

According to a survey published in September 2015, more than a third of Ukrainians (34%) considered armed resistance to be the main method of opposing a larger and better-armed occupying force.<sup>49</sup> The same percentage of

*Their desire to defend the country stems from five essential values: family safety, national security, loyalty, self-respect, and health*

respondents also considered it the most effective method, though on this question a slightly larger number (35%) chose non-violent actions (demonstrations, protests, marches, boycotts, strikes). It is also important that 24% of respondents were ready themselves to carry out armed resistance in case of outside intervention in their home communities, while a further 29% were ready to participate in civil resistance actions. The survey also found that as of the end of 2015, 26% of Ukraine's population fully agreed with the view in full that military conscription for the defence of the homeland was a matter of honour.<sup>50</sup> It can thus be concluded that a significant part of society was, in one way or another, ready to undertake voluntary defence activities.

Returning to our study, it is important to point out that 83% of respondents had no combat experience prior to entry into service, though at the time of our

survey 42% had already participated in combat operations in the ATO zone.

These data show that those volunteers who served at the front are a young and promising group who developed a set of useful skills and knowledge in a fairly short period. The military potential of this group may be wasted if reforms are not conducted effectively, and if the approach to the retention and development of valuable personnel is inadequate. There were many signs that at least some volunteers saw no rationality in the government's proposals to integrate them into the official structures of the state, while the rest felt dispirited and disappointed by the attitude of Ukrainian society.<sup>51</sup> In this light, it must

be noted that, at the time of the survey, only 25% had the official status of ATO participants, which is an alarmingly low indicator. As a result of our in-depth interviews with soldiers and battalion representatives, we found that there was a low level of awareness about the social protections offered by the government to ATO participants, as well as about one's who is entitled to official participant status or how to claim it. Despite reports last June that the government was planning to develop a procedure for granting ATO participant status to volunteers, to this day volunteers often have to seek such status in court.<sup>52</sup>

Accordingly, it is interesting, in retrospect, to consider why many Ukrainians decided to fight

48. Silva Kiili, *The Will to Defend and Personal Values: Ukraine, Estonia and Denmark* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, 2016), [www.icds.ee/publications/article/the-will-to-defend-and-personal-values-ukraine-estonia-and-denmark](http://www.icds.ee/publications/article/the-will-to-defend-and-personal-values-ukraine-estonia-and-denmark) (accessed February 1, 2017).

49. "KMIS: tret' ukrainsev gotovy s oruzhiem v rukakh oboroniat' stranu" [KMIS: one third of Ukrainians are ready to defend the country with weapons], *mResearcher*, September 29, 2015, <http://mresearcher.com/2015/09/kmis-tret-ukraincev-gotovy-s-oruzhiem-v-rukax-oboronyat-stranu.html> (accessed February 1, 2017).

50. Razumkov Centre, The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), *Citizens of Ukraine on Security: Personal, National, and its Elements* (Kyiv, 2016), <http://www.dcaf.ch/content/download/371262/5861314/file/2016-DCAF-UKR-ENG-Survey.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2017).

51. Ruslan Ivanov, "Volnye strelki. Pochemu vlast' boitsia ukrain-skih dobrovol'tsev" [Free riflemen. Why the authorities fret about the Ukrainian volunteers], *YUAI Media*, November 12, 2015, <http://ua1.com.ua/rus/publications/volnye-strelki-pochemu-vlast-boitsja-ukrainskih-dobrovoltsev-12415.html> (accessed February 1, 2017); Dmitri Teperik, "Zhurnal 'Diplomatiia': Pochemu nam vazhno pomnit' o vojne v Ukraine?" ['Diplomacy' magazine: Why is it important to remember the war in Ukraine?], *rus.delfi.ee*, December 17, 2015 <http://rus.delfi.ee/daily/diplomaatia/zhurnal-diplomatiya-pochemu-nam-vazhno-pomnit-o-vojne-v-ukraine?id=73226081> (accessed February 1, 2017).

52. "Boitsam 'dobrobatov' predostaviat status uchastnikov ATO" [Fighters of volunteer battalions will be given the status of ATO participants], *Obozrevatel'*, 6 July 2016, [www.obozrevatel.com/society/19632-boitsam-dobrobatov-predostaviat-status-uchastnikov-ato.htm](http://www.obozrevatel.com/society/19632-boitsam-dobrobatov-predostaviat-status-uchastnikov-ato.htm) (accessed February 1, 2017); "Boitsy dobrobatov vynuzhdeny v sudakh dobivatsia statusa uchastnika boevykh deistvii" [Fighters of volunteer battalions are forced to seek the status of combatants in courts], *Segodnia*, February 15, 2017, [www.segodnya.ua/ukraine/boicy-dobrobatov-vynuzhdeny-v-sudah-dobivatsya-statusa-uchastnika-boevykh-deystviy-817870.html](http://www.segodnya.ua/ukraine/boicy-dobrobatov-vynuzhdeny-v-sudah-dobivatsya-statusa-uchastnika-boevykh-deystviy-817870.html) (accessed February 15, 2017).

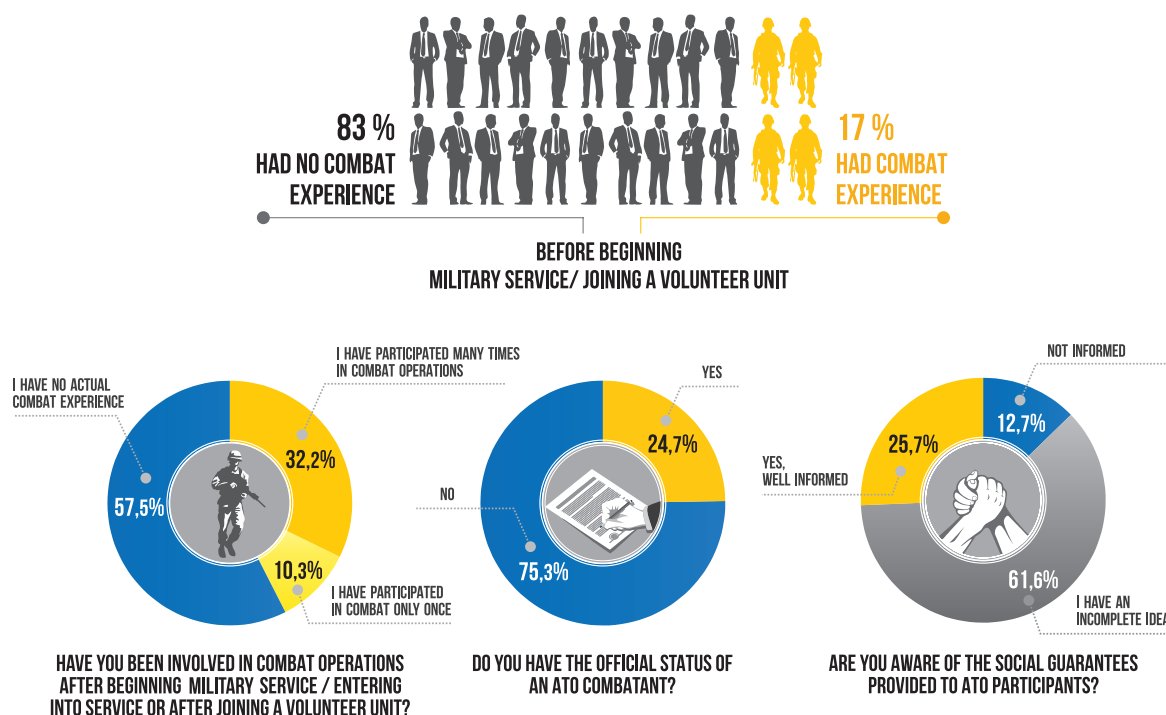


Figure 4. Combat experience of volunteers and participation in the ATO.

in the volunteer battalions instead of waiting to be drafted into the regular armed forces. At the beginning of the ATO, the image of the AFU and public confidence in the military as a whole were severely damaged. This happened for several reasons: first, due to the ineffectiveness of the conscription system throughout the entire period covered by this study; second, because of corruption and other illegal schemes; third, because of general boycotting and deliberate actions to disrupt conscription in some regions; and fourth, because of popular protests against conscription as well as outright draft evasion.<sup>53</sup>

There were numerous cases in which hostile information campaigns were conducted to

*At the beginning of the ATO, the image of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and public confidence in the military as a whole were severely damaged*

discredit the ATO and volunteer units, as well as the entire conscription process.<sup>54</sup> Against the

53. "Mobilizatsiiu sryvaiut otsutsvie vlasti na mestakh i koruptsiia v voennkomatakh" [Mobilisation is being disrupted by the absence of authority locally and corruption in the military call-up centres], *Zerkalo Nedeli*, January 31, 2015, [http://zn.ua/UKRAINE/mobilizaciya-sryvayut-otsutstvie-vlasti-na-mestah-i-korruptsiya-v-voennkomatah-butusov-165620\\_.html](http://zn.ua/UKRAINE/mobilizaciya-sryvayut-otsutstvie-vlasti-na-mestah-i-korruptsiya-v-voennkomatah-butusov-165620_.html) (accessed February 1, 2017); "Otkosit" ot mobilizatsii: varianty, skhemy, tseny—obzor sotsialnykh setei" [To dodge mobilisation: options, schemes, prices—a survey of social networks], *Slovo i Delo*, January 19, 2015, <https://ru.slovoidilo.ua/articles/6980/2015-01-19/otkosit-ot-mobilizatsii-glavnye-she-my-ceny--obzor-socialnyh-setej.html> (accessed February 1, 2017); Igor Grishchenko, "Mobilizatsiiu sryvaiut, a predstavitelei voennkomata— b'iut?" [Mobilisation is being disrupted and representatives of military call-up centres—beaten up?], *Gorodskoi sait Chernigova*, July 18, 2015, <http://www.gorod.cn.ua/news/gorod-i-region/65450-mobilizaciya-sryvayut-a-predstaviteli-voennkomata-byut.html> (accessed February 1, 2017); Galina Korba, "Masshtabnoe issledovanie NV: Tsentralnye oblasti upravliaiut liudei na front vmesto Chernovitskoi, Kharkovskoi i Zakarpatskoi oblastei" [Large-scale research by NV: Central

districts are sending people to the front instead of Chernovitsi, Kharkiv and Zakarpatski districts], *Novoe Vremia*, July 29, 2015, <http://nv.ua/publications/tjazhelo-idet-nv-provelo-issledovanie-o-hode-mobilizatsii-v-strane-60828.html> (accessed February 1, 2017); Oleg Karpiak, "Otkazyvaius' ot mobilizatsii" [I refuse the mobilisation], *BBC Ukraina*, January 21, 2015, [www.bbc.com/ukrainian/ukraine\\_in\\_russian/2015/01/150121\\_ru\\_s\\_mobilisation\\_denial](http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/ukraine_in_russian/2015/01/150121_ru_s_mobilisation_denial) (accessed February 1, 2017); Karoun Demirjian, "Ukraine's military mobilisation undermined by draft dodgers", *The Washington Post*, April 25, 2015, [www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/ukraines-military-mobilization-undermined-by-draft-dodgers/2015/04/25/fc3a5818-d236-11e4-8b1e-274d670aa9c9\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/ukraines-military-mobilization-undermined-by-draft-dodgers/2015/04/25/fc3a5818-d236-11e4-8b1e-274d670aa9c9_story.html) (accessed February 1, 2017).

54. NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, *Russian Information Campaign Against the Ukrainian State and Defence Forces: Combined analysis*, by Vladimir Sazonov et al (Tartu, 2016), [www.stratcomcoe.org/download/file/fid/7504](http://www.stratcomcoe.org/download/file/fid/7504) (accessed February 1, 2017); "Rossiiskie spetssluzhby pytautsia diskreditirovat' mobilizatsiiu v Ukraine—SNBO" [Russian special services are trying to discredit mobilisation in Ukraine—NSCU], *Segodnia*, July 31, 2014, [www.segodnya.ua/ukraine/rossiyskie-specsluzhby-pytayutsya-diskreditirovat-mobilizatsiyu-v-ukraine-snbo-541015.html](http://www.segodnya.ua/ukraine/rossiyskie-specsluzhby-pytayutsya-diskreditirovat-mobilizatsiyu-v-ukraine-snbo-541015.html) (accessed February 1, 2017). A review and analysis of targeted hostile information campaigns will be provided in a forthcoming ICDS report scheduled for publication later in 2017.



backdrop of all the difficulties in joining regular military units through official enlistment offices, in the summer of 2015 only one in ten of mobilised reservists joined, as a volunteer, the ATO.<sup>55</sup> The confidence factor played a very important role at that time—as confirmed by the survey data, according to which almost 60% of volunteers decided to join a specific volunteer unit because of distrust in the AFU. Among other main reasons, 51% pointed to better service conditions in volunteer units compared to regular units, while 41% indicated the stricter discipline among volunteers as an important factor (see Figure 5).

Thus, it appears that, after the conflict began, voluntary units proved to be a more attractive option to recruits, as well as an alternative platform that better reflected their personal values as described above. Certainly, the problem of negative public perception of the regular military existed even before the annexation of Crimea; however, because of the war in eastern Ukraine, it became a subject of widespread public discussion because of the mutual suspicion of the regular and voluntary military structures.<sup>56</sup>

According to our in-depth interviews with the commanders and soldiers of the units involved in the first stages of repelling military aggression in the eastern regions of the country, many of them acted as instructors of new recruits to those units. Approximately one third (32%) of all respondents to our survey confirmed that they had participated in combat operations many times. One of the most frequently mentioned reasons this group cited for joining the volunteer units was the extensive and inefficient bureaucracy of

the conscription and enlistment processes in the AFU. According to those interviewed—many of whom had also applied to join regular units of the AFU—it took a long time before they received any response. Such delays undoubtedly lowered their motivation; due to the increasing aggression in the east, there was practically no time to wait.<sup>57</sup>

Social psychologist Oleh Pokalchuk shared his perspective on the factors that affected volunteers before, during, and after their service:

*Three important factors mattered [to them] before becoming a volunteer soldier: reputation, the opinion of the immediate circle and the place of deployment. For many of those who were at Maidan, the problem was that the volunteer battalions were mainly being formed as special police [militsiya] units, but nobody wanted to be a ‘cop’; everyone clearly remembered the role of the police in the Maidan shootings. Yet, unlike others, the Ministry of the Interior did issue arms and assigned real combat duties, working more flexibly than did the Armed Forces at the beginning of the war.*

*Another important point is the approval or disapproval of one’s immediate circle of contacts. In 2014, approval was unequivocally high, since the real war was perceived by the public as a heroic drama, a kind of reality show about the struggle between Good and Evil. Since on the whole this raised our self-esteem and promised increased social status, the decision to volunteer was viewed positively. On the other hand, however, was the pragmatic viewpoint: “they’ll make peace afterwards, but you’ll be left without a foot”. Accordingly, a unique psychological compromise was reached—the hope that, by making the sacrifice to participate personally, we*

55. “Cherez voenkomaty dobrovol’tsem v armiiu idut kazhdyi desiatyi—VSU” [One in ten goes to the army through military call-up centres—AFU], *RBK-Ukraina*, July 16, 2015, [www.rbc.ua/rus/news/cherez-voenkomaty-dobrovoltsem-armiiu-idet-1437054902.html](http://www.rbc.ua/rus/news/cherez-voenkomaty-dobrovoltsem-armiiu-idet-1437054902.html) (accessed February 1, 2017).

56. Roman Lebed, “Beskonechnaia istoriia o kontraktnoi armii v Ukraine” [Endless story of contract army in Ukraine], *BBC Ukraina*, March 2013, [www.bbc.com/ukrainian/ukraine\\_in\\_russian/2013/03/130301\\_ru\\_s\\_contract\\_army\\_coming\\_soon.shtml](http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/ukraine_in_russian/2013/03/130301_ru_s_contract_army_coming_soon.shtml) (accessed February 1, 2017); Andrei Datsiuk, “Vooruzhennye sily Ukrainy: Istoria razvala i perspektiva vozrozhdeniia” [AFU: History of collapse and prospects of rejuvenation], *112.ua*, December 7, 2014, <http://112.ua/statji/vooruzhennye-sily-ukrainy-istoriya-razvala-i-perspektiva-vozrozhdeniya-156791.html> (accessed February 1, 2017); Serg Marco, “VSU i dobrobaty: ‘za’ i ‘protiv’” [AFU and volunteer battalions: pros and cons], *Argument*, May 19, 2015, <http://argumentua.com/stati/vsu-i-dobrobaty-za-i-protiv> (accessed February 1, 2017).

57. “Esli by ne dobrovol’cheskie batal’ony, razmezhevanie s rossiiskimi terroristami prokhodilo by gde-to po Dnepru—Anton Gerashchenko” [If not for the volunteer battalions, the dividing line with the Russian terrorists would lie somewhere along the Dnipro—Anton Gerashchenko], *Cenzor.Net*, November 9, 2014, [http://censor.net.ua/news/311039/esli\\_by\\_ne\\_dobrovoltcheskie\\_batalony\\_razmejevanie\\_s\\_rossiyskimi\\_terroristami\\_prokhodilo\\_by\\_gdeto\\_po\\_dnepru](http://censor.net.ua/news/311039/esli_by_ne_dobrovoltcheskie_batalony_razmejevanie_s_rossiyskimi_terroristami_prokhodilo_by_gdeto_po_dnepru) (accessed February 1, 2017).

### THREE MOST IMPORTANT REASONS WHY YOU SPECIFICALLY DECIDED TO JOIN A VOLUNTEER ARMED UNIT

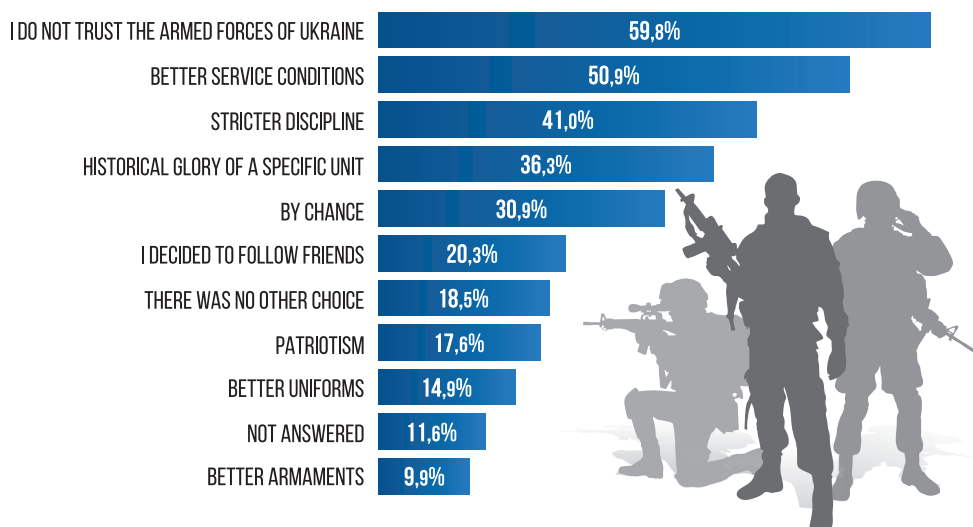


Figure 5. Main reasons for enlistment.

would not allow the war to drag on for a long time.

The third factor was the place of deployment. For example, the ADBs were formed and equipped in order to protect their own areas above all. As the war on the Eastern Front continued—revealing both heroic volunteers and effective army combat units as well as cowards, deserters, and those simply too weak for war—the ADBs were redeployed away from their places of formation first to reinforce the border guards and then directly to combat areas. This had a partially demoralizing effect, since people went [into battle] without such a strong motivation [as protecting their homes]. Sometimes this led to the disbandment of units.<sup>58</sup>

Many volunteers felt both enthusiasm and uncertainty during their service.<sup>59</sup> There

were also cases of negligence by the ATO command and misunderstanding between them and soldiers of individual battalions.<sup>60</sup> Summarizing the experience of many soldiers, Pokalchuk explains:

*Our lack of understanding of what was happening or what our place was had a serious impact on our fighting spirit and military morale. A further source of frustration was the necessity not just of shooting people, but of being the first to fire. The lack of a clear legal basis for this subsequently led to the initiation of criminal proceedings against volunteers for using force against “the local population” and “local authorities” (for example, exchanges of fire with militsiya [the pre-2015 police service] members who had gone over to the side of the separatists). Additionally, there was shock from the first mass artillery and rocket attacks, which showed us the real scale and strength of the aggressors’ military threat. Moreover, there was a steadily growing distrust in our middle- and high-ranking command staff, who issued orders that were either impossible to understand or impossible to fulfil (due to a lack of transport, ammunition, or*

58. Oleh Pokalchuk (Director of Network for Implementation and Analysis of Non-Systemic Actors, Centre of Social Engineering), e-mail communication with the authors, January 4, 2017.

59. Yuri Marchenko, “Voyna uzhe idet: kak sluzhat dobrovol’tsy ukrainskoi armii” [The war is already taking place: how the volunteers of the Ukrainian army serve], *Platfor.ma*, May 26, 2014, <http://platfor.ma/magazine/text-sq/search/-voyna-uzhe-idet/> (accessed February 1, 2017); Yuri Palamarchuk, “Programmist iz ‘Azova’: ‘la sam eshche do kontsa ne ponimau vsego proiskhodiashchego” [Programmer from ‘Azov’: ‘I still do not understand a lot of what is happening], *Argument*, April 7, 2015, <http://argumentua.com/stati/programmist-iz-azova-ya-sam-eshche-do-kontsa-ne-ponimayu-vsego-proiskhodiashchego> (accessed February 1, 2017).

60. “Boitsy batal’ona ‘Cherkassy’ ne uklonialis’ ot sluzhby na Donbasse” [Fighters of ‘Cherkassy’ battalion have not been evading service in Donbas], *BBC Ukraina*, September 11, 2014, [www.bbc.com/ukrainian/ukraine\\_in\\_russian/2014/09/140911\\_ru\\_s\\_cherkasi\\_batalion](http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/ukraine_in_russian/2014/09/140911_ru_s_cherkasi_batalion) (accessed February 1, 2017).



*personnel). The failure by many to grasp the life-saving importance military discipline was another demoralising factor, as was positional warfare: it is one thing to be engaged in combat, and another to constantly be in trenches.<sup>61</sup>*

Due to the ambiguity, contradictions, and context-dependent shades of meaning inherent in war (as in other complex human endeavours), when analysing the situation on the ground, it is often worthwhile to delve into and consider specific conditions of service as motivational factors. For example, almost three-quarters of volunteers participating in our study believed that service in their unit allowed them fully to apply their skills and knowledge, while providing them with good opportunities for self-fulfilment (see Figure 6). It is also noteworthy that the volunteers interviewed during our study gave equally high ratings to the work of their immediate commanders and of military health professionals, the quality of combat training in the unit, discipline and the overall psychological climate (see Figure 7). This indicates that, despite some of the negative contextual and situational aspects observed by Pokalchuk, there were also a number of positive aspects in the volunteer units which

sustained the motivation of the individual volunteers to continue their involvement.

The lowest ratings were those evaluating the supreme military command and ATO command, though these may reflect the earlier distrust between the Armed Forces hierarchy and some volunteer units.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, according to the data from focus groups and in-depth interviews, it can be added that the clear majority of volunteers considered the signing of the Second Minsk Agreement not only to be a betrayal of national interests, but also a denigration of the will of the people to defend their country.<sup>63</sup> This echoes Pokalchuk's observation about the demoralizing effect that attrition warfare in

62. "Iz-za bezdarnogo komandovaniia gibnut liudi" [People are dying due to incompetent command], *Obozrevatel'*, September 4, 2014, [www.obozrevatel.com/crime/26813-iz-za-bezdarnogo-komandovaniya-gibnut-lyudi/amp.htm](http://www.obozrevatel.com/crime/26813-iz-za-bezdarnogo-komandovaniya-gibnut-lyudi/amp.htm) (accessed February 1, 2017); "Komandir iz 'Donbassa': Batal'ony okazyvaiutsia v kotlakh iz-za komand rukovodstva ATO" [Commander from 'Donbas': Battalions end up in cauldrons due to the orders of the ATO command], *Podrobnosti*, September 21, 2014, <http://podrobnosti.ua/994416-komandir-iz-donbassa-batalony-okazyvajutsja-v-kotlah-iz-za-komand-rukovodstva-ato-video.html> (accessed February 1, 2017).

63. "Minskie soglashiia-2: slabye mesta. Kakie voprosy vyzyvaiut novye mirnye dogovorennosti po Donbassu" [Minsk Agreements-2: weak points. Questions prompted by peace agreements on Donbass], *Meduza*, February 19, 2015, <https://meduza.io/feature/2015/02/12/minskie-soglashiya-2-slabye-mesta> (accessed February 1, 2017).

61. Pokalchuk, e-mail communication.



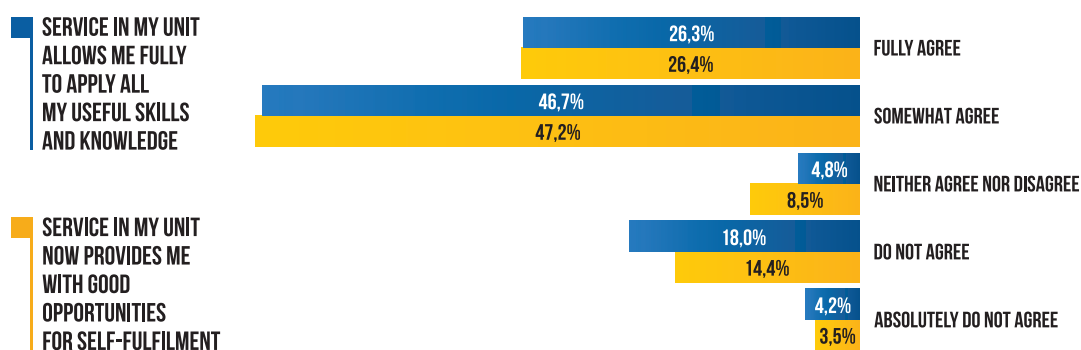


Figure 6. Overall assessment of service conditions.

the trenches has on front-line volunteers. To quote one unit commander, “this is not peace, but some kind of hybrid armistice; under these conditions, our initiative is completely restrained; we cannot do the things we signed up to do: fight for and defend our country”.

In summary, it can be noted that during 2014-2016 the military volunteer movement had developed its own understanding of the military situation in eastern Ukraine—along with expectations and even demands regarding the country’s senior military and political leadership. Given the information presented in this chapter about the personal motivation, profile and socio-political views of volunteer servicemen, as well as communication gaps between the volunteer

However, the long-term success of Ukraine’s security and defence sector hinges on the progress and effectiveness of various reforms, including those that provide for attractive career opportunities in this sector. Overcoming the issues which create image problems for Ukraine’s regular and, sometimes, voluntary military and security structures is of paramount importance in this regard. The next chapter discusses the Ukrainian security and defence sector’s ongoing struggle for a better image.

## 4. THE STRUGGLE FOR A BETTER IMAGE

*The military volunteer phenomenon has already changed Ukrainian society and will continue to exert a tangible influence on both socio-economic and political expectations*

Work to improve the image of all national security and defence institutions is an equally vital aspect of the ongoing reform process, since it directly affects the motivation of potential employees and can contribute to their decision

and regular forces, beginning full-fledged dialogue among all stakeholders is a critical challenge for the government. It is also obvious that positional trench warfare is perceived by many volunteer servicemen as a hopeless and motivation-draining stalemate, which may eventually have serious repercussions to the implementation of the Second Minsk Agreement in the future.

to build a professional future in the defence and security sector. The image of volunteer units and the regular military forces in the eyes of the society in general, and of the volunteers in particular, plays an important role in ensuring future success of this sector. Ukraine has begun to pursue a targeted policy that is already showing some results, such as, for example, a threefold increase in wages.<sup>64</sup>

The military volunteer phenomenon has already changed Ukrainian society and will continue to exert a tangible influence on both socio-economic and political expectations.

64. “Rabota voevat’: armii stanovotsia odnim iz samykh privlekatelnykh ukrainskikh rabotodatelei” [Waging war a job: army is becoming one of the most attractive Ukrainian employers], *Novoe Vremia*, March 31, 2016, <http://nv.ua/publications/rabota-voevat-armija-stanovitsja-odnim-iz-samyh-privlekatelnyh-ukrainskih-rabotodatelej-108187.html> (accessed

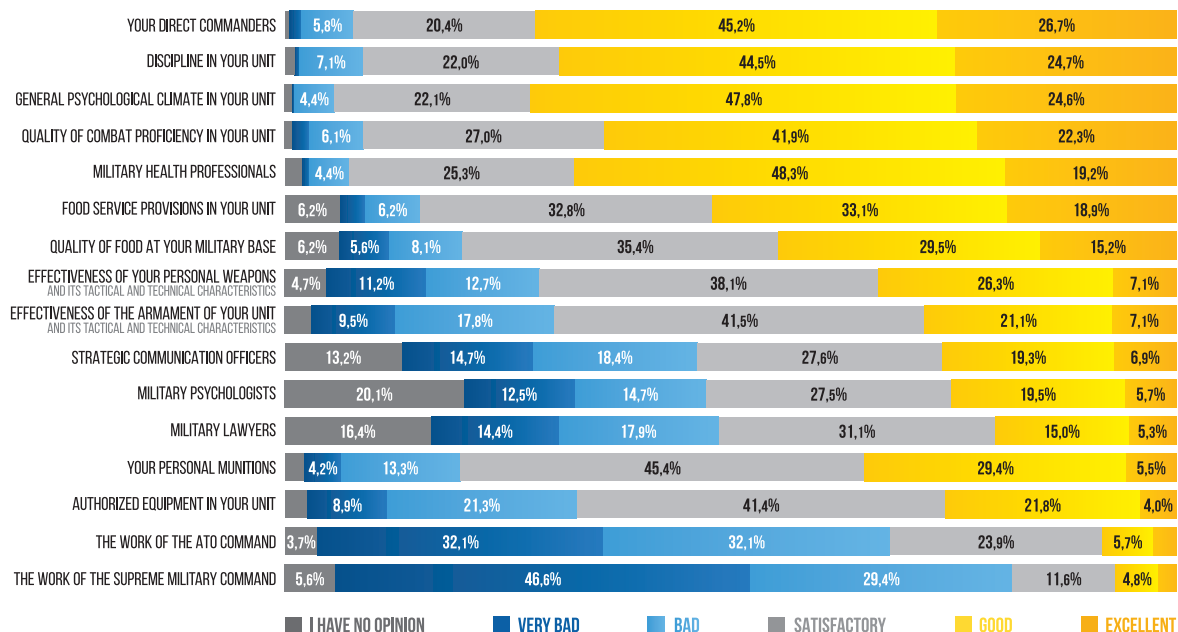


Figure 7. Assessment of constituent elements of military service.

However, this is not the only issue to be addressed.

Volunteer units came into picture at a very difficult time and with their own set of reputational risks. It should be kept in mind that, at the beginning of military operations in the ATO zone, there were already some

*Some battalions, however, focused attention of the public on their achievements, especially as compared to the regular military*

lawless areas used as bases for various criminal activities.<sup>65</sup> Thus, as early as 2015, one in six Ukrainians viewed the volunteer battalions as oligarch private armies containing criminal elements.<sup>66</sup> Certainly, due to frequent changes of junior command staff, poor personnel management and logistical support, there

were problematic issues with some volunteer units, including incidents of looting, etc.<sup>67</sup> Some battalions, however, focused attention of the public on their achievements, especially as compared to the regular military.<sup>68</sup>

Undoubtedly, image-wise, special mention should be made of the participation of women both in the volunteer movement as a whole and in volunteer military units in particular.<sup>69</sup>

Since 2015, the role of women in defence has become a contentious topic of public discussion in Ukraine, but certain changes towards greater the acceptance of female soldiers in the volunteer military units

February 1, 2017).

65. Natalia Vlashchenko, "Konstantin Kulik: Segodnya zona ATO—eto odna bolshaia koloniia" [Konstantin Kulik: Today the ATO zone is one big penitentiary], *Publichnye Lyudi*, July 30, 2016, <http://pl.com.ua/konstantin-kulik-segodnya-zona-ato-eto-odna-bolshaya-koloniya> (accessed February 1, 2017).

66. "Kazhdyi shestoi ukrainets vidit v dobrovol'cheskikh batal'onakh chastnye armii oligarkhov" [Every sixth Ukrainian sees the volunteer battalions as private armies of the oligarchs], *Zerkalo Nedeli*, January 8, 2015, [http://zn.ua/UKRAINE/kazhdyi-shestoy-ukraintec-vidit-v-dobrovolcheskih-batalonah-chastnye-armii-oligarhov-163047\\_.html](http://zn.ua/UKRAINE/kazhdyi-shestoy-ukraintec-vidit-v-dobrovolcheskih-batalonah-chastnye-armii-oligarhov-163047_.html) (accessed February 1, 2017).

67. Pavel Sheremet, "Batal'ony: rasformirovat' nel'zia reformirovat'" [Battalions: disband not reform], *Ukrainskaia Pravda*, November 3, 2014, [www.pravda.com.ua/rus/articles/2014/11/3/7042927](http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/articles/2014/11/3/7042927) (accessed February 1, 2017).

68. "Dobrovol'tsy v etu armiiu ne idut cherez razocharovanie v komandovanii, vlasti—komandir polka spetsial'nogo naznacheniiia 'Azov'" [Volunteers are not joining this army due to disappointment with the military command and authorities—commanding officer of the special purpose regiment 'Azov'], *Military Navigator*, April 25, 2016, [www.milnavigator.com/dobrovolcy-v-etu-armiyu-ne-idut-cherez-razocharovanie-v-komandovanii-vlasti-komandir-polka-spetsialnogo-naznacheniya-azov](http://m.milnavigator.com/dobrovolcy-v-etu-armiyu-ne-idut-cherez-razocharovanie-v-komandovanii-vlasti-komandir-polka-spetsialnogo-naznacheniya-azov) (accessed February 1, 2017).

69. Oksana Mikoliuk, "Zrimye problemy 'nevidimogo batal'ona'" [Visible problems of 'an invisible battalion'], *Den'*, March 15, 2016, <http://m.day.kyiv.ua/ru/article/obshchestvo/zrimye-problemy-nevidimogo-batalona> (accessed February 1, 2017).

have already been observed.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, although this is beyond the scope of this study, it is also fair to mention the contribution of the foreign volunteers who came to fight for Ukraine.<sup>71</sup> The participation of both women and foreign volunteers shaped positively the overall image of the volunteer units. Some foreign volunteers drew attention to problems of the present-day AFU, including the pervasive and corrosive Soviet legacy.<sup>72</sup>

While the negative ATO soldiers' perception of the country's military structures highlighted in the previous chapter certainly influenced that of Ukrainian society in general, the integration of voluntary units into the official structures had the effect of transferring some of their positive reputational capital to the regular military. Thus, while there are many notable critiques both of the military in general and service at the front line in particular, the gradual increase in public trust of the Armed Forces over time is worth noting.<sup>73</sup> According to a survey published in 2012 by the Kyiv Institute of Sociology, the

confidence index was 34%.<sup>74</sup> In 2016, however, the same figure for the AFU and the National Guard (including the volunteer paramilitary units) was almost 49%; this reflects progress in changing the image of the AFU, increasing

its potential to attract new recruits.<sup>75</sup> Among other positive trends, it is worth noting that,

*One of the problems identified was the lack of effective, full-scale cooperation among various military units, especially between regular forces and volunteer detachments*

from 2014–2015, some 45% of Ukrainians provided assistance to the AFU, the National Guard, or the volunteer battalions.<sup>76</sup> According to our focus group interviews, an important motivation for such support included having friends or relatives in active service. However, as a representative of a civilian of volunteer organisation told us in an interview, many now suffer from both physical fatigue and psychological exhaustion: “Previously, when there was a need for actual help, we provided it day and night, bringing everything that was needed at the front from all over. But now it's time for the state itself to step up. This should be primarily the army's concern, and not that of enthusiastic activists”.

In terms of overall image, the combat readiness of the AFU often came under severe criticism; in two decades of independence, the country had not been able to undertake effective reforms, and as a result, the state of the military was dissatisfactory in terms of training, equipment or discipline. After the war began, however, it was forced quickly to carry out vital changes, including recruitment and training of new personnel, as well as

70. “Zhenshchiny v ATO vyznuzhdeny voevat’ nelegal’no iz-za ministerskoi biurokratii” [Women in the ATO have to fight illegally due to ministerial bureaucracy], *TSN*, December 5, 2015, <https://ru.tsn.ua/ato/zhenshchiny-v-ato-vynuzhdeny-voevat-nel-egalno-iz-za-ministerskoy-biurokratii-538526.html> (accessed February 1, 2017); Igor Vetrov, “Zhenshchiny v armii: VSU i mirovoi opyt” [Women in the army: AFU and world experience], *Segodnya*, February 14, 2016, [www.segodnya.ua/ukraine/zhenshchiny-v-armii-vsu-i-mirovoy-opyt-689801.html](http://www.segodnya.ua/ukraine/zhenshchiny-v-armii-vsu-i-mirovoy-opyt-689801.html) (accessed February 1, 2017).

71. Maria Antonova, “They Came to Fight for Ukraine. Now They're Stuck in No Man's Land”, *Foreign Policy*, October 19, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/10/19/ukraines-abandoned-soldiers-russian-belarusian-volunteers> (accessed February 1, 2017).

72. Irina Shevchenko, “Amerikanets Dzhim Kovpak: V Ukrainie priniali zakon, chto inostrantsy mogut byt' voennoslu-zhashchimi ukrainskoi armii, no ne sdelali nichego, chtoby zakon real'no rabotal” [American Jim Kovpak: in Ukraine, a law has been passed allowing foreigners to serve in the Ukrainian army, but nothing has been done to make this work in practice], *UNIAN*, March 10, 2017, [www.unian.net/society/1817071-amerikanets-djim-kovpak-v-ukraine-prin-yali-zakon-cto-inostrantsyi-mogut-byit-voennoslujaschi-mi-ukrainskoy-armii-no-ne-sdelali-nichego-ctobyi-zakon-real-no-rabotal.html](http://www.unian.net/society/1817071-amerikanets-djim-kovpak-v-ukraine-prin-yali-zakon-cto-inostrantsyi-mogut-byit-voennoslujaschi-mi-ukrainskoy-armii-no-ne-sdelali-nichego-ctobyi-zakon-real-no-rabotal.html) (accessed March 10, 2017).

73. Dmitri Mendeleev, “Kto i kak razvorovyvaet armiiu Ukrainy” [Who plunders the army of Ukraine, and how], *Argument*, August 19, 2014, <http://argumentua.com/stati/kto-i-kak-razv-orovyvaet-armiyu-ukrainy> (accessed February 1, 2017); Roman Malko, “Ofitser z peredovoi: ‘Armii brakue logiki, logistiki i poslidovnosti’” [Officer from the front-line: ‘Army lacks logic, logistics and consistency’], *Tizhden.ua*, April 14, 2015, <http://tyzhden.ua/Society/134210> (accessed February 1, 2017).

74. “Dovira ukrainsiv do sotsialnikh institutsii” [Trust of Ukrainians in social institutions], Kyiv Institute of Sociology, April 18, 2012, <http://kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=81> (accessed February 1, 2017).

75. “Volonter i armii pol'zuiutsia naibol'shim doveriem sredi naseleniia” [Volunteers and army enjoy the highest trust of the population], *LB.ua*, February 23, 2016, [http://lb.ua/news/2016/02/23/328604\\_volonter\\_armiya\\_polzuyutsya.html](http://lb.ua/news/2016/02/23/328604_volonter_armiya_polzuyutsya.html) (accessed February 1, 2017).

76. Razumkov Centre, The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), *Citizens of Ukraine on Security*.





retraining existing service members.<sup>77</sup> At the end of 2015, the General Staff reported changes in military exercises over the preceding four years which had led to improved coordination of combat units and subunits and consolidation of experience gained during ATO. Combat training is now carried out according to NATO standards under the guidance of foreign instructors and with the participation of ATO veterans.<sup>78</sup> These are extremely valuable steps given that unit coordination and quality training of both soldiers and commanders constitute the basis for a strong and effective military.<sup>79</sup>

Despite this increased professional training, however, there are still obstacles within the system that are difficult to overcome. One of the problems identified was the lack

of effective, full-scale cooperation among various military units, especially between regular forces and volunteer detachments.<sup>80</sup> This, in part, seems to be the main reason for defeats in the battles of Debaltsevo and Ilovaysk, for which the public of Ukraine (36%) is inclined to blame the MoD and the General Staff of the AFU, not the commanders or soldiers of volunteer battalions (1%).<sup>81</sup>

This perceived incompetence of the MoD and the General Staff is also often blamed for high number of casualties of the AFU. Comparing ATO casualty figures across all government agencies, as of spring 2016, the statistics is the following: the AFU lost 2,218 troops; the National Guard—179; the MoI forces (not including the National Guard or Emergency Service but including volunteer battalions

77. Yaroslav Tinchenko, "De vziatii novikh komandiriv" [Where have the new commanders been taken?], *Tizhden.ua*, January 9, 2016, <http://tyzhden.ua/Society/155279> (accessed February 1, 2017); "V Genshtabe ozvuchili novuiu informat-siiu o griadushchem prizyve ofitserov zapasa" [The General Staff announced information about the forthcoming call-up of reserve officers], *Didzhital Venchez*, January 11, 2017, <http://news.bigmir.net/ukraine/1051222-V-Genshtabe-ozvuchi-li-novuju-informaciju-o-grjadushchem-prizyve-oficerov-zapasa> (accessed February 1, 2017).

78. "V Ukraine startovali voennye ucheniia pri uchastii boitsov ATO" [Military exercises with participation of ATO fighters commenced in Ukraine], *Dsnews*, November 7, 2016, [www.dsnews.ua/politics/v-ukraine-startovali-mezhdunarodnye-voennye-ucheni-ya-pri-07112016140500](http://www.dsnews.ua/politics/v-ukraine-startovali-mezhdunarodnye-voennye-ucheni-ya-pri-07112016140500) (accessed February 1, 2017).

79. "Ucheniia ukrainskikh voennykh v tsifrah, infografika" [Exercises of the Ukrainian military in figures, infographics], *TSN*, December 21, 2015, <http://ru.tsn.ua/ukrayina/ucheni-ya-ukrainskikh-voennykh-v-cifrah-infografika-548261.html> (accessed February 1, 2017).

80. Dmitri Tymchuk et al, *Vtorzhenie v Ukrainu: khronika rossiiskoi agressii* [Invasion of Ukraine: a chronicle of the Russian aggression]. (Kyiv: Bright Star Publishing, 2016).

81. Yuri Butusov, "Tsena Debaltsevo—boevye poteri VSU. Pravda pro 'samuiu uspehnuiu operatsiiu po vyvodu iz Debaltsevo'" [The price of Debaltsevo—combat losses of the AFU. The truth about 'the most successful withdrawal operation from Debaltsevo'], *Cenzor.NET*, August 8, 2015, [http://censor.net.ua/resonance/347010/tsena\\_debaltsevo\\_boevye\\_poteri\\_vsu\\_pravda\\_pro\\_samuyu\\_uspehnuyu\\_operatsiyu\\_po\\_vyvodu\\_iz\\_debaltsevo](http://censor.net.ua/resonance/347010/tsena_debaltsevo_boevye_poteri_vsu_pravda_pro_samuyu_uspehnuyu_operatsiyu_po_vyvodu_iz_debaltsevo) (accessed February 1, 2017); "Volonter o porazheniakh sil ATO v 2014-m: my proigrali bitvy, no utseleli sami i sokhranili stranu" [Volunteer about defeats of the ATO forces in 2014: we lost the battles but survived ourselves and preserved the country], *Glavred*, June 17, 2015, <http://glavred.info/politika/volonter-o-porazheniyah-sil-ato-v-2014-godu-my-proigrali-bitvy-no-uceleli-i-sokhranili-stranu-372739.html> (accessed February 1, 2017); Razumkov Centre, The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), *Citizens of Ukraine on Security*.



as well as police)—127; the State Border Guard Service—67; the State Emergency Service—at least 17; and the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU)—11. In total—including all state institutions as well as the volunteer units “outside the system”, about 2,700 people were killed and approximately 9,900 were wounded.<sup>82</sup> It is very difficult to estimate the losses of volunteer units specifically—especially for 2014—since both because not all units were completely regularised by that period (often lacking any formal records of their own), and because some losses were included in the above official state statistics.

In conducting its own assessment of the implementation of the 2015 action plan a year later, the MoD singled out several systemic problems that undermined discipline and weakened morale: violations of rules on handling weapons; alcohol abuse; desertion; and offenses related to obtaining unauthorised benefits.<sup>83</sup>

82. “O chem ne govorit gosudarstvo. SMI vyiasnili poteri v ATO vseh silovyykh struktur” [What the authorities do not speak about. The media has figured out the losses of all the security structures in the ATO], *iPress.ua*, March 5, 2016, [http://ipress.ua/ru/mainmedia/o\\_chem\\_ne\\_govoryt\\_gosudarstvo\\_smy\\_viyasnyly\\_tochnie\\_potery\\_v\\_ato\\_vseh\\_sylovih\\_struktur\\_157020.html](http://ipress.ua/ru/mainmedia/o_chem_ne_govoryt_gosudarstvo_smy_viyasnyly_tochnie_potery_v_ato_vseh_sylovih_struktur_157020.html) (accessed February 1, 2017).

83. Yuri Butusov, “Voennaia strategii Ukrainy: Rezul’taty za god” [Military Strategy of Ukraine: results after a year], *Zerkalo Nedeli*, <http://army.zn.ua/> (accessed February 1, 2017).

Problems with discipline shaped the public perception of the regular military even before the conflict in the east of Ukraine, thus exacerbating corruption in the conscription

*Ultimately, Russia’s aggression against Ukraine aggravated existing problems in the military and intensified the need for accelerated and substantive reforms of the entire defence and national security sector*

and call-up systems. Naturally, discipline on the front lines was much higher than in the units stationed in rear areas; however, the situation remained rather serious throughout 2016. In fact, due to the careless handling of weapons as well as accidents, murders and suicides, non-combat deaths of the AFU in the ATO zone exceeded losses in combat.<sup>84</sup>

Ultimately, Russia’s aggression against Ukraine aggravated existing problems in the military and intensified the need for accelerated and substantive reforms of the entire defence

84. “Mobilizatsiia v ATO: kak korruptsiia vedet k poteriam” [Mobilisation in the ATO: how corruption leads to losses], *Politeka*, January 30, 2017, <https://politeka.net/401824-mobilizatsiya-v-ato-kak-korruptsiya-vedet-k-poteriam> (accessed February 1, 2017).

and national security sector.<sup>85</sup> Among them are a serious review of what traditions should be retained and which should be cast away. This process is clearly necessary, given that even the most obviously unsuitable elements are still in place in some locations, including leftover Soviet symbolism and visual veneration of Soviet heroes.<sup>86</sup>

As the renowned Ukrainian military and political expert Mykhailo Samus commented:

*The Ukrainian volunteer units that emerged in 2014 through the inability of the state power structures of Ukraine to effectively resist Russian aggression, were quite diverse in their nature, structure, and departmental affiliation. Subsequently, the volunteer units were integrated into various state institutions, thereby undoubtedly strengthening them—most of all, the Armed Forces and the National Guard. However, this process did not lead to the launch of a thorough reform... in terms of creating effective volunteer paramilitary units that could become a reserve for the main defence forces in case of armed aggression...*<sup>87</sup>

## 5. AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Given the reasons outlined above, from better discipline to better conditions of service to the failure of the regular military to meet minimum requirements of equipment provision, the decision by many Ukrainians to join volunteer units at the very beginning of

the conflict is understandable and explicable. But what about the future—either for them or for the country?

While volunteers also favourably view membership in NATO and the EU, they place the most emphasis on the objective of developing a national security and defence system that relies upon Ukraine's own resources (see Figure 8). This view is an important sign that both government and society should promote the active involvement of these active citizens—many of whom have had practical combat experience in the ATO—in security and defence.

Did volunteers clearly understand, what problems they would face after their service? The issue of the so-called “legalisation”

*Uncertainty surrounding volunteer soldiers' legal status had created many emotional and legal difficulties, neither the Ukrainian state nor its society were prepared to reintegrate soldiers—especially those that lacked formal veteran status—into society*

of volunteer units was recognised as early as 2014, before any specific expectations about social guarantees had even emerged, let alone before any violations of laws occurred.<sup>88</sup> By 2015, observers noted that the uncertainty surrounding volunteer soldiers' legal status had created many emotional and legal difficulties.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, neither the Ukrainian state nor its society were prepared to reintegrate soldiers—especially those that lacked formal veteran status—into society.

85. “Poltorak: situatsiiu v armii udalos' stabilizirovat', dalshe—reformy” [Poltorak: situation in the army has been stabilized; next—reforms], *Glavnoe*, April 15, 2016, <http://glavnoe.ua/news/n268023> (accessed February 1, 2017).

86. Yaroslav Tinchenko, “Dva poliusi patriotizmu” [Two poles of patriotism], *Tizhden.ua*, December 8, 2016, <http://tyzhden.ua/Society/180371> (accessed February 1, 2017).

87. Mykhailo Samus (Deputy Director for International Affairs, Centre for Army, Conversion and Disarmament Studies), interview with the authors, Kyiv, February 10, 2017.

88. “Dobrovol'cheskie batal'ony voidut v sostav armii—Stepan Poltorak” [Volunteer battalions will join the army—Stepan Poltorak], *iPress.ua*, November 10, 2014, [http://ipress.ua/ru/news/dobrovolcheskie\\_bataloni\\_voydut\\_v\\_sostav\\_armii\\_stepan\\_poltorak\\_94621.html](http://ipress.ua/ru/news/dobrovolcheskie_bataloni_voydut_v_sostav_armii_stepan_poltorak_94621.html) (accessed February 1, 2017); Tatiana Pechonchik, “Dobrovol'cheskie batal'ony: na pole bezpraviia” [Volunteer battalions: in the zone of lawlessness], *Zerkalo Nedeli*, August 15, 2014, [http://gazeta.zn.ua/socium/dobrovolcheskie-batalony-na-pole-bespraviya\\_.html](http://gazeta.zn.ua/socium/dobrovolcheskie-batalony-na-pole-bespraviya_.html) (accessed February 1, 2017).

89. Irina Kirichenko, “Dobrovol'cheskie batal'ony prosiat priznaniia—ogon' oni vedut s samogo nachala voyny” [Volunteer battalions ask for recognition—they have been fighting since the start of the war], *Zerkalo Nedeli*, September 4, 2015, [http://gazeta.zn.ua/internal/dobrovolcheskie-batalony-prosyat-priznaniya-ogon-oni-vedut-s-samogo-nachala-voyny\\_.html](http://gazeta.zn.ua/internal/dobrovolcheskie-batalony-prosyat-priznaniya-ogon-oni-vedut-s-samogo-nachala-voyny_.html) (accessed February 1, 2017).



### IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT IS THE MAIN GUARANTEE OF UKRAINE'S SECURITY?

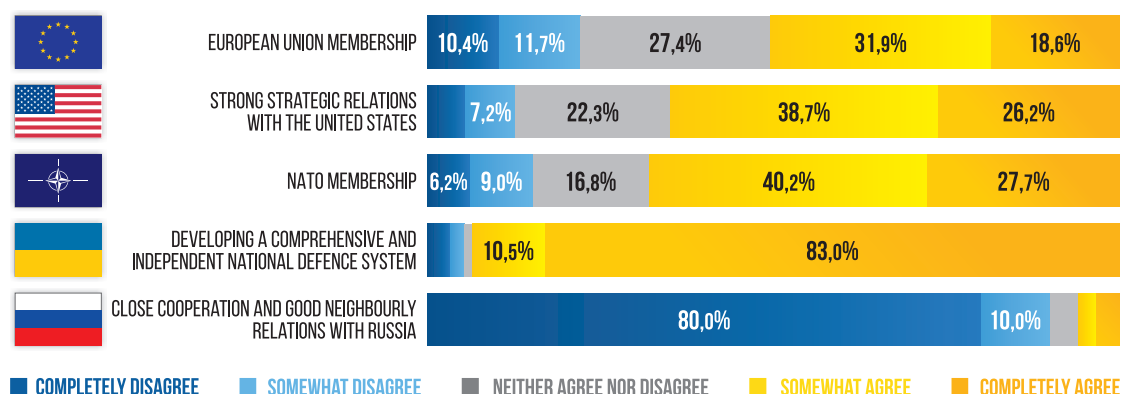


Figure 8. Main guarantees of national security.

Oleh Pokalchuk describes the situation that many volunteers faced with after returning back from war, which was characterised by:

*An irresolvable contrast between the reality of war and the peaceful life of those who had stayed behind. A painfully uncompromising, black-and-white perception of reality. A sense of resentment of the falling patriotic motivation among the population as a whole because of fatigue and the drawn-out nature of the war. Behavioural changes characteristic of post-traumatic stress disorder (for example, sudden aggressiveness in response to fireworks displays). Narrowing one's contacts only to "our people," that is, other former volunteers or combatants. Encountering subtly or openly hostile attitudes from the bureaucracy, accompanied by the phrase "I didn't send you to war".<sup>90</sup>*

Of course, such attitudes do not help keep former military volunteers interested in contributing to the development of Ukraine's defence capability, especially since there is still no well-considered system for making use of their practical combat experience. Further delay in effectively resolving this issue can exacerbate the already serious social consequences of the war in eastern Ukraine.<sup>91</sup>

In an interview, Kramatorsk journalist Vera Shelest shared her experience in talking with military volunteers who have returned from the front:

*After returning from the war, they seek revenge when they return to civilian life and realize that life has passed by. While they were on the front lines, a lot has changed – neither the veteran health care system nor many options for ordinary employment await them; many are not ready to return to their previous jobs, because their brains now work differently. On the front, they are idealized and perceived as heroes or defenders of the country, but, when they return to the civilian life, they realize that they are in worse conditions compared to those who stayed [in the ATO]. Another significant blow to their fighting spirit and morale is caused by difficulties in obtaining the official status of a combatant, or—which is even more frightening—by the fact that others who had nothing to do with the real war (prosecutors, officials and others who did not participate in the fighting) have been granted this status.<sup>92</sup>*

Another alarming fact is the rather widespread opinion among military volunteers—expressed in numerous ways throughout our in-depth interviews and focus groups—that the current conflict is not the last. It is aptly summarized in the words of one experienced soldier who

90. Pokalchuk, e-mail communication.

91. Dmitri Teperik, "Assessing Social Consequences of the War in Eastern Ukraine", *ICDS blog*, February 3, 2017, [www.icds.ee/blog/article/assessing-social-consequences-of-the-war-in-eastern-ukraine](http://www.icds.ee/blog/article/assessing-social-consequences-of-the-war-in-eastern-ukraine) (accessed February 3, 2017).

92. Vera Shelest (journalist), interview with the authors, Kramatorsk, September 20, 2016.

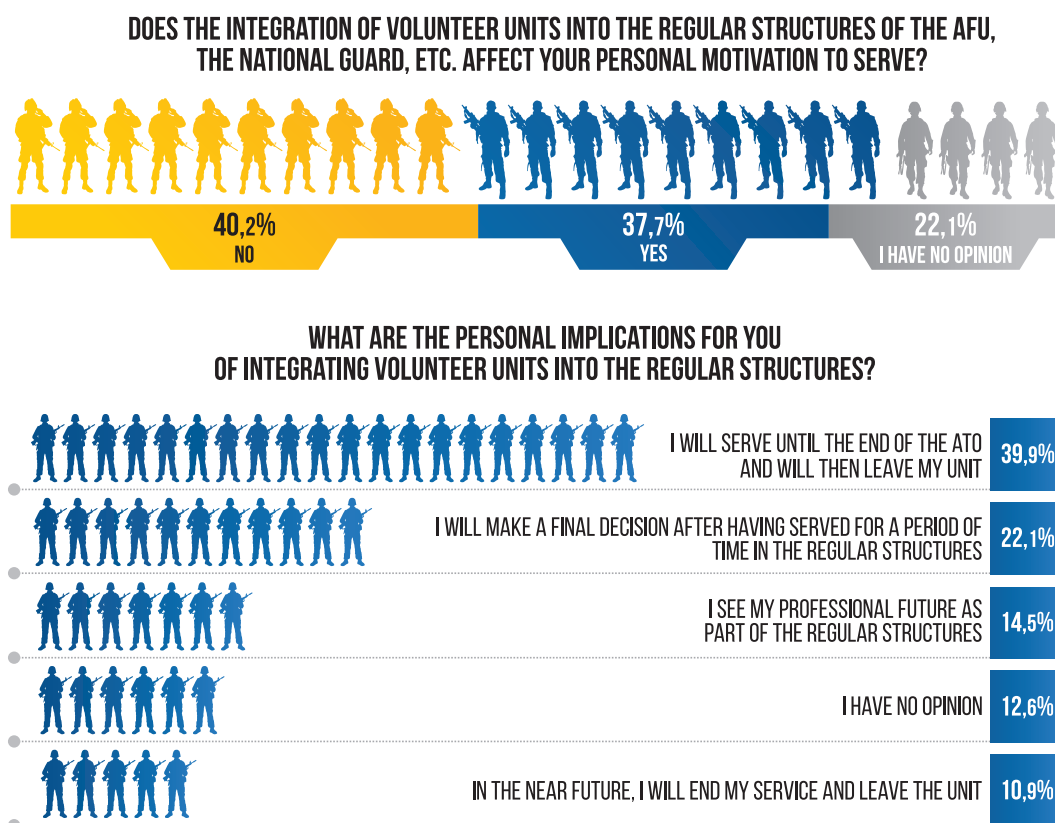


Figure 9. Attitudes towards integration of volunteer units.

fought in the ATO: “Ukraine does not yet have a full-fledged civic society, there are only numerous groups united by narrow interests. A lot of dissatisfaction and frustration has built up among young and middle-aged citizens, with the result that the new generation expects the next crisis or conflict to take place by 2023–2025, since history develops in a spiral. We don’t know, what the next Maidan will look like, but we believe that it there will be one for sure”. With the right combination of circumstances, such reasoning can create a self-fulfilling prophecy—one that can be used to destabilize the political situation while creating opportunities to exploit the revanchist mood of some ATO veterans.

The monopoly on the use of force should remain in the hands of the state, as one of the powers transferred by citizens to ensure the maintenance of lawful order and stability. Given the ongoing internal competition among certain oligarchic and political forces, the continuing existence of some volunteer units, or “freedom-loving people dressed in camouflage”, outside the system may pose

a risk to that stability.<sup>93</sup> It seems likely that some units could pursue revenge or revanchist ideology, and persecute specific people (politicians, societal leaders, entrepreneurs) without any legal authority. Undoubtedly, this represents a threat of increased social tension and internal conflict. Despite the rather heated public discussion about military volunteers, their motivation and willingness to serve remains an important component of Ukraine’s defence. The war rallied Ukrainian society and served as a strong impetus for accelerating the implementation of extremely important changes that could increase the combat capability of the AFU and National Guard.<sup>94</sup> Among the volunteers we surveyed, 40% said that the integration process does not affect

93. Iliia Lukash, “Semen Semenchenko: Okhota na dobrobaty—eto chast’ plana po prevrashcheniiu Ukrainy v satellita Rossii” [Semen Semenchenko: The hunt for volunteer battalions is part of a plan to turn Ukraine into a satellite of Russia], *Novoe Vremia*, July 8, 2016, <http://nv.ua/publications/okhota-na-dobrobaty-eto-chast-plana-po-prevrashcheniiu-ukrainy-v-satellita-rossii-167160.html> (accessed February 1, 2017).

94. Viacheslav Tseluiko, “Dobrovol’cheskii ‘fenomen’ Ukrainy ili gde sluzhit’ patriotu” [Volunteer ‘phenomenon’ of Ukraine, or where should a patriot serve], *Argument*, October 31, 2016, <http://argumentua.com/stati/dobrovolcheskii-fenomen-ukrainy-ili-gde-sluzhit-patriotu> (accessed February 1, 2017).

their motivation to serve, while 38% expressed the opposite view—revealing a clear division of opinion (see Figure 9).

In our focus groups, some volunteers stressed that they perceive the government's intention to "legitimize" all volunteer movements as tantamount to destroying authentic volunteerism in Ukraine—a phenomenon which, in their opinion, has become the driving force of positive changes in the country since the Revolution of Dignity. At the time of our study, 40% of volunteers planned to serve until the end of the ATO and only then would leave their units; 22% intended to make a final decision on their professional future after serving for some time in the integrated unit, and 14% could say that they saw their professional future in the regular forces (see Figure 9). In other words, among those soldiers who voluntarily went to the front lines, there are many potential professional servicemen who can and should remain part of the AFU or National Guard. For many volunteers, one of the factors that motivated them to enlist in the AFU was that their comrades, who remained on the front lines, needed professional support.<sup>95</sup>

When asked, many volunteers highlight a number of reasonable criteria that would need to be met before they would consider the possibility of becoming professional soldiers. According to the survey data, 56% want to see professional and reasonable commanders, 44% emphasize the importance of adequate provision of necessary materiel and services, and 37% expect a reasonable salary (above the national average wage). At the same time, such factors as a special military pension, benefits or leave are not significant; they were cited by less than 8% of respondents (see Figure 10).

While material factors clearly have some influence, the most important condition is one, on which not only the image but also the very

future of any armed forces is dependent—evidence that the state fully carries out its duty of care towards its soldiers. According to a soldier in the Azov unit, servicemen should see that the state is investing in them: "Soldiers should focus on carrying out their combat missions, not on how to keep warm during a night in the field. This lowers their combat effectiveness."

Although the formation of a full-fledged professional armed force in Ukraine—one that includes former military volunteers—is not an easy task, it is extremely important. The difficulty lies not only in the funding, but also in the motivation and professionalism of individual soldiers.<sup>96</sup> The modernisation of the Armed Forces has had some undesirable

*Although the formation of a full-fledged professional armed force in Ukraine—one that includes former military volunteers—is not an easy task, it is extremely important*

and well-known side effects, notably a loss of morale.<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, there have clearly been positive changes as well; the growth in the number of contract soldiers and formation of an active operational reserve has created the critical mass of professional military personnel necessary for the full development of the national defence system.<sup>98</sup>

It is interesting that some volunteer organisations were able to quickly find their niche for cooperation with the state, for example, by providing the military and border

95. Aleksandr Savitski, "Kak izmenilis' ukrainskaia armia: ot dobrovol'tsev k professionalam" [How the Ukrainian army changed: from volunteers to professionals], *DeutscheWelle*, April 14, 2016, [www.dw.com/ru/как-изменилась-украинская-армия-от-добровольцев-к-профессионалам/a-19207974](http://www.dw.com/ru/как-изменилась-украинская-армия-от-добровольцев-к-профессионалам/a-19207974) (accessed February 1, 2017).

96. Dmitrii Bruk, "Kontraktnaia armia: motivatsiia, zhelanie, professionalizm i perspektivy" [Contract army: motivation, wish, professionalism and prospects], *Glavnoe*, February 2, 2016, <http://glavnoe.ua/articles/a10607> (accessed February 1, 2017).

97. Vitali Kuksa, "V ukrainskii armii z'iavisia groshi i tudi pover-taiut'sia 'stari' ofitseri. Z nimi prihodiat i armii'ski marazmi" [Ukrainian army got money, and 'old' officers are returning. Army nonsense comes along], *Teksti.org.ua*, March 3, 2016 [http://texty.org.ua/pg/article/editorial/read/65788/V\\_ukrajinskij\\_armiji\\_zjavlysa\\_groshi\\_i\\_tudy](http://texty.org.ua/pg/article/editorial/read/65788/V_ukrajinskij_armiji_zjavlysa_groshi_i_tudy) (accessed February 1, 2017).

98. Ruslan Rudomski, "Kak izmenilis' Vooruzhennnye sily Ukrainy za 25 let" [How the AFU changed in 25 years], *Depo.ua*, December 6, 2016, [www.depo.ua/rus/war/yak-zminilis-zbroynisili-ukrayini-za-25-rokiv-06122016110000](http://www.depo.ua/rus/war/yak-zminilis-zbroynisili-ukrayini-za-25-rokiv-06122016110000) (accessed February 1, 2017); Andrei Pyndyk, "Sluzhba po kontraktu v VSU: kak postupit' i skol'ko poluchaiut" [Contract service in the AFU: how to enlist and rates of pay], *NEWSONE.UA*, August 12, 2016, <https://newsone.ua/ru/sluzhba-po-kontraktu-v-vsu-kak-postupit-i-skolko-poluchayut> (accessed February 1, 2017).



### NAME THREE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH YOU WOULD AGREE TO BECOME A PROFESSIONAL SOLDIER IN THE REGULAR STRUCTURES



Figure 10. Retention factors.

guards with air support (e.g. supplying and operating surveillance “drones”, piloting combat and transport aircraft, etc.).<sup>99</sup>

Nevertheless, according to Samus, the process of integration failed to make any real changes to the country’s security and defence system:

Based on the results of the focus groups and in-depth interviews that we conducted, we found that, at the integration stage, it was and remains extremely important to facilitate the transition of all qualified and responsible volunteer military personnel to professional service. Entering the regular military structures as NCOs or senior soldiers, they bring excellent discipline and high morale to the regular structures, thus helping to form the core of renewed combat units in the AFU or the National Guard. Such a development would be consistent with the vision of Ukraine’s top military command and would reaffirm the fact that about 40,000 representatives of the volunteer movement continue to protect the territorial integrity and security of Ukraine today.<sup>100</sup>

*One cannot claim that the practical application of the experience of creating and operating the volunteer units has been particularly effective. Currently, the process of integrating volunteer units and volunteers into state structures, is, in fact, completed. However, their integration did not lead to any synergistic effects on the process of modernising and reforming existing power structures, [let alone] the creation of a new coherent system of national resilience that could provide for the broad involvement of civil society.... It can be argued that the volunteers of 2014–2015 were absorbed as a resource by the existing system with [only] minimal conceptual adaptations.<sup>101</sup>*

99. Konstantin Kachalov, “Dobrobat kak investproekt” [A volunteer battalion as an investment project], November 14, 2015, <https://petrimazepa.com/invest.html> (accessed February 1, 2017).

100. “Ukrainskie dobrovol’cheskie batal’ony legli v osnovu postroeniia ukrainskoi armii—Turchinov” [Ukrainian volunteer battalions formed the basis of building the Ukrainian army—Turchinov], *Segodnia*, January 27, 2017, [www.segodnya.ua/ukraine/ukrainskie-dobrovolcheskie-batalony-legli-v-osnovu-postroeniya-ukrainskoy-armii-turchinov-792558.html](http://www.segodnya.ua/ukraine/ukrainskie-dobrovolcheskie-batalony-legli-v-osnovu-postroeniya-ukrainskoy-armii-turchinov-792558.html) (accessed February 1, 2017); “Poltorak zaivail, chto Ukrainu zashchishchaiut 40 tys. dobrovol’tsev” [Poltorak stated that Ukraine is being defended by 40,000 volunteers], #Bukvy, January 27, 2017, <https://bykvu.com/bukvy/56234-poltorak-zayavil-chto-ukrainu-zashchishchayut-40-tys-dobrovol'tsev>

(accessed February 1, 2017).

101. Samus, interview with the authors.

## CONCLUSIONS

Ukraine's success in repelling military aggression and conducting a defensive war, although obtained only at great cost to the nation, demonstrated the extraordinary ability of concerned citizens to consolidate and mobilize. The mass voluntary movement in Ukraine played a decisive role in preserving the integrity of the country by responding to the acute demands of the crisis period, assuming a number of functions from a government that at that time proved unable to respond effectively to hybrid threats and military aggression. This phenomenon—the emergence of both civilian and paramilitary volunteer organisations—is unique in the modern history of Europe.

The Minsk Agreements have turned the conflict into a low-intensity war of attrition, which will require close cooperation between the military and civil society in order to maintain the nation's strength and resilience in such a time of crisis. The rise of the genuine and authentic volunteer movement and its ability to involve civil society gave Ukraine an unexpected advantage over a technically superior but morally bankrupt adversary.

It is important to understand the social consequences of this phenomenon, as they have already greatly changed the people of Ukraine and will continue to exert a tangible influence. Due attention must be paid to the explosive nature of the revanchist ideas cultivated by some forces based on deep disappointment, unfulfilled desires, unrealized hopes, unjustified expectations, and broken dreams of former volunteers. It is also important to remember the political and oligarchic support that was provided to some volunteer units, as this entails a number of risks—including to the reputation of the volunteer movement, to state monopoly over organised means of violence and to internal stability.

Despite the controversial public debate about volunteers, their personal motivation—though not their linguistic or ethnic affiliation—was and remains an important component of Ukraine's defence. The war in the east of Ukraine has highlighted the abilities of many active, industrious and conscientious people whose potential should be skilfully directed to the development of the country's defence and security system. Facilitating the transition of volunteers to professional service will allow them to enhance the regular military with their experience, excellent discipline, and high morale. Many volunteers have the motivation, battle-tested skills and professional potential to be among the best soldiers in renewed combat units of the Armed Forces and National Guard of Ukraine.

At the moment, there is still much uncertainty whether Ukraine will be able to substantively and systematically utilise the experience gained by the volunteer movement without wasting valuable human potential. Any delay in dealing with this issue can exacerbate the already serious social consequences of the war. It should be remembered that, in addition to addressing the factors of personal motivation and expectations, effective reforms and favourable public perception also play an important role in assuring future success of volunteer movement's contribution to Ukraine's security and defence.







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