
UKRAINIAN CIVIL SOCIETY AND VOLODYMYR ZELENSKYY: IN TERMS OF COOPERATION, CONTRADICTIONS AND CHALLENGES 2019–2023

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Abstract

A strong civil society is a manifestation of developed democracy, freedom and law. A developed civil society is one of the identifiers of European democracies, an example of a modern state governed by the rule of law, to the level of which many countries of the world strive to grow.

In this context, the article examines the role of Ukrainian civil society in the fight against internal and external challenges during the presidency of Volodymyr Zelenskyy. On the one hand, this text studies the role of civil society in the struggle for the implementation of reforms in various spheres of the state apparatus, judicial and law enforcement branches of government. On the other hand, it is analyzed how civil society becomes one of the “shadow” geopolitical players that have an influence on the adoption of key decisions in the Russo-Ukrainian war. The article also examines possible dangers/risks/challenges faced by Ukrainian civil society during and after the Russo-Ukrainian war.

Key words: *Ukraine, civil society, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, reforms, Russo-Ukrainian war.*

INTRODUCTION

In the current era of geopolitical change, individuals can become part of civil society by creating public organizations, joining volunteer groups, and effectively using traditional mass media and social networks. Civil society, although not politically ambitious, becomes a significant political player. The European Commission defines Civil Society as “non-governmental groups such as trade unions, employers' associations and other social groups—allow citizens to take an active part in setting the political agenda. For an aspiring EU member country, a vibrant civil society contributes to fulfilling the conditions for EU membership” [European Commission, Civil Society 2023]. The influence of civil society on political processes in Ukraine was first observed during the Orange Revolution of 2004. Following the falsification of the presidential elections by Viktor Yanukovich's team, Ukrainian society organized itself and defended the right to fair elections and a European perspective. Ten years later, Ukrainians united once again to protest against the threat to their national interests and the large-scale corruption in the country's middle. The Revolution of Dignity demonstrated that despite previous failures to integrate into NATO and the EU, Ukrainian society possesses the strength and determination to continue the fight for a European future. The American philosopher Francis Fukuyama shares a comparable view, stating that “I was amazed that civil society in Ukraine did not give up after the failure of the Orange Revolution. You have preserved and strengthened your ability to self-organize and exert pressure on the authorities. People in the country have not lost their desire for a better government” [Nayyem 2014]. According to Fukuyama, self-organization and pressure on authorities will transform civil society into a political player that Ukrainian and Western politicians will have to take into account in the future.

In the post-revolutionary period, Ukraine faced the challenge of both the war in the east of the country and the need to implement reforms to move towards the EU, as declared by the Revolution of Dignity. The issue of the war in the east was addressed through the Minsk agreements, which brought an end to the active phase of the conflict and resulted in a frozen conflict. The internal reform of the country was aligned with the political will of the former President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, and the efforts of civil society. The creation of the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office, National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, National Agency on Corruption Prevention, decentralization reform, medical reform, and reform of the public procurement system (ProZorro) were implemented due to the pressure exerted by civil society on Poroshenko's team. Andrii Andrushkin from

the Center for Joint Actions, a public organization, highlights that important changes in the country were made possible due to societal pressure [Zabolotny, Pivtorak 2021]. Even in the case of creating and reforming anti-corruption bodies, it is evident that politicians who came to power on the Maidan slogans lack the political will to carry out reforms and only do so under strong public pressure.

In 2019, V. Zelenskyy came to power after receiving 73 % of the votes. However, his connections with the oligarch I. Kolomoyskyi and ambiguous statements regarding Ukraine's movement into the EU and NATO, as well as his blind belief in the possibility of reaching an agreement with Russia, have caused some anxiety in society. After his election as president, V. Zelenskyy promptly attempted to arrange a meeting in the Norman format with President V. Putin to discuss the potential resolution of the conflict in Donbas.

On December 9, 2019, Ukrainian President V. Zelenskyy, Russian President V. Putin, Chancellor of Germany A. Merkel, and French President E. Macron held a meeting, which was not successful. It is worth noting that a few months prior to the Norman meeting, protests under the name 'No Surrender' took place in the capital and other cities, following reports in the Ukrainian media about its preparation. The protests aimed to prevent the implementation of the Steinmeier Formula and to caution V. Zelenskyy against making any concessions to Putin. According to Polish historian Jerzy Targalski, the mass protests in Ukraine could deter President Zelenskyi from making further concessions to Russia [Targalski 2019]. These protests can be interpreted as a signal to President Zelenskyy that Ukrainian society will not accept any national or territorial concessions from Russia. The meeting's results suggest that the authorities realized they cannot impose their rules on society and must consider public opinion.

Over the next two years, civil society will continue to play a crucial role in preventing authorities from suppressing freedom of speech, halting reforms, or taking actions that could result in a power grab. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has presented a new challenge for civil society. Currently, civil society is working alongside the authorities in the international arena to secure military aid and impose sanctions against Russia. However, Ukrainian civil society is increasingly becoming a geopolitical player, influencing negotiations between Russia and Ukraine. It is also advocating for a concept of 'just peace' for Ukraine, which includes the liberation of all Ukrainian territories, punishment of those responsible, and reparations paid by Russia to Ukraine.

ANALYSIS OF THE EVOLUTION OF IDEAS (CONCEPTS) OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE HISTORICAL PARADIGM

The concept of civil society was first introduced in the philosophical works of Plato and Aristotle in ancient Greece. Plato believed that the community of citizens, specifically philosophers, was essential for his ideal state. According to Plato, the ability of each citizen to perform their own duties competes with wisdom, prudence, and courage in achieving a perfect state [Plato 2006]. In his discussion of the state, community, and citizen, Aristotle focuses on the influence of citizens on the state. He observes that the state evolves in response to the demands of communities, and that each citizen bears equal responsibility for the success of the state.

In *Politics*, Aristotle observes that everyone participates in the management of the state, including artisans, farmers, and soldiers [Aristotle 2013]. The ideas of Plato and Aristotle regarding the state, citizens, and society have evolved and influenced philosophical and political thought in the medieval and modern eras. During this period, notable political philosophers such as Marsilius of Padua, Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas More, Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke offered their perspectives on the problems of civil society. Marsilius of Padua believed that the community of people should be considered the legislator and have the primary right to choose their ruler. The concept of Marsilius of Padua, *legislator humana*, is a transitional one from the Middle Ages to the modern era in the context of the coexistence of the state and the citizen.

N. Machiavelli's works focus heavily on the role of the ruler in the state, diminishing the importance of the citizen and their role in state-making. In contrast, T. More's 'Utopia' opposes private property and exploitation of citizens by the state, promoting social production with a monarch at the head of the state in his 'utopian state'. T. Hobbes introduces the concept of the 'natural state of people' when considering the state and society. According to Hobbes, individuals are inherently self-interested and will go to great lengths to impede others from achieving their objectives. These obstructions are often concealed, but they have negative consequences for both the individual and the state. To ensure the proper functioning of both the state and its citizens, Hobbes suggests that a social contract be established between individuals regarding the organization of society. The agreement was intended to be implemented through the public authority and the head of state.

Hobbes' concept reveals certain aspects of modern democracies, where power and civil society coexist. It is important to note that Hobbes himself supported absolute

monarchy, but did not object to democracy. The conventions regarding the functioning of the state and the citizen, as proposed by another English philosopher, J. Locke, can be seen as a transition from the modern era to the Enlightenment. Locke supported equality between citizens, freedom, and private property. He believed that the state should act as an arbiter in civil disputes. If the government fails to fulfil its duties, citizens have the right to change it. Locke's views clearly demonstrate the evolution of ideas about a liberal state and democracy with a developed civil society, which can be traced from Hobbes' concepts. This evolution can be traced to the modern understanding of a liberal state and democracy with a developed civil society. These views strongly influenced the founding fathers of the United States, the constitution they created, and the declaration of independence of the United States.

The concept of liberalism, which emphasises individual freedom and societal progress, saw its greatest development during the Enlightenment period. Key figures such as Charles-Louis de Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Adam Smith, Alexis de Tocqueville, and John Stuart Mill contributed to this development. Montesquieu, for instance, developed the doctrine of the social contract between the state and society. According to the social contract, power in any state should belong to the people. The people delegate this power to the ruler. If the ruler usurps this power, the people can rebel against them.

Rousseau, like Montesquieu, developed the theory of the social contract. He believed that in order for the state and its citizens to function properly and transition from natural laws to civilization, it is necessary to establish laws and state institutions that both the state and citizens will adhere to. Similarly, Adam Smith noted that nations with strong political and economic systems are those where citizens have freedom in their civil rights and freedoms. In his work 'Democracy in America', Alexis de Tocqueville substantiates how personal freedom of the citizen and private property can coexist successfully with the state. He argues that the success of a liberal democracy with a strong civil society depends on the equality of opportunities for each individual and non-interference of the state in the economy.

When reviewing the ideas of civil society in the 19th century, it is impossible to overlook the contributions of Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. In his work 'Critique of Practical Reason', Kant discusses the relationship between the citizen and the state, emphasising the importance of individual freedom, equality, and independence, as well as the autonomy of the human mind as the fundamental

principles upon which civil society is built. Regarding civil society, Hegel highlights several fundamental aspects. He emphasises the economic independence of citizens as a crucial factor for the proper functioning of society. Additionally, he partially adopts Hobbes' ideas about human nature, considering people's inclination towards violence and injustice to be natural. The rule of law and civil society can prevent illegality, violence, and injustice.

The development of ideas related to the problems of civil society in the 20th century was hindered by two world wars. However, in the 1970s and 1980s, transformative geopolitical processes in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe led to a change in this situation. During this time, Pope John Paul II fought for civil rights. Today, the ideas and theories surrounding civil society are represented by the works of various philosophers and political scientists, including Zbigniew Brzeziński, Francis Fukuyama, Timothy D. Snyder, and Niall Ferguson. In particular, Fukuyama argues that modern democracy is based on an effective modern state, which, unlike feudal models, does not rely on the family and close friends of the ruler. The modern state should encourage professionals who are dedicated to serving citizens as citizens, rather than treating them as individual customers exchanging services. This transition is challenging, as stated by Fukuyama (2018). It is also worth noting that today, concepts from the theory and practice of civil society appear depending on geopolitical metamorphoses and the role of certain civil movements in them.

COOPERATION AND CONFRONTATION BETWEEN UKRAINIAN CIVIL SOCIETY AND PRESIDENT ZELENSKY IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF REFORMS IN UKRAINE

In 2019, Volodymyr Zelensky's rise to power elicited mixed reactions from Ukrainian society. While the majority of voters deemed him fit for the presidency, some criticized him harshly, labeling him as either incompetent or a Kremlin agent. However, the election of Zelensky as Ukraine's president after the Maidan was not a clear-cut success or failure. Instead, it served as a test of the maturity of civil society. In European democracies, the policies of democratically elected presidents are based on the demands and requests of their societies. This interaction between government and civil society is what builds strong democracies. Prior to his presidential candidacy, Zelensky did not exhibit strong patriotism. He spoke Russian and believed in the possibility of achieving peace with Russia and Putin through negotiations.

During that period, civil society's objective was to compel Zelenskyy to meet the demands of the people, which had been voiced since the Maidan protests. These demands included combating corruption, continuing the reform of anti-corruption and judicial institutions, and safeguarding Ukraine's national interests in foreign policy. At the start of Zelensky's presidency, Ukrainian writer Oleksandr Sydorenko (Fozzie) observed that... "Ukraine will make Zelenskyy a nationalist <...> Referring to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Sydorenko cites the case of Leonid Kuchma. Kuchma, who was previously known as the 'red director', became a moderate Ukrainian nationalist after finding himself on Bankova and understanding the state's problems. It is possible that Zelenskyy may experience a similar transformation" [Sydorenko 2019]. On one hand, Zelenskyy took criticism seriously after being elected president. As a comedian and actor, he was accustomed to receiving only applause and ovations, not sharp criticism. On the other hand, he made every effort to meet society's needs and demands, often imitating real solutions to certain problems.

It is important to note that prior to the Revolution of Dignity, Ukrainian society was divided in its views on Ukraine's foreign policy course. It is unclear which side Zelenskyy would have chosen. The fact that before the elections, he was considered a protégé of the fifth president of Ukraine, Poroshenko, in terms of his rhetoric and political ideas. After the elections, he began to repeat Poroshenko's slogans. This shows that the idea of the Maidan and the power of civil society passed the test of maturity and won in the battle with the idea of 'Russian peace'.

However, the public was concerned at that time about Zelenskyy receiving unlimited power similar to that of Yanukovich, as it could lead to a gradual departure from the democratization and reform of the country. Zelenskyy responded to these criticisms as follows: "an authoritarian regime is impossible in Ukraine, because there is a strong civil society that will not allow this" [Zelenskyy 2021]. On one hand, these statements could be interpreted as an attempt to appeal to both Western audiences and Ukrainian civil society. On the other hand, he believes that any government following the Revolution of Dignity must heed the demands of society, or risk losing power. However, despite President Zelensky's praise for civil society, both he and civil society face the challenge of combating corruption and establishing independent anti-corruption structures.

The issue was that, despite civil society pressure, the fight against corruption was more of a show than a systematic effort. The anti-corruption bodies in Ukraine, even before Zelensky's term, were structured in a way that allowed each government to influence the seemingly independent Security Service of Ukraine,

Prosecutor General's Office, and judicial system. Regarding system reforms, there was pressure from both Western partners such as the European Commission and the European Council, as well as civil society. The latter consists of independent public organizations that are trusted and financed by EU and US funds.

In this context, the Prime Minister of Ukraine Denys Shmyhal noted that “during 2020–2021, the Government systematically involved public organizations in the development of documents that are a “roadmap for the development of the state”, for example, in the development of the National Economic Strategy for the period until 2030 involved more than 20 think tanks and 30 business associations” [Shmyhal 2021]. Another example of the involvement of civil society in legislative processes can be the following comment of the Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Ruslan Stefanchuk, where he noted that “together with representatives of civil society, we developed a number of legislative initiatives in the field of direct democracy, such as laws on all-Ukrainian and local referendums. A number of legislative acts on judicial reform were also developed. Among them is the adopted draft law No. 3711-d on the restoration of the work of the Higher Qualification Commission of Judges of Ukraine” [Stefanchuk 2021]. However, it is important to note that the involvement was not systematic and did not concern the formation of anti-corruption bodies. For instance, the specialized anti-corruption prosecutor's office, which was created on September 22, 2015, faced transparency issues immediately after its establishment.

The formation of the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecution was a condition set by the EU for visa liberalisation between Ukraine and the EU. This institution was created as part of the reforms to Ukraine's anti-corruption system, which is a necessary step for Ukraine's integration into Europe. At the outset of this important body's operation, there were transparency issues with the election of its head, which jeopardised Ukraine's visa-free regime. European partners highlighted this, emphasising the unacceptability of the situation. When the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine passed laws regarding the establishment of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau, changes were made that resulted in the body losing its *de facto* independence and becoming closely linked with the 'old prosecutor's office' and the Prosecutor General personally [Sydorenko, Sushko 2015]. Regarding the appointment of the members of the selection commission for the election of the head of the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office, Jan Tombiński, the head of the representation of the European Union in Ukraine, commented that “The effective functioning of the newly established National Anti-Corruption Bureau depends on how quickly the anti-corruption prosecutors will start their work”. The

expert community and civil society representatives have expressed concerns about the appointments made to the Selection Committee by the Prosecutor General [Tombinski 2015]. The then Ukrainian authorities were forced to make concessions and elect the head of the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office according to the mechanism proposed by the EU, under strong pressure from the EU and civil society.

After five years, when the term of the anti-corruption prosecutor ended, problems arose again during the election of the new prosecutor under Zelenskyi's presidency. Currently, the announcement of the results of the competitive commission for the election of the head of the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office is being blocked. For two years, the office worked with an acting prosecutor, and the winner of the competition was unable to start their duties. Representatives from the Ukrainian public organization, the Anti-Corruption Center, commented on another unsuccessful attempt to appoint the head of the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office, noting that... “the commission for electing the head of the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office held a meeting, but for the second time could not formally approve the winner of the competition Oleksandr Klymenko. The Bank-controlled part of the commission again refused to vote for a formal decision” [Anti-Corruption Center 2021]. The appointment of the head of the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office was delayed by two years, only occurring after Ukraine received candidate status for joining the EU. This was a requirement for further negotiation with the EU. This example illustrates that when the government is confronted with the possibility of losing influence over a significant state institution, it often faces fierce resistance that even a strong civil society cannot overcome.

It should be noted that although civil society (public organizations) were involved in the development and writing of laws on anti-corruption and judicial reform, as declared by the Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada, Ruslan Stefanchuk, there were issues with the implementation of these laws. Roman Smalyuk, an expert from the Center for Political and Legal Reforms, highlighted that there was no significant progress in the implementation of recommendations by public experts in the field of judicial reform between 2020-2021. A total of 17 recommendations were provided by experts, none of which were fully implemented by the authorities. 13 were partially implemented, and 4 were not implemented at all [Smalyuk 2021]. When analysing the government's consideration of recommendations from experts specialising in anti-corruption reform, a result of cooperation between the government and civil society was observed.

Andrii Borovyk, Executive Director of Transparency International Ukraine, notes that “in the area of anti-corruption reform, out of 14 recommendations of experts, the authorities have fully implemented only one – passed the law on the Bureau of Economic Security. However, there are already questions about the political independence of the members of the commission, which should elect the head of this bureau” [Borovyk 2021]. These examples demonstrate that the government, through effective use of the media, prioritises form over substance in implementing reforms. The issue at hand is not solely related to President Zelenskyy or the current government, but rather stems from a deeper problem within the system. This problem has been deeply ingrained in various state structures for decades, allowing it to absorb any power. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that without the influence of civil society, the results of the reforms would be completely absent. Considering the current domestic regulatory and legal framework and scientific research on the interaction between state authorities and civil society institutions in implementing anti-corruption policies, three main directions can be identified where it is most fully implemented: The first form of interaction between civil society institutions and state authorities is demonstrated through the involvement of civil society representatives in the work of specialized anti-corruption bodies. These bodies include advisory, coordination, and expert permanent and temporary councils, as well as commissions and working groups. The second direction of interaction involves civil society institutions using individual tools or mechanisms to combat corruption in conjunction with state authorities. The third direction of interaction between state authorities and civil society institutions pertains to the formation and development of the institution of public control over the implementation of the state's anti-corruption policy [Antonova, Mishchenko, Bandura, Abdullayev, Dolhyi 2022].

Examining the power model that has emerged in certain Eastern European countries, particularly Ukraine, Fukuyama refers to it as the 'Berlusconi Formula'. This formula combines media control with economic power. Berlusconi used his influence in the media to secure his election to power and subsequently employed his political power to safeguard his economic interests <...> this model, he said, “could destroy Western democracy, was later used by oligarchs in many countries, but primarily in Eastern Europe” [Schur 2021]. The aforementioned formula was implemented by Ukrainian oligarchs in an attempt to retain their assets, which were obtained illegally during the 1990s. The system reportedly persisted until the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia on February 24, 2022.

Today, Ukrainians, civil society, and the government cannot afford to delay reforms or eliminate those enemies who are in the rear. Civil society should learn one simple lesson: there should be zero tolerance for those who oppose Ukraine's progress, reforms, and initiatives that contribute to the democratic development of Ukraine.

Since the start of the full-scale Russian military aggression against Ukraine, there has been an increase in cross-sectoral cooperation between authorities, local self-government, civil society, and, in some cases, representatives of Ukrainian businesses in various areas. In many cities, public associations, charitable organizations, business entities, and local authorities establish humanitarian hubs to gather various resources. Thanks to the joint efforts of state authorities, public and volunteer organizations, several information and reference resources have been created. These resources provide information and guidance on the evacuation process and receiving emergency humanitarian aid. In Ukraine, the official platform 'Spivdiya' was launched to unite volunteer and state initiatives for humanitarian aid during the war¹. To address the issues faced by internally displaced persons, public organizations establish networks of coordinators to communicate with local authorities. Namely, the regional coordinators of the NGO "CrimeaSOS"².

The Ukrainian Volunteer Service, in partnership with SoftServe, has developed the 'Palyanytsia.Info' platform for quickly searching for humanitarian and volunteer aid in all regions of Ukraine. The platform provides information about organizations that offer aid to vulnerable populations, including internally displaced persons, the elderly, children, and people with disabilities. This aid includes assistance with evacuation, housing, food, and medicine, both within individual cities and villages, as well as throughout the regions and the entire country of Ukraine. The platform currently lists over 800 organizations that offer various forms of assistance. The platform team is continuously working to supplement and update this resource³.

The cooperation between civil society and the army should be highlighted. The state must establish legal protection for citizens and create a favorable legal environment for the activities of public institutions established by them [Semyorkina 2011]. The interaction between civil society and the Armed Forces of Ukraine should be

¹ SpivDiya is a charitable foundation that unites the efforts of volunteers, businesses, international funds and the state to help those in need. [online]. Available at: <https://spivdiia.org.ua/>

² Krymsos a public initiative created on February 27, 2014 for prompt and objective coverage of the events taking place in Crimea in connection with its illegal occupation by the Russian Federation. [online]. Available at: <https://krymsos.com/>

³ Palyanytsya.Info is an open database of organizations that provide humanitarian and volunteer assistance to the population throughout Ukraine. [online]. Available at: <https://palyanytsya.info/>

perceived positively as a sign of a developed public sector. However, it may also indicate an insufficient level of provision by the state for the effective functioning of the armed forces in terms of material, technical, psychological, and cultural-educational directions. The close interaction between the armed forces and the public, which has developed since 2014 and continues to this day, is only feasible under conditions of war when the very existence of the state is threatened. However, the true fighting capacity of the armed forces cannot be guaranteed by the volunteer movement alone; it must be provided by the state.

The growth of trust in civil society representatives is significant. According to Komnatnyi, Buha, Fedorova, Horovyi, and Bortniak (2011: 350), the level of trust in public organizations increased from 34.5 % to 40 % between 2015 and 2020. In December 2022, the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) conducted an all-Ukrainian poll of public opinion called 'Omnibus'. The study results show that trust among volunteers increased from 68 % in 2021 to 84 %, and the balance improved from +57 % to +81 % [Hrushetskyi 2023].

UKRAINIAN CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE UKRAINIAN AUTHORITIES IN TERMS OF EXTERNAL CHALLENGES

On 24th February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The Ukrainian people's task became to fight for their freedom and their lives. While the Ukrainian armed forces resisted on the front lines, the Ukrainian president fought on the information front. Ukrainian activists had to organize a strong public movement abroad to support their cause. According to Ukrainian researcher Kateryna Zarembo, the Russian invasion added a new dimension to Ukrainian civil society – “dimension of internationalization”. [Zarembo 2023: 55]. The internationalization is a result of the mass and forced migration of Ukrainians, primarily to Europe. According to UN data from April 2023, 8.1 million Ukrainian refugees have been registered in Europe [Operational Data Portal UNHCR's, Ukraine Refugee Situation 2023]. Given the ongoing hostilities in Ukraine, it is probable that this number will continue to rise.

An internationalized Ukrainian civil society, led by activists of various profiles, had to assist the official Ukrainian authorities in the fight for Western weapons and sanctions against Russia. Additionally, they had to persuade citizens of Western countries of the necessity of these weapons and sanctions. In many Western countries, there is still a narrative that Russia is invincible. It is suggested that giving Russia a conditional Crimea could lead to peace in Ukraine. However,

Ukrainian intellectuals, human rights defenders, and activists who are part of the Ukrainian public movement in the West should also inform Western societies that Ukrainians deserve to be part of the EU and NATO. This is because they are willing to sacrifice their lives for Western values.

When Zelenskyy attempts to persuade Europeans and Americans of the necessity of certain weapons and sanctions, representatives of civil society immediately join these calls, creating significant media attention. This was particularly important in the early days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It is worth noting the impassioned speech of Ukrainian activist and executive director of the anti-corruption center, Daria Kaleniuk, during a meeting with former UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

In particular, D. Kaleniuk addressed Johnson with the following words: “You talk about the stoicism of the Ukrainian people, but Ukrainian women and children are afraid because of the bombs and rockets flying from the sky. The Ukrainian people are desperately asking the West to protect our sky. We are asking for a no-fly zone, which you say will trigger World War III. But what is the alternative? Watch?” [Kaleniuk 2022]. This speech by a public activist was a plea for help from Ukrainians to a Western leader. It is important to share stories like this in the media, as it is an extension of oneself and expands possibilities (McLuhan, 1964). The actions of civil society leaders on the Western front in Europe had a huge impact on the Western world in a matter of minutes. The media activity of Ukrainian activists was significant not only in the context of the supply of weapons to Ukraine and the introduction of sanctions against Russia but also in conveying to Europeans that Ukraine is part of the Western world and culture, which also fights for European security.

In this context, it is worth mentioning Oleksandra Matviichuk, the head of the Center for Civil Liberties and a human rights activist who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2022. Matviichuk has emphasized the importance of achieving justice in her numerous public speeches, including during her acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize “We still look at the world through the lens of the Nuremberg Tribunal, where war criminals were convicted only when the Nazi regime fell. But justice should not depend on the stability of authoritarian regimes. After all, we live in a new century. Justice should not wait <...> In order for justice to be established, and for freedom and democracy to win the war against the dictatorship, it is enough to be in solidarity with Ukraine – you do not have to be Ukrainian to support Ukraine. Just being human is enough” [Matviichuk 2022]. It is not appropriate to claim that civil society's actions led to the international criminal court in The Hague

issuing a warrant for Putin's arrest. However, Ukrainian human rights defenders played a significant role in the fight for this decision. The decision of the International Criminal Court demonstrates that justice can be achieved without delay and the death of a war criminal. It also serves as evidence that the values on which Europe stands, and for which Ukraine is fighting, remain strong.

The European identity is shaped by values such as freedom and democracy. When referring to 'Europe' or 'the West', it is not so much about the territory, but rather the values, particularly personal freedom and justice. According to Polish-Ukrainian researcher Ola Hnatiuk, "when there is a conversation about European identity, they usually appeal to the concept of a community based on Mediterranean (Greek and Roman) culture and Christianity (sometimes together with its roots), which shaped Europe, as well as – although not always – to the heritage of the Renaissance. It is much less common to talk about the legacy of the Age of Enlightenment, which, however, is of fundamental importance for current European culture <....> as early as 1748, Montesquieu in the treatise "On the Spirit of Laws", sharing his thoughts on the meaning of Europe, noted that it is a secular concept, and it is not united by Christianity, but by the idea of freedom" [Hnatiuk 2005: 66–67]. Today, this concept is becoming increasingly relevant. It serves as a valuable reference point for the current united Europe and is a cause for which Ukraine is fighting.

In this struggle for freedom, Ukraine is gradually gaining support from the Western world, particularly Europe. Since gaining independence on August 24, 1991, many scientists, publicists, and politicians in Ukraine and abroad have supported the idea that Ukraine is culturally, mentally, and ideologically distinct. Some have even suggested that there are 'two Ukraines'. Ukrainian researcher Mykola Riabchuk has also highlighted this phenomenon, introducing the concept of 'two Ukraines' and adding, "...that in the past, the current western territories of Ukraine belonged to the Habsburg Monarchy and Poland, and the eastern and central territories to the Russian Empire. The differences between these "two Ukraines" are so strong that, as Ryabchuk claims, it is already worth talking about "different worlds" <...> they represent, rather, mutually exclusive "ideological concepts", the first of which, from these Ukraines, symbolizes the tendency "to return to USSR", and the other "return to Europe"" [Riabchuk 2001]. The average European has historically viewed Ukraine as a unified entity, although some consider it to be part of the Russian cultural sphere, characterized by corruption, poverty, and ruin.

This division was expected to cease after Ukraine gained independence. However, it is only disappearing now due to the physical destruction of Russian imperialism

and the mental destruction of the USSR in the minds of many Ukrainians. A 'third Ukraine' is emerging in place of physical ruins and mental emptiness. This new Ukraine is not only being born in the minds of Ukrainians but also in the minds of Europeans. Ukraine has historically been viewed as an object rather than a subject in geopolitical processes, likely due to its association with Russian cultural space. For instance, at the 2008 Bucharest NATO Summit, Ukraine requested a roadmap for joining the alliance, but instead, six years later, it faced Russian military aggression and the annexation of Crimea. At the summit, Putin stated that Ukraine did not, does not, and cannot exist as an independent state. In particular, he addressed US President J. Bush, "You do understand, George, that Ukraine is not even a state! What is Ukraine? Part of its territory is Eastern Europe, and part, and a significant one, was a gift from us!" [Ukrainska Pravda 2008]. The West's weak reaction, or lack thereof, to Putin's words gave him the freedom to continue his aggressive actions.

The 2008 NATO summit demonstrated that Ukraine was not a subject but an object in the geopolitical arena. Additionally, Ukraine lacked a strong ally in civil society to support its foreign policy national interests. The state's lack of a strong civil society and ongoing internal division between the 'two Ukraines' made it vulnerable to both future conflict with Russia and the rise of a 'new third Ukraine'. Mykola Riabchuk, the researcher mentioned above, aptly refers to this new faction as the 'third Ukraine', "... it is unnamed, undefined, and ambivalent, until recently doomed to a political struggle for the role of an object, not a subject – a huge battlefield and in that at the same time, the main victory in the struggle between these two other "Ukraines" <...> therefore, this "third Ukraine" is not only a "great battlefield", but also a "main gain", on which the future of Ukraine largely depends" [Riabchuk 2001]. The future of not only every Ukrainian, but also many Europeans, including their security and stability, depends on the victory of this "third Ukraine".

In the early stages of the war, the contrast between the liberal values of the EU and its involvement in the war was less apparent. The technocratic European Commission supported the war effort by proposing measures to arm and provide moral support to Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression. The decision to grant Ukraine candidate status was an extraordinary move for the bloc, driven by geopolitical imperatives and the tools of process-oriented bureaucracy [Leonard 2023]. Under the influence of Ukrainian civil society activities in the West, Europe is beginning to understand Ukraine in a different light. It is now widely recognized that Ukraine is a distinct entity from Russia. Today, Ukraine has come closer to Europe than ever before, culturally, politically, and economically. However, for full

unification to occur, Ukraine must complete its reformation process through cooperation between the government and civil society. Additionally, Ukraine must continue to adopt a European mindset, living according to the rules and laws.

Currently, there is a prevailing opinion among politicians and citizens in Europe, particularly in France and Germany, that Ukraine's large territory and post-war devastation will make it challenging to integrate into the EU quickly. For instance, in France, a referendum is held when the question of joining other countries to the EU arises. The integration of an economically devastated country, whose territory spans from London to Lviv, is not universally admired by Europeans.

However, Ukraine's territorial integration into the EU space is not a new issue, but it is acquiring new geopolitical contours. Ukrainian writer Yuriy Andrukhovych has reflected on this challenge for Ukrainians, noting that "Ukraine is the largest objective data in Europe in terms of area, which for this very reason fatally cannot fit in Europe..." [Hnatiuk 2005: 8]. However, the collective event recognises that Ukraine's buffer position no longer provides the desired stability for Europe. While integrating Ukraine into the EU presents a challenge, granting Ukraine candidate status may indicate that Europe has accepted this challenge. The completion of the integration process, however, depends on Ukraine itself in many ways.

Today, the Ukrainian government and civil society face three key challenges: winning the war with Russia, continuing internal reforms, and completing the process of joining the EU and NATO. These challenges require further unity of Ukrainian society. At the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Ukraine survived primarily due to the unprecedented unity in the middle of the country. Western support for Ukraine is based on the country's military resistance and internal unity. It is important for Ukrainians to maintain this unity, especially considering their unsuccessful attempt at statehood a century ago. Former Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko has commented on this issue, "national unity is the most important challenge for 46 million Ukrainians today. The lack of unity was and remains the main impersonal factor of social disharmony in recent years" [Yushchenko 2014: 4]. Both overcoming current challenges and being resilient to new ones depend on national unity.

CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that Ukraine is currently defending its independence and striving for freedom and democracy. The pursuit of freedom is a key component that aligns Ukraine with the European family and reinforces Ukrainian identity as European.

The interaction between the Ukrainian authorities and civil society is where this process takes place. Ukrainian civil society is aware of the challenges it faces and is attempting to oversee the actions of the authorities in terms of internal reforms. Additionally, civil society is appealing to Western leaders to provide arms for Ukraine and strengthen sanctions against Russia in the foreign policy arena. It is important to note that since 2014, all major reforms in Ukraine have been implemented due to the control and pressure exerted by civil society on the authorities. This is particularly evident in the establishment of anti-corruption bodies, which play a crucial role in Ukraine's ongoing European integration processes. It should be noted that Ukrainian civil society faced significant opposition from both current and former authorities when it came to reforming anti-corruption bodies. Following the full-scale invasion of Russia into Ukraine, civil society was forced to work on two fronts: internally, to control the Ukrainian authorities in domestic politics, and externally, to defend Ukraine's interests among Western countries. It is worth noting that President Zelenskyy's decision not to attend the negotiations with the Russians was influenced by civil society. The perception of Ukraine as a non-Russian cultural space in the West is largely due to the efforts of an internationalized civil society. Public activists, human rights defenders, journalists, and intellectuals, including Daria Kaleniuk, Oleksandra Matviichuk, Myroslava Gongadze (Voice of America), and Sevgil Musaeva (chief editor of Ukrainian Pravda), strive to keep the 'Ukrainian question' at the forefront of Western public and political discourse. Ukrainian human rights defenders, including Oleksandra Matviichuk, were involved in a historic precedent in international law, when an arrest warrant for war crimes was issued to the president of a nuclear state, Russia.

Ukrainian civil society continues to encounter numerous challenges in its activities, both in Ukraine and in the West. In Ukraine, public activists, intellectuals, and journalists must persist in exerting pressure on the government to implement the reforms necessary for further European integration. However, civil society on the Western front should focus on working with citizens of Western societies rather than solely pressuring Western politicians. This will lead to a joint victory over our common enemy.

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