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Research Report on the Third Investigation Level

The Ukrainian Case

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Research Project „The Image of the Democratic Soldier: Tensions Between the Organisation of Armed Forces and the Principles of Democracy in European Comparison“
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1. Introduction

Within the previous Research Phases a number of conclusions and assumptions have been defined. Among the findings is the fact that Soviet heritage's impact at the modern Ukrainian army was quite significant. Besides that we came to the conclusion that the soldiers' -training and the officers' -training systems in USSR were oriented at building up the loyalty towards the Soviet state and Communist leaders. The educational process for the military servicepersons was also deeply affected by the realities of the Cold war. Moreover, deeply rooted conservatism of the closed hierarchy-oriented military system led to the fact that the term of service was much more decisive than the innovative approaches, whereas the loyalty towards the "official" position was praised higher than any initiatives.

The mentioned circumstances are still reflected in the modern Ukrainian army, since Ukrainian Armed Forces inherited certain level of conservatism, unification, authoritarian and technocratic style of management, isolation, lack of self motivation etc. During both first and second stages of the research we made attempts to concentrate at the historical background of the military traditions, basics of leadership concept, impact of humanitarian education and social science at the process of army democratization and also paid certain attention to the interconnections between the rules typical for the democratic state and their impact at the rules within of military subsystem. It was of scientific interest to compare the basic values of brand-new democratic state and their influence at formulating relations between the military servicepersons within the army, which is supposed to protect the mentioned values in case of necessity.

The aim of the third stage of the research was to define to what extent our assumptions correlate with the responses of the interviewees who are directly affiliated to the military system and represent "citizens in the uniform". It is important to emphasize that despite the anonymity of the interviews it was a challenging task for the interviewer to collect the necessary data. Furthermore, it might be of interest that there was no formal support for such activities and the project task was completed basically due to the number of social links and mainly by means of informal social network connections. Among the main obstacles was the very idea of the project. The lack of social education as well as Cold War heritage (lack of trust towards Western think-tanks within the conservative segment of the Ukrainian army) proved to be enough to make military servicepersons unwilling to share their views at the existing problems. Mostly they did not agree to respond to the questions because of mistrust towards the interviewer and because of being suspicious towards the real goal of the research. In some cases the interviewer was directly blamed for collecting the data aimed at discrediting the Ukrainian army in the eyes of international community and NATO-partner states. The aforementioned context of the interviews' preparatory period might lead to certain suspicions towards the results of the field research. The main question is whether those who answered the questions were

sincere in their answers. Another important point is why the interviewees mostly refused to address problematic issues. One might presume that in the process of interviews they tried not to discredit the military structure they serve at and therefore the results of the interviews do not provide us with the real situation reflection but rather construct the ideal perception of the Ukrainian army by the military servicepersons. However, in some cases clear trends can be observed.

Finally, it should be noted that the interviewer managed to get in touch and had interviews with the men only. In this regard the results of the interviews do not fully reflect the views of the military servicepersons. For example, while speaking of the applicability of the ideal soldiers' features to both men and women we face the perception of the male respondents only.

2. General Remarks

In the framework of the third stage of the project 30 military servicemen were interviewed.

100% male

23 – Ukrainians, 17 – Russians

The youngest respondent was 23 years old, the oldest – 57 years old. The average age of the respondents was 37.5 years old.

The period of military service: from 6 to 37 years in the army.

Average period of service: 20 years.

The period of contract service: from 3 to 11 years.

Average period of contract service: 6.5 year.

The lowest rank: sergeant major, the highest rank: colonel.

3. Personal motivation, self-image and ideals

During the theoretical part of the research we came to a number of conclusions regarding the ideal concepts of leadership and the ideal features of soldier. Basically, it was clear the leadership concept in the independent Ukraine (after 1991) had to be constructed rather than renovated or reformed. The ideal and normative military leader's model respectively contains the following ideal leader's features – combination of Cossak era traditional features, the elements typical for the leaders in Polish, Austrian and Russian Army and the features developed within the period of Soviet domination.

During the third research phase we made an attempt to study self-images and the professional identities among soldiers at the practical level. To some extent we made an attempt to define how the soldiers understand their role-model, and to what extent they relate it to democratic (or other) ideals. Also, during the interview we attempted to find out the motivation that determines the choice for a professional military career.

In these regard the following data has been collected:

While answering the question “Which objectives do you connect with your occupation as a soldier? What was the reason for you to join the army?” the most popular answers (13 Out of 30) were related to the career opportunities. There were some variations of the answer – either directly career, or the desire to climb the social ladder and in some cases the desire to become an officer (to get education at the Military Academy) which is indirectly pointing to the soldier's desire to climb social ladder. At the same time relatively high number of respondents explained their desire with less pragmatic reasons. Ten out of thirty interviewees stressed that by joining the army they wanted to protect their Motherland and its independence. The main reason for them to join the army was patriotism. Only one respondent referred to social welfare and explained his desire to join the army by need to provide his family with all its needs.

The relatively high level of patriotic feelings in describing the objectives and reasons for the military service corresponds with the normative model of the ideal soldier and even refers to the oath (in particular its part “I swear to protect the Ukrainian state, uncompromisingly protect its freedom and independence. I swear never to betray the people of Ukraine.”¹)

While describing the main features of the ideal soldier the respondents mentioned honesty (13 out of 30 respondents). Less popular but still important feature of the ideal soldier is professionalism (33% of respondents). Such outcome of the interviews indirectly reflects thirst for the reforms and army professionalization (this issue is, probably, the only one widely covered by media and causing public debates between

¹ The Decree of the Parliament of Ukraine # 1936-XII by 06.12.1991

prime-minister Yulia Tymoshenko who called for army professionalization and President Victor Yushchenko, who defends conscription system and actually prohibited transferring to contract system as a Commander-in-chief). Quite surprising is the fact that despite high presence of patriotic spirit while describing the objectives of military service, only 5 respondents named patriotism as one of the prerequisites for the ideal military service. However, 8 respondents named readiness for self-sacrifice among the features important for the ideal soldier. All the respondents, except for the one, stressed that ideal features are the same for both men and women. This fact proves certain eradication of sexism in the Ukrainian army.

Another important conclusion based on the results of the interviews is connected with the issue of “army traditions”. We have already mentioned that most of the traditions of the Ukrainian army were constructed. Basically they are formed out of the traditions of the states which used to dominate at the territory of Ukraine. Besides that, there is some impact of the Cossakdom which was almost lost during the period of Russian and Soviet domination though.

Despite the mentioned circumstances the respondents did not agree with the interviewer’s assumption that the traditions of the Ukrainian army were constructed but not implemented. All of them, in accordance with the existing military norms, stressed that they are placed within a certain historical tradition. Moreover, not only all of them admitted that fact but also all of them approved it. While describing commanders’ ideal features most of the respondents focused at human features. Naming the ideal facets of the military leader the majority of respondents emphasized that commander should care about the soldiers (18 respondents pointed at that feature). Fifteen times professionalism and fifteen times being goal-oriented were mentioned as the very important features for the commander. Therefore 18 respondents share humanistic approach towards the leadership concept, whereas some of them combined human-oriented features with pragmatic approach, it appears to be quite obvious that self-sacrifice or any totalitarian commander’s features do not belong to the priorities of the Ukrainian army servicemen.

Finally, when coming to the ideals that the Ukrainian servicemen consider to be decisive within the process of their service are the protection of Motherland and nations tranquility. The first ideal directly corresponds with the normative ideal model while the second indirectly points at the soldiers’ willingness to be involved in the politics. However, if to take a glance at the further answers, such desire is rather the citizens’ option and has nothing to do with the special status of the military servicemen.

4. The image of the soldier and acceptance of the armed forces in society

It has been mentioned before that the only issue which is covered by media widely and causes public debates in Ukraine is the issue of conscription. Although within the circumstances of the world economic crisis and pre-election campaign this problem is discussed mostly through the lens of political parties and leader, still there is some public and media attention directly to the problem. Only 5 respondents agree that the mentioned public debates on the problem of conscription are directly or indirectly related to the issue of the ideal soldier, whereas the majority of the interviewees consider that there are no public debates on the issue of army within the Ukrainian society. The respondents either stressed that they never heard of such debates or emphasized that “Ukrainian society does not care much about the army”.

Respectively, due to the low interest of the society towards army, there are no visible dynamics of public opinion changes towards army. Mostly the interviewees admitted that fact as well as with the fact that there are no negative public stereotypes or prejudices against military servicepersons. It is noteworthy that despite the absence of public debates and “non relations” between army and society the index of trust toward military servicepersons is traditionally high (See table below²).

Year	1994	1995	1996	1998	1999	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008
Church	3,1	3,2	3,0	3,0	2,9	3,1	3,3	3,3	3,4	3,5
Army	3,2	3,2	3,1	3,0	3,0	3,1	3,1	3,1	3,0	3,0
President	2,3	2,9	2,6	2,1	2,2	2,7	2,2	2,3	2,7	2,5
Government	2,3	2,4	2,3	2,1	2,1	2,4	2,2	2,3	2,5	2,4
Parliament	2,3	2,1	2,1	2,1	2,1	2,1	2,1	2,2	2,5	2,3

² Golovaha Y. Panina N. Ukrainian Society. Sociological Monitoring. 1992 – 2008. – Kyiv: National Academy of Science, Institute of Sociology. – 2008, pp. 24-25.

5. Democratic ways of organising the military

While studying to what extent democratic norms are implemented in the army we focused at the norms of legislation which mostly regulate the relations within the collective of military servicepersons. The analyses of the legislation and legal collisions led us to some anxious conclusions. From the formal perspective, the conflict resolution within the Ukrainian army is based on the obedience. The soldiers and officers must obey the orders of those with the higher rank. In certain cases they can claim the order illegal (however only after fulfilling such order). Moreover, the principles of conflict resolution in cases which do not presuppose the military court trial deserve for some attention, since Military Statutes do not always correspond with the Constitution of Ukraine. For example, Article 40 of the Constitution states that everybody is guaranteed the right to appeal orally or in a written form to the officials of the state agencies. However, the Statutes of the Armed Forces define that military servicepersons can address only the official they are directly subordinated to and only in case he is not able to solve they problem they can go further.

Also the Article 29 of the Constitution defines that no one can be arrested without the court's decision. However, the Articles 48, 49, 50 of the Disciplinary Statute suggests such form of the punishment as putting in the guardhouse, which presupposes the conditions even worse than for those who has been arrested in accordance with the court decision. Moreover, such kind of arrest is foreseen by the Statutes, although they do not define what is breaking the discipline. Under such circumstances it is the commander who can execute the punishment without any legislative limitations and court decision. Besides that the Disciplinary Statute does not mention the minimum age at which towards the servicemen such punishment is applicable. Therefore, even cadets of the age lower than 18 can be punished for the disobedience.

Most of the respondents admit the existing drawbacks, although obey them. It was interesting enough to note that the younger generation of the interviewees wants some changes in this regard, whereas older generation/high ranking officers emphasize that the existing system of conflict resolution is not only functional but also "the only correct". Respectively, while discussing how individual rights and liberties are protected in the army in spite of the general principles of command and obedience, 50% of respondents (younger generation) said their rights were jeopardized. It is of importance for our research that all the interviewees fully agree that the army should be out of politics. Not only everyone supported this idea but some of the respondents used even common for the military servicepersons slogan: "Army is out of politics!"

The research of current situation in the field of military education was based on the analyses of open to public sources and led us to the following conclusions: In accordance with the Ukrainian legislative provisions and the demands of Ministry of Education 20-25% of the academic hours should be devoted to studying the humanitarian and social disciplines; 5,75% out of aforementioned 25% is physical training, named "physical

culture”; 6,5% is devoted to studying of Ukrainian and foreign languages. Therefore, the lack of social and humanitarian disciplines is evident. Such technocratic approach has some impact at the interviewees, because 13 of them, when mentioning civil disciplines they’ve studied at the military educational institutions, stress the good quality of computer science courses, engineering courses, foreign languages courses were mentioned 5 times whereas political science was mentioned only 3 times.

It is noteworthy to mention that 20 respondents are quite satisfied with the level of civil disciplines teaching. Moreover, 28 respondents consider that civil education is desperately needed at the Military Academies. This fact proves that despite rudimentary system of military education and “brain-drain” of qualified teaching personnel from the military educational institutions the level of education is still satisfactory. There is space for the further improvement though and without any doubt the military servicepersons do not object being integrated into democratic system of education despite their specific status.

6. Final Remarks

Regrettably, the list of interviewees did not contain those experienced in out-of-area missions; therefore this aspect of the field research is not covered. However, in other cases interesting data was collected.

We defined that our assumption related to the lack of civil education proved to be true. On the one hand the military servicepersons were quite satisfied with the level of teaching. On the other hand almost all of them expressed interest in fostering civil disciplines teaching at the military educational institutions. It makes the interviewer to suppose that the interviews were trying to avoid discrediting of their military institution. However, indirectly they admit that there is space for the improvement.

Similar situation is with the principles of conflict resolution. It is clear that younger generation of servicepersons is interested in humanization of the existing military system. The assumption of the first stage of interviewing (before the Vilnius conference) proved to be incorrect. After finalizing interviewing it appeared that not only career ladder but also patriotism is their reason for the military servicepersons to join the army. One of the most interesting findings is the fact that there is almost no public debate on the ideal soldier; the artificial model of Ukraine’s army traditions is not yet implemented. However servicepersons feel them placed within certain tradition and have rather high level of trust. More detailed interpretations might be found at the respective paragraphs.